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A BOLD MOVE

"The Swatantra Party has taken a bold move in the reorganisation of the party unit in Bihar. The Bihar Swatantra Party attracted much attention in political circles. It gained considerable strength during the 1962 general elections. Today, the Swatantra Party happen to be the main Opposition Party in the Bihar Vidhan Sabha. The political reputation of the leader, Raja Bahadur of Ramgarh, shot up as the Bihar Swatantra Party gained a few important key seats and gave a strong fight to some of the well-known Congress candidates. It was believed that the political influence of the Raja Bahadur of Ramgarh was confined only to the district of Hazaribagh. The 1962 general elections showed that the Bihar Swatantra Party, under the leadership of the Raja Bahadur of Ramgarh had made dents in other districts also. Both the Jharkhand Party and the Congress Party conceded seats to the Swatantra Party. The Congress Party's majority went down, and the Jharkhand Party's strength was found to be declined.

As political analysts, we noted that the anti-Congress temper in Bihar was growing. The shrunken majority of the Congress Party was traceable mainly to two factors, viz. inner-party bickerings on a group basis, and the isolation of the enlightened people from the Congress Party. The Swatantra Party being a new political party, it did not take roots in the different parts of the State. But tragically enough there was the erosion of democratic forces within the Bihar Swatantra Party. The leader, the Raja Bahadur of Ramgarh, asked for supreme authority. He is reported to have made the suggestion to the central organisation of the party that he must not be fattered from above and within if he has to function as the instrument of people's will. He wanted to stand aside if he was not given the requisite authority. This was a dangerous thesis in a democratic party organisation. The Raja Bahadur of Ramgarh chose to act on his own authority. Theoretically, he preferred to impose his scheme on the party organisation in Bihar in scorn of the wishes of the Central Organisation Committee. The undemocratic claim of the Raja Bahadur of Ramgarh proved gulling to the High Command of the Swatantra Party. The Central Organisation Sub-Committee and the Parliamentary Board found that the interim State Committee, nominated by the Raja of Ramgarh, was "unrepresentative of the various elements in the State". Moreover, they could not swallow the thesis of the Raja Bahadur of Ramgarh which would disrupt the integrity of the Party.

We are not interested in the apportionment of the blame. We note that the Central Organisation Sub-Committee and the Parliamentary Board of the Swatantra have no stomach for the undemocratic pill of the Raja Bahadur of Ramgarh. The Party's High Command recorded the view that every State unit was organisationally subordinate to the Central authority and that democratic forces must be given full play in the party organisation at all levels. No party leader of the State unit can be given unfettered authority to act in his discretion. The leader has to work with the active consent of party members. He is the servant, not the master, of the Party.

It was undoubtedly a bold move that the Central Organisation Sub-Committee had revoked the authority given to the Raja Bahadur of Ramgarh, President of the Bihar unit of the Party, to appoint an interim State committee and office-bearers and to reconstitute the District Committee, pending their replacement by duly elected committees. The High Command nominated a new interim committee, nominated by the President, was dissolved. The Swatantra Party showed much courage in adhering to the principles of democracy. It did not hesitate to scuttle the authority of the President of the Bihar unit who planted firmly the flag of the Swatantra Party in the 1962 General Elections. In other words, the party did not permit the Raja Bahadur of Ramgarh to sacrifice the tenants of democracy in the organisation of the Bihar unit. It did not look at immediate gains for its long-range interests.

As students of liberal democracy, we compliment the Swatantra Party's move. The Raja Bahadur of Bangarh may not easily give up his fight for power and authority. And the Bihar Swatantra Party may bleed if the President of the Bihar unit violently pecks at the authority of the Central Organisation Sub-Committee. But the Swatantra Party took all the risks. Mr. Minoo Masani, General Secretary of the Swatantra Party in his lecture on "Party Politics in India" under the auspices of the Harold Ingham Institute of Political Science at Ahmedabad stressed the central point that an Opposition Party could not grow in a democracy with the help of men and women of undemocratic temper and dubious political morality. Those who believe in short-cuts may condone indiscipline, disloyalty, casteism, and corrupt transactions. But that is not the way of watering the plant of democracy. Mr. Minoo Masani in the General Secretary's report to the Patna Convention of the Swatantra Party in 1960 argued: "We should be careful not to depend on dubious elements. It is less harmful to have no unit in a particular place or district than to have a bad one". The Swatantra Party thus chose to vindicate the process of democracy in the strengthening of the party organisation.

They say that hordes and castes win elections in India. Mr. Minoo Masani says that the Swatantra Party is not caught by the slogan: "My party right or wrong". We quote with approval the following observations of Mr. Minoo Masani:

"When political power and economic patronage are concentrated in the hands of the ruling party, as they are at present, only an Opposition party, which is accepted as morally superior by the people at large can hope to make the grade."

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