



A Better Alternative

PERMIT me to enumerate certain positive aspects of the Presidential System as adopted in the U.S.A. While going through the current debate in the press (especially your magazine) I felt that these points have been overlooked. They will make interesting reading for your readers. I am not touching on other vital plus points of the Presidential System such as its stable character and lack of practically scope for defections, and so on, as they have already been discussed.

The Fixed Tenure

IT has been criticised that the Presidential System concentrates lots of powers in an individual might lead to a dictatorial trend. However, in addition to the regular checks enjoyed by the Congress (the word commonly used to include Lower and Upper Houses in the U.S.) such as full legislative authority, power of impeachment, approval for all appointments made by the President, it should be noted that there is a stipulation under which no President or Congress is allowed to prolong their office for a single day under any circumstances unlike our system where under emergency, Parliament could exercise the power to extend its own life and thereby of the Prime Minister.

The twenty-second amendment to the U.S. Constitution further prescribes that no person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice.

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This automatically restricts the perpetually rule practised so often in the disguise of democracy in several nations. Absolute power corrupts even the most democratic minded person in the long run. Nowhere in the world has this fact been so emphatically recognised as in America.

Freedom To Vote On Legislation

A VERY important development in the U.S. Presidential System is the freedom available to individual members of the Congress to vote unlike our Parliamentary System, where the legislators are normally made to vote in line with the party directives in spite of holding different views. In our system, mainly because of the party in power on the legislation could bring about its downfall. This is quite different from the practice in U.S.A., where the vote against the President of his own party does not bring about his downfall. The total inter-dependence of the Executive and the Legislature in our system has also resulted in the lack of independent line of action by the members of the legislature on several occasions.

Unlike our members of the legislature, members of the Congress in U.S.A. are people of prestige who cherish a tradition of independence. They need not and do not feel obliged to vote with the party at all times. They frequently vote against their party if an issue happens to touch their conscience. Each member is likely to become a focal point for pressure. This also means that every member is accountable individually for his opinion to the press and the public. It is certainly a healthier sign for a democracy. Compare this with our system where even the emergency was supported and applauded by almost all the Congress Party members and Ministers, who cried themselves hoarse against it after it was lifted.

Talented Ministers

PERHAPS the biggest question under our present set-up is whether we can ever get talented ministers who can deliver the goods with the total devotion and intelligence required

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to solve our mammoth problems?

The critics of the Presidential System often cite the possibility of electing such non-political members in Rajya Sabha in our system and appointing them as ministers. Let us not face the illusions. Uptill now during last thirty years from amongst the several hundred ministers who functioned at the Centre and enumerably more numbers at the state level, very few examples can be cited where the top professional talent has been invited to join the cabinet. This list would include Dr. John Mathai, C. D. Deshmukh, M. C. Chagla, Sachin Chaudhari and Prof. V. R. Rao who had joined the Central cabinet. (At the state level not a single example can be cited).

A deeper analysis will reveal that:

(a) Unless the top professional is willing to oblige by joining the ruling party and take active interest in the affairs of the party, the dominant party-hierarchy may not support the induction of non-party professionals. On the other hand, it also does not suit a top professional to enter politics. They have neither the time nor the inclination. There is very possibility of their talents getting diverted if they were to enter politics in a full-fledged way.

(b) A Prime-Minister's or a Chief-Minister's very existence may depend on the support he derives from the legislature. A dominant issue therefore would be the hold of the member concerned on the party legislators. Intellectual or administrative capacity is a totally secondary issue.

Stability At State Level

IN SPITE of possessing wide powers, the President in the U.S. System is not allowed to interfere in the State Administration. The tenure of a State Governor, elected directly by the popular vote, is fixed and he cannot be dismissed or sacked by the President.

In most cases, the President and the State Governor belong to different parties. However, till now, there has not been a single occasion when State Governors have been toppled and removed from the office by the President. Irrespective of the President's popularity

or hold on his party, the State Governors enjoy full stability.

Comparing this with our system, it will be found that nothing prevents the Prime Minister from trying to put his party in power or establishing his hold on state politics by putting his yesmen as Chief Ministers. There have been several instances of the Prime Minister trying to influence or even browbeat the State Legislatures through all sorts of means to dislodge a State Government of his dislike. It then becomes difficult for a non-obliging Chief Minister to hold his own in many cases. If the Chief Minister belongs to a different party, there are several instances of a non-tolerant Prime Minister, trying to impose the President's rule (Central) at the earliest possible opportunity on some pretext or another and seek a mid-term poll.

Leadership Qualities

A DEEPER analysis will reveal that our present system has resulted in the lack of promotion of leadership qualities at the state level. A governor, directly elected by a popular vote, enjoys a great deal of confidence and is able to assert his rights and prove his merits much more authentically than a Chief Minister who may have to rule at the mercy or under the shadow of the Central leadership which is not likely to tolerate a state leader who could eventually be a rival.

While discussing leadership qualities, mention must be made of the U.S. Senate which has helped a great deal in grooming aspirants for higher leadership status. The old practice was to choose senators through the state legislatures (similar to our Rajya Sabha elections). However, since the dropping of this system and its replacement by the direct elections in 1913, its preponderance has increased. Every state elects only two senators and the election of a senator through direct election by a state would mean emergence of a leader who really commands popularity throughout the state. The senators are also allowed a long six-year term so that they can concentrate on their work very thoroughly. A seat in the Senate is the ambition of every Ameri-

can who aspires for a name in national politics. More often it is a stepping stone to the White House.

City Level

UNDER the American Constitution, the system of direct elections is carried out where the Mayor is elected at large and the council is elected by the wards. The Mayor is elected once every four or five years. There has been a gradual and marked tendency to increase the powers of the Mayor. This is especially helpful for large metropolitan areas where the mayoral elections attract top personalities.

The system of direct elections and giving wide powers to the elected executive has gone a long way in the development of leadership at the grass-root level in the U.S.A. This is in sharp contrast with our municipal governments where the councillors (who are elected once every five years) elect a Mayor and other officers of various committees every year. They have hardly any power over the general administration. By the time our Mayor gets a grasp of the problems he is due to be replaced. Similar is the case with the elective members for other posts such as education committee, standing committee, etc. Most of the times these portfolios are bargained for by the various parties.

During the last ten years, the city of Bombay has had as many as ten different Mayors who have only been show pieces, spending their first few weeks in attending receptions (for their grand achievement on being elected as the first citizen!) and the rest of the time in attending mayoral conferences in other cities, social and civil functions and performing inauguration ceremonies.

The direct election of a Mayor by the electorate for a fixed term is likely to bring in a new leader who would be groomed for a higher responsible elective post in future. He gets a full term of four or five years to prove his capacity and can easily aspire for a higher post on the strength of his ability.

Primary System

A DISTURBING feature of our present political system is the selection process for party candidates. The

party in power is usually flooded with applications for tickets. The candidates use all sorts of means to impress or influence the selection machinery of the party. It is difficult for the party bosses to judge the merits of all the candidates in a few weeks' time at their disposal. Many times mutual adjustments are carried out by these party bosses to suit their strategy. The unscrupulous party bosses even use the weapons of fraud and intimidation to perpetuate their political power. It is common to find that many deserving candidates are left out in favour of non-deserving but influential candidates, whose claim for selection is their ability to raise resources by any means — foul or fair. On several occasions, selection of the candidate is the starting point of troubles for the parties. If democracy is a rule of the people, for the people and by the people, there is no better way to have these very people participate in the selection of the candidates.

Double Choice

THE Presidential System also allows double choice to the electorate. The choice of voting of President or a Governor belonging to one party allowing simultaneously a worthy candidate of the opposition is very vital. Under the Parliamentary set-up the choice to bring a Prime Minister or a Chief Minister of a particular party is only possible by voting for the M.P. or M.L.A. of the same party irrespective of the calibre of the M.P. or M.L.A. concerned.

The dialogue in favour of the Presidential System has started from the supporters of Mrs. Gandhi. Most of them had stood by her through thick and thin. Are they genuinely opting for a truly democratic type of Presidential System or they want to adopt it only partially without the checks and balances simply to grant more power to their mentor?

**Jashwant B. Mehta,
Bombay.**

Mr. Mehta is a well-known architect and consulting engineer. Besides contributing articles to several periodicals, he has written two books "High-Rise Buildings" (the first ever on the subject in India) and "Presidential System — A Better Alternative?" — Editor.