

29 May 1968

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Indiscipline in Gujarat Swatantra unit deplored by Munshi

"The Times of India" News Service

BOMBAY, May 28. MR. K. M. MUNSHI, Vice-President of the Swatantra Party, has addressed a special letter to the party's general council meeting in Madras on Saturday expressing his deep displeasure at the indiscipline of some party members of the Gujarat unit.

Releasing the text of the letter at a news conference in Bombay on Monday, Mr. Munshi said that he felt strongly about the Gujarat affair.

He said the party was breaking into

bits in Gujarat because of the most disgraceful conduct of some its members there.

The letter says, "Our party is not a confederacy of autonomous units. It is not as if units at the State level got together and decided to form the party. The Swatantra Party is one party and State units are its branches. There is no question of the party at the national level 'interfering' in the affairs of the branches. How can there be 'interference' when there is only one party. This is absolutely fundamental."

NOT A CLUB

Stating that the party was not "a club for contesting elections", Mr. Munshi observed that in the Gujarat affair, some MLAs were reported to have argued that the promise given to Mr. Babulal Vaidya was no longer valid because it had been made by the party's MLAs in the last Assembly. "This is an absurd proposition", he asserted.

The letter warns, "We seem to be drifting towards a general demoralisation in our public life. Unless we prove our superiority in terms of our loyalty to principles and morality, unless we demonstrate in no uncertain terms that what we are interested in is not the immediate achievement of power, but adherence to moral and ethical standards which alone can contribute to the preservation of democratic institutions, I am afraid, our existence as a political party would be of no use to our people or to our country."

The tragedy of present-day India, Mr. Munshi says is that all the major political parties, old and new are, step by step, ceasing to be "real" all-India parties with the courage to enforce discipline on recalcitrant State units.

Mr. Munshi told reporters that because of his poor health he would not be able to attend the general council meeting and hence this letter was addressed to the members. "But, I keenly feel", he says in the course of the letter, "that the decisions taken by this meeting will decide the future of the party".

Answering a question, Mr. Munshi said that though he felt very strongly about the Gujarat episode, he would not leave the party unless Mr. C. Rajagopalachari permitted him to do so.

UNI adds from Ahmedabad: The Gujarat Executive Committee of Swatantra Party yesterday expressed its "strong resentment" at the reported suggestion made by Mr. M. R. Masani, party's former general secretary, that the State executive should be dissolved and an "ad hoc" committee be set up in its place.

At a news briefing after the committee meeting, the party's State unit President, Mr. H. M. Patel, said the members had asked him to convey their feeling to the national executive, meeting in Madras on June 1 and 2.

Mr. Masani is believed to have circulated a letter in the national executive that the Gujarat executive should be dissolved as it was virtually responsible for defeating party's official candidate in the recent Rajya Sabha election.

Mr. Patel said the delegates from Gujarat would oppose any such move at the national executive meeting.

Census

Then, the efficiency that the Ministry has not been able to obtain is in respect of inventories. The inventory in Indian steel industry is terribly high. According to the Annual Report of 1966-67, the inventory of all the three plants is around Rs.110 crores. This is not serious. The other part is more serious. Out of Rs.110 crores, as much as, nearly, Rs.70 crores represent the cost of spares and stores. What is the consumption of spares and stores? The total consumption of spares and stores annually in all the three Plants is only Rs.30 crores. They have an inventory of 2½ years for spares and stores. I have no doubt that this Ministry and the Plants are capable of reducing the inventory at least to the extent of Rs.40 crores. It has been estimated by the ARC in their Report that maintenance of inventory involves approximately 15 to 20 per cent of the expenses in the form of interest, in the form of storage and in the form of other charges, and a reduction of inventory by Rs.40 crores itself will introduce a minimum saving of Rs. 6 crores to the Exchequer and will change the picture of the Steel Plants.

The third point over which they have not been able to obtain efficiency is that these Plants have been subjected to large scale thefts, on account of bad management again. The Pandey Commission has reported that, in Durgapur alone, in 1965-66, there was a shortage of Rs.81 lakhs; similarly, in all other Plants, the incidence of theft and shortage is extremely high.

Another point is this. A new, modern plant is expected to have an advantage over the old plant; on account of the sophisticated nature of the plant, the material cost must be low, the consumption of raw material must be less, but here in India, the picture is just the reverse. The material cost of the old plant of TISCO and Indian Iron and Steel is lower compared to the plant of Hindustan Steel Limited, and here again I quote from the report; in the case of TISCO, the cost of material is 48.6 per cent; in the case of Indian Iron it is 54.2 per cent, but in the case of Hindustan Steel it is Rs.64.6 per cent.

Another point is with regard to rejection and poor quality. It is tremendously high. After working for 7 or 8 years, the rejection at the various stages is so large that it eats into the profits. It is very much high compared to the other steel mills in India and compared to the steel mills in the world. Serious remarks have been given with regard to rejections by the ARC as well as by the Public Undertakings Committee.

One of the pleas advanced by the hon. Minister is that the higher incidence of depreciation and interest is partly due to the fact that the existing steel plants do not work to the expected capacity or, in other words, to the optimum capacity. It has been estimated that the optimum capacity of Rourkela is 2.5 million tonnes and the optimum capacity of Durgapur is 3.4 million tonnes. If we have to achieve this optimum capacity, it is necessary for us to expand these units further. Here I bring the Bokaro Steel Plant into the picture. What is this Bokaro Steel Plant? It is a project for which the contract was signed in 1965; it is a project for the production of 4 million tonnes of steel; the first stage which will be capable of producing 1.7 million tonnes of steel is expected to be completed earliest by 1971 or even in 1972; thereafter, it will have