

Sunday Standard

14/2/71

44688

When Masani was 'in the wrong'

Express News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 13
The Swatantra leader, Mr M. R. Masani, has no hard feelings about his wife working for a ruling party candidate here and his son being starry-eyed about the New Congress.

Reacting to the observation of the Press Club official that Mr Masani's family had a truly democratic tradition in this respect, Mr Masani quoted an eminent international authority to say that if one was not a socialist at 21 something was wrong with him. Similarly, if he was still a socialist at 41 it meant he had no brains, the authority had said.

"I learnt that I had been in the wrong," said Mr Masani amidst laughter. He was an ardent socialist when young.
(See also Page 4)

The Sunday Statesman
14/2/77

Swatantra Favours 'Radical Change'

FROM OUR SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE

NEW DELHI, Saturday.—The Swatantra leader, Mr. M. R. Masani said here today that the Prime Minister's "gamble" in calling a snap election would fail and that she would "emerge substantially weaker" out of the mid-term elections.

Addressing a luncheon meeting at the Press Club, Mr. Masani refuted the charge that his party stood for the status quo. In fact "we stand for radical change", he added.

While he admitted a certain amount of dynamism in Mrs. Gandhi's leadership—which he undoubtedly admired—this was geared to remaining in power. Describing the Government as "incompetent", Mr. Masani pointed out instances to show how on no major policy issue Mrs. Gandhi has advocated any change.

Speaking about the Constitution and the fundamental rights, Mr. Masani referred to the mandate the Prime Minister has sought from the people without spelling out the changes she wanted to bring out in the basic law. This was a funny way of seeking a mandate and "typical of what she thinks of the democratic approach".

NO COMMUNISM

Mr. Masani said the co-ordinating committee of the four parties had not selected any candidate for this constituency which was a free field for all. Therefore the Jana Sangh could really have no grievance. After all that party had also set up candidates against Swatantra nominees in two constituencies in Gujarat, he added.

Mr. Masani also regretted the fact that in spite of electoral fronts formed by different parties, no polarization had taken place. In fact there was a proliferation of candidates and this made the election a gamble, he said.

Predicting that "Mrs. Gandhi and her party would emerge weaker", Mr. Masani said: "We may relax because the threat to the Constitution has passed", adding PTI.

Mr. Masani agreed with a questioner that people were supreme, but contended that Parliament was not sovereign. Constitutional amendments must be made through a referendum of the people, he said.

Besides the Constitution, Mr. Masani regards the "change of Government" as an issue in the elections. For he regards the present Government as one of "drift and incompetence".

He listed coal shortages, disruption of air services and "shortage of small coins" as proofs of this charge.

The Swatantra leader quoted a Gujarati proverb "a squint-eyed uncle is better than no uncle" to justify the four-party alliance, which has not been able to agree on any common minimum programme.

Mr. Masani noted that the manifestos of his party, the Organization Congress and the Jana Sangh showed "no major contradictions on major issues". The Samyukta Socialist Party was the only exception.

Mr. Masani quoted the English proverb "better late than never" and expressed the hope that the meeting of front partners on Monday would result in a joint electoral appeal and poll programme.

Mr. Masani said Mr. Morarji

Desai's talk of merger between Organization Congress and the Jana Sangh should be viewed in the long-term perspective and not in the context of the present elections.

It was, however, true that merger discussions had been held from time to time among "like-minded parties". He recalled how his own party had probed merger with the Jana Sangh and the BKD in the past.

He parried a question whether his party would support Mr. George Fernandes (SSP) in Bombay South by saying: "We are not supporting any candidate against him".

Mr. Masani made these further points: The Swatantra was opposed to the permit-liaison raj, excessive bureaucratic controls, disproportionate investment in the public sector, deficit financing encouraging heavy industry to the detriment of consumer goods and agriculture.

Kashmir: The American-Soviet trusteeship idea is Rajaji's personal view. The Swatantra Party held that Kashmir is part of India.

Hijack: I stand behind the Government's present stand against hijacking, but deplore the Prime Minister's failure to condemn Jordanian hijacking a few months ago.

The Swatantra leader dubbed the support of his wife and son to Congress (R) as "misguided" but told members of the Press Club that he had "no hard feelings".

He said 20 years ago he held socialist views which "I now know to be incorrect".

Mr. Masani recalled what he was told by an elder friend at the time: "If you are not a socialist at 21, you have no heart and if you are still a socialist at 41, you have no brain".

He said he ceased to be a socialist by the time he was 41.