

Q. All of us know the background behind, and the reasons for, your resignation as Chairman of the Minorities Commission and there is not much point in pursuing the matter further. After all the heat and dust had settled over the Minorities Commission issue, where do we go from here and what are your plans?

A. I am jolly relieved to get away from the somewhat shattering experience of the past three months of dealing with the Administration in New Delhi which I found marked by ineptitude of a very high order. My interest in the problems of Minorities is of course undiminished. I am keen that the very weighty report which the Commission adopted at its last meeting on 24th and 25th of May in Bombay on the Aligarh Muslim University (Amendment) Bill, which is now before Parliament, should be published. This is all the more necessary since some garbled leakages from official quarters in Delhi have already appeared in sections of the press. I really can't imagine Government asking M.P.s to discuss the Bill while withholding from them copies of our Report. (The Aligarh Muslim University (Amendment) Bill was introduced in Parliament at the end of the last Session and will come up for discussion during the Monsoon Session commencing in July).

The work to which I have turned immediately is that on my Memoirs. As you know, the first volume, "Bliss was it in that Dawn", brought the story up to the achievement of Independence. The next volume will move on from there up to date, which is nearly thirty years. During the last few weeks, I have already made considerable progress and have got as far as 1970.

Q. Will it in any way be different from the first volume in terms of style or revelations?

A. Not in style, but certainly in content. The story of the years since Independence, when I was in Parliament from 1957 to 1970, is quite an exciting one and people like Jawaharlal Nehru, C. Rajagopalachari, Jayaprakash, Indira Gandhi and Morarji Desai figure quite a lot in it.

- Q. Will you have anything to add to the record which has not been already said about these persons?
- A. Rather. I guess there will be quite a lot which would be new in the nature of conversations and correspondence.
- Q. Do you have anything controversial to ~~add~~ say about Indira Gandhi in particular and about other personalities in general?
- A. What I will have to say about all of them will be factual, but others may well consider it controversial.
- Q. The political set up in India has become increasingly murky. As an observer of the political scene for several decades and as a participant till recently, would you comment on the outlook?
- A. I retired from Party politics as far back as 1971. Since then, my angle has been that of a student of history and an observer. From that angle, India appears to be back in 1967 and the years that followed. You will recall that in 1967 all the States in Northern India threw up what were described as Samyukt Vidhayak Dal (S.V.D.) governments. These were unprincipled coalitions of parties and groups who had little in common except the lure of office. Striking a personal note, I may say there was an exception in the Swatantra led coalition in Orissa which has a principled programmatic alliance arrived at before the elections with which as the Party General Secretary I had something to do.

These S.V.D. Governments behaved so badly that within two years the people had thrown them out of office in all States from Punjab to West Bengal. This created the "Indira Wave" in 1971 and finally June 1975. The pendulum had swung from chaos to an authoritarian regime.

The situation today is only superficially different from that in the years after 1967. True, the Janata Party exists now and it did not exist then, but I fear the character of the Janata Government in Delhi continues essentially to be that of a coalition which is finding it difficult to hold together. The sixty-four thousand dollar question is how those who believe in democracy like myself can help to prevent the pendulum swinging again all the way from the current breakdown of law and order and labour indiscipline to another authoritarian regime.

- Q. Do you see a parallel of the situation in 1975 and in 1978 regarding lawlessness and political facism and, if there is a parallel, would you say that the situation today is similar to the pre-emergency situation?
- A. No, there was no lawlessness before June 1975. The lawlessness was before 1971 so it was a phony Emergency. We are today in 1969/70 and not in 1975.
- Q. In June 1975 if there was no lawlessness would not Jayaprakash Narayan call..... would you consider the January 1974 agitation in Ahmedabad followed by a call by J.P. to Patna youth for a peaceful revolt would constitute lawlessness because it was recorded that there was several lathi charges - would that not be construed as lawlessness?
- A. I fear that we are getting into a sterile argument. I made my view very clear in my last answer.
- Q. Are there any signs already of a backlash against the Janata Government today? Have you seen our June 15 issue and the poll of opinion it carried?
- A. Yes, I was interested in reading the result of the poll that your magazine organised, but perhaps more authoritative are the results of legislative elections held in the last few months. Contrary to the general impression that the Janata Party polled a higher percentage of votes in the South in February 1978 than in March 1977, the figures provided by Mr. Surendra Mohan M.P., former Secretary of the Janata Party, show that in Andhra Pradesh the Janata party polled 28.6% of the votes as compared to 32.4% in the Lok Sabha election, in Karnataka 37.4% as against 39.7%, and in Assam 28% as against 35%. (The Statesman 24.4.1978). In the recent bye-election in Karnal the Janata majority dropped from 2,76,000 to 19,000, and in Azamgarh a Janata majority of 138,000 was converted into Congress (I) majority of 35,385.

- Q. Jayaprakash Narayan has made certain statements in recent weeks deploring the functioning of the Janata Administration and the Prime Minister on his return from U.S.A. two weeks ago and he did not want to get into a controversy with J.P. on this question. What are your comments?
- A. I think J.P., from whom country still expects a lot despite his very poor health, is performing the function which he has performed for decades as "the conscience of India". He does so of course in a gentle Gandhian way of his own. Unfortunately I have a sad feeling that the Janata Government have as little regard for J.P.'s views as the Congress Government had for Mahatma Gandhi's views once they took office. There are misguided persons who approach those of us who speak up by suggesting that criticism of Janata may accelerate Indira Gandhi's return to office. I hold the opposite view. There is an old Russian proverb : "The yes man is your enemy; your friend will argue with you". If those of who are friends of the present regime join in a conspiracy of silence about the Government's defaults, all the discontent would find its way into communist or Indira Gandhi channels. This would not be helpful, would it? That is what I said in my article in the Reader's Digest of December 1977 'Indians Speak Up'.
- Q. The Indian economy at present is showing signs of stagnation for various reasons, some political and some non-political. Not being an economist yourself, it would not be fair to ask you for a blue print, but could you give us your suggestions?
- A. The Janata Government's overall economic policy does not appear to be basically different from that pursued so disastrously by Prime Minister Nehru. The last two Budgets have been extremely disappointing. According to Nani Palkiwala, India was already the "highest taxed nation" when the recent Budget added to the burden with vicious excise duties on the needs and comforts of life. This was accompanied by a massive dose of deficit finance. The estimate of Rs.1050 crores is likely to be exceeded. The final official figures of increase in money supply during the month of April 1978 shows that the money in circulation had increased during that single month by Rs.760 crores, or about three-quarters of the entire year's quota. One Shudders to think what kind of inflation the country is in for. This is not visible at the moment because

of certain temporary reasons but the laws of economics cannot be flaunted for very long with impunity.

Q. Mr. Nani Palkhiwala had long advocated tax cuts and a more rational tax structure. Do you agree with him?

A. Very much so. I used to respond to the call for a "U Turn" in our fiscal policy which he made year after year in his excellent commentary on the Budgets. There is no sign of such a "U Turn" today. I am glad to see, however, that the people of California, perhaps influenced by Nani Palkhiwala's presence in the U.S.A., have taken up this slogan with a vengeance. I follow the Anglo-American press and I have gathered a sheaf of clippings about the middle class revolt which has swept California and is likely to sweep the rest of the United States. Early last month, the people of California in a referendum voted by a two-thirds majority to slash the taxes on property by 60%. This was in the face of opposition from both political parties and the politicians led by the Governor of the State. The man who led this revolt single handed was Mr. Howard Jarvis who, at the age of 75, carried out a one man revolt for which he is called the "Moses of the Middle Class". He has been inundated with invitations to speak all over the U.S.A. Very encouraging proposals are being tabled by many States restricting the power of State Governments to spend more than in the previous year except only to the extent of inflation ~~mf~~ in the present year.

One wishes there was a similar revolt in India where the Middle Classes are ground between the millstones of taxation and inflation. The ~~xxxx~~ sad thing is that, while all other classes have their champions, the Middle Class hasn't any one. Chowdhary Charan Singh and Mr. Bhanu Pratap Singh, Minister of State for Agriculture and Irrigation, are giving excellent leadership to the farmers. The politicians in office are of course protecting the "paper tigers" of Trade Unions which have a much louder bark than their bite. Industrialists and businessmen can be trusted to look after themselves. It is time the middle class got organised in a non-partisan Middle Class Front and made its voice heard.

Q. How?

A. How did the people in California do it?

Q. Obviously there can be no comparison with the middle class revolt in California and the hoped for middle class revolt in India. Because of the greater financial capabilities of Californians their protests are more sophisticated and effective and therefore more likely to be listened to by the Government. The Middle Class in India on the contrary are so over burdened with the basic question of survival and making ends meet that the protest should be more muted. Therefore it would be found difficult for Middle Class in India to revolt than California.

A. I do not share your somewhat defeatist view. Nobody could have foretold what happened in California six months ago. It is on record that the supporters of the tax cut had very little funds and even public support. It was a miracle of grass roots will power. I agree that it is more difficult in India, but it is called for even more because of the distress of our lower middle class.

Q. I would have imagined that my reservation about the effectiveness of the methods by the Middle Class in California was more realistic than defeatist. Since we have both agreed that such a revolt is necessary and desirable, though more difficult, shall we leave it at that?

A. As my old friend Dossu Karaka would have said: "Jai Hind phor that"!

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