

Inaugural Address

M. R. MASANI

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SWATANTRA PARTY

SIXTH NATIONAL CONVENTION

Rajaji Nagar, Madras

April 14 & 15, 1973

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by **M. R. MASANI**

I AM grateful to you, Mr. President, and to you colleagues for asking me to inaugurate the Sixth National Convention of the Swatantra Party. It is now four years and a half since we met last in October 1968 at the Fifth National Convention in Bhubaneswar. At that time, we had the benefit of the presence and guidance of Rajaji who delivered the Inaugural Address. His is a loss that can never be filled, and I feel somewhat overawed by having to perform that function on this occasion. The only way in which I can hope to avoid letting down the memory of our great and incomparable leader is by speaking my mind without reservations and sharing with you whatever thoughts and concerns I may have about the state of our country and our Party and their future. I am sure this is what Rajaji would have wanted me to do.

Since Bhubaneswar Convention

It is well that we should take stock today of all that has happened in India since we met in Bhubaneswar in October 1968. A great deal, of course, has happened, but unfortunately not much has been of a nature that can evoke any enthusiasm.

Within a few months of our last Convention, the country underwent a series of political convulsions which might best and most compendiously be described as Mrs. Indira Gandhi's take-over bid. This started with an Ordinance to nationalise the Banks enacted, quite outrageously, on a Saturday after-

noon notwithstanding that Parliament was scheduled to meet on Monday morning.

Events moved in quick succession which resulted finally in a split within the Congress Party leaving the parent organisation and its apparatus in the hands of the old leaders, while the Cabinet and a majority of Congress members of Parliament defected and formed a rival party.

Wanted—An Alternative Government

Faced with this development, our own Party and its Executive decided in the later months of 1969 that the way out was to provide the country with an alternative government and that the best way to do this would be for a *bloc* to be formed in Parliament under a single leader and a common discipline which would demonstrate to the country that there was a Front Bench in the Lok Sabha capable of taking over the Government of the country as and when the people gave it a mandate.

At last, on June 30, 1970, the AICC of the old Congress Party passed a Resolution appealing for common action between democratic parties and elements and providing a programme for such a *bloc*. From then till the end of that year, those who were then the Office Bearers of our Party strove with great determination and patience to bring such a *bloc* into existence. Unfortunately, the timidity and indecision of some of the then leaders of the Congress (O) repeatedly frustrated such efforts and denied the country the opportunity to watch in action an alternative government with agreed policies.

Parliament Dissolved

Taking advantage of this failure, the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, dissolved the Lok Sabha on December 27, 1970, in order to deny the fumbling Opposition parties more time to put their house in order. Far from this challenge acting by way of shock therapy, we found that on January 3, 1971, the leaders of the Congress (O) and the Jan Sangh joined with the SSP in a downright opportunist move to scuttle the agreed programme which had been evolved and replace it with a hotch-potch *sambhu mela* under the puerile slogan of 'Indira Hatao' which, predictably, turned out to be counter-productive.

With superior demagoguery, the Ruling Party countered this with the altogether unachievable slogan of 'Garibi Hatao'. Undoubtedly, with an electorate such as ours, such an enticing assurance was bound to have some impact even though anyone with the slightest knowledge of economics would have known that it could never be anything more than a pious aspiration for generations to come.

What was perhaps a more decisive factor in determining the result of the General Election of March 1971 was the fact that the electorate found on one side a Party with a determined leader who seemed to know her mind and looked at that time as if she might conceivably be the person to deliver the goods, and on the other a grouping of four parties which had failed to agree on a common programme and three of whom had just successfully double-crossed the fourth.

The result was foreseeable and indeed some of us had warned about it at the time of the debacle on the 3rd of January, 1971, more than two months before the polls.

No Landslide

Even so, the election yielded no 'landslide' victory, as the newspaper headlines had it. The Congress (R) improved on the previous performance of the Congress Party in 1967 by getting just over 43% of the popular vote as against around 38%, while the remaining 57% of the vote was distributed between the various other parties. It also needs to be recalled that only 54% of the electorate actually voted. When this data put out by the Election Commissioner is evaluated, it is clear that just under 24% of the electorate actually cast their vote in favour of the ruling Congress Party.

In most other countries, where some system of proportional representation prevails, it would have been necessary for that Party to form a Coalition with one or two other parties so as to be able to form a Government at all. Thanks, however, to the archaic electoral system that we have taken over from Britain and the inability of the Opposition parties to form a cohesive *bloc* with an agreed programme, the ruling Congress Party got some 85% of the seats in the Lok Sabha instead of the 43% to which they were entitled.

The result has been a complete distortion of the popular will and the reduction of our democracy to a farce. What is even more serious is that this inflated majority, with only one

in four Indians behind it, has shamelessly misused its advantage to attempt to subvert the Constitution by getting through Parliament the 24th and 25th Amendments to the Constitution which seek to legalise despotism by striking at the fundamental rights of the citizen and making those immutable rights subject to the whims and fancies of a thoroughly unrepresentative Parliament of the day.

Threats to Freedom

Already a variety of threats has been held out to the fundamental freedoms of the people. The Press, one of the bulwarks of a free society, which has already survived one such blow, thanks to the intervention of the Supreme Court, still has a Democles sword hanging over its head. The freedom of the people to see films of their choice has already been severely truncated. Social control of the film industry is now threatened. The threat is now advanced to the similar freedom to read books of one's own choice by the proposal to give a monopoly to import books to the State Trading Corporation. Travel out of India has already been, for a long time now, drastically limited.

The continuing attack on the academic freedom of universities, colleges and educational institutions is another facet of the same ugly development. The position taken by the President of the Swatantra Party criticising the Aligarh University Amendment Act bears testimony to the Swatantra Party's consistent interest in academic freedom and the rights of the minorities. The changes in the status of the Aligarh University can be criticised on a variety of grounds, but it is necessary to make it clear that we as Liberals cannot ignore the fact that the amendments to the Aligarh University statute are aimed at depriving that historic institution of its autonomy and internal democracy and that both these are sought to be destroyed by arrogating all power in the hands of the Union Government which, so far, has shown its proclivities by encouraging and strengthening the hold of a clique of communists over that institution. While any attack on the autonomy of any educational institution anywhere needs to be denounced, *Liberals should be concerned to exercise even greater vigilance where the institution reflects the cultural interests and aspirations of a minority, whatever its character may be.*

The protection of Article 30 of the Constitution must be provided to such institutions.

Trade Unionism is no more immune from such attacks than any other institution. The conditions of near-fascism which exist in West Bengal have got so bad that the International Labour Organisation's Committee on Freedom of Association has expressed the view that "the situation involving the large number of unions affiliated to the complainant organisation was of a sufficiently serious nature, involving not only physical violence and destruction of property, but also the severe restriction of the free exercise of trade union rights, as to warrant stringent measures being taken by the authorities to restore a normal situation."

The Committee felt that the information supplied to it by the CITU gave the impression that "although the authorities were aware of the frequency and gravity of the attacks on members of CITU-affiliated organisations or the property of these organisations, intervention on the part of the authorities was often inadequate to ensure protection of trade union rights."

One cannot, in the light of these developments, be accused of needless alarm if one apprehends that if the 24th and 25th Amendments are not struck down as *ultra vires* of the Constitution, these and other major freedoms of the citizen will be in danger of being snuffed out.

Moral Decline

Alongside of these political developments and just as important, there has been during the last four years a sharp drop in the standards of public morality. Responding to the low level of behaviour indulged in by people at the top during the split in the Congress Party and the campaign for the election of the President of the Republic in August 1969, a mood of unabashed skulduggery and cynicism has spread wider and wider during the last few years.

In a recent article on this subject, Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan has made certain observations which should make all of us ponder: "The present state of affairs might suit Indiraji's style of leadership, but it spells ruin for the Congress as a democratic organisation and *ipso facto* for Indian democracy itself. For, it is not reasonable to expect an organisation that does not practise democracy in its internal affairs to be much

concerned about preserving democracy in the affairs of the nation. 'Democratic centralism', a Russian euphemism for the dictatorship of the leader, towards which Indiraji's Congress seems to be consciously led, is bound, if left unchecked, to recast Indian democracy in its own mould. . . .

"Turning to the democratic values and standards of public conduct evolved during the freedom movement, which according to me have helped greatly to sustain our democracy, the present situation appears utterly hopeless. No doubt, there has been a steady erosion of these values since independence, but latterly there has been a precipitous fall. All means now are right means as long as they help to achieve the end. There are no holds barred. . . .

"The galloping political corruption is affecting and degrading because of the predominant position politics occupies in an undeveloped society, the entire gamut of national life: business, whether it is private or public; administration; the professions; education; even customs, manners and personal relations. Let alone democracy and socialism, the most important question is: can a nation without a moral fibre survive? It is not for the politicians alone to give the answer; it is for everyone of us."

It is particularly sad that, while corruption has permeated the ranks of the administration, both political and bureaucratic, the spirit of opportunism has left none of the Opposition parties untouched. What Mr. Balraj Madhok has had to say about Jan Sangh is evidence of this.

It was with deep pain that one watched the way in which the leadership of our Party in Orissa not only joined in a "toppling" operation at the beginning of this year but went so far as to join hands for this purpose with those whom it had itself condemned as being unworthy of continuance in public life and even accepted as leader of the group someone against whom a judicial investigation was successfully instituted by the Swatantra Party's Government in Orissa for his improprieties. Indeed, it is ironic that the "Orissa model" which I for one was proud to project before the country as one that should be followed, in contrast to the disreputable SVD model in the States of North India, has been forgotten and that the SVD disease has now infected our own camp in Orissa.

Economic Regression

As depressing as the picture on the political and moral scene is that on the economic one. During the past four years, official figures have revealed that the population has gone on increasing at the same rate as before and it can now be forecast that, as things are, the population of India by the end of this century will be around a thousand million or one billion.

Alongside of the population explosion, the number of the unemployed also increases by leaps and bounds. Mr. B. K. Nehru in the Madon Memorial Lectures has given figures which are enlightening and at the same time frightening. According to him, there were around 14 million unemployed in 1970. Also, according to him, if current economic policies continue, there will be 23 million unemployed added to this figure during the Seventies, so that in 1980 we may expect to have 37 million unemployed, one in seven of the working population. Mr. Nehru has calculated that this means that every twenty-four hours, 6,000 more persons are added to the number of the unemployed. By this calculation one of the results of the General Election fought on the slogan of 'Garibi Hatao' has been to add over four million to the number of unemployed.

During the past seven years, inflation has continued to grow apace and wholesale prices have risen by around 70%, and by 13% in the past year alone. There is a danger that, if anything, this process will accelerate.

Inflation is rightly denounced as an anti-social and anti-socialist phenomenon, but our so-called socialist Government has been indulging in unproductive expenditure, year after year, which is beyond its means and can only be paid for by the printing of currency notes, which is politely called deficit financing, but which is in fact legalised counterfeiting. By reason of the excise duties on articles of common consumption and of the wrong order of priorities by which the tax-payers' money is sunk in unproductive enterprises, inflation is aggravated and the people are driven to suffer the unendurable miseries caused by high prices and scarce supplies. Wrong policies have made this a period of shortages all round.

As is well known, the Swatantra Party from the moment of its birth has been protesting against the wrong order of priorities in the Five-Year Plans, as also the pre-occupation with investing the tax-payers' money in vast Government-run

enterprises which have resulted in the loss of hundreds of crores of rupees to the country.

Suddenly, on January 20, 1973, an echo of our criticism, which had been ignored during the past decade, was suddenly to be found in a speech made by the Prime Minister. She told the National Development Council that "it should not talk all the time in terms of bigness" and she deprecated "the fascination for big projects." It is to be hoped that this realisation has taken deep root in the Prime Minister's mind and that we shall see some concrete results of this cure from Giganticism in a "public" sector devoid of public spirit which has been characteristic of the socialist administrations during the last two decades.

Soviets Echo Swatantra

Indeed, even the Soviets appear to be having second thoughts about the desirability of concentrating on heavy industry in the governmental sector. In an article in the *Soviet Review*, a Soviet Embassy publication in India, last August, a Russian specialist in Asian affairs, Mr. R. Ulyanovsky, referred to "the negative consequences" of the policies practised during the sixties of trying to solve problems by building State-owned heavy industry units. According to Mr. Ulyanovsky, such concentration of resources on heavy industry units had led to light industry and agriculture—both of which are in the main privately owned in India—failing to get modernised or to expand. The economy is thus deprived of their contribution and the burden of taxation is increased.

In case this might be found too difficult to believe, let us quote from Mr. Ulyanovsky's article in the *Soviet Review*:

"It should be pointed out that in the early 1960s conceptions were advanced for a simple solution of the problems confronting the third world by building up heavy industry within the framework of the State sector. However, in practice the weak sides of this approach soon made themselves evident. It was found that if the extremely limited available resources were concentrated on the building up of heavy industry, it would exist on its own, so to say and would not help modernise the small and medium industries. Unless there is a market of exchange between the heavy and light industries on the one hand, and between

the industries and farming and handicrafts on the other, the sources of accumulation for financing industrialisation will be closed. As a result industrialisation will have to be financed exclusively through taxation with all the negative consequences arising therefrom. That is why it is important to develop in the Asian and African countries small and medium-scale production while giving preference to producer cooperatives.

"It is essential to utilise the possibilities of accumulation in the small and medium industries for purposes of industrialisation, for the manufacture of improved implements of labour for the backward economic sectors, such as agriculture and the handicrafts."

Mr. Ulyanovsky and his comrades have not woken up one day too soon to the realities. The gigantic losses made by the Government-run enterprises should have opened their eyes long ago as they did those of Prof. Galbraith about what he described as our "post office socialism".

Over-advertised Green Revolution

Till a year ago, it was claimed that India had at least made some progress on the agricultural front. Undoubtedly, in so far as the wheat-producing areas of Punjab and Haryana are concerned, there has been a big surge forward for which the whole country is indebted to the sturdy farmers of these States. Some of us had however always suspected that the so-called "Green Revolution" was an over-advertised and highly over-rated phenomenon. Unfortunately, the bubble has now burst as a result of Nature and Man conspiring to that end. While Nature, which had been very bountiful by providing five good monsoons in a row, has turned capricious, Man has made his contribution to this disaster in the form of Government's policies and in particular measures of land ceilings which have, far from giving the farmers incentives to produce more, done a great deal to discourage such efforts. It is not pieces of land but jobs that the landless people in the countryside need.

While there can be nothing in principle against the optimum size of a farm being fixed, with lower and upper limits, as had been done for the general good in Japan and Taiwan, it has regretfully to be conceded that the *bona fides* of those behind the present expropriatory ceilings legislation in India

cannot lightly be accepted. It is their own pronouncements that prove that, not giving land to the landless but creating conditions for the termination of peasant proprietorship and the imposition of collective farming, despite its disastrous failure in Russia and elsewhere, is the real motive. Here are some revealing statements:

Dr. Antulay, a Minister in the Maharashtra Government, let the cat out of the bag when, on 28th November, 1971, he said:

"Lowering of ceiling is not the ultimate solution, it is only a stop gap arrangement. We do not have sufficient land for distribution for all the landless peasants. Therefore ultimately the whole land will have to be nationalised in order to provide social justice to all."

President Giri has openly and repeatedly recommended the setting up of joint farms, as a means to solve the rural unemployment problem.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, addressing the AICC meeting in Delhi, had said: "Mere ceiling legislation will not bring about institutional changes in agriculture; many structural and organisational changes will have to be brought about."

The Madhya Pradesh and Assam Governments have already announced that their surplus lands would not be distributed amongst the landless, but will be utilised for establishing State farms. The Kerala Government has decided to establish a number of collective farms.

According to the decision of the Congress High Command, cooperative farms will be exempt from the new ceiling laws. Big tractors and combines continue to be imported in large numbers, despite the fact that even the smallest 5-wheel tractor cannot be economically maintained on an 18-acre holding.

The Chief Minister of Haryana, Mr. Bansi Lal, said in the State Assembly on the 23rd of August 1972 that the large farmers need not be unduly worried, because soon all land would be nationalised.

The Revenue Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Udit Narayan Sharma, said at a meeting of the U.P. Farmers' Forum that if the small farmers failed to meet the food requirements of the country, the Government would not hesitate to establish big

cooperative farms. In spite of the repeated and open accusations by Ex-Chief Minister of U.P., Mr. Charan Singh, that Mrs. Indira Gandhi's land policy was aimed at socialisation of agriculture, the Prime Minister has not contradicted him in any of her public utterances. I am glad to see that the Farmers' Federation of India under the leadership of Mr. Bhanu Prakash Singh and Mr. N. K. Ganapiah is organising the farmers in defence of their rights and I hope that all members of our Party will give the Federation the help and support they deserve.

After all the tall talk of self-sufficiency having been achieved, India has been driven back to importing foodgrains and it is not yet clear to what extremes we may be driven in order to avoid deaths by starvation on a large scale later this year and in the years to come.

I have said enough to show that, far from poverty having been removed or even lessened, all the basic indices point to the fact that the net result of the policies of the Union Government during the last two years, since the General Elections of March 1971, has been to increase and aggravate poverty and draw a larger number of people within its fell swoop.

Utterly Irrelevant

At a time when the need for corrective and ameliorative measures is so dire, it is pathetic that we should be presented in succession with an Approach to the Fifth Plan and a Budget about which all that needs to be said is that they are utterly irrelevant. If anything, they will aggravate and accelerate the unfortunate trends which have just been described.

As if this was not enough, New Delhi is proceeding cheerfully with pursuing policies that are altogether counter-productive. We may mention two or three such recent measures. There was the take-over of the non-coking coal mines. This has been followed up by the establishment of a *government monopoly in the wholesale trade in foodgrains*. In both cases, the old adage of "giving a dog a bad name and hanging it" has been tried by allegations that some mine-owners and some foodgrain dealers have behaved in an anti-social manner. Assuming this is so, would it justify transferring the entire trade in the staple food of the people from the trained and efficient hands of lakhs of small foodgrains dealers

scattered all over the country, with a tradition of cheap service, to the hands of a soulless and corrupt bureaucracy which has proved its utter incapacity to carry on trade of any kind?

It is amusing in this context to read in the columns of our newspapers that the Soviet Union and the communist countries of Eastern Europe have refused to deal with the Minerals and Metals Trading Corporation in so far as the purchase of Indian mica is concerned on the ground of their incompetence and their inability to deliver the goods and are insisting on dealing with private traders.

It is also significant that even someone wedded to the service of the poor and to social justice as Jayaprakash Narayan has found it necessary to protest against this vandalistic measure which threatens the food supplies of the people.

Coming as these measures do at the end of a process by which the availability of cereals per head had dropped from 418.8 grams in 1965 to 409.6 grams in 1971, one wonders at the recklessness of those in authority and the risks that they are prepared to take with the lives of the people. The bold and healthy reaction of the grain traders, in contrast to the supine behaviour of the bulk of the business class, gives rise to the hope that the Congress Government may well meet its Waterloo on the field of the nationalisation of the food-grains trade. The members of the Swatantra Party will, I hope, continue to give expression to their solidarity with the cause of the foodgrains dealers and to do whatever is possible to make their nation-wide hartal from May 7 onwards, a success.

Meanwhile, the Rake's Progress is continuing. It is now announced that other articles of daily use like sugar and textiles may also be handed over to a Government monopoly.

International Affairs

Time does not permit of my dealing at any length with the state of our international relations and the low ebb to which our reputation abroad has fallen. Suffice it to say that since the ill-advised Defence Treaty with the Soviet Union was signed in 1971, our country has come to occupy an unhappily isolated position in the councils of the world. Prof. Robert Scalapino in a recent publication, *Asia and the Major Powers*, finds no difficulty in saying that "today India is allied and, in effect, serves as part of the Soviet Union's containment policies

against the People's Republic of China". Few students of the subject can disagree with this characterisation.

What Prof. Scalapino and others outside India do not quite realise is the impact that this satellitism in international affairs is having on our domestic policies and the opportunity it gives for communist infiltration and subversion within our own boundaries.

The way in which the entire pattern of our foreign trade is, for instance, being distorted and our economy tied to the chariot wheels of Soviet imperialism is something that needs to be studied in greater depth so that the eyes of the Indian people are opened to the way they are being sold down the river. At the other extreme is the appeasement of Moscow's agents in India by the Railway Minister's connivance at ticketless travel by thousands of communists coming up to Delhi to participate in a demonstration at the end of March at great cost to the public exchequer and inconvenience to thousands of legitimate travellers. Even the young Turk, Mr. Chandra Shekhar, is driven to refer to the danger of the communists being installed as "Managing Agents of the Congress Party".

Many questions arise from the over-commitment of this country to the Soviet dictatorship. Can we under Soviet hegemony hope to escape the unhappy fate of Egypt whose over-dependence on the USSR and excessive Soviet influence finally resulted in a cataclysmic rupture? It appears to me that unless these trends are reversed quickly and we return to a relatively balanced role with the three Super-Powers and restore some degree of independence of manoeuvre between them, the risk of our needless involvement in international controversies will increase and so will the difficulty of our dealing in a friendly manner with those countries which are genuinely non-aligned and seek to preserve their independence of action.

Consider, for instance, the wide gulf that we have needlessly opened between our own posture and that of genuinely non-aligned Indonesia. Not long ago, President Suharto observed, in marked contrast to our equivocal utterances: "We want ASEAN to strengthen regional independence and avoid having this area become a regional cockpit. Therefore we automatically reject the Brezhnev Doctrine". How far we have drifted from such a clear-cut and honourable position!

Is there any surprise then that the independent countries of South East Asia which are grouped in ASEAN have firmly but politely banged the door in the face of our very belated attempts to enter such groupings? Even Communist China, which has no reason to love Indonesia, Thailand or Malaysia, is, according to Mr. V. K. Tiwari (who writes for the *Indian Express* from Hong Kong) "for the time being more keen to normalise ties with the ASEAN countries than with India". According to him, "the Chinese feel that once their relations with these three countries are normalised, India would be forced to come to terms with them."

All this has resulted in India's political isolation in South East Asia. Writing from Hong Kong in the *Hindustan Times* of 19th March, 1973, Mr. T. J. S. George, whose pro-communist bias has been well-known, tries to explain the factors that have led to this sad result:

"Diplomatic circles give several reasons for India's present political plight. One is the glamour that China enjoys and the keenness of the rest of the world to woo Peking to the exclusion of other power centres. A deeper one is the poor image India (and overseas Indians) have in most of these countries. The most important is said to be the dissensions and political squabbles inside India on the one hand and India's pre-occupation with Pakistan on the other. These factors have combined to give the impression that India, despite its size, is inconsequential in terms of power politics."

Nonetheless, it is perhaps not too late to give proof of our genuine interest in the security of the region by taking concrete steps to work for a Council of Asia which is badly needed and which we have done nothing in practice to promote.

The Outlook

What then is the outlook for India? Are things really beyond repair? Must we resign ourselves to the horrible prospect of the country going down the drain and ending up in the gutter of communism or the ditch of chaos? Many people, including some educated and thoughtful ones, tell me that *this is the conclusion to which they have come*. All they can, therefore, do is to shrug their shoulders and sit back to await the inevitable doom.

I must confess that I find this attitude somewhat shocking. Even if things were as hopeless as they imagine, it is one's duty to try and reverse these trends and save the country from disaster by redoubling one's efforts.

All Is Not Lost

As it happens, however, all is *not* lost. So long as one does not take an extremely short-term view, there is every ground for hope. Let us consider for a few moments the trends with which we are likely to be faced in the coming years. On the *one hand*, there is undoubtedly what has been described as "a revolution of rising expectations" which is common to this country along with many others. People who docilely accepted their lot are *no longer prepared to do so and are now demanding a fair deal*. They want our country to progress alongside the more progressive countries of the world and to give them a better life and they are not likely to put up with excuses or alibis for very long. On the *other hand*, there are the economic trends of increasing population, increasing unemployment, rising prices and diminishing food supplies, all of which add up to a stagnant if not a declining standard of life. With the present government, which is sick with ideology and engaged in a headlong rush to transform our pluralistic and democratic society into a monopolist and Marxist one, there is little chance of the counter-productive policies described above being jettisoned or reversed. This means that India is heading for a veritable economic collapse.

Imagine for a moment the spiritual and moral implications of such a disaster—the effect on the maintenance of law and order, on our democratic Constitution, on the Rule of Law, on religion, on moral standards and on our national character. Somebody has described this as the prospect of starved children growing into "a nation of mediocrities".

Even the Worm Turns

It is said even the worm turns, and I see no reason to believe that the Indian worm will be an exception to the rule. There is a limit beyond which flesh and blood will not stand deprivation and misery, particularly when it can be demonstrated to be avoidable.

That this is so in our case is obvious from the fact that many other countries of Asia have, during the years since

World War II, made tremendous advance and have given their people a richer and happier life. The Government, since Independence, have fallen prey to the fashionable nonsense about developing countries being "different" and requiring a departure from the rules of human nature and the science of economics. The fact is that all countries—even the most advanced—are developing, with only rare exceptions like India and Burma. The real distinction is between well managed countries and badly managed countries like ours. One has only to mention Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore, as examples of the contrast. While they have carried out pragmatic and intelligent economic policies, we in India have not.

Prof. Harry Johnson of London University has referred to this contrast in his article in *Encounter* magazine entitled "A Word to the Third World":

"The position I shall argue for, in brief, is that the second answer—competition—is far more promising than the first answer—controls. But I shall not argue for it on the basis of dogma, or of first principles of economic philosophy. I shall argue for it instead on grounds of empirical observations of 25 years of effort to promote economic development in various parts of the world. Experience of these efforts, in my view at least, strongly suggests that the approach to the promotion of economic development through controls, central planning, and the like, has been both a failure in terms of results achieved and a shocking waste both of the world's very scarce supply of educated manpower and of the political energies of the peoples of the developing countries."

Far, therefore, from it being true, as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi claimed at Patiala on March 23, that "the only alternative to the Congress is chaos", the fact is that the inevitable outcome of the continuance of the Congress regime is chaos. Already the breakdown of law and order is visible and the Armed Forces are being brought in to suppress internal disorder on a scale which the British rulers in India had never found necessary. Whether they know it or not, those in charge of the country's affairs are riding the Marxist dogma which has failed egregiously to work or deliver the goods in

a single known example. Their feats recall a little ditty written about such futile efforts:

"A fact without a theory
Is like a ship without a sail,
Is like a boat without a rudder,
Is like a kite without a tail.

A fact without a figure
Is a tragic final act,
But one thing worse
In this universe
Is a theory without a fact."

It is true that the Socialist Establishment appears, for the moment, to have managed to pass the buck for its own mistakes and crimes to scapegoats for their failures. But how long will this effort succeed? How long will the cult of personality and a charismatic leader blind the people to the realities?

History's Answer

The answer is provided by history which has shown that there is a limit beyond which such figures are unable to continue for long.

Suddenly the picture changes and the very people who had supported them turn on them and rent them. From being beloved leaders, their names and memories become the object of contempt and disgust.

As a student of history, I see no reason to doubt that, if present policies and trends continue, a similar situation would develop in our country. It is to be hoped that, before this happens, a certain measure of wisdom may dawn on those in office and they may yet draw back from the brink. Unfortunately, current indications, such as the take-over of wholesale trade in foodgrains, and talk of the Government monopolising the import of all consumer goods and even of books, give little ground for such hope.

When and how a change will come over the scene I do not know. Anyone's guess is as good as mine and I hear a lot of guesses being made these days. Not being a determinist like the Marxists, I would not venture to suggest any time scale. Nor, indeed, can one tell whether it will be for the better or for the worse.

It is not only Liberals like us, who would like to see India get back to the middle of the road, who desire and work for a change. There are also the Maoists, or Naxalites as we call them in our country. They too can be expected to make a bid for power when the present Socialist Establishment crumbles as a result of its own failure. Their defeat and our success can by no means be taken for granted and a great deal will depend on the dedication and zest with which those who believe in a free society, whatever the party they may belong to, work during the next few years. Assuming, however, that the good sense of the Indian people, the Civil Services, the Armed Forces and the other elements in our society prevails, would a more pragmatic, middle-of-the-road Government be able to do anything to solve the country's basic problems? That question has been put by some of our doubting and faint-hearted friends, and I think it is necessary to answer it.

An Alternative Scenario

Let us imagine for a moment a sudden outburst of sanity in New Delhi or, since that is not very likely, an act of will on the part of the Indian people to replace the present Government by a more enlightened and sensible set of persons. Let us, for the moment, rule out the possibility of the Swatantra Party being in office and in a position to carry out its own policies. Let us say that those who take over are modern, practical people who are not wedded to any dogma and who will take sensible steps to pull the country out of the morass. Let us even imagine that they would do what would be done by socialists like Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yu of Singapore, or by Chancellor Willy Brandt of West Germany who won the elections last December in alliance with the Liberal (Free Democratic) Party on a manifesto for "the free market economy" which would be considered blasphemous by those who call themselves socialists in this country.

Such a regime could *inter alia* be expected to take the following steps to undo the mischief of the past two decades:

First, it would go in for a drastic cut in taxation, both indirect and direct, and a corresponding reduction in the unproductive expenditure of government.

Secondly, it would stabilise the Rupee by eschewing inflationary policies like deficit financing and by insisting that the country live within its means.

Thirdly, it would give priority to labour-intensive activities like agriculture, irrigation and road-building in order to further employment opportunities of a productive kind.

Fourthly, it would stop further nationalisation and take-over bids and insist on Government enterprises making a profit and giving a return to the tax-payer and to the country.

Fifthly, it would double the rate of industrial production by utilisation of installed capacity, modernisation of plant and machinery, eliminating most of the shortage of raw materials, power and transport, and reducing labour indiscipline.

Sixthly, it would cut out excessive controls, red tape and delay and follow Ludwig Erhard's prescription to 'let men and the money loose', so that the country may advance.

Seventhly, it would activate competition and fight monopoly in all sectors and stop the current shadow boxing against the so-called concentration of economic power which has deprived the country of the economies of size which the rest of the world enjoys.

Last but not the least, it would take more serious steps to stop the explosive growth in our population on which today not even half a per cent of the outlay of our Five Year Plans is allocated.

Can there be any doubt that, if only these things are done, the picture would begin to change within a matter of months?

Politically Impossible?

There are people who tell me: "Yes, all this is true, but it is politically impossible." To them, all I can say is that they seem to have learnt nothing from history. Listening to them it would seem that these advocates of change have come to believe that there can be no further change and that history has come to a stop in 1973.

When educated and affluent people talk like this and claim that it is the ignorant and illiterate masses who come in the way of *desirable reforms*, *I feel that they are advancing an alibi for their own guilt*. Let us frankly face the fact that the greater part of the blame for the state of the country today lies on the shoulders of the educated and the affluent.

There is nothing wrong with our country; there is nothing basically wrong with our people who are both intelligent and enterprising. What is wrong is that the people are not getting

the leadership that they have a right to expect from those who are better endowed with intellectual and material resources.

Has Swatantra a Future?

It is in this context that we have to consider whether the Swatantra Party has a role to play and, if so, what it is.

There are people who think that the Party has no future and cannot hope to influence the course of developments in this country. I feel that they take a very short-term view. Public opinion is changeable and even fickle. History teaches us that, if on the one hand, the high and mighty are toppled from their seats into the abyss of disgrace overnight, on the other hand those who bide their time and prepare for the day often find that their opportunity comes. Since I believe that the principles of the Swatantra Party are not only sound but that, unless the country turns to them, there is no hope for the future of India, I am convinced the Swatantra Party has a role to play. Indeed, if the principles of the Swatantra Party have no future, it would mean that India has no future worth talking about either.

But, then, what is that role? Is it to join with others in groupings in this State or that in an effort to get into office? Or is it, whether by hook or by crook, to win the next elections? My own answer is that for us to join in efforts such as those recently started by Mr. Biju Patnaik is counter-productive. It is not to discredited politicians of that kind or to any combination of them that the people are going to turn in order to replace Mrs. Indira Gandhi and those in power in Delhi today. The people have had their fill of the old type of politician and, if that is the only choice, they will prefer the old dictum: "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't".

The Swatantra Party will have to beware of false starts of that nature. This applies to efforts being made in that direction even by patriotic and well-intentioned persons like Mr. Balraj Madhok.

I think my old friend Jayaprakash Narayan was very wise in sensing this and regretting his inability to give any aid or comfort when Mr. Biju Patnaik approached him in Calcutta on 11th February 1973 to place himself at the head of such a move. While the invitation was a tribute to Jayaprakash's honesty and the clean image that he enjoys, JP's declining the

invitation bears testimony not only to his sense of moral rectitude but also to his political sagacity.

Jayaprakash's Sapient Advice

JP performed a service to the country by listing a few pre-conditions for such a move which are so sapient that they are worth quoting:

- “1. Even though there is always room, perhaps also a historical necessity for forces of conservatism and slow non-revolutionary change in every society, in the present situation an effective Opposition must necessarily represent forces of radical, even revolutionary, change, and if democracy has to be preserved, as it must be, the Opposition must at the same time adhere strictly to peaceful and democratic means.
2. The consolidation of the opposition forces must be principled and not opportunistic, and it must inspire confidence of being able to provide a clean administration.
3. The sad spectacle of the coalition governments of 1967 and 1969 that proved so unstable and the constituents of which openly carried on bitter and abusive campaigns against one another and in one case, at least, did not stop even from physical liquidation of one another, should never be repeated.
4. The proposed Opposition must not be consumed by mere negative aims, such as *Indira Hatao*, but place before the people a positive policy and programme and give assurance of being able to carry them out within a stated time-period.”

What Is To Be Done?

What then should the Party do? Some of you will recall that, when I asked the Party to allow me to step down from the Presidentship of the Party at a meeting of the General Council on 17th April, 1971, I had taken the view that what we had lost was not a battle but a war. That, in my view, called for a re-appraisal of our position and the adoption of a long term strategy as opposed to short term tactics.

In my address to the General Council, I had urged that the qualities that would be required of us were courage, patience,

faith in the people and a capacity for innovation. I had described our task in the coming years to be one basically of educating the people in the spirit of the British statesman who had advised his followers to "educate our masters".

The answer to our needs was provided to us even earlier by Rajaji on the many occasions on which we asked for his guidance. Writing in *Swarajya* of July 24, 1965, he had said:

"The Swatantra Party is not just a group of people seeking office to displace the present rulers through success in elections. It is a party devoted to the education of the people in true liberalism with its emphasis on individual freedom and rejection of Statism. In the words of the Liberal International, our way of life must be safeguarded not only against communism and other non-democratic forms of government, but equally against the great heresy of dogmatic socialist planning. The suppression of economic freedom must lead to the disappearance of political freedom. Service is the necessary complement of freedom and every right involves a corresponding duty. If free institutions are to work effectively, every citizen must have a sense of moral responsibility towards his fellow men and take an active part in the affairs of the community."

Two years later, Rajaji returned to the theme on October 25, 1967:

"Swatantra stands for sanity and the education of the electorate in every respect on right lines without caring for popularity and immediate results based on the propagation of untruth. Whether or not the Swatantra Party tries to find a commanding or other place in the Central or other Cabinets, the party's mission is to educate the nation in correct, sane politics and economics. This mission can be performed by a group of a thousand men and women or by a whole party of tens of thousands of ardent politicians actively engaged in winning office and responsibility. Whether we are granted power and office by the electorate or whether we are not so invested, we want the politics and economics of the nation to run in the right direction. Our standing mission is the education of the public. The mis-guiding of the electorate in order to get power should never be our line."

On November 21, 1970, he told his readers:

"It is a body of political thought conceived eleven years ago for the welfare and progress of all sections of the people of this country, to be attained in peace and harmony, without conflicts or deprivation of the freedom which the human spirit needs for true happiness. These principles are, I make bold to say, the best that any political party pledged to honesty, justice and democracy can adopt. Whoever may hold power, the Swatantra Party's work is to educate the government and people in these basic principles and secure their acceptance, as far as possible."

It is not enough to make a ritualistic obeisance to Rajaji's wise words. Is it possible honestly to say that we all act on them? If so, how are we to understand the behaviour of some of our friends in Orissa?

In this context, it was good to read in the press the gist of the letter that the General Secretary of the Party addressed to Bhubaneswar at the end of January 1973 in the course of which he cautioned against getting involved with people with whom we have already had an unfortunate experience in the past and wisely suggested that we should keep our identity intact while waiting for a suitable opportunity to appeal to the electorate. The General Secretary had gone on to express his fear about the consequence of what he described as "the one point programme" of 'Nandini Hatao' and had gone on to remind those concerned where the slogan of 'Indira Hatao' had got us in 1971. It is a pity that his advice has been ignored.

I am glad, in the context of all this, to see from the Note prepared by Mr. Piloo Mody for discussion at this Convention that the commitment that he wants us to make to the principles which we adopted in 1959 in Bombay and in 1960 in Patna is unconditional and total. It is a good corrective to the counsel of these faint-hearted people who would mistakenly dilute those sound principles because, for the moment, the mass of the Indian people have been unable to appreciate their virtue.

An example which we would do well to emulate has been set for all of us by our colleague, Mr. G. Latchanna, who, in contrast to some others, has stood staunchly by our Party in Andhra and who has by his courage and dynamism, kept for

our Party its initiative in the turbulent developments through which the people of Andhra are passing.

Rally the Reasonable

Some of us have watched with amusement the dog fight that has been going on recently in Delhi within the ruling Party between the Socialist Forum infested by Communist fellow-travellers on the one hand and the Nehru Forum of those who consider themselves to be democratic socialists on the other.

If we keep up an unrelenting campaign against the follies and mistakes of the Socialist Establishment and keep placing before the people a sane and practical alternative, one of the results should in time be to rally the sensible elements throughout the country against the unredeemable ones.

In order to play this role effectively, however, we shall have to be prepared to think afresh and to think boldly and if necessary to jettison any dogmas or other intellectual baggage that may weigh us down. We shall have to be prepared to show that we are more radical than the members of the Socialist Establishment who cling to the dead wood of Marxist dogma and mistake bureaucratic State Capitalism for Socialism. Brushing aside the meaningless labels like 'Right' and 'Left', we shall do well to work with all those who have a genuine concern for the poor and a burning passion for social justice. We too want change, but change that works.

Naturally, we shall have to be prepared to be in a minority, perhaps even not a very significant one. Mr. G. H. Hardy, the well-known scientist, aptly emphasised the need for dissent in a democracy when he said: "It is never worth a first class man's time to express a majority opinion. By definition, there are plenty of others to do it".

Ours is not the line of least resistance. That was not the role for which the Swatantra Party was cast when Rajaji brought us together in 1959.

The stake is nothing less than the freedom and well being of the Indian people. In such a context,

*"They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three".*