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M. R. Masani, Member of Parliament from Rajkot and General Secretary of the Swatantra Party, is a man who has taken the Mahatma's words to heart, for he preferred rejecting the erroneous beliefs he once held to being narrowly consistent. Years ago, he was a socialist, breathing fire and brimstone with the most ardent of that breed; today, he is a Liberal and considers State Socialism a form of archaic stupidity.

Through experience, I have found that if you irritate a politician — not too much, of course — he will give you a lively and controversial interview, so the moment I met Mr. Masani at his Delhi residence, I led off by asking how he justified the "betrayal" of his early socialist views.

Masani was not at all irritated; in fact, he seemed to welcome the chance to hammer away at a favourite target. "I once believed socialism was right. Later I found I had been wrong. What should I have done? Stuck to something I no longer believed was right? If a man is going along a road and finds he has taken a wrong turning, would you expect him to keep going — or to turn back and take the correct path?"

Before I could think of a convincing retort, he had launched into a revealing little anecdote. "As a student in London, I met a Member of the British Parliament who was a friend of my father. During the course of a very pleasant lunch he casually asked me about my political beliefs. Brimming with pride and very sure of myself, I answered, 'Sir, I am an ardent socialist.' My host, who happened to be a Tory, patted me benignly on the back and said: 'Very good, my boy. That is exactly what you should be at your age. If you

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In Masani's own words: "I found this alternative firstly in what is broadly called 'liberalism' and secondly in the thought and work of Mahatma Gandhi, whom we had staunchly opposed as socialists until he converted us."

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ANSWER: "Gandhi's philosophy cannot be compressed into vague catchwords. It is better to get to essentials. Gandhiji, for one thing, believed and taught that ends and means are interlinked and that a decent society cannot be produced by methods that are basically ~~unclean~~ and dishonest. The Communists, on the other hand, set themselves a goal and are ready to lie, cheat, murder or double-cross in order to achieve it.

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Russia has plenty of steel; it goes into the manufacture of armaments. But the people cannot eat steel. They do eat wheat, but unfortunately there is very little wheat to go around. Why? Because when Stalin was in power, he butchered the Kulaks, the Kisans. He simply wiped

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In a democracy the people choose their government and can kick it out if that government proves unfit. In Britain they rejected Sir Winston Churchill despite the part he played in winning the war. In which "socialist" state has any government been unseated except through violence? How CAN such a government be unseated? Have you seen the voting patterns in Communist countries which follow the most undiluted and extreme form of socialism?

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ANSWER: I wonder. The pattern in Ceylon was very much the same -- people were robbed of their rights, the foreign exchange position went from bad to worse, and -- is it coincidence? -- scores of Russian and Chinese agents flooded the country.

It was only after Mrs. Bandaranaike was thrown out of power that the country began at last to get back on an even keel. Fortunately, the present Ceylonese Government is an honest and Liberal government and there is no reason to worry about Ceylon's future.... But it was a close thing. A few more months of socialism and the country would have been completely engulfed by the Communists and their foreign masters.

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In the Indonesia of Sukarno, another ardent Socialist, everything was concentrated in his hands. While the economy tottered and the people went hungry, Sukarno was busy trying to "crush Malaysia" and to sell the country out to the Communists. Sukarno is still President, but the army is in control and in time this unhappy country ^{may} at last realise what havoc socialism has caused and how dangerous too much concentration of power can be.

QUESTION: So far, your arguments are purely negative; have you anything concrete to suggest as an alternative?

ANSWER: One must diagnose the disease before one can prescribe a cure. Socialism has not worked. Liberalism will. What is Liberalism? It is a belief that society can safely be founded on the self-directing power of the human personality. Freedom to a Liberal is not merely the right of the individual, but an essential part of the social order.

Under a Liberal government the State would be based on social welfare and social justice. Since the well-being of the people depends on a healthy economy, the Liberals prefer to adopt sound economic policies rather than

tie themselves to unworkable doctrines which are political rather than economic. The consumers' needs, for instance, are much more important to a Liberal than the desires of the State. Only those goods would be produced that the people want, goods for which the people are prepared to pay a price in the market.

Under Liberalism the pattern of production is dictated not by Government, not by a Planning Commission, not by the diktat of anybody, but by the will of the people as expressed collectively in the market place. The law of the market is the only sane economic law. This law forces the biggest capitalist to cater to the smallest man in the market. This is what is called a free market economy in contrast to a socialist economy. Under it, the little man, the Consumer, is King.

Socialism deprives the common man of choice, for under it a group of ten or fifteen people in Moscow or Delhi can tell the people what to take. The National Planning Commission is omniscient, omnipotent - God. The Liberal way, on the other hand, lets the people decide what they want.

QUESTION: Are you completely against planning? If planning were to be abolished altogether, would it not lead to chaos?

ANSWER: I am not against planning based on natural economic laws - I am against doctrinaire planning based on ideas which run counter to the fundamental nature of human beings, which ignore incentives and consider normal ambition and acquisitiveness to be criminal and "reactionary".

Other things being equal, a man will prefer to work for his own benefit than for the benefit of the State. Sane men admit this, Socialists don't.

I deeply believe that the commonsense of people as a whole is far

superior to the ideas of a handful of men who draw up plans or run the Government. It is because of this that I am against centralised, Soviet-type planning, which makes the State supreme. I am for "indicative planning" of the kind that is practised in France or Britain today.

The Congress Government keeps claiming it is following Mahatma Gandhi -- but Gandhiji believed that "that Government is best which governs the least."

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Under a Liberal government the State would be based on social welfare and social justice. Since the well-being of the people depends on a healthy economy, the Liberals prefer to adopt sound economic policies rather than

tie themselves to unworkable doctrines which are political rather than economic. The consumers' needs, for instance, are much more important to a Liberal than the desires of the State. Only those goods would be produced that the people want, goods for which the people are prepared to pay a price in the market.

Under Liberalism the pattern of production is dictated not by Government, not by a Planning Commission, not by the diktat of anybody, but by the will of the people as expressed collectively in the market place. The law of the market is the only sane economic law. This law forces the biggest capitalist to cater to the smallest man in the market. This is what is called a free market economy in contrast to a socialist economy. Under it, the little man, the Consumer, is King.

Socialism deprives the common man of choice, for under it a group of ten or fifteen people in Moscow or Delhi can tell the people what to take. The National Planning Commission is omniscient, omnipotent - God. The Liberal way, on the other hand, lets the people decide what they want.

QUESTION: Are you completely against planning? If planning were to be abolished altogether, would it not lead to chaos?

ANSWER: I am not against planning based on natural economic laws - I am against doctrinaire planning based on ideas which run counter to the fundamental nature of human beings, which ignore incentives and consider normal ambition and acquisitiveness to be criminal and "reactionary".

Other things being equal, a man will prefer to work for his own benefit than for the benefit of the State. Sane men admit this, Socialists don't.

I deeply believe that the commonsense of people as a whole is far

superior to the ideas of a handful of men who draw up plans or run the Government. It is because of this that I am against centralised, Soviet-type planning, which makes the State supreme. I am for "indicative planning" of the kind that is practised in France or Britain today.

The Congress Government keeps claiming it is following Mahatma Gandhi -- but Gandhiji believed that "that Government is best which governs the least."
