

Shankar

1742
SOME EXTRACTS FROM TRANSCRIPT OF
PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE
HELD AT VIGYAN BHAVAN ON 7-8-1959.

Question: What are you going to do with the Congress leadership in Kerala, because even such section of the Press which has welcomed the dismissal of the Kerala Ministry is of the opinion that the Congress rule there was both dishonest and incompetent?

Prime Minister: Well, you are using strong language.

Question: That is the editorial opinion.

Prime Minister: I know. The editorial opinion is also, let us say, strongly in favour of the Swatantra Party. How any sensible persons can be that, I do not understand. What am I to do with that editorial opinion except to come to the conclusion that the editorial opinion is coloured by the persons' view points and prejudices and, may be, the financial backing of the paper? What am I to do about it? It is quite extraordinary. It is quite interesting and fascinating for me to follow editorial opinions which seem to me often so wide of the mark that it is difficult really to make logic or sense out of it.

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Question: You are getting the impression that the Swatantra Party's main target of attack is yourself and inspired more or less by personal reasons. Can it be the personal reasons that a vast number who gathered in Bombay wanted jobs and you denied them? What can be the personal motive there? There should be other factors behind them.

Prime Minister: Again you are asking me embarrassing questions. I don't mean to say that the Swatantra Party is formed for personal reasons. But I say they have unfortunately got some kind of bees in their bonnets which come out all the time, of King Charles's head business. It rather reduces the level of discussion. The Swatantra Party is a legitimate party, a very wrong party, I think but a legitimate party, legitimately reactionary, conservative, reactionary, backward -- use any word you like. It simply raises the ghosts of yesterday; it has nothing to do with today, much less with tomorrow. It is a ghost-like party, ghosts of the last century, ghosts of past ages. Ghosts may have a proper place sometimes. Most such groups are rather ghost-type. Of course, ghosts can make a nuisance of themselves -- perfectly true.

Question: That such a party like that should occupy so much attention of the Congress leaders is a tribute to that party. That apart, can it not be said

Prime Minister: So much attention is a tribute to our fine Press which gives pages and pages to

Question: Will it be correct to assume that the emergence of the Swatantra Party has put some fear into the Congress because they find that hitherto the alternative before a voter in the country was between the Congress Party and the Communist Party. In between there was no other party. The Praja Socialist Party got up, but it has floundered; it is finished now. Therefore the emergence of the Swatantra Party provides a third alternative which a vast section of the people wanted. That is why the Congress leaders are a little nervous.

Prime Minister: May be so. What can I say about really.

Question: What are your comments on the policy of the Swatantra Party, the policy of laissez-faire?

Prime Minister: I should imagine it would do a good deal of good to the leaders of the Swatantra Party to have a world tour and come back, see how the world is getting on and where laissez-faire is.

Question: One of the main issues the Swatantra Party is taking up as a campaign, is against agricultural cooperatives. You know, Sir, generally the peasant is very reluctant to join a cooperative, and suppose they are in a position to initiate in certain regions of this country, a sweeping movement against agricultural cooperatives, what will happen to your Nagpur Resolution?

Prime Minister: When you talk about agricultural cooperatives, are you talking about joint-farming or cooperatives?

Question: Farming.

Prime Minister: Now you must remember that what the Nagpur resolution has said is service cooperatives all over India. We have said that after three years, we recommend that joint-farming may be tried on a voluntary basis. First of all there is no question of compulsion. Secondly, this itself is not the immediate issue unless people want to do it, they can do so; they may have model farms, etc.

It may interest you to know that our President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, appointed a Committee when he was Congress President twelve years ago or thirteen years ago, in 1946. He appointed an Agrarian Reforms Committee with Mr. J. C. Kumarappa as Chairman, and a number of economists and others - Congressmen, non-Congressmen, as members. They presented a factual report, a very interesting report, and Rajendra Babu himself inaugurated this meeting. In that report it dealt with cooperatives and it said that, to begin with, quoting from a report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, twenty years earlier, "that unless the Indian agriculturist adopts cooperative there is no future for Indian agriculture", no joint-farming, I mean, service co-operatives. That starts at that as I said.

Then, it deals with two types of co-operatives -- one with better farming i.e. the service cooperatives. Then it says in regard to the really small holdings, it is impossible for them to continue for long. As they are, they are too small, too profitless and can make no progress; they can only function under joint-farming. That was their view, twelve years ago. And, in fact, they went further than we have thought of going or consider proper to go. They said there must be compulsory joint cultivation of the small holdings so as to make them profitable. That was twelve years ago, and much has happened in these twelve years. Most of the people -- some of the people -- who are raising their voices against this have functioned in the Congress, then and later. We had three Congress election manifestoes. In everyone -- in 1945, 1951 and 1957 -- in all there it was there. It is surprising that sudden light has dawned on some people after the Nagpur Resolution, which is a milder one and a wise one, because it entirely lays a greater stress on voluntariness. There is no compulsion. If people do not want it, they do not want it. If they want to come in, they come in. In fact, my whole conception of cooperation of any kind is that compulsion is not cooperation, it is something else.

Question: Mentioning in your speech to the Party, about the Swatantra Party you said something to this effect, that Congress has ~~restrained~~ restarted economic thinking. Does it now stop at only nationalisation of insurance and would not go beyond as, at one time, the Congress was pledged to nationalisation of banking etc?

Prime Minister: What has nationalisation got necessarily to do with economic thinking? It shows a lack of economic thinking to go on thinking about one odd thing all the time, with all respect. As I said, Congress is a huge nationalist institution. The only economic thinking indulged in in the old days was in regard to the agrarian problem which we had to deal with. We represented very largely the peasantry. For the rest economic thinking began, in a sense with the Ka rachi Resolution of 1931, the Fundamental Rights and Economic Programme. That laid the official basis -- I do not mean individuals, of course. Official organisational basis of economic thinking came with that Ka rachi Resolution. Every Provincial Committee produced numerous reports about agrarian conditions. But now since Independence, and since planning has come in, we have been forced to think -- because of Plans etc. -- in a more organised way. This is not economic thinking asking for nationalisation of this and that. That is only an urge, it is not a thought. It is an urge.

Question: It raises resources.

Prime Minister: It does not, I beg to differ from you. It has no relation to this. It is only an urge, and a constant repetition shows a complete inability even to try to think about the problem. The idea of thinking that you seize hold of every thing in the country and raise resources has no meaning. The real problem that has arisen in India is a problem to which really not much thought has been given in the past, nowhere, except in the last few years. That is the problem of an underdeveloped country catching up the developing a self-generating economy fairly rapidly. You see in the Soviet Union, tremendous progress has been made. The Soviet Union even had started far ahead of India when we started. But the Soviet Union's methods were special methods, we have got a somewhat different set-up. In this set up how can this be done rapidly. We go to planning and when we go to planning, there is really no parallel of this problem, how it has been dealt with. All Western countries dealt with in a different way in 150 or 200 years under different conditions. The Soviet Union has dealt with after great wars in a different way. Therefore, there is no real parallel to the problem as we face it in India in our present political and like conditions. To that a good deal of thought has been given by the Planning Commission and others. The Congress has given more thought to these matters than ever before and than almost any party, individuals of parties may have given it. For the last year the Congress Committees, Sub-Committees considered this, out of that arose the Nagpur Resolution, out of that came to Ooty Seminar and out of that, I think a Committee is meeting tomorrow to consider what the Ooty Seminar discussed. All this a deliberate attempt at organised thinking, no urges. Political parties have urges. Congress has an urge, let us do this, let us do that. An opposition party usually has urges. But a Party which has to think constructively and to think of all these together the result of one thing and the other. I am quite positive that this talk of nationalisation has absolutely no meaning at all in terms of resources. I am not going to enter into an argument. I am amazed at people talking about it, really

thinking just because in a particular case nationalisation may be helpful. Quite right, do it. I am not taking about particular cases, but this vague thing as if your coffers are filled with money when you pass a law.

Question: Has not life insurance brought money or is it a failure?

Prime Minister: I do not know how to answer these questions which have no particular meaning. I say individual cases can always be considered, have been considered, but this talk nationalise every thing and you will get money, that I say has no meaning. We nationalised various banks, State Banks because we thought it right and proper. It is good we nationalised insurance, it is a good thing. Of course, it a good thing, we may nationalise something else when time comes for it. But this vague talk of nationalisation bringing in larger number of-remember, in planning you have to control a good deal; that control is there.

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