

SWATANTRA PARTY

National Convention

Patna, March 19 & 20, 1960

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GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

by

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FRIENDS,

It is normal for a report of this nature to be devoted largely to a factual narration of developments during the year under review, both of a political and an organisational nature, along with suggestions and comments. In this report, the usual proportions will have to be reversed. For one thing, the Party has been in existence only for about half the normal period and, for another, I myself did not take charge of my office till just three months back. I hope I may, therefore, devote the greater part of this report to looking ahead, considering the tasks that face the Party, the pitfalls on the way and the measures that are necessary to build up the organisation and further the cause.

The Party was conceived at an informal meeting in Madras on June 4, 1959, and inaugurated on August 1 and 2 in Bombay with the adoption of the Statement of Principles and the membership clause. The Constitution of the Party was left over for consideration at a later Convention, with the result that its organs have so far functioned on an *ad hoc* basis.

its Patrons to the Congress of the Liberal International at Gardone in Italy on October 1, 1959, many delegates found it difficult to understand why sections of the Continental press had described the Swatantra Party as a Conservative development. They found that the Statement of Principles was the essence of liberalism. The Congress of the Liberal International, therefore, passed a resolution welcoming the formation of the Party and expressing the hope "that the Swatantra (Freedom) Party will prove a staunch and successful upholder of the values and policies of liberalism, which are so necessary for the development of the good life, for friendly relations between the people of the East and of the West and essential to the peace of the world."

II

A Public Opinion Survey

The Party has been received with widespread sympathy and public opinion has responded to the stimulus provided by its emergence. Whether one considers the massive meetings, often exceeding a lakh of people, which have gathered to listen to Rajaji or whether one judges by the comment in the national press, the result is encouraging. It would seem as if people had been waiting for this development.

In this context, a Public Opinion Survey conducted by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion in Delhi during the months June to September 1959, on the eve of the Party's emergence is of some significance. The question put to a cross section of the public was: "Would you like to see a liberal but non-socialist party in opposition to the Congress?" 68.9% said they had no opinion or did not know. But 14.3% said 'Yes.' It would appear from this that there was a ready-made minority waiting for the Party and an almost equally small minority antagonist to it, while a large majority was open-minded and not biased one way or the other.

When asked, last June to September, who they would vote for if there was an immediate election to the Lok Sabha, 44.5% said they would vote for the Congress, 7.8% for the Communists, 4.2% for the P.S.P., 1.5% for the Jan Sangh, 3.2% for all the other parties then in existence put together, while 37.2% said they were independent, undecided or did not know. It is clear from this that almost as large a number of people in India were, on the eve of the emergence of the Swatantra Party, uncommitted as adhered to the ruling party.

The field, therefore, lies open before us. There is almost no limit to the advance that the Swatantra Party can make in terms of available public sympathy and response. The opportunity is great but it needs to be matched by effort. Sympathy and potential support are of value and to be treasured but, unless they are converted into actual support mobilised in organisational form, they will be inadequate for furthering the Party's objectives. The opponent is far too well-entrenched to be dislodged otherwise.

The fact must squarely be faced by us that today our capacity to keep pace with public support and expectations is inadequate in terms of available resources in men and money. We are in consequence unable to reach more than a small proportion of those who are ready to receive our message.

III

Our Task

What is the task facing the Party and its organisers? It is primarily that of educating Indian public opinion to the validity and soundness of the Party's aims, principles and policies. It is that of harnessing and mobilising the potential sympathy and support into a mass movement. It is of providing the Indian people with an alternative government. Finally, it is that of providing the country with a new government when the people

call it to that high responsibility. To state the task is to show its immensity, its almost frightening proportions. There is the problem of the vast numbers of the people to be reached, there is the problem of the vast distances to be covered, there is the hurdle of illiteracy and other barriers to communication such as diversity of tongues, religions and social institutions. The task is continental rather than national. It is like establishing and developing a new party for, say, the whole of Western Europe!

How is this tremendous challenge to be met? What are the elements out of the fusion of which this weapon may be forged?

IV

The Message

Our first requirement is leadership. This has fortunately been provided to us by Shri C. Rajagopalachari in a way that has extorted admiration from even the Party's staunchest opponents.

Another most important element in the Party's make-up is, of course, its message. The concise Statement of Principles with its 21 points adopted at the Bombay Convention struck exactly the right note and gave the Party its "take off". The Statement of Principles evoked widespread support and large numbers of Congress Party members were heard to say that they found themselves in broad agreement with it. As time passed, however, the comment was heard that, while the 21 Principles were generally acceptable, they were in much too general terms, necessarily vague because of the brevity, and that something more detailed and concrete was expected of the Party. Indeed, at the Bombay Convention itself, it had been decided that a fuller Statement of Policy should be presented by the Central Organising Committee to the next National Convention. At its meeting

action a large number of men and women carrying the Party's message and spreading it to the most distant villages and towns of this vast land.

The placing of the right man in the right position of influence within the organisation is not an easy one. Certain defections from the Party within a few months of its establishment have naturally caused some concern within our ranks. The Congress Party has plenty of jobs to offer. But, knowing this, we should be careful not to depend on dubious elements. Our enthusiasm and eagerness to see the Party grow should not lead us to welcome people in our fold without due discrimination. In the pursuit of importance and numbers, the weightage that needs to be given to quality should not be overlooked.

People are tired of the old faces and the old voices. They look for new thinking. It will be good policy for us to attach more value to new and unknown people, preferably the young, whom we can infuse with our message and enlist among our workers.

As has been mentioned earlier, it is natural that the development of the Party over an area as large as this country should be uneven. If I may venture a thought, it is less harmful to have no unit in a particular place or district than to have a bad one.

In this, as in many other respects, Rajaji's experience and instinct must be our guide. Any minor set-backs will turn out to be a blessing if the appropriate lessons are drawn.

It is essential but not quite enough that a party worker should be devoted and sincere, and capable of mixing with people of all classes. It is also necessary that he should have a firm grasp of party policies and be competent enough to popularise them, as against the superficialities of socialist slogans. The need arises for the training of party workers, particularly the enthusiastic young men and women who place themselves at the Party's disposal. Study circles and training camps need to be organised throughout the country in order to equip them for their important task.

Party Membership

Next in importance to the cadre of workers comes the general body of members of the Party. The Swatantra Party is a mass party and its doors are wide open to every man or woman who accepts its principles and policies. As has been mentioned earlier, progress with the enrolment of members in certain parts of the country has already been most impressive and I have little doubt that if we put our hands to it, the target will be achieved. The campaign for enrolment of members must proceed with redoubled vigour to provide a true and effective base for the Party. Whatever may happen, we must guard against following the Congress Party's practice of enrolling "bogus" members to make easy passage to offices in local committees. The Central Office of the Party will shortly institute machinery for strict inspection and scrutiny of membership registers and account books of State parties in order to ensure that no malpractices are allowed to creep in.

Literature

The preparation and distribution of literature embodying the Party's thought and policies in all our principal languages is another task to which we shall have to turn. The publication of the Statement of Policy adopted at the National Convention should, it is suggested, be followed by the preparation of a series of pamphlets and booklets elaborating on each major topic in that document.

The contact between the Party worker and member and the citizen it is sought to approach can take many forms apart from the effort at getting him enrolled as member. The door-to-door distribution of literature is an effective medium of communication in democratic countries.

The multiplicity of languages in the country does not permit of the Central Office supplying literature in each of these

languages. So far, only some literature⁸ in English has been produced. It is proposed, however, to set up a small centre for translating material into simple Hindi so that it would be made available particularly to the various States in Northern India.

The spoken word is as important as the written one and meetings of various kinds from mass meetings to small study circles and seminars have to be organised from day to day.

The Central Office has already taken in hand the preparation of "Talking Points for Speakers" which will be issued from time to time to Party organisers and speakers. These will consist of a series of questions and answers.

Constructive Work

Gandhiji never tired of stressing the importance of constructive work in the service of the people both as an end in itself and as an aid to the¹ propagation of the political message. A wide field of service lies open to us in this context. In one or two places, the Party has already organised a Swatantra Service Centre with such departments as a civic grievances bureau, a youth service centre and a legal grievances bureau.

Public Advice Committee

A major step in that direction has been the setting up by the General Council at its meeting held at Hyderabad on December 8, 1959, of a Public Advice Committee consisting of Shri K. M. Munshi (Chairman), Sardar Harnam Singh, former Judge, Punjab High Court, New Delhi, Shri C. B. Agarvala, former Judge, Allahabad High Court, New Delhi, Shri N. C. Chatterji, Advocate, Supreme Court, Shri N. A. Palkhivala, Advocate, Supreme Court, Bombay and Shri R. M. Sheshadri, Advocate, Madras.

It has called upon the public to forward to the Committee cases which involve matters relating to public policy, Fundamental Rights, corruption and favouritism of Ministers and officials, and interference by the members of the ruling Party in administrative and judicial matters.

An office of the Committee has been set up in Bombay.

The Committee has appealed to the public to cooperate with it by bringing to its notice any *encroachment on civil liberties* or on honest and fearless administration. For enquiry, the encroachments are classified as follows:

- (a) Any legislative enactment, or rule, or act of the executive which (i) amounts to encroachment on civil liberties or Fundamental Rights under the pretext of being in the general public interest, or (ii) is discriminatory without apparently valid reasons.
- (b) Any ministerial act which has been the result of personal favouritism or inspired by party advantage or pressure.
- (c) Any act or attempt of an organ or a member of the party in power to interfere with the judicial or executive administration.
- (d) Any instance of economic or political pressure by the party in power brought on any person or institution to do or omit to do what he or it lawfully should or should not do.
- (e) Any instance of political, official, economic or legislative pressure brought on any one to do something which is supposed to be done voluntarily, for example, pressure brought to bear on a farmer to give up his farm to a joint farming society.
- (f) Any other act or attempt which may amount to an interference which would prejudice proper democratic functioning of the State or fearless non-party administration.

Nursing the Constituency

One of the main forms of mass contact developed in the older democracies is the nursing of the constituency by the prospective Parliamentary or State Assembly candidate. While it is still too early to think in terms of elections and it was very wisely decided at Hyderabad that the Party would keep aloof from all elections till 1962, the need to nurse the constituency is something to which it will soon be time attention is given. In India it is the general practice to nominate candidates only a few days or weeks before nomination day. Quite apart from the fact that this does not make it possible to nurse the constituency as is done elsewhere, this has led to last-moment quarrels and disgruntlement. May I suggest that the Swatantra Party break away from this practice and decide not to nominate its candidates through a Parliamentary Board sitting like a Railway Booking office issuing 'tickets' to aspirants, but that the Party should consider this a routine day-to-day activity covering a long period. My own thought is that, as soon as the new General Council and Central Organising Committee have been constituted by the beginning of 1961, the task should be taken in hand of sounding probable Parliamentary and State candidates and encouraging them to work from then on to get to know voters in their constituencies and get known in the area.

I can anticipate certain objections that may be raised but I believe that, on balance, the adoption of this democratic practice will yield very valuable results when the time comes. I leave it for the considered decision of my colleagues.

The "Forgotten Factor"

Hardened political workers will by now have noticed a "forgotten factor" in this list of essentials. Money is the last but by no means the least of the elements that go into the development of a political organisation. Money is today the Swa-

tantra Party's crying need. Both the Central Office and State organisations are today functioning "on a shoe string". There are several States where the cry has gone up that if only some funds were available the workers are there ready to be placed in the field. In case there are any persons in the Party who at its inception thought, along with the Congress leaders, that the Party could rely on the rich men of this country, I hope they are by now cured of this delusion. I myself had no such illusions and said at Bangalore even before the Party was established, on May 29, 1959, with Rajaji in the Chair, that a Party of this nature will never get going unless the small man is ready to put his hand into his pocket to build it up.

The reasons why, by and large, industrialists and businessmen have held off from contributing to the funds of a Party which believes in the way of life that gives them an opportunity to contribute to the country's advance are not unknown. The Congress Party does not hesitate to use all its power, known and unknown, to lay siege to the rich man's treasure. In a highly controlled economy, it is also natural that the businessman should fear vindictiveness and discrimination should he indentify himself with an opposition party. I myself believe that this fear is exaggerated. If a large number of businessmen would act in an open way, that in itself would paralyse any thought of a retaliatory nature. In some cases, fear may be just an excuse. Be that as it may, the fact remains that only those whose hands are clean and who want no favour from government are in a position to stand up and be counted. Almost all the former Rulers and Big Businessmen are to be found on the Congress bandwagon. I suggest the Party may consider preparing a list of the Maharajas and tycoons who are Congress members or supporters so that the Big Lie that the Swatantra Party is the Party of "vested interests" may be effectively exploded.

Unfortunately, the shortage of money puts us in a vicious circle. In the absence of even modest funds, it is difficult to build an organisation with workers who can carry the message of the Party to the villages. Until the Party's strength is esta-

blished, those with money are reluctant to part with it. This vicious circle it is we who will have to break.

Future With Us

The fiasco of the Congress Session in Bangalore should be an eye-opener to those who had believed that the Congress Party would remain in office almost for ever. The fact is that the Congress Party is now on its way out. The question is who shall replace it: a democratic party such as the Swatantra Party or a communist dictatorship? Whatever else it may or may not be able to achieve, it will be a service that the Swatantra Party renders to the country that it seeks to divert into democratic channels the natural discontent with the government of the day which otherwise might have led India to "go the China way" after Chaing Kai-shek. As I said at the Bombay Convention, communism is the Swatantra Party's Enemy Number One. While any discussion of whether or not our Party should consider cooperation with other democratic Parties during elections is premature, one thing is certain—that in no circumstances should any such cooperation with the Communist Party of India be considered by us. On this point there can be no room for ambiguity or equivocation in our ranks.

If we perform our primary task of educating public opinion and building up our Party organisation under Rajaji's inspiring leadership between now and 1962, I have no doubt that the Swatantra Party will be a powerful Opposition to the Congress and offer the country an alternative government. It seems likely that in certain States at least, where the limits of popular patience with the present governments are rapidly being reached, our strength will also make it possible for us to displace the ruling party.

I have no doubt that the future is with those who hold the ideas that are embodied in our Statement of Principles. There

is a definite turn in the tide of public opinion in our country. Socialism and Planning are falling into bad odour. This change in climate is only part of a world trend. Ever since our Party was established, we have seen how country after country is turning away from the *cul de sac* of Stateism and groping towards the values of a free economic order. By the time 1962 turns up, millions of Indians too will be found to say: "It is time for a change".

March 14, 1960.

M.R. MASANI