

Masani lauds Indira stand on controls

By A Staff Reporter

SWATANTRA leader Minoo Masani on Wednesday "wholeheartedly" welcomed Mrs. Indira Gandhi's recent statement that the Government would be only too glad to shed controls if industry and trade honoured the principle of social responsibility.

"I congratulate the Prime Minister and I give full credit for her sincerity in the matter," said Mr. Masani in Bombay, and exhorted the business community to take up the challenge.

Without mincing words, he lashed out at the "black sheep" in the business community who had brought a bad name for the private sector as a whole in the eyes of the common man and the Government.

Responsibility

The business community, he said, could certainly not shirk its share of responsibility for the creation of the climate leading to the nationalisation of banks.

Bank nationalisation, the Swatantra leader asserted, would not have come if the business community had earned public trust. It was still not too late if only the community kept Mahatma Gandhi's concept of trusteeship before it.

While Mr. Masani congratulated the few big and small business

houses in the country on their discharging their 'social responsibility,' he said. "This is not enough." It was up to private enterprise to earn a fair name.

Mr. Masani's observation came during question time, after his talk on "Public Accountability" at a meeting organised by the Forum of Free Enterprise.

When someone asked whether there was any specific way of making a Minister accountable for his lapse in paying taxes, Mr. Masani said a people always got the Government they deserved.

"If a Prime Minister can describe such a lapse as 'forgetfulness' and get away with it, it only shows the backwardness of public opinion in the country."

The Opposition leader gave his impressions of his two years' work as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

He paid a tribute to the way in which all members especially the Congress members who had every reason to be concerned about the Government's good name, worked together, shedding party labels and prejudices.

A great deal more could be done by developing a system of committees, which functioned away from the glare of publicity with its consequent temptations to noise and exhibitionism.

Another impression was about the colossal waste of public funds. In only a few reports Mr. Masani presented to Parliament, a total loss or infructuous expenditure of Rs. 95 crores had been disclosed.

The system of Parliamentary scrutiny suffered from a time lag

between the actual use of public funds and the scrutiny. This had to be remedied.

The Swatantra leader asserted that the best check on inefficiency was the avoidance of monopoly, as competition had a therapeutic effect.

He regretted that the public thought that "monopoly" meant "anything big." Monopoly actually meant absence of competition.

State monopoly had to be eschewed as much as private monopoly. Mr. Masani regretted that the Government had excluded "State monopolies" from the scope of the Monopolies Bill now before Parliament.

Where State enterprises were inefficient, there should be "privatisation" as in West Germany and Japan, he argued.

Govt. & trade

"The conflicting principles of public accountability and of business efficiency appear to be inherently irreconcilable when applied to the running of State enterprises in the fields of industry and trade."

"This problem, which remains unsolved in Britain and other countries, as in India, stems from the fact that a Government is not a social organism thrown up for the purpose of carrying on business."

Mr. V. K. Narasimhan who presided pointed out that the "erosion of fiscal consciousness" was a serious matter.

He also warned about the danger of inflation that was demoralising every section of the people.