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"Now that the Congress Party is disintegrating and is on its way out, the basic choice before the country lies between communist dictatorship and the free way of life embodied in the principles of the Swatantra Party," said Mr. M.R. Masani, M.P., General Secretary of the Swatantra Party, while participating in the Leadership Training Programme of the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Ahmedabad this morning.

The Swatantra leader described the Congress Party as "a paper tiger" which had never once secured a popular majority in the elections to Parliament ever since Independence. It had only polled 44.72 per cent of the votes in the 1962 elections and enjoyed its present bogus majority in the Lok Sabha thanks to the archaic electoral system and the absence of a Second Party which could offer an alternative government. A recent poll carried out by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion in metropolitan cities had shown that the Congress vote had slumped from 60 per cent in January-February, 1966 to 41 per cent in May. Mr. Masani shuddered to think what would happen if the Congress Party, which would certainly not get 40 per cent of the popular vote in the General Elections next February, were to get a fluke majority in the next Lok Sabha. According to him, the very process of parliamentary democracy embodied in the Constitution would then be in danger. The need of the day, therefore, was for a Second Party to emerge in the coming General Elections which would prevent such a catastrophe.

According to Mr. Masani, there were three reasons indicating that the only Party that satisfied the requirements of such a Second Party was the Swatantra Party. First, it was the only Party which offered a clear-cut alternative to the economic and international policies of the present Government. Secondly, its National Democratic and non-denominational character made it possible for every Indian, whatever his religion, community or location, to have an equal voice in the councils of the Party. Thirdly, it was the only Party which had the capability of challenging the Congress Party by reason of the quality of its leadership and its far-flung national character.

In this context, the objectives of the Swatantra Party in the coming General Elections would be two-fold. First, to get enough seats in the Lok Sabha to deny the Congress Party a majority and thus to end its disastrous monopoly of power for the last twenty years. Secondly, to carry a couple of States, including Gujarat, and to show what a Swatantra or Swatantra-led Government could do. While he admitted that these were ambitious objectives, he claimed that they were within the reach of the Party provided the electorate showed the requisite awareness of the country's needs. "After all", said Mr. Masani, "if the people of Ceylon in 1965 could show the patriotism and the intelligence to throw out the Congress-type Government of Mrs. Bandaranaike and to instal a liberal, Swatantra-type Government like that of Mr. Dudley Senanayake, why should the Indian people

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in 1967 not be able to do this?" The main danger came from inertia, cynicism ^{the} and defeatism of a large section of the intelligentsia. If they did not shed these, India might drift the way of Indonesia and Ghana and go through all the horrors that the unfortunate peoples of those countries had been through during the last few years before turning in the right direction.

Mr. Masani described the policy of the Swatantra Party as one of "double rejection" of the Congress Party on the one hand and the two Communist parties on the other. Those who advocated preferring the communists to the Congress were playing with fire. The Communist Party was a fifth column of either Moscow or Peking and would destroy democracy the moment it had the chance.

On the other hand, he criticised those who professed to see the Congress Party as a lesser evil in the belief that the Congress Party was changing its basic policies and moving in the right direction. Communism had three faces in India and the third was that represented by the Statist policies of the Congress Party which were all the more dangerous because of their insidious nature.

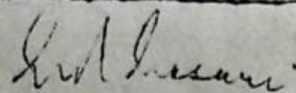
Many people had hoped for big things from the new Prime Minister and he himself had welcomed her earlier statements. Recent events, however, had belied those hopes. The Prime Minister had come down on the side of a "Big" Plan which would be ruinous to the country and her surrender to Mr. Kosygin over Vietnam when in Moscow showed that she was a broken reed on whom to rely.

The Swatantra Party, according to Mr. Masani, was primarily a Peasants' Party and gave first place to the interests of the rural people. All the seats it had carried in the 1962 elections and most of the ten million votes cast for it were the votes of the farmers. At the same time, because it believed that Free Enterprise was an essential part of a free society, it stood for competitive free enterprise against State Capitalist Monopoly.

Mr. Masani deplored the pusillanimity and betrayal of their way of life by a large section of Big Business in India who had got on the Congress bandwagon in order to make a "quick rupee" by reaping the fruits of permit-licence-quota Raj. He appealed to the younger businessmen such as those in the Junior Chambers to take the initiative and turn away from the false path along which a large part of Indian business had hitherto been led and to enter the field of active politics undeterred by false fears.

Answering the question what his Party would do if returned to power, the speaker listed the following basic measures: 1) Shelve the Fourth Plan, 2) Progressive decontrol, and 3) Regional collective security for Defence. These steps would make possible 4) A drastic reduction in both direct and indirect taxation. The result would be a tremendous advance in production, both agricultural and industrial, and better life for the common man.

Mr. Masani described the principles and policies of the Swatantra Party as a blend of Gandhiji's thinking and western Liberalism. Describing his Party as a modern, twentieth century Party in tune with the latest trends in world thought, he appealed to young and progressive people to rally round it and join its ranks. The Swatantra Party was not a closed corporation. It wanted no monopoly of power but wished to see a Government of all the talents replace the present Government. The Party's doors were wide open to all those who were in basic agreement with its policies and he appealed to his hearers to join in the "Open Conspiracy" to defeat the Congress Government in Ahmedabad and Delhi and to open a new chapter in the country's history.


(M. R. Masani)