

Bombay

Client :-

5564

Swatantra Party

Subject :- Swatantra Party

Thought, Delhi.

20 APR 1968

Crescent

Mr. Masani

I think you should
 all have high
 thought that his
 ignorant correspondent
 has got some of his
 facts mixed up.
 Inday

they were the three aspirants for the
 Swatantra Party nomination.

Mr. Vaidya, a former MLA, has a
 hold over the Rajkot electorate and
 he helped Mr Masani to win the crucial
 Lok Sabha bye-election in Rajkot. Later
 Mr Vaidya extended the helping hand in
 the election to Rajya Sabha of Dr
 Bihari Lal Antani of Kutch on Swatantra
 ticket as at that moment Mr Vaidya was
 leading the Independent Progressive Bloc
 in the State Assembly. In return for
 these gestures, Mr Masani with the
 approval of State unit chief Mr
 Bhailalbhai Patel and Mr Baria Deputy
 Chief of the party gave an undertaking
 to Mr Vaidya that the Swatantra Party
 would nominate him as the party candi-
 date for the Rajya Sabha poll.

GUJARAT

By Our Correspondent

SWATANTRA PARTY—A

HOUSE DIVIDED 259

THE RIFT in the Swatantra Party in
 Gujarat over the recent bye-election
 to the Rajya Sabha is not confined
 to Gujarat but will have repercussions
 on an all-India basis. The top party
 leadership is sharply divided over this
 issue.

Party Secretary Dandekar described
 the rift as a serious one. Mr Minoo
 Masani, who is ranked only after Rajaji
 in party hierarchy, has resigned from the
 National Executive and the Central
 Parliamentary Board of the party. He is
 credited with the view that strict dis-
 ciplinary action should be taken against
 those who defied the party whip in
 Gujarat. He believes it would be better
 to have a smaller but disciplined party.

The rift in the Swatantra Party in
 Gujarat has come as a surprise to many
 outside the State. In the post-election
 scene only two States—Orissa and
 Gujarat—gave solid base to the party.
 In Orissa it formed the Government as a
 major partner but failed to come to
 power in Gujarat mainly because the
 Patels and Kshatriyas—the two main
 elements which constitute the party in
 Gujarat—could not close their ranks.
 Now the party strength of 72 at the time
 of the elections is reduced to 54. Some
 MLAs have defected either to the Con-
 gress or to the Independent bloc. These
 defections came after some of them saw
 no sign of Swatantra Party coming into
 power, while others like Mr Vadilal
 Mehta left the party after being dis-
 illusioned with the State leadership.

These internal dissensions reached
 their climax during the Rajya Sabha bye-
 elections. Three Congress members were
 retiring but due to the reduced strength
 of the Congress only two could be
 elected while the Swatantra Party could
 hope to win. Messrs U.N. Mahida,
 (elected), Babubhai Vaidya and Prof.

But this was hardly agreeable to some
 members of the party who felt that this
 was Mr Masani's personal commitment
 and that Mr Vaidya was not a party
 member. Some even suggested that he
 was a fellow-traveller. Though Mr Vaidya
 describes himself and his supporters as
 "progressives" and he certainly does not
 fully agree with the Swatantra Party
 ideology. Those who know him would
 not agree that he is a fellow-traveller.
 Of all the persons in India surely Mr
 Masani could not be suspected to join
 hands with a fellow-traveller. The party's
 Central Parliamentary Board had approved
 the nomination of Mr Vaidya and
 hence he was the official candidate.

The forthcoming party meeting will
 take up the issue. Mr Masani is expected
 to demand disciplinary action against the
 rebels while Mr C.C. Desai is likely to
 oppose it.

Party Chairman N.G. Ranga (who
 visited Gujarat) failed to bring about a
 rapprochement. The rebels who enjoy
 the support of some central leaders were
 in no mood to climb down. They blame
 the central leadership for nominating a
 non-party man whom they could not
 vote. "If the party makes mistake how
 are we responsible for it?" they argue.
 Prof. Ranga pleaded with them that once
 the party had made a commitment it was
 the bounden duty of the members to
 honour it.

Even a leader like Rajaji is distressed.
 He was already unhappy over the State
 unit's opposition to Kutch Award and
 he expressed his view openly in *Swarajya*.
 And now another shock to him. The
 election of the new leader of the party in
 the State Assembly is scheduled for next
 month. It is still to be seen whether or
 not the Patels retain their hold or the
 Kshatriyas manage to control the party in
 the State Legislature.

Of late the domination of the ex-ICS
 officials on the party is resented by the
 workers who feel that they have no grass
 roots in the people and hence cannot
 feel their pulse. They are least compe-
 tent to run political parties. It is against
 this background that Mr H.M. Patel's
 elevation to the presidency in the State
 unit was not liked by the party men.