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Swatantra Party

ELECTION MANIFESTO

Assembly Elections, March 1972

Early last year, in the absence of a credible alternative programme presented by a wrangling "alliance" of Opposition Parties and with the haunting spectre of defections leading to unstable Governments in the States before them, the electorate voted Smt. Indira Gandhi's Party to power at the Centre; and because of the simple majority system, in spite of her Party receiving only 43% of the votes the Party secured 350 seats out of 521, giving it in its own right a two-thirds majority.

And now, inevitably, with the failure to evolve an effective policy to implement their fraudulent promises the Ruling Congress is compelled to search for scapegoats.

The Constitution of India is the first casualty. On the specious plea that the provisions of the Constitution came in the way of fulfilling electoral promises, the Ruling Congress has improperly utilised its majority in Parliament to enact the 24th and 25th Amendments to the Constitution by which all fundamental rights and not only the right to property, can virtually be abolished.

The Swatantra Party rejects the contention that the Constitution stands in the way of economic and social progress by impeding the implementation of the directive principles of State Policy. The Party is firmly of the view that the fundamental rights guaranteed to the people of India by the Constitution of the country, not only do not in any way obstruct the enactment of measures genuinely needed for achieving social and economic progress, but are essential for the preservation of democracy and, in particular, for the protection of minority and other weaker sections of the people from abuse of authority by the Party in power.

The Party therefore considers it its duty to ask the people of India to reject outright the 24th and 25th Amendments to the Constitution as they violate the Constitution and the Rule of Law, frustrate democracy, jeopardise the freedom of person, religion, education, association and speech and expose all property to expropriation. The Swatantra Party pledges itself to resist these attempts to deprive the citizen of his rights, liberties and freedoms.

Similarly, the proposed Press legislation is a continuation of the same policy of the Ruling Congress Party to destroy the Fundamental Rights of our people. Under the pretext of "diffusing ownership of the Press", the Government seeks to take power to manipulate shareholdings so as to ensure a dominant position for the Ruling Party and for the Communists, fellow-travellers and opportunists upon whom it relies for support. The result will be the stifling of all independent projection and critical interpretation of new and views.

The Swatantra Party will therefore give whole-hearted support to the Press in its struggle to exist as a free institution so vital to democracy. Regarding freedom of speech and expression as essential for the very existence of democracy, the Swatantra Party pledges itself to fight against this dangerous piece of legislation as it would fight for democracy itself. In this it is confident that the Press will also put up unremitting resistance, and in doing so, make possible the continued existence of free institutions in this country.

The decision to import foreign films through State Trading channels, the threat by the Minister of Foreign Trade to set up a panel to screen imported books, journals and magazines from the ideological point of view and to advise him on banning them, the continued misuse by the Ruling Party of All-India Radio and Television for its own purposes and the persistent refusal to convert All-India Radio and TV into autonomous corporations are all clear indications of the Ruling Party's desire to acquire a monopoly over every medium of mass communication in the country with the sole purpose of bringing about a one-Party, one-Leader rule.

Meanwhile, the Government has taken hardly any effective steps to fight inflation, check rising prices or stimulate economic growth. The economy is today stagnant; unemployment has not only reached massive proportions but is continuing to increase; and the economic conditions of the poorer sections of the country are worsening.

The country is being made to pay dearly for the unrealistic policies the Government has adopted and pursues, and in particular for the way in which it is allowing its faith in the dominance of the public sector and in widespread State control to outrun all discretion. But where the State ought rightly to be functioning with imagination and determination, it fumbles and falters, or is indifferent and inefficient.

Even after twenty-four years of Independence, the people of India, especially those living in and around the mighty rivers of India, are not safe from floods. Year after year, these cause extensive havoc, rendering people homeless and washing away valuable crops and cattle. Likewise, vast areas of the country are ravaged by drought almost every year. Yet, no long-term measures have been evolved and vigorously implemented for the provision and conservation of water and for its scientific utilisation and management. These, however, are the directions in which Government should find its proper function.

There is indeed a vast area in which the Government can play a legitimate and vital role. It is, for example, clearly for the State to undertake and provide adequate and efficiently functioning public utilities such as railways, electricity, roads and bridges, telephones and telegraphic services and communications generally. It is the Government again which can and must take effective measures for the protection and conservation of the natural resources of the country: under this category would come activities such as reafforestation of catchment areas of rivers, efficient planning and implementation of a variety of soil conservation measures, deepening of river beds, and similar measures all designed to prevent floods from ever assuming destructive proportions. It is the Government alone which can minimise the evil effects of droughts by taking steps designed to ensure that rain water is conserved to the maximum extent possible so that sub-soil water reservoirs are replenished.

In a developing country, Government has an important role to play in the industrial sphere. This role should primarily be that of a helper and regulator but not a participant. The business of Government is government and not business. There is a great deal that Government can do in a developing country through the development of roads and other forms of communications, transport and cheap electric power. Today these functions of government are being neglected while the Government needlessly enters the field of trade and manufacture of products which are not of much significance to the life of the country. While the Swatantra Party has always believed in a mixed economy where the Government and free enterprise would cooperate side by side on equal and autonomous terms in the service of the community, it is of the view that there should be no further wasteful investment of the taxpayers' money in the governmental sector, which has failed to function effectively, until such time as it is able to give a reasonable return on the people's hard earned savings.

The Government can again encourage and participate in research on the scale and comprehensiveness necessary to enable the country to keep pace with the technological development taking place all over the world, and to sustain the industrial and agricultural progress at a satisfactory rate of growth.

Government can also assume responsibility for helping the small farmer to secure the full benefits of the green revolution by providing him with facilities for the intensive cultivation of land in the form of water, fertiliser, seed, pesticides, tools, credit, improved techniques and electric power and by providing reasonable support prices calculated to give the farmer a fair margin of profit.

Until all these legitimate tasks have been satisfactorily discharged, the Swatantra Party would deprecate all attempts to accelerate merely on ideological grounds, the pace of nationalisation and to expand almost indiscriminately the public sector without proper regard to management and efficiency considerations. This would be inexcusable both because past experience has amply proved that

it would involve wasteful use of scarce resources — material, financial and human; and also because it would retard the accomplishment of basic and essential tasks without which the country's progress can neither take place nor proceed at the pace needed.

For the satisfactory and efficient discharge of even the legitimate tasks, the Government must have an administrative machinery with a high degree of honesty, impartiality, and of managerial and executive competence. It has unfortunately, to be recognised that our administrative machinery today is not of the requisite calibre. It should be realised also that the administrative machinery is inclusive of ministers: it is they indeed who set the tone of that machinery, how impartial it is to be, how incorruptible, it is, how independent it is, that is, how strictly it operates according to the principles of the rule of the law. The need for such emphasis on the quality of the administrative machinery arises from the fact that the administrative machinery of the State, enjoying all the powers of a monopolist, is not subject even to such regulations as the State may impose in the case of a private monopolist.

When the Swatantra Party was formed in 1959 and placed its principles and policies before the people it was perhaps still possible to hope that the policies and measures being followed by the Congress Government might in course of time yield results. Today, it is crystal clear to the meanest intelligence that the policies of statism and inflation are ruinous and self-defeating.

More than ever the Swatantra Party is therefore convinced that the principles and policies it has stood for ever since its foundation are sound and that only their adoption and determined pursuit would make possible the speedy achievement of the legitimate objective of good life for the common man in this country. While reaffirming its faith in them, and without in any way departing from its stand on any of the several issues that have not been specifically referred to here, the Swatantra Party restates below certain of the more basic and immediately relevant of these principles and policies:

(i) The Party holds that the policies of Government should be founded on faith in the people and not on State compulsion and the encouragement of hatred and conflict between classes, expropriation, repudiation of obligations and the conferment of more and more powers on the officials of Government at the expense of the freedom of the citizens.

(ii) The Party stands for every effort being made to foster and maintain spiritual values and preserve what is good in our many-sided culture and tradition, and avoid the dominance of a purely materialist philosophy of life having little or no reference to its content or quality.

(iii) The Party holds that a sense of stability and incentive for individual effort can be restored only by strict adherence to the fundamental rights and guarantees specified in the Constitution as originally adopted in respect of freedom of person and property, trade and occupation, and just compensation for any property compulsorily acquired by the State for public purposes.

(iv) The Party holds that all policies should be discarded that lead to excessive inflation, high prices that reduce the value of savings, endowments and fixed incomes and lead to greater hardships for the weaker sections.

(v) The Party holds that the paramount need is for achieving higher agricultural production and that this is best attained through the self-employed peasant-proprietor who is interested in obtaining the highest yield from his land. It holds that the level of life of the rural people should be improved by (a) assuring to the tenants and share croppers security of tenure and fair rents, (b) by effectively guaranteeing to landless labourers a minimum wage, (c) by protecting farmers from calamities not of their making, through facilities for insuring crop and cattle, and (d) by ensuring farmers through fair support prices protection against the effects of wide fluctuation of prices. The Party is firmly opposed to any policy of monopoly procurement or purchase of agricultural commodities.

(vi) The Party holds that higher industrial production is possible only by offering adequate incentives for higher production and expansion inherent in competitive enterprise, with adequate safeguards for the protection of labour and consumers against profiteering where there is no competition or where competition does not secure the necessary corrective.

(vii) The Swatantra Party stands for a fair deal to labour, both industrial and agriculture, and would therefore urge the acceptance of a fair wage as a basic principle for attaining a satisfactory wage structure. The Swatantra Party however is of the view that collective bargaining between employers and employees without Government's interference is the only proper method for solving labour and industrial disputes. The Party holds also that since only in increased prosperity can higher wages be possible, a wise labour policy would take care to see that the need for continuous increase in productivity is continually emphasised.

The Party's workers will be expected to promote the Party's policy on labour and may provide active guidance to trade unions so as to try and secure its acceptance by labour.

(viii) The Party stands for the restriction of State enterprise to such heavy industry as are necessary to supplement private enterprise in that field, such national services as the railways and the starting of new enterprises which are difficult for private capital and initiative to establish.

(ix) The Party stands for the preservation of the freedom of the small and self-employed artisans, craftsmen and traders who are in danger of losing their occupational opportunities by reason of the policy of Statism. These persons perform inexpensively a great, widespread and essential function in our society, and their gradual extinction will be a national misfortune and add to our unemployment problem.

The Party is opposed to the State entering indiscriminately the field of trade and disturbing free distribution.

and introducing controls and official management with all its wastefulness and inefficiency.

(-.) The Party holds that taxation should be kept at such levels as will not interfere with a reasonable living standard for the people, both rural and urban, and which while being necessary and sufficient for the carrying on of administration and such social and economic services as are taken up by the State, is yet not so high as to be confiscatory or so ubiquitous as to prevent capital formation and private investment. It is therefore opposed to a programme of development based on crippling taxation, and abnormal deficit financing.

(xi) The Swatantra Party holds that a clean and good administration is the country's most vital need today. It also holds that the quality of the administrative machinery in regard to incorruptibility and impartiality is determined essentially by the standards set in these respects by the ministers, by those who constitute Government. It hopes that with the early establishment of the Lokpal and Lokayukt machinery, there will be marked improvement at all levels including in particular the highest. Then alone can there be justification for the people to hope for an efficient and honest administration at all levels that matter, namely, the village, the taluka or the tehsil, the district and the States.

The Swatantra Party holds that whatever other steps may be taken to raise the standard of administration, so long as controls are not reduced to an absolute minimum, and the present system of permits and licences is not discontinued, it will be impossible to make any dent on the extent to which corruption permeates the administrative machinery at the Centre and at the State level today.

In effect, thus, the Swatantra Party offers to the electorate a constructive approach for the solution of the country's manifold problems, based on restrained and enlightened self-interest at the individual level, and a service purpose at the State level designed to build secure foundations for progress in all fields. All in all, the Swatantra Party would seek to restore in the body politic the Gandhian principle of giving first priority to the rule of Dharma as the true basis for enduring moral progress and material prosperity.

The Party's State Units, which are faced with a General Election in March, will no doubt draw up their own respective election manifestoes with due regard to the special problems of their respective States enunciated in the preceding paragraphs.