

A New Political Party Comes

2461
'FREEDOM PARTY' FOUNDER TELLS HOW IT WAS FORMED

by MINOO MASANI

IN August in Bombay, India a new political party was born. If it were yet one more party wedded to some kind of socialism, that would hardly be news. What is interesting about the development is that the Swatantra (Freedom) party, which has come into existence under the leadership of Elder Statesman C. Rajagopalachari, is pledged to the maintenance of individual liberty, believes in peasant proprietorship on the land and people's enterprise in industry, and is opposed to statism and the methodology of socialism. That a broad-based political party of this nature should have come forward to question the very foundations on which the social and economic structure of the 10-year-old Indian republic has so far been reared constitutes nothing short of

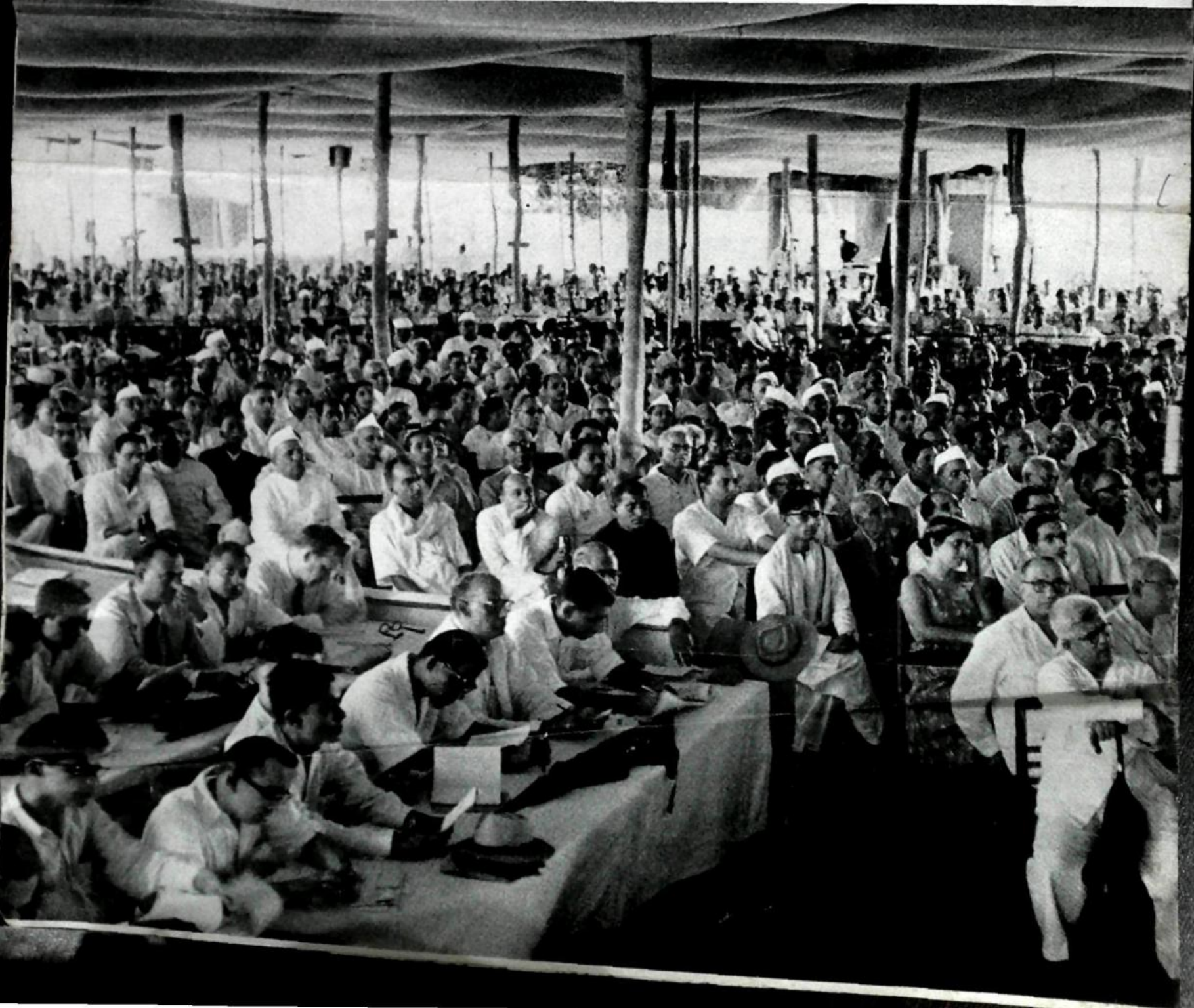
a revolution on the Indian political scene.

The birth of the Swatantra party marks, in a way, the end of the post-independence era which has been infused with the agitational politics of the struggle for national freedom. It may well mark the beginning of the functioning of normal parliamentary democracy in a country whose freedom has been well and truly founded on the rock of a democratic constitution and which now turns to utilize that freedom for the well-being and happiness of its people. Swatantra party leaders claim the emergence of the party as a sign of the growing political maturity of the Indian people.

The philosophy of the new party, put in a nutshell, is that it has faith in the people's capacity to serve the country by serving

themselves. The slogan under which Dr. Ludwig Erhard has accomplished the magnificent postwar recovery of West Germany, "Let the men and the money loose and they will make the country strong," strikes a responsive chord with the Swatantra party's members. The new party's members do not believe that a collectivized economy can coexist for long with political democracy. One or the other must give way. Some measure of state enterprise and regulation in the economic field the party accepts as inevitable in the conditions of the 20th Century. But, when government regulation steps across a certain limit, it threatens the purpose for which it is invoked. The new party stands for the "defense of farm and family." It rejects materialism and recalls the stress which Gandhi

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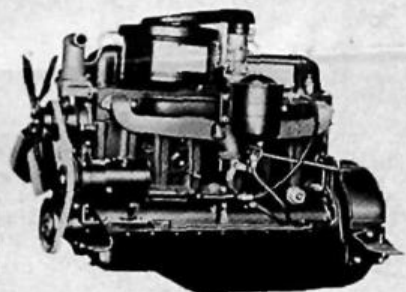
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into Being in India

AND WHAT ITS OBJECTIVES ARE

laid on moral values. It rejects the false dichotomy of bread *versus* freedom. In its view, bread can be achieved only *with* and *through* freedom. Abraham Lincoln's adage that "the legitimate object of government is 'to do for the people what needs to be done, but which they cannot, by individual effort, do at all, or do so well, for themselves,'" was quoted in one of the keynote speeches at the Bombay founding convention because it has relevance to the problems of India a century after Lincoln's time.

The new party has decided to limit its opposition to the socio-economic sphere and has not so far developed a plank on foreign policy or on the linguistic and other local problems which abound in different parts of India. The

sponsors feel that the political parties of today, whether in India or elsewhere, often tend to lay down "the party line" on almost every aspect of life, and they accordingly believe that the Swatantra party might well set an example of limiting its area of agreement and discipline and leaving its individual members free to express their own points of view on many of these issues outside the party platform.

For a decade now Prime Minister Nehru, with his quaint blend of Soviet-style economic planning and British-model parliamentary democracy, has dominated the Indian intellectual scene. A faint challenge from an isolated pocket here and there is all he has had to encounter. The fundamental thinking on which the Nehru government's economic measures have been based is that, in an underdeveloped country such as India's, a departure from the normal functioning of economic laws becomes necessary if the high expectations of material improvement raised in the minds of newly independent people are not to turn sour. So, the argument goes, the building up of heavy industry must, contrary to the normal sequence, precede consumer goods industries. The government has to play a particularly active role, both in establishing capital goods industries, such as steel and huge river-valley projects, and in regulating the entire functioning of economic life, whether in industry or agriculture. Like Russia and China, though without political dictatorship, India would pull itself up by its bootstraps, performing in a short span of time what might otherwise take generations to accomplish. There can be no question that, during the first decade of independence, a large part of the Indian intelligentsia followed Mr. Nehru in this line of thought.

Under the surface, however, second thoughts have been developing and discontent with the "socialist pattern" has been building up during the last few years. The middle classes have found themselves being ground down slowly by the inevitable consequences of excessively high taxation and the inflation that was slowly creeping over them. The consumer was made to pay more for the necessities of life through successive impositions of heavy excise duties. The investor was being taxed out of his investable surplus. The entrepreneur was being harried by bureaucratic regulation and interference. A businessman responding to the government's call to undertake the manufacture of some scarce material or one for which there is an export market found that he had to trudge the dusty corridors of the New Delhi secretariat, moving from office to office in a never-ending attempt to obtain the various licenses and permits. Those already in the field of manufacture have been known to spend several days every month flying up to Delhi to answer queries or remove some road block in the way of obtaining the necessary facilities. New constraints on the people's enterprise were being systematically imposed, and justi-



AUTHOR MASANI, one of the three founders of the new Freedom party, has been mayor of Bombay, ambassador to Brazil, a business executive and is an Independent member of India's Parliament. He has also written eight books, is an outspoken critic of Nehru's "socialist pattern of society."

fied by reference to the socialist doctrine. Fear, hesitancy and uncertainty as to what the government would do next have become a feature of economic life.

On the political plane, the evils of interference by political bosses in the administration of the country and the pressure they brought to bear on officials have been causing demoralization among civil servants and destroying public confidence in the government of the day. Interference on ideological grounds has been elevated into a principle. The cult of personality has smothered free discussion even within the ruling party itself. The bulk of the members of the Congress party, who think along liberal or Gandhian lines, have been intimidated into silence by a few confused Marxists at the head of the party. In the absence of an alternative government, discontent has been funneled increasingly into Red channels, and the kind of polarization that took place in China in the '40s between the Kuomintang and the Communist party was becoming noticeable in the state of Kerala and was in danger of developing elsewhere. Even so, only the wildest optimist could have foreseen the emergence of a major political party which advocated rejecting the entire pattern of planning and economic development that has been followed during the past decade. Only a year ago, I myself tried unsuccessfully to weld together several of the local groups



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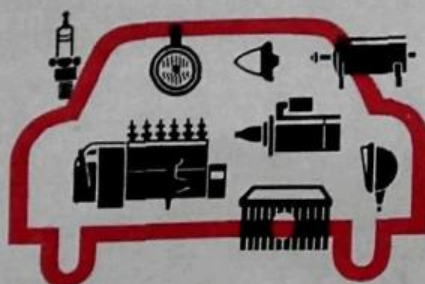
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FOUNDERS of Swatantra party meet during its first convention. They are (left to right) Professor N. G. Ranga, party chairman; Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, the party's leader; and Minoo Masani, the author of this article.



FREEDOM PARTY CONTINUED

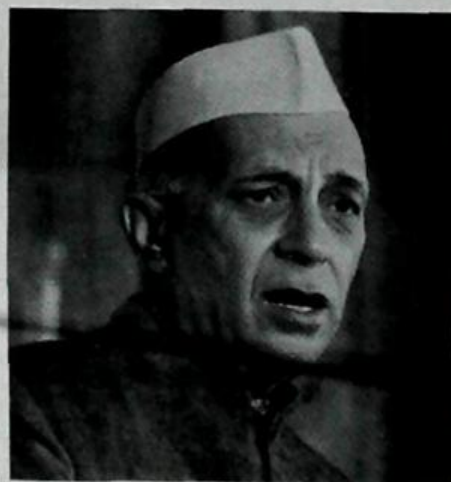
which have now come together under the umbrella of this new national party. How has this new party of freedom finally come about?

Oddly, credit for its emergence must go to the Congress party, because of what is described in India as the "Nagpur Resolution" which the Congress party adopted last January.

That resolution constitutes a three-pronged attack on the way of life in the Indian village. The first prong of the attack is the imposition of ceilings on land holdings which in practice would deprive the farmer of all land that he might own in excess of what would bring in an income of around 3,600 rupees (\$760) in the year. This measure would break the back of the middle classes in the villages and deprive them of the capacity to withstand the inroads of governmental authority.

The second prong is the proposal which is euphemistically called "joint cooperative farming." Barring its name, it has nothing in common with the principles of genuine cooperation as practiced in Denmark, England and other countries. It is in reality an attempt at introducing collective farming of the Soviet-Chinese pattern through the pooling of land, the uprooting of boundaries and the establishment of big cooperative farms. Even if this plan were brought about without coercion it must, in present-day conditions in India, inevitably mean management by officials of the government and the reduction of the farmer to the status of a landless laborer. Heedless of the lessons of the failure of collective farming in the Iron Curtain countries and ignoring the magnificent achievements of small-scale peasant farming in Japan, Prime Minister Nehru insists that this change would result in increased food production. It is also supposed to constitute a "higher way of life" than the age-old method of a man and his family cultivating land which is his own.

The third prong is the attempt to establish a state monopoly in the wholesale trade in food grains, thereby eliminating thousands of traders and leaving the farmer face to face with the monopoly, which can dictate to him the price at which he must sell his produce.



NEHRU, India's Prime Minister, has been a Congress party leader for 35 years. His daughter, Indira Gandhi, is now Congress party president. Nehru's personal rule is one of the main targets of new party.



It was this ill-conceived Nagpur Resolution which acted as a spark-plug to the political revolt. The urban middle class and the business class, helpless against the hold of the Congress party on rural areas, have found a new ally. The reaction of landed peasants, who with their families constitute at least 52% of India's population, has been instinctive. In a country where most peasants live in mud huts, own little more than a plow, and, if they are lucky, a pair of bullocks, the piece of land that they have is all they can call their own. When Prime Minister Nehru brushes aside the plea for peasant proprietorship by pointing out that most of the peasants own small, fragmented farms and should therefore not object to the pooling of their lands, it sounds to the peasant like asking a mother not to mind parting with her child because it is only a tiny infant. So it was not surprising that the All India Agriculturists' Federation convened the initiating meeting at Madras on June 4 where the decision to launch the Swatantra party was taken. Professor N. G. Ranga, a leading spokesman of the Indian peasantry, resigned his post as secretary of the Congress party in Parliament to become chairman of the new party.

Even within the ranks of the Congress party there is widespread disquiet over the Nagpur Resolution. Only a few weeks back, the Indian press published the gist of a letter written to the Prime Minister by the veteran Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of the Republic, sounding a note of warning against a hasty and doctrinaire approach to rural problems.

Perhaps the best parallel to the character of the Swatantra party in Western countries is that provided by such as the Smallholders' party in Hungary. In the field of agriculture the paramount need for increased food production is stressed, and it is felt that this is best attained through the self-employed peasant proprietor who is interested in obtaining the highest yields from his land. The peasant farmer should be given all psychological and material inducements for greater production without disturbing the harmony of rural life and without affecting ownership or management. Among such incentives would be a fair and stable price, the provision of credit and the supply of water, tools, seed and fertilizer.

In the field of industry, the Swatantra party believes in the incentives for higher production and expansion that are inherent in competitive enterprise, with necessary safeguards against monopoly. The party would restrict state enterprise to the field of heavy industries, where essential, in order to supplement the notable achievements of such private enterprise as, for example, the giant Tata Iron & Steel Company in Jamshedpur, and such national services as the railways. The party has declared itself to be in favor of a balanced development of capital goods industries, organized consumer goods industries and rural industries that afford supplementary employment to the large number of unemployed and underemployed people on the land. The party is opposed to the state entering the field of trade. It believes in free choice for the investor, the producer and the consumer.

Through such a positive policy, the Swatantra party believes that agricultural production can be set on its feet in the way that has been so successfully achieved in Japan since World War II. Thus can be provided a sound foundation on which the industrial structure of the country can be reared. While deprecating the policy of asking the

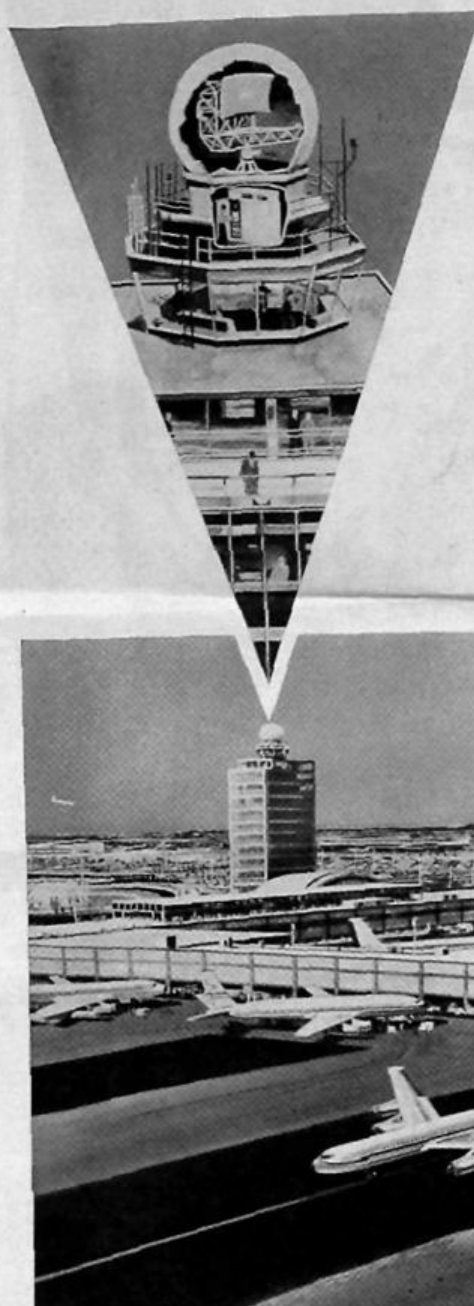
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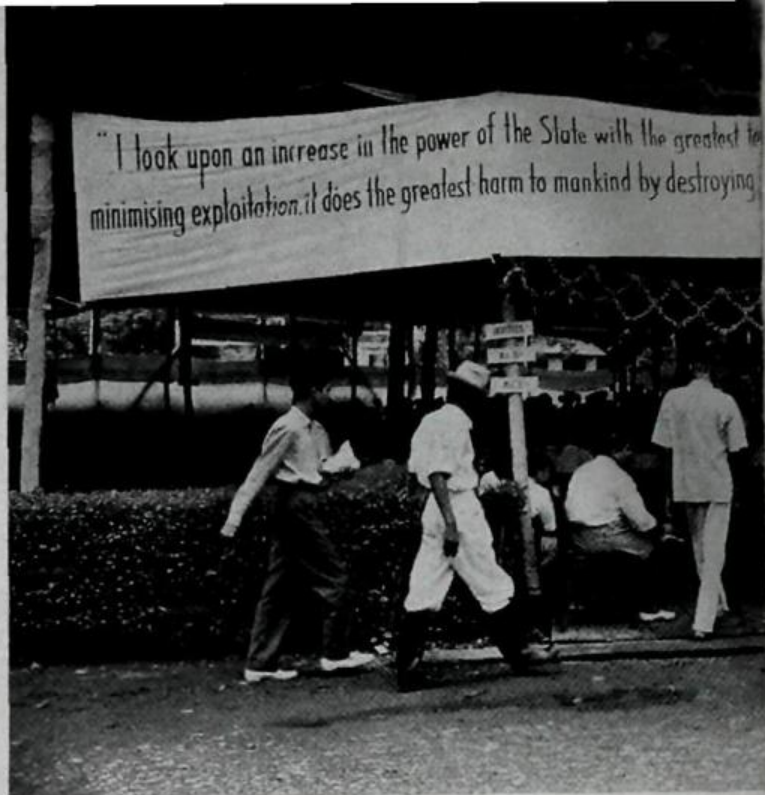
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FREEDOM PARTY CONTINUED

present generation to tighten its belt (which, in India, it does not possess) for the sake of generations yet unborn, the Swatantra party believes that the policies it suggests would liberate the productive forces from the restrictive effects of bureaucracy, so that a much quicker expansion of industry and a more rapid rise in the standard of life of the people can be brought about, just as this was accomplished by the successful implementation of Dr. Erhard's policy of social enterprise in West Germany. Such a policy would be in consonance with the established Indian principle that those who possess wealth should not run the government, while those who control the army and police should not be in control of agriculture and industry. The party's policy would prevent the concentration of political and economic power in a few hands. The way is thus opened for the building up of a broad-based coalition of the peasantry in the villages and the middle classes in the cities.

Two charges have been levied against the new party by its opponents. The first is that it is a projection of the interests of big business and is therefore "reactionary." Since this is Mr. Nehru's main line of attack it merits consideration. It is undoubtedly true that the implementation of the party's program would bring the businessman the much needed relief for which he has been clamoring for the past few years. That does not, however, mean that the business class will wholeheartedly throw its weight behind the Swatantra party. The reason for this lies in the present controlled economy where business tends to become the handmaid of government. The selfish scramble for licenses and permits blunts the capacity of businessmen to stand up for their way of life. Fear of the wrath of government against businessmen who give political or financial support to the new party is omnipresent. Thus, while some courageous businessmen will no doubt gravitate to the Swatantra party, it is more than likely that those businessmen who have hitherto distinguished themselves by lack of vision and supine attitude to the government will continue to be found on Mr. Nehru's "socialist" bandwagon. The new party will therefore have to rely for its sinews on the small man's support.

Another argument advanced by the critics of the Swatantra party is that by dividing the democratic forces in the country, it may unconsciously help the Communist party. I believe this fear is based on a profound misconception of current political realities.

If today the new party has come out in frontal opposition to the government of the day, it is because the policies of the Nehru government are in many ways preparing the ground for Communism, giving it respectability and making it ideologically acceptable. The Prime Minister has often said that he sees nothing to object to in the ideology of Communism but only in its methods of violence. In other words, the Communist leopard is good, but without his spots. The moral barrier which Gandhi erected against Communism has been lost in a fog of confusion. The economic policies of the ruling party, and in particular the attempt at collective farming, justify the use of a phrase which the late Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel used in a different context: these policies are in some ways "the sappers and miners of the Communist party."



WARNING taken from writings of Gandhi hangs over tent at the Freedom party convention. Party also featured antistatism sentiments of Vinoba Bhave, Indian land reformer.

In the past few months, we in India have seen Communist imperialism destroy the freedom of the unarmed and defenseless people of Tibet. Until only recently the people of the state of Kerala were battling bravely to throw off the Communist yoke. Unfortunately, it seems that many good men in the Congress party, who would react violently at the direct threat of Communist dictatorship, do not mind very much if the poison is administered to them in homeopathic doses over a period of years. And certainly there is little merit in the suggestion that, in the face of the inability of Congress party members to assert themselves, others should stand by helplessly and watch this erosion of democracy for fear of splitting the non-Communist vote.

The whole world, including the peoples in the Iron Curtain countries, is moving away from the shibboleths of collectivism. The danger of India's being committed to outmoded dogmas which the rest of the world is discarding must be combated. By rallying India against Communism and by educating public opinion about the moral gulf between Communism and the free way of life, the new party will eliminate the danger of the current unconscious drift toward the precipice. The party's Statement of Principles allows no coexistence between it and the ideology of Communism, and the leading spokesmen of the party have a long record of struggle against Communist totalitarianism.

The main architect of the party is India's elder statesman, C. Rajagopalachari, a former Governor-General and Home Minister in the Union Government and more than once the Chief Minister of the state of Madras. The charge of irresponsibility laid on him by the Prime Minister sits oddly on the shoulders of this 80-year-old patriarch. One of Gandhi's trusted lieutenants, and allied to him domestically by the marriage of Gandhi's son with his daughter, he has said that Communism is "Public Enemy Number One." The phrase has become famous and is now part of the party's credo.

Professor N. G. Ranga, the party's chairman, early learned the facts of life about Communism in the villages of his home state in Andhra, and has increased his knowledge through the bitter experiences of such friends and associates as Ferenc Nagy of Hungary.

The party has the moral support of Jayaprakash Narayan, former socialist leader and now Vinoba Bhave's chief lieutenant in the Bhoo-dan (land gift) campaign. Jayaprakash, though himself a believer in nonparty democracy, has welcomed the emergence of the Swatantra party because he supports its opposition to the totalitarian trends in centralized planning which he describes as "creeping paralysis." He is also heartened by the party's acceptance of the Gandhian way of achieving social justice through the theory of "trusteeship" on the part of those owning wealth and enjoying privilege of any kind. Currently, Jayaprakash, who three years back had raised the banner of revolt against the Indian government's ambivalent attitude toward the Hungarian revolution, is hard at work to keep alive the issue of Tibetan freedom.

What are the party's prospects? Here we are in the presence of imponderables. The next general elections are scheduled for the spring of 1962, and a great deal of water will flow down the Ganges between

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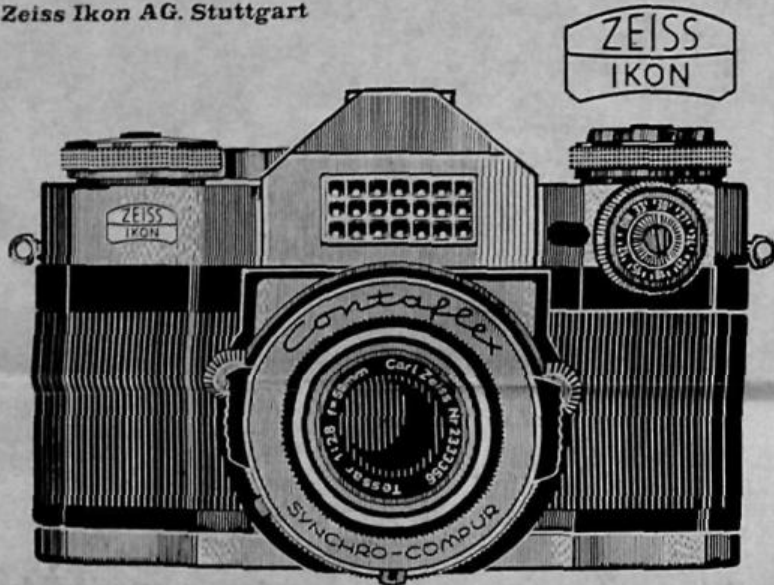
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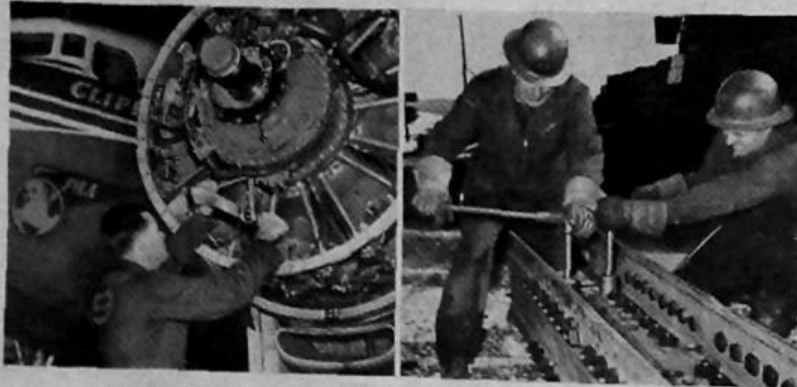
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FREEDOM PARTY CONTINUED

now and then. The mind of India is in flux. No static or statistical analysis based on the figures of the last elections makes any sense. The Indian voter is, by and large, an uncommitted voter, swayed by a multiplicity of such pulls as religion, caste, region, ideology and the cult of personality. There can be no question that the Congress party has had its day and must now be prepared for a continuous decline in its prestige and popularity. People are getting bored with the old faces, the old voices and the old slogans. By 1962, it will be "time for a change."

The question is now whether the Congress party will lose ground. It will. The question is who will occupy that ground—the Communists or the Swatantra party? The answer to this question will lie in the capacity shown by the new party to build what is now a broad national movement into an efficient machine, to convert widespread but nebulous sympathy into resources and votes. My personal belief is that, whether we win or lose the next elections, our greatest service will lie in the fact that we will have broken the "Congress or Communist" strait-jacket which limited the Indians' choice. And we will have prevented India's going along the Chinese path. For every vote the Swatantra party takes away from the Congress party it will take away scores of potential votes from the Communist party. A friend of mine in Bombay told me about a year ago that at the next elections he would vote for the Communists, much as he detested them, because that was the only way to remove the "corrupt and inefficient Nehru government." I pleaded with him that this would be a tragic mistake on his part, but to no purpose. Last month the first donation that came into the Swatantra party's offices in Bombay was from the same man, who wrote that once again he could see a bright future for India.

At the last elections the Indian who was not a socialist—and there were quite a few million—was virtually disfranchised. The choice between the Congress party, the Praja Socialist party, the Socialist party and the Communist party candidates was for him little choice indeed. It will now be possible for the country and the electorate to have before it a clear alternative.

Will the Swatantra party succeed in giving India, in course of time, a government that will implement its liberal policies? I don't know. No organization has a guarantee of victory at its birth. Indeed, no worthwhile cause would ever take shape if its sponsors awaited such assurance. Every spontaneous, grass-roots development must at the same time be an act of will and an act of faith.



THE FARMER landholder will, predicts Party Spokesman Masani, be the backbone of the party. Here Indian farmers harvest wheat in Uttar Pradesh.