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The Swatantra Party

Establishment

The Swatantra ~~Party~~ Party was established in Bombay on August 1 and 2, 1959 at a preparatory Convention. Earlier a small informal meeting convened by the All India Agriculturists Federation had been held in Madras in June 1959 which decided to launch a new Party under this name.

General characteristics

Perhaps the best parallel to the character of the Swatantra Party in Western countries is that provided by ~~such the Smallholders' Party in Hungary before the Communist take over or a Liberal Party on the Continent.~~

Oddly enough, credit for this Party's emergence must go to the Congress Party, because of what is described in India as the "Nagpur Resolution" which the Congress Party adopted in January 1959. This resolution imposed ceilings on land holdings which in practice would deprive the farmer of all land that he might own in excess of what would bring in an income of around 3,600 rupees ~~(£ 340)~~ a year. It proposed in euphemistic terms a system of "joint cooperative farming", which in reality was an attempt at introducing collective farming of the Soviet or Chinese pattern. Finally, it made an attempt to establish a State monopoly in the wholesale trade in foodgrains, thereby eliminating thousands of traders.

The Swatantra Party has made a novel experiment in restricting disciplinary control over members to essential issues, giving freedom in all other matters to speak and vote according to individual opinion.

Policies

The Party's basic policies are outlined in its Statement of Policy entitled "To Prosperity Through Freedom" adopted at its first National Convention in 1960 (Copy attached).

Future programme

Like any other political party, the Swatantra Party aspires to assume the reins of office through democratic elections. While other democratic Parties in the country do not materially differ from the ruling Congress Party in economic affairs, the Swatantra Party has stepped out of the beaten path and advocates policies which are fundamentally different from those followed by the Congress Party in the name of a "Socialist Pattern of Society".

The immediate programme is to develop the Party into a meaningful democratic opposition Party in the country's Parliament and in the State Assemblies.

Representation

Formed in August 1959, the Swatantra Party had to face General Elections in February-March 1962. The showing it put up was, according to impartial commentators, noteworthy. In the Union Parliament, it succeeded in securing a total of ~~one~~^{9.10} million votes and 27 seats and emerged as the largest single opposition democratic Party. The Communists were, however, better represented with 31 seats. In the elections to the State Assemblies, the Party emerged as the "recognised" Opposition Party in four States, viz. Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Orissa. In overall strength, it emerged as second only to the ruling Congress Party securing a total of 206 seats.

However, in relation to the numerical strength of the Congress Party, the representation of the Swatantra Party, or for that matter of other opposition Parties, is sketchy. Under the present system of elections in the country, patterned after the British model, these figures do not truly represent public support. For instance while the Congress has 73% of the seats in the House of the People it secured less than 45% of the popular vote.

The Swatantra Party, on the other hand, polled 9% of the total vote and secured only 27 seats.

Prospects

In a country where literacy is pitifully low, the intellectual appeal of a Party's programme is limited. The problem is one of "harnessing and mobilising potential sympathy and support into a mass movement," as the General Secretary of the Party stated in the course of his report to the First National Convention in March 1960. He added: "Even Truth, it has been said, needs wings, and the finest programme or policy can make little headway unless it finds organisational channels through which it can reach every corner of the country".

and rising prices!

This continues to be the problem facing the Party today. If the Party is able to develop an organisational mechanism composed of a coordinated group throughout the country, is able to develop a sound cadre and has the necessary financial resources, then with the temper of the Indian people being what it is today, thanks to the Chinese Communist invasion of the country and the unpopular economic policies resulting in oppressive direct and indirect taxation, it is not impossible for the Swatantra Party to emerge as a truly liberal Party and provide the people with the choice of a democratic alternative to the Party in office today.

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The Swatantra Party was established in Bombay on August 1 and 2, 1959 at a preparatory convention. Earlier, ^(Freedom) an informal meeting of the All India Agriculturists Federation held in Madras on June 1958 decided to launch a new Party under this name.

General characteristics

Perhaps the best parallel to the character of the Swatantra Party in Western countries is that provided by such ^{example} the Smallholders' Party in Hungary. Oddly credit for this Party's emergence must go to the Congress Party, because of what is described in India as the "Nagpur Resolution" which the Congress Party adopted in January 1959.

This resolution imposed ceilings on land holdings which in practice would deprive the farmer of all land that he might own in excess of what would bring in an income of around 3,600 rupees (£ 340) a year. It proposed in euphemistic terms a system of "joint cooperative farming", which in reality was an attempt at introducing collective farming of the Soviet or Chinese pattern, and finally an attempt to establish state monopoly in the wholesale trade of foodgrains, thereby eliminating thousands of traders.

The Swatantra Party has made a novel experiment in restricting disciplinary control over party members to essential issues, giving freedom in all other matters to vote according to individual opinion. The Party does not believe that legislative compulsion, any more than violence that preceded and enthroned Communism in certain countries, can contribute to true or lasting human happiness.

Membership of the Party is open to all persons who have completed 21 years of age and are in agreement with the Party's statement of principles.

Policies

The Party's basic policy is ^{as outlined} contained in its Statement of Policy entitled "To Prosperity through Freedom" adopted at its first National Convention in 1960. ^(Copy attached)

The major highlights of this Statement of Policy are:

The Swatantra Party is pledged to social justice and equality of opportunity for all people without distinction of religion, caste occupation or political affiliation.

Before the Communist take-over of a country in the Continent.

The Party stands for the principle of maximum freedom for the individual and minimum interference by the State, consistent with the obligation to prevent and punish anti-social activities to protect the weaker elements of society and to create the conditions in which individual initiative will thrive and be fruitful.

The Party holds that in the policies adopted for national development priority must be assigned to the basic needs of the people, namely, food water, housing and clothing.

The Party believes that every citizen has a fundamental right to educate his children according to his choice and in a free atmosphere untrammelled by official directives and that the State should afford facilities for such education without discrimination.

The Party holds that the paramount need is for increasing food production and this is best attained through the self employed peasant proprietor who is interested in obtaining the highest yield from his land.

In industry, the Party believes in the incentives for higher production and expansion inherent in competitive enterprise with adequate safeguards for the protection of labour and against unreasonable profits, prices and dividends, where there is no competition or where competition does not secure the necessary corrective.

The Party stands for the restriction of State enterprise to heavy industries such as are necessary to supplement private enterprise in that field, such national services as Railways, and the starting of new enterprises which are difficult for private initiative.

The Party believes that in the field of production, the free choice of the producer and the consumer must be given basic place and importance.

The Party holds that taxation should be kept at such levels as will not interfere with reasonable living standards for the people, both rural and urban and which will not be so high and exacting or so ubiquitous as to prevent capital formation and private investment.

The Party believes that the cost of public administration should be reduced considerably. It stands for integrity and efficiency in the services. It is against the expansion of the bureaucratic machine, with a hierarchy of officials asked to do work which is best done by citizens and private agencies resulting in unproductive waste of national resources.

The Party stands for a fair deal for labour whether in the field, factory or office and for the correlating wages to increased productivity and for the workers' right to organise for the purpose of collective bargaining. It stands for harmonising the interests of capital and labour when they get into conflict.

The Swatantra Party holds that democracy is best served if every political party allows freedom of opinion to its members on all matters outside the fundamental principles of the party. It, therefore, gives its members full liberty on all questions not falling within the scope of the principles stated above.

Future programme

Like any other political party, the Swatantra Party ~~aspires~~ aspires to assume the reigns of office through democratic elections. While other democratic Parties in the country do not materially differ from the ruling Congress Party in economic affairs, the Swatantra Party has stepped out of the beaten path and advocates policies which are fundamentally different from those followed by the Congress Party in the name of a "Socialist Pattern of Society".

But the immediate programme is to develop the Party into a meaningful democratic opposition Party in the country's Parliament and State Assemblies.

Representation

Formed in August 1959, the Swatantra Party had to face General Elections in (1962) February-March. The showing it put up, by Indian standards, was, according to impartial commentators, noteworthy. In the Union Parliament, it succeeded in securing a total of 26 seats and emerged as the largest single opposition democratic Party. The Communists were, however, better represented with 34 seats. In the elections to the State Assembly, the Party emerged as the "recognised" Opposition Party in four States viz. Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Orissa. In overall strength it emerged as second only to the ruling Congress Party securing a total of 166 seats.

However in relation to the numerical strength of the Congress Party, the the figures of the Swatantra Party or for that matter of other opposition Parties, is pathetic. But in the present system of elections in the country, patterned after the British model, the figures do not truly represent public support. For instance while the Congress has 75% of the seats in Parliament it secured less than 45% of the vote.

The Swatantra Party on the other hand polled ~~almost~~ ⁹⁹ 20% of the total vote and secured 25 seats.

Prospects

In a country where literacy is pitifully low, the intellectual appeal of a Party's programme is limited. The problem is one of "harnessing and mobilising the potential sympathy and support into a mass movement," as the General Secretary of the Party stated in the course of his report to the First National Convention in March 1960. He added: "Even Truth, it has been said, needs wings, and the finest programme or policy can make little headway unless it finds organisational channels through which it can reach every corner of the country". ~~As~~ This continues to be the problem facing the Party today. If the Party is able to develop an organisational mechanism composed of a coordinated group ~~thought~~ throughout the country, is able to develop a sound cadre and has the necessary financial resources, then with the temper of the Indian people being what it is today, thanks to the Chinese Communist invasion of the country and the unpopular economic policies resulting in oppressive direct and indirect taxation, it is not impossible for the Swatantra Party to emerge as a truly liberal Party and provide the people with the choice of a democratic alternative to the Party in office today.