

Shri Harihar Patel.

3183

312-Kharvel Nagar,
Bhubaneswar-1.
Dated 25th March, 1973.

8th personal file

D-10

My dear Sri Raju,

I am in receipt of your letter dated March 22nd, 1973. I am not surprised that you have viewed my inclusion in the Working Committee of the Pragati Party as intriguing. In fact it was never my intention to be associated with the Pragati Party, but Sri Manubhai Amarsingh who had come to Bhubaneswar proposed my name and advised me to agree. The reasons why he proposed are that in a way the Swatantra Party, Orissa Unit has been committed to some sort of united action with the Pragati Party and follow up steps will naturally be taken. In the follow up steps, preparation of many documents such as election manifesto, election pamphlets, etc. will have to be generally made and it is necessary to see that at no time there is any document prepared which will conflict with our party ideology and programme. To secure this he advised that I should agree in the interest of the party and do my best. I could not say 'no' to this in the interest of the party. In fact my task in the Executive Committee, being mostly to safeguard the interest of our party in any joint action or joint publicity may be quite unpleasant at times in the Pragati party Working Committee. Yet, I had to agree on the above consideration. I now proceed to give below an analysis of the situation.

Discontent amongst many of our party members and also members of the Orissa Legislative Assembly against party leadership particularly against Sri Singh Deo was growing since a long time. The reasons were out of many, (a) lack of consultation, (b) personal decisions being imposed on the party, (c) negligence in management of the party and (d) too much concentration of party functions and powers in him. It was in fact a pity that Sri Singh Deo was blind to this or I would rather say disregardful of the sentiments of others. The selection of candidates for Rajya Sabha bye-election both the times were unreasonable and resented. Many of the members voted in support rather unwillingly. The growing discontent could have been checked and removed by cultivating a team spirit and by resorting to team work, but instead he took steps all along to build up rather a coterie group and set it against any member resenting.

While the situation was so in our own party the Ruling Congress who constituted the single largest party in the Orissa Legislature was sparing no efforts to tempt and win over members from other parties to their own fold. In such a situation some weak-minded members of Swatantra Party under the leadership of Sri Gangadhar Pradhan who was a Minister in the Cabinet defected to the Congress camp. Soon after the Utkal Congress M.L.As. joined the Ruling Congress under the leadership of Sri Nilamoni Routray, However, some Utkal Congress Ministers and

Sri Biju Patnaik were not accepted into the fold of Congress (R) and Sri Routray went on trying to make their entry also acceptable. There was, however, no sign of any success in this and Sri Biju Patnaik decided to take some drastic actions during the Cuttack bye-election. The Utkal Congress as a party had not decided for merger with the Congress (R) and a convention of the Utkal Congress was held during that period to decide and announce that the Utkal Congress merging with Congress(R) is not approved and the Organisation is revived. Sri Routray and participating members in Congress(R) however kept aloof from this decision for some time.

Smt. Satpathy won the Cuttack bye-election. This was not liked even by many Congress members and some of her colleagues in ^{the} Cabinet too. The defecting members from other parties were getting impatient that Smt. Satpathy was not giving consideration to their claims for being included in the Council of Ministers. After Cuttack bye-election there was pressure from such M.L.As. in the Congress Ruling party. The Assembly session was impending and Smt. Satpathy had to expand the Cabinet and include many aspiring members before the session. This expansion perhaps satisfied a few, but the number of discontented members perhaps increased more.

Along side there was a secret move by Sri Biju Patnaik and our two Maharajas to do something to form a

new Organisation regional in nature long since. This was kept a close secret and members in Political parties were left only guessing. At times feelers ^{were} ~~are~~ being thrown by Sri Patnaik and the Maharajs to this effect - the response to which from amongst the members of our party was generally not encouraging. But it seems these leaders did not give up their intention. Dr. Mahtab it seems associated with them later.

In the meantime it became clear that many of the defecting members to the Ruling Congress were ~~1~~ keen to come out from the Congress fold, but especially the Swatantra defecting members could not think of coming back to the Swatantra party fold mostly due to their resentment against party leadership. Sri Singh Deo could also sense this. His study of the situation was perhaps that pulling down the Congress Government and formation of an alternate Government was imperative, to suit and serve also many other purposes which are rather private and personal. He thought that the dynamism of Sri Biju Patnaik was most essential for it and he did not hesitate even to forego his Opposition Leadership in the Assembly in his favour. To be on the safe side he wanted to get the party Executive ~~Committed~~ by having its approval of whatever he was doing. His method of getting approval in the Executive Committee is to invite M.L.As. and many others also to the Committee meeting, have some

sort of discussion, draw consensus and also get authorised for taking any other steps that may be necessary. This method has been going on for the last some years which is gradually polluting the democratic character of the party. He thought the leadership of the opposition in the Legislature to be his personal attribute and personal concern too and conceded it to Sri Biju Patnaik. He likes it to be interpreted as an act of magnanimity, but in fact it has been a bait to catch him for his purpose. The party is nowhere in his calculations about the future. The party - if at all - has only to conform to his own purposes. This seems to me to be his outlook and attitude.

In the instant case when the question was broached in the Executive Committee meeting of our party I had pointed out that there was nothing wrong for the opposition parties to be united on some basis in the Legislature in offering opposition to the ruling party. It is an internal matter for the Legislature party and no approval of the Executive Committee was necessary. It is enough if the Executive Committee is only informed of the move. The Executive Committee should be requested to consider and guide only when the basis was enunciated. I explained that by following this method the Executive can be kept aloof and in a position to pull back the Legislature party in case any error is found later on to have been committed by them. But if they associate the Executive Committee

in some manner in formulating the basis also the Executive Committee is put in an embarrassing position and prevented from discharging any corrective function properly. But my observations were not properly understood also. Some people had been deliberately invited to deliver high sounding speeches and drown all voices of rationality. I informed the Executive Committee about my intention to append a note of caution in the matter to the proceedings of the day. But the proceedings were drawn up rather in a half-hazard manner in haste before I could send my note of caution and I refrained from sending any.

Later another Executive Committee was convened and our President Sri Pilla Mody attended the same. But he could realise that things had gone somewhat far and his strong denouncement could rather give rise to some problems rather than solving any. He advised the members to act wisely to keep the entity of the party in tact and make the Pragati Party only a front in the Legislature. What he said can be summed up as 'this far and no farther'.

I apprised him about my observations in the previous meeting and he said that my objection was about the modelity which I said was sometime very important. But there was no way to undo many things that had already been done without creating other problems and so he left us with that advice of no farther.

In the meantime the anticipated coming out of the M.L.As. from Congress(R) materialised at a time when Land Reforms Bill was going through the third reading. Smt. Satpathy's Government was reduced to minority and she submitted her resignation to the Governor to prevent any alternative Government being formed. She also recommended for dissolution of the Legislature. In spite of ~~Biju~~ Biju Patnaik's claim of support of 75 members in a house of 140 the Governor did not call upon him to form the Government and dissolved the Assembly. I need not write much on this because the facts as well as various comments on this have appeared in the Press which you must have come across.

In these circumstances the Maharaja perhaps had further discussions with Mr. Patnaik and Dr. Mahtab. Then both of them i.e. Sri Biju Patnaik and Sri Singh Deo went to Delhi to convince whom and about what is rather better known to you. You know about the things that took place in Delhi and I need not write here.

After returning from Delhi again confusion was created by various statements issued to the Press by these leaders. Pragati Legislature Party had transformed to Pragati Party and it was stated in the Press that the Pragati Party had decided to fight the ensuing election as one Party under one flag and one symbol. Sri Gashiram Majhi then wrote a letter to the Orissa President

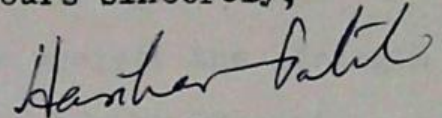
Sri P.K. Deo to convene the Executive and I also sent a telegram to the same effect. The Executive Committee was thus convened on the 16th last which Sri Manubhai Amarsley also attended. He could find that things had gone even farther in the meantime and the Maharaja could perhaps not be pulled back from going farther. In the circumstances he thought it better rather to advise for caution than to ask them to retrace and he advised what he thought best. Personally I also feel that this is the only possible attitude that can be adopted in the circumstances taking into account all the background and other factors. However, there should be no further conceding and jeopardising Swatantra Party's interest. I will try to act in conformity with this, but it is necessary that the Central leadership shows some stiffness atleast now and to be rigid about points and promises secured from the erring Maharajas. ~~I have~~

I have given above an analysis of the situation as it appears to me and I will be happy to discuss with Mr. Masani and yourself at Madras further when we meet. I am in fact anxious to get light myself from the wisdom and experience of man like Mr. Masani, but in the present circumstances it is rather expensive and beyond my

capacity to get in touch with him by coming over to Bombay. Kindly convey my deep regards to Mr. Masani and also that I hope to meet him at Madras.

With all my good wishes for you.

Yours sincerely,



(H. Patel)

Shri S. V. Raju,
143 Mahatma Gandhi Road,
Bombay-1.

P.S.:- The query whether it is in the party's interest to have agreed to become a constituent of the Pragati Party I feel has to be replied ^{to} in some more detail. The united Legislature party had become necessary in the Legislature, as explained above, to facilitate defecting members to the Congress(R) to come out and join it if they hesitate to go back to their former party. The main purpose of this was to pull down the ~~Congress~~ Government and make out a case for an alternative Government. The name Pragati which means progressive was contemplated perhaps to confound profession of the Congress (R) to be the only party wedded to progress. As far as the purposes ^{mentioned above} of formation of the Pragati Legislature party was thus a necessity.

After the Legislature was dissolved if that Legislature front is only transformed to a joint forum for many parties, I think there could not be any objection to that. It will facilitate different parties to come together and project their combined strength to the electorate. It should be a forum to project the strength of many i.e. more than one party. So if the Pragati Party can uphold only such a character it may be helpful and beneficial for our party to be a constituent of the forum. But if the Pragati party is conceived and built up as one party and absorbing others, certainly it will be detrimental to the interest of our party. That will also be an absurd proposition; because the Swatantra Party is an All India party and is established one and there can be no case for its joining a party which is formed till now simply by hanging a sign board. To submit to such a proposition will also tell upon the prestige of the Swatantra Party and has to be viewed as humiliating. So our interest lies in confining the Pragati party to a joint ^{forum} ~~forum~~ only.

Sri Biju Patnaik, outside the forum, may go ahead with his efforts for an All India Opposition which he has initiated. I think we may even encourage him in that. If he succeeds and the birth or growth of an All India united opposition party is in sight the National Executive of the Swatantra Party may consider at that point the question of joining the new party or being a constituent

of that or any other question that may arise. It is certainly pre-posterous on the part of a State Unit of an All India party to decide such questions and compel action in certain direction only. Normally persons behaving this way require to be chastised. But in Orissa I think any such action has been rendered impossible without being fraught with other grave consequences. Atleast this seems to be the idea prevailing with the Central Leadership. I have no comment to make but I would only like to say that further indulgence and conceding to the Maharajas may harm the party much more. The party in Orissa, should no longer be equated with the Maharajas.

.....

Ambedkar