

Not holding the reins of government but dispelling the Congress socialist miasma must be Swatantra's role

The speeches delivered, at the Eighth Convention of the Swatantra Party held recently in Madras, show that its leadership is now realising the mistake of deviating from the original aims and purposes for which it was formed—to oppose Socialism.

In 1959, when Rajaji took the famous decision to resign from the Congress and to lead the Swatantra movement, the Congress was drifting dangerously to the extreme Left. Its previous all-inclusive character, its endeavour to represent all sections of the Indian society—from the businessmen and landlords to the working classes and the downtrodden poor—had considerably changed. Having adopted the "Socialistic Pattern of Society," at the Avadi Session, of the AICC in 1954, it became the "Socialist Society" at the Amritsar Session the next year. That was not merely a change in terminology. With every apparently innocuous shift that the Congress made in its reigning formula, the country saw profound social and economic transformation until little difference could be noticed between its political philosophy and that of Communism. Doubtless, democracy and democratic institutions were there, but they existed only in name. The totalitarian trends were so pronounced that they could not miss the eye of any discerning person.

At the same time, observing the success of "Congress Socialism" with the masses, the socialist parties of various persuasions, the Communists and the Marxists in their demagoguery started promising a more radical dose of Socialism to the people, thus compelling the Ruling Party to veer more and more to the Left.

It was at this stage that a group of intellectuals led by Rajaji formed the Swatantra Party, mainly with the intent of opposing the socialistic proclivities of the Ruling Party. The rationale behind this move was that, for democracy to function effectively, there must be two opposing political ideologies of economic and other programmes for the development of the Nation before the people. If every party were to offer only a socialist programme, the options of the electorate would get reduced to a choice between varying degrees of So-

cialism itself. The Swatantra, therefore, was formed as a non-socialist or an anti-socialist party, and in its early stages did considerable good work by exposing the fallacy and myth of Socialism, its inherent shortcomings in developing an economically backward country.

The Swatantra Party ought to have been content with this role in the political life of the Nation—the role of an elder offering guidance and advice of moderation and suggesting correctives in the rash courses being followed by the Ruling Party, whether it was accepted or not. But, once in the arena of politics, the party was faced with the lures and temptations existing before all political parties, and in the attainment of these demagoguery, compromise of the party's guiding principles, even adjustments and alliances with political groups radically opposed to one's own concepts played a major part. These considerations assumed a much more magnified form when the party jumped into the fray of elections. That is what happened to the Swatantra. What a few intellectuals like Minoo Masani, Dandekar, Lobo Prabhu, and others achieved, and would have kept on achieving through their erudite analysis and exposure of Congress policy, was lost through the formation of the Coalition Government of the Swatantra and Jharkand parties led by Mr. R. N. Singh Deo in Orissa. With the Central Government wielding absolute power and following Leftist policies, no State Government could possibly show a record of progress acceptable to the people, and the Swatantra-led regime in Orissa jogged along in much the same way as any other, without making any significant dent into the poverty of the people.

The fact that emerges from this discussion is that the Swatantra should have remained content with the role of an enlightened Opposition inside and outside the Legislatures. But, the same passions that seize all politicians had taken possession of the Swatantra leaders. How could they resist the temptation of power, the loaves and fishes of office? Thus, like all others, Swatantra politicians also made a bid to achieve power by hook or crook. Ends mattered, means did not. Alliances were formed

with parties which had nothing in common with the Swatantra ideals, even with parties believing in Socialism. How could a party which was started to oppose Socialism make common cause with another which was socialist?

For these reasons, the decisions taken at the Eighth Convention of the Party in Madras appear to be sensible. The party has ruled out all alliances and has decided to assert its original role of a party opposed to Socialism, whether it meets with any success at the polls or not. If, in the years to come, the Swatantra devotes itself to an unrelenting campaign against the follies and misdeeds of the Government and, at the same time, places before the people sane and practical alternatives, it will doubtless be able to rally to its support the sensible elements throughout the country. This, however, is an arduous process which will take considerable time. The Ruling Party is doubtless offering many opportunities to the Swatantra to prove that its prognosis is correct, and the best opportunity available would be over the confusion and chaos that nationalisation of wholesale trade in foodgrains would create. Any failure of the Government in the quixotic task it has undertaken will touch millions of people, in fact, the entire population of the country, and that ought to be the time when the Swatantra Party can prove how wrong Congress Socialism can be. It is over this single issue that parties in the Opposition can destroy the charisma that surrounds Mrs. Gandhi, and wean the people away from the support they are blindly extending to her party.

The 8-point programme enunciated by Mr. Masani in his inaugural speech must be highly commended. He has suggested, in essence, the following: A drastic cut in taxation, both direct and indirect, and corresponding reduction in the unproductive expenditure of Government; stabilisation of the Rupee by eschewing inflationary policies like deficit financing and by insisting that the country live within its means; priority to labour-intensive activities like agriculture, irrigation and road-building to increase productive employment; stopping further nationalisation and

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Debu Hosali

Is that the real purpose?

In the wake of the nationalisation of the wholesale trade in foodgrains, the Government is facing numerous difficulties in the procurement, distribution and sale of foodgrains at a fair price—this largely because of the boycott by those who have traditionally dealt in this commodity, coupled with the inadequacy of Government machinery, and the complexity of the trade itself. The Government having taken the plunge, it is no exaggeration to say that its success or failure will determine the future of the Congress Party.



An irate Mr. Devaraj Urs, Chief Minister of Mysore, driven to the extreme by one vexed problem after another this move has created, addressed a closed-door meeting of the District and Block Congress Committees, and went hammer and tongs at all and sundry. He thundered:

"This is a matter of life and death for the Party. If we succeed, the image of the Congress becomes resplendent like the Koh-e-noor itself. If we fail, we are doomed and will sink into the abyss."

"The Government will not allow itself to be bamboozled or influenced by anybody and will take stern action against blackmarketeers and hoarders. Party men should be vigilant of the nefarious practices of these anti-social elements. We will offer them all protection for rendering this service."

"I am even thinking of entrusting the distribution of foodgrains and other essential commodities to party men if they are prepared to shoulder the responsibility."

A non-believer (in the back rows): "So that is the real purpose of nationalisation of the wholesale trade in foodgrains, eh?"

From the Capital



Mrs. Gandhi now consults her Cabinet colleagues ★ Mixed reception to Indo-Bangladesh initiative abroad ★ Opposition leaders in Parliament sure Pay Commission Report an exercise in futility ★ Government rapped for failure on petrochemical front

NATURALLY, the Indo-Bangladesh initiative in breaking the deadlock over the POWs and the meeting of the Working Committee of the Ruling Congress last Wednesday, have been the main topic of discussion in political and diplomatic circles. Both events have significance in that they will determine the course of sub-continental politics for the coming months and will affect favourably or adversely the electoral prospects of the Ruling Congress in UP and Orissa and in weakening or strengthening its Ministries in Gujarat, Mysore, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi has tackled the Indo-Bangladesh issue in a manner that the inner Cabinet had a full say and senior Ministers took collective responsibility for the course mapped out in the Swaran Singh-Kamal Hassain joint communique. Some political observers consider this procedure as indicative of the Prime Minister's desire to take her colleagues into confidence in a larger measure. It is said that this feeling has arisen because the Opposition critics have been concentrating their fire on her and have partially succeeded in damaging her image. She presumably thinks that if it were made known that all important decisions reflect the collective judgment of the inner Cabinet, then her senior colleagues like Mr. Jagjiwan Ram, Mr. Chavan and Mr. Swaran Singh will share the credit or the blame for them.

Such a resolve is more easily said than done, say the Opposition critics. They believe that Mrs. Gandhi's temperament is authoritarian and that she cannot and will not treat her Cabinet Ministers as equals and herself as the first among equals.

Whatever the shape of things

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Smt. Aroti Dutt.

A fine write-up about this dedicated social worker, who is President of the Country Women's Association of India, appears on page nine of this issue.

to come in this matter, there is no doubt that Mrs. Indira Gandhi is most concerned about stagnation in economic growth and consequent spiralling inflation. She has found that the Communist remedy is not applicable, while the private sector has to play a role. Accordingly, she has turned to those Ministers in charge of economic affairs as are in favour of making both the public and private sectors improve on their performance and yield results in terms of more goods and employment opportunities.

There is, for instance, the decision to associate four executives from the private sector as Secretaries to the Planning Commission, and about a dozen businessmen and management experts have been associated with a Committee of Ministers for advice on how to promote economic growth. The fact remains that until the right climate is created it is difficult to see how the stock market will stimulate fresh investment.

It is said that the decision of the Working Committee of the Ruling Congress to put off the AICC session scheduled for May until July and to tear up the Communist-inspired changes in the Constitution of the Congress, may serve to indicate the wind of change in the Ruling Congress, more especially as the provisions enjoining wearing of *khadi* and abstinence from alcohol have been retained. The Congress leadership also wished to avoid a session in May as it could have led to outbursts by delegates against shortage of food caused by unsatisfactory working of the decision to take over wholesale trade in foodgrains.

The Indo-Bangladesh initiative in breaking the deadlock over Pak POWs in India and Bangalee internees in Pakistan has had mixed reception judged by the way news was put out and commented on by leading radio stations. BBC led with the news on Tuesday night whereas Voice of America did not refer to it even in its Asian news bulletin on Wednesday morning. Apparently, Washington was awaiting Islamabad's reaction. BBC Newsreel went further and said that the ball was now in President Bhutto's court.

But BBC did not mention the fact that the trial of 195 war criminals would be by Supreme Court Judges and that lawyers from abroad and observers would be welcome. This was brought out in the bulletin put out by Voice of Germany.

Implementation of the plan largely depends upon the attitude of Pakistan and both India and Bangladesh naturally expect Pakistan to reciprocate the gesture made by them. The least that they are expecting is the return of four lakh Bengalis stranded in Pakistan. As the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Dr. Adam Malik, said during his recent visit to New Delhi, Pakistan will have to see the realities of the situation. However, a feeling has grown, because of Bhutto's latest utterances, that Pakistan would like to utilise the issue of Bengalis to force Bangladesh to come to the negotiation table even without being recognised.

The Soviet Union has accused China of propping up Pakistan with a view to maintaining tension in the sub-continent. As Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw has said in an interview in London, Pakistan is militarily stronger today than in 1971 and might not hesitate to resort to a military adventure. India and Bangladesh do not want a military confrontation as it would seriously impair economic development of the region.

Opposition leaders in Parliament are feeling elated that their doubts about the outcome of the Third Pay Commission's labours have been confirmed and that the fact that its members are airing their differences in public, proves that none of them was a serious party to it. In fact, as the inner story of the voluminous Report is unfolding itself, it appears that the Commission had virtually come to a breaking point on the status of the Indian Administra-

tive Service *vis-a-vis* other comparable jobs. Thus, the Report may turn out to be an exercise in futility or, at best, it may be treated as a basic exercise in the matter, leaving the Government free to make its own decisions.

Government is exercised, however, over the manner in which the Commission's recommendations are being criticised by almost all service associations. Protests from Grade III and IV employees that a minimum need-based wage has not been recommended, have made the Government create a Special Cell in the Finance Ministry, which is now busy making a study in depth of financial implications, in case the minimum remuneration is raised from Rs. 185 to Rs. 195, as proposed by Prof V. R. Pillai in his Dissenting Note.

The Special Cell has also been asked to make special studies not only on the question of minimum wage but other controversial issues such as the primacy of the IAS, the question of direct recruitment, lateral entry into the IAS and IF selection grades, comparable pay scales for administrators, scientists and technocrats.

The Government's thinking on the status of the IAS had crystallised earlier than the Pay Commission's Report, namely, that the IAS should not be dislodged from its key position. While conceding that some ICS and the older generation of IAS officers might have brought a bad name to the Administration through tactless handling of situations, the bulk of IAS officers have acquitted themselves creditably. Government's faith in the Civil Service is also reflected in the appointments of two retired ICS officers to key positions, one as Chief Election Commissioner and the other as a Member of the Planning Commission.

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insisting on Government enterprises making a profit and giving a return to the taxpayer; doubling industrial production by full utilisation of installed capacity; modernisation of plant and machinery, eliminating the shortage of raw materials, power and transport and reducing labour indiscipline; cutting out excessive controls, red-tape and delay; activating competition and fighting monopoly in all sectors; and, finally, stopping the "explosive" growth in the country's population.

These, assuredly, are non-socialist remedies to clear the miasma created by the socialist policies of the past, and if the Swatantra Party devotes itself single-mindedly to criticise the wrongs perpetrated by the Government, based on these points, its even-

tual success would be assured. Therefore, instead of chasing the mirage of forming Coalition Governments, it should dedicate itself to this vital task. There is no getting away from the fact that Mrs. Gandhi and the Congress Party will remain in power for a long time to come, and will relinquish it only as a result of the utter chaos they are going to create. The chances are that even after that, another party mouthing extreme Socialism might seize power. But, Socialism being a discredited political philosophy in the rest of the Free World, it is bound to fail, no matter who professes it. The tradition-ridden Indian masses will eventually see its futility and throw it overboard. Until then, the Swatantra must eschew the temptation of being in the Government, and, instead, must assume the highly superior role of political and economic mentor of the people.