

Swatantra Party

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"It was not till I got to Rajkot that I became aware of that intense antagonism towards the Congress Administration and its representatives felt by all classes of people which was undoubtedly the main factor that led to the defeat of the Congress Party and our victory," said Mr. M. R. Masani, General Secretary of the Swatantra Party, while addressing a public meeting here this evening on "The Significance of the Rajkot Victory", with Mr. N. Dandekar, Chairman of the Bombay unit of the Party, in the Chair.

According to the speaker, the decisive shift from a 41,000 Congress majority last year to a 14,000 Swatantra majority this year denoted a well-marked trend in public opinion, which the results in Dohad, Amroha and Farrukhabad also underlined. These elections were a warning to the Congress Party to mend its ways and change its policies or to go. As Rajaji had put it, the superstition of the inevitability of Congress success had been shattered. On the midnight of the 26th, after the result of the election had been declared at Rajkot, nearly half a lakh of people joined in a procession and demonstrated in such a tumultuous manner that one would have thought that they were celebrating their liberation from a hated regime.

In so far as Gujarat was concerned, the Dohad and Rajkot by-elections meant that the door was now wide open to the Gujarat Swatantra Party, one of the best units in the country, to move on to take power in 1967. In this context, Mr. Masani paid a tribute to Mr. Bhailalbhai Patel, leader of the Swatantra Party in Gujarat, at whose insistent invitation he had stood in Rajkot and whose optimism and faith had thus been vindicated.

Mr. Masani proceeded to observe that, while high taxes and prices, the Gold Control Order and the neglect of the country's defences were undoubtedly responsible for the marked swing in opinion since the last General Elections, even more decisive was the widespread disgust with the lack of honesty of purpose shown by the representatives of the Congress administration and the gulf between their professions and their practice.

Among other reasons for the Swatantra Party's victory, Mr. Masani mentioned the valuable support received by him from various parties and elements who, despite their own ideological differences, were moved by a strong sentiment for strengthening the Opposition in Parliament and throwing up an alternative government. Yet another factor was the contrast between the Swatantra Party's campaign, which was based on an ideological approach, modern techniques and the complete absence of personal invective on the one hand and the Congress campaign, which was based on a personal smear campaign against himself and attempts to intimidate sections of the public by threats of official displeasure.

Referring to Mr. Rasiklal Parikh's statement in the press on 31st May denying that he had sent for a Muslim businessman of Dhoraji by sending a policeman to his home in the dead of night and had sought to intimidate him to work for the Congress candidate, Mr. Masani said that subsequent enquiries had shown that the allegation he had made against the Home Minister of Gujarat was basically well-founded. Mr. Masani said that he was now in possession of evidence to show that the Home Minister did in fact at about 2 a.m. in the early hours of the 26th May, which was polling day, send a police Jamadar named Purshottambhai to the home of this Muslim businessman with a message that the Police Poddar wanted to see him. On his emerging from the house he was placed in a car and was decoyed away instead to the place where Mr. Rasiklal Parikh was residing that night. Mr. Parikh sought to induce him to vote and work for the Congress candidate during polling hours. When the business-

man refused to agree to this proposal, Mr. Parikh told him that it was his duty to do so and that, if he failed to perform it, it would bode no good for his future in Dhoraji.

It would thus be seen that the report to which Mr. Masani gave publicity on 26th May, within a few hours of the incident, and which Mr. Rasiklal Parikh purported to challenge was entirely correct except for the small detail that he was taken not to the Police Station, as he had earlier been informed, but to Mr. Rasiklal Parikh's residence.

Mr. Masani also mentioned that complaints had been made to him that the Home Minister had visited various villages in Jasdan and Padadhari constituencies on the 24th and 25th May accompanied by a posse of Police following his around in motor vans.

Mr. Masani mentioned that the question of what action should be taken to deal with this misuse of his powers by the Home Minister of Gujarat was being considered, but he for one would advise Mr. Rasiklal Parikh to tender his resignation and to agree to an enquiry into these allegations of his misusing his position as Home Minister in the Rajkot by-election. By doing this he would be upholding the high standards of British public life, as recently exemplified by the resignation of a Junior Minister, Mr. Galbraith, in order to facilitate a fair inquiry into his conduct.

Not for publication:

M. R. Masani

(M. R. Masani)