

Notes of a discussion between Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan and a group of active public workers in Bombay on July 9, 1974

Over a dozen activists engaged in various areas of public service and activity had an opportunity of seeking Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan's views on a variety of issues when they met him in Bombay on Saturday, July 9. Here are some excerpts from the hour-long discussion.

(1363)

Family Planning

Asked how in the context of the disrepute into which the family planning programme had fallen, one should go about seeking the people's acceptance of the programme, JP felt that what ~~was~~ called for were new and different approaches to motivate different sections of the population to accept family planning and reassuring that the whole effort would be voluntary.

Janata Politics

Some Janata Party workers who were present at the discussion complained that they were being discriminated against by the four ^{old} parties who had come together to form the Janata Party. They felt unhappy at being treated as 'untouchables' and would prefer to resign from the party rather than submit to ^{such} humiliation. They wanted JP's advice on the matter.

In his reply, JP felt that the process of fusion takes time though he agreed that the ~~old~~ labels and loyalties should now start disappearing. He also felt that the youth wings attached to the erstwhile parties now ^{dissolved in} involved with the Janata Party should similarly dissolve their identities to form a single body. He counselled patience and asked the workers not to be in a hurry ~~and not~~ to quit. ^{the Party}

Style of living and functioning of Janata Ministers

Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan's attention was drawn to the fact that there was ~~a~~ growing disenchantment with the manner and style of functioning of Janata Ministers which appeared to be no different from that of their predecessors. The questioner wondered whether it was not time for JP to publicly pull up such Ministers. JP pointed out in reply that the ways of working of the Civil Service had ^{something} a lot to do with Ministerial functions. Most Ministers were new ^{to} office and it would take them time to be on their own and less dependent on civil servants. He therefore expected no abrupt and drastic changes.

While ~~he~~ ^{it} was not in favour of his issuing any statement of the kind the questioner had in mind as it was too early for him to do so, ^{At} the same time there would be no harm in constructive criticism ^{by} the people at large. Such criticisms ^{however} should not sound condemnatory.

The Labour Situation

The deteriorating labour situation was the next issue that was brought to JP's attention and the dangers it spelt ^{for the economy} for the economy. A comparison was drawn with what happened in Britain in 1972 when ^{workers} workers refused even to listen to their ^{Trade Unions} shop stewards. There were illegal strikes and a total lack of discipline among workers.

JP pleaded that, being in and out of hospital every other day, he had not been keeping in touch with what was going on. He hardly could even ^{keep pace with the daily} read the newspapers. He had, however, been informed that the Labour Minister ^{was} had been trying to establish some kind of dialogue with labour and management. Personally, he was not very surprised over the eruption of labour unrest as feelings ^{which} had been bottled up during the Emergency and because of it, were now bursting forth. He, however, agreed that Government could not afford to let matters drift ^{and} but that there was need to take decisions in the ^{national} country's interest.

People's Committee

The idea of ~~the~~ People's Committee was not clear according to a Social Worker who asked JP if he could spell this out in some detail.

JP in his reply pointed out that the ~~Apex~~ ^{Apex} Body of the People's Committee had approved certain guidelines. The basic concept behind the ~~the~~ People's Committee was the need to ensure the vigilance of the ordinary people in regard to the functioning

of the ^{new} elected representatives. This Committee, whether at the Mohalla level in the urban areas or the Gram Sabhas in the rural areas, would be in the nature of a vigilance body to monitor the speeches and activities of their elected representatives and by so doing, ^{make them accountable} ~~hold them to account~~. This, he said, was a continuous process.

Deploing the fact that organisations tended to centre round personalities, Jayaprakash said that in India organisations were set up at the top and percolated downwards instead of it being the other way round. His own experience of trying to develop them from the grass roots level upwards have not yet succeeded

At the same time he visualises the Gram Sabhas in the villages as being the agents of socio-economic change. Even here ^{are} ~~there~~ practical difficulties such as divisions between landowners and the landless and caste considerations ~~come~~ in the way of these Gram Sabhas fulfilling their role.

In Jayaprakash
sanat activity
in Bimby
Over a dozen activists engaged in various areas of public work had the opportunity of seeking JP's views on a variety of issues when they met him at Mr. H.R. Masani's residence on Saturday July 9. Here are some excerpts from the hour-long question and answer session. *de smen*

Family Planning

Question: The family planning programme has fallen into disrepute following the excesses committed in its implementation during the Emergency. How should we go about seeking people's acceptance of the programme ?

Answer: It is true that Sanjay's methods had brought a bad name to family planning. But population has to be controlled. New and different approaches are necessary to motivate different sections of the population to accept family planning.

Janata Politics:

Question: The four parties in the Janata Party treated others in the Party who did not belong to these four parties viz. the Congress(O) the Jan Sangh, the Bharatiya Lok Dal and the Socialist Party, as untouchables. They were behaving as the Janata Party version of the Gang of Four. The Jan Sangh elements in particular were putting obstacles in the way of others. Their aim being to gain control of the Janata Party. Sincere workers who did not come from these four parties were feeling frustrated. They feel like quitting the Janata Party rather than submit to humiliation. What is JP's advice to such aggrieved workers ?

Answer: The leadership of the Jan Sangh have in their meetings with me given me the impression that they have changed considerably their attitudes in the light of recent events. This also includes their thinking on socio-economic issues. I have also met the RSS leaders who have responded positively to my suggestion that they should dissolve their organisation and their members should join the Janata Party. *The process of fusion will take time*

I also feel that the youth wings attached to the erstwhile parties now a part of the Janata Party should dissolve their identities and join to form a single Youth body.

Compulsions of democratic politics such as the importance of the votes of Harijans and minorities is bound to bring moderation in the thinking of the Jan Sangh elements in the Janata Party.

But all this takes time. There is need for patience. His advice therefore to the workers is to be patient and not quit.

*The old
Congress
legislature
should now
reappear*

Style of living and functioning of Janata Ministers:

Question: People have been commenting on the fact that ~~they~~ has been no change in the style of living and pattern of functioning of Janata Ministers which had been marked by as much ostentation as had characterised Congress ministers. Why can't JP publicly pull up such ministers ?

Answer: We must understand that the ways of working of the civil service has a lot to do with ministerial functioning. Most of the ministers were new to office and it would take time from them to assert themselves. No abrupt or drastic changes can be expected. The Ministers on the other hand are aware of the need for such changes. We must all help them with constructive criticism and at the same not sound condemnatory.

As for my publicly pulling them up, I think that it is somewhat premature. After all they have been in office only for about three months and a little more. I would again ~~renew~~ counsel patience.

The Labour Situation

an illegal strike
Question: The labour situation is deteriorating and the economy is being damaged by the spate of strikes and lockouts. There is a total lack of discipline among workers in their new-found freedom from suppression. Government does not appear to have any positive policy to deal with this situation. There is the danger that this could lead to a situation similar to that in Britain in 1972.

Answer: I have been out of touch. Every other day I have to be in hospital and hardly read the newspapers. However I believe the Labour Minister has been trying to establish some kind of dialogue with labour and management. It is natural to expect that feelings bottled up during the emergency are bursting forth. I agree however that Government must not matters to drift but decide in the country's interest.

The Language Problem

Question: What would JP advice in regard to the medium of instruction. Would you consider that English should be the medium in Schools ? Moreover Hindi is not being given the attention it deserves. Hence its development has suffered.

Answer: I think English should be taught as a language and not as the medium of instruction. The country needs a link language. Hindi by virtue of the fact that it is spoken by the largest number is the logical choice. I agree it has been given the attention it deserves. I would accept a common script for all Indian languages. This would in my view minimise opposition to hindi and help its growth by wider usage and acceptance.

People's Committees

Question: We have formed a Mohalla Committee. Has JP any suggestions to offer on its functioning ?

Answer: The apex body of the people's committees has provided guidelines. Generally these committees at the grass roots level should carefully study the speeches and activities of their elected representatives . By doing so they could hold them to account. This is a continuous process.

In our country unfortunately organisations generally begin from the top and percolate downwards. In my experience attempts to develop organisations and build them upwards . I visualise that the Gram Sabhas ~~at~~ in the rural areas will be the instrument for socio economic reforms throughout the country. But there are practical difficulties. In the villages there are divisions between landowners and the landless and also along caste lines. These divisions weaken the Gram Sabhas and prevent them from fulfilling their role.

*have
not
succeeded*