

Swatantra Party

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For favour of publication

Ahmedabad, June 14.

"Those who had hoped that the lesson of Amroha, Farrukhabad and Rajkot would be learnt by the Congress Party's leadership and they would mend their ways and policies will be disappointed by the speech made by the Prime Minister in Madras on June 12 which shows that, like the Bourbons, Mr. Nehru has learnt nothing and forgotten nothing and that all he can do is to gnash his teeth in rage at his defeat. The man who has brought the country to the frightful mess in which it is today blames others for being intoxicated with success, but that fault is at least more excusable than to allow failure and defeat to go to one's head as appears to be the case with Mr. Nehru," said Mr. M. A. Masani, M.P., General Secretary of the Swatantra Party, while addressing a public meeting here, with Mr. Bhailalbhai D. Patel, leader of the Opposition in the Gujarat Legislative Assembly, in the chair.

Since Mr. Nehru had said that he would only resign when the people made it clear that they wanted him to go, Mr. Masani invited the people of Gujarat to make their invitation to Mr. Nehru to go even more clear than it already was. He had no doubt that, in the coming months and years, the wish of the people for a change of government would be brought home to Mr. Nehru in an unmistakable fashion.

Refuting the Prime Minister's charge that the Swatantra Party showed weakness in wanting to cast the burden of defending the country on others, the speaker said that, in that event, Mr. Winston Churchill, the great war leader, could also be accused of weakness for having told the United States during World War II: "Give us the tools and we shall finish the job." That was precisely the position of the Swatantra Party which wanted India to fight and drive the Chinese invaders from our soil with arms and equipment supplied by those who could afford them. Mr. Nehru, on the other hand, by saying that the defence potential could only come from a strong industrial base was seeking to postpone the war against the Communist invaders for several decades, thus justifying the weak-kneed refusal of his government to fight the invader. This was perverse persistence in policies which had invited an attack on the country and had brought military defeat and national humiliation.

Referring to the Prime Minister's annoyance that democratic Opposition parties had got together to defeat his candidates, Mr. Masani said that there was no motley crew in the country comparable to that in the Congress Party itself. The only thing that held the Congress Party together was the desire to continue to enjoy the fruits of office. It was this that made the emergence of a clear-cut party system in India so difficult.

In refreshing contrast to Mr. Nehru's desire to cling to office till the bitter end, Mr. Masani congratulated Mr. Bhailalbhai Patel, who had just completed 75 years of age, on his decision to withdraw from active organisational activity by resigning the Presidentship of the State unit of the Swatantra Party and bringing in fresh blood. Mr. Masani was glad, however, that Mr. Bhailalbhai Patel had agreed to continue as the Leader of the Opposition in the Gujarat Assembly till 1967 and to serve on the Central Organising Committee and Parliamentary Board of the Party.

"It was not till I got to Rajkot that I became aware of that intense antagonism towards the Congress Administration and its representatives felt by all classes of people which was undoubtedly the main factor that led to the defeat of the Congress Party and our victory," said Mr. Masani. According to the speaker, the decisive shift from a 41,000 Congress majority last year to a 14,000 Swatantra majority this year denoted a well-marked trend in

public opinion, which the results in Dohad, Amroha and Farrukhabad also underlined. These elections were a warning to the Congress Party to mend its ways and change its policies or to go. On the midnight of 26th May, after the result of the election had been declared at Rajkot, a quarter lakh of people joined in a procession and demonstrated in such a tumultuous manner that one would have thought that they were celebrating their liberation from a hated regime.

Mr. Masani proceeded to observe that, while high taxes and prices, the Gold Control Order and the criminal neglect of the country's defences were undoubtedly responsible for the marked swing in opinion since the last General Elections, even more decisive was the widespread disgust with the lack of honesty of purpose shown by the representatives of the Congress administration and the gulf between their professions and their practice.

Mr. Masani mentioned that he proposed to draw the attention of competent authorities to the misuse of his position by Mr. Resiklal Parikh, the Home Minister of Gujarat, in the Rajkot by-election campaign. This incident showed that the British convention that Cabinet Ministers should not participate in by-elections was a very wise one which could with advantage be adopted in this country.

Not for publication:

M. R. Masani

(M. R. MASANI)