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SWATANTRA PARTY

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS' NOTE ON ORGANISATION

In his report to the forthcoming meeting of the General Council the President, Mr. Masci has observed that among the factors responsible for the Party's disastrous performance at the polls and its unwillingness to go it alone is the fact that the excellent programme of work for the period October 1969 to March 1972 outlined in the Mid-Term Report was largely ignored by the Party's units and members.

The pertinent question arises as to why the Mid-Term Report which was unanimously adopted by the General Council itself was ignored. Was it because the Party's units and members had more "important" matters to occupy their attention? Or was it because the significance of the report was lost on the members? It should be remembered that we were the only party who two and a half years after the 1967 General Elections undertook a survey of what we had done and what we proposed to do for the remaining two and a half years.

If one who has intimate knowledge of the Party's functioning for the last eleven years could hazard a guess, the answer to the above would be somewhat as follows:

- (1) the Mid-Term Report was never taken seriously because it would have meant the abandonment of the short-term pursuit of power and the need to concentrate on hard work to fulfil even part of the objectives contained in the second part of the Mid-term Report.
- (2) an adequate appreciation of the significance of the Mid-Term Report presupposes an ideologically committed rank and file. Evidently, the number of members in our Party who have such an ideological commitment is marginal. This should not have been the case if only we had not treated casually the very significant decision taken by the Third National Convention at Bangalore in 1964.

This decision was the conversion of the Party from a mass to a cadre party, with the emphasis shifting from numbers to quality. The National Headquarters in the light of this decision laid down a detailed procedure for the screening of applications for enrolment so that adequate care would be taken in enrolling into the party only those who believed in its principles and were willing to work for it. This would in turn have meant a smaller but highly effective rank and file. This procedure though formally followed was ignored in spirit. As evidence, one has only to see the manner in which enrolment took place in the various states. For example, for the 1967 party elections, almost half the total enrolment was registered in the second or third week preceding the last date for enrolment of workers for purposes of party elections. The conclusion one is inevitably led to is that enrolment was done more with an eye on party elections than with a desire to bring into the Party's fold, loyal, sincere and hard-working people.

This being the case, it is hardly surprising that by and large most members did not take Part II of the Mid-Term Report (What the Party proposes to do between the publication of the Mid-Term Report and the General Elections of 1972), seriously.

- (3) Large scale defections particularly in certain State Assemblies again point to the same absence of ideological commitment on the part of those elected on our platform. Very often the choice of candidates was taken at the very last minute and last minute recommendation made it impossible for the Central Parliamentary Board to be anything more than a mere rubber stamp. Many of these candidates, it was found out later, were either not members of the Party at all or had joined it a day or two preceding the date of nomination.
- (4) The politics of toppling with the prospects of instant power successfully diverted the attention not only of the Party's legislators but also its leadership outside. Central directives concerned more with maintaining the image of a principled party even if this meant reduction in numbers was not only frowned upon but ignored or even repudiated.

In the context of the above picture, what can the General Council do to give the Party a sense of direction and purpose ?

First of all, what is urgently needed is a restatement of the continuing validity of Swatantra policies and principles. This is necessary because there are in our Party many who mistakenly ascribe our debacle to the rejection by the electorate of our policies and principles, whereas the real reasons for our poor performance could be traced to our organisational weaknesses and the reluctance on the part of our members to do hard and sustained work. Such a restatement is also necessary because it is essential to understand that the only raison d'être for the Swatantra Party's continuing to exist and function is its projection of a distinct path for the economic and social development of the country unlike other parties including the Jan Sangh which are really varying shades of the socialist hue.

If there is one lesson to be learnt from the results of the last General Elections it is this; that the electorate by and large has rejected politicians and political parties who were engaged in opportunistic policies. In this climate of public cynicism the people in the long run would welcome any party or group that not only promises but acts with dignity and conforms to the norms of principled politics.

The Swatantra Party's role for the next few years in the context of the re-emergence of the politics of charisma with all the inherent dangers such a development portends for the future of democratic institutions, is thus cut out very clearly viz., (a) to project the Party as one with principles and integrity and which seeks power not through short cuts and opportunism but in a manner that will uphold democratic institutions; (b) embark on a massive programme of mass education of its principles and policies. Mrs. Gandhi has promised people "a pie in the sky". With the kind of policies she is expected to adopt, she is bound to fail. And when she fails, there will be a natural rebound. The Swatantra Party has to begin its programme of educating the people right from now so that when Mrs. Gandhi fails, the Party's campaign would have spread sufficiently wide for people to realise that what went wrong was not too little of socialism but too much of it; (c) such a programme could only be carried out by a dedicated

rank and file and such a dedicated rank and file with its emphasis on quality rather than quantity would mean in the short run a shrinking in our numbers but in the long run would mean a highly effective group which would be able to disseminate the Party's philosophy and ideas with conviction. This again would presuppose that even now it is not too late to implement in spirit the decision of the Third National Convention converting the Party into that of a cadre Party; (d) Giving high priority to the development of feeder organisations among the farmers, women and youth; (e) the setting up of candidates in future elections and by-elections not on the basis of how much resources a candidate can put in (although this would be one of the factors) but with the main emphasis on the quality of the candidate and his record of work as a member of the Party.

If the above call is given by the General Council it would perhaps mean in the immediate future a considerable reduction in numbers. Many who are in the Party for reasons other than a commitment to its philosophy would perhaps "defect" and join that party which would fulfil their immediate aims as some have already done. But in the long run, which perhaps may not be as long as it may seem now, the Party would have developed itself into a highly organised clean, disciplined and ideologically motivated organisation.

In a different context Lenin observed that an organised minority can destroy a disorganised majority. There is no reason why this dictum cannot be usefully followed to build our Party on the one hand and to provide the people with an alternative on the other so that when disillusioned with the present ruling party the people turn to Swatantra they can say "here is a party which has by its actions proved and shown that it cares for us and can be trusted with our destiny. "

Bombay,
April 12, 1971