

The Economic Weekly

A Journal of Current Economic and Political Affairs

June 17, 1950

Eight annas

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A MINISTER DOFFS HIS GARB

REASONS of state and not the heat in New Delhi, as a press correspondent flippantly suggests, must be responsible for the absence of sixteen of the Ministers from the capital—16, that is, out of the total strength of 22, including Ministers of State, and Deputy Ministers - leaving Mr. Deshmukh and Mr. Shri Prakasa alone among those of Cabinet rank to hold the fort. Of the Ministers who are away from Delhi, three are abroad: three are reported to be resting under medical advice; and the rest on tour in different parts of the country, undoubtedly on official business.

The Prime Minister has been visiting the relics of Greater India in Java and Bali; the Deputy Prime Minister has been attending to his work in the more salubrious climate of Dehra Dun; the Health Minister is now in London on her way back from Geneva where she had gone to attend the WHO Conference; the Labour Minister, too, is enjoying Alpine air, while piloting the affairs of world labour; the Law Minister, after attending a Buddhist Conference in Ceylon, is at present in South India; the Minister for Transport and Railways, for health reasons, has taken shelter in Ooty where no railways can intrude and disturb his peace; the Minister for Works, Mines and Power is at another hill station, Mussorie; the Food Minister, too, is at Dehra Dun attending, no doubt, to other things than planting trees, of which there is no dearth in that part of the country.

Ministerial peregrinations are not exactly what it is for other people when they go on a spree. Hence it is nice to find that even a Cabinet Minister may sometimes divest himself of his high rank and speak in his individual capacity. This the Minister of Industries and Supply did while he was in Bombay, and the Progressive Group must be congratulated for having persuaded Shri Hare Krushna Mahatab to do something so startlingly unconventional. Indeed, it was such a refreshing change to watch a Minister doff the dignity of office and speak out his mind, instead of making set speeches. Mr. Mahatab, by the way, does not like Ministers making set or any speeches.

The individual, however, is such an elusive being, that when Mr. Mahatab doffed the garb of his office, what came out were his successive previous incarnations—first that of the successful Chief Minister of Orissa, the State which has no rationing and no prohibition and the earlier incarnation of the Congressman who had gone to jail for defying the excise laws.

Behind this practical man, there was the orthodox Congressman who had fought for the cause of prohibition. The subsequent change had been occasioned by a forceful impact with realities. Prohibition is not a practical proposition, said Mr. Mahatab, not as a Minister for Industry and Supply, but as a Congressman who had grown wiser. What gives point and adds to the significance of this horrie truth is the fact that Mr. Mahatab was also speaking as the ex-Chief Minister of Orissa State, though being the politician that he is, he did not

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