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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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bought out the difficulty of a Finance Minister who did not have the feel of the party and therefore needed the personal intervention of the Prime Minister to persuade Parliament to toe his line. The second arose from one of Pandit Nehru's minor foibles, his careless disregard of good form in asking some body else to look into the financial procedure which, the party complained, was unduly dilatory. On both occasions Shri Chintaman displayed a love of order, system and propriety which is undoubtedly, a virtue for the civil servant but not for a politician. He lacked elasticity and capacity for accommodation, even if he did not take up the wooden attitude that existing procedures were the best conceivable and admitted of no improvement. But no one accused Shri Chintaman of lack of objectivity to the extent that when the case was fairly presented to him,

seewhere secretarial practice was too rigid and capable of being made more flexible, without necessarily sacrificing prudence. In his handling of the Company Bill, Shri Chintaman was accused by the rank and file of the Congress party in Parliament of being too partial to vested interests. But now that he is gone, the same members will discover that no one is in sight who can resist pressure of the wrong sort to the same degree as he. No greater tribute could be paid to a guardian of national finances who has also to shoulder the responsibility for framing and implementing economic policies that necessarily conflict with various sectional interests. It may not be a mere coincidence that a forum for one of these sectional interests is being launched just after his resignation from the Cabinet.

The severe indignance of the retiring Finance Minister is not

however on the issue of Maharashtra and Bombay but the Prime Minister's disregard of the principle of joint responsibility. On this Shri Chintaman has no new light to throw. Others who left the Cabinet in the past had made the same indictment, forgetting that the Cabinet Ministers pull their weight not according to their intelligence and ability but according to their standing and position in the party as also in Parliament. If those who later resigned had cared to remember this elementary principle before joining the Cabinet, they would have been spared much frustration. They could also, perhaps, then pay greater respect to Cabinet responsibility by keeping to themselves what had been discussed in the secrecy of Cabinet meetings. The unreserved acceptance of this political convention is a condition precedent to the successful working of the Cabinet,

Towards Co-existence

EVEN as America's Secretary of State has yet failed to make a reappraisal of the international situation because, presumably, the effort is proving too agonising for him, he does not yet seem to have realised that neutralism is an inappropriate definition of foreign policies pursued by India, Egypt and Yugoslavia. By the time this appears in print, Pandit Nehru's personal impressions of his one-month tour of foreign countries will be available to the public. It may be presumed that he will reiterate the advantages of personal contacts and exchanges of views between the leaders of countries following different policies. It was unfortunate that President Eisenhower's illness prevented intimate personal talks between him and Pandit Nehru. Even so, it is to be assumed that Pandit Nehru's analysis of the world situation will indicate a gradual lessening of the international tension.

Mr Dulles may still be suspicious of the morality of neutralism. But many of America's allies are now convinced that the Bandung countries and Yugoslavia are not neutralists so much as advocates of "peaceful and active co-existence". One clear fact emerges from the statements and communiqués issued by leaders of various countries in the last few weeks. Commonwealth Prime Ministers, the West German

Chancellor, the French Premier and the Presidents of Yugoslavia and of Egypt are agreed that developments within Russia since the death of Stalin call for a reappraisal of the world situation. As Bandung Powers, India and Egypt have always endorsed the principle of peaceful co-existence. Yugoslavia has long been a convert to the Bandung principles of peace. Britain and many other Commonwealth countries now concede the need for a changed attitude to the Communist bloc. America alone persists in pursuing a policy which can only perpetuate the cold war".

From the moment the Heads of State reached an understanding not to start an atomic war the policy of "building positions of strength" became obsolete. Immediately, Russia reoriented her military policy. Among the Western Powers, the Socialist French Premier and his Foreign Minister were prompt in appreciating the need for military re-thinking. They were vocal in their criticism of the Western Powers' foreign policy. They were emphatic in rejecting a foreign policy based exclusively on security. Their urgent appeal for efforts towards greater economic co-operation among nations was widely endorsed.

India, along with other Bandung countries, welcomed the shift in

emphasis in the foreign policy of the Western Powers in the hope that America will in due time be convinced of the need for adjusting her foreign policy to the changing world situation. That hope has yet to be fulfilled. But India, Egypt and Yugoslavia can take comfort that Britain, West Germany and France are now converts to the principle of peaceful co-existence.

Much has happened in Russia since Stalin's death to provoke a conciliatory attitude to the Communist bloc. Rejection of the personality cult in Russia and the gradual process of democratisation in Russia and in the neighbouring Communist States are events which should facilitate an understanding between the Western Powers and the Communist bloc. But there has been a danger that the lack of response from the Western Powers may hamper the encouraging developments within the Communist bloc. Such fears have been openly expressed by India and some other peace-loving nations.

It is a welcome sign of the times that Britain is aware of this possible danger. "We in the West would make a mistake". Sir Anthony Eden has now warned Britain's allies, "if we did not accept this and understood it (rejection of Stalinism by Russia)". Sir Anthony is prepared to reorient his Government's foreign