

Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the General Council Held in
New Delhi on Sunday and Monday, 9th & 10th June, 1974

Present : Mr. Piloo Mody -- in the Chair

Andhra

Mr. G. Latchanna

Delhi

Mr. M. R. Arya
 Mr. A. C. Bisaria
 Mr. Mohanlal Jatav
 Mr. M.K. Mohta
 Mr. D. N. Patodia
 Mr. R. P. Gill
 Mr. H.C. Trivedi
 Col. H.R. Pasricha
 Mr. Satish Sharma
 Mr. R. C. Sharma

Gujarat

Mr. H. M. Patel
 Mr. Navin Patel
 Mr. Hargovind Thakkar
 Mr. Ratilal D. Patel
 Mr. Girish Dholabhai
 Mr. Bhickhabhai Patel

Haryana

Mr. Sukhchain Preet Singh
 Mr. Mange Ram

Karnataka

Mr. N. K. Ganapaiah

Maharashtra

Mr. Madhu Mehta
 Mr. Girish Munshi
 Mr. Sumantilal P. Shah

Orissa

Mr. R. N. Singh Deo
 Mr. Lok Nath Mishra
 Mr. Tribikram Tripathy

Rajasthan

Mr. Laxman Singh of Dungarpur
 Mr. K. C. Singhvi
 Mr. Balmukund Chappar
 Mr. Kanti Nath Sharma

Tamil Nadu

Mr. K. Sunderam
 Dr. M. Santosham
 Mr. J. Ramabhadran
 Mr. C. R. Narsimhan
 Mr. V. Devanathan
 Mr. S. Balasubramaniam

Uttar Pradesh

Mr. H. K. Srivastava
 Dr. Gangaram Dwivedy
 Mr. H. K. Pathak

The Minutes of the Meeting of the General Council held in ^{Lucknow} New Delhi on December 15 and 16 were confirmed.

This meeting of the General Council had been called specifically to discuss the policies and programme of the proposed New Party. A number of members objected on the ground that --

- (a) adequate notice had not been given and hence the meeting had not been properly called, and
- (b) the Draft Programme had not been received in advance therefore it was difficult for them to give their views on the lengthy draft of 24 pages given to members only at the commencement of the meeting. Members felt that the draft should have been circulated at least 15 days in advance so that they would have had sufficient time to study it.

Mr. Piloo Mody explained to members the problems he had had to face and the time it had taken to prepare the Draft. Mr. Mody pointed out that he had been ~~empowered~~ by the National Executive to probe into the possibilities of helping the emergence of a National Alternative leading to a two-party system in the country. Tracing the circumstances leading to the preparation of the Draft which was now before the General Council, Mr. Mody said that he had had talks and discussions with the leaders of various parties and it was only after that it had been possible for him to prepare a Draft which was put to the leaders of the various parties. Mr. Charan Singh had prepared a draft running into 45 pages which was ~~again~~ discussed by the leaders of various parties at their meeting in New Delhi on 25th and 26th May. After a thorough discussion, Mr. Piloo Mody was authorised by the leaders of the new groups to give a final shape to this Draft. After working on it, the final Draft was got ready on 6th June and it was duplicated and ready for distribution only on the 8th and that was why members could not receive the copies earlier. Members present were satisfied with Mr. Mody's explanation.

As members wanted some time to go through the contents of the Draft before them before discussing it, it was felt that the meeting should be adjourned for an early lunch and that discussion of the draft to begin in the afternoon session. In the meantime, several members discussed the pros and cons of the new party. After lunch, Mr. Piloo Mody, the President, briefed the members on the developments that had taken place in the last few months. The President said that the situation was changing rapidly and the time was opportune to discuss a new initiative. This change had taken place even before the UP elections when he had tried hard to get various Party leaders together to promote a two-Party system. The talks had been going on for quite a number of months. In fact, the late Rajaji had been very much in favour of a merger, Mr. Mody pointed out.

At the last meeting of the National Executive held in New Delhi on April 6 and 7, 1974, the President had been authorised to conduct negotiations on behalf of the Party. The National Executive had passed a Resolution for a National Alternative and he had been authorised to explore possibilities of building up a two-party system in India. He was requested to carry on negotiations with the help of any two members available in Delhi. The President felt that times were moving fast and the Party had to move with it. The President said he had to spend long hours lobbying with other members on why the Swatantra Party was anxious to bring about a two-party system to stem the rot that had crept in. Unless the numerous parties were regrouped into a new one, it would not be possible to arrest the Ruling Party. He explained to members that the two-Party system did not mean that there would be only two parties. There may be more than two -- may be even four or five, but it would at least reverse the trend towards the mushroom growth of political parties.

These small parties were making no headway, but were merely confusing the Indian electorate. Being called President and General Secretary was not enough -- we could not shirk our responsibilities. The talks, Mr. Mody felt, had yielded good results. It was the intention to get as many as 30 parties to come together and the choice before us is limited to all non-Congress and non-Marxist parties.

Explaining why it was decided to dissolve first and not merge, the President explained that in a merger the old Party labels would continue. The best thing therefore was to shed our own labels and to start afresh and that was how it was decided to dissolve all old Parties first and form a new party. This Draft which had been prepared was being given first to the members of the Council for their consideration. The President had consulted all leading members of the Swatantra Party in Delhi and had also sought the guidance of both Mr. Masani and Mr. Dandekar. He had written to various other political parties. Meanwhile, the leaders of the various parties had met. Mr. Masani had advised the President to prepare a Programme first and put it up for discussion to the members. Hence the Draft had been prepared so that it could be discussed before deciding on the dissolution of the Party. Mr. Mody went on to point out that the Draft had taken into account all the points in the Party's programme and had not deviated from our ideology. It was now left to the members to discuss and decide upon it.

In the discussion that followed, the following members participated : Mr. C.R. Narasimhan, Mr. Lok Nath Mishra, Mr. N.K. Ganapathiah, Mr. Mohanlal Jatav, Mr. Harikumar Pathak, Mr. Mange Ram, Mr. Brindavan Dwivedy, Mr. G. K. Sunderam, Mr. Devanathan, Mr. D.N. Patodia, Mr. Hargovind Thakkar and Mr. G. Latchanna.

Of these speakers, Mr. C.R. Narasimhan, Mr. Mohanlal Jatav, Mr. G.K. Sunderam, Mr. Devanathan and Mr. Hargovind Thakkar were not in favour of the dissolution of the Party. They felt that they had all worked as soldiers and the State Units of the Party would be in great difficulty. The two-Party system was a good objective but they did not feel that it would succeed. The new party was therefore not welcomed by them. On the other hand they supported the idea of a federation or electoral alliances. The new party plan, according to these members, was premature and the wide publicity given to it had damaged the Party's reputation. They felt that we would be in wrong company as we would be joining hands with the wrong people. The Swatantra Party to them was a sacred Party and they were wondering as to what would happen if the new Party was to fail after some time and there was no Swatantra Party.

Mr. Sunderam felt that a change for the good could be seen in some recent policies of the Prime Minister. He said that it was only upto 1967 that the Party had really spread its ideals, and after that, nothing had been done. In Tamil Nadu, various Press Statements had done the Party serious damage. He also conveyed to members that at the meeting of the Tamil Nadu State Council, not one of them was in favour of a merger or the dissolution of the Party although 99 % of them were ready for a federation or alliance. He suggested that as a first step, the various parties which sought to merge should all work together for some time with a minimum programme and see how they could function. He made it very clear that the Tamil Nadu Unit unanimously was against dissolution and warned that in case of a dissolution, the Tamil Nadu Unit would continue to function as the Swatantra Party. He recommended a federal Party system where the various Parties would be able to retain their flag, name, symbol etc but with a minimum programme. Mr. C.R. Narasimhan, Mr. Devanathan from Tamil Nadu supported Mr. Sunderam.

Mr. Hargovind Thakkar from Gujarat felt that if the idea of the merger was to save the country from dictatorship and communism, this new Party was not the solution. This, he felt was a very premature process and will die a natural death if it is not matured properly.

Among those who supported the idea of the new alternative were Mr. Lok Nath Mishra, Mr. N.K. Ganapaiah, Mr. H.K. Pathak, Mr. Mange Ram, Mr. Brindavan Dwivedy, Mr. D.N. Patodia and Mr. G. Latchanna. They felt that these smaller groups coming together could form a big Party in India. Mr. Ganapaiah was of the opinion that the country was greater and more important than the Party. In fact, the Swatantra Party would be enlarging itself. If the socialists were prepared to discard socialism, accept most of our principles, why should we not enlarge ourselves?

They also felt that there was no harm in dissolving, because our principles were being retained.

Referring to the suggestion for a federal party, Mr. Patodia felt that there would always be a clash about allocation of seats etc. in a federal party. When we do not agree on one thing, we keep on flouting decisions and hence there is no discipline. He did not however see the possibility of any other national party coming together at the moment.

Since 1971, it was the policy of the Ruling Congress to ensure that the regional parties grew but national parties were destroyed. He felt that by a new Party we will enlarge ourselves and not shrink and by remaining out of the National Alternative, we would shrink further.

Mr. Latchanna felt that the main object was to keep democracy in tact. He was of the view that Rajaji had started this movement to protect democracy. All these years, we have been labelled as a party of the rich man, and could never shed that label; neither are we making much headway. He assured members that the Andhra Unit has whole-heartedly approved the idea of the dissolution of the Party to form a new Party.

The meeting then adjourned for the next day.

The meeting of the General Council resumed its deliberations the following day, viz., June 10, 1974.

Present

Mr. Piloo Mody -- in the Chair

Andhra

Mr. G. Latchanna

Delhi

Mr. M.R. Arya
Mr. Mohan Lal Jatav
Mr. A. C. Bisaria
Col. H. R. Pasricha
Mr. H. C. Trivedi
Mr. D. N. Patodia
Mr. V. C. Channana
Mr. Satish Sharma

Gujarat

Mr. H. M. Patel
Mr. Navin Patel
Mr. Hargovind Thakkar
Mr. Ratilal D. Patel
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Mr. Sukhchain Preet Singh
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Mr. V. Devanathan
Mr. C. R. Narasimhan
Mr. S. Balasubramaniam

Uttar Pradesh

Sardar Harbhajan Singh
Dr. Gangaram Dwivedy
Mr. H.K. Srivastava
Mr. H. K. Pathak

Col. H.R. Pasricha initiated the discussion. He wondered how all the parties could maintain their policies and yet evolve a new policy.

Mr. Girish Munshi, Mr. H.M. Patel, Mr. J. Ramabhadran, and Mr. Sumantilal P. Shah, Mr. M.R. Arya were not in favour of the dissolution whereas Mr. H. K. Srivastava, Dr. Santosham and Mr. N.K. Ganapaiah, Mr. Sukhchain Preet Singh and Mr. Madhu Mehta were in favour of the dissolution.

Mr. Girish Munshi was of the opinion that Press Statements had done a lot of damage. He also felt that the Draft was given at the last moment and protested that everything was being done in too much of a hurry. However, after listening to the President the position had become clear that it was not so. He felt that the entire complexion of the Party had changed. It started primarily as a farmer's party but the farmer was not to be found in the Party. They had all left us and we had shifted from farmers to princes. The whole complexion had changed. We were now sacrificing our principles to form a new Party. He felt that we must stick to five things before we finally form a new Party viz., that (1) there must be an uncompromising ideology, (2) no giving up of our principles, (3) we must have a dedicated cadre of workers, (4) there must be a general objective, i.e. we must spread our ideology, and (5) the tactics and strategy should be very carefully planned and executed.

Mr. Sumantilal P. Shah felt that the merger proposal came because of our failure and poor performance at the polls. Under federalism the unity of the country is being lost. The attitude of the new leaders of the new Party does not fit into our ideology. He also felt that the alliance would never work and the smaller groups do not fit into our fold. He was of the definite opinion that the two-party system may work in other countries but was not likely to succeed in India.

Dr. Santosham felt that this move was brought forward with the best of intentions. The Party had shrunk in number. More than that, the interest of the workers in the Party had also shrunk. Our image was fading out and the Party's electoral chances had shrunk to zero. After some time, we would be wiped out completely, he predicted. When we started it was a different situation - today, it was something else. No Party can survive without finance - we will die of starvation.

When a new Party is started, all sorts of people join in - we cannot be choosy how when we have allowed all sorts of people to expand our frontiers. He felt that we could join the Front but we must maintain our identity. We must be most cautious when we go ahead with the dissolution of the Party. It will definitely make us more stronger and we will have a better bargaining capacity.

Mr. H.M. Patel felt that in the new alternative, there were different parties holding different views and it was sought to bring them together. It was with this idea that the National Executive had discussed this and asked the President to go ahead and the result is this document. The document was good in parts but it had some defects when it says that for instance, that there should be a weak centre. The new Party will cut very little ice - the Swatantra Party had lost its image, others were regional parties. He had his own doubts whether the coming together of these parties, would take us far. Will a new Party work as a homogeneous Party? We will have to consider the mental make up of the people who were coming together. He was of the opinion that they will not be making much headway.

Mr. J. Ramabhadran was of the opinion that if the Party was to be dissolved, it should be done right away and there was no sense going to the National Convention. He conveyed to the members that the Tamil Nadu Unit had a very clear mind that the Party should not be dissolved as the Swatantra Party was the only Party which could deliver the goods to the country. Mr. Arya felt that the new leadership would definitely harm the new Party and was not at all in favour of the dissolution. He felt that some of the new leaders were only a regional or sectarian leaders who would offend certain groups. The people will be against such a party and the Swatantra Party will be completely wiped out.

Mr. N.K. Ganapiah welcomed the idea of the new Party. At present, he was of the opinion that the Swatantra Party was between the devil and the deep sea. We must therefore get into a new Party and enlarge our sphere. Our policy and principles have been repeated in the new draft programme.

Mr. Madhu Mehta said that many people in the country have started wondering whether the present democratic system, where there is no national alternative to the ruling party, can survive. He said that we should welcome the attempts made by Mr. Piloo Mody and Mr. Charan Singh and others to work for the creation of a national alternative. However, he expressed his doubt whether a two-party system was the only alternative in the present situation in India to preserve the democratic system. He felt that a completely fresh and new remedy was called for to save India from anarchy and chaos by mobilising people through programmes on non-political fronts. He said that he was not in favour of the alternative suggested by the Tamil Nadu Unit of the Party which favours a federal party. He said this is a very illogical stand for the very reasons given by the Tamil Nadu Unit and Mr. M. R. Masani against the dissolution of the Swatantra Party. Our past experience of Mr. Charan Singh and Mr. Biju Patnaik along with Mr. Raj Narain and his SSP colleagues, should guide us against it. Mr. Mehta said that while

he shared the apprehensions of Mr. Masani and Tamil Nadu Unit, he could not understand how a federal party would solve this problem. He said it was like a young man agreeing to get engaged to a young lady, but without any intention of marrying her. Mr. Mehta, therefore, suggested that either we should, in the larger interest of democracy, take the plunge and join the new party or carry on as we are. Mr. Mehta also pointed out that so far as Swatantra Party's present condition was concerned, it will require superhuman efforts to build the Party again afresh. He pointed out that lack of energy levels, scarce financial position of the Party and the image of the Party had gone down considerably after the 1971 elections. Mr. Mehta made a suggestion that perhaps it would be a good idea to start a Swatantra Forum which can carry out an educative campaign for a few years without plunging straightaway into elective politics. Those who wish to join the new party can do so and those who wish to keep the Swatantra Party view alive can do so through the Swatantra Forum.

Mr. Sukhchain Preet Singh was in favour of the dissolution of the Party. Mr. H.K. Srivastava also felt that we were only expanding ourselves. He felt that we all had our limitations in the State and were not able to make much progress and that a Convention should be called to discuss this new alternative.

Mr. Iaxman Singh of Dungarpur was of the opinion that besides the BKD and the Utkal Congress, there is hardly any other party of any significance. We are the only national party and he felt that the Congo and the Jan Sangh cannot go it alone by themselves. A day will come when these two parties will also have to come to our fold. They cannot stay out for too long. The Swatantra Party's ideology has to be kept alive, for which we must keep democracy alive.

Resolutions:

Mr. H.M. Patel moved a Resolution welcoming the new party and calling for a National Convention of the Party at an early date and this was seconded by Mr. Iaxman Singh of Dungarpur. The Resolution was unanimously approved in the form attached.

The second resolution on Bihar was proposed by Mr. H.M. Patel and seconded by Mr. Tribikram Tripathy. The Resolution was adopted unanimously in the form attached.

The Resolution on the arrest of Mr. Ramender Kalia of Haryana was moved by Mr. Sukhchain Preet Singh and seconded by Mr. Mange Ram. The resolution was adopted in the form attached.

The meeting then terminated with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

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RESOLUTIONS PASSED AT THE GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING OF THE SWATANTRA PARTY HELD AT VITHALBHAI PATEL HOUSE, NEW DELHI, ON JUNE 9/10, 1974

1. The General Council of the Swatantra Party met in Delhi and discussed the proposal of getting together with various parties with a view to creating a National Alternative. It also discussed the draft programme prepared by the leaders of the new group.

The members of the General Council generally agreed that the present political situation in the country demands that an all out effort should be made for the formation of a National Alternative with a well defined and clearcut alternative capable of fulfilling the urges and aspirations of the people.

In this context, while it welcomes the attempts made by various parties to come together with a view to ultimately provide a National Alternative it feels that in so far as the Swatantra Party is concerned the final decision can only be taken at a National Convention. This could give a fair opportunity to as many members as possible to study the proposed programme and carefully examine all the pros and cons of the proposal. The General Council therefore has decided that a copy of the draft programme should be circulated to all the members of all the State Councils.

The General Council also authorises the President to fix the date and venue of the National Convention at the earliest, after giving due notice.

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2. The General Council of the Swatantra Party congratulates Shri Jayprakash Narayan on the courageous non-violent struggle he has launched with the enthusiastic support of the people and particularly Student community of Bihar.

The Swatantra Party is particularly gratified at the failure of efforts to provoke the silent non-violent participants into violence, and is for that reason confident of the successful culmination of this historic struggle against injustice. It should serve as a clear warning to the ruling Congress that the people are no longer prepared to remain silent with a government which is unable to give them a clean and honest administration.

The General Council of Swatantra Party invites the attention of the Haryana Government to the arrest of Mr. Ramander Kalia son of Smt. Kamla Kalia, Joint Secretary, Swatantra Party, Haryana, without assigning any reasons from Delhi on 4th June 1974 and to make necessary inquiries without delay. There should be no room for doubts to arise that some political vendetta has been at work.
