

SWARAJ PARTY (1922)

Origin and Purpose

Gandhi's decision to call off the agitation caused frustration among the masses. His decision came in for severe criticism from his colleagues such as Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das and N. C. Kelkar, who organised the Swaraj Party. The foundations of the Swaraj Party were laid on 1 January 1923, as the Congress-Khilafat-Swarajya Party with C. R. Das as the President and Motilal Nehru as one of the secretaries, It proposed that an alternative programme of diverting the movement from a widespread civil disobedience programme to restricted programme would be undertaken. By this programme, its members would enter the legislative councils by contesting elections to wreck the legislature from within and use moral pressure to compel the authorities to concede to the popular demand for self-government. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. Ansari and Rujendra Prasad opposed council entry and were known as non-changers. They warned that legislative politics would weaken nationalist fervour and create rivalries among the leaders.

Rise and Decline

In the elections held in 1923, the Swaraj Party captured 42 of the 101 elected seats. In provincial elections, they secured a few seats, but in the Central Provinces they secured a clear majority. In Bengal, the Swaraj Party was the largest party. It followed the policy of undiluted opposition. The Swarajists demanded the release of all political prisoners, provincial autonomy and repealing of the repressive laws imposed by the British government. However, after the death of C. R. Das in 1925, the party drifted towards a policy of cooperation with the government. This led to dissensions in the party and it broke up in 1926. In the 1926 general elections, the party fared badly in the United Provinces and Punjab which were its stronghold earlier. Finally, in 1930, it merged with the Congress.

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