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- Q. What is the basic impression you gathered during your visits to Delhi in the last three months about the extent to which the present Government is serious about solving the problems of the minorities? Was it your impression that they were more interested in playing politics than in solving these problems?
- A. The Government showed great interest in the Minorities Commission at the time of its establishment but, once it was established, they lost interest in it and adopted what Mr. Daniel Moynihan in another context described as "benign neglect", though it was not all that benign! I would not go so far as to say that they were playing politics in this matter. They were perhaps serious about the problems of the minorities in principle, but after all the proof of the pudding is in the eating, isn't it?
- Q. If Mr. Charan Singh, the Home Minister, to whose Ministry your Commission was treated as an "attached office", had not fallen ill and been hospitalised, do you think that it would have made any difference?
- A. One of those 'ifs' of history! It is difficult to say, but it is quite possible that if Mr. Charan Singh had been functioning normally things might not have come to this sad pass.
- Q. Are you implying that besides Mr. Charan Singh the others were not genuinely concerned about the urgency of finding solutions to the minorities

question ?

- A. That, I fear, would be jumping to a conclusion ! There are two reasons why I gave the answer I did. The first is that it was Mr. Charan Singh, as Home Minister, through whom the Government's invitation to us to join the Commission had come and he might have felt a personal responsibility to put things right. The other lets face it is that he is a man who knows his mind and gets things done. In his absence, the Prime Minister neither puts things right nor had the courtesy to reply to our letters.
- Q. Why do you think the Government did not seek your advice on the issue of the Aligarh Muslim University (Amendment) Bill they were introducing in Parliament ?
- A. I don't really know what happened behind the scenes. I did get the impression that the Law Ministry was particularly worried about the possibility of the Muslim character of the University being recognised. They were obsessed by the judgement of the Supreme Court in what is known as the Azeez Basha case, which had ruled to the contrary. I have reason to believe that the decision not to consult the Commission was not the decision of the Education Ministry but that of the Cabinet as a whole. That, of course, makes things much worse.
- Q. Can you give some indication about what conclusions you have come to in the report that the Commission have adopted at the meeting in Bombay on the 25th and 26th of May on this subject ?
- A. I fear that I cannot answer that because it would not be proper as our Report

is with the Government and it is for them to publish. We in fact have pressed Government that the Report should be placed on the table of both Houses of Parliament on the opening day of the next Session which I understand will be in the middle of July. I am afraid you will have to wait till then for the contents of the Report.

Q. Suppose you had not resigned as Chairman, what in your view are the kinds of things the Commission should have dealt with ?

A. Oh, there is so much to be done. For instance, there is the important subject of the Urdu language. Then there is a wide subject of discrimination in the fields of Education and Employment. There are the problems of the Adivasis and the Harijans. These are problems in which I have been interested since I was Chairman of the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities as far back as the early fifties. The Minorities Commission could have done so much useful research and work in these and other fields. I feel deeply disappointed that I have been denied the opportunity of contributing towards a solution of these vital national problems.

Q. In your Statement to the Press on May 30 you referred to the fact that at almost every turn the Commission was stymied by some rule thrown at it and by being told to get the sanction of some bureaucrat or the other. Would you care to give an example ?

A. Well, I'll give rather a ludicrous example. When on the 8th of May the Vice-Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University and the deputation he led motored up all the way from Aligarh to testify before us, we naturally asked them to stay on and have lunch with us as our guests. This appeared to irk some officials. Also, horror of horrors, the tea at the India International Centre where we held our meeting cost Re.1.50 per head, while it would appear that according to the Finance Ministry rules not more than Re.1.00 per head

can be spent on tea or coffee without the prior approval of the Finance Ministry. The Secretary of the Commission was therefore told to advise me as Chairman of the Commission that such excessive expenditure should be avoided "so as to contain inflation"!

Q. What assurances was the Commission given when it was set up and in what way were they broken ?

A. If you were to refer to my Statement explaining the reasons for my resignation on May 30, ^{you} they would find there the answers to these questions. But, in a broad way, let me put it that I for one was persuaded to join the Commission on the assurance that the Government intended to attach great weight to the recommendations of the Commission. In fact, we were also told that the Cabinet had decided that our recommendations would be considered binding and I recall reading that Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee actually saying so in a public speech. Well, now from that to failing to consult us when we asked to be consulted in good time in regard to the Aligarh Muslim University Bill was a bit of a come down, wasn't it ?

We got the same feeling of let down when, after having been assured that an Amendment to the Constitution would be introduced in the Budget Session of the Parliament to give the Commission a permanent, statutory and independent existence. This promise was overlooked and we are now told that the Law Ministry had not found time to introduce that Bill. This certainly does show what a high order of priority has been given to the Minorities Commission !

Thus, the cumulative effect of these various developments has brought me to the sad conclusion that conditions did not exist in which I would perform the tasks I was asked to undertake.

Q - You have seen Prof. John's statements in the newspapers on 30th May. Would you like to comment on them?

A - I am rather reluctant to do so.

Q - Don't you think you owe it to the public?

A - Well, knowing the facts as I do, I found Prof. John's reasons for his stand quite unconvincing. For instance, the poor man's memory seems to playing him false. He admitted that he had "earlier threatened to resign", but that he was later mollified when "the Union Education Minister gave us a copy of the Bill and explained the position to us". Now, as it happens, the fact is that, while we saw the Education Minister at 10.30 a.m. on the 9th of May, Prof. John and I prepared and signed our joint letter of resignation to the Prime Minister on the afternoon of that day after we had already seen the Education Minister! I felt rather sorry for Prof. John. It would seem from the statement published on May 31 that he did not know his mind and was unhappy both at the thought of resigning and also at not resigning. On 9th May Prof. John and I wrote jointly to the Prime Minister :-

" The facts to which we have referred in this letter and in our earlier letter of April 27 have led us to the sad conclusion that conditions do not exist in which we can fulfil the tasks that face the Commission. We, therefore, request you to accept our resignations as from May 31, 1978".

Nothing whatsoever had happened since then to justify our resiling from that commitment.

Q - Prof. John's statement seems to show some concern that criticism of the Janata Government's behaviour may benefit the opponents of the Government. How do you feel about it?

A - I gave my answer to that question long ago in an article entitled "Indians, Speak Up" which appeared in the Readers Digest of

December 1977. I am no less friendly to the Janata Government, but I believe that if there is a conspiracy of silence amongst us about the Janata Government's activities and we leave the job of criticism only to those who believe in authoritarianism, this would only expedite the backlash towards authoritarianism by canalysing all discontent into authoritarian channels. In a democracy the people benefit by being told the truth. Hence I believe Abraham Lincoln was right when he said: "To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men".

Q - Do you really think that the problems of the Minorities ~~ever~~^{can} be solved?

A - That can be well described as a sixty-four million dollar question! Certainly, your scepticism is not uncalled for when one recalls that the United Nations has not been able to make ~~very~~ much progress with its efforts to deal with the Minorities question over all these decades. So too the Soviet Government, which had professed at the time it was established to solve the minorities problem, has signally failed to do so. The Ukrainians and the other ~~linguistic~~^{ethnic and} minorities certainly do not find that their problems have been solved. Was'nt it only last month that there was rioting in the streets of Tiflis, the capital of Georgia, against a move to lessen the importance and recognition of the Georgian language as opposed to the Russian language?

The Minorities problem can not be solved in a hundred per cent manner, but certainly a great deal can be done to remove the feeling of alienation from which many minorities suffer. The fact that the task is a Herculean one would suggest that it had better be taken up with a great deal of seriousness and zest in the cause of national integration so dear to all.

Q. Prof. John has implied that you acted in haste in sending in your resignation. He maintains that the Centre had assured you all that it would move an amendment to the Constitution making it obligatory for the Centre and State Governments to report the steps taken by them on the recommendations of Minorities Commission - What do you have to say about that?

A. Every man has his own yardstick about what his self respect demands. The fact that there were two letters that I had written to the Prime Minister, one dated 27th April on behalf of the entire Commission and approved by the Commission and the other jointly signed by Prof. John and myself on May 9, and that neither of them had even been acknowledged by the Prime Minister is in my view adequate reason for resigning, quite apart from the numerous other reasons of substance we had stated in those letters.

It is perfectly true that Government had assured us that it would move an Amendment to the Constitution of the nature that Prof. John mentions, but the amusing thing is that that assurance was given to me in a letter dated 18th February by which the Home Secretary invited me on behalf of Government to be the Chairman of the Commission. That assurance was repeated to us ~~several times~~ during the interim ^{working} months. But Government did not honor the assurance that they would introduce an Amendment of this nature during the Budget session. In fact that is one of the three reasons I gave for my resignation.

All that seems to have happened since then is that the Home Secretary managed to samjhao Prof. John with platonic assurances which I found utterly unconvincing when Prof. John tried to induce me to desist from the course on which we had decided.

Indeed, in one of his letter to me ~~dated 22nd May~~, Prof. John made the ridiculous suggestion that I should write once again to the Prime Minister as if the failure to receive a reply to my earlier two letters was not enough and we should submit ourselves to a third rebuff !

I hold the view that for me to have delayed my resignation *further* beyond ~~31st May~~, as desired by Prof. John, in the absence of a reply to the two letters would have been to betray a lack of elementary self-respect.

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