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CALCUTTA - 27.

16th April, 1968.

Mr. M. R. Masani, M.P.,
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My dear Minoo,

Raju will be seeing you tomorrow in Bombay, and by now you must have had a full report of what went on at the meetings of the Central Parliamentary Board and the National Executive. Not being a member of the Central Parliamentary Board I did not attend, but I must tell you that your absence from the National Executive was very badly felt. The standard of debate and the compromises that were made left me quite depressed and this would not have been so had you been present.

I had several long meetings with Raju and a few other trusted people in the Party. Finally after the Central Parliamentary Board meeting on Saturday, Raju's advice was that our original idea of asking for the suspension of the Gujarat Executive and setting up an Ad-Hoc Committee under Baria should be given up because Baria had made it quite clear at the C.P.B. that he was opposed to strong action against the rebels and would not accept leadership even of the Assembly Party if strong action was taken. I therefore had to be content with making the following points as forcefully as I could at the National Executive :-

1. I refuted C.C.Desai's arguments that there was confusion about orders and instructions issued and proved that this was a clear breach of discipline. In answer to Desai's point that MLAs were not sheep to be herded here and there, I quoted the example of Prof. Ruthnaswamy's election in Madras, where the D.M.K. detailed their Ministers to ensure that their MLAs asked to vote for Ruthnaswamy did so. I pointed to the example in Orissa also. I stressed that in the larger interests of the Party as a whole, the national leadership will continue to have to make such commitments in future, and they will continue to have to be honoured if we are to function as a Party at all. This was not therefore an isolated instance that could be dismissed or disregarded.

contd....2/-



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2. C.C.Desai had made a charge that there was failure of leadership at the Centre and at the State level. I supported Dandeker's quotations from the record to show that many months before the date of election in Gujarat, the decision of the Central leadership and the commitments made to Vaidya were made perfectly clear. No one in Gujarat therefore ought to have been under any misapprehension on this score. I charged the Gujarat State leadership with dragging their feet and with not pulling their full weight behind the official candidate in time.

3. Broadly therefore, there were two ways of looking at this clear breach of discipline. One was the limited point of view of expediency. C. C. Desai had said that it was numbers that counted. If this was to be accepted, then we seemed to be in the wrong party and should be in the largest party which was still the Congress. Further it appeared during the debate that if no action at all was taken, there would still be resignations and numbers would reduce. There was therefore no substance in this argument.

The second way of looking at it was far more important, which was one of principle. The Swatantra Party had a reputation to maintain. Were we now to accept the fact that our discipline was worse than the discipline of parties like the D.M.K. who had shown that decisions taken at higher levels were implemented ?

Therefore I said one could come to the following conclusions :-

- (i) It was a great pity that the time limit given to Mahida for answering the charge-sheet had not expired before the meeting of the National Executive was held, as this seems to have immobilised the National Executive for the time being.
- (ii) The least that we could do in the circumstances was to send the identical charge-sheet to those who nominated Mahida and the other man who acted as his polling agent.

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(iii) In the meantime I wondered what our public stand should be, because when we went back to our respective homes we would be asked what action the National Executive of the Party had taken or was prepared to take in the face of this act of gross indiscipline. I suggested that the public stand should be that the National Executive took a very serious view of the matter and had served charge-sheets on all those concerned, and appropriate action would be taken when replies to these charge-sheets were received. I concluded by again referring to C. C. Desai who had said that we should look to the future and not to the past. I made the point that if we did not draw the appropriate lessons from the past we would assuredly lose the future.

I am sorry that we could not do better than this but Raju will have explained the whole background.

I have written to Shakuntala who looked after me so well. I am afraid I was not able to spend much time with her but she was most understanding. Thank you both very much.

Yours sincerely,

(C. R. PANI)

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