

NOTE OF DISCUSSION WITH
CH. CHARAN SINGH.

Place & Time: At Prof. Ranga's residence (4, Sunheri Baug Road)
New Delhi, at 11 A.M. on Sat. 15th June '68.

Subject: Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD).

Present: Prof. Ranga) Swatantra Party.
Mr. N. Dandekar)
Ch. Charan Singh)
Mr. Gopal Shastri) BKD.
Mr. ?)

1. The discussion concerned the suggestion, emanating from Ch. Charan Singh (President of BKD in U.P.) and conveyed through Mr. Bhanu Pratap Singh (President of the Swatantra Party in U.P.), that the Swatantra Party, BKD, SSP and other like-minded democratic Parties or Groups in India should merge to form a new party, -- a sort of national democratic Party (with a suitable name). It was suggested that such a Party should exclude

-- all the parties of the Left
including SSP; and

-- the Jana Sangh and other
Communal Parties.

It was pointed out that there were indications that PSP would favour the formation of such a Party; and in fact they were due very soon to consider the proposal at their national executive level; and if the Swatantra Party also came in, a strong united democratic opposition party could emerge as the only effective challenger to the Congress, not only during the ensuing mid-term elections (which were already scheduled for West Bengal and U.P., and would almost certainly take place also within the next year or so in Bihar, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh), but also in the General Election of 1972.

2. Prof. Ranga and I indicated our reluctance to go along with the suggestion because, we felt, it could raise more problems than it would solve. The Swatantra Party was already a well established and well organised party --- notably in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bombay City, Mysore, Madras, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. To merge this into a new Party with BKD, PSP and other on the lines proposed could, we felt, prove a very difficult task as regards carrying with us not only the rank and file of our Party but also our well-organised State Party Units. The BKD had no such problem because it was hardly one year old; and the PSP might not have to encounter such difficulties because it was already breaking up. Moreover, in the matter of doctrinal unity there was for us the difficulty that both BKD and PSP had "socialism" as their main plank. And precisely because of this there was the added disadvantage that our sources of finance might well dry up because, with such a merged party, there would be little to distinguish it from the Congress Party. It would be no answer to this to say that the new Party would subscribe to "Gandhian Socialism", because most people do not know the difference between this and other variants of "socialism". I said that the phrase "Gandhian socialism" was in fact a contradiction in terms because Mahatma Gandhi was opposed to "Socialism".

3. As an alternative to merger, Prof. Ranga and I suggested that the better course would be for the BKD to merge into the Swatantra Party. This would secure all the advantages, with little or none of the disadvantages, of merging both parties to form a new Party. There would be the important added advantage that the Swatantra Party's by-now-well-established Election Symbol and Flag, -- which had cost us a great deal to popularise with the public, -- would continue to hold the field instead of having again to popularise a new flag and a new Symbol. Prof. Ranga added that he anticipated no difficulty about fitting into the Swatantra Party some of the leading personalities of BKD; and indeed, he said, he would even be willing to step down from the Presidentship of the Party in favour of Ch. Charan Singh and one of the BKD MPs could become the second Dy. Leader of the Party in Parliament.
4. However, this suggestion was not warmly received by Ch. Charan Singh. He felt that while in terms of principles, politics and manifesto the BKD could easily go along with this suggestion, there was the real difficulty that the Swatantra Party's public image was, -- rightly or wrongly, -- that of a Party of Rajas, Maharajas, Landlords, and Capitalists. The public view of the Swatantra Party was that there was no place in it for the "little man" and that all its policies tended to favour big business and large scale farming. We argued about this a great deal, but it was obviously an inconclusive argument because while Ch. Charan Singh had no quarrel with the Swatantra Party's principles, policies and manifesto or its leaders, he was plainly allergic to its public image.
5. The next alternative we suggested as a via media was that in the ensuing mid-term elections, whether in West Bengal, U. P. or elsewhere, the Swatantra Party and the BKD should work together closely on the pattern of our pre-General-Election alliance with the Jana Congress Party in Orissa. I added that we were equally eager to work it in U. P. where the BKD, instead of the Swatantra Party, would be the likely "major partner". I also mentioned that if such an arrangement could be worked out ad hoc for U. P. and elsewhere (whenever and wherever there were mid-term elections) we could even consider extending some financial assistance to BKD. Both Prof. Ranga and I emphasised that we saw greater possibilities in this sort of arrangement at this juncture than in merging the two parties (and others) to form a new party.
6. We ended up by agreeing to give further thought to the three alternatives and to keep our minds open concerning all of them. Even so, I made it clear that any kind of merger which required us expressly to accept "Socialism" as our basic Philosophy was unlikely to be acceptable. Meanwhile, I promised to send to Ch. Charan Singh a copy of the pre-Election "Common Programme" we and the Jana Congress had agreed to in Orissa in 1966 and also the Joint Declaration we had signed about working together after the Election, whether in forming a Government (if we together were in a majority in the Legislature) or in opposition to a Congress Government.

sd/-

(N. Dandekar).