

Swatantra Party

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When replying, please quote our Reference No.

July 7, 1969

Dear Choudhary Charan Singh,

Handwritten signature and initials.

You must have already seen in the papers a Statement issued by the National Executive of the Swatantra Party at its meeting in Madras on June 22 and 23 in regard to efforts to evolve a broad-based democratic Party. Your General Secretary, Mr. Prakash Vir Shastri, whom you were kind enough to depute to be present at this meeting, must have already reported to you on the proceedings and his impressions. May I say his presence was most helpful!

We enclose herewith an extract from the Minutes of this meeting dealing with this subject.

Now that the National Executive has authorised Prof. Ranga, the General Secretary Mr. Dandekar and Mr. Masani to continue talks, we should proceed further in the matter. You could perhaps meet again in Delhi, where the next session of Parliament will commence on 21st July.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Handwritten signature of R. C. Cooper.

(R. C. Cooper)
Acting for General Secretary

Ch. Charan Singh,
President,
Bharatiya Kranti Dal,
Lucknow.

Encl : *

CC : Mr. Prakash Vir Shastri, MP,
1 Canning Lane,
New Delhi.

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Prof. N. C. Ranga, M.P. - Madhuban
✓ Mr. M. R. Masani, MP,
148 Mahatma Gandhi Road,
Bombay 1.

Extract from the Minutes of the Meeting of the National Executive held in
Madras on June 23, 1969

Review of negotiations with the BMD and the Jan Sangh :

" Mr. Prakash Vir Shastri was invited to join the meeting at 11 am.

Welcoming Mr. Prakash Vir Shastri, the President Prof. Ranga said that the presence of Mr. Shastri indicated the keenness of the BMD in achieving the objective of bringing into being a national party capable of taking over the reins of power at the Centre. He invited Mr. Prakash Vir Shastri to make his remarks.

Giving reasons for the BMD's anxiety to achieve an early merger of democratic parties, Mr. Prakash Vir Shastri said that recent developments particularly after the mid-term elections had convinced the BMD that while on the one hand the Communist Parties were rapidly gaining strength, the Congress Party on the other, was fast disintegrating. This was a dangerous development threatening the country's security and democratic way of life. The BMD was therefore convinced that the only way to fill the vacuum caused at the Centre by the disintegration of the Congress and to arrest the growing influence of the Communist was for like-minded democratic parties to get together and form a formidable national party which could make an effective bid for power.

In a reference to the Jan Sangh Mr. Shastri said that though in the beginning they evinced interest in a merger, as indicated by the fact that the Jan Sangh's National Convention in Bombay had appointed a sub-committee to negotiate with other parties, their subsequent actions had given BMD the impression that the Jan Sangh was not really interested in any merger but only in limited arrangements like United Fronts inside Parliament and the State legislatures. According to Mr. Shastri the absence of the President of the Jan Sangh from the meetings in New Delhi on May 26 and 27 (despite the fact that the meeting had been arranged to suit his convenience) and the fact that the representatives of the Jan Sangh who were present did not possess the necessary authority on behalf of their party had further convinced the BMD that the Jan Sangh was not serious about merger. It was against this background that Mr. Charan Singh issued a statement that he would not negotiate with the Jan Sangh any further. However, Mr. Shastri made it clear that it was not the intention of the BMD to bang the door on the Jan Sangh; indeed, he said that talks could be resumed with them as soon as they gave evidence of their seriousness in regard to this matter.

Mr. Shastri also referred to the discussions the BMD was presently having with the PSP and said that reports in a section of the Press that the PSP would not participate in any proposal that involved the Santantra Party or the Jan Sangh were incorrect. No such condition had been put to the BMD representative who attended the PSP's National Executive in Mysore recently. Mr. Shastri added that Chaudhary Charan Singh had, indeed, made it clear to the PSP that in the event of the talks being successful the name of the new party would not contain the word "Socialist" although the "social justice" and "social welfare" objectives of the PSP were acceptable to him.

This was followed by a general discussion with Mr. Shastri. Annexure C sets out briefly the questions that were raised and Mr. Shastri's views concerning them.

At the close of the discussion it was decided that the following statement (which was drafted with Mr. Prakash Vir Shastri's concurrence) be released to the Press :

" The National Executive of the Santatra Party having considered the reports made by Prof. Banga and Mr. Masani on their talks on 26th/27th May with the leaders of other parties on the merger issue, and after having discussed the matter with Mr. Prakash Vir Shastri, General Secretary of the BHD, has decided to have further talks with the BHD and continue their efforts jointly with the BHD, to evolve a broad-based democratic party to meet the emergency arising out of the growing Communist violence and subversion in the country and to fill the vacuum caused by the deterioration in the Congress Party. The Santatra Party will strive for maximum cooperation, including merger between all democratic parties on the basis of a common programme. The National Executive authorises the President, the General Secretary of the Party and Mr. Masani to continue talks on its behalf with the leaders of other Parties."

On behalf of the National Executive Prof. Banga thanked Mr. Prakash Vir Shastri for having accepted his invitation and attended the meeting. Mr. Prakash Vir Shastri and Mr. M. R. Masani then retired from the meeting.

Questions discussed with Mr. Pramesh Vir Shastri

- Q 1. Why is the BKD so insistent on a merger straightaway? Why not, to begin with, closer working in Parliament and State legislature as a United Democratic Front?

A 1. In the first place, the experience of the short-lived BYD Government in UP had convinced Mr. Charan Singh that such arrangements were unworkable. So long as the partners in the United Front retained their separate identities, they were tempted to seek party gains at the expenses of the other parties. Secondly considering the growing and organised Communist threat, the BKD was of the opinion that a United Front would not be strong enough to challenge that threat effectively or to fill the vacuum caused by the impending disintegration of the Congress Party at the Centre and in the States. He underlined the fact that the results of, and the developments after, the mid-term elections had radically changed the political context and that what must be aimed at was not a coalition of Parties in Opposition, but the formation of a strong national democratic party capable of taking over the reins of power.

- Q 2. What were the BKD's views in regard to the following :

Minorities, Language, Kashmir, Nuclear Weapons, Large-Scale Industries?

Mr. Dandekar explained that while these and other matters would undoubtedly be thrashed out in negotiations between the representatives of the various parties, members of the Swatantra Party's National Executive wished to know the views of the BKD on these important issues.

- A 2. Minorities --

Mr. Shastri referred to the proposed Amendment to the Constitution in regard to reservation of seats in Parliament and State Assemblies and said that while the BKD was of the view that such reservation should no longer be continued the fact remained that there were large numbers of Harijans and those belonging to scheduled castes and tribes who were members not only of his party but also of the Swatantra Party. Therefore, the BKD had decided that they would ask for the gradual removal of reservation of seats by reducing the number of reserved seats at the rate of 1/3rd at the end of every five years so that after 15 years the reservation of seats would disappear altogether.

In regard to Christian missionaries, he said that the BKD's view was the same as that of Mahatma Gandhi viz., where Indian missionaries were available, foreign missionaries should not be permitted, particularly in the sensitive border areas where their activities must be regarded as objectionable.

Language

The BKD's view was that Hindi should not be forced on non-Hindi speaking States till such time as those States were ready to accept Hindi.

Large-Scale Industries

The Bharatiya Kranti Dal's Manifesto states that the Private Sector should be excluded from large scale industries which should be owned, or at any rate effectively controlled, by the State, whereas the Swatantra Party's policy was quite different in that it did not make any such exclusions and believed in free enterprise.

Mr. Shastri said that in regard to controls there were always degrees of control and this was a matter of detail which could be settled. In regard to large-scale industries, this was a matter open for discussion, negotiation and agreement between the Parties.

Other Matters:

Similarly, all other areas of disagreement would have to be discussed; and given an attitude of "give and take", these should be capable of an agreed approach.

- Q 3. If the process of merger has to be gradual - i.e. at first only the two parties (BKD and Swatantra) should merge - with an open invitation for others to join, would there be everytime a new Party with a new name, a new flag and a new symbol? Instead, why should not the Swatantra Party and BKD jointly attempt a multi-Party merger ab initio?
- A 3. Mr. Shastri agreed that efforts should continue for a merger of more than two parties. He also agreed that it would not be possible to change the name of the new party, its symbol and flag everytime another Party decided to merge. Therefore it was necessary to keep the merger question open till such time as at least one ~~more~~ Party in addition to the BKD and the Swatantra Party agreed to come together.
- Q 4. Pending such a development would it not be possible for the Swatantra Party and the BKD to form a United Democratic Front in Parliament and State Legislatures?
- A 4. The BKD's National Executive had not given thought to this. However, Mr. Shastri felt inclined to agree with the suggestion and would put it to the National Executive of his Party.
- Q 5. Should we not make an effort to get parties at the State level composed of dissident Congressmen to join our negotiation?
- A 5. The BKD has been in touch with some of these parties. However, Mr. Shastri was of opinion that we should not wait for them to make up their minds but continue our negotiations in the meanwhile.