

A Record of Swatantra's opposition
to toppling + Indira Katar
Personal

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"Toppling-An Indecent Act"

1970

The National Executive of the Party took an important decision on April 11, when dealing with correspondence that had been proceeding with Mr. George Fernandes, the General Secretary of the S.S.P.

The S.S.P. General Secretary had, in a letter some months ago, forwarded to us a 17-point programme adopted by their party and invited the Swatantra Party to a discussion of this programme along with other parties. The National Executive, at its meeting on February 16 in Bombay had considered this letter and, after rejecting multilateral talks as not being likely to be helpful, suggested bilateral talks and welcomed the SSP General Secretary to pursue the matter further with our President in Delhi. At the same time, the Executive pointed out that several points in the S.S.P. 17-point programme were not acceptable to the Swatantra Party.

In his reply Mr. George Fernandes, S.S.P. General Secretary, stated in effect that dislodging the Indira Gandhi Government should precede agreement on a common programme. The National Executive disagreed with this view and reiterated its earlier decision that efforts to dislodge the present government could only be meaningful and successful when a viable alternative was available. This meant the emergence of an opposition front with an agreed programme. At the same time the Executive was clear that the dialogue with the SSP should continue on a bilateral basis.

Explaining this decision to the Press at a briefing in New Delhi the same evening (April 11), Mr. Masani drew a distinction between "toppling" a Government and replacing it by the normal democratic process. "Toppling" he said, "is an indecent act, a disgusting phenomenon of Indian politics arising out of a lack of political development". According to the Swatantra President, toppling had three specific characteristics which distinguish it from the normal process of replacing a Government democratically. The first is that there is no issue of policy at stake. The second that there is no alternative Government ready to take over with an agreed programme. The third is that individual defections of members of the ruling Party are sought to be fostered by the use of financial or other dishonourable inducements.

Mr. Masani explained that it was in this context that the National Executive had declined to go along with the SSP General Secretary's proposal.

Earlier, when he was in Orissa on April 7, the Party President had expressed satisfaction at the failure of the effort that had been made to topple the Swatantra-led Government in Orissa. In answer to a question, he said that he was not in favour of "toppling" Mrs. Gandhi's Government at the Centre, but that the Party gave high priority to her removal and replacing it by a better Government. What the President had in mind was the Orissa pattern of pre-electoral understanding on the basis of a common minimum programme which had already proved its merit by producing the only coalition government since the last General Elections in 1967 which continues to be in office.