

423, Budhwar Peth,
POONA-2.

13th May 1974.

Respected Shri Masani Sahib,

I am writing this letter to you because I feel compelled to write. I request that you may kindly consider the feelings of men like me and take an urgent decision about the future of the Swatantra Party. I feel that it is only you who can take action to save the Party.

The news first published on 15th April and the various news items published afterwards, including the latest news published today on 13th May, create a definite impression that seven "parties" have already decided to dissolve themselves and merge into a new party. These news also create an impression that Shri Charan Singh will be the Chairman of the new party; and that five out of the seven parties have "already agreed to merge", the Swatantra Party being one of these five. I feel that it is necessary to avoid such a merger and you can still advise the leaders of the Swatantra Party not to go further towards ^{this} merger.

I have been very carefully reading all that you write in the "Freedom First." I have thought over your comments on various events like the participation by the Swatantra Party in the "Pragati Party" of Orissa, the results of municipal elections in Orissa, and the results of the recent elections to the Assemblies of U.P. and Orissa. Your comments on the opportunist behaviour of Shri Charan Singh and Shri Biju Patnaik are also well-known. Your address to the National Convention of the Swatantra Party at Madras also made clear what you thought about co-operation with Shri Biju Patnaik. So I feel that you must not be happy about the proposal that the Swatantra Party may merge itself into the new party under the leadership of Charan Singh and Biju Patnaik.

On this background, I request you to act and prevent the dissolution of the Swatantra Party.

I do not understand why Shri Piloo Mody and other leaders of the Party have become so nervous as to be in a hurry to dissolve the Party and join such a group of people who have no considerations for principles, policies and programmes. The only reason that seems to have prompted these leaders of the Swatantra Party is perhaps their hope that this merger will bring "success" at elections. I feel that this is a very dangerous thought. Even after being unsuccessful at elections, it is in the best interest of democracy in India that the Swatantra Party must maintain its existence and educate the people about the soundness of its policies.

Shri Piloo Mody had come to Poona on 26th April; and I was with him for about five hours. I expressed my apprehensions about the proposed merger. In the course of discussion, he frankly told me, "Charan Singh and Biju Patnaik are first-class scoundrels." Still he maintained that the merger was necessary. About the principles and policies of the new party, he said that it will be a "broad-spectrum" party. He actually mentioned the model of the Congress Party which could accommodate S.K. Patil and Krishna Menon in its fold. I feel that this leads us to a shapeless party having no clear principles.

Next day, that is on 27th April, the Maharashtra State Council of the Party met at Bombay to consider the proposal of the merger. In that meeting, Shri Madhu Mehta told us that on 15th April, at first, he himself and Shri Piloo Mody actually knew nothing about what Shri R.N. Singh Deo had agreed to in the meeting of the seven parties held at Delhi on 14th April. Then he said

that he and Shri Piloo Mody had met you and discussed the problem with you, and no decision was to be taken about merger without the approval by various bodies of the Party including a National Convention. However, it now seems very clear that Shri Piloo Mody is proceeding very rapidly towards the merger; and it will actually take place before 26th May.

I am very much aware of the work done by you before the founding of the Swatantra Party. I feel that your efforts during a long period of many years before 1959 made possible the founding of this party. I am a very small man, a wage-earning clerk, an ordinary member of the working class. But I was very much impressed by the great ideals of the Swatantra Party. I have been having the greatest regards for the leadership of Rajaji and yourself. I, therefore, very strongly feel that the Party founded by Rajaji and yourself must continue to exist, work and progress. During the last fourteen years, I have been working for the Party with devotion. Men like me are working inspite of the circumstances which are very unfavourable to the Party. We do not want leaders of this Party to join a party lead by Charan Singh, Bijju Patnaik and Balraj Madhok!

I was very much impressed by the article, "The Renaissance of Liberalism" in the latest issue of the "Freedom First". Jeremy Thorpe has expressed very important thoughts about the Liberals being relevant. He refused to share power after recent British elections. The Swatantra Party can very well follow this idealism and serve the cause of Liberalism in India vigorously. It must continue to serve the democracy in India. Its leaders must not be carried away by the thoughts of winning elections and getting power.

At the meeting of the Maharashtra State Council of the Party at Bombay on 27th April, five members of the General Council of the Party from Maharashtra very strongly expressed their opposition to the proposed merger. They were, Shri Parmanand Kejriwal, Shri Girish Munshi, Shrimati Sarla Datar, Shri K.H. Subramaniam and myself. We feel that our Party can have full co-operation with other democratic parties for the sake of specific issues. But merger is not at all advisable.

I take the liberty to just mention here that I am a member of the General Council of the Party since the last three elections of the Party for the terms of 1969-71, 1971-73 and 1973-75. I was General Secretary of the Maharashtra Regional Unit of the Party during the term of 1969-71. I am President of the Poona District Committee of the Party. In Maharashtra, all the while, the Party has been facing a very difficult situation. But love for its great ideals has made me to work for the Party in whatever way I could work for it during the last 14 years. I feel you will definitely consider my feelings about the future of the Party.

I do hope to receive a reply from you.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

Sumatilal P. Shah

[SUMATILAL P. SHAH]

SHRI M.R. MASANI,

148, Mahatma Gandhi Road,
Bombay-1.