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Masani outlines Employment plan

Interviewed by
M. L. Kamath

BOMBAY:

The basic issues which are facing the country are unemployment, the defence of the Constitution, fundamental rights and liberties, boosting of agriculture and giving their proper dues to the minorities and the backward classes, says Mr. M. R. Masani, the Swatantra leader, in an exclusive interview to "The Economic Times."

Unemployment should be approached as a priority item in the national budget. An annual outlay of Rs. 250 crores should be made for wages, material and equipment for road building and provide employment for scores of people.

Secondly, a programme providing house sites and rural housing, drainage, minor irrigation, afforestation and rural electrification and the provision of pure drinking water in every village is the best way to provide massive employment.

For the educated unemployed, a separate corporation is necessary wherein the skills of the young people could be re-oriented and they could be given financial and technical assistance for self-employment.

A department of economic opportunities must be created at the

Centre with a budget of Rs. 1,000 crores.

Agriculture will be the basic industry of the country. Peasant proprietorship and family farming should be bolstered as they have proved to be the most productive and socially desirable form of cultivating the land. Land reforms should be speedily implemented. Tenants and sharecroppers should be assured security of tenure and fixed fair rents. Landless labour should be guaranteed a minimum wage.

Constitution

For a stable democracy, there must be the sanctity of the Constitution and it should not be tampered with. There must be unqualified acceptance of the role assigned to the Judiciary and the guarantee given about the Fundamental Rights.

In a country like India, the treatment of the minorities and the backward classes assumes great importance. The Constitution has provided for the protection of the rights and interests of these categories and they should be effectively implemented. Equality of opportunities and education is not just a principle but must be worked out in every legitimate and equitable manner.

A commission on civil rights is necessary to look into and correct discrimination against any section of the people in education, employment and economic activities.

Regarding the public sector, Mr. Masani refers to the manifesto of Congress (O) which is substantially adopted by his own party. As

several key areas in the economy have already been nationalised, the task now is to impart efficiency to government undertakings and make them adequately productive and profitable.

These public sector enterprises must have functional autonomy. At the top or the lower management level, persons must be appointed strictly for their managerial ability. They will be clothed with autonomy and must show results. The public sector has to yield substantial results and enrich the economy.

About the controversy regarding the foreign know-how and foreign aid, Mr. Masani says that foreign private capital is welcome because it comes at its own risk, whereas foreign government aid is not welcome because it comes at this country's risk. So, government-to-government aid is not at all necessary except for the building of the infra-structure like roads, communications, power and technical education. He adds, "It is a lie that foreign private capital is not available for setting up big private industries in this country. What is needed is the facility to develop private industry in such a way as to engender international division of labour."

Mr. Masani fully endorses the need for distributive justice with a big proviso that there must be something first, it is to be distributed equitably. In other words, if it is there you distribute and if it is not there what is there to distribute? In this country it is mostly poverty which is seen and to inject distributive justice now is to

distribute poverty. What is needed is massive production and then distribution. He refers to what Pandit Nehru said some years ago during his visit to Nepal that socialism in a poor country is only distributing poverty. Mr. Masani says this is equally true of India; the only sad thing is that Pandit Nehru could not see this country in that perspective.

The intelligentsia of this country, according to Mr. Masani, has let the country down badly. In this group he not only places the educated class, but also the business men. He says this is a culpable class and the sooner this lapse is mended the better for the class as well as for the country. He referred to a lecture delivered by him at Bangalore a couple of years ago and feels the situation has remained, tragically unchanged.

He said then: "Passivity is the enemy of freedom. Of all classes, I think the class of business men and the class of intelligentsia who are privileged, who have the knowledge and the weapons have failed the country most."

In literature and arts, there is widespread patronage. Artists, writers and musicians are sought to be bought by the Establishment. This is done through the so-called Academies and the Council of Cultural Relations. Large number of artists and writers are now becoming lack writing on government

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Masani's view

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orders losing their independence in the process for a mess of pottage.

In politics, the decay has set in because of a few peculiar factors. One is the reluctance to be in the opposition, that is most of the politicians must be in office at any given time. Secondly, the party, which is a means to an end, has become an end in itself. Politics is about power, power for the purpose of carrying out one's principles and one's policies. Now it has become power for its own sake, office for its own sake.

Thirdly, there is the cult of personality, the preoccupation with men rather than with measures, with personalities rather than with principles. Fourthly, there is the illiterate electorate, an electorate difficult to communicate with. One can meet only a few persons and address only a few meetings. The radio is under government control. TV will be under government control. The channels of communication, the conveyor belt is missing. This makes the quality of the politician being what it is.

Permit raj

In the economic field, it is also inordinately politicised. Controls and permit-licence-raj have throttled initiative in every walk of economic life.

All these malaises have, perhaps, partly risen because of a strange talk of 'we' and 'they' which, according to Mr. Masani, is a dangerous talk. A kind of void has developed among the people, people waiting to be led, waiting for a sign.

What is needed is to develop better communications, greater participation, the end of the 'we' and 'they' complex, the shrug of shoulders,

the helplessness of the private citizen.

Today grassroots activity is lacking. There is an absence of an infra-structure of voluntary organisations to supplement Government at the top. This makes the Government too strong, because there are no alternative channels of influence.

Mr. Masani says the chances of a stable government at the Centre after the elections are extremely poor. According to him, no party will get a clear-cut majority and so a stable government is ruled out.

He says that if Mrs. Gandhi wants to form a government again she has to seek the help of other parties, including the Communist Party. If it happens, it is inevitable that there cannot be a stable government.

About the other side, that is the alliance, a stable government would have been possible if the election had been fought with a common manifesto. Unfortunately, this could not be done. Since the SSP's policies are entirely 'out of line' with the other parties, an alliance could not be forged and, again, the chances of forming a stable government have been missed.

Even his own party's 'yes' and 'no' attitude for an alliance has its explanation. Mr. Masani says the Swatantra Party is the only party which has been consistently demanding the formation of an alliance on an agreed programme in a principled manner. It has never wanted an 'opportunistic hotchpotch' like SVD in U.P.

But on June 3, 1970, there was a 'debacle' and the idea of an alliance on an agreed programme was abandoned.

After consulting the National Executive, the Swatantra Party agreed to join the front but expressed deep disappointment at the absence of an agreed programme.

DSP closure threat

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rivalries had a bearing on the strike.

He said that the strikers' representatives had walked out of the tripartite talks here yesterday threatening that the strike would be extended to other areas and they would not attend any conciliation meeting for at least eight days.

The extension of the strike for another eight days would lead to the chilling of the blast furnace. That might take anywhere up to three years to repair the damages.

"The Management is left with no option but to take all steps it possibly can to protect the plant and reduce the damage and risks to the minimum."

Referring to the strikers' demand for a fixed 30 per cent. bonus, he said no management could agree to give 'fixed minimum production bonus with no relationship to actual production.'

The plant authorities today alleged that there had been deliberate attempts to create confusion in the minds of the workers of the plant about the soundness of the new incentive scheme introduced in the wheel and axle plant.

Since the introduction of the new incentive scheme in the wheel and axle plant on September 6 last year, the bonus earnings of the DSP workers have improved and as a result their total earnings have gone up.

The total incentive bonus payments during the months of September, October, November and December 1970 have been of the order of Rs. 25,12, Rs. 44,504.96, Rs. 34,678.35 and Rs. 44,844.60, respectively.