



3705
swatantra party

national headquarters

sassoon building, 143, mahatma gandhi road, bombay 1.

phone: 251424
grams: surajyam

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My dear Russi,

I have received a copy of your letter addressed to Mr. H. M. Patel our President.

I do not think that it is correct to say the programme of our Party has not attracted the people of India inspite of our strenuous efforts extended over a period of more than ten years. I am sure you are aware of the fact that from the 1st of August 1959 till the elections in 1967, the Swatantra Party's stride in the legislatures and in Parliament was meteoric. We succeeded in displacing the Communists in Parliament and became the single largest opposition in Parliament to the then undivided Congress. We gradually became a major Opposition Party in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bihar, Andhra and Orissa in the State Legislature. After 1967 elections due to a number of factors such as lack of proper follow-up action, failure to develop grass root organisation, lack of proper nursing of the constituencies, indiscipline, quarrels among the Party members at the state level, the Party suffered the final disaster in the last Mid-Term elections for Lok Sabha and also the recent elections to the various State legislatures. Most of the reasons for our failure have been very aptly described in the Mid-Term Report which was published by us in 1969 and which was adopted by the General Council of the Swatantra Party on November 15 of the same year. I am enclosing a copy of the Mid-Term Report herewith.

You have put three alternatives before the Party. I am sorry I do not agree with any one of these alternatives you have suggested. It is obvious that we cannot continue the Swatantra Party as it has been functioning.

You talk about merging the Party with other like-minded Party or Parties. After the last Mid-Term elections to the Lok Sabha I wonder whether there is any Party left in the country which can be described as a like-minded party. Even the Jan Sangh after its Ghaziabad Session has adopted a socialist posture and for which it had to pay very dearly in the last elections. Congress (O) with its 22-point programme and the Socialist Party with its extreme leftist radicalism, surely cannot be described as like-minded parties. Whatever may be the state of our organisation we are the only party left in the country with a set of principles and policies which alone represent the true and genuine voice of dissent in the country.

I think that to dissolve the Swatantra Party and to leave members to decide for themselves what they are going to do in the future will be the greatest disservice not only to our Party and what it stands for but it would be a distinct dis-service to the cause of democracy for which we are all in politics. Of course some of us would prefer to remain out of any political party and try and educate public opinion and render public service, but surely the continuance of the Party does not come in the way of rendering public service and

educating the public.

I now come to your last point viz., that some of us may decide to join the Ruling Party itself in an effort to reform it from inside. Here, I would like you to seriously consider the following arguments :

1. Congress members have no ideology. They are there to serve their own interest and to share power and patronage. The entire organisation has become a purchased organisation. Every member has been paid his or her price in return for which explicit obedience is expected from them. The result is to be seen in a completely total lack of interest displayed by the Congress members in Parliamentary proceedings ever since the Parliament opened on March 13. Even the Cabinet has no hand in framing the policies of Mrs. Gandhi's government. Mrs. Gandhi has become a Supremo who conducts the affairs of her empire with the help and advice of the members of her kitchen cabinet. The most interesting aspect of the whole situation is that the Congress has even succeeded in corrupting and demoralizing the CPI members after their last alliance with the Congress. Most glaring example is that of Mr. Rajni Patel in Bombay.

Another interesting example which I would like to point out to you is the reaction of some of the Congress and CPI members when the Wanchoo Committee Report on direct taxes was published. They promptly dubbed it as a Swatantra Report. I think it will be an exercise in futility if any of us nourish the illusion that by our joining the Congress we will be able to change the heart and soul of the Congress Party which has been extinct for a long time.

I think that the disastrous defeat suffered by the Swatantra Party should prompt all of us to do some honest soul-searching to enable us to come to the right conclusion as to why, inspite of our very sound set of principles and policies, we have not been able to attract the people towards us. I have come to the following conclusions after having toured extensively various places and having met a large number of rank and file and other people in various states.

(1) From 1959 to 1967, the main reason for our success in various States and in Parliament was that our top leadership after having presented to the people a first-class alternative programme to the Ruling Party attracted the imagination of some really respected and popular people from various States who joined the Party. We had people like Shri Bhailalbhai Patel, Raja of Ramgarh, Rajmata Gayatri Devi, Mr. Jinaraja Hegde and Mr. V.P. Menon from Mysore, Mr. R.N. Singh Deo of Orissa, and a number of other prominent personalities from Bombay. These people because of their popularity and respect they enjoyed personally managed to attract many more people in the Party and succeeded in winning a number of seats in various State Legislatures and the Lok Sabha. This process continued by and large till 1967. After that, barring a few honourable exceptions, not all of them could consolidate these gains by building up a grass-root organisation. Thus the decay in organisation started.

(2) The one most common complaint that I had from the rank and file from outside about our Party's functioning was that our Party becomes

active only at the time of elections and that no attention was paid to either contact the rank and file or to give them any programme of action and no sense of direction was coming from anywhere either from the Centre or from the States. While I am aware of the fact that many attempts have been made from the Central leadership in the past to give organisational and other guidance to the State Party with organisational matters and other programmes, I think merely issuing paper directives without any follow-up of action undertaken by frequent personal tours and contacts is one of the reasons why these directives did not evoke the desired response. I remember receiving a very interesting circular from you when you were the General Secretary about the manner in which financial resources in the Party could be raised at the State and other Primary levels. And yet no progress was made in this direction anywhere. The moral of the story is that constant supervision, encouragement and persistent follow-up of action is the key to success and not the satisfaction of having issued directives however sensible and eminent they may be. Complete lack of training to our rank and file about our Party's principles and policies and programme at the State and Centre has also contributed to demoralisation amongst the rank and file.

I believe that only by a complete understanding of Swatantra's Principles and Policies by ~~any~~ ^{each} one of us, we can succeed in building up ~~our~~ emotional loyalties to the cause of Swatantra.

(3) The reason why we have failed to carry conviction with the people that we are not a party of and for the rich is because no serious thought has ever been given to ^{the} project our principles and policies in a manner which will dispel the doubts in the minds of the people about our Party. Mass action, mass demonstration and agitations always have been frowned upon as taboo. In the Lok Sabha particularly, our members always concentrated more on economic issues and were always hesitant to expose corruption in high places when it concerned industrialists for fear of being misunderstood by them. With the virtual monopoly of the Press and other means of communication enjoyed by the Ruling Party it was not possible to spread our message to the maximum number of people by depending only on passing very carefully worded resolutions in closed door meetings.

There has hardly been any contact leave alone between Central leadership and the rank and file but in certain States also there has hardly been any contact between the State leadership and the rank and file. In certain States, I was shocked to discover that there has hardly been any contact between the State leadership and their elected MLAs.

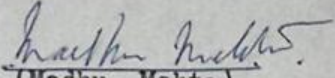
These are some of the serious draw-backs which have contributed to our downfall. We will have to rebuild the Party from scratch. We must learn to change our image without sacrificing the basic principles of our Party. It is not possible to do that if we continue in the same fashion, viz., getting active only at the time of elections. We will have to educate public opinion on Swatantra values and Swatantra way of life. Mrs. Gandhi is helping us a great deal. Her brand of socialism has only succeeded in

creating the monster of permit-quota-licence raj which has unleashed corruption on an unprecedented scale. In fact, the Swatantra Party will now have to fight the most pervert form of materialism which has been let loose by the most perverse kind of socialism of Mrs. Gandhi. It may take time for the people to realise how serious the problem is becoming before they become restless and start hating the system, but we must start acting from now onwards so that at a suitable opportunity we should be able to gain popular support from the people who will have been completely disillusioned by Mrs. Gandhi's socialism.

Let us not lose heart. Ours may be a struggle for a life time, but we must fight because the Swatantra cause is the only cause that is worth fighting for in the country today.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,


(Madhu Mehta)

Dr. R. C. Cooper,
P.C. Hansotia & Co.,
Mahatma Gandhi Road,
Bombay 1.
