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Masani Explains Manifesto

NEW DELHI: Swatantra's Minoo Masani last week fought back the slogan-shouting socialists when he argued that the State Capitalism of the Indicate, the CPI and other so-called Leftist parties was "obscure-rants".

The Swatantra Party President told a press conference here: "Ours, in fact, is the real radical approach, opposed to the reactionary attitudes of the sloganised minds of the socialists."

Mr Masani was face to face with the gang of pressmen who habitually heckle leaders of the Alliance parties. He slapped them down with quick, precise answers, displaying his unquestioned mastery of the "ism" that seems to have afflicted the press corps more than any other section of Indian society.

The manifesto he released, he said, was a "softened edge" of the party ideology, but it cut all the same. The Swatantra leader said his was a middle party, opposed to status quo and waiting radical changes.

"You are a middle party," said a questioner who imagined

he had trapped the Swatantra leader, "who is to your Right and who is to your Left?"

The chuckles and laughter that followed froze soon enough when Masani answered forthrightly, instead of acting apologetic as some other Alliance parties are prone to do.

"Right and Left are utterly meaningless in the present day world," Masani declared, adding: "Those phrases were used in a certain historical background."

When the questioners persisted in asking him to define "Right" and "Left", Masani came back sharply: "The CPI is an extreme right reactionary party." And the extreme Left? "Well, J. P. and Vinoba Bhave are extreme Left," the Swatantra leader said.

When somebody suggested

that Swatantra and SSP could not co-exist in an Alliance on account of ideological differences, Masani cited the example of West Germany, where the experiment had been successfully tried since the end of the War.

The Swatantra leader said that the right to property was fundamental to democracy. Once this right was abolished, a villager's hut, or a peasant's land would all be subject to the whims and fancies of the Government.

PEASANT PROPRIETORSHIP

"We are for peasant proprietorship," he explained, adding that the government of the day had ample powers to put reasonable limits on property and there was no need to abrogate Fundamental Rights.

Mr Masani said his party was going to the polls on a seven-point programme. The first on the list was defence of the Constitution and fundamental rights and liberties.

The second point was maintenance of law and order and

regard for the rule of law. "No quarter should be given to manifestations of violence from whatever direction they may come", said the manifesto.

On the economic front, the manifesto stressed the employment situation. "The starting point, as Mahatma Gandhi used to stress, must be employment".

The manifesto estimated that there were 100 million to 150 million unemployed or semi-employed people in the country. Calling for priority for this item in the national budget, the manifesto pledged the Swatantra Party would have an annual outlay of Rs 230 crores to start with, to tackle the problem.

It called for starting public works such as housing, roads, small-scale industries, drinking water, wells, afforestation and drainage in order to provide massive employment.

Other points in the manifesto dealt with rising prices, agriculture, production and protection of minorities and backward classes.

Review