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Masani-Mody clash at 'merger' meet

FPI News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 5: The Swatantra Party is heading for a split over the question of dissolution of the party and merger with the new party — the Bharatiya Lok Dal — being formed by seven non-Congress and non-Communists Opposition parties.

At the national convention of the party which was marked by shouting and physical assaults, an overwhelming majority of the members led by party president Mr. Piloo Mody voted for dissolution of the party. But the minority faction led by former party president, Mr. Minoo Masani threatened to form a new party if the national executive finally approved of the dissolution of the party.

Out of the total of 461 members 407 voted for dissolution, 53 opposed and one abstained from voting.

While Mr. Mody described the merger idea as the inevitable process of history, Mr. Masani felt as the most foolish decision for the party to take.

According to Mr. Mody, the

Bharatiya Lok Dal is the viable alternative to the Congress. But Mr. Masani would not agree. In his view Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan is the viable alternative to the ruling Congress.

Mr. Mody felt that the question before the opposition parties is either to merge and survive or destroy by breaking themselves.

He was optimistic that more and more parties would join the new party leading to a two-party system in the country.

The resolution adopted by the national convention said: "That this national convention of the Swatantra Party welcomes the idea of forming a national alternative by the amalgamation of all political forces, other than the ruling Congress and the Communists parties and approves the impending formation of the new party namely Bharatiya Lok Dal (the Peoples' Party of India). And notes with gratification the fact that it has evolved a common programme, acceptable to the Swatantra Party."

The final declaration will be announced by Mr. Piloo Mody

after the national executive which meets on September 2.

PTI adds: The resolution adopted by the convention would allow those like Mr. Masani who do not wish to join BLD to "carry on such non-partisan activities, which eschew all elections, as they may choose in any name other than the Swatantra".

Mr. Mody is to take steps to get the party election symbol frozen by the Election Commission to prevent its "unfair exploitation".

Originally meant to be named the Conservative Party of India, the Swatantra Party was formed in 1959 mainly by a group of Congressmen disenchanted with the mother party after the Nagpur resolution that year favoured "co-operative joint farming" and extension of the public sector.

Of the founding fathers, Mr. Masani alone survives; Mr. C. Rajagopalachari and Mr. Dahyabhai Patel have passed away. Mr. N. G. Ranga has rejoined the Congress.

The "Swatantra alternative" to the Congress was anti-statism, and

(Continued on page 5 col. 3)

Swatantra split

(Continued from page 1)

and anti-Communism and pro-private capital (both domestic and foreign) and pro-independent farming.

Mr. Rajagopalachari gave the party much initial boost by his campaign against the "licence-permit-quota raj" of the Congress.

Mr. Masani later ruled out any split or defiance in view of differences during the two-day national convention over the party's merger with the Bharatiya Lok Dal.

Addressing a Press conference, Mr. Masani said the convention was barred to Press for the first time and was held in an 'atmosphere of intimidation'.

Asked if his Press conference, attended by three members of the national executive and ten delegates, by itself did not suggest a split in the party over the merger with six other parties, Mr. Masani said "there is major cleavage" at the moment.

"If the party was dissolved, at that stage the question of disobeying the party discipline will arise" Mr. Masani added.

Mr. Masani presented to newsmen Mr. Mohan Lal Yadav, acting president of the Delhi unit of the Party, who was allegedly man-handled on the dais at the convention for certain remarks about the genuineness of delegates from UP. Out of a total of 483 delegates at the convention, UP unit sent 209.

"There was a regular scuffle and an assault on Mr. Yadav," Mr. Masani said.

Mr. Masani also alleged that the proportional representation of the delegates was changed arbitrarily this time. This is how the merger resolution was carried at the convention.

Mr. Masani said the new party would not take off the ground but would prove to be a non-starter.

6

Notice of Resolution to be moved at the Seventh
National Convention of the Swatantra Party on
August 4 and 5, 1974 in New Delhi.

The Seventh National Convention of the Swatantra Party has carefully considered the proposal placed before it that the Swatantra Party be dissolved along with the similar dissolution of six other parties so as to facilitate the formation of a new Party.

The Convention notes that of the seven parties that are expected to dissolve to enable the formation of the new Party, the others being confined to particular States or parts of a State.

The Convention is firmly convinced that the Party's principles and policies continue to be valid and that had the policies of Government been formulated on the basis of the said principles, our country would not be in the present critical situation.

The Convention is equally convinced that the new Party will make no advance in the search for a truly national alternative comprising as it does those who, though for the present have consented to get together on a general programme are bound to disagree in regard to the interpretation of a vague and general statement of policy.

Moreover, with opposition parties like the Congress (O) and the Jan Sangh continuing their individual existence, the objective of a two-party system and its electoral benefits will continue to elude us. On the other hand, there is real danger of the ruling Congress on the one side and the Jan Sangh on the other being the direct beneficiaries of such a development.

The National Convention of the Swatantra Party does not consider the time or occasion opportune for the disappearance of the Swatantra Party from the Indian political scene and therefore **rejects** the proposal to dissolve the Party.

Proposed by:

Seconded by: