

Bombay

Swatantra Party

Subject :-

Deccan Herald, Bangalore,

14 APR 1968

Swatantra faces revolt from Gujarat

From NARAYAN SWAMY
NEW DELHI, April 13.

The Parliamentary Board of the Swatantra Party today appeared to be helpless in the face of the massive revolt of the Gujarat MLAs against the Central leadership.

The crisis in the party came to a head when its nominee for the Rajya Sabha, Mr. Vaidya was handily defeated by the dissident, Mr. U. N. Mahida who was supported by about 40 Swatantra MLAs (out of a total of 68) in defiance of the Parliamentary Board's directive.

The Leader of the Gujarat Swatantra Legislature Party, Mr. Bhilalbhai Patel, and Mr. M. R. Masani, former General Secretary and at present a member of the Board and national executive, have already resigned their posts as an atonement of the party's indiscipline. Apparently, little else can be done by the National Executive.

If disciplinary action is taken against the defiant MLAs, the Swatantra Party will be reduced to a mere rump in the Gujarat Assembly. And yet, failure to impose sanctions against the rebels will reduce discipline within the party to an alarmingly low level. This is the dilemma before the Party leaders.

Today, the Board, after a listless discussion, passed the buck to the National Executive. According to a compromise face-saving formula that has been canvassed, the Thakore Sahab of Dhrol and four others, who sponsored Mr. Mahida's candidature will be suspended from the Party for a period of five years. This it is feared by some, may lead to a large-scale defections from the Party.

The plain fact is that the Swatantra Party in Gujarat is controlled by feudal elements, the former princes and the Thakore Sahab. They lend strength to the Swatantra Party and the party in no way can add to their political influence or electoral strength. This is the crux of the problem and it remains to be seen whether the National Executive will summon up enough courage to cleanse the Gujarat unit of these haughty relics of a bygone era.

PTI Adds: The Parliamentary Board of the Swatantra Party today decided to request Mr. M. R. Masani to withdraw his resignation from the Board.

The reaction of Masani, who had submitted his resignation sometime back on the Rajya Sabha election controversy in Gujarat, is not known immediately.

Party's General Secretary Dandekar told pressmen that the National Executive meeting here tomorrow would take decision on various issues considered by the Parliamentary Board today.

Dr. Dandekar confirmed that Mr. Mahida who contested and defeated Mr. Vaidya in the Rajya Sabha elections had been "suspended" and asked to submit explanations.

On the Kutch issue, the Board decided to permit members of the Party to take part "on an individual basis" in the "satyagraha programme" of the Anti-Kutch Surrender Committee.

To questions, Mr. Dandekar made it clear that the Gujarat unit as such would not join in the "satyagraha".

Signature
MAM