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SWATANTRA PARTY

PREPARATORY CONVENTION

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29/7

OPENING REMARKS

by

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स्वतंत्र पक्ष :

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सभासदाची सही

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संघटना
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अनुक्रम नंबर

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स्वतंत्र पक्ष सभासदत्वाचे काढे

THIS is a historic occasion and I feel honoured to play my humble part in it, which is, on behalf of the Reception Committee and the Organising Committee of the Party in Bombay, to welcome all of you here to this City of Bombay for the first Convention of the Swatantra Party. By your presence and the long distances you have taken the trouble to travel, you have given expression to the widespread relief and joy with which the coming to birth of the Party has been hailed by people throughout the country.

Bombay is the birth place of great movements. It was in this City that, in 1885, the Indian National Congress was established, and once again a new national movement, this time not for national liberation but for democratic liberties and personal freedom, takes shape here.

The coming into existence of the Swatantra Party marks, in a way, the end of the post-Independence era into which had overflowed the agitational politics of the struggle for Independence, in which so many of us here actively participated under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. It marks 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 utilise that freedom for the well-being and happiness of its people. The emergence of the Swatantra Party is a sign of the growing political maturity of our country.

Judging by the letters received by leading spokesmen of the Party and its Secretariat and the warm welcome extended to it in all quarters, the Swatantra Party has come into existence in response to a widely felt need. The Congress adventures in joint-farming, land ceiling and State monopoly in the foodgrains trade are calculated seriously to injure food production and the harmony of rural life. The evils of interference by political bosses in the administration of the country and the pressure they bring to bear on officials in regard to such things as licences have demoralised the officials and destroyed public confidence in the government of the day. Most people hold the view that this has established itself as a malignant growth in the body politic. We have, for every one of us to see, the parade of the public sector, with some notable exceptions, achieve the double distinction of being expensive and inefficient. The middle class is being pulverised by the inevitable consequences of excessively high taxation which affect not only those directly taxed but every consumer below and by an inflation that is steadily creeping over them. The investors are being taxed out of their investable surplus. The poor are made to pay more for the necessities of life through heavy excise duties. The expansion of our Plans and the shrinking of our resources make simultaneous progress. New constraints on the people's enterprise are systematically imposed and justified by reference to a doctrine. Intolerance does not simply occur; it is being elevated into a principle. In the result, the main features of our economic life today are fear, hesitancy and uncertainty as to what the government will do next. For the first time, a political party has come forward to say openly these things which were already in people's minds.

The groundswell against State Capitalism—miscalled socialism

—and against collective farming—miscalled joint cooperative farming—has found an effective channel of expression and there is every sign of its becoming a tidal wave. Many who felt suffocated by the pall of silence that seemed to have descended upon the country during the last few years are able to breathe freely once again. Among such people are to be found numerous members of the Congress Party, the bulk of whom think along Gandhian and liberal lines but who have been intimidated in recent years by a few confused Marxists at the head of the Party. The Swatantra Party will endeavour to break the spell of fear of established power, the thrall of ideology.

A Clear Alternative

At last there is a broadbased political party in India which provides a clear alternative to the policies of the ruling party, by putting the individual right in the centre of the picture and rejecting lock, stock and barrel the methodology, as opposed to the ideals, of Socialism, which is more accurately described as State Capitalism.

There has been, since the achievement of Independence, a double imbalance in our polity. By reason of there being no acceptable alternative at the elections, the ruling party has in Parliament and in the Legislatures of the States been so numerous and so powerful that there has been no opposition worth the name. In the House of the People, for instance, the Congress Party has around 365 members while no opposition group numbers more than 30. Such a state of affairs does not conduce to the health of a parliamentary democracy. It is bad for the government, because it creates arbitrariness on the one side and flabbiness on the other. It is bad for the opposition because it breeds irresponsibility caused by lack of hope in ever achieving power.

All the parties in existence hitherto have adhered to socialism

or communism of one brand or another. Communist and Socialist parties cannot by their very nature function as an effective opposition to the government of the day because, ideologically, they are merely satellites of the ruling party. The most they can do is to egg the government on to slide faster down the slope of collectivism. The result has been that, at the last elections, in most constituencies the voters did not have an opportunity to vote for any way of life other than the communist or socialist. To a man who believed in any other ideology, the choice between the Congress, the Praja Socialist Party, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party candidates was Hobson's choice. For all political purposes, a large part of the electorate was thus disfranchised. It will now be possible for the country and the electorate to have before it a clear alternative.

As I have said earlier, the discontent against "Socialism" and the pattern of planning have been gathering momentum during the past few years and more and more people are coming to realise that the country is being led in the wrong direction. The immediate provocation for the formation of the Swatantra Party was, however, the adoption of the Nagpur resolution by the Congress Party. The attempt to commit the country to collective farming, a State Monopoly in the foodgrains trade and to ceilings which would reduce the peasant permanently to economic helotage by denying him a monthly income of more than Rs. 300 for himself and his family, has produced a lively reaction, which shows that the peasantry of India is aware of its interests and is not prepared to be liquidated in a fit of absent-mindedness. A large number of people in the Congress rank and file are not only in favour of joint cooperative farming of the Nagpur pattern, but are deeply disquieted and concerned at the thought of such a development. The days have passed when the Prime Minister could brush aside opposition to joint farming as confined to a "few incorrigible persons". The latest, most welcome and most significant note of warning against a hasty, doctrinaire approach of this nature has come from none other than the esteemed President of the Republic,

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, than whom India possesses no more seasoned and far-sighted statesman.

A Challenge

Affecting as it does the possession of land by no less than 52 per cent of the Indian people, the Nagpur Resolution presents both a challenge and an opportunity. It is not an accident that the move for the establishment of the Swatantra Party should have taken place at a meeting convened in Madras on June 4 by the All India Agriculturists' Federation and that Professor Ranga should be nominated its leader. This is as it should be. India is, and will remain, for many generations to come, a peasant country and a broad-based democratic party cannot but have firm roots among the peasantry.

The fight of the peasant for his land cannot, however, be carried on in isolation. Nor can the businessman or industrialist hope to survive for long if he stands by and sees the peasant dispossessed of his farm. The principle for which the peasant proprietor stands and the free way of life of which he is the backbone he has in common with other sections of our people, such as the artisan and the worker, the doctor and the lawyer, the businessman and the industrialist, the writer and the teacher. Each of these classes can thrive only in a society where there is freedom of expression and freedom of choice for the producer, the investor and the consumer, where a man gets a fair return for hard work and for enterprise, and where the fruits of his labour may not one day be snatched away from him by a bureaucratic despotism of the type we see in the communist countries of Russia and China and the captive countries of Eastern Europe.

Broadbased Coalition

The Swatantra Party can succeed in giving effective opposition to the State Capitalist policies of the present government

My reply to the Prime Minister's charge of "vested interests" is that the only vested interest today in this country is that of the politicians in power, the bureaucrats in office and the businessmen who hang on to their coat-tails. I am inclined to think that, if a year from this Convention, a census is taken of the businessmen who support the Swatantra Party and the business-men who secretly if not openly support Mr. Nehru's Party, it would be found that those in the Swatantra Party happen to be clean and enlightened exponents of the principles of free enterprise unlike some of those who, no doubt, will continue to be found on Mr. Nehru's "socialist" bandwagon.

It has been suggested that the Swatantra Party is depending on large funds from Big Business. Not only our opponents but

Who are the "Vested Interests"?

and in providing the country with an alternative government only if it can mobilise a broadbased coalition of these various elements in our national life. The middle classes of the cities and towns must join hands with the peasants in the villages in defence of their rights and property. If they do not hang together, they will assuredly hang separately.

We, of the Swatantra Party, judge the patriotism of the Indian citizen not by the vocation he follows or the level of life in which he is born, but by the spirit that animates him, his love for his country and his desire to serve his fellowmen. We accept no caste system in our political life. In our scheme of things, there are no new untouchables. Such discriminatory practices we leave to those who now hold the reins of authority.

We certainly do not turn our backs on businessmen just because they are businessmen. They are as welcome in our ranks as any other section of the community. I am sure they are too intelligent to imagine that a Party as broadbased as this and led by such men as Shri C. Rajagopalachari and Professor Ranga can ever become the stooge of Big Business.

many of our supporters are under that wrong impression, and it therefore becomes necessary that I should say a few words on that subject. At a meeting in Bangalore on May 29, with Rajaji in the Chair and even before this Party was formed, I had said that it would be futile for us to wait for Big Business to make up its mind to give us support and that the job of establishing and building the kind of Party we were thinking of would, and must, fall on the shoulders of the common man, whether in the town or the countryside. Rajaji has already stated publicly that he wished it were true that large funds donated by businessmen were coming into the Party's coffers. The reason for this state of affairs is not far to seek. It lies in a controlled economy, where business tends to become the hand-maid of the State and a selfish scramble for licences and permits obscures the capacity to stand up for one's own way of life. At this point, may I be permitted, without hurting the susceptibilities of my business friends, to say that the lack of imagination and vision, the supine attitude to government and the pathetic desire to clutch at any straw that may come their way in the shape of soft words thrown at them occasionally by government spokesmen, displayed by certain sections of Business are not qualities that are calculated to help them fill the important role they have in the country's economic life.

I have sounded this candid note of caution so that the thousands of our supporters throughout the country, men in the shops and bazaars and fields, may know that the Swatantra Party relies on them and on their small contributions for its functioning. This is a broadbased freedom Party and it is right that while welcoming support from all, it should, by and large, rely on the small man's mite.

The Fight Against Communism

There are two criticisms made about the Party to which I would like to offer a brief answer. One doubt or fear

that has been voiced by some good people is that the Swatantra Party might, by dividing the democratic forces of the country, unconsciously help the Communists. There is a plausibility about this argument that makes it necessary to consider it. I hope its worst critics will not deny that the Swatantra Party is clearly and categorically committed to a frontal opposition to Communism in a way that no other party in India can claim. Its Statement of Principles is such that there can be no reconciliation between it and the ideology of communism, and its leading spokesmen have a long and distinguished record of struggle against communist totalitarianism. In the past few months we have seen Communist imperialism destroy the freedom of the unarmed and defenceless people of Tibet. As we meet here, we witness the people of Kerala battling bravely to throw off the communist yoke. More than ever is it necessary to guard the country against the communist menace, whether from within or without.

If today the Swatantra Party comes out in all-out opposition to the government of the day, it is precisely because the policies of the Congress government are preparing the ground for communism. In many ways that I do not have the time now to list, the policies of the Prime Minister and his supporters, whether on the international or the domestic plane, have made communism respectable in this country. The moral barrier that Gandhiji had erected against communism has been eroded and a fog of confusion has been allowed to spread in the country. The economic policies of the Nehru government, and in particular those of collective farming, justify one in using about it a phrase of which the late Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was fond, that it is in some ways playing the role of the "Sappers and Miners of the Communist Party".

Is it suggested that, in the face of the unfortunate inability of the majority of the Congressmen to assert themselves in the councils of their government and their Party, the rest of us should stand by helplessly and watch this erosion of democracy for fear of splitting the non-communist vote? The drift to com-

munism implicit in governmental policies, though slow, is sure. It would appear that many estimable members of the Congress Party, who would react violently if the threat of communist dictatorship were directly round the corner, do not seem to mind very much if the process is not quite that rapid.

The whole world, including the peoples behind the Iron Curtain, is moving away from the shibboleths of collectivism, and we are not prepared to allow our country to be committed to outmoded dogmas which the rest of the world is discarding. By rallying the country against communism, by educating public opinion about the moral gulf between communism and the free way of life, and by presenting an alternative to the Congress, the Swatantra Party will eliminate the danger of the Indian people drifting towards communism without being aware of it. By our uncompromising opposition to State Capitalism which leads to communism, we shall put heart into the broad ranks of the Congress Party who have been overawed into silence during the past few years. To adapt Rajaji's celebrated phrase of many years ago, communism will be the Swatantra Party's "Public Enemy Number One."

Perhaps our greatest service in fighting communism will lie in the fact that we shall stop the polarisation which has been taking place between the Congress on the one hand and the communists on the other. Till now, there was a danger that all discontent would be funnelled into Red channels. Such a polarisation took place in China in the '40s, with what tragic results for the Chinese people we have seen. If the Swatantra Party takes away one vote from the Congress, it will at the same time divert several potential votes away from the Communist Party. Let me give a personal example of this healthy process. A friend of mine in Bombay, many years my senior, 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 anti-democratic Nehru government". I pleaded with him that this would be a tragic mistake on his part, but to no purpose. Last month, the very first donation that

came into the Swatantra Party's office in Bombay was one of Rs 100/- from the same man who wrote that new hope had come to him and he could see a bright future for the country.

“Negative” and “Positive”

Another criticism, to which the Prime Minister has made himself a party, is that the Swatantra Party has not come forward with a “positive” programme and is only confining itself to criticism of the government. This is a peculiar statement, coming as it does from someone who has claimed all these years that he would welcome the emergence of a strong opposition. Now, the first duty of a party in opposition in a democracy is to oppose. Its primary function is to draw attention to the mistakes and mismanagement of the party in office. If the history of democratic parties throughout the world is examined, it would be found that normally they came into existence as a reaction or revision against policies that were considered to be contrary to the public interest. It is in the process of such opposition that a new Party evolves its own positive policies and features. Criticism of the government of the day is a necessary overture to the thrashing out of a new constructive programme. Such a programme will be found in general terms in the Statement of Principles as it emerges from this Convention.

It is interesting, however, to note how these words ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ are used. One would imagine from the Prime Minister’s comment that the destruction of private enterprise, the elimination of the farmer, the liquidation of the trader in the foodgrains business, and the taxing out of existence of the investor are all ‘positive’ policies. We may be forgiven for considering them totally negative and destructive. By contrast, the Swatantra Party’s broad policies are to help the peasant proprietor by giving him fertilisers, implements and credit, to encourage the entrepreneur by assuring him of the possibilities of a fair

return, to assure the worker that he would get a higher wage provided there is increase in productivity, and to promise each of them the freedom of choice appropriate to his function. This cannot be called a negative policy simply because it seeks to reverse the destructive processes on which the present government is engaged. It is time we cease to be deceived by such semantic jugglery. Whatever enlarges individual liberty and the dignity of the individual, whatever enhances the area of a man's freedom of choice, and also whatever limits the dangers of bureaucratic despotism, whatever limits the concentration of political and economic power in a limited number of hands is a positive policy.

I trust the participants in the Convention will not spend too much time in arguing the pros and cons of alternative drafts of items in the Party's Statement of Principles. As H. G. Wells once observed: "No passion in the world, no love or hate, is equal to the passion to alter someone else's draft"! Let us rather concentrate our intellectual fire on the task of planning the Party's future and building its organisation in such a way that it can, in the shortest possible span of time, win the people's confidence and obtain a mandate to implement its policies in the governance of this great country. That, and no less, is the task before the Party.

Eternal Verities

Under Rajaji's inspiring leadership, the Swatantra Party will seek to adhere to the eternal verities. We shall seek to guide the country back from Nehru to Gandhi. We draw inspiration from our own country's great cultural heritage and her spiritual traditions, but, just to show that humanity is one and men are the same the wide world over, I wonder if you will forgive me if I end with a quotation from a very great world figure who, every one will agree, had a positive philosophy, even

though he contributed towards the destruction of Negro slavery. That man was Abraham Lincoln; and his words, from which I shall quote to you, are so startlingly relevant that they almost appear to have been drafted as a message to this first Convention of the Swatantra Party in Bombay a century after his time:

"You cannot bring about prosperity by discouraging thrift. You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. You cannot help the poor by destroying the rich. You cannot establish sound security on borrowed money. You cannot keep out of trouble by spending more than you earn. You cannot build character and courage by taking away man's initiative and independence. You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could do for themselves."