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DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CENTRAL PARLIAMENTARY BOARD HELD IN NEW DELHI ON MAY 20, 1967.

Present

1. Prof. N.G. Ranga (in the Chair)
2. Prof. M. Ruthnaswamy
3. Mr. B.P. Singh
4. Mr. G. Latchanna
5. Mr. Dahyabhai V. Patel
6. Mr. M.R. Masani
7. Mr. N. Dandeker - Offg. General Secretary
8. Mr. S.S. Mariswamy - By special invitation

The minutes of the last meeting held in Madras on March 1, 1967, were confirmed.

1. Party strength in Parliament

Mr. M.R. Masani, Leader of the Party's group in the Lok Sabha, reported on the Party's numerical position in the Lok Sabha. Of the forty-five members elected to the Lok Sabha on the Party's symbol,

- a) two had resigned their membership of the Lok Sabha viz. Mr. G. Latchanna and the Rajmata of Gwalior; and Mr. R.K. Birla had chosen to sit as an Independent.
- b) Two independent members viz. Mr. K.M. Kaushik and Raja Giriraj Singh of Bharatpur had joined the group and Prof. Ranga had been elected in the by-election to the seat vacated by Mr. Latchanna.
- c) The total number of members in the Lok Sabha thus remained at 45.

In so far as the Rajya Sabha was concerned, the Leader of the Group in that House, Mr. Dahyabhai V. Patel, reported that, with the addition of two Independent members and a Congressman and the unopposed return of Mr. B.K. Deo in the by-election from Orissa, the strength of the Party in that House was 13.

2. Attempt to form Opposition Bloc

Mr. Masani reported on the reasons that led to the failure of attempts:-

- a) to form a United Opposition Bloc in Parliament consisting of Swatantra, Jan Sangh and the D.M.K;
- b) to persuade the group of Independents led by Mr. Prakash Vir Shastri, the Rajmata of Gwalior's group and the Akali members of Parliament to join the Swatantra group in Parliament.

He also explained the circumstances which led to permitting Acharya Kripalani the use of the Party's symbol in the Guna by-election.

3. Election of President and Vice-President of India

Mr. N. Dandekar indicated the various causes which led to the defeat of Mr. Subba Rao and Prof. Habib in the Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections.

4. Results of By-Elections

The Board reviewed the results of by-elections to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and State Assemblies contested by the Party's candidates.

- a) It noted with satisfaction the victory of Prof. Ranga and Mr. H.M. Patel. The Board thanked Mr. G. Latchanna both for vacating the seat to enable Prof. Ranga to contest and for bringing about a convincing victory. It also thanked the Sriakulam electorate for returning the Party's President. The Board noted that the Party's candidate for the Bhavnagar Parliamentary Constituency had been defeated.
- b) A complaint received from certain persons against the choice of the Party's candidate in the by-election to the Thirumangalam Assembly Constituency was considered. After hearing the comments offered by Mr. S.S. Mariswamy, the Board held that the complaint was unsustainable.
- c) In the by elections to the Rajya Sabha the Board congratulated Mr. B.K. Deo on his unopposed election. At the same time, in view of Mr. Masani's report concerning certain developments that had taken place prior to the by-election, the Board hoped that the State Unit of the Party had not made any commitments in regard to the biennial elections from the State to the Rajya Sabha scheduled next year as a quid pro quo for Mr. B.K. Deo's unopposed election.

5. Developments in State Legislatures

The Board reviewed the position obtaining in various States' Legislatures and the Party's attitude to non-Congress Governments.

Uttar Pradesh

- a) Recalling the circumstances in which the Party's MLAs were permitted to join the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal (SVD), Mr. B.P. Singh, President of the U.P. Unit, reported that differences had developed between the State Unit and the SVD Government on the compulsory procurement scheme. He added that after protracted discussions the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh had conceded almost all the modifications to the scheme demanded by the Swatantra Party. The Party had therefore withdrawn its objections to the scheme.

The Board approved this decision and further approved the attitude taken so far by the U.P. Unit of the Party in giving conditional support to the Government and reserving the right to re-examine its support in the light of policies adopted by the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal Government from time to time.

- b) Mr. Masani reported the reasons that had reluctantly compelled Mr. Dandekar and himself, after obtaining the approval of Rajaji, to permit our member Mr. Akhtar Ali Khan to join the SVD Cabinet in U.P. The State President, Mr. B.P. Singh, had in a note to the General Secretary stated that the Swatantra Party's declining to join the first opposition Government in U.P. would be misunderstood and the Party might lose face; he also stated Swatantra participation would prevent the communists from dominating the SVD Government. This was followed by a telephonic request to Mr. Masani from Mr. Charan Singh pleading that permission should be given to Mr. Akhtar Ali Khan to join his Cabinet. In the light of these circumstances and the strong feeling among the Party's legislators in U.P. in favour of joining Charan Singh's SVD Government, Mr. Masani and Mr. Dandekar permitted Mr. Akhtar Ali Khan to join the U.P. Cabinet as a special case which should not be treated as a precedent.

In this context the Board recorded the letter dated 5th April 1967 received from Mr. Akhtar Ali Khan undertaking to withdraw from the SVD Government if called upon to do so by the Central Parliamentary Board of the Party. The action taken by Mr. Masani and Mr. Dandeker in the circumstances was approved.

Orissa

The Board complimented the Orissa Government for abolishing land revenue so expeditiously. It also expressed its satisfaction with the manner in which the coalition government was functioning. The Board felt it was necessary for the Party to give intellectual, moral and public support to the Orissa Government at the national level.

Punjab

A letter received from the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee protesting against the refusal of the Gurnam Singh Ministry to resign though defeated on the "motion of thanks" to the Governor's Address was considered and it was decided that no action need be taken.

Andhra

Mr. G. Latchanna, the Leader of the Party's Group in the Andhra Legislative Assembly reported on the possibility of forming an opposition bloc within the State Assembly with the Jana Congress. The Board permitted Mr. Latchanna to go ahead with the talks and if possible arrive at such an arrangement provided it was made clear that the leadership of such a bloc would be with the Swatantra Party and that the Jana Congress did not become part of the newly formed Bharatiya Jana Kranti Dal.

Haryana

The action of the Party's convenor in Haryana Ch. Inder Singh in not permitting any legislator of the Party to join the United Front Government but to give it conditional support from outside was approved.

Rajasthan

The Board held that the Janata Party's demand that certain members elected on the Swatantra symbol and now sitting with the Party's group in the Rajasthan Assembly should be permitted to sit with the Janata Party members should be considered an unfriendly act. The Board decided that this demand should not be conceded. If the Janata Party persisted in the attempt to wean away the members, the Board would expect the Swatantra Party's group in the Rajasthan Assembly to resist the demand and break up the Samyukta Dal. In any event the wisdom of the Party's continuing in the Samyukta Dal as at present constituted was doubted, especially as the Janata Party was reported to have joined the Bharatiya Jana Kranti Dal.

6. Functioning of the Party in Parliament: Last Session

- 1) Mr. Masani reported the circumstances which led to his having to accept the Chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament at the request of the Parliamentary group's Executive Committee.
- 2) He also reported on the efforts made to arrive at a consensus in regard to the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker and President and Vice-President.

While deploring the tactics of the Congress Party in general and of the Prime Minister in particular in thwarting a consensus, the Board noted with satisfaction that the Group's performance in the last session had been commendable, particularly as we had been able to achieve the tacit acceptance of the leadership of the Opposition Parties by Mr. Masani and had been able to bring about a measure of operational unity between them on most issues.

3) In this context, a note from Mr. J.M. Lobo Prabhu somewhat critical of the Party's getting too involved with other Opposition groups was considered. The Board felt that while Mr. Lobo Prabhu's views should be taken note of by the Parliamentary Group, it was quite incorrect to say that the Party's identity had been submerged. The Party had taken an independent line on more than one occasion, and the fact was that the Leader of the Swatantra Group in the Lok Sabha had actually succeeded in exercising tacit and de facto leadership as the spokesman of the Opposition parties in the last session.

7. Functioning of the Party in Parliament: Next Session

- 1) Mr. Masani stated that, as mentioned by him at the previous meeting of the Board, he proposed to tender his resignation as Leader of the Parliamentary Group and to invite the Group to elect Prof. Ranga as Leader. This was approved.
- 2) The Board decided to recommend that there should be only one Deputy Leader. If, however, the Parliamentary Group decided to have two Deputy Leaders, the Senior Deputy Leader should be elected first, followed by a separate election of the Junior Deputy Leader.
- 3) On major issues of policy which were likely to come up in Parliament during the Budget session, the Parliamentary Group was left free to take appropriate attitudes in consonance with the principles and policies of the Party as laid down in its Statement of Policy and Manifesto.
- 4) The question of joint functioning of all opposition parties so as to bring about a change of Government at the Centre with the help of the independents and some dissident Congressmen who may cross the floor was discussed at length. In this context the President, Prof. Ranga read a letter from Mr. C. Rajagopalachari on the subject; and Mr. Masani reported on the correspondence he had had with Mr. Madhu Limaye on the subject. The Board approved Mr. Masani's letter of 27th March, 1967.

The Board felt convinced that the formation of patchwork Governments on the Haryana and U.P. models, where a small number of Congressmen crossed the floor merely to bring down the Government to enable a non-Congress coalition to be formed, was unworkable. Such opportunist arrangements while being unstable would merely afford opportunity to Communists and extreme socialists to entrench themselves in strategic positions and extend their grip on the country. The inevitable failure of such Governments could only lead either to the Congress being returned to power with greater strength in the next election or to the failure of democratic institutions. In any event, the Board was unanimous in rejecting any proposal to participate in any government which included Communists.

On the other hand the Board favoured our getting together with democratic parties like the Jan Sangh, the D.M.K. and the P.S.P., alongwith like-minded independents and Congressmen who might break away from the Congress Party in substantial numbers on ideological grounds leading to the formation of a Government of Democratic Unity.

In the meanwhile the Swatantra Party should vigorously project its own principles, identity and image as a democratic alternative to the Congress.

8. Gujarat

The reported statement by Mr. Bhailalbhai Patel nominating Mr. H.M. Patel as his "political heir" (if true) was deplored by the Board. The Board wished to remind the Gujarat Unit that if and when Mr. Bhailalbhai Patel decided to retire, it would be for the appropriate party organs to elect his successor to each office (as President of the State Unit and/or Leader of the Assembly party) in a democratic manner.

9. Lok Pal and Lok Ayukt

The proposal to appoint a Lok Pal and a Lok Ayukt on the lines of the Ombudsman, which the Swatantra Party had been demanding, was welcomed by the Board.

10. The meeting then terminated, with a vote of thanks to the Chair.
