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Split AP, demands Swatantra Party

"The Times of India" News Service

MADRAS, April 15.

THE sixth convention of the Swatantra Party today demanded that either Andhra Pradesh should be split up into Andhra and Telengana according to the wishes of the people of the two regions, or the state assembly should be dissolved and a referendum held to ascertain the people's wish in a democratic way.

The party congratulated Swatantra legislators who had resigned their seats on the issue of separation and called on other AP legislators including those belonging to the Congress to follow suit "and express their resentment at the contemptible manner in which the Prime Minister is treating the people's movement in Andhra."

Anything short of this, a resolution adopted by the convention said "is an act of treachery against the people of Andhra." It condemned the Prime Minister's alleged attempt to treat the whole problem as a party problem and the people's movement as one of law and order.

In resolutions dealing with economic affairs, the convention alleged that the Union government's policies in 1971

had brought the economy to the brink of ruin. Extensive unemployment, inflation, shortages of essential commodities and power famine were the result of policies of controls.

The party called on both the government and the people to set aside ideological predilections and adopt and approve only policies conducive to increased production, effective control of population growth and elimination of corruption.

It deplored "the elevation of statism and bureaucracy to the status of saviours and guardians of the consumer" and urged that the economy be freed from the stranglehold of controls.

The convention called upon the government to reconsider the take-over of the food grains trade which it described as "an adventure" which could only end in further rise in prices and disaster besides "aggravating corruption to an incredible extent."

The convention squarely blamed the government for the present power crisis and suggested several short-term measures to tide over the difficulty. One suggestion was that the Centre should assume control of the all the inter-state rivers through a statutory commission, and if necessary the constitution should be suitably amended.

The Swatantra Party demanded that the voting age should be reduced to 18.

Earlier, in his report, the general secretary, Mr. Madhu Mehta, suggested an organised movement for securing more rights for the states and opposing undue interference from the Centre.

"We must tell the people that while we want India to be united, we shall resist attempts of a handful of people in Delhi to impose their Soviet-inspired plans on our states," Mr. Mehta said.

FOREIGN POLICY ASSAILED

P.T.I. adds: The convention noted with "grave concern" the impact of the Indo-Soviet treaty on India's foreign and domestic policies and suggested speedy normalisation of India's relations with other countries and close co-operation with neighbouring nations.

In a lengthy resolution on international relations, the convention said the "ill-advised defence treaty of 1971 with the Soviet Union, had led India to occupy an unhappy isolated position among the countries of the world."

The convention, which adopted unanimously the draft resolution recommended by the general council of the party without any amendment, also stated that the treaty had "limited India's options in the promotion of the national interest and removed any scope for independent domestic and foreign policies."

It had given the Soviet bloc a "stranglehold" on India's foreign trade and economic life, the resolution said.

The resolution wanted India to bring about a detente between Pakistan and Bangladesh. It also emphasised the need for a phased programme of repatriation of the Pakistani prisoners of war and Bengalis from Pakistan.

Stressing the need for closer rapport with Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal, the resolution called for mutual co-operation among the South-East Asian countries and for the creation of an area of peace.

Mr. M. R. Masani, former president of the party, who moved the resolution criticising the Indo-Soviet defence treaty, said the treaty had "virtually made the Indian ocean a Soviet lake for Russian ships" though India had been professing that the ocean would be left alone by the big powers.

He gave figures which he claimed showed that Soviet ships had used the ocean for a longer number of days than any other country.

Personal