

SWATANTRA PARTY

GENERAL SECRETARY'S STATEMENT ON ORGANISATION

I

Review

Discontent with the policies of the ruling Party is spreading apace. Large numbers of people are getting desperate about the deteriorating economic condition and are looking for relief. There is a widespread feeling that it is time for a change of government. The fact that the Swatantra Party has, since its inception, warned against the results of Government's domestic and foreign policies in a manner that has now been justified by events is securing for the Party's position a clearer understanding and a better response than before. It is lightening, to some extent the onerous burden we took on ourselves when we undertook the Herculean task of educating our people on the facts of economic life.

The Outlook

The outlook for our cause is therefore bright. There can be no doubt that, if Indian independence and democracy have to be preserved, the policies of the Swatantra Party will have to become the nation's policies. In such a context, the Party can do big things in the next General Elections to Parliament and State Assemblies in 1967.

We had every reason for gratification at the result of our first effort in 1962, within less than three years after our birth. The position that we have secured as the main Opposition in both Houses of Parliament, the fact that we have more members in the State Assemblies than any other Party and the fact that we are the official opposition in Orissa, Rajasthan and Gujarat provide a good foundation on which to build for a "take off" at the polls next time. Given the public temper, and dynamism and drive on our part, even a landslide in our favour is possible.

Yet there is a mood of helplessness in the country. Why is this so? Why have objective observers felt despondent about our capacity to provide an alternative Government to the country? A delegate at the Durgapur Session of the Congress Party made the observation: "The Congress Government is continuing only because there is no Opposition worth the name." You cannot beat someone with no one, say others. What are the causes that inspire such pessimism? To find the answer, it becomes necessary to examine the state of our Party today.

The State of the Party

It must be conceded that progress made since February 1962 has been very disappointing. It is true that the victories at Chittoor, Rajkot and Mahuwa and the success of the Election Petition in Gonda provide cause for satisfaction. On the other hand, the adverse results of the by-elections in which the Party has participated, with the exceptions mentioned above, call for self-examination. There have been a few defections from the ranks of our Party's representatives in the Legislatures. So too, our members have faced set-backs in Panchayati raj elections. While good work has been done by the Party's spokesmen in both Houses of Parliament and in some State

Assemblies, that good record has been sometimes marred by speeches and acts out of tune with the basic policies of the Party. State units have failed to give the Parliamentary Board a chance to consider the Party's position at by-elections by not giving timely thought to them but asking for approval to their proposals just on the eve of nominations. Coming to a lower level, there has also been a failure even to pay membership subscriptions by several Assemblymen and M.P.s.

The organisation of the Party in the country generally, while marked by natural ups and downs, has been on balance stagnant. It is true that all over the country a small number of dedicated Party workers is carrying on the Party's work in difficult conditions and without the necessary resources.

The Party has every reason to be proud of the long and sustained struggle it waged against the 17th Amendment and the work our Kisan wing has been doing, involving the imprisonment of some of our colleagues in Andhra and Saurashtra.

There are quite a number of young people willing to work for our Party but we have not been able to mobilise them. Our ranks in consequence remain pitifully thin.

The ratio of party workers to the number of votes cast for the Party's candidates in the 1962 General Elections indicates how thin on the ground we are in terms of active Party workers. We have only one worker for every 500 votes cast for us in 1962. The question also arises how many of those enrolled as workers have in fact during the last six months participated in active Party work and what efforts have been made by State and District units to give these workers the necessary opportunity?

It was hoped that the recent elections to Party organs would lead to an influx of younger men and fresh blood in the Party's apparatus. This has not happened adequately and something has to be done to make up for this.

Vast areas in several States remain untouched by our organisational activity, no doubt for lack of personnel and resources. So too State Offices in a majority of States function fitfully and are unable to give a lead to the district and constituency levels.

All this perhaps explains why the Party's image in the minds of the public is not what it should be. It is a mistake to think that it is some defect or fault in our economic or international policy that is to blame in this connection. It is the absence of dedication, discipline and hard work in the pursuit of our ideals, in sharp contrast to the inspired leadership and tireless activity of Rajaji, by which people judge the rest of us.

In a country which has yet, in large measure, to acquire political experience, organisation counts for a great deal, apart from ideology or policies. Can it be said that the intellectuals in our Party have devoted adequate attention to large sections of our people like the small farmers, industrial and agricultural labour, and shopkeepers? Or to women and youth?

This surely cannot be the way nor the mood in which we can gear ourselves to victory in 1967. Some of us are inclined to explain away our default by blaming the Congress for demoralising the country and its public workers. Some would write off democracy and leave the country to Providence or a military dictatorship.

Such an attitude would not be justified by the facts and would do incalculable harm to the country. We should recall Gandhiji's precept that we should "turn the searchlight inwards" and find out in what way we may

remedy the situation.

A review of the past three years tends to show that much better progress could have been made had it not been for a lack of hard work, efficient organisation, discipline and dedication to the Party in so many instances; and a tendency to compromise with weaknesses of various kinds and to attempt to cover them up rather than face those weaknesses.

As far back as 1962, the Party's Newsletter had republished an article entitled "Our Mission" by our discerning leader, Rajaji, who had placed before us some relevant thoughts. He had pleaded for an avoidance of shortcuts and had urged that "as the Gita teaches us, we should work patiently through the discerning elements of the population and look to the steady dissemination of ideas through that medium....For the same reason and consistently with the fundamental principles of our Party, we must stress on character and good example in all the ramifications of our work. If we adopt means of adharma, whatever be our motives, we shall build in haste and error and the structure must collapse." Mysindia of Bangalore had written in its issue of November 4, 1962: "Rajaji and Masani have correctly grasped the problem, namely, the problem of leadership. If the leadership of the Party is not able to create a superior image in the public mind, it is certain that the ruling Party will continue its rule. In fact one of the common arguments of Congressmen is: 'Where are the men who can take the place of these experienced Congressmen?' "

II

Proposals

With two years left for the next General Elections, the time for decision is now. Can the picture be changed and the party put on the path to success? How can it be done?

The answer lies in an acceptance of the basic fact that, while the Party's policies are correct and meet with little resistance and we have the potentiality of becoming the major national party, what is needed is an efficient "conveyor belt" of articulate and dedicated workers who can spread the Party's message to the remotest village. It is not enough to depend on the striking failures of the ruling party and their growing unpopularity.

Expansion the Keyword

Expansion should be the keyword, accompanied by a decision to streamline our organisation and work hard.

Hard work will not give the fullest results unless it is within the framework of sound organisational principles and a sound organisational structure. These truths are as valid in political life as elsewhere. Given an acceptance of these truths, there is no doubt that the men and the resources needed would be forthcoming to help in these tasks.

Targets

What should be our targets? Laying aside our bigger hopes and ambitions and pitching our sights nearer, our targets should be:

1. Wiping out the Congress majority in the Lok Sabha by carrying for the Swatantra Party around 125 seats;
2. Elimination of the Congress majority and the establishment of Swatantra or Swatantra-led Governments in Orissa, Rajasthan and Gujarat;
3. Becoming the principal Opposition in some other States, e.g. Andhra.

These may look to be ambitious but, given great effort and dynamism on the part of all of us, these targets are achievable.

Such targets would entail putting up around 300 candidates for Parliament and a correspondingly larger number for State Assemblies, both in these constituencies and elsewhere. Today, the Party has neither the organisation in many constituencies nor an adequate number of appropriate candidates. Hence the need to develop new organisational strength by evolving new organisational forms to cope with the colossal tasks which face us.

Our Tasks

The tasks for the Party, therefore, involve:

1. A rapid expansion of our work in regions and districts which lie untouched, and intensification of activity elsewhere.
2. Search for, and enlistment of, 300 men to act as the Party's standard-bearers in the Parliamentary constituencies, and a larger number in the Assembly constituencies.
3. The recruitment of another 300 men to act as full-time Organisers at constituency level. Mr. J. M. Lobo Prabhu has kindly prepared a draft note (annexed) which outlines the work such organisers are expected to do at the constituency level. The note illustrates what can be done in a systematic manner.
4. A programme for the education and training of candidates, organisers and Party workers.
5. The raising of material resources to finance the huge effort at all levels.
6. A realisation of the need for self-dependence, while always leaving open the door for understandings with other democratic Opposition parties.

It has reluctantly to be conceded that in most States we do not possess the capacity or command the resources to extend our activities in line with these targets.

A National Campaign

Our campaign for 1967 must, therefore, be a National Campaign run on national lines. This should be so in any event, even were we not faced with these limitations. We must realise that there is only one Swatantra Party, and that is The Swatantra Party. Our leader, Rajaji, put his finger on this truth as far back as August 1959 in Bombay when he pointed out, in connection with our attitude in regard to a regional controversy then current in Western India, that there could not be one Swatantra Party in Bombay, another

in Maharashtra and a third in Gujarat, but that these should all function as branches of a single Party.

This is a fact which is commonplace in Britain where the Conservative, Liberal and Labour Parties are organised with National Headquarters in London, on the one hand and Constituency organisations consisting of the candidate, the Agent (or Organiser), and local branch on the other. The size of our country certainly justifies our interposing an additional tier, namely, the State unit. But that cannot mean that the State unit should claim territorial authority, seek a monopoly of developing the Party in that area, and question "interference" by the Centre. The National Executive of the Party and the Parliamentary Board are there precisely to guide and direct the affairs of the Party throughout the length and breadth of the country, whenever it is necessary in the Party's interests. The freedom of opinion and expression guaranteed to our members cannot be misunderstood to cover up organisational anarchy.

Our first decision should therefore be that our campaign for the General Elections should be conducted throughout the country by the National Executive and a strong and compact Parliamentary Board to be appointed by the National Executive, involving inter alia the laying down of the line and strategy to be followed, the allocation of resources, the supervision and control of the activities of Candidates and Organisers, and the preparation and publication in the various languages of Party literature. Naturally, the advice and assistance of State units will be welcomed as necessary in these tasks.

Our second decision should be that the candidates that we put up should not only work for their success in elections but should be the Party's standard bearers in their constituencies, help in selecting the Assembly candidates and generally help in building up the Party organisation. This will produce an integration of work that will be helpful. They will be entitled to expect the fullest cooperation from the Central, State and District units of the Party. The candidate, who has the incentive to win, should be made primarily responsible for educating and nursing the constituency and thus carrying the Party to victory.

Our third decision should be that the Party's candidates should be GOOD men. Our doors should be open to such men who are in agreement with us but have not come in as yet.

Our fourth decision should be that candidates should be placed in the field at the earliest possible moment to enable them to perform their tasks.

Strengthening National Headquarters

In the same spirit of self-criticism, it must be confessed that the functioning of the Central Office has to accept its share of the responsibility. It has not developed into what it should have become, namely, the hub of party activity, an active agency to guide and direct Party effort throughout the country and ensure the emergence of a National Party strong enough to pose a formidable challenge to the ruling party at the polls. So also, it has failed to take the initiative in building Party organisation in States such as Assam and Madhya Pradesh. Towards this inadequacy, several factors have contributed. The General Secretary's Reports to the last two National Conventions have repeatedly pointed out the difficulties under which the Central Office has had to function. For instance, the Report to the Third National Convention in February, 1964, said:

"Even the Central Organisation, sketchy as it has been, has been starved of funds. As against the budget of Rs.10,000 per month sanctioned by the Central Organising Committee, the Treasurer, despite his best efforts, has found himself unable to provide more than Rs.44,300 over

a period of twenty-two months from March 1962 to December 1963.

"It will be seen from this that the Party apparatus has to continue to function on a shoe string. Considering that the Party functions over an area as large as the whole of Western Europe and with a comparable population, that it should be expected to do so with such insignificant resources would be looked upon as a laughable proposition in any part of Europe. The British Liberal Party, our counterpart in the U.K., which covers an area negligible in comparison to our own and which has only seven Members in Parliament spent, during the year 1963, according to its published accounts £87,713 or Rs.1,169,506. The Liberal Party of Israel, even a smaller country, which has a strength in Parliament comparable to our own, collects a yearly subscription of Rs.50 from each member and has a secretariat which is magnificently staffed."

Despite these handicaps, the Central Office, with the absurdly inadequate strength of six including clerical staff, has gamely tried to keep the ball rolling. The following may give a rough idea of what the Central Office has been doing:

1. Between the period April 1963 and December 1964, the Central Office handled about 5,000 letters and communications of various types.
2. It prepared and distributed the Swatantra Newsletter, of which 48 issues have so far been published, with a mailing list of over a thousand persons, both domestic and foreign.
3. It published a total of 29 publications.
4. The Central Office has endeavoured, in an altogether inadequate measure, to develop Party activity in States where there are no units, e.g. West Bengal and, till recently, Kerala.
5. It has taken over charge of State units dissolved for ineffective functioning, e.g. Bihar and Delhi.
6. Since last year, the Central Office has taken on the task of supervising the enrolment of full-time Organisers, the scrutinising and maintaining of Register entries, and the supplying of Workers Cards.
7. It is organising training camps for workers and organisers.
8. A Labour Department with a full-time Organiser has been set up.

If the desire is to go ahead in a big way, it is of the utmost importance that the National Headquarters, which is the executive arm of the National Executive and the Parliamentary Board, should be strengthened considerably. This should involve:

1. The appointment by the General Council, on the recommendation of the General Secretary, of Joint Secretaries who could share his burden;
2. The appointment of full-time honorary and paid personnel
 - (i) to act as Field Organisers for work at State or Zonal level, and
 - (ii) to take charge of such departments as Women, Youth, Peasants and Publicity on the lines already done in the case of Labour.

It is only by taking the steps outlined above, involving as they would

a New Look being given to the Party, that it will be able to shoulder the tasks and responsibilities that face it.

February 1, 1965.