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Comments and Suggestions by Mr. K. N. Taneja (Ahmedabad)

For Consideration by the General Council

The elections to the Fifth Lok Sabha are now over and the prophecies of instability and coalition government in the country after the elections have been belied. Congress(R), entirely because of the public image created by Mrs. Indira Gandhi for herself and her party, has come out not only successful but has also eclipsed and routed out almost all the political parties of India. The greatest credit to the Prime Minister should be given for making people think in terms of nationalism as against parochialism which had dominated Indian political scene of the past many years. Except for the DMK in Tamil Nadu and Telengana Praja Samiti in Andhra, all parties with parochial programmes have suffered crushing defeats and it is a welcome feature of Indian politics.

However, it is a pity that All India parties like Swatantra too could not withstand the strong winds in favour of the Congress(R). This is because instead of relying upon their programme and explaining this to the people, they relied only upon the illusory popularities of individuals, such as ex-rulers and rich industrialists, and upon negativistic slogans, such as 'Indira Hatao' or 'Save Democracy'. Ex-rulers and rich industrialists have created a bad public image for themselves and on the other hand the Prime Minister has created a lot of goodwill for herself by her Party's ten-point programme, measures for abolition of ex-rulers' privileges and bank nationalisation etc., although these have only emotional values and would not fulfil the objective of removal of poverty. Richer classes stand isolated, are opportunists, would shift loyalties for immediate personal gains and hence are unreliable. Dependence on them and other vested interests as Swatantra Party has actually shown would be a political liability and suicidal for the Party. I think it will be wise to let them do "Harakiri" and let Swatantra Party follow its own programme, be independent of them and stand on its own merits.

The Congress(R) placed before the country its objectives and a programme for their achievement. I think the objective of every party is to remove poverty and therefore, one cannot have any quarrel with any party on this issue. Other objectives, if any, are not very important to the people of India at the present moment. The acceptance or rejection of any party by the people would depend entirely upon their confidence in its programme for removing poverty and in this Congress(R) was direct and specific although I do not believe its programme would achieve the objective. On the other hand the support to the privileged classes (how-so-ever it may be justified on legal and moral grounds) and the Swatantra's association with such support, would cost any party its rout.

The long term growth, strength and popularity of a party will depend upon its ability to show progress in improving the living standards of the people and since the Congress(R)'s programme cannot achieve a miracle, I believe its present popularity is only short term. Its financial and economic policy is restrictive of all economic activity and not only of the economic activity of big business. It is wasteful as a lot of money is being poured into unproductive or inefficiently managed projects. It is too ideological in many matters such as in labour legislation which grant benefits disproportionate to performance or bank nationalisation which raises expectations beyond resources. The implementation of the programme builds up machinery which is too monopolistic and too bureaucratic to be of the liking of the public. Thus I do not think that the Congress(R) will be able to sustain its public image for a long if Swatantra Party can place an alternative programme before the country, a programme which is prepared to incur the wrath of its present friends.

Swatantra Party should forge for itself an image of a Party of the middle classes, peasant proprietors, small business, professional managers and self employed persons. It should unequivocally commit itself as being against vested interests of any kind, be those of politicians, bureaucrats, monopolistic big business or ex-rulers. Thus it can commit to minimise state control on economic activity, to remove protection to big business and to create and help small business to stand against big business, to democratise capital and professionalise management in the private sector, to divert bulk of the country's savings to the agricultural sector even at the cost of big industry except that which is essential for the security of the country and to remove glaring exhibition of power of money and authority.

Bulk of the middle classes belong to fixed income group of people. The policies of the undivided Congress and those of the Congress(R) have resulted in abnormal fall in the value of the Rupee. The prices of commodities have gone up and are continuing to rise all the time. Swatantra Party could effectively mobilise public opinion on this issue. But public opinion will not turn in its favour and be sustained by a mere criticism of the Government. Other methods such as criticism, even picketing and boycott, of the business community at fault and organising of associations for supply of commodities at reasonable profits would change its image of being a party of the vested interests to a party of the middle classes. Likewise programmes which help peasant proprietors in increasing productivity and obtaining economic and social benefits from the Government etc., would obtain the confidence of this important category of people for the Party. The business community must be made to realise their social responsibility in their own interest and the Party should help educate it. Particularly the small businesses can be weaned away to support the Party's programme if they can be organised to get fair treatment from the big business, market protection, easy and cheap credit etc.

I do not think the above programme is against the basic objectives and principles of the Swatantra Party. It is positive in approach, conservative compared to the leftistic outlook present in the country and is designed for the benefit of the people in general without a bias to any particular community. This programme, sustained over a period of time, should be able to turn the tide in the country in its favour. After-all Swatantra is an All India Party, without its image tarnished by communalism and it is the only Party with a definite all India programme not equivocal with the programme of Congress(R) and the rest of the political parties of India. It will however, require unequivocal demonstration, exposition and action to build up public image.

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