

Bombay, May 14.

2331

That there was an unpublished decision not to take serious disciplinary action, such as expulsion, against those called on by the National Executive of the Swatantra Party at its recent meeting in Delhi to explain their conduct in connection with the elections to the Rajya Sabha from Gujarat is disclosed in the letter written by Mr. M. R. Masani, Deputy Leader of the Swatantra Party in Parliament, to Mr. Dandeker, General Secretary, declining to withdraw his resignation from the Party's National Executive. Mr. Dandeker's letter of April 22 and Mr. Masani's letter to Mr. Dandeker of May 13 were released to the press today.

Describing the published version of the Committee's decision as "eye wash", Mr. Masani goes on to point out that the Committee had failed to take notice of the failure of duty on the part of the President and General Secretary of the Gujarat State unit and the action of certain members of Parliament, including a member of the National Executive, who had gone all the way from Delhi to Ahmedabad to canvass against the Party's candidate. "The Committee has", says Mr. Masani's letter, "purported to court martial the corporals while turning a blind eye to the colonels and captains involved." "Quite apart from the failure to take an ethical stand", continues the letter, "the attempt to turn a blind eye to what has happened is somewhat ostrich-like in that it shows a lack of political acumen in what is needed to restore the shattered image of the Party in the eyes of the people of Gujarat. I hope we are not going to develop the same cynicism about the sanctity of the Party's pledged word and the same contempt for the electorate which the Congress Party have been showing, with results with which we are all familiar."

"I am sure you appreciate", continues the letter, "that, if our democratic Constitution is wrecked and the country turns to some form of authoritarianism, there will be very little scope left for the Swatantra Party or any other Party in the country. Therefore, it is more than ever necessary that all of us should put the country before Party."

The letter records Mr. Masani's belief that he could do more for the Party by staying outside the National Executive and devoting himself to constructive work such as the training of workers, campaigning for the Party's candidates and spreading the Party's principles in Parliament and outside.

"If and when the Party realises the need for an acceptance of ethical and disciplined functioning," concludes the letter, "when it agrees that the means must be as clean as the ends, that it is quality and not quantity that counts and that people have a right to be told the truth, I shall be ready to respond to its call to share responsibility for guiding its work and organisation."

M. R. Masani
(M. R. Masani)

143, Mahatma Gandhi Road,
Bombay 1.

April 22, 1968.

My dear Masani,

The Central Parliamentary Board and the National Executive at their meetings held in New Delhi on April 13 and 14, considered your letter of resignation from these two bodies. I also read out to both these bodies the text of your letter dated 10th April to the President, Prof. Ranga, declining his invitation to be present at those two meetings. In doing so, I emphasised your reiteration not to withdraw your resignation.

Both the Board and the Executive however unanimously requested that you should withdraw your resignation. They felt that in view of disciplinary action having been initiated against Mahida and the five persons who are known to have supported his candidature, there remained no further cause for such a drastic act of atonement by you; and that you should be requested to reconsider your resolve not to withdraw your resignation.

I trust in view of this unanimous request you will reconsider the matter.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

sd/-

(N. Dandeker)

P.S.

To all that I have said above, may I add my personal appeal, based on honest conviction, that you should certainly come back to both these bodies? Please do.

Mr. M. R. Masani, M.P.,
No. 2, Tughlak Road,
New Delhi 11.

May 13, 1968.

My dear Dandeker,

I have received your letter of April 22, 1968, and have given it careful consideration.

How I wish I could agree with you and our colleagues on the National Executive of our Party that "in view of disciplinary action having been initiated against Mahida and the five persons who are known to have supported his candidature there remained no further cause for such a drastic act of atonement" by me as resignation from the National Executive and Parliamentary Board of the Party. In my earlier letter of April 10, I had made it clear that my resignation was final and was not intended to influence in any way the decisions of our National Executive. In any event, the decisions of the National Executive at its meeting in Delhi on April 13 and 14, far from leading me to the conclusion you suggest, confirm my feeling that I should adhere to the action I have taken.

The National Executive has failed to take the obvious steps that were called for in order to restore the credibility of the Party in Gujarat and a measure of discipline within its ranks. The minutes record something that was not mentioned to the press, namely, the intention of the Executive not to resort to any serious disciplinary action, such as expulsion, against the rebels even before notices to show cause were served on them! Further, the Executive appear to have ignored the failure of duty on the part of the Leader of the Opposition and the President and General Secretary of the State unit in Gujarat as also of certain Members of Parliament, one of them a member of the National Executive, who went to Ahmedabad a day or two prior to the elections to work against the Party's candidate. It seems to me, therefore, that the National Executive has in fact purported to court martial the corporals who were guilty while turning a blind eye to the colonels and captains who were involved. Would it be unfair to consider this kind of disciplinary action mere eyewash?

In so far as our Gujarat colleagues are concerned, the statement of the President of the Gujarat Party on April 15 dismissing the entire incident as a mere "misunderstanding" and his attack on the victim of our Party's breach of faith whom he charged with "ingratitude" for venturing to write to Rajaji stating the facts shows not the slightest awareness of misconduct or a desire to atone for it.

Quite apart from the failure to take an ethical stand, the attempt to turn a blind eye to what has happened is somewhat ostrich-like in that it shows a lack of political acumen about what is needed to restore the shattered image of the Party in the eyes of the people of Gujarat. I hope we are not going to develop the same cynicism about the sanctity of the Party's pledged word and the same contempt for the electorate which the Congress Party have been showing, with results with which we are all familiar. People are hankering for a little idealism and ethics in our politics and these they are not getting today. The Swatantra Party could supply these missing elements if it made up its mind to do so. I hope the time will come when the Party will

appreciate that having a few spokesmen in whom the people have faith is even more important than adding to the number of its M.P.s and M.L.A.s.

As you are aware, the Party system and Parliamentary democracy are on trial and larger and larger numbers of people are losing faith in political parties and in the democratic process. I am sure you appreciate that, if our democratic Constitution is wrecked and the country turns to some form of authoritarianism, there will be very little scope left for the Swatantra Party or any other Party in the country. Therefore, it is more than ever necessary that all of us should put the country before Party.

In these circumstances, I feel I can do more for our own Party and the maintenance of democratic processes by staying outside the National Executive and the Parliamentary Board. I propose to do what I can in the way of what may be called "constructive work", such as training programmes for the building of a cadre of young workers. I shall continue to spread the Party's excellent principles both in Parliament and outside. I shall be ready to campaign for good candidates put up by the Party. In this way, I shall also be free to give expression to the suppressed feelings of the rank and file many of whom are not happy with the state of the Party.

If and when the Party realises the need for an acceptance of ethical and disciplined functioning, when it agrees that the means must be as clean as the ends, that it is quality and not quantity that counts and that people have a right to be told the truth, I shall be ready to respond to its call to share responsibility for guiding its work and organisation.

For these reasons, I shall be obliged if you will now kindly report my resignation from the National Executive to the General Council of the Party so that it may be able to consider the issues that arise when it meets in Madras on 1st June.

As there have been some ill-informed comments in the press and as you have been good enough to agree to my releasing to the press your letter of April 22 and my reply, I am doing so now.

Yours sincerely,

sd/-
(Minoo Masani)

Mr. N. Dandekar, M.P.,
General Secretary,
Swatantra Party,
Bombay.