New Delhi October 2, 1976

Shrimathi Indira Nehru Gandhi Prime Minister of India New Delhi, India.

## My Dear Indu:

I am in Delhi.

I just had to see things for myself, find out what was really happening in our beloved India: whether it was true that all those valiant men and women who had fought heroically for our nation's freedom under the leadership of Gandhi (Mahatma, I mean) and had been imprisoned *then* by the heirs of Queen Victoria had been imprisoned again (by those who wish to carry on the legacy of Gandhi and Nehru) since midnight, June 25, 1975.

At a table a few yards in front of me, on the patio of this rather deserted outdoor cafe close to the Cottage Industries Emporium, underneath the dominating life-size picture of you, there sits a rather stern-faced man. (Your pictures are everywhere, Indu: on walls, billboards, in front of bus stands, airports, inside railway stations—of course on every magazine cover—and in the cinema houses across the country, before the

feature starts, a great big close-up of your image fills the screen. Although the man is pretending to be deeply immersed in reading a book, I can feel his eyes watching me closely. (You too are watching me.) Of course he's not in police uniform, but in India these days it's not so much the police in uniform that you have to watch; it's the police who are not in uniform.

I'm not being paranoid, Indu. Where people gather, your informers infiltrate.

The other day while going in a bus, one of our slow-moving water buffalo plumped itself right in front of the bus. Any amount of shooing or sounding of the horn wouldn't make it budge. The conductor said, "Come on, move. Don't be like the Prime Minister and hold onto your...." The poor fellow could barely complete his sentence before one of the nonuniformed policemen in the bus jumped to his feet and dragged away the conductor for violating your new guideline: No denigrating remarks of any kind in any form must be made about the Prime Minister or her Office. The British Government, the Imperial Raj, used to do that to our students when they refused to stand up for "God Save Our King" at the end of a cinema show. They would be dragged off for not showing proper respect for the Office of the Emperor. Ah, they were forever dictating to us to show respect and love under compulsion.

I earnestly hope that this letter will be brought to your attention. I would have liked to publish it in one of our own Indian newspapers, a sort of Open Letter to the Prime Minister of India by her Father, the former Prime Minister. But you have woven such an intricate and elaborate web of censorship, and my letter, which is neither "cautious" nor "circumspect," violates every guideline proclaimed in your Censorship Order of June 26, 1976. The few journalists and editors who might have dared make an honest attempt to publish this letter are all unfortunately out of a job or behind prison bars.

Remember that visit we made to the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., during that first State visit I made to the U.S.? In 1949 I think it was. Yes, October, 1949. We stood and gazed upon that impressive statue of Jefferson, and you whispered to me and pointed out the words carved around the circular dome... "I have sworn eternal hostility on the altar of God against all forms of tyranny over the minds of men." Later, when we were driving back, you kept repeating those words, fascinated by them, coming under the spell of the sentiment they expressed.

Let me ask you directly: Have you seen that Censorship Order? Have you scrutinized it? You, who used to say until very recently, "I abhor censorship." Well...it was just a thought that you might not have seen it, that some overzealous bureaucratic official had acted on his own in order to please you. Of course when you were in Sri Lanka recently at the Conference of Non-Aligned Nations you declared: There is no censorship in India.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU's letter to his daughter was discovered in New Delhi and sent to us by an Indian (who prefers to remain anonymous). He said that he himself hopes the elections scheduled this month indicate a renewed responsiveness to her father's concerns.

What you really meant was: There is no censorship of the words of Indira Gandhi. Right, Indu? That's what I thought.

I have this compelling urge to talk with you.

This is my second attempt to compose a letter to you. I completed a letter this morning and made several copies of it. I was hoping to catch you when you visited the Gandhi Memorial earlier today in connection with Gandhi's (Mahatma, I mean) birthday and attempt to hand over this letter to you personally. But you walked amidst such tight security that I hardly could get a glimpse of you.

Later this afternoon a cadaverous but courageous student from the University of Delhi agreed to put up copies of the letter on several pillars and walls of public places in and around Connaught Circle. I told him how, during our fight for independence, Indian students had circulated letters by Gandhi (Mahatma, I mean) and other nationalist leaders, including myself. They distributed the letters underground and sometimes even memorized the contents (because these student couriers were often stripped naked by the police and searched), then recited the messages to our villagers. Greatly inspired, this young Delhi student said, "I will do it, Sir. I will do it." (He reminded me a bit of you, Indu, when you were young and full of revolutionary zeal and had organized the Monkey Brigade to articulate what the British called "seditious literature.") But before the glue was dry on the first letter he had pasted on a pillar in front of Gaylords Restaurant five policemen pounced on the poor boy, seized him by the scruff of his neck, and dragged him away for passing anti-Indian, objectionable, and seditious literature.

All I wish to talk about with you in this letter is freedom, fundamental human rights, and civil liberties. Concepts, ideals, and human values for which we had fought so long and so passionately; ideals for which we had gone to prison and faced the anger, the might, and power of the greatest empire since the time of the Romans. We put our lives on the line (you too, Indu) because, as we said so eloquently in our Declaration of Independence in the pledge we took on January 26, 1930:

We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people to have freedom...so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them the people have a further right to alter it or abolish it.

And continuing, we said of the British:

The rights of free expression of opinion and free association have been denied to us, and many of our countrymen are compelled to live in exile abroad and cannot return to their homes.

But these same words and ideals that roused us then and made us join the ranks of nonviolent soldiers in the cause of freedom and human rights have now unfortunately become subversive and dangerous in India.

Do you remember those letters I wrote you when I was

constantly being put away by the British, charging me with "threatening the internal stability and security of the country"? Another favourite expression of the Raj hurled at me often was "inciting people with dissatisfaction." I have noticed that you've used these very same expressions to remove the freedom of India's press.

Nine times the British sent me to prison. I suppose I was a bit nervous the first time, but after the first visit going to prison became rather a routine. Remember that one time when, hardly out of one prison term for six months, I was rearrested and taken to prison? I telegraphed you by saying, "Am going back to my home for a while." To the police officer who came to arrest me I said, "I have been waiting for you a long time!" Of course I was not as anxious as Gandhi (Mahatma, I mean) to go to prison. Remember how agitated he would become if the British delayed "calling" on him to escort him to prison? After the protest he led for the repeal of the Salt Tax (he called it "Our Boston Tea Party") the British delayed for a few days before sending the police to call on him. So he kept sending his Quaker friend, Reggie Reynolds, to go and find out what was the cause for the delay. "Maybe the police don't know where I am. Go tell them I'm here, Reggie," he would urge. And when they finally showed up at midnight, he smiled and said, "What took you so long?" He also used to say, "There's nothing like a good prison sentence to strengthen one's commitment to a noble cause.'

So, my dear Indu, going to prison for the cause of freedom and individual liberties is deeply etched on the Indian psyche. If you think that all these thousands of people you've jailed are going to lose their spirit in prison and come out docile, you're sadly mistaken. It's a terrible hardship on their families, children separated from their fathers (like we were), wives from husbands, and of course the gnawing anxiety of not even knowing where their beloved ones are. But by locking up political prisoners you've spurred them towards greater commitment, greater passion, and even far greater opposition. And your prisons are getting overcrowded, Indu. And as for the conditions within the prison...I can't even begin to tell you. It brings tears to my eyes.

I know.

I've been there.

Do you remember those letters I used to write to you when I was in prison, particularly those letters I wrote during that three-year prison term I served?...between 1930 and 1933 I think it was. I was deeply concerned about your education. There were so many things I wanted to talk to you about, things a father wants to share with his only daughter. But we were cruelly separated. I became rather restless, but I had to find a way to teach you and decided that I would write letters to you so that through those letters I could at least temporarily demolish the prison walls that stood between you, my adored child, and me, your affectionate father. I must have written over two hundred letters to you. "This mountain of letters," I think I called them. Remember them? Do you still have those letters? They were collected and later published—Glimpses of World History, that was the title. Do you still have that autographed copy I gave you, or is it in that museum in Delhi along with many other mementoes of my life? Imprisoned

Maybe it's not there, in the Nehru Museum I mean Under your Emergency Proclamation (June 26, 1975) may books are subversive documents. Maybe whole passages have been censored; the heart cut out; just shells left on the shelves. Did you know, Indu, that a quote from one of my speeches was censored from one of the Indian newspapers? Yes, it was! A harmless sentence, actually. But your Censor axed it. My words are banned. Even Gandhi's (Mahatma, I mean). When you ban a man's words, you banish the man, and I, as you know, "am a lover of words and phrases and try to use them appropriately." I put that in quotation marks because that is what I said in my statement at my trial on November 3, 1940, when I was accused of using words to incite people to join our Independence Movement

There's irony for you. Both the British and my daughter banning my words!

I guess you have to be tough. That's what the Raj used to say in their heyday, those days when India was the brightest jewel in the crown and the sun never set and Kipling sang of the white man's burden. We have to be tough with those Indian dissidents, they used to say gathered in their clubs (guarded by a sign that read: Dogs and Indians not allowed!). We've got a job to do. And the job is to rule India. This is no time for love and compassion and civil liberties and all that nonsense. And, Indu, you said recently, "We're building a new economic and social order. Nothing must stand in its way. If a few people are hurt, that's the price one has to pay for the changes needed in society. You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. Right, Comrade? People control at all times, from birth to death. What's the next step, Indu? What's the permitted old age in the Brave New India you are building?

Do you have a moment amidst your busy activities? And you are busy, for ruling a subcontinent all alone is full-time work, and dangerous too, because you begin to trust fewer and fewer people. What used to function in the open has now gone underground, bringing into existence that whole macabre world of midnight knocks, fear, suspicion, secret police, informers, betrayals, escapees, exiles, rumors, and counterrumors.

Well do take some time and take a look at some of those old letters of mine. And while you are at it, dip into Gandhi's (Mahatma, I mean) autobiography (My Experiments With Truth) and of course my autobiography too (Towards Freedom—there's that persistent subversive word again; it refuses to disappear from my vocabulary). I hope you'll forgive my old habit of suggesting books for you to read, constantly trying to educate you. You recently said, I think it was at one of the sessions of the All-India Congress, that you are so busy with statecraft that you have no time to read, that your Congress President, however, is directing your attention to passages in books he considers worth your time so as to complete your "sadly neglected education." I hope he has included some of the books I have suggested.

Going back to my old letters to you, do you remember me saying in one of those letters, "Through these letters you shall silently come near me and then we shall talk of many things." Well, through this letter, Indu, I once



Nehru with his wife and Indira, aged one (Credit: Wide World Photos)

again want very much to talk with you. Rather, I want to ask you so many questions and want you to explain to me so many of those unbelievable things that have happened (and are still happening) in India since the midnight of June 25, 1975.

Please be honest with me, Indu. Don't give me one of your press release-type statements. We'll have to have a heart-to-heart talk. After all we both love India. We have that much in common...don't we?

There's one more item for your reading list... I positively assure you that this will be (for the time being) the last item. You remember that article I wrote about my own self (anonymously of course) and sent off to the *Modern Review*, which used to be published in Calcutta? No, you don't have to go digging for it in some dusty old archives; an excerpt from it (as an appendix) is in my autobiography. In fact, you don't even have to read all of the excerpt. I'll save you the time. I remember it well, and I'll just write those parts I want you to read. It goes something like this:

From the Far North to Cape Comorin he has gone like some triumphant Caesar, leaving a trail of glory and a legend about himself. Is all this just a passing fancy which amuses him...or is it his will to power that is driving him from crowd to crowd and making him whisper to himself, "I drew these tides of men into my hands and wrote my will across the sky in stars."

What if the fancy turns? Men like Jawaharlal, with all

their great capacity for great and good work are unsafe in a democracy. He calls himself a democrat and socialist, and no doubt he does so in all earnestness ...but a little twist and he might turn into a dictator. He might still use the language of democracy and socialism, but we all know how fascism has fattened on this language and then cast it away as useless lumber.

Jawaharlal cannot become a fascist. His very face and voice tell us that. His face and voice are definitely private....And yet he has all the makings of a dictator in him....Vast popularity, a strong will, energy, pride....And with all his love of the crowd, an intolerance of others and a certain contempt for the weak and inefficient. His flashes of temper are well known. His overwhelming desire to get things done, will hardly brook for long the slow processes of democracy....His conceit is already formidable. It must be checked....

No, please don't turn away, Indu, I'm almost at the very end.

We want no Caesars....It is not through Caesarism that India will attain freedom, and though she might prosper a little under a benevolent and efficient despotism, she will remain stunted and the day of the emancipation of her people will be delayed.

When freedom came to us and we drafted our constitution with the ringing words, "We, the people," how many times was I counseled by my so-called advisors to move in, take over, suspend the Constitution, declare a state of national emergency, and govern the people.

How could I? After all, we had just fought those people who had done precisely that.

Remember the Rowlatt Bills? I wrote to you about it in one of my letters. I think it was in that letter that I discussed the coming of Gandhi (Mahatma, that is) into Indian political life.

The Rowlatt Bills gave enormous powers to the British Government in India. Under the authority of those Bills the police could arrest any person they disapproved of, any time, and keep that person in prison without trial for as long as it pleased them, or have a secret trial and pass a judgement that was not subject to any kind of review by courts. I am sure you know about those Bills, Indu, because your recent amendments to the Indian Constitution seem to have derived their inspiration from the Rowlatt Bills. Oh, there was a lot of opposition to those Bills at the time, "Only a few educated Westernized Indians oppose it," was the way the British press in India reported it. (You've borrowed the same phrases to dismiss the opposition to your Emergency Measures.) The Rowlatt Bills were passed. The few Indian members of the Imperial Legislative Council (the more eloquent members were, of course, in prison) who opposed passage of the Bills were overwhelmed by the British Government officials, and thus, after what Gandhi (Mahatma, that is) called "the farce of legal formality," the hated oppressive measures became part of so-called British justice.

I'm sorry if I keep drawing parallels between the Raj in its heyday and India today. But the Raj is the only

autocratic form of government under which I've had to live (you too).

Is history repeating itself? Oppression is oppression, whether done by an alien government or a national government. I wish you would explain it to me. Again, not one of your press releases, as I said earlier. And not that other excuse that the Indian press, stifled under censorship, keeps repeating: The masses are happy. They welcome the new measures. What does freedom mean to those who starve? It's just a handful of disloyal Indian intellectuals who, hypnotized by Western life, talk of freedom and civil liberties. What the masses want is law and order, and these new measures have brought that. These are the very arguments, Indu, that the British Raj employed to denounce the Congress and its legitimacy as a movement of the people: Nehru, why he's just a Harrow-Cambridge-educated Brahmin; and Gandhi (Mahatma, that is), why he's a half-haked fakir, a seditious unsuccessful Middle Temple lawyer, and Patel, a wealthy landlord; and J.P. Narayan, Americaneducated with Communist leanings; and so on and so forth. Photographs were splashed across the Britishcontrolled papers to show the multitudinous Indian masses turning out with garlands to greet the Viceroy, His Majesty's Imperial Representative. Of course the press did not report (could not) that those masses had been bribed and bamboozled with money or threats to show up.

By the way, Indu, in case you don't know it, when your son Sanjay recently made a visit to Calcutta, dozens of shopkeepers were fined and jailed because they had refused to contribute to the buntings and garlands to greet him. And what about that trip you made recently to the Soviet Union, "A most triumphant trip," as your controlled, obedient press praised? (That was a very large entourage you took with you...including all those who joined you...over four hundred? Everyone in your Government was there. Good strategy, I suppose. You could keep an eye on all of them. Remember what I said earlier: you trust fewer and fewer. It's the quicksand of a closed society.) All those Indians who came to see you off and "came" again to welcome you! Those spontaneous outpourings of affection for you! Well, your Congress workers worked night and day filling up buses and bullock carts with people to come "spontaneously" to cheer you. Smile and cheer under compulsion. Organized, disciplined spontaneity.

If you can't choose, you are not free. That was my statement that had been axed out of the Indian press. Just remembered it, so I thought I'd slip it in here.

It is dangerous and unhealthy, Indu, when everyone agrees with you. Agreement under compulsion is even more dangerous. Look around you. Look at all those people who disagreed with you until the midnight of June 25, and now, in the morning, after you proclaimed the emergency and threatened those who opposed you with the prison, how pliantly they've started to sing your praises. They have become fanatical in supporting you. Watch those who jeer at the meagre opposition. See how they jeer loudly when you are watching. So many, so eager, so obedient, all to praise you because they want to hang on to their positions. Indu, those who sing your

praises are really nervous, afraid. There are more people in India today who are fearful than ever before, for those who are unafraid are really behind prison bars, for you are afraid of them.

Remember that day when you went proudly to the Court in Allahabad and, like the servant of the people, you submitted to the law? Oh, I was so proud of you, and then when the Court found you guilty of election violations, I was hoping you'd reach for greatness and submit to the law. Instead you began the process of legalizing lawbreaking to protect the high and mighty, set yourself above the law.

Remember Lal Bahadur (my successor, your predecessor), who wanted to resign from his position of Minister of Railways because of a train accident? He felt he was responsible. No one is above the law, Indu. That's what dharma is all about. That's what the whole Independence Movement was all about. That's what the Ashoka chkara on our tricolor flag is all about. There must not be a retreat from the high principles that inspired us.

You said recently: Human rights of a nation are more important than individual rights. What is a nation? Is it something apart from the people? A nation is people. When you trespass upon the nation

Remember how we used to crisscross our country from the Himalayas in the North to the Cape in the South and speak to enormous crowds of people? Remember how they used to cheer loudly *Bharat mata ki Jai*, Victory to Mother India, and I used to ask them: Who is *Bharat mata*? Who is Mother India? Over and over again I would tell our people: This *Bharat mata*, this Mother India, is all of you, you the people. Millions and millions of our people make up Mother India.

Or is it you who alone is Mother India? Well, why not? After all, your Congress President has declared: India is Indira and Indira is India.

Are you, Indu? Are you the State? Will you amend the Preamble to the Constitution from "We, the people" to "I, Indira Gandhi"? Please answer me, Indu, but not one of your press releases please.

Even as I write this, I have this strange, eerie feeling that all I'm having is just a terrible nightmare about my beloved India...that it is not you, not my daughter, who is responsible for this loss of freedom by our people (if you can't choose, you're not free) but that an imposter cleverly disguised as my daughter is imperiously ruling the nation...or maybe, Indu, you are the unsuspecting prisoner of a diabolical group forcing you (or flattering you with such statements: Indira is India) to take these steps: Making the courts impotent; stifling all opposition; setting yourself above and beyond the rule of law; commanding the press to sing your praises; regimenting the people until they move towards unquestionable obedience (Why did you do it? Because the Government ordered me to do it. A long way, Indu, from what Gandhi [Mahatma, that is] taught us: Speak truth to power.); amending the Constitution until it becomes an unlimited charter in your hands to farcically legalize all your actions. Maybe you are a prisoner of a group (national? foreign? both?). If you are actually a prisoner, I'm

relieved, for the only ones who are truly free in India today are those who are in prison.

Are you free?

Please answer me, Indu.

Are you suppressing opinions and ideas (that you don't like) out of your own free will? I mean, are you free to do so, or are you compelled to do so? Who is compelling you, Indu?

Wait one second, Indu, please.

I ask this question because just this morning—or was it yesterday?—at some Teachers Day Conference where you spoke, you said: My best teacher was my Father. Your very words, Indu. And you continued, I quote your very words (your words are not censored): "My Father taught me many things, but his greatest lesson was that a human being had to learn from others all through his life."

Does "others" include only those who agree with you?

Was I really your best teacher, Indu?

Then listen, listen carefully to what I said in a broadcast I once made right here in Delhi. You were sitting right beside me. I said:

To crush a contrary opinion forcibly and allow it no expression, because we dislike it, is essentially of the same genus as cracking the skull of an opponent because we disapprove of him. It does not even possess the virtue of success...the suppressed opinion or idea...prospers the more it is sought to be crushed with force.

Would you like your civil liberties to be taken away? Would you like to be accused without having the benefit of your side of the story?

To safeguard your civil liberties (of course you say: To safeguard the nation) you have placed yourself above the reach of the law. You value your fundamental human rights; you value them so much that you've gone to such great lengths to amend our Constitution itself in order to safeguard your rights. You want your side of the story to be told. You want it told so much that you've suppressed all other sides of the story. You've already substituted "I, Indira Gandhi" for "We, the people."

Am I harsh?

If I were your best teacher, and you claim to be my star pupil, I have no other choice but to judge you by high standards.

You've accused the world of applying "special standards for India." You've said: "India should be nonviolent; it does not matter whether other countries are or not; other countries can make nuclear bombs and stockpile them. But if India has one peaceful experiment, then India has opened the doors to nuclear warfare in the world."

It is not really the world applying a double standard, Indu. It is just that we set high standards for ourselves; that we told ourselves and the world that the way to work for world peace is not through arming oneself to the teeth but renouncing violence; that we would in our own way set new standards for the world; that we would move towards becoming a new power based not on the realities of geopolitics (how glib and expedient that phrase is) but

on total commitment to high principles and personal integrity.

I am glad the world uses high standards to "judge" us. I am reminded of what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said when he came to India: "To other countries I go as a tourist. To India I come as a pilgrim."

You could have achieved what you say you've achieved under your one-woman rule (just your word in the censored press, which, for lack of news, often repeats the same news in different pages) by being firm instead of being authoritarian; by convincing people rather than imprisoning them; by setting a personal example of incorruptibility and accountability rather than placing yourself above the law.

You have said many times in recent months that you want to continue my legacy to the Indian people. Indu, if you mean what you say, then turn to the pages of my autobiography and please reread the following passage:

But of one thing I must say a few words, for to me it is one of the most vital things I value. That is the tremendous deprivation of civil liberties in India. A government that has to rely on the Criminal Law Amendment Act and similar laws, that suppress the press and literature, that ban hundreds of organizations, that keep people in prison without trial, and that do so many other things that are happening in India today, is a government that has ceased to have even a shadow of a justification for its existence. I can never adjust myself to these conditions; I find them intolerable. And yet I find many of my own countrymen complacent about them, some even supporting them...stand by the British Government for its oppression of civil liberty. We belong to opposite camps.

Was I your best teacher, Indu?

What a student you turned out to be!

I believe in an open society, you have ushered in the closed society; I believe in Freedom of the Press, you've stifled it; I respect dissenters, you've put them behind bars; to me the Constitution is the voice of the people, to you it's a document for personal power.

If you've failed as my student, I've failed as your teacher. But Indu....

The stern-faced man at the table beneath your picture has closed his book and is about to rise. So I had better conclude, for I don't want to be dragged off to one of your prisons—those "rest homes for the politically insane." I want no rats scuttling across my face. I've had enough of that in British prisons.

Goodbye, Indu. I'll hear from you...through your actions.

With all my love, your Father

## Jawaharlal Nehru

P.S. Gandhi (Mahatma, I mean) sends you his love and blessings. You remember, of course, that today is his birthday.

P.P.S. The Indian Post Office is selling Soviet stamps. At least it was when I went to buy stamps to post this letter. Did you know that, Indu?

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