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# We, the people... *photo*

*Democracy*

*Dawn 23.2.63*

of Pakistan. The business community should not shirk from their social responsibility of offering financial support to such nation-building moves. Everybody stands to benefit from a well-directed and well-oiled government machinery.

We should demand from the Election Commission and the National Reconstruction

orders. The 'leaders' they elect come largely from the same families, and have no claim on merit. Experience has proved that they only perpetuate the vicious circle of power, repression, illiteracy and ignorance. Unless this cycle is broken

## The Velvet Revolution

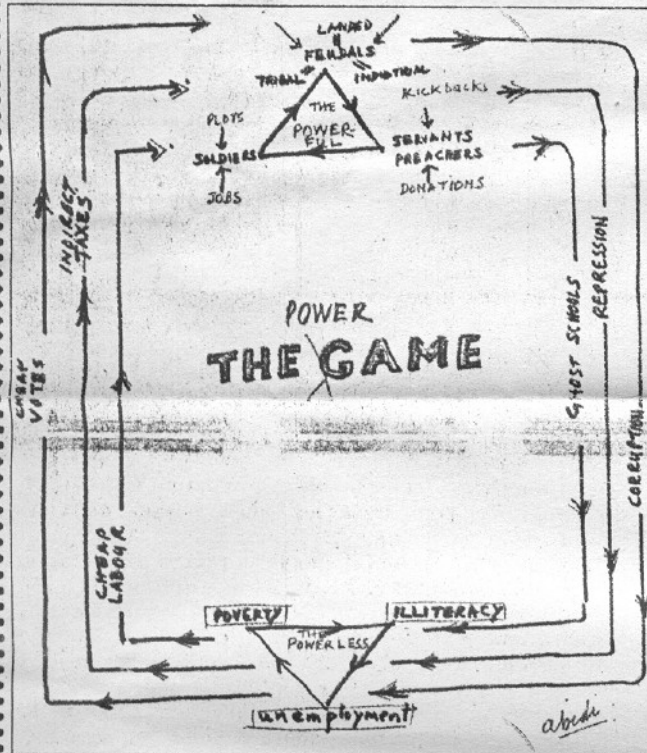
THE Philosopher King may be a utopian dream figure, but the nearest that the world has got to it is a Novelist President who occupied this position in the Czech Republic till late. As would be expected from a creative thinker, Vaclav Havel was able to bring down a dictatorial government and install democracy in Czechoslovakia in 1989, without ordering any heads to roll or firing a single shot. He is, therefore, rightly given the singular honour of being the author of a Velvet Revolution.

However, it required the dedication of 20 years of his life to the passion of liberty, many of which were spent in jails. In fact, he literally marched from jail to the Parliament to be sworn in as the President in order to pacify his 350,000 supporters who had earlier demonstrated in Prague for eight consecutive days. All this while his writings were banned for publication in his country, and his earlier work was also pulled out from libraries and destroyed. He was repeatedly incarcerated and harassed for his dissident activism against the oppressive government, but refused to give up the struggle. When friends urged and rulers encouraged him to leave the country, his response was Socratic: "I am Czech. This was not my choice, it was fate.... This is my language, this is my home.... I try to do something for my country because I live here."

Dissents and protests have known many expressions in history, ranging from beheading rulers to civil wars and disobedience, creating social unrest and even the din of housewives beating utensils with spoons. What Vaclav Havel used was a snowballing effect of communication through the written word and petitions signed by dissenting citizens. In the final days of his struggle, he organized an unofficial loose coalition of opposition known as the Civic Forum. They started a campaign of collecting signatures, calling for a dialogue between the rulers and the ruled.

The first one was signed by more than 3,000 people. But the second one had the signatures of 31,000 citizens from all walks of life. What worried the government was an increasing number of people from inside official institutions who were signing, and action could not be taken against all of them. The enemy Vaclav Havel encountered was none other than the ruthless and uncompromising one-party system of the Communists, with the support of the mighty USSR. He based his resistance on facts, reason and the consensus of the people he took along with him. His peaceful approach did not justify any violent reaction by the rulers, and his safety was guaranteed by the unity of the supporters. Although there was a history of the invasion of Russian forces who brutally crushed dissent in 1969, that still scared the older people, he was lucky to have the support of the younger generation who were bold and brave.

Havel decided to retire only a few weeks ago, and deserves a salute for being a role model to many. — S.A.A.



Bureau not to go in to slumber, but to work harder to ensure greater participation of the people. They should be able to find ways and means of politically educating the majority of silent spectators and drawing them in the political process. Some countries have even used the law to introduce compulsory voting. Failure to take such measures will amount to leaving the field to a small fraction of the electorate who sell, surrender and squander their votes for money, protection, patronage or the bonds of biradri, tribes and sectarian

with political will, we cannot hope to put the polity on the rails of progress.

If we are not vigilant and do not act, our representatives will keep committing the same blunders and meet the same ends that they have so far. Once the government fails and falls, "all the king's men" (spared of accountability or patronized) and "all the king's horses" (traded or purchased), "cannot put it together again." The best way to save a government, and indeed democracy, is to pull the reins of those in power now, before they fall again.