

FALL OUT FROM THE SWATANTRA NATIONAL CONVENTION

By its own previous standards and even by the standards of other Parties, the Swatantra Party Convention at Madras, was impressive, at each of its four venues, the Kakli Office for the National Executive, the Das Prakash Hotel for the General Council, the SIA grounds for the Delegates and the Marina Rostrum for the General public. The delegates had come from most States in large numbers, with chartered buses from Kashmir and reserved compartments from three other States. The SIA pavilion, named Rajajinagar, had a size and shape which made me remark that it was faintly imitative of the Congress. The Convention surely succeeded in proving to the Party and to a great many others, that Swatantra Party was not dead and that it had potentials which are showing as Congress promises are wilting.

The Fall Out of an explosion is from its unseen spread and strength. Not every thing said or reported is effective but only what is new and gnawing on public consciousness. In the inaugural address of Masani, the key notes were first, bold and new thinking on the follies and mistakes of the socialist establishment, second, care and caution in returning to power without counter productive alliances like those which may be proposed by Patnaik or Madhok, third, balance in international relations without over commitment to the Soviet Union, and fourth, freedom from opportunism, which has reached Opposition parties, making a farce of democracy. All these ideas are sound and should have been the basis of positive resolutions, binding the Party to a programme of action, and spell binding the public.

President Mody's address on an X factor, which would give 300 seats to

the Party in the next election struck a note of optimism. To be meaningful, he should have amplified Louella Lobo Prabhu's resolution already accepted, on Election Strategy, to set up candidates well in advance, who could establish their appeal by finding and furthering the needs of their constituencies through questions in legislatures, writings in the Press and pressures on officials. What he said about the erosion of the Constitution and democracy has to be shown in the material and moral loss caused to the people. Mody's Restatement of Swatantra Policy is an amplification of his address and tries to update the approaches of the Party on a spectrum of problems, arising from Socialism. While appreciating the diagnosis, I suggested that considering the popular associations of Socialism, it was Congress Socialism, which should be condemned, as that socialism was for political and not economic ends. As my suggestion was not accepted, it is necessary to spell the alternative to Socialism, which may be Humanism or Welfarism, so that the opponents of the Party do not represent it as looking after only vested interests. In amendments of the Constitution, the Congress must be shown to seek an alibi for its failure to realise Directive Principles through the inbuilt provision of "reasonable restraint" contained in Fundamental Rights. As the only polarised opponent of the Congress, the Swatantra Party must be shown as the balance against autocracy and the guardian of the 55% voters, not represented. On Land Reforms, admitted now after 25 years to have failed, the Swatantra Party can affirm its offer of immediate and complete rights of permanence and fair rents, together with a new right of transferability of tenancy, which will, with a stroke, add new wealth to a very large class, with-

out cost to the State or loss to the owners. In Agriculture, the Party will give the highest priority to utilise 63% of the unused flow and to utilise under ground water for areas, which cannot be served by surface irrigation. It will generalise the subsidy now given in limited areas to Marginal farmers, particularly in respect of fertilisers, which should be available to them at international prices. In Industry, Nationalisation, particularly the Take over of Management, should not destroy investment, particularly of small shareholders. On the other hand, State Enterprises should be partially denationalised, the private shares in them bearing a return not below the interest on government securities. This form of Joint Sector is more necessary for the Public Sector, which with a paid capital higher than that of the private sector, has worked at a loss of 19 crores last year. To activate idle capacity, the same concessions as have been given to Sick Mills taken over, should be given to the additional production. For Labour, the Right to Work emphasised in Restated Swatantra should become the basis of Planning. A National Wage structure, rising from the Minimum Wage of the lowest category should end the present disparities between workers which are more marked than disparities between workers and employers. It is in this context that I opposed the interest of the Party in Trade Unions, which are symbols of Class War and thrive by competing with each other in unreasonable demands, which are ultimately paid by the Consumers. It is worse when this interest is in Unions, not identified with the Party, for which identification not one Union is prepared. For Irrigation and Power, which are now working far short of their capacity, a Joint Sector, on the same lines as for

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Industry, may win some of the record profits now made by private Electricity Companies. Coal and Oil similarly should be partially denationalised. This spelling of Socialism, where the people do what they can and the Government does what they cannot, by benefitting the country, will also make the Swatantra Party the only alternative to the Congress. I pressed that the Party which had so far left the initiative to Mrs. Gandhi for all plans and promises, should pass from a criticising to a constructive stage. If anything, this may be the X factor on which the President relies.

On the General Secretary's report, Louella Lobo Prabhu wanted lessons to be drawn from failures not only in elections but in organisational failures. Particularly, she warned as Masani did, against expediency, as only then the Swatantra Party will become a credible alternative to the public which now identifies politics generally with pitch tar.

On the Resolutions of the Party, credibility arises when there is good anticipation. On Andhra, Separation is no longer probable after the High Court has decided that 15 years residence is enough to qualify for Mulki status, which practically ends the *causus belli* and increases the number in favour of the status quo. On Foreign Policy, the package deal on exchanges of POWs with Bihars and Bengalees now proposed by India and Bangla Desh, which *Insight* had proposed three months ago, could have been projected by the Convention. While Masani's disclosure of the Russian presence in the Indian Ocean justified the demand that we should not take sides in Big Power politics, we could again have got credit for initiative by proposing alliance with US on the same terms as Russia, which corrective Mrs. Gandhi is likely to take in the near future. On Power

Shortage, the resolution seems to have immediately stirred the Government though a warning that Non Communist countries should not be cold shouldered in respect of supply and development of oil would have also anticipated the trend now imposed on government. On Aligarh, the autonomy of one University out of 100 in the country, to Muslims who form 11.21% of the population might have made a better impact both on Government and Muslims. On Grain Take Over from which Government is not likely to retreat, the Public would have appreciated the initiative of the Party in proposing a ceiling for Prices if the Government had a floor for them. This would have been not only in the interest of consumers but would have

checked the undue handling charges of the Food Corporation, on one hand and excessive hoarding by producers, on the other.

The Swatantra Party has proved the Ruling Party wrong in most of its policies, which may dispose the voters against it. If it intends to dispose them in its favour, it must show how the mistakes can be avoided, or corrected. Politics is the Art of the Possible in which mistakes may or may not be forgiven but corrections will be surely welcomed. If the Swatantra Party can distinguish itself from others by a constructive approach, the voters are waiting for such a Party.



WAR OF THE FORUMS

For many years now, the Congress Forum for Socialist Action was the most 'chic' pressure group within the Congress, its members being part of the Prime Minister's inner coterie, and its radicalism, the spur to government's far-left policies. Its first setback came when differences surfaced between its members of P. S. P. origin, like Mr. Chandrashekar, and its members of Communist origin, who appeared to find greater favour with the Prime Minister. To the public this cleavage served one purpose: to focuss attention on the inroads of Communists and fellow travellers in the high places of power. With the birth of the Nehru Forum, more recently, the danger of Communist infiltration has been further highlighted, and should carry more conviction with the electorate than the warnings of democratic Opposition Parties, as these revelations stem from those who have inside knowledge.

Whether or not the Nehru Forum had, (as is popularly believed) the unofficial sanction of the Prime Min-

ister for its genesis, her dissolution of the Socialist Forum, coupled with her transfer of its leading lights like Mr. Raghunath Reddy, from key portfolios, suggests her fear, that in trying to tame the tiger of Communism, she may be like

"The lady of Niger, who smiled as she rode the tiger."

When the tiger came back from the rode, with the lady inside, the smile was on the face of the tiger."

It may be, however, that her realisation of the perils involved by cizening of Communists and fellow travellers, has come too late. Members of the Forum are already well entrenched in the government and with their Communist background, are well versed in the art of subversive underground warfare.

For the Opposition, however and even for the Prime-Minister herself, the war of the Forums exemplifies some tactical lessons. Since the Socialist Forum was only destroyed by a wooden horse from within the Party itself, rather than by the batter-

ing ram of criticism from other Parties, it would appear that in politics, frontal attack is less effective than internal division and diversion, as a means of ousting undesirable persons or trends. This strategy can be applied to domestic and international policies as

well. For instance, if there is no other way of containing unlimited demands by organised labour, it may be useful to project the conditions of unorganised labour, as a bargaining point. Similarly, if Russia cannot be ousted by repudiation of the Indo-

Soviet Treaty, the importance of that document can be reduced by other such bilateral Treaties with democratic powers. It is to be hoped that the Prime Minister will take this lesson to heart.



What next in Food Trade Take Over

Horror stories have begun to come of the Wheat Take Over. There have been food riots in Nagpur and Malgaon. In Bombay, the queues at 1,880 Fair Price shops in place of 10,000 retailers, run to hundreds, with no certain prospect of getting their quotas. There is a run on unrationed grains, the prices of which are doubling and trebling. In Haryana and Punjab, the grain is not moving from the producers, who have set up as retailers and are demanding from Government a 60% increase on the procurement prices. What will happen next is almost impossible to predict, because first, human nature, predatory, on the part of producers and primitive on the part of consumers is involved. Secondly, there is no forecast possible of the attitudes of Government, with Ministers equipped with confused ideologies and officials, at best concerned only about their own pay and generally corrupt, inefficient and poorly officered. Thirdly, the mechanics of food trade are complicated, even concealed, Government and even economists, proceeding on assumptions unrelated to past experiences and current reactions.

Some simple equations about food supply must be understood. First at least 70% of the production is consumed by the producers themselves, in higher proportions as rising prices reduce the necessity to sell. Secondly, of the remaining 30%, only 20% find its way to the consuming centres, largely after harvest because of the pressure of debts, rents and other liabilities. Thirdly with abolition of wholesalers, a good part of the debts due to them may remain unpaid, reducing to that extent the flow to the market. Fourth in proportion as the

supply to urban areas is shortened, prices rise, which make hoarding increasingly profitable. This tendency is strengthened as the difference between procurement and market prices increases, not only to make up for the loss on the former but also from the intensification of the black market. These mechanics are familiar ones, which the Take Over of the wholesale trade has exaggerated beyond all proportions, the more so as the administrative arrangements were not ready. The position can become worse while psychological reactions add to the physical shortages.

The Government is nonetheless making predictions of success, which may to a large extent be like whistling in the dark. Otherwise, Government reckons on the urgencies of the producers, whose storage is limited and self interests of the retailers to take the place of the wholesalers. In fact, the wholesalers themselves will be reappearing as retailers, the whole change amounting to little more than

lowering the quantities held under licences. All this however depends on what happens in the next two weeks. In one way, Government is fortunate that except in Bombay and Calcutta, wheat is largely consumed in the States where it is grown, which means that normal dealings will largely continue. Secondly, though Government react generally only to street demonstrations, in this case, its ideology is involved and all Leftist Parties, which start agitations will be against this one. Thirdly, Government may see the logic, which the Madhya Pradesh Government has done, that ceiling prices for consumers are an integral part of floor prices for producers. Since 1965, this simple combination has been overlooked for which reason the assurance just given by the Food Minister that retailer will observe the Fair Shop prices gives hope of a change to success. Fourth, Government has to see that its staff turns a new leaf or is made to leave. To check it, two members of the public must be associated with its searches and pections, as in criminal proceedings. If so much happens, the Take Over may succeed and reasonable food prices may reduce general inflation and increase development. The rice Take Over though more difficult will have the benefit of the experience and momentum of that of wheat.

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