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SWATANTRA AT THE CROSS ROADS

by V.T. SREENVASAN

It was in June 1959 that Rajaji founded the Swatantra Party - after he was convinced beyond any possibility of doubt, that the policies of the "Socialist" Congress, under the one-man dictatorship of Jawaharlal Nehru, were bound to lead the Country to Communism. Rajaji had no illusions that the Party that he had founded would not be able to make any headway (with adult franchise and an 80% illiterate electorate) unless a man could be found who can spear-head the attack on the strongly entrenched Congress. Rajaji with his unerring instinct and sixth sense picked out Minoo Masani as the Man of Destiny whose mission it would be to save this ancient Country with its glorious heritage in religion, morality and culture from the dangerous drift to Communism which appeared inevitable if the Congress continued to have its way. Whether it is a new political Party or it is a cultural Institution, its progress is bound to depend on the personality and sense of dedication on the part of its principal Executive who is called the General Secretary. The last eight years have proved that, if to-day the Swatantra Party is the principal Opposition in the Indian Parliament and in the States of Gujarat and Rajasthan and holds the reins of power in Orissa, the credit must go almost entirely to the dynamism and sense of dedication brought to bear on his work by Minoo Masani. Next to the Founder-Leader, Rajaji, Masani stands head and shoulders over every other leader in the Party. If a Government of talents were formed in this Country to take it out of the morass into which the Congress has led it, Masani would be the undisputed Prime Minister. Had he been born in any other free Country, he would have adorned the Cabinet of that Country.

In view of all this, Masani's frank statement to the Press in Madras, after the conclusion of the meeting of the General Council on the 1st and 2nd of June '69, must cause great concern to members of the Swatantra Party all over the Country. They know that, with Masani standing out of the National Executive, the latter would be playing "Hamlet" without the Prince of Denmark.

Its decisions and resolutions will not cut any ice with the vast majority of Swatantra workers in the Country.

Only 69 Members (out of 170) attended the meetings of the General Council in Madras. I was one of them. Every one knows that Masani felt compelled to resign from the Central Parliamentary Board and National Executive

when he found rank indiscipline in the leadership of the Gujarat Party and in the majority of the Swatantra P.M.L.s. This led to the defeat of the official candidate in the Rajya Sabha election. With the full backing of the Central Parliamentary Board and the National Executive, Masani had pledged the support of the Party to this official candidate when he was the General Secretary of the Party. Two resolutions had been brought forward in the General Council to rectify matters and make it possible for Masani to rejoin the National Executive. If only Rajaji had lent his full support to those resolutions (which were meant to cleanse the Party machinery in Gujarat), they would have been passed by a thumping majority. For reasons which will never be known, Rajaji did not lend his support to the resolutions. It is, therefore, not a matter for surprise that the resolutions were defeated. What was surprising, however, was the argument that a "pledge" ceases to be a pledge depending on circumstances.

One thing, however, is certain. If Congress is to be ousted from power at the Centre in 1972, there is only ~~one~~ one man in the Swatantra Party who is capable of doing it. And his name is Minoo Masani.

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