

14
M. R. MASANI

3731

14
148, Mahatma Gandhi Road,
Bombay 400 001

2nd July, 1974

To:

Members of the General Council,
Swatantra Party

Dear Friend,

I find that our Party's President, Mr. Piloo Mody, has circulated to all members of the General Council his letter of June 12, 1974 replying to an earlier letter of mine. I have now replied to Mr. Mody's letter.

Since I have received several enquiries from members of the General Council who were not present in Delhi asking what my letter said and enquiring about my views in the matter, I am enclosing herewith for your perusal and consideration copies of my two letters of June 6 and July 1 to Mr. Piloo Mody.

Yours sincerely,

M. R. Masani

(M. R. Masani)

Encls: *

M.R.MASANI

148, Mahatma Gandhi Road
Bombay 1.

June 6, 1974

My dear Pilco,

I had hoped to attend the meeting of the General Council of the Party that you have called on 9th and 10th June in Delhi but I find that I am unable after all to do so.

2. I am therefore dropping you this line to share with you and our colleagues my thoughts on the issue that is coming up before the meeting as to whether or not the Party should be dissolved in order to facilitate the emergence of the proposed new party.
3. While I see no objection in principle to a proposal to dissolve the Party to permit of a consolidation of all non-Marxist parties, including the Congress (O), Jan Sangh, the Akalis and the DMK for the purpose of establishing a two-party system and of counteracting the mischief of the British electoral system from which we suffer or to strengthen the hands of Jayaprakash Narayan in his campaign for developing people's action on a non-party basis, I do not think that the proposed move to form a new party in conjunction with the BKD, the Pragati Dal, the SSP and the Loktantrik Dal provides any justification for such a drastic step as the dissolution of the Party for which we have all worked for nearly fifteen years.
4. I fear the proposed Party will be such a puny affair that it is not likely to make any impact on the country as a whole. The only national party that would be called upon to dissolve itself will be the Swatantra Party, as all the others are local groups. I hope it is appreciated that, outside of U.P. and Orissa, it will only have the effect of a minor ripple and even in these two States it will mean no change in the situation except in name. The major purpose of establishing a two-party system and of avoiding a split vote will not be achieved unless the Congress (O), the Jan Sangh, the DMK and the Akalis also join in. Indeed, it is quite likely that a move of this partial nature may actually come in the way of a more comprehensive consolidation of non-statist and non-Marxist elements a little later.
5. The mere adoption of a platonic statement of principles which may be found possible is not enough. The Swatantra Party's programme provides a clear cut alternative to the policies of those in office for two decades. Anything less than a 'U' turn or a complete reversal of these policies cannot pull the country out of its present mess or avert the economic collapse that it is facing. Will the proposed new Party have the homogeneity that is necessary

and is it likely, in the light of past experience, to present a credible image to the people? Or might it on the other hand reduce the specific appeal of each of the combining elements and only result in strengthening the ruling party? These are questions and doubts that assail one.

6. I would therefore be inclined to suggest that the General Council may, as a first step towards a genuine consolidation, be prepared, while maintaining the Party's individual identity, to agree to our coming together with others on a common programme for Unity in Action. Such a front would, it is hoped, by working together in unison show the path to others and thus pave the way for the emergence of a genuine and principled alternative for the country. That would be the time at which we could consider dissolving our Party in order to merge into something bigger and better.

7. In any event, I understand from Madhu Mehta that you are all agreed that the General Council can at most only recommend dissolution of the Party to a National Convention which alone is competent to dissolve the Party. That is the correct constitutional position. It will also give us all another opportunity to meet again and take a final decision.

With best wishes for a successful meeting.

Yours sincerely,

(sd) Minoo Masani

Mr. Piloo Mody, M.P.,
President
Swatantra Party
NEW DELHI.

M. R. MASANI

148 Mahatma Gandhi Road,
Bombay 400 001

1st July, 1974

My dear Piloo,

I received your letter of June 12. To my surprise I also received a copy of your letter to me along with the papers circulated by the Party Office after the meeting at Delhi. I must confess I was taken aback when on enquiry I was told that you had circulated it to all members of the General Council. I had sent copies of my letter to you to Delhi only for the benefit of those few who were attending the meeting in order to facilitate discussion but I had not thought of sending copies of my letter except to those few who were in Delhi. Now that you have given your letter this extended measure of publicity, I am forced to send copies of both my letters to those whom you have addressed as they must have been mystified on getting your letter to me without their knowing to what you were replying!

2. You start by saying that you read my letter with 'great dismay'. I fail to understand this because there was nothing in my letter which I had not told you verbally in Bombay in the presence of Madhu Mehta and Viren Shah.
3. I am afraid your letter has not provided any reason whatsoever for those who feel like me to reconsider our position.
4. Your basic fallacy is to be found where in your letter you make the statement that "a man who wishes to be in politics, must join the Congress or the National Alternative or retire. There should be no other parking place." I find this obiter dictum positively hilarious. If one must belong to a political party or retire from public affairs, Rajaji (before the Swatantra Party was formed), Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Kripalani and Nani Palkhivala, to mention just a few, have no 'parking place' and must stay at home! This is where the root of the trouble with your present attempt lies and I think it is therefore necessary to draw attention to it.
5. Another basic fallacy in your letter is to equate the puny effort in which you are engaged with what you call 'The National Alternative'. Are you seriously telling us that the BKD (a Party confined to U.P.), the Utkal Congress (an Orissa State Party), the SSP (itself divided on this issue), the newly formed Loktantrik Dal, Ram Subhag Singh's Khetibar Sangh (with whatever little influence it has, confined to parts of Bihar) and the Haryana Sangharsh Samiti really constitute a National Alternative? Let me caution you that if and when this Party is formed, it will hardly make a ripple on the national scene.
6. I have gone through the draft statement of policy you have

.....2

circulated. I am inclined to agree that there is nothing very much one can object to in it, but is that enough? A statement of policy as vague and platonic as this is one to which most people would find no difficulty in subscribing, but then their understanding of it will vary considerably. Thus, for instance, if you will kindly refer to the Statesman of June 19, 1974, you will see that the SSP feel happy that "between 60 and 70% of "our economic policy" has been accepted and that "the new party is against capitalism". I fear, therefore, that the draft statement of policy does not help very much.

7. What is more relevant is the record of those with whom you propose to associate. Mr. Biju Patnaik was found guilty of improprieties when in office by a quasi-judicial tribunal appointed by our own Government in Orissa. Dr. Ram Subhag Singh, as you know, was the main obstacle from June 1970 till the end of that year to the formation of a united bloc in Parliament which would have provided an alternative government to the country and perhaps changed the course of subsequent history. Mr. Raj Narain was one of the "demolition squad" who came to Delhi on January 3, 1971, and turned Rajaji's dream of a grand alliance based on a common programme into an 'Indira Hatao' hotchpotch against which our Party protested. As for Mr. Charan Singh, I have always had great regard for him as a farmer's man and he and I have fought many a battle together in opposition to joint co-operative or collective farming. Unfortunately he has proved to be an undependable ally. We were badly let down by him when we agreed to join his SVD Government in the U.P. What was worse was that during the Presidential Election of 1969 the BKD in U.P. co-operated in installing Mr. Giri as President. But for this support, Mr. Giri would not have been elected President and for this Mr. Charan Singh bears a heavy responsibility. You might argue that people's past-sins should be overlooked. I would agree if they had publicly expressed regret for their behaviour but not one of them has done this so far and one is therefore entitled to judge them by our experience of them.

8. As a result of such a record, I fear the credibility and the public image of the proposed new Party will be a very poor one. This is one more reason why, quite apart from its puny size, the new combination will not be taken seriously by the public as a 'National Alternative'.

9. These are among the reasons why your proposal that the Swatantra Party should be dissolved for this particular purpose is one that many of us cannot accept. As I have already said in my earlier letter, if the purpose had been to facilitate an effective "National Alternative" in which all non-communist opposition parties joined, I certainly would go along with it. Similarly, if the purpose was to strengthen the hands of Jayaprakash in his efforts to mobilise action on a non-party basis, I would co-operate. You will

forgive me if I express the view that the specific purpose for which you are seeking the dissolution of the Swatantra Party is an altogether ~~one~~ one. The principles and policies of the Party constitute the only clearcut alternative to the Statist policies which have brought India to disaster during the past twenty-five years, and their disappearance from the scene would be a great blow to our national life.

10. Since you seem to be set on your attempt, despite the widespread opposition to your proposal that was voiced at the Delhi meeting of the General Council, ~~and have turned down the more~~ limited 'Unity in Action' which I had suggested in my earlier letter, let me place before you and our colleagues yet another alternative.

11. When the National Convention meets, let us agree, in the spirit of the advice that Gandhiji gave to the Congress Party on the achievement of independence, to convert the Swatantra Party into a Service or Constructive Work Organisation which would under the present dispensation eschew the contesting of elections and dedicate itself to educative work, as Rajaji had consistently pleaded during the last years before he passed away. The word 'Swatantra' should form part of the name of the new organisation and it should adhere to our present principles. Once this is done, those who, like you, wish to join the proposed new Party or indeed some other Party would be free to do so with a good conscience. On the other hand, a large number of members who are still dedicated to the principles of the Party and do not wish them to be diluted, will be able through the medium of the new non-party organisation to carry on the educative work which Rajaji had wanted them to do. This is my constructive response to your letter and I earnestly urge you to give it your careful consideration as it appears to me that it may provide the basis for a consensus which might be shared by a large majority of the members of the Party and its State units. As you are aware, there are several State units that have already declared that even if the Party at the National level were to decide to dissolve itself, they propose to carry on as State Swatantra Parties. My proposal would make it possible to ~~in~~ avert such an unpleasant situation from materialising.

Yours sincerely,

M. R. Masani

M. R. Masani