

## *Some Historical Letters*

To Prof. H.J. Laski

Central Jail  
Agra  
(No date)

Dear Prof. Laski,

“As the newspapers of my country have not yet learnt to cut the question hour in your Parliament, I have to trouble you over something you would know nothing about. The Under-Secretary for State, India, Mr. Arthur Henderson, has said that I have made unfounded allegations in respect of my detention in the Lahore Fort. “I doubt if the Under-Secretary knows what my accusation is. The amazing thing is the repose with which the British Government has asked my country to dismiss my accusation when, in practice. It has made some very awkward though successful attempts at suppressing its publication. Aside from odd bits, my country does not to this day know of what I have accused the Government. “While still a prisoner in the Lahore Fort, but after I was allowed to write to the High Court, I made a Habeas Corpus application in December 1944, and supplemented it with somewhat fuller details in January 1945. When the hearing was held, the Judge ordered it to be secret. The Government had earlier taken an added precaution and banned, under one Ordinance or another, all reference in the newspapers to this Habeas Corpus case. At the hearing, the Judge declared his intention to go into the merits of my application and I was examined on oath, and they were on the way to enquiring into my accusation, when he accepted the Indian Government’s plea that I was under orders of transfer to another province and the proceedings were scotched. In the order dismissing my applications, the Judge also felt that the ‘sole motive’ of the India Government in detaining me was not to torture me. I regret I am unable to give you the exact wording of this strange order. I may add that I was arrested in Bombay in May 1944, and kept there for a month. If it was the Government’s intention to secure the King’s peace, that could have been very well achieved by continuing to hold me in the Bombay jail or taking me to another as now, in my home province, the United Provinces. “In respect of prisoners ill-treated in the Lahore Fort, the Punjab Government has often amused the country

by passing the responsibility on to the Government of India. The British Under-Secretary has now almost passed it back to the Punjab Government. So far as it concerns me, the Government of India is the culprit, for I have been its prisoner in law as in fact and recurrent orders for my ill-treatment emanated from it, and the Punjab Government is an associate in crime. “No Government in your country could so interfere with Justice or shirk a criminal charge against it. On my transfer to this jail, I made an application to the Federal Court, but the Chief Justice of India felt that he had no jurisdiction of any sort. After several months’ delay, I have succeeded in contacting my lawyer Mr. Madanlal Pittie, but I do not know how much longer it would be before he is supplied with copies of my applications to the Lahore High Court. These were seized from me on my transfer from Lahore to Agra.”

### **Torture in Lahore Fort**

“I do not intend to detail to you my rather long experience in the Lahore Fort. Should your Parliamentary Party or any of its members be genuinely interested, they could easily obtain the two applications to the Lahore High Court and the third to the Federal Court as court documents. I must add that these applications are a definite understatement of what I had to go through. In the first place, I have avoided mention of vulgarities and, in the second, the short scope of a court application and inadequate talents would have made me sound dramatic, if I had tried to communicate the dull but ugly cruelty as I felt it. I had hoped that the hearing in the court would bring it out more fully. I would here indicate that I was ill-treated in one way or another for over four months, that I was kept awake day after day, night after night, the longest single stretch running into ten days; and that, when I resisted the police in their efforts to make me stand, they wheeled me round on my manacled hands on the matted floor. It took me some time to learn as a physical feat, and a lesson I should like never to forget, that no pain is actually unbearable; it has either been unbearable in the past, but then the man is insensible or dead, or it appears to be unbearable as an imagined state of the next moment. It is true that I was not beaten nor were needless driven under toe-nails. I do not wish to make comparisons. A European, more than another, with his better sensibility to the human body and if he is not dulled with horrors, may realise

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what I underwent. But, beating and bastinadoing to death or near about it and forcing the human mouth to considerable atrocities—these and worse have also taken place. I will give you one or two instances, as readily come to my mind. One man swallowed poison in a police outpost of the Bombay Province, another threw himself down a well in a United Provinces jail; and of those who died through beating or illtreatment after their arrest, there is no checking up except that in one Orissa jail out of over 300 in the country, the number of deaths among political prisoners rose to around 29 or 39—I cannot exactly recollect. “My country has gone through a great deal in the past three and a half years. Men have been shot dead by the thousand, some out of moving vehicles as a test of marksmanship or to instil terror, women have been strung up on trees and lacerated or raped on the public road, and houses razed in the Lidice or Becassi fashion, though not as intensive in a single area but in the total vaster by the score. This is not surprising. Once it is understood that the country was reconquered in terror and vengefulness, the fact that nothing more massive than the August Rebellion is known to modern history explains itself. Three to four million died in the created famine. Already there was beating of an another kind fifteen years ago. My father, who died in a bus two weeks back, was beaten unconscious in the wholly peaceful raid of the Dharsana Salt Depot. Aside from my regret that we had not enough time together, it is as well that he is freed from successive imprisonments and worse in his own country, and from the oppressive sense of a nation’s suffering that goes with these.”

### **Orderly Rule Gone**

“I have given you the national picture to fit into it my own experience as very small bit. The British Labour Movement, as any other socialist movement, has been erring, because it views foreign rule on the ground of democracy or fascism or other political forms at home. If pre-conceived notions are cast away, it is just possible that the British system of ruling my country may be found to be slightly worse than any other, or it may be slightly better. That would depend on one’s understanding of facts. No one would deny that British rule in Hindustan has, as a young brute, been heinously atrocious. It is again becoming so, now that it is declining into an aging ogre. The

middle period of secured and comparatively orderly rule is gone beyond recall. I do not know if it is at all possible to prevent or even to mitigate the ugly doings of this ogre. But this I know that the British Labour Movement will not even have made an attempt, if it theorises foreign rule on any other view than that of bloody youth and crueller decline, with the middle period, at any rate in my country, dead and gone. “In face of all this, the Under-Secretary has had the brass to call me a liar. All Governments, as known to everybody, tell lies on the plane of high policy, but when a Government does so at the level of persons and minor things, it must be wholly mucked. Isn’t there one man in the Parliamentary Labour Party who can bring this out? Should it be said that the doers of these atrocities are in large numbers my own countrymen in British employ? I do not deny that there is a great deal of rottenness in my country and that is what makes it so galling, but the Englishman thinks he would not be here unless he made use of it.”

### **Miss Usha Mehta’s Case**

“Not wanting to release me, the Under-Secretary has also said that the Government is considering the question of my prosecution. I am now under detention for over a year and a half, apart from my imprisonment of two years early in the war, and if the Government has not yet completed considering this question, it may as well go on doing so indefinitely. There is a young woman in a Bombay jail, Miss Usha Mehta, perhaps the only woman political in the jails of that province, who is doing a term of four years for running a freedom radio. I am not quarrelling with her sentence, although, had this young woman of rare attainment and rare courage been Spanish or Russian, your countrymen would have glamorised her into a heroine. She was held under detention for a year and for several months more as an under-trial, so that, if this judicial lapse had not taken place, she might have well completed her term and be out now. I might add that her trial and that of her colleagues was banned from the newspapers. “Of the eight to ten thousand political prisoners, a large number of whom are classified as ordinary criminals, almost the entire lot are held in prison, aside from the inherent inequity of their sentence or detention owing to one lapse or another even under the existing law. A few days back, ten persons serving life terms were released,

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because the Allahabad High Court found they had been convicted on the evidence of an ‘unmitigated liar’.

### **Jayaprakash Narayan**

“Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan, General Secretary of the Socialist Party, is now under detention for over two years, apart from his earlier conviction and detention of nearly three years, and the India Government, on its own declaration, has been considering the question of his prosecution ever since his arrest. It will presumably go on considering the question, meanwhile holding him in prison. I do not know what kind of an answer Mr. Leopold Amery would have returned, had he been asked about my detention and presuming that he had still wanted to hold me in prison. I like to think that he would have taken his stand on the usurper’s unhedged power and would have just said that I was detained under the laws of the land, whatever they might be. That would have been better than a Labour Under-Secretary’s screening of a bad deed. “The Government is afraid of placing us on trial and it will continue to be so afrighted. Our trial may end up in its own trial. Except for the Indo-Russians, no one can possibly think that we have worked for Axis victory in intention or even in the unintended results of our deeds. In fact, Mr. Jaya Prakash Narayan had wanted that an appeal be sent from the Freedom Press of this country to the British Socialist Movement, but I felt that there was not at that time a worthy enough head of the Movement nor any actively favourable element to whom such an appeal could be sent.”

### **A Vague Charge**

“Then the charge is levelled against us that we have tried to achieve our aim through violence. It is a vague charge and as such has no validity in law nor a place in any coherent political discussion. The drawing of the line between violence and nonviolence as a method of political endeavour is an essentially Indian beginning and is wholly distinct from the accepted opposition between constitutional and unconstitutional means. It must, therefore, await recognition, until, if at all, the Indian National Congress is able to create a State with its politics. Such an event will also radically alter the concept of Government and its obligations. Meanwhile, it does not lie in the mouth of the British Government or of any other, to throw about this charge, for the right to violence is, in the dominated

world, linked up with some of the finest efforts of man. If I were to follow the British Prime Minister, Mr. Clement Attlee, or the Archbishop of Canterbury, I would have to call it the sacred right to violence. For the rest, the Indian Penal Code is drastic enough, more drastic than any now prevalent. There is ghastly provision in it against the political kind of killing, or the very vaguest association with it, or sedition, or the mere owning of arms. I have not been put up for trial on any of these counts, nor the many hundreds, who have been detained almost throughout the war and are still in prison several months after the last fascist was let out in your own country. In lending the smallest countenance to Government’s plea that everybody still in prison is a Socialist and advocate of violence, the British Socialist is deliberately enabling the British Fascist in this country to work out his lawless ire against the Indian Socialist. “If Mr. Stephen Davies, a member of your Parliamentary Party, thought it worthwhile to question the Under-Secretary about me he should also have acquired necessary information to bring out through supplementary how inept and unworthy the answer was. Questions asked in a hurry and in pursuit of an unpleasing duty or to create illusion are worse than no questions at all. For the present, at any rate, I have little desire for release and there is no urgency of any sort whatever. The British Government is welcome to hold me in prison as long as it lasts in this country. But the fact remains that there was not one man in your Parliamentary Party who could tell the Secretary with facts that he was lying, that he has not so far, nor shall, put me up for trial, that he did his habitual screening to make my detention more palatable to the stupid. “All writing from a slave country to the ruler’s land is largely ineffectual, and wearies, but I hope you have not asked yourself why I have not addressed this letter to your Parliamentary Party.”

Please accept my warm greetings.

Yours sincerely,

Rammanohar Lohia.

(From *The Price of Liberty*,  
Edited by Yusuf Meharally)

## *Some Historical Letters*

To Acharya J.B. Kripalani

P/410, Lake Temple Road,  
Rash Behari Avenue P.O.,  
Calcutta 29.

10-7-1947.

Dear Rashtrapati,

Permit me to write to you on the subject of such sections of our population as are claiming to be minorities and have even introduced a separatist element in their claims. In particular I wish to write about Christians, specially Catholics, Nepalis and the Adibasis. These together form nearly 10 per cent of our population. They have in various degrees all-India organizations and all-India policies. Unless we too prepare to treat this problem on the all-India level, we will probably be faced soon enough with a new and major obstacle to the building up of our nation. I will first present to you nature of the problem. It is possible that the cases that I have come up against may have differently interpreted. But that would not take away from the urgency or the serious character of the problem. Such Christians as operate on the all-India level either through the Congress or their own organisations are generally protestants and although there is much to be done with regard to the mass of them, they are on the whole not very much subject to foreign influences. But the Catholics are a different story. The Catholic Church is under the control of Rome. Through the various church organisations, schools and colleges, foreign influences work subtly but very effectively and sometimes openly. In addition, the Portuguese in India through Goa exercise an effective control over the Catholics. Nevertheless a considerable number of nationalist Catholics have been working in their own limited spheres and in recent months there has been an increase in their number and also their zeal. But in the absence of any systematic Congress policies and programme, encouragement is often given knowingly or unknowingly by Congressmen to the unnational and reactionary sections among the Catholics. I would here mention the case of Dr. Alban D'Souza, whom the Bombay Congress has elevated to be Catholic representative for the Constituent Assembly, Bombay

Corporation and such like. Dr. D'Souza is a complete reactionary on such issues as those of Portuguese India or of the need to bring Catholics into the main stream of our national life. The acceptance by the Congress of such a man as its spokesman inevitably leads to a great deal of confusion and weakening. It may be that internal stresses within the Congress are a reason for such selections. Perhaps any other Catholic acceptable to the masses may be more independent minded and those in control of the Bombay Congress may not feel quite safe with him. But then such considerations if at all they are present of any other are dangerous. The Congress should be prepared to lose a seat rather than to encourage reaction. And in any case there is no question of losing a seat, I know the Bombay Catholics as well as any other non-Catholic and I am perfectly behind him would be able to beat everybody else, provided he did not have to oppose the Congress.

The Nepalis have long been a considerable element in the Indian army and no doubt they are among the bravest in the world. And yet they have until recently hardly been touched by any kind of national pride or awareness. The All-India Gurkha League which was founded during the war had as one of its aims recruitment to the army. This organisation, in addition to the circumstances attending its birth, has chosen to play on the communal sentiment. It is trying to give the Nepalis of Darjeeling and elsewhere a separatist attitude. Its leader, Dumber Singh Gurung, is widely known to have incited hills - men against plainsmen. And yet the Bengal Congress has once again chosen him as its nominee on the Constituent Assembly. I may here add that the Darjeeling Congress Committee had recommended two names of such Nepalis as have the Congress tradition behind them. Why the Bengal Congress should still have selected Dumber Singh Gurung is unexplainable except as a measure of some kind of power politics. I am not suggesting that the Gurkha League should at once be dropped by the Congress. All that I am suggesting is that a consistent policy be worked out with regard to these all-India Nepali organisations. The Adibasis are perhaps not yet an all-India problem. And yet there are certain common features in the life of Adibasis in the Central Province or Bihar or even Assam which may well be seized upon by an enterprising person or organisation so as to turn them into a major problem. Already they have

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become a problem in Bihar. And in the Naga territory also the separatist sentiment has been allowed to grow. The provincial Congress Committees are hardly in a position to cope with this problem in any just or effective way. Energetic effort must be made to satisfy the economic, social and cultural aspirations of these Adibasis. Otherwise they are threatening to become a political problem. In all these cases the Communists have thrown in their lot with the communalists and the foreign agents whether in the missions or the British political service. The All-India Congress Committee must set up a special department to deal with these enormous sections of our population. This department would collect all relevant materials and be the source for nationalising publicity. It will also command all the information necessary for formulating all-India policies and be a medium for putting them through. The Congress Governments or even the Government of India will hardly be competent to do all these. They may tackle the question in its economic or social aspects. But the Congress alone can deal with it in its political and cultural aspects. And even the economic and social measures to be systematic and effective will have at least in some measure to be proposed by such an A.I.C.C. department. Should you decide to set up such a department I will be able to suggest you some Catholic and Nepali and Adibasi names, of course only in the event that you have no such names in view. The head of this department must of course be a member of the Congress Working Committee. Otherwise he will neither have the status nor the qualifications for formulating any all-India policies, much less of putting them through. In the first formulations of these all-India policies, it would

be advisable to invite a representative meeting of the group for which the policy is to be formulated. Thus for instance, the head of this department may invite representatives of the Nepali National Congress, the All India Gurkha League, the Gurkha Dhuka Nivaran Samiti and some other outstanding Nepalis in India. It would be known at this first meeting as to which elements in the future will be willing to pursue a national policy and also what measure of agreement is possible. Similar meetings may be arranged for the other groups. It may also be necessary to set up a training school for the purpose of training political and social workers for these various groups. Some of these workers may be recruited from the group among which they will be expected to work while some others not belonging to that group may select it for purely missionary reasons. It is remarkable how few non-Adibasis know any of the Adibasis' languages. I would not be surprised if there are more Europeans who know the Naga language in comparison to other non-Naga Indians. A new beginning must be made and soon. I need hardly add that work among these various sections would be spoiled if it is undertaken only as one-way traffic. It is a two-ways activity in which the Adibasis and others may have a lot to give to the general body of Indian thought and culture.

I pray you to treat this matter as serious and urgent.

Your sincerely,

Acharya J.B. Kripalani,  
President,  
Indian National Congress,  
6, Jantar Mantar Road,  
New Delhi

Sd/  
Rammanohar Lohia

To Jayaprakash Narayan

My Dear Jayaprakash,

I have read the Prime Minister's letter twice which you showed to me. Nothing that I write is out of fleeting irritation. I do not remember having ever said anything "highly offensive and personal". But I am noting what flunkeys might well consider interesting enough for the fear of a big man. (1) To have mounted the funeral carriage of Mahatma Gandhi was irreverence rarely suffered by a nation. If this act was the result of passing insanity, the doers should have absolved themselves through repentance and apology.

I have made use of this argument very exceptionally in three or four meetings. (2) The slogan and mantram to work hard in order to produce wealth is false and empty unless supported by an abundant supply of tools and machines. I have in this connection advised the Prime Minister to pull a riksha for a week in order to discover how hard the people are already working. (3) The Prime Minister and his Government bear the guilt of famine and blame should not be transferred to rain, clouds and the like. By refusing to prohibit all ejections of farmers after assumption of power the Prime Minister has caused a deficit of at least two million tons of food crops annually, by refusing to form a food army for cultivating waste lands another

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two million tons, and by refusing to redivide land and thus to encourage voluntary labour on minor irrigation another four million tons.(4) The Prime Minister's Relief Fund running into millions should be subject to Government or Parliamentary audit and should not be a matter of personal discretion as at present. The suspicion should not be permitted that this sum is being used for bolstering up the personal prestige of the Prime Minister. I have rarely used this argument in the hope that something would happen. Among the Prime Minister's critics I believe I am the least personal, but of course the bluntest and everything is reasoned out. I have never referred to any act which the Prime Minister does not do publicly and when once a relation did so in private conversation, I asked him to shut up and that was the end of it. I do not think that that could be said of the Prime Minister or at least of his entourage. They specialise in cheap suggestions and jokes. As to impersonal affairs of public policy, the Prime Minister is airy and vague and sits on the high perch of unreasoned abuse. He has often resorted to the vulgar expedient of denouncing me and praising you and others. The Prime Minister seems to think that I have no other business than to talk about him and his Government when I travel overseas. That is wholly untrue and I do not give them that importance. The records of my speeches and even private conversations are available. I do not think I have given more than 5% of my talking time, both public and private, to the India Government and the Prime Minister, and in most cases when I was pressed to do so. Two years ago I had adopted a different policy but I think that a person who believes in socialism and a world government cannot obviously draw such a line between home

speech and overseas speech as the Prime Minister seems to. I do not expect the Prime Minister and his stupid embassies abroad to show me any courtesy, however much that may hurt me, but I would not at the same time have them expect me to go calling on them. Either we should leave each other alone or they should observe protocol. Furthermore, when Norman Cousins acts like a McCarthy and ferreted some article I wrote in the Harijan in 1942 in order to prove that I was pro-Japanese, I wondered where he could have got the information from. The Ambassador was also kind enough to refer to my visit to the U.S. two weeks in advance and, before a meeting of Indian students in Chicago, as that man on his red wagon who will say and do things hurtful to India's cause. I can easily understand the stranglehold which the Prime Minister has on the country's organised opinion, on newspapers, commerce chambers, political parties and the like. A programme of personal vilification is easily let loose against a person and ideas are no longer debated. To go beyond capitalism and communism, beyond the Congress and the Communist Parties, beyond America and Russia, is to walk on a razor's edge and to suffer vilification at the hands both of the Prime Minister's entourage and the Communists. I should like to get rid of it.

Yours affectionately,

Sd/-

Rammanohar

1 March 1952  
Calcutta

To Dr. B R Ambedkar

Hyderabad  
10th December 1955

Dear Dr. Ambedkar,

The enclosed folders are self explanatory. "Mankind" would try earnestly to reveal the caste problem in its entirety. It would therefore, be very happy to have an article from you. It expects its articles to range between 2, 500 and 4,000 words. You are of course free to select your own subject. Should you select one or the other aspect of the caste system prevalent in our country, I would want you to write something which makes the people of India sit up, not alone in anger but also in wonderment. I

do not know whether the speeches I made about you during the parliamentary campaign in Madhya Pradesh were communicated to you by your Lieutenant who also travelled with me. Even now I very much wish that sympathy should be joined to anger and that you become a leader not alone of the scheduled castes, but also the Indian people.

The Zonal Study Camp would be very glad to have you in its midst. The accompanying list of subjects is meant to help. If you could give us a resume of your lecture in advance it would be good for the purposes of publication afterwards. We expect that a lecture lasting an hour would be followed up by a discussion of similar duration.

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I do not know whether the foundation conference of the Socialist Party would have any interest for you. Although you are not a member of the party the conference would want to have you as a special invitee. The conference will take up, among other subjects, problems relating to agricultural labour, artisans, women and parliamentary work, on any one of which you have something significant to say. If you feel like participating in the proceedings of the

conference in order to bring out one or another point. I trust that the conference will extend you special permission to do so.

With warm greetings.

Yours sincerely,

Rammanohar Lohia

To Ravela Somayya

Dear Ravela,

I can understand your irritation with me. But I have now read the book Humanist Politics by M.N. Roy which you sent me. I must disappoint you again. While I agree with some of the motivations of M.N. Roy, I am unable to understand his modes of action. In fact, I do not know whether there are any modes of action; they are not there at least in the book you have sent me. The sole concrete mode that M.N. Roy has suggested is to have some people throughout the country who would "begin the task of awakening the urge for freedom in the individuals" and who would tell people not to be carried away by election speeches but use their brains and who would teach people "to examine the promises that are made to them in a critical spirit". I fail to see how this work can be done by a group of people who stay outside of, and above, political parties. Even if such a group should come into existence, which is itself almost impossible, it will soon turn into a political party with its own promises or a pack of high brow and superior people whose capacity for action is completely blocked. In such a situation, they would either become cynical or seek for an adjustment and accommodation with all kinds of important people. The critical spirit is absolutely necessary. My own appeal to the electorate is based precisely on this critical spirit. That is why presumably I have so far been failing. But there is a firm belief that sustains me. Some day the electorate will examine programmes. But that it will do not because of the doings of non-party people but because of an honest political party that assists them to this critical spirit as also to the enthusiasm needed for all political action. Enthusiasm and criticality must go together if they are to be effective and useful. In M.N. Roy's way there is no possibility of enthusiasm and criticality by itself must necessarily become cynicism

or kowtowing. The way of the Socialist Party awakens hope that enthusiasm and criticality may emerge in combination. Even if the Socialist Party should fail, I am certain that only another party of similar aims but with better people or different circumstances would succeed. Mr. M.N. Roy has talked of the "original democratic doctrine of the freedom and sovereignty of the individual". He believes that this original doctrine has been way-laid by Communism or Fascism and also that at the time of its first birth it could not be realised due to lack of knowledge. Now, with better knowledge and information available, rebirth of this doctrine is necessary and this is what Roy calls "New Humanism". While much of this historical presentation is open to doubt, the need for the freedom of the individual is incontestable. Such freedom requires a more thorough examination than European scholarship has so far been capable of. The freedom of the individual would seem to depend as much on external as on internal conditions of equality, also the mental and the material. That is why I have tried to examine the four conditions of equality: (1) internal material, (2) external material, (3) external mental, and (4) internal mental conditions of equality. Kinship, which is the word for external mental relationships, and tranquillity, which is the word for internal mental conditions, would be better words to use. Unfortunately, the world is not yet ready for a scholarship that would go to the whole truth and not only that part of it which has been seen by the ancients, particularly by ancient Indians or that other part which has been seen by Europeans.

Give my warm regards to Mrs. Ellen Roy if you are still corresponding with her.

Yours Sincerely

Rammanohar Lohia

[25th June 1958]