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Finance Minister Resigns

WHY is it that the Congress has not yet been able to produce a Finance Minister from its own ranks? Is it because the present leaders had been so busy going to jail and running the party that they had no time to study finance? This cannot be the explanation, for even the ablest Finance Minister need not be a financial expert. Amateurs at the top is the recognised principle of parliamentary Government. All the three Finance Ministers whom the Congress put up since it assumed office had to be recruited from outside the party. The circumstances under which the first two of them left raised the obvious question how any Finance Minister could possibly fill the bill unless he held such a commanding position in the party as to be able to over-ride others, not excluding the Prime Minister. if the occasion demanded it.. In the case of Shri Chintaman Deshmukh, however, this does not apply to the same extent as it did in the case of his predecessors.

In the second term of his office, he was a Congress member and however aloof he might have been intellectually, he was accepted by the party. But with what reservations, has always been a subject of considerable speculation. Was Shri Chintaman the architect of the First Five-Year Plan? How far was he responsible for the Second Plan? These are idle questions today for though Shri Chintaman was already a Member of the Planning Commission before he was invited to take up the Finance portfolio and therefore continues to be a member after surrendering that portfolio, his break with the Cabinet and the Government looks so complete that his association with the Planning Commission can no longer be taken for granted. Which is a pity, since it would certainly have meant that he would have continued to shape economic policy to a larger extent than any other member that one can think, of at this stage,

Shri Chintaman's interpretation of the duty of a representative to his own constituency may not be accepted by all. Burke's dictum is still as good as any other, but it Shri Chintaman feels the same way about the separation of Bombay City as the people of his constituency, resigning from the Cabinet is as honourable a course as any, to register his protest. Purists may complain only about the propriety of continuing his membership of Lok Sabha on a Congress ticket when Shri Chintaman differs so fundamentally from his party on this particular issue. But he it, not clinging to his seat on false pretences. Had it been open to him to seek re-election he would certainly have done it to vindicate his stand. The only criticism to which he has exposed himself is that while indicting violence on *one* side, he has kept silent about the violence on the other. But he has the justification that the other side did not need him to defend its case.

The issue on which India's so far the ablest Finance Minister has resigned had nothing to do with finance. Yet Shri Chintaman had his differences with the Congress Parliamentary Party as also with the Prime Minister which had led him to tender his resignation on two occasions though the differences were made up in the end. Going entirely by newspaper reports, the occasions were his piloting of the Companies Bill and the question of revising the financial procedure. The first

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