

3584

A PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE SWATANTRA PARTY

Madhu Mehta

The tragic performance of the Swatantra Party in the mid-term elections has shattered the hopes of practically all the workers and well-wishers of the Party about its future. There are many who even question the need for continuing the existence of the party. The winding-up of the party will not only mean severe disappointment and frustration for all those who believe in the Swatantra philosophy, but also deal a hard blow to Indian democracy, as it will amount to the winding up of the only genuine Opposition with a purposeful alternative set of principles and policies.

However, the decision to continue the existence of the party can only be vindicated in the coming months and years, if we can educate and convince the people that not only our principles and policies are sound and can deliver the goods, but, we have the right kind of instrument -- dependable, dedicated, intelligent and dynamic people working in our organisation -- who can faithfully implement the party's policies.

This requires an honest reappraisal of our policies and conduct, which alone can provide the clue for future programme of action to revitalise and popularise the party.

The first step we must take is to find out what was responsible for Mrs. Indira Gandhi's victory. According to me the following factors are responsible for her victory.

1. To the weaker sections of society she became their sole champion who was fighting on their behalf against "The Establishment".
2. Her shrewd manoeuvres to get Mr. Desai out of the Cabinet, her dramatic move to nationalise all banks (major ones) and later the ruthless manner in which she reshuffled her Cabinet succeeded in creating an image in the minds of the people that here was a leader, strong and tough, who meant business and who got what she wanted.
3. Her handling the problem of the minorities, harijans, and backward classes against the background of certain indiscriminate pronouncement of certain opposition parties made her look like a Messiah to the minorities.
4. She took full advantage of the squabbles amongst the Opposition parties on the issues of the programme of the Grand Alliance, their squabbles over seats and their only slogan of "Indira Hatao".

In other words, people preferred to gamble on her, that she was the only strong leader committed to a programme of action, however good or bad, and who alone could provide a stable government.

To sum it up, it was the victory of youth versus the old; strength and stability versus weakness and disunity; and commitment to a programme.

This is the writing on the wall, and if we want to succeed in building up an effective opposition, we must take note of it and proceed accordingly.

We must change, We must change immediately. We must have a new leadership. We must put accent on youth. We must rearrange our proprieties, and we must be prepared to shift our emphasis. We must provide the evidence that we mean business. This can only be achieved through a programme of mass action and not by mouthing of principles and policies.

Let us have a young president for the party and let him select his team of office-bearers, and give a new look to the party. It is easier to build-up new faces and new ideas of action.

What should be the plan of action ?

1. Indira Gandhi talks about the removal of poverty, and she talks about her ten point programme.

Let us prepare immediately our plans to remove poverty. It should be simple, specific and should be easily understood. Let us go to the people and explain our programme to them.

2. She talks about poverty, but in her scheme of things there is more emphasis on the distribution of wealth rather than the creation of wealth. This is for political reasons.

Let us go to the farms, factories and offices and let us talk about the importance of production. Let us generate respect for all those who produce things.

Let us popularise slogans like "More production, more prosperity", "Banish poverty, increase production", "Produce or Perish" and "Creation first, distribution second".

3. Mrs. Gandhi talks about rising prices. What causes a rise in prices ? Explain to people in simple language what brings down the prices.

4. We can immediately frame a Charter of Demand to bring down prices and present it to her if possible before the budget.

5. Mrs. Gandhi talks about Privy Purses and Princely Privileges. She may succeed in abolishing them, but the matter can still go to the Supreme Court, and the verdict may go against her.

Once again she will appear helpless, and start a tirade against the Supreme Court.

What can we do ? Can we not be more imaginative than by voting against the Bill in Parliament if and when it comes. That is not enough. Let us change our emphasis and let us take the first step by publicly appealing to the princes to give up at least their privileges, and then pressurise the government and the princes to arrive at a negotiative settlement.

If we start this programme, we will certainly, to some extent, change our image, which is very necessary.

Similar programmes of mass action can be gradually launched. Issues like the right to own property, civil liberties, freedom of the press, abuse of government machinery, and many other issues can be taken up time and again.

These programmes will help to change the image of the party, take the party nearer to the people, will draw fresh young faces to the party and help us to find a new cadre of party workers.

What should be the role of the Swatantra Party in Parliament ?

1. Co-operate with the government where we feel that the government has taken the right stand.
2. Give and present positive ideas and constructive schemes respectively to the various schemes.
3. Bring forward new bills and interesting amendments in Parliament and in legislatures.
4. Criticise boldly the Government if it does anything which goes against the grain of democratic values, conventions and principles.

The Swatantra Party should also consider seriously about starting peaceful and massive resistance after exhausting all constitutional means if the issues involved are seriously affecting the lives of our people.