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SWATANTRA PARTY - BOMBAY
WHAT SWATANTRA STANDS FOR

(An interview with Sri.C.Rajagopalachari by Hindustan Times Special Correspondent.)

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Twelve years after India won her freedom from an alien Government through a struggle in which he played prominent part, Mr.C.Rajagopalachari, Founder of the Swatantra Party, with a passion and an alertness of mind undimmed by age, believes that a new struggle must be waged against the national government in power to preserve the freedom of the individual.

Individual freedom is not only an ideal, according to Rajaji, to be sought for its own sake, but the most potent instrument of increasing national wealth by stepping up production. And for this purpose individual enterprise and initiative must be given the fullest expression and nothing should be done to deprive them of the rewards they earn by their own effort.

The policy of the Congress Party which controls the Government, Rajaji believes, threatens imminent destruction of this freedom by its attempt at "improvement by compulsion", by increasing encroachment on individual enterprise and initiative and growing State control of every aspect of life.

"The Swatantra Party has come into being", in Rajaji's words, "to oppose totalitarianism, be it what the Communists desire or what in short-sighted competition with them, the Congress Party has adopted as its policy. Courage and full-hearted opposition to all attacks on Freedom, this is the call of the party".

Complacency Shaken Instead of State action, except in certain well-defined fields and to protect the weaker sections of the population Rajaji would like to give full scope to the Gandhian concept of trusteeship and the innate sense of the millions" in dharma or moral consciousness.

Instead of compulsion, he would have persuasion through education founded on moral values.

However, baffling Rajaji's new philosophy may be and it is baffling only to those, he implies, who have been indoctrinated by the cliches and the wrong propaganda of the present Government, it is the philosophy on which the Swatantra Party has been founded.

However curious a mixture, according to its opponents, it may appear to be a concrete economic formula and a vague moralism, there is no doubt that it has succeeded in arousing interest and stimulating thought in all parts of the country.

Judging by the criticism it has aroused, it seems to have shaken the Congress from its complacent attitude and opened a new avenue of agitation and action to the growing discontent in the country.

The last general elections in Kerala had indicated that a large number of people seemed to consider the Communist Party as the only alternative to the Congress. The Swatantra Party offers the third alternative or to put in Rajaji's words at the interview: "The Swatantra Party offers a field of operation to those who dislike the Communist Party and who are discontented with the Congress for several reasons including defects in administration."

The Swatantra Party does not intend to contest any by-election, according to Rajaji, so that the strength of the party will be known only in the next general elections.

In the meanwhile Rajaji himself is untroubled by doubts whether his Party's policies will catch the imagination of the masses or not, "I shall try to do what is right and leave the rest to God", he said.

Rajaji lives in an unassuming house in a quiet corner of Madras City. The simplicity and austerity which even the splendours of Rashtrapati Bhavan did not affect still distinguishes his mode of life.

He carries his 81 years lightly. Though his interview with me lasted for nearly two hours, not once did his voice weaken or lose its restrained resonance. The interview made it clear that he retains not only a razor-like sharpness of mind, but also an amazing memory.

I started my interview by asking him what was it specifically that had moved him to start an entirely new party and not continue as he had done before as an elder statesman who had watched the Government's policies and spoken only when he disagreed with some aspect of it.

"Provocative Cause" Rajaji named the Nagpur resolution of the Congress as the specific cause. "The agricultural, the land policies of ceilings and the drive towards collectivism which were announced by the Congress at Nagpur and which were not simply left to remain on paper but have been taken up by the Government; that is the provocative cause for the formation of the Party."

Why did he not feel the same impulse when the Congress adopted the "Socialist pattern" resolution at Avadi?

"That remained more or less an ideal and did not take shape", he replied. "Socialistic ideals have been off and on incorporated in Congress resolutions. But that is very different from the steps taken to interfere with land ownership of peasants and others. When this line of action was definitely taken up, I felt it was time to do something and hence the party."

Rajaji's answer made it clear that the familiar pattern of political development in India had repeated itself. When India was dependent the Congress movement held supreme sway but it also became the spawn-in-around of a number of groups and parties in reaction to some action or policy of the Congress.

Rajaji confirmed this impression by emphasizing that the new party "arises on account of the differences with the Congress. All important matters really making a difference between the Congress and the people have been included in the principles of the Swatantra Party."

FOREIGN POLICY As the 21 principles proclaimed at the national convention of the party at Bombay on August 1 mainly deal with the economic policies of the Government, did this imply that the party agreed with the policies of the Government in other fields?

Rajaji's reply was: The omission of certain things will not in any significant measure matter. For instance, we have not included the language question in the party's principles. We have not included prohibition. Other examples, too, may be given. In all these matters, I would like the majority in Parliament to prevail. They are not matters on which an individual party should be formed.

With regard to the omission of reference to foreign policy from the party's principles, Rajaji said that it has been done deliberately. "If the party takes responsibility for government, it will no doubt have its own foreign policy. Today every member of the party will be free to hold his own opinion on the subject."

Generally in matters of foreign policy, we may expect overwhelming support from Parliament if not unanimous support for any government that is in power with the majority vote of the people", he added.

Pressed to express his views on the party's attitude to the non-alignment policy, Rajaji could only say "I don't think any member of the Swatantra Party will be against the non-alignment policy of

of the present Government of India. It is open to the members of the Swatantra Party to hold any views of their own on this point. How non-alignment is to be worked is a matter of sound discretion. We are yet too far away from power and so the question does not arise now."

As Rajaji's answers made it clear that the Swatantra Party had been formed because of differences with the Congress and that too in a specific field and the party had therefore been described as "negative", I asked Rajaji how he would answer this criticism.:

"They may call it negative, but it is not," he added. It is wrong to call the principles of the party negative. Freedom is not negative. Incentive to private efforts is not negative and I can go on multiplying the examples. The negative of a negative is a positive. Semantic juggling is no answer to our party.

POSITIVE APPEAL The greater part of the interview was devoted to an expansion by Rajaji of the Central theme of the party which is the full restoration of individual freedom in agriculture, industry, business and in education combined with the faith that the people know what is good for them and if left to themselves would build up a prosperous India where the "trusteeship" concept would replace socialism.

Rajaji is of the view that if the profit motive is given full play, the only limitation on it being to prevent it going "mad" or anti-social-national wealth can be rapidly increased. It is an illusion, he thinks, to attribute any positive value to the "liberty" of the State in the production of wealth.

In a country which has lived in an atmosphere of planned development for a decade, Rajaji's concept has evoked criticism from many quarters. I sought to get answers to some of the main criticisms.

What is the basic objection to the principle of co-operation in farming when Mr. Nehru has repeatedly stated that such co-operation would be voluntary, I asked.

In his reply Rajaji indicated that while he was not opposed to the principle of co-operation as such, he was opposed to co-operative or joint farming. Although the Government may start with service-cooperatives, co-operative farming had not been given up.

"If we do not protect now, it will be too late to do so later on. The Government still persists in the joint farming idea by way of propaganda or otherwise. Co-operative farming to my mind means definitely collectivization. 'Voluntary' is a good word; but when Government pressure and subsidies come from public funds, the word 'Voluntary' means practically enforcement through Government pressure. All small savings, for instance, come 'voluntarily', but you are aware of the amount of protest the people are raising against such small savings drives."

With regard to land ceilings, Rajaji thought the policy would not help landless peasants. "I know already that the landless peasants are now convinced that this plan of ceilings on land will not give them lands to cultivate but that it will be taken over by the so-called co-operatives, which will be worked by Government machinery."

To further questions Rajaji referred to his writings and speeches on the subject and to the principles of the party which holds that food production is best attained through the self-employed peasant proprietor who is interested in obtaining the highest yield from his land. The Government should help them in every way without disturbing this basic principle.

PRIVATE ENTERPRISE Whether the principle applies only to farmers who possess economic units, who number about a fourth of the rural

peasant community or also to the rest who either possess uneconomic units or are landless has not been made clear either by Rajaji or the party.

Rajaji spoke at length on the question of individual enterprise and initiative as applied to the production of national wealth.

"I am firmly of opinion", he said that Socialism will not work in our country before we have raised the wealth of our country to a higher level. For raising national wealth to a higher level, we require incentive for private enterprise. If any policy goes against the maintenance and increase of this enterprise, that policy is wrong. Our concentrated efforts should therefore be to increase the incentive for private enterprise.

Developing this theme he said "Socialism is a distribution policy. I am sure we cannot increase wealth through Socialism or through any form of compulsion. If socialism is applied today, it means a government drive through compulsion. To produce more wealth, I am clear in my mind, it will not succeed. If it should be successful even by a miracle, it would have robbed us of all our freedom."

PROFIT MOTIVE Rajaji places great importance to personal interest or the profit motive in the drive for the production of wealth. He said: "The profit motive is absolutely necessary. The Government can only take a share of the profits through taxation and this must serve all its needs. I do not expect that we shall be able to make any substantial addition to production without the profit motive, except where the Government itself produces things required for itself and in fields which are legitimately within its province."

The 21 principles of the party have specified what the province of the Government in industry is - "heavy industries such as are necessary to supplement private enterprise in that field, such national services as Railways and the starting of new enterprises which are difficult for private initiative".

As regards the profit motive, Rajaji himself pointed out that "our principles include reasonable curbs to prevent the profit motive from going mad", i.e. according to the principles, "adequate safeguards for the protection of labour and against unreasonable profits, prices and dividends where there is no competition or where competition does not secure the necessary corrective."

I asked Rajaji whether he believed that the profit motive was in itself sufficient for all-round development particularly in an underdeveloped country like India. Would not capital flow only in those directions where quick profit could be made?

Rajaji thought that the word "underdeveloped" was only a cliché. Every country has to develop by stages and therefore it was a gradual thing.

"If we wish to accord freedom and at the same time increase production, whether we are an underdeveloped country or an advanced country, personal interest is necessarily to be encouraged and exploited," he said.

DEMOCRATIC PLAN As regards planned development, he said he had "no objection whatsoever to the Government taking into account the present industrial activities and then making a democratic plan as to the direction in which action should be taken. But I again emphasize that a free country based on a successful drive for competition will best produce the results we need. Government interference will interfere with this freedom to consumer and producer. If we wish to preserve freedom even if the Government is sure of its opinions, it should educate the people in those lines and not resort to compulsion."

Was it possible to have any sort of planning, even democratic planning without some compulsion through legislation?

"If your compulsion is in the right direction, education should succeed", Rajaji replied. "If your compulsion is in the wrong direction, you will fail in that education. Persuasion is the test of the correctness of the position."

"I say that compulsion is not necessary. On the contrary compulsion is necessary when a benevolent dictator is sure of his own opinion and the correctness of his opinion and wishes to put it into action. I do not think this is consistent with freedom. This is the dictatorship I object to."

"If we have no faith in the people that they will accept what is good for them, then dictatorship must be the rule. We ought to have faith in the people; we ought to believe that they will understand what is good for them and we should not resort to compulsion."

"We have large resources for the Government to operate in certain matters of public welfare - that is, taxation. Taxation should be reasonable and not such as to kill incentive."

Rajaji had definite views on what is "crippin" taxation.

"Taxation is crippling which does not leave enough behind to satisfy the urge for expansion and further investments. It must be remembered that the money which goes into the Government, though it has been for good purposes, involves greater costs of administration, than the money which is invested for the same purpose through the man to whom it belongs. I believe that wisdom demands that as much as possible be left to private enterprise and just what is wanted for government work should be taken away by taxation. Barricade defence industries and certain other industries legitimately taken over by the Government on account of their intrinsic public character or on account of their being individual and pioneering industries for which private capital may not be forthcoming; taxation should be limited to the requirements and not for building up State Capitalism."

Rajaji disagreed with me when I said that surely some measures of the Government had succeeded as the statistics of the national income show.

"I don't think any measures have succeeded. I don't believe in the national statistics being reliable. What is it after all? All that increase in national income is, in my opinion, only paper money subject to the inflation of prices. It is only my opinion as an untrained economist."

Winding up the questions I had put to him on the economic principles of the party, Rajaji said that "they take us to the fundamental difference between the Socialistic pattern of government and the free form of Government I stand for. Certain well-known countries in the West have demonstrated that freedom is compatible with progress and prosperity."

TRUSTEESHIP: The Swatantra Party in its principles has laid great emphasis on the principle of trusteeship of Gandhiji "Which is to foster and utilize the sense of moral obligation, the principle of satisfaction and sense of fulfilment felt by individuals in serving others instead of legislative and other forms of compulsion." The party also stands for every effort being made to foster and maintain "spiritual values and avoid the dominance of a purely materialistic philosophy of life which thinks only in terms of quantity and of life without any reference to its conduct and quality."

But its economic formula for increasing national wealth is to give full play to the profit motive within the limitations already mentioned. Critics of the Swatantra party have pointed out this as a contradiction in terms; if not something even worse - self-contradiction.

advocating full material rewards for those who have the resources and enterprise to earn them and spiritual values for others who have not.

Again while the party lays emphasis on production it has nothing concrete to say on distribution. How can these seeming contradictions be resolved? Has not the Swatantra Party left out something? I asked.

Rajaji gave a general exposition of the concept of trusteeship in answer to these questions.

"Our concerted efforts should be to increase the incentive for private enterprise so that national wealth may be increased. It is premature to think of equitable distribution now. But in the process of making wealth people should be made aware of their duty to the community. This should be done not by compulsion but by a moral drive. When the time arrives for attempting equitable distribution, it is time to consider all the steps we should take to enforce the doctrine of trusteeship. At present we should concentrate all our efforts on producing and increasing wealth and not follow any policy which will impede that process."

ANSWER TO HATRED Rajaji also believes that the doctrine of trusteeship is an answer to the propaganda of hatred which he thinks the present government follows consciously or otherwise.

"The present policies" he said "try to polarize people into rich and poor. It is totally wrong. No particular man is rich or poor. The gradation is very slow from rich to poor. You may be poorer than your neighbour on the right and richer than the neighbour on the left."

"I am aware of one thing - the present policies of the Government are not going to improve the general welfare or make the poor rich. No wealth can be produced without some capital and people should be encouraged to save and to put the savings into production. If the Government takes away all the savings, it will only result in terrible waste and will produce much less than what it would do in the hands of private persons. It is only then that wealth can be increased on the whole and poor people can get employment and be better off."

Developing further how the trusteeship idea can fight hatred, Rajaji said: "The rich people do not deserve to be hated because they help to produce more wealth in which everybody will share. Hatred and jealousy are bad for everybody - to the man who hates and the man who is hated: to the man who is envied and the man who envies. We want the doctrine of trusteeship to be practised so as to reduce this hatred and jealousy. Government regulations to transfer wealth and property will only increase hatred and jealousy and not reduce them. The essential principle of trusteeship is its voluntary character."

In addition to this concept, Rajaji has emphasized in his speeches and writings the importance of building society on dharma, a concept adopted by the Swatantra party in its principles.

I asked Rajaji to explain it in the context of the freedom he advocates:

"The dharma that I refer to is common to all religions - truthfulness in behaviour as well as in feeling. This is dharma and common to all religions. Unless people are made to believe in and follow dharma that is to say, people as a whole, including bad characters, we cannot have prosperity or happiness. The Government too should follow dharma."

"Excessive taxation is not dharma. Dispossession of private property is not dharma. Protection of weaker elements of society is dharma"

and it is the duty both of the Government and the people who are in a position to protect and help. Dharma can be propagated only through great religions, which people respectively possess."

Rajaji also emphasized that the Government can do something in associating dharma with education. The present negative attitude was wrong. The Government could be impartial, but at the same time positive in giving aid, as in Scotland, to all denominational institutions without any discrimination.

What emerges from the principles of the party is an economic formula which has been tried with success in some countries of the West to be applied against what Rajaji calls dharma.

DO WHAT IS RIGHT. Was this approach, I asked Rajaji, such as to have mass appeal ?. Critics of the party have said, I pointed out to him that it had attracted so far only a certain type of people—those in the upper income brackets.

Rajaji replying to the first question said "My simple answer is that I shall try to do what I think is right and leave the rest to God. I do not propose to base policies on prospects of success. This does not mean that I am not a practical person. It means I am fully confident that the mass can be disabused of the false promises made to them.

"The peasantry feel that the attack on ownership of land is a dangerous and tyrannical act. If anybody offers them any patent medicine for making them richer they will accept. But I don't believe in any false patent medicines, and socialism is such a one.

Rajaji emphasized that We should not count on chances of success when we want to do what is right. We must persist and one day or the other people will come to realize that socialism is out of place in our country now. General welfare can be reached and unemployment problems solved only through much greater private production. Capital is necessary for private production. Hating Capitalists is not the way to increase production."

To the second question Rajaji said that it was only the Government who believed that the upper classes are with the Swatantra Party. That is because the Government was oppressing these classes.

"Unfortunately, people who are oppressed are with the tyrant. The upper rich classes are not with us. Their hearts may be with us. But hearts do not help parties. All their activities and their resources are manipulated by the Congress. I look forward to all sensible people being with us and I believe that sensible people will make a majority. Those who yield to fear will be in the hands of the ruling party, but they will be a minority and also half-hearted elements."

Rajaji refused to be drawn into answering Mr. Nehru's criticisms of the party. "On the whole Mr. Nehru is a patient man. He has been very patient with me than I have been with him." he said.

SOCIALISM When I asked him to comment on Mr. Nehru's remarks in Kathmandu that socialism was not suitable to an underdeveloped country since it would only distribute poverty, Rajaji said that Mr. Nehru speaks to the intellectuals when he answers such questions. But in India his activities are to do propaganda among the people. He is not dealing with intellectuals.

If the Swatantra Party succeeds in weakening the Congress, how sure was he that it would not strengthen the communists, for instance? I asked.

"The activities of the Swatantra Party will not make anybody go more left than he is. Those who are dissatisfied with the Congress are not going to join the Communist Party just because the Swatantra Party has come in. Anybody going to the Communist party will have

have nothing to do with the Swatantra Party. The Swatantra party offers a field of operation to those who dislike the Communist Party and those who have been discontented with the Congress."

Already Rajaji said when I asked him his views on the bifurcation of Bombay State, the Swatantra Party seems to have had some impact on an important domestic issue.

"I think the rise of the Swatantra Party may have something to do with the present Government of India turning a favourable eye on the bifurcation issue. They may believe that granting the demands of the Samyukta Maharashtrians and the Maha Gujaratis may reduce the discontent against the Congress in keeping with the new party. On the other hand, people are likely to attribute concessions to the rise of the Swatantra Party."

MUSLIMS: I asked him to elucidate what he had said about Muslims in a speech at Madras recently.

"The Swatantra Party intends to make no discrimination against Muslims or any other particular community. Even the present Government has enunciated the policy of non-discrimination. It may be that Muslims may feel that they are not having a fair deal in actual administration. That would be a question not of discrimination but of injustice."

My last question to Rajaji was to ask him to explain his remarks about not going to Delhi before the Swatantra Party was strong enough.

He has he had never said that he would not go to Delhi on a private visit. What he meant was that "the Swatantra Party will go to Delhi when it is strong enough in the country. Delhi does not mean the State of Delhi but the headquarters of the Central Government and Parliament."

"Pondering on the interview, an echo of what was said many centuries ago about Delhi came to my mind when I left Rajaji's house."

DELHI DUR AST - but only the next two general elections will show how far the party would have to travel. Till then, as Rajaji says they have left the rest to God.
