

Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Central Parliamentary Board
Held at Kalki Buildings, Chetput, Madras, on July 20, 1970.

Present

Mr. M. R. Masani .. in the Chair

Mr. R.N. Singh Deo
Mr. Dahyabhai V. Patel
Dr. R. C. Cooper

Mr. N. Dandekar)
Mr. H. M. Patel) .. By special invitation

1. Confirmation of Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Central Parliamentary Board held in New Delhi on April 11, 1970, were confirmed.

2. Business Arising from the Minutes of the last Meeting

(1) Pronouncements by Party Members of Parliament contrary to Party policies

- (A). In pursuance of a request made to him at the last meeting of the Board, Mr. Dandekar reported that he had examined the papers concerning the complaint made by Mr. N.K. Somani and Mr. Lobo Prabhu's reply thereto regarding the position taken by Mr. Lobo Prabhu on a Private Member's Bill moved by Mr. Kothari.

Specifically, Mr. Dandekar was requested to examine --

- (i) Whether what Mr. Lobo Prabhu said was contrary to the views expressed by Mr. N.K. Somani on the Private Member's Bill moved by Mr. Kothari, and
(ii) whether what Mr. Lobo Prabhu said was not in consonance with the Party's policy.

Mr. Dandekar's observations in regard to the above queries were :

- (a) Except as regards difference in emphasis what Mr. Lobo Prabhu, MP, said was not contrary to the views expressed by Mr. Somani, MP, in the course of the debate in the Lok Sabha on the Private Member's Bill (Mr. Kothari's).
(b) No question of Party policy was really involved. But having due regard to our Party's approach to the sort of problem dealt with in the Bill in question, it was both unwise and unnecessary for Mr. Lobo Prabhu to have suggested, as he undoubtedly did, that Government servants should be required to make good losses which ex post facto might be considered to have been "preventable" and regardless altogether of whether there was any fraud to which the officer was a party.

In the light of Mr. Dandekar's comments, the Central Parliamentary Board modified its earlier decision of February 17 that

Mr. Lobo Prabhu had taken a position contradicting the views expressed by the earlier Speaker for the Party and decided that no action was called for in the matter.

- B. While on this subject, the Board's attention was drawn to complaints received from certain Travel Agents that Mr. Lobo Prabhu had opposed payment of commission to travel agents by transportation agencies. The Central Parliamentary Board after discussion felt that it would have been better if Mr. Lobo Prabhu had, before expressing his opposition, taken the trouble to examine the role played by travel agents in being of service to the public performed by travel agencies and the fact that the commission levied by travel agents was not a burden on the traveller. The Board felt that members of Parliament should not get into committed positions without first adequately studying the issues involved and consulting the Party Leader or Deputy Leader. The General Secretary was requested to convey the above to Mr. Lobo Prabhu and to the Party's MPs.

(ii) Report on Rajya Sabha Elections in Gujarat

Mr. H.M. Patel reported on the circumstances leading to the Gujarat legislature group not carrying out the directive of the Central Parliamentary Board at its meeting on April 11 that the Party's official nominee Mr. Dahyabhai Patel should be given all the Party's first preference votes. Mr. Dahyabhai Patel had in actual fact received only 43 first preference votes as against 55 available votes. Mr. Patel explained inter alia that

- (a) As the second preference votes of the Party were not enough, the Party had to agree to Mr. Devdutt Patel, a former member of the Party, standing as an independent to enable him to secure the votes of other opposition parties in the State Assembly who indicated that they would give their votes only to a non-party candidate, and
- (b) an inadequate understanding of the implications of the single transferable vote system particularly the fact that second preference votes had in the end the same value as first preference votes.

In the light of this explanation, the Central Parliamentary Board, while deciding not to take further action in the matter, requested the General Secretary to issue a circular explaining how the system of the single transferable vote works so that members of the Party might show a better understanding of the working of the system.

The Board's attention was also drawn to the correspondence between Mr. Dahyabhai Patel, leader of the Party's Group in the Rajya Sabha, and Mr. H.M. Patel regarding Mr. Devdatt Kikubhai Patel's indifference to our Group in the Rajya Sabha and the fact that, though elected to the Rajya Sabha largely with Swatantra votes, he was seen to be more in the company of certain former members of our Party in Parliament who had been expelled. While expressing its helplessness in the matter, the Central Parliamentary Board sympathised with Mr. Dahyabhai Patel's feelings.

3. Review of the Party's functioning in Parliament

(a) Proceedings of the Consultative Committee on West Bengal

(i) Preventive Detention Act

The position taken by the Party's members on the Consultative Committee of Parliament in regard to the need for a Preventive

Detention Act in West Bengal was noted. The Board regretted the fact that the then Home Minister, Mr. Chavan, as Chairman of the Consultative Committee had acted in a partisan manner by showing special regard for the communist point of view while ignoring the protests of members from our Party, Jan Sangh and the Congress (O) in regard to the order of business to be taken up by the Committee which had resulted in our members walking out in protest.

(ii) Levy of Octroi on goods entering Calcutta :

The attention of the Board was drawn to a letter received from the Secretary of the Indian Roads and Transport Development Association Ltd., expressing their disappointment with the endorsement by the Consultative Committee of the proposal to levy Octroi duty on goods entering Calcutta and hoping that when the Bill came up in Parliament, the Swatantra Party would vigorously oppose the measure. There was also a telegram from Mr. M. K. Mohta, our MP and a member of the Consultative Committee, recommending that the West Bengal Octroi Bill be opposed in Parliament. After discussion, the Board decided that the leader of the Party's Group in Parliament, Prof. Ranga, or the Party's President, Mr. M.R. Masani, should write to the Prime Minister asking her to reopen the matter for further consideration by the Consultative Committee. In the opinion of the Board, the Octroi levy, apart from being an outmoded form of taxation (as revealed in the findings of several responsible Committees) would also retard the growth of road transport and lead to further corruption. At the same time, the Board realising the financial needs of Calcutta, felt that some other move acceptable and suitable substitute for Octroi Duty should be considered. Meanwhile, the Party's MPs were asked to oppose the Bill as and when it was introduced in Parliament.

(b) Petition to impeach Justice Shah signed by some Swatantra MPs

The fact that eight MPs of our Party had been misguided enough to sign a petition calling for the impeachment of Justice Shah of the Supreme Court was brought to the attention of the Board. The Board was further informed that Prof. Ranga had subsequently got all the eight MPs to write to the Speaker withdrawing their signatures from the petition. However, the unfortunate fact remained that these MPs had ignored a Party decision that MPs should not append their signatures to memoranda drawn up by other people without first clearing it with the Party leaders.

The Board was of the opinion that the move to impeach Justice Shah was not an isolated attempt but part of a calculated plan on the part of certain members of the Ruling Party and the Communists to bring the Supreme Court into disrepute and curtail its powers. The Board decided :

- (i) that Prof. Ranga or Mr. Masani should write to the Speaker hoping that this matter would not be brought up for discussion in the House, and
- (ii) that the General Secretary should write to the MPs concerned conveying the Central Parliamentary Board's displeasure over their action.

It was decided in this connection that copies of letters sent to the Party's MPs as also copies of reports received from MPs regarding the work should be made available to the President and/or General Secretary of the concerned State/Regional Units.

(c) Private Members' Bill on Salaries and Perquisites of Ministers

As a follow up on the speeches delivered by Mr. Masani and Mr. Dandekar during the last Budget Session of Parliament drawing attention to the fantastically high salaries and perquisites drawn by Central Ministers, it was decided that the Party's Group should introduce a Private Member's Bill in the forthcoming session of Parliament seeking to integrate the income and perquisites of Central Ministers into a consolidated taxable income. The Bill's main purpose would be to focus the attention of Parliament and the public to the scandalously high incomes and perquisites of ministers.

4. Review of the Party's performance in by-elections

(i) Sarsa (Gujarat Assembly)

The Party failed to retain the Sarsa seat in the by-election to the Gujarat Assembly caused by the death of Mr. Bhailalbhai Patel. The President of the Gujarat State Unit, Mr. H.M. Patel, gave reasons leading to the Party's defeat among which were the use of money power and the misuse of official machinery. The Board expressed its disappointment with the Party's failure in this by-election.

(ii) Colachel (Tamil Nadu Assembly)

There were two by-elections; one from Cheranmadevi caused by the death of our sitting member Mr. Audimoolam and the other at Colachel caused by the death of a sitting Congress(O) member. On the insistence of the D.M.K., we contested the Colachel seat and conceded the Cheranmadevi seat to the D.M.K. The Central Parliamentary Board discussed at length whether we were justified in conceding our seat in exchange for one we had failed to carry in the last General Elections. In this connection attention was drawn to a letter from Dr. M. Santosham, the Party's MP (in whose constituency lies Cheranmadevi) critical of the Tamil Nadu Unit's arrangement with the DMK which had ended with our candidate subsequently forfeiting his deposit.

Rajaji (when he was met by the Board's members) explained the reasons for the Tamil Nadu Parliamentary Board coming to such an arrangement with the DMK. In the light of his explanation, the Board decided not to pursue the matter further.

(iii) Mathura Parliamentary By-election

The Board was informed that Raja Mansingh of Bharatpur, who had been supported by the Swatantra Party, had lost in the by-election to Parliament from Mathura. This vacancy has been caused by the death of the sitting Swatantra Member, Raja Giriraj Saran Singh of Bharatpur, brother of Raja Mansingh.

5. Resignation of Mr. Krishnaswamy Gounder

The General Secretary read out a letter dated 29th June from Mr. Krishnaswamy Gounder of Coimbatore who had resigned from the Party and the State Assembly in protest against the State Unit's attitude concerning the farmers' agitation in Coimbatore and its

arrangements with the DMK. The Board discussed his letter in considerable detail. The President conveyed to Rajaji (when the Board's members consulted him that afternoon) the feeling of uneasiness of members of the Board in regard to the Colachel by-election matter and the resignation by Mr. Krishnaswamy Gounder. Rajaji explained in detail the position that the Party had taken regarding the farmers' agitation to reduce electricity rates and to postpone collection of agricultural loans and other demands. He also explained that Mr. Krishnaswamy Gounder's earlier speeches and actions had not been helpful to the Party. Rajaji asked the members of the Board not to be unduly perturbed but to leave matters relating to Tamil Nadu to him.

It was decided that the General Secretary should write to Mr. S. S. Mariswamy, General Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Unit, conveying the uneasiness of members of the Board in regard to the above matters in Tamil Nadu.

6. General Elections in Kerala

At this stage the President and General Secretary of the Kerala Unit and Mr. Johnson Vallikkappan were invited to join the discussion and give the Board an assessment of the situation in Kerala and their recommendations on the Party's strategy to be adopted in the Kerala General Elections. The Kerala representatives informed the Board that at an all Party meeting with the Chief Election Commissioner in Trivandrum recently, our representatives had opposed the postponement of the elections and wanted them to be held in early September. The Board after giving them a hearing decided that the Kerala Unit should be authorised to take the initiative in calling for a Front of all democratic parties in the State barring the two Communist Parties and the Ruling Congress. Meanwhile, the Kerala representatives were asked to submit in writing their proposals in regard to constituencies and candidates for consideration by the Central Parliamentary Board. The Kerala representatives then retired from the meeting.

7. Pending By-Elections-

(i) Gurdaspur Parliamentary By-election :

The President gave a background of the circumstances under which the Central Parliamentary Board had earlier permitted Mr. Kesho Dass to be the Party's candidate in the Gurdaspur Parliamentary by-election on a self-supporting basis and the Board's subsequent withdrawal of this permission. This became necessary as the President of the Jan Sangh requested us to stay away from the contest on the ground that his party's candidate stood second in the last General Elections and therefore, applying the principle followed at Mathura and Buldana our Party should not field a candidate. On the other hand, the Board had before it a report from the State General Secretary, Sardar Basant Singh, to the effect that the Party's chances in the by-election were favourable as the Party's position in the constituency had improved since the last General Elections. In view of the fact that the Election Commission had not even issued a notification so far in regard to this by-election, it was decided to authorise the President and General Secretary to discuss the matter further with the Congress (O) the Jan Sangh and Sardar Basant Singh and obtain the Central Parliamentary Board's decision either at its next meeting or earlier by circular in case this became necessary.

(ii) Avinashi by-election

In regard to the Avinashi by election that has arisen as a result of the resignation of the Party's MLA, Mr. Krishnaswamy Gounder, the Board decided that no commitments should be made by the State Unit to any Party, or individuals or other ise in regard to this matter till the State Unit had made appropriate recommendations to the Central Parliamentary Board well in advance and obtain its decision. The Tamil Nadu unit should be informed accordingly.

8. Punjab Situation

The Board fully approved the non-committal attitude taken by the Party's MLA, Sardar Basant Singh, in the State Assembly, vis-a-vis the Badal Ministry and called upon him to continue to remain uncommitted. Meanwhile, Sardar Basant Singh was requested to keep the National Headquarters informed from time to time in regard to developments in this regard.

9. Orissa Matters

The proposed Orissa Bandh in protest against the Centre's refusal to grant a second Steel Plant to Orissa was discussed. Various points of view were expressed in regard to the propriety of the Party asking for a steel plant, particularly when the Party's policy was against the setting up of steel plants in the State sector. The discussion being inconclusive, the matter was referred to the National Executive.

Nationalisation of textbooks

The Board noted that despite a resolution of the Orissa State Convention at Rourkela on May 3 and 4, calling upon the State Government to stop further nationalisation of text books, the Swatantra-led Government in that State had gone ahead with the nationalisation of text books though this was not in consonance with the Party's policies. The Central Parliamentary Board decided to request the Orissa State Unit to ensure that the State Government implemented their own (State Unit's) resolution and stopped further nationalisation of text books.

The President, Mr. M. R. Masani, said that he would refer to this issue when he prepared a note on various issues for the consideration of the Orissa Government.

10. Bihar Affairs

At this stage the Board invited the leader of our Party in the Bihar State Assembly, Mr. Yashwant Kumar Choudhary, to join the discussion. Mr. Choudhary reported that an SVD comprising of the Congress(O), Jan Sangh and the SSP was functioning in Bihar but he had not made any commitments in regard to a common minimum programme though there was a draft programme presently being considered by the partners in the SVD. Mr. Choudhary was requested to send to the National Headquarters a copy of the Draft Programme for consideration by the Board. Meanwhile, the State Legislature Group's participation in the SVD along with the Jan Sangh and Congress(O) was approved.

The meeting then terminated.
