

## GUJARAT LETTER:

## A PAINFUL DILEMMA

RAJKOT, April 1: The defeat of the official Swatantra candidate, Sri Babubhai Vaidya, in the biennial Rajya Sabha election at the hands of the rebel Swatantra candidate, Sri U. N. Mahida, has created a crisis in the party. Within hours of the declaration of the result, the leader of the Opposition, Sri Bhaikaka, and the Deputy Leader, Sri Jaideepsinh, resigned from these offices. In a press statement Sri Bhaikaka said that the letter which he addressed to the members calling upon them to vote for the official candidate was as good as a whip, and disregard of it is mutiny against the party leadership. He declared that he would accept no office in the party now. Sri Jaideepsinh does not take it as an expression of no confidence in the party leadership but as a challenge to it. Many party MLAs were repentant and requested Sri Bhaikaka to reconsider his decision, but he refused bluntly to oblige them and did not even attend the meeting of the party MLAs which was held to consider the resignations, which were accepted with regret. Sri Udesinh Vadodia, party whip, has been directed to officiate as leader till the vacancies are filled on 21st of April, when the State Council and the State Executive are meeting.

Sri H. M. Patel, President of the Gujarat Swatantra Party, said that this defeat was brought about by party MLAs who had defied the party whip, but he refused to accept it as lack of confidence. He conceded that it was a breach of discipline. He did not indicate whether disciplinary action would be taken against all, but he said that some action would be taken against the four MLAs who supported Sri Mahida's candidature. He hoped that party members would work for unity and pull the party out of the crisis. Sri Pravinsinhji Solanki, General Secretary, denied that it showed want of confidence in the leadership, but admitted that if he had been party leader he would have resigned. He did not know whether any office-bearer had flouted the whip, but if so he should not be spared. But he did not believe that any action would be taken against erring members, as they were not committed to the promise given to Sri Vaidya by party leaders.

But Sri Solanki is only splitting hairs. Promises and programmes of the party are binding on the members. Sri

M. R. Masani is in direct disagreement with Sri Solanki's reasoning and has tendered his resignation from all executive posts in the party. Sri Masani, having been directly concerned as the then General Secretary, feels responsible for the breach of promise by the Gujarat unit. In his resignation letter to the General Secretary, Sri Dandekar, he has referred to the failure of some of the Swatantra MLAs to vote for Sri Vaidya.

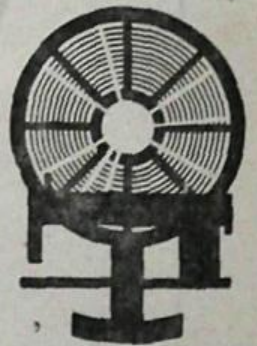
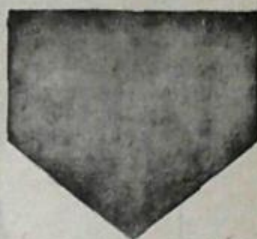
In the 1966 Rajya Sabha biennial elections, the Swatantra Party required the support of the Independent Progressive Group, headed by Sri Vaidya, in order that Swatantra candidate Sri Biharilal Antani be returned to the Rajya Sabha. In the 1967 general elections, Sri Vaidya stood down in favour of Jan Sangh and Swatantra did not contest his former Assembly seat. This further obliged Swatantra, which gave him the ticket for the Rajya Sabha, but a group of party members objected that he was not a party member. Sri Vaidya thus did sincere service to the party. He was magnanimous in his defeat, refusing to make any comment.

The Congress is jubilant. In fact some Congress leaders, including a Deputy Minister, encouraged Sri Mahida to contest, promising him surplus votes. Two first preference votes and all the second preference votes from Congress went to Sri Mahida. Congress does not gain materially. But it has introduced a wedge in the opposition. An element of treachery and dishonesty has been introduced in Gujarat politics. The relations between the ruling party and Swatantra were cordial before 1967, and even during the first session after the elections. Congress is guilty of disturbing this amicable relationship.

A study of the voting shows that 34 or 35 Swatantra MLAs voted for Sri Mahida, while barely 20 Swatantra votes seem to have gone to Sri Vaidya. Sri Bhaikaka has stated that nearly 39 Swatantra MLAs defied the whip. This tallies with these calculations. Thus the Swatantra leaders both at the Centre and State level are faced with a painful dilemma. If they take disciplinary action, 39 party MLAs will be affected, and if they do not, a bad precedent will be established. In any case, the aura of the party is tarnished.

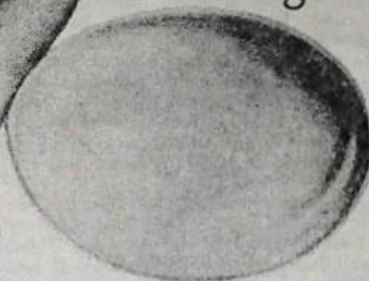
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