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PRESS CONFERENCE ADDRESSED BY MR. M.R. MASANI
AT BHUBANESWAR ON 25.2.68 (11.00 A.M.)

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"Delhi is very cold and chilly, but I find Bhubaneswar is nice and warm both from political and climatic points of view", remarked Mr. Masani at a Press Conference on 25.2.68 at Bhubaneswar.

Mr. Masani visited Orissa for the first time after the Swatantra-led Government took over power, his previous visit being more than a year back before the swearing-in of the present Government. He left for Calcutta this afternoon to inaugurate the All India Bank Depositors Association which is to fight chiefly against the proposed Bill in the Parliament envisaging to squander away the depositors' money by bureaucratic and political interference although euphematically called 'Social Control over Banks'.

Mr. Masani during his stay at Bhubaneswar had met the Chief Minister and other Ministers of the Swatantra Party, the Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Pradhan and Education Minister, Shri B. Patnaik of Jana Congress Party, Dr. Mahatab and also the Governor. "I feel satisfied and I rejoice at the success of the first-year in office of the Swatantra-led Government in Orissa. I have not heard any opinion to the contrary so far from any quarter. All the people I spoke to, conveyed the same satisfaction. I think the satisfaction is due to these factors :

- (i) the maintenance of law and order and stability i.e. maintenance of peace and the climate of stability;
- (ii) secondly there has been complete harmony within each of the Parties and between the two Parties that make the Coalition Government.

- (iii) The people generally feel that there has been a very honest attempt to provide good Government.

By and large, people think a very sincere attempt is being made to clean the administration. To some measure, the Orissa Government have achieved Rajaji's ideal of *good* ~~Government~~ Government though it is not 100 % perfect as no ideal can be expected to be achieved cent percent", he continued.

He deplored that these healthy aspects of what has happened in Orissa find very little place in the National Press. May be, when things are good here, Orissa news is no news. He added, "But truth also must have wings and publicity of what is happening in Orissa would be good for the country and for Democracy. People who are disheartened at what is happening in West Bengal and other States, will be heartened to know that something good was happening in another part of the country."

To a question regarding the Freedom of Religion Act, Mr. Masani said that there was a discussion on this matter in the Central Parliamentary Board and National Executive of the Party. He said, "We felt that there are All-India implications. Swatantra Party is a champion of minorities. There was some amount of anxieties in our members from Kerala which has a large number of Christian population. It is to ^{be} seen now whether something can be done to remove the feeling of misgiving. There can be no controversy that conversion is sometimes carried out by fraud, threats or inducements etc. which should be punished. The only matter of anxiety was whether the

law passed was beyond the needs; and whether perhaps the law could be so used as ^{not} to impair the Constitutional Rights of propagating religion. Mr. Dandeker, the General Secretary was authorised to discuss this matter with the State President of the Party to see how these fears could be allayed."

Asked whether he was satisfied that the local situation in Orissa justified such a legislation, Mr. Masani said that the Chief Minister was the right person to apprise on the point. Continuing Mr. Masani said, "I cannot sit in judgment on the actions of the Chief Minister". He added, "Unlike other Parties, our Party members act in a very free way. Authority is not exercised over them. We do not like to control our Government like other Parties. We do not want to interfere in the administration. The question may better be left to the judgment of the Chief Minister and his colleagues who are in office. Their first obligation is to the electorate here. The party caucus is not brought into the picture at all. The first accountability of a Member of Parliament or a Member of Assembly is to the people, the second is to the Party. The Party should not be dominant over the people. Our Government is free to act in a free manner for the good of the people. Of course, when National interest is involved we will take interest."

Asked whether the Swatantra Party is ^{facing} ~~getting~~ any difficulty over the Rajya Sabha Election here, he said, "I think this is a false impression. First of all no choice can be unanimous. Unanimity is very rare. Unanimity is always an enforced unanimity as you found in the case of

election of Mr. Kamraj. Whether for a leader or a Chief Minister or a Rajya Sabha candidate, there has to be selection by a body. So far as this particular point is concerned, the State Parliamentary Board of the Swatantra Party recommended four names in order of priority to the Central Parliamentary Board, which nominated the two and the matter is final. So far as the Central Office is concerned, we only act on the recommendation of the State Party. The two candidates nominated by the Party for Orissa are (1) Shri Sundarmani Patel and (2) Shri Krushna Chandra Panda."

P.S.P. Resolutions

Asked to comment on the Resolutions passed by the P.S.P. to withdraw support from the Coalition Government in Orissa, Mr. Masani said, "P.S.P. being in Opposition, naturally they will raise issues that may be critical. I do not attach much practical significance to it. When in Opposition, we were criticising those who were in office then. So this is not anything uncommon. We want to co-operate with all Non-Communist Parties."

Being informed that the P.S.P. would bring a No-Confidence Motion against the present Government, Mr. Masani said, "I do not know anything about it. He (the Chief Minister) can tell you the background and the details of the so-called alienation of support. I cannot be of any help. The P.S.P. are in Opposition. They have every right to criticise."

Regarding his 'Discussion with M.L.As. of the Joint Party, Mr. Masani said, "It was just an

exchange of views with the Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister, other Ministers and some individual non-official members. But the story of Orissa is not being projected outside Orissa well. If some thing good happens, the story should be carried to the people. The people should know that some thing is happening here which is distinctly different from what is happening in West Bengal, or Bihar or U.P. The Indian people should know that some thing good is happening in some part of India. My feeling is that an assertive Public Relations Programme is called for in Orissa."

Setting-up New Industries in Orissa

Regarding C.M.'s visit to outside the State and his call to the Industrialists to come to Orissa to set up industries, he said, " You want to have them make investment. So you have to go out and get the capital. Government of India is doing that. They have opened offices abroad which are called 'International Investment Centres'. There is a such an office in Delhi, another in New York and another in London perhaps. The whole idea is to sell India in the world market so that foreign capital will come. You must talk to Public Relations people. You must go to the investment market. Mr. Morarji Desai goes abroad and he is particularly skilful. He tries to sell. I feel Orissa needs capital. You cannot have it unless you go out. "

Prohibition Policy

Asked why the Swatantra Party is fighting shy of the decision it took on its revised Prohibition Policy, Mr. Masani said, " My thinking is Swatantra Party is to be

more assertive in interpreting and explaining the policy of Government."

To a question why the Public Relations Department or members of the Ruling Party did nothing to counter the demonstration of Prohibitionists at Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, Shri R.W.Singh Deo, Chief Minister said, "The Collector allowed some of the people to speak in favour of prohibition. There are all sorts of people who have got into that - the Sarvodaya people, the Gandhi-ites, some Congressmen and others. Some of the people who participated in that do not believe in prohibition. Those who made appeal from the platform to the bidders, not only failed in their attempt, but also exposed themselves by making it a platform for political propaganda instead of a prohibition appeal. This exposure is also for the good."

Labour Front of the Swatantra Party

Asked about the Labour Front of the Swatantra Party, Mr. Masani said, "The recent circular of the Central Office re-explains our attitude to the Labour policy. Our members should take interest in the developing of Trade Unions. We should not endeavour like other political parties in capturing Trade Unions. We should offer our services as advisers, helpers and Sevaks of the workers, but not as leaders. Wherever workers want us, we will do it on non-political, non-party line."

Communist Party

To a question regarding Swatantra Party's demand to ban the Community Party, Mr. Masani said, "It is true that in U.P. immediately after the General Election we made a very sharp departure from our policy not to join any coalition with the Communists. That was in

February-March. By May, the National Executive of the Party decided that the Swatantra Party will not join any coalition with the Communists. Soon after i.e. in July our participation in U.P. Government came to ^{an} end. Then came Nuxalbari and Gherases in West Bengal. On 23rd July, we took the view that the Communist Party is a danger to India and the Communist Party should be eliminated from the West Bengal Government. That Party should be banned and the Communist Ministers ejected from Mr. Ajoy Mukherjee's Cabinet. They were a clear danger. Our view is that Banning of a Party should be reduced to ^a minimum. It is a question of timing. There are certain periods of time when it is necessary to ban some political parties. In 1962 when the Chinese attacked India, we wanted banning the Communist Party. We dropped the demand when fighting stopped. The attempt of the Communists at Nuxalbari was foiled by the maturity of the people of West Bengal and by Dr. P.C. Ghosh and Mr. Dharamvira. We have only one member in West Bengal. We asked him to join with Dr. Ghosh. He has helped Prafulla Babu to hold the fort against the Communists. We believe the Communist-dominated United Front Government in Bengal should have been dismissed at the time of Nuxalbari. Our feeling is, 'Dismissi^{al}on of the U.P. Government came very late'. We believe that banning of Communist Party should precede any election in West Bengal. President's Rule should continue as long as it is necessary, but before fresh elections the Communist Party should be banned". Asked whether he means banning of the Left or Right Communists, Mr. Masani said, "We refuse to choose between the two evils."

Uttar Pradesh

Regarding Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Masani said, "S.V.D. has failed. The Swatantra Party has withdrawn from S.V.D. The support of Swatantra Party was to be only so long as Mr. Charen Singh was the leader."

Merger between Swatantra & Jana Sangha

Regarding Merger between Swatantra and Jana Sangha, Mr. Masani said, "The prospect of merger between Swatantra Party and Jana Sangha is nil. Offers for co-operation made by the Swatantra Party have met with negative response. Mr. Balraj Madhok wanted to co-operate with us, but unfortunately he failed to convince his party. We will be prepared for limited forms of co-operation in regard to allocation of seats, in elections to the Rajya Sabha and such like limited objectives. But at the Party level, the matter has ended." To a question whether Swatantra Party should not demand banning of non-secular parties like Jana Sangha and Muslim League, Mr. Masani said, "Jana Sangha is not an anti-National Party."

Language Issue

Regarding Language Issue, Mr. Masani said that the Swatantra Party has not developed a language Plan or Programme yet. "Our policy is not to get entangled in side issues and miss the main problems. Our members are free to take any stand on the language issue." Mr. Masani continued that when the Swatantra Party was formed in 1959, even at that time, "We felt that certain trivial issues such as re-organisation of States and the allied issues of language, are coming to the fore. In view of this we took the decision

that we would confine our Party Programme to basic socio-economic problems at home and international relations abroad and on matters of boundaries and language the Party would abstain from taking a stand and give the members freedom of expression and vote. That stand has been vindicated by more recent developments and I am glad that my party is not participating in the hysteria of squabbling and quarreling over such side issues where the basic issues of protecting people's life and property and maintaining order and progress, ~~in~~ providing food and other needs of the people are being neglected."

Asked why the Swatantra Party is keeping silent when the language agitation has set the whole South India on fire, Mr. Masani said, "We are acting as a fire brigade. We are not keeping silent. When some body goes crazy, the psychiatrist tries to remove his obsession and bring him back to his former state of mind. We are playing a therapeutic role by not joining any side."

Continuing, Mr. Masani said, "Orissa is very much free from confusion of language. Rajaji made a kind of last minute proposal ~~x~~ to the Prime Minister saying, "Let there be a moratorium on this issue; status quo should continue until people ~~quieted down~~ quieten down and become sensible; let it be kept in cold storage. Some time later on, it can be taken." But no body listened to it. The Prime Minister said, "No, we cannot wait."

Party Line on Language Issue

"Our alternate motion which was rejected by majority, said thus :

"This House having considered the matter comes to the following conclusion, namely, that in the

interest of the autonomy of educational institutions (Universities and others) and the rights of parents to choose for their own child, the medium of ~~instruct~~ instruction, this House considers that this is an issue which is outside the scope of the House."

"Government, Parliament and politicians have nothing to do with language. It is a matter between teacher, parent and child. Politicians have no right to interfere in the medium of instructions. They should not make language any criterion for grants. Swatantra Party's position on language issue is that language is not part of politics. Government should not tilt the scale as between languages. As on economic matters, on language our Party's policy is consumer preference."

Control on Movement of Rice by Orissa Govt.

Asked to comment on the control policy of Orissa Government and the ban order for free movement of rice, Mr. Masani said, "This is an interesting subject. It is capable of many points of view in many situations. We stand for removal of Zonal barriers. We want free market. So far as Orissa is concerned, it is for the Government of Orissa to work out in a pragmatic way what is best and in accordance with the wishes of the people of Orissa. We do not like to suggest any thing to Orissa Government. Our view is that the policy should be such as would encourage and give an incentive to increased agricultural production.

- (1) Incentive to the cultivators to produce more.
- (2) Maintain social justice as between different classes. Justice to the cultivators in getting a good

price for the produce based on fair parity between agricultural and industrial prices which has been denied for generations now. On the other side meeting the needs of non-cultivating populations, both urban and rural, for their essential food needs which is also basic human wants. The problem of social justice, - the demand of the agriculturists for higher price, - should be met.

(3) Honest book-keeping. That means whatever subsidy is given from one Class to another, should be identified. It should ^{not} be suppressed and kept hidden from view. The fact that the cultivator is helping such and such elements should be justified."

Asked whether he was speaking of book-keeping, keeping in view the subsidy given by Madras & Kerala Governments over foodgrain prices, Mr. Masani said, "Whenever a section of the public is given a subsidy, it should be identifiable. You can protect an industry in two ways. You may give subsidy or create a tariff barrier. If you like that some poorer classes should be given food at cheaper rates than the market price, do not cover it up, do not hide the fact of subsidy. If there is any subsidy in food price, you say that we are subsidising it at the cost of so and so. Orissa Government is following a pragmatic policy in deciding issues on practical lines."

National Government at Centre

Asked to comment on his earlier view for formation of National Government at the Centre, Mr. Masani said, "National Government is a misnomer. It means inclusion of Communists also. So technically we are for a Govt. of Democratic Unity. Such a Government can be formed at

the Centre on an agreed programme of work. The present Government is incapable by its own constitution to solve the basic problems of the country to-day. Their whole policy is inflationary. Mr. Morarji Desai said that he would not tolerate deficit financing. But six months later, he said that there can be no escaping from deficit financing which was Rs. 350 crores. He is a good man, no doubt. He tried it, but failed."

"Our view is that a Government of Democratic Unity with 75 % of the country behind it, can ban the Communist Party. The present 38 % Congress Government is hesitating to ban the Communist Party. In many ways like this, the present Congress Government is not capable of solving the country's problems. We want a Government in India, a good Government to maintain order and stability."

"It is unlikely that this Government will last its 5-year term. My fear is that if it is not replaced by a Government of Democratic Unity, economic situation and law and order will further deteriorate. It will be difficult to maintain the present form of Government. Eventually India will go on the road of Indonesia, Pakistan and Greece. As a democrat, I would deplore such things happening. The process of Parliamentary Democracy in India is very much on trial in every practical sense and not in theoretical sense. If the politicians in India will not behave better, India will make a mistake. If Congress will not be thrown out democratically, democracy will be in danger.

Land Revenue.

Asked to comment on the abolition of Land

Revenue in Orissa, Mr. Masani said, " We welcome it very much. That is part of our programme. Orissa is short of funds and for this, expenditure should be cut down. The financial burden left on Orissa is beyond its capacity to bear. Quite apart from the grants-in-aid coming from Centre, non-productive Government expenditure should be cut down. It is a legacy of the past. As you know retrenchment is a painful process. But surplus people beyond the needs of the State have to be retrenched. The cure is not to go on taxing people. The cure is to cut down radically unproductive expenditure by keeping the budget at a lower level, not by raising taxation. To-day Orissa is living on capital. Cut down expenditure. Do not raise taxation. These are basic things."

Kutch

Asked to comment on the implementation of Kutch Award, Mr. Masani said, "Government of India having gone to the International Tribunal, now they have to honour the award. The honour of the country requires that the award should be implemented. Whether it was right for Government to go in for arbitration, that is another question. Government will have to account for it. They can be held responsible for the loss to the country. But the award must be accepted. "
