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Jayaprakash: The Far-off Freedom

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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

One of the young men led the way, and Jayaprakash followed. We stepped along the narrow bund-top path that led this way and that around the now brown stubbled rice fields. We passed through a mud-hut village, and the people turned silently toward him with their sober eyes and folded hands.

We went on. The sun felt good. I looked around at the brown fields, and the grove of dark bulging trees in the distance, and the blue mountains that ringed around us lowly. I said, "This land is very beautiful, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said sadly. "If they only had more to eat."

Jayaprakash Narayan, the limousine-class politician, the one-time "heir to Nehru," was walking five miles through the Bihar countryside to talk to an isolated village. India's "J.P.," having left the hurly-burly of "power and party" politics, has devoted his life to Sarvodaya, the Gandhi-inspired movement of "compassion for all" (WDF-22).

In his new "larger" politics, J.P. campaigns for an egalitarian society based on voluntary sharing. He would begin with the village, where the vast mass of people live, and persuade them to share their land and cooperate in farming it; to learn and work to provide themselves the necessities of life; and to govern themselves, each one subordinating his selfish interests to the well-being of the others.



Jayaprakash Narayan

Thus, peacefully and permanently, J.P. believes, would disappear the present competition and exploitation, the idleness and poverty of the village, the hand-me-down democracy which gives the village no real self-rule. And thus also would come, broadly, by extension, the "freedom, equality and brotherhood" so compelling a need, so elusive an attainment.

A former communist (small "c"), Congressman and Praja Socialist, J.P. brings to the Sarvodaya movement the most thorough through-the-mill political experience owned by any Indian.

He brings also a radical, searching, honest mind and the ability to express it clearly. And his brings a personal attractiveness born of his intelligence, integrity and devotion.

I first met J.P. in Calcutta in the palatial home of a businessman where he was staying on visit. When he entered the room, I was astounded. I had seen photographs and cartoons of his broad face and solid jaw, and I had just read his pre-Independence book, Towards Struggle, which surges with defiance and insurrection. But here came a graceful man, tall and slender, with a strong, benign face and a soft voice asking me to please be seated.

Knowing there was only a half-hour, I asked crowding questions. Though I was getting answers, I was not getting J.P., and I knew at the end that what I should have done was simply sit there and become acquainted. He must have felt uneasy too, because he said, "Well, it would be better if you could come to the ashram, when we could have more time together." I was delighted, and made plans.

At the railway station in Gaya, I was piled into a battered, bald-tired jeep, a hors d'election combat gift to the ashram by the Praja Socialist Party. We headed north on the tarred road, past neat flat fields bunded high with dark clay earth. Forty miles straight, then off to a lesser road, then off to a dirt road. We rolled the dust behind us across the plain. Seventy miles in all, into a semi-circle of hills, until we came to Sokhodeora village, with naked children playing in the lanes and women washing clothes by the well. Beyond, like a new village, lay the ashram.

I am always slightly disappointed when an ashram turns out not to consist of one swami sitting under a banyan tree, and so at first I thought Sokhodeora was a trifle "busy": delegates to a cottage-industries conference and ashram students strolled about, some young men were digging the excavation for a new building, and the gardeners, carpenters and potters were as active as you can be at noon on a hot day.

There are 70 people living now in the 60-acre ashram. A few had started out four years ago in two grass huts in that scrub-jungle part of Kawakal police district. That was just after J.P. had joined Vinoba Bhave's bhoodan ("land-sharing") movement and in a few weeks persuaded Bihar villagers to share 7000 acres with their landless neighbors. The ashramites cleared the land, sunk wells, planted seed, set up cottage industries to sustain themselves and serve as a model for nearby villages. There have been sizeable gifts of money---Rs 25,000 or Rs40,000 from big industrial companies and a Gandhian welfare organization, the largest have been---and total contributions amount to about Rs250,000, or \$50,000.

Some of the ashramites have come to Sarvodaya along with J.P. from the Praja Socialist Party, that is, taking the political route. A larger proportion are old-school Gandhians who have found a new school, quasi-religious, in Sarvodaya as preached by the more orthodox Gandhian disciple, Vinoba. They have met on the common ground of human concern, and they work and worship together, Sokhodeora is a matter-of-fact, down-to-earth

ashram, with none of the holier-than-anybody attitude, or the atmosphere of Silence!-the-master-is-meditating.

The chief product of the ashram is the young men who are trained in Sarvodaya ideas and village-construction techniques and go out to the villages of the district as "workers." Their work is to instil an attitude of cooperation and conduct a program of village-improvement. So far, the 30 or so workers from Sokhodeora have helped found 27 cooperative societies, 19 night schools for adult literacy, and two kindergartens. They have organized villagers to dig 66 wells and construct five irrigation tanks. They have assisted in the resettlement of 1500 bhoodan acres, and have served as agents for Government village-aid programs that included distribution of improved grain seeds, oil-crushers and four-spindle spinning-wheels, and the subsidization of village weaving.

During the week I spent at the ashram, I talked at length with J.P. and his friends, students and teachers, and other visitors. I slept on a backbone-straightening wood-plank bed, and squatted cross-legged on the floor to eat rice from a thatched-leaf plate. I took my bath in public at the well (you wear a pair of shorts), and did my laundry in a bucket (and once had a dripping wet clean dhoti, hung on the roof of a hut to dry, blow down in the breeze).

In the early morning I took tea with J.P. at his mud-walled cottage. We would move the charpoy, the stringed bed, off the porch to catch the warming sun. He talked while I listened and peeled oranges and took what now appear to be orange-flavored notes.

He talked in his soft, slow voice, of many things: of his boyhood in Bihar ("We were then in college, only dreaming of national freedom. Then Gandhiji began showing us the way..."), of his eight years as a student in the United States ("...the warmth and friendliness of the people. But in a way the '20's were a bad decade for America..."), and of the Congress ("Mr. Nehru should leave the Congress. His popularity deceives Congress about the party's popularity. He is really a national leader..."). He talked of caste in Bihar and of the Indian labor movement (he was once General Secretary of the All-India Railwaymen's Federation), of Stalin, and of Professor Sorokin.

We talked at length about his long journey through communism and democratic socialism to what he hesitatingly calls "Gandhism." "I know," he said, "Gandhiji denied there could ever be such a thing. But I mean, basically, 'revolution through non-violent, mass action.'" "Now you are here," I said, "but your trial-and-error method has taken too long. You could have saved a lot of trouble if you'd simply been religious, like Gandhiji and Vinobaji." He smiled. "Yes, but I don't think it's been harmful to have come the long way I did. I may have come along 'negatively,' but the idealism is there, or else the quest would not be there."

On three days we visited villages where J.P. spoke to the people about the message and methods of Sarvodaya. I saw him also in the ashram at evening prayers (with his eyes closed and face solemn straight through) and in conversation with villagers who had come with problems or simply for his darshan, his viewing them (he seemed a little embarrassed). Once I interrupted him in his yogic asanas, exercises.

The man I became acquainted with in this way is like this:

He is a humanist: he believes man is the concern of man. A moralist: man is capable and responsible. A pessimist: man is now violating his capabilities and responsibilities. And an optimist: man can become reconciled one with another if he will solve the problem of method.

He is a dissatisfied man, unhappy because of the unhappiness of so many. He is a courageous man, acting on the important thing he sees and believes in. He is strong and gentle, informed and reasonable, patient but persistent. He is a man with a motif: it comes from his shy eyes and soft voice, and from his pen when he writes: it is a passion for personal freedom for all, and freedom urgently now, for the first time, for the poor in things and the poor in spirit.

We were walking, that afternoon, to Kadhar village. We were still a half-mile off when the welcome party came toward us, three great drums beating thunder, and garlands of marigolds to put around J.P.'s neck. They shouted all the way: "Sant Vinoba ki jai! Gramdan ki jai! Jayaprakash amar ho!" Victory to Vinoba...to village-sharing! Long live Jayaprakash!

In a wide place in front of a whitewashed house there was plank bench and, wonder of wonders, a battery loudspeaker. The children sat close, the men sat in a semi-circle on the ground, and a few women stood at a distance, huddled together and peering out from the hood-like fold of their saris.

The head of the village council nervously recited an honorific greeting and then asked the honored guest in straightforward terms to get someone in the Government to grant them a small irrigation canal.

Then J.P. But the loudspeaker squealed. He smiled and said to himself, "No, my song is a solo." The microphone was fixed, and he began, slowly and softly.

"Brothers and sisters, I was in your village two or three years ago on the bhoodan walking pilgrimage..." And he talked of Vinoba and the bhoodan movement and the new beginning that came for many landless through the redistribution of land.

"But redistribution of land, or of any wealth, cannot obliterate poverty, nor make any difference to the villages. Even if we had 100 crores (one billion) of rupees and distributed them equally among all the people of India, each man would have only three rupees, and that would disappear so quickly. Then, to eradicate poverty we must create more wealth."

What a dream it was, he said, to think of being wealthy, when "we are not getting even the necessities of life: a house, food, cloth, health and education. "A house," he said, "with walls that will not crumble with the rains, enough rice for two meals in a day, cloth enough to cover ourselves..."

"Ha, there is another 'necessity' we add to the five: expenses for marriage." And he digressed to discourage the debt-laying custom of dowry-paying and lavish feasting that set back many a family for years.

Now J.P. hunched closer to the microphone and began to speak more intently. "When we want to eradicate poverty, where must we make our beginning? We must all begin together. If you take the religious point of view, everyone is the son of God---Brahmins, Rajputs {the "warrior" caste}, Indians, Americans. The souls of all men are the same. Then what does religion demand of us? Making food offerings, feasting the Brahmins? Or is it to make sure that every house is happy?"

"If we take the practical point of view, we must have concern for each other. Suppose cholera comes to the village. No one can say he will avoid it. The only protection is not to permit the disease to come to the village. Poverty is like an epidemic. There is no guarantee against it for one person. Even as the well may become ill, even the rich may become poor, and there will be no help for them.

"If anyone says he accumulates wealth through his own intelligence and work, he is mistaken. We owe so much to our fathers, that is true, but we also owe so much to each other. We are always helping each other, and being helped by one another." He spoke at length about the spirit of cooperation and mutual help, in buying seeds, lending bullocks, repairing bunds, marketing produce, and building a village anti-famine reserve by jointly setting aside a small portion of each harvest. He urged the villagers to "leave politics and parties" out of village affairs, and to settle their disputes without running to the police station and courts. "The trouble is," he said, "that everyone thinks he has so-much land and so-much produce. This is wrong. We came to life with empty hands, and we will go with empty hands. The earth was created by God and no one else. No one owns it. We must all use it."

But "Land is not made of rubber," he said, "which you can expand. There is only so much. Therefore you must do work of another kind; this is village industries. In one year villagers have three months in which they are completely without work, and the other nine are not fully busy. That spare time could be used for spinning yarn. How much does each family spend in a year for cloth?"

There was a lot of buzzing and some wild estimates, but the expenditure is probably 10 or 15% of the family income. "If you produce your own cloth," J.P. continued, recovering them from distraction, "you can save so much money that you can spend for other things, a cycle, for example, and other things which you cannot make, which must come from the outside.

"How expensive it is to depend on the town and the city for everything! And to borrow money from the merchants at such high interest! They oppress the people. Why? Because you are not united. Each of you is like a stick. If all the sticks are tied together, then they will be very difficult to break. The merchants should lend money at cheaper rates. You must make them understand that they are wrong."

J.P. referred again to marriage and village cooperation. "A man has two daughters to marry. Consider them as daughters of the whole village and together share the wedding expenses. How can one man carry a burden of twenty large sticks? If each one of you will carry one stick, there will be no burden for anyone, yet the sticks will be carried.

"You have welcomed me. I take it that you have welcomed the ideas of

Sarvodaya. What are they? That when the welfare of all is served, your own individual welfare is served. That there should be sharing of land, self-sufficiency, and village self-rule. We are not begging you, or asking for your vote. We only come for service. We want you to understand."

There was one other matter, he said. About the irrigation canal: "I am no longer in that kind of politics. All I can do is see to it that your request goes to the right place."

The meeting was over. J.P. chatted with some villagers. Then inside the house there was tea and fruit. We said goodbye to those who accompanied us to the edge of the village, and then made the long walk home in the growing darkness.

When J.P. speaks, whether to these villagers, or a circle of intellectuals in New Delhi, or the Bombay city council, he speaks for himself, but also on behalf of the loose body of some 10,000 Sarvodaya workers throughout India. While Vinoba is the acknowledged leader and symbol of Sarvodaya---and indeed Gandhi's foremost acharya, or preceptor---J.P. is Number Two, not only because of the prestige he so dramatically brought to the movement, but also because of the leading role he plays in energizing its program and propagating its ideas.

Vinoba, coming from a devout Hindu background, speaks largely in religious terms. J.P., trained in hard-headed politics, appeals primarily to common community sense. Ever since Gandhi coined the word, "Sarvodaya" has meant many things to many people, including some present-day Sarvodayists who have fairly hysterical and uncharitable ideas. Personally I find Sarvodaya most understandable as it is presented by J.P:

To begin with, man longs for freedom, cooperation and peace. But because of his desire for power and material goods, he has fallen into greed, selfishness and inequality. Historically, efforts to redress the imbalance have produced only temporary solutions at best and eventual new inequalities, for the means of redress have not been consistent with the means. If the goals are freedom, cooperation and peace, the means must be free, cooperative and peaceful.

This is not a new idea and yet the world cannot seem to accept it. But now there is a new chance, for in India Gandhi and his disciple Vinoba have experimented with the method of reaching the goals, and have shown that the hopeful direction lies in persuasion, love and example.

There are other directions that man is taking these days. In the first instance J.P. rejects communism, which he once embraced, as the foe of freedom, cooperation and peace. He condemns communism, with greater force and authority than any other Indian, as amoral, materialistic, expedient and predatory. Politically, he says, it is false, "calling dictatorship 'democracy,' state capitalism 'socialism,' and national expansionism 'world revolution.'" The economic gains of communist rule, benefitting the state, are not worth the price of individual liberty.

J.P. also rejects parliamentary democracy. Practically, he says, the foundations of democracy in India are so weak, the gaps in social level so vast, the isolation and ignorance of the people so great, that parliamentary

government is far removed from popular understanding or participation. Theoretically, he rejects a political system that "consists of vote-seeking and vote-casting and imposition of the majority will on the minority." Economically, he sees the present Government erecting a costly modern facade, while the mass of people is left in their usual poverty.

The solution, or, J.P. would say, "the approach," lies in a system which demands active political participation of the populace, provides the fulfillment of their basic material needs, and induces harmonious human relationships.

This is the Sarvodaya, the great change to be brought about not by violence or even by legislation, but by "change of heart on a mass scale." It does not originate, this lasting revolution, in some insurgents' camp or in a Politiburo or in a Parliament or Planning Commission, but where people live with each other, the villages. Its ends-and-means are the threefold goal-and-method which J.P. mentioned to those villagers:

Gram dan, or sharing of village land.

Gram swalamban, village self-sufficiency.

Gram swaraj, village self-rule.

The plan is this: Villagers give up ownership of their land and pool it in the name of the village. They then apportion the land according to family need, including every cultivator, even the heretofore landless laborers. The land is then farmed individually but with mutual help. By improved farming and by supplementary cottage industries worked by village artisans and farmers with spare time, the village provides itself with its basic needs. Self-rule will come with the villagers planning and managing their own affairs by conference and consensus. Each village will have full political, judicial and revenue-collecting powers, but could cooperate with others in ever-widening circles---not "higher levels"---for common benefit.

The institutions of this Sarvodaya society are designed to facilitate cooperation and good-will. They are also designed to abolish what J.P. calls "dehumanizing" institutions which have sprung up during India's history, or are newly imported from the West in the name of modernization.

For example, J.P. sees India as having become ensnared in "the economics of production and marketing, when we should be facing up to our real economics, those of employment and distribution.

"With India's population increasing at a rate of three per cent a year, with mass underemployment already in agriculture, which can absorb only a limited number of workers in future years, and with the Government emphasizing capital-intensive, 'modern' industrialization, which can bring great increases in production by only small additions to the working force, India will have new millions unemployed, and thus without income to buy what is available in the marketplace.

"What we need is large-scale development of small-scale production," he continued. "We are a capital-poor, labor-rich economy. It is both sound economics and simple humanity to develop the kind of economy which is demanded by the facts.

"Somehow we have become convinced that science and centralized, large-scale production in cities go necessarily together. Nothing could be more

absurd. The application of science does not depend on science itself but on the character and needs of society. What is a 'modern' machine? Is it a gigantic spinning machine that crowds men into cities, that enslaves him, that throws vast numbers of men out of work? Or is it a simple charka (spinning wheel) that gives man work and dignity and creates an atmosphere of self-reliance and cooperation? What does 'progress' consist of?"

While no longer Marxistly insistent about the "withering away of the State," J.P. would like to see it reduced to the absolute minimum. He abhors the centralization of powers of totalitarian states ("The Soviet State, far from withering away, has become an all-powerful monster."), and he sees an "authoritarian trend" in the planning and administration of India's welfare state.

For the mass of the Indian people, according to J.P., political participation consists of "voting in the general elections every five years. At that, the strongest party in the 1957 elections was caste, which is a complete negation of democracy..."

"Our democracy today," he recently told a New Delhi audience, "is run by the narrow stratum of middle class, of which you are a cross-section. We have given our people a system of government they do not understand at all. The shell of democracy is there, but the foundations of democracy are not...If you build democracy---if you build anything---it's wise to build from the bottom, and we are a nation of villages. They can be the foundations of democracy if we will permit them to govern themselves, and not pull away the right of governing to higher levels where democracy becomes the plaything of a few of us."

The Sarvodaya structure, therefore, is designed to eliminate, with consent all around, "errors" in the present society: If there is no big landlord, there will be no exploitation of landless laborers. If there is no powerful political office, there will be no abuse of power.

But the institutions can only facilitate, not guarantee, the new order. "Even if the village has the right of self-rule," J.P. knows, "there can be division and conflict. Either the dominant caste or the leading family or some dishonest fellows will capture power for themselves.

"What is needed is a revolution in attitude, some kind of humanitarian idealist approach in every village, some realization that after all we have gone through, clearly the self-interest of every one is bound up in the same kind of interest in all others."

So what must fill the institutional form is the spirit of cooperation, self-discipline and responsibility to community. To encourage this spirit there is need for a "vast band of selfless workers" who will live in the villages, animating the people with the Sarvodaya principles and guiding them in the village-reconstruction program.

There are some 10,000 Sarvodaya workers now---just a few, in giant India---scattered individuals, societies and ashrams who are united loosely in a huge unorganization. They are, in J.P.'s phrase, "not all loincloth and khadi (homespun)," but most of them are former participants in Gandhi's old village-oriented "Constructive Program."

They live and work in the rural areas mostly, and especially in the places Vinoba has visited in his now seven-year walk through the Indian countryside. They do the kind of preaching-and-program work that the missionaries sent out from the Sokhodeora ashram do. Their area of greatest effort and accomplishment is in Koraput district in Orissa State, where in 1954 aboriginal tribesmen responded to Vinoba's land-sharing appeal by giving 260,000 acres of land, including 1400 entire villages.

In Koraput workers have led the villagers into cooperative crop planning, joint farming and management of small village plots, and the setting up of cooperative credit, marketing and provisions societies. The State legislature passed a law recognizing the gramdan "village community" as a legal entity, for tax-collection and grant-in-aid purposes. And the Government of India has allocated Rs9,415,000 (nearly \$2 million) for inter-village projects such as contour-bunding, well-digging, irrigation-channel construction and a village leaders training program.

Government, through its Community Development program, has provided Sarvodaya with moral support and physical assistance, though it has refrained from outright advocacy, ostensibly so that Sarvodaya may retain its voluntary nature. It supports the movement because it furthers village development and because bhodan and gramdan make a frontal attack on the problem of maldistribution of land, however weak, from the Government's point of view, the attack may be.

The political parties too have given their good wishes to Sarvodaya. The Congress praises it, probably out of a guilty conscience, for the most part. The party lauds Vinoba as the Gandhian heir outside of Government, but they do not include J.P., their former Praja Socialist foe and even now an occasional critic. The Communist Party supports Vinoba from the front when the occasion demands, but has recently cut him down from behind ("reactionary, fantastic") in a minor theoretical piece in a party journal. The Praja Socialists are sorry to have lost their leader.

Sarvodaya workers are generally clearly distinguishable from both Community Development "village level workers," who frequently have a routine, lowest-bureaucrat attitude about them, and political party workers, who generally come either to line up votes or organize an agitation.

It is young, well educated and mature workers who are the greatest need of the Sarvodaya movement. That kind comes in limited numbers.

At Sokhodeora ashram I became acquainted with one fine, pleasant young man, Tripurari Sharan, who had formerly been a student organizer for the Praja Socialist Party in Gaya District. We had a talk one morning about why he joined the Sarvodaya movement. He spoke in English, haltingly, but the reason came through clearly:

"It is nothing religious," he began. I do not believe in God. I believe in Gandhiji's 'Truth is God'...I can see the needs of the people in Gaya. I take up the interest of the people...

"I am not here forever. I have to quench my thirst, some desire, some unseen emotions. So there is some worldly interest, and some, you-may-say godly interest. At last I will join them together."

Tripurari also told me what, for him, Sarvodaya was all about, what it was trying to do. He thought hard, sipping slowly at the tea, and spoke

fitfully, but when it came out it was abundantly clear:

"What I want for everybody is
Not rice alone,
Not rice without freedom,
Not freedom without rice,
But rice with freedom."

That's what life in India today---and maybe the world---is about.

There is an Indian principle which, ideally, serves as a goal and a guide for action in life. It is a fundamental concept of Hinduism and it lies, I suspect, at the very foundation of Sarvodaya. It is ahimsa, literally "non-violence," but also translated "reverence for life," or "love," in the sense of near-identification with the interests of others.

"Violence" has a deeper, or perhaps touchier, connotation in India, something more than "fisticuffs" or "war." It is rather, as J.P. puts it, as an Indian: "...the deep-seated all-pervasive violence that inheres in the social order. All the millions of acts of violence that we commit daily in the course of our normal lives..."

He adds: "We find it in exploitation of man by man, of race by race, of nation by nation. There are feudalism, capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, totalitarianism. There are caste and color, rich and poor, learned and illiterate. All these are forms, expressions of violence. As long as they remain there will be violence in the world and there will be wars." The roots of violence are found "in the human heart," in selfishness and fear.

Non-violence, the opposite and antidote, is also there in the human heart, in selflessness and courage. Non-violence is expressed in non-possession, renunciation, non-argumentativeness, indecision, non-combativeness, in a range of customs and habits from reverence for the cow to vegetarianism.

Ahimsa, or non-violence, is stated negatively in the Golden Rule as taught by Lord Buddha: "Do nothing to others which if done to you would cause you pain."

When J.P. states the Rule positively (in effect): "If I want for myself a full meal, a full meal cannot be bad for you...What is good for one is good for all," he is saying exactly what Bhimsa, in the classic epic Mahabharata, is saying when he advises: "What one loves for oneself he must love for others also."

When Sarvodaya talks of "trusteeship," the "voluntary recognition of non-ownership of property," it is in tune with the Isayasya Upanishad, which begins: "The world is owned by the Divine Being. We can use the world, but never forgetting that we hold whatever we have in trust for others."

When Sarvodaya envisions "village decision by consensus," it echoes the ancient Rig Veda, which sings: "Assemble and discuss. Let your minds be of one accord. Our prayer is common, the assembly is common, and the minds and hearts are united. In consensus, united be the thoughts of all that may happily agree."

There are other elements of thought---some borrowed and confused---in Sarvodaya. There are the impressions of Islamic equality and Christian brotherhood, a propensity for Marxian economics, and romantic notions of a Golden-Age Village India.

In J.P. himself, I sense the disillusioned Marxist and the frustrated politician, as well as the clear-eyed realist and fervent idealist. For all his apparent tranquillity, he seems uneasy: having been in-opposition in the field of politics for so long, he seems to be a little ill-at-ease being in-favor in the quieter atmosphere of the ashram. The restlessness that has stirred him in the past may appear again, and it is possible that he may, in the event of political crisis in India (say, a fragmentation of the Congress, after Nehru, and an upsurge of the Communist Party), re-enter "power and party" politics, as a leader of the middle.

When he was working his way through a year at the University of California, J.P. had a job in a fruit orchard, inspecting the baskets of fruit and tossing out the bad ones. He tends, in looking at India today, to toss the good out with the bad.

It is still too early, for example, to see the "failure" of parliamentary democracy in India, after ten scant years. Ignorance, confusion and inefficiency abound, and there is a lack of familiarity with the techniques of political self-management and economic development. But there is good faith and remarkable progress.

Moreover, inequality in society is not invariably the product of injustice. Power is not synonymous with oppression. Possession does not always mean stealing. Competition is not necessarily conflict.

And yet these "corrective" objections of mine, however valid theoretically, become shaky when tested by the practical conditions of the lives of so many in India. If J.P. seems hypersensitive to "inequality, power, possession and competition," he cannot be accused of sentimentality. Too many millions of people are impoverished, exploited, crushed in India, too many people who from the day of their birth are bound tightly to a life stifled by poverty and isolation, with little substance and less scope, with too much illness and not enough food, with death close by and life so far away. Indian society is so fixedly out of joint that those thus bound tightly can only be freed if someone lends a freeing hand.

In feeling such an intense sympathy; in seeking a solution internally, that is, "surpassing" foreign-made goals and foreign-tried methods; and in making a profound personal renunciation in the name of systematic salvation, J.P. appears to be more Indian than any other of India's front-rank leaders. For all his acquaintance with the West (and his eight years' residence in the United States), there is an Indian mode about his life, a return-to-India, delve-into-Indian soil, commingle-with-Indian-people motivation which, at the minimum, reduces distraction, and, in full, deepens his devotion.

The problem about such a man is, How to make him as effective as possible. "Practically speaking," I asked him, "wouldn't you be more useful if you participated in active politics, using your ability to correct the 'mistakes' you see, or, even specifically, to rally middle-ground political forces as an effective opposition to the present Government or as an alternative to it?" His answer: "No. I'm convinced we have to work in this other method, beginning over, beginning from the bottom."

Personally I think that J.P. is in the right place at the wrong time. Sarvodaya is right historically, but there is an urgency about history being made now in India. He is needed now in the middle no-man's-land of Indian politics, the chaotic gap between the Congress and the Communists, at the beginning of a time when the Communists have a good chance of gaining ground. Now, J.P.'s criticism of the present polity and politics of India disheartens good young men, even while his call to Sarvodaya fails to attract them. And Sarvodaya needs a cadre. But there seem to be only two paths to it: one the religious way, after Vinoba, which few young people these secular days feel compelled to take; the second the political way, after J.P., which at present required the nearly full course of political experimentation that J.P. has gone through himself. These two narrow gates permit only a few to enter.

The Sarvodayists I have met are nice people, even the crackpots. They are sincere, devoted and modest. They have refrained from carping criticism and dogmatic conceit. There is about them, however, a pervasive amateurism, a lack of clear comprehension about the whole Sarvodaya, and a lack of technical competence for working the village-reconstruction program. At the minimum they have performed great service to those on the lowest social rung in many communities. They serve as a selfless conscience to the Government and those who pass in India as the "fortunate." What their maximum achievement will be remains to be seen. "Our goal," says J.P., "is far off."

Sarvodaya is no mass movement, no "wave of the future." By those whom it needs to make it work, the young men, it is ignored or criticized as "fantastic, utopian, emotional, reactionary, visionary." Much of the criticism takes the spirit of the wry question, "In your Village India, who will run the railways?"

I am sympathetic to Sarvodaya. For the moment at least, my own weltanschauung, fitted into one paragraph, goes something like this:

The world is a nice place, but we have problems. The two main problems are violence and poverty. We have produced violence, and it wears us down; whatever the origin of poverty, we are now capable of eradicating---or rather lifting---it up. But violence is not a "political" problem, nor poverty an "economic" problem. Both are moral problems. Anxious as we are to solve these problems (and we are not anxious enough), we are ineffective because of our moral near-sightedness. We see solution to these problems in superficial terms. We are apt, in the case of more bank robberies, to put on more policemen, in the case of hungry people, to give them a free meal. Granted the need for policemen and free meals in this world, there is room for trying, on a personal and a collective scale, to prevent bank robbers, to prevent hungry men.

J.P., with the Sarvodaya people, is asking fundamental questions, and searching out fundamental problems, and trying a fundamental solution. He has written, "I am not for a moment suggesting that I have arrived at a flawless solution of social problems or that Sarvodaya is the last word in social philosophy.

"Man is ever progressing towards the truth, for he is by nature an enquiring being. He will never be able to reach the ultimate truth, but by gradually eliminating untruth he will be able slowly to approach the truth..."

For J.P., the truth is freedom. The freedom is far off.