

March 30, 1972

Dr. Cooper

I have read your letter to Mr. H. M. Patel carefully, and as desired give below my reactions.

As you rightly suspected, I disagree with the course you have suggested. If I may say so, you have reached the conclusions you have because they are based on defective premises, viz., the reasons for the failure of the Swatantra Party have to be sought elsewhere and not in its policies.

Your premises are :

- a. The Party's programme has not attracted the people of India
- b. That we made strenuous efforts to spread the programme
- c. That the Party's policies were rejected by the electorate in 1971 and again in 1972.

Let's take the above ad seriatim

- a. The Party's programme has not attracted the people of India. This is not true, at least not in rural India. We should recognise our rural character in terms of our policies. They essentially appeal to the farmers big and small. The 1967 success in Gujarat can be explained (apart from factors like the Kshatriya/Patel combination, Bhaikaka's leadership, etc.) by the fact that rural Gujarat saw the point in our policies. In other words, wherever we were able to reach and explain our policies, they were understood and appreciated.
- b. That we made strenuous efforts to spread the programme:
I think nothing could be farther from the truth. We (which includes you, Minoo, Dandekar and a few others) did make strenuous efforts. But that was all. Bhaikaka did and he succeeded. But throughout, our efforts were stymied at the State level. At that level party policies were always secondary to what we may describe as "practical policies" - a euphemism for opportunistic or unprincipled politics. To this must be added our behaviour totally lacking as it was in discipline, morality and principled behaviour.
- c. That the Party's policies were rejected by the Electorate in 1971 and again in 1972.

I disagree.

Last April, the General Council analysing the reasons for the Party's debacle in the Lok Sabha elections came to the conclusion that it was our membership of the so-called Grand Alliance that was largely responsible for the disaster. What made it worse was our identification with the communal politics of the Jan Sangh on the one hand and the discredited policies of the Congress(0) on the other.

The 1972 elections resulted in the Indira sweep thanks to the successful war with Pakistan and the solution of the Bangla Desh problem on the other. In the euphoric climate no other result was possible. At the same time, the majority if computed in percentages of votes does not indicate any startling shift.

Policies of parties or their organisational competence mattered very little.

Now, coming to the alternatives you have posed :

- (1) continuance of the Swatantra Party, as it is

If by the phrase "as it is", the present policies and name of the Party

are meant, I opt for this alternative. But if the phrase is used to signify the manner in which the Party's affairs have been conducted particularly at the State, District and primary levels, I am all for radical change. Every political party has to contend with the current aspirations of the people. To the extent the Swatantra Party has to meet head on the "revolution of rising expectations" which has been given a greater momentum by the slogans of Mrs. Gandhi, I urge fresh thinking of imperatives and strategy. Therefore I would whole-heartedly agree that radical rethinking (within the framework of party policies) is called for viz.,

- (a) the policy formulations have to be given a certain slant which will attract mass attention.
- (b) the 1972 elections brought home with shock the fact that dependence on the Centre for financial help is no longer possible. Thus, our units will be compelled to 'collect or perish'. This will be a welcome departure from the debilitating crutches of Central aid.
- (c) the need to be self-sufficient will generate in turn an effort to cast the net wide rather than dependent on a few rich at the top who have proved to be broken reeds, and easily vulnerable to pressures from the Government.
- (d) leadership at the Centre and States who have demonstrated neither leadership qualities nor the ability to inspire confidence with the rank and file will have to go. Younger more dynamic leaders will have to take their place.
- (e) With the forums of the legislatures denied to us, we have to use every public platform (other than those provided by the ruling, communal and communist parties) to spread the party's gospel. Also not to be ignored are the streets for peaceful agitation or as Rajaji described as "non-violent insurrection". A considerable dose of nationalism and emotionalism will have to be injected into everything that the Party does. We shall have to review our policy regarding participation in labour and student union in the light of the objective situation.
- (f) The base of the Party's organisational pyramid will from now on have to be the polling station area. Though it is very unlikely that future elections will be fair, we shall nevertheless have to do whatever we can to expose corrupt poll practices. Our polling station cadres should be our vigilance squads.

Idiotic though it may sound, I have a feeling that this is precisely the kind of situation for which the Swatantra Party was formed. We remain the only party in the democratic opposition with a distinct form and content. The future for the Party is indeed bright, Cassandras notwithstanding. It is necessary to communicate this emotional attachment to our Cadres, and by God, we shall do it.

- (ii) to merge the Party with other like-minded party or parties :
Mr. Masani has answered this in a beautiful sentence - "Zero plus Zero plus Zero equals Zero". We are Zero today. But

only in terms of organisation and cadres, not in ideas. Therefore this does not contradict anything I have said in regard to (i).

- (iii) Forgive me, but the third alternative is the worst of all. To me, the Swatantra Party represents an idea - the idea of individual liberty, of individual initiative, of individual enterprise and reward. A path to a rich (not in the monetary sense) life. The Ruling Congress made up as it is of a 'motley crowd' (an expression once used by Jawaharlal Nehru to describe Swatantra Party) from the very rich, the very unscrupulous and political adventurers on the one side to the dregs of society like the bootleggers, gamblers and other anti-social elements on the other is no longer a vehicle for political action. In fact, Mrs. Gandhi wanted it to be so that there could be no challenge to her power. Joining it to clean it up from the inside or to influence its policies is like trying to get inside a sewer to promote hygiene. Judging by some recent entrants to Mrs. Gandhi's Party, I am convinced that careerists, the incompetents who find sycophancy and bandwaggoning the only way to succeed and of course the communists and fellow travellers can and are joining the Congress. I can understand a Nana Chudasama or a Marli Deora joining the Congress (R). It will indeed be a sad day when a Cooper or a Patodia decides to go into a snakepit which is what the Congress is.

I have not the slightest doubt that the surest way to ensure that this country descends into dictatorship is for otherwise intelligent people to throw in the towel. For this is how I frankly view the third alternative in whatever way it is sought to be rationalised.

(S. V. Raju)

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