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Swatantra Party

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Events and Echoes

SWATANTRA CRISIS
SPREADS TO RANKS

By GULAM

THE crisis in which the Gujarat Swatantra Party was landed following the defeat of its official candidate in the election for the Rayasabha seat is now percolating the party ranks.

The crisis was so far limited to the Legislative wing of the party. Now Gradually, a strong feeling that leaders of the dissidents should be cut to size, has been gaining ground among the loyalists in the rank and file the 15,000-strong party.

Prof N. G. Ranga, the chairman of the Party had sensed this feeling among some of the leading party members when he visited the city early this month and discussed the issue with the leaders of both groups. His efforts to pacify the loyalist group proved futile.

The National Executive of the Party, which met last week in New Delhi also attempted to smoothen matters by evolving the formula that 'show cause' notices should be issued to four MLAs who led the defiance of the party whip. It could convince the loyalists that disciplinary action was not possible against all those who voted for M. U. M. Prasad as they would not be responsible though they were in a majority.

The formula could have brought some satisfaction to the angry loyalist group had Mr Pravinbhai Solanki not reacted adversely to the National Executive decision. Unfortunately for the Gujarat Swatantra Party, soon after the National Executive meeting was over, Mr Solanki told reporters that the dissidents would quit the party if disciplinary action was taken even against those who had openly defied the party whip.

UNTIMELY STATEMENT

Again in view of the "ungrateful" behaviour of Mr Babubhai Vaidya (the defeated official candidate of the party), who in a letter to Mr C. Rajagopalachari, blamed the loyalist leaders for his defeat, the loyalists could have derived satisfaction from the compromise formula evolved by the National Executive. However, Mr Solanki's untimely statement has come in the way of restoring the solidarity of the party.

Mr Solanki is a general secretary of the Gujarat Swatantra Party and that is why his statement has enraged the loyalist group all the more.

In Mr Solanki's statement, they find convincing proof that the mild decision of the National Executive has set loose forces of indiscipline in the party. They argue that no organisation worth the name could function when there is total absence

of discipline and when its responsible office-bearers resort to bullying tactics.

They are sure that Mr Solanki's statement was not more than an empty threat to prevent the party from taking severe disciplinary action. Even Mr H. M. Patel, the President of the Party, had commented one day that Mr Solanki's statement might be nothing more than a threat motivated by a desire to prevent strong disciplinary action.

The loyalists argue that when things have moved so far, strong disciplinary action is essential.

SUSPICIOUS STAND

Mr Solanki's stand has given rise to suspicions among the non-Kshatriyas about the intentions of the Kshatriyas in the party. Quite a good number of non-Kshatriya party members suspect that Kshatriyas are bent upon usurping all the key positions in the party both at the organisational and legislative party levels.

Their fear has some basis too. The Kshatriyas, in collusion with Mr Vadim Mehta, had played all the cards at their disposal to prevent Mr H. M. Patel from being elected as the party leader. When they failed, gradually they created a situation where in Mr Bhagabhai Patel had to resign from the Opposition leadership paving the way for Mr Jaydeep Solanki, who is a Kshatriya leader.

This suspicion strengthened when Mr Jaydeep Solanki, who had resigned from the deputy leadership following the crisis of the official candidate, showed readiness to accept the leadership of the Legislative Swatantra Party, which has not undergone any change since his resignation.

Many members feel that Mr Jaydeep Solanki's resignation was only a ploy to facilitate the acceptance of

Mr Patel's resignation. If he were really annoyed at the attitude of the party why should he accept the leadership of the same members who have not changed nor shown willingness to express any regret for their behaviour?

At present the eyes of party members are focused on the national executive meeting scheduled to be held in Madras in May, by which time the replies to the 'show cause' notices issued to four MLAs who had led the defiance of the party whip are expected to be conveyed to the Executive.

Meanwhile, Mr Pravinbhai Solanki's statement is likely to figure in the Gujarat Swatantra Party Council meeting on April 21.

As many members have demanded that Mr Solanki's explanation should

(Continued on page 7)

Crisis file

Bombay

Client :-

Subject :-

EVENTS & ECHOES

251

(Continued from page 4)

sought by the party chief and if the party was convinced that he had made a statement damaging to the party then disciplinary action should be taken against him and he should immediately be removed from the secretaryship. Mr H. M. Patel is reported to have assured them that he would demand an explanation from Mr Solanki when he comes to attend the party meeting.

From present indications, it is clear that the crisis is deep. The leaders may succeed in repairing the damage in due course but they are not likely to pull the party out of the crisis of confidence.

The party is at present without any programme which could create a sense of involvement among members. Unless such a programme is drawn up, a deterioration could not be prevented.

SSP CORPORATORS' REVOLT

UNTIL recently it was believed that the SSP in Gujarat were free from the party's trait of anarchism. Last week's revolt of SSP corporators against the Mayor of Ahmedabad has shown that they are no different from their counterparts elsewhere in the country.

The SSP corporators have refused to recognise the Mayor. The reason is that the Mayor had declined to withdraw the invitations issued to them on the occasion of the inauguration of the Tagore Theatre by the Prime Minister. The Mayor's decision to withdraw the invitations was a reaction to the SSP members' announcement that they would create trouble when the Prime Minister performed the inauguration ceremony.

To refuse to recognize the Mayor is not a small thing to those who have faith in democracy and, above all, the rule of law. It is perhaps for this reason that no other party which, like the SSP, had opposed the Prime Minister's visit to the city in protest against the Union Government's decision to accept the Kutch Tribesmen Award, has supported the SSP on this issue.

The SSP corporators have subsequently boycotted the Corporation Board meeting and have announced that they would not return to the Board unless the Mayor apologises for his act.

The Mayor has not only refused to bow down to the threat but has warned them that he would suspend them if they repeated their statement on the floor of the House. The SSP corporators do not seem to have needed the warning. They repeated their statement in a letter addressed to Mr Indulal Yagnik, President of the Janta Parishad, to which the Mayor belongs.

The situation is both piquant and delicate. The Mayor is determined to suspend them if they repeat their statement. The SSP corporators are not prepared to relent.

The SSP corporators have now gone to attend Kutch Lalai Samiti Conference at Bhuj. It will be known only on their return whether they want to stick to their demand.