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Masani's Resignation : Bid To Restore Probity To Public Life

BOMBAY: THE RESIGNATION OF M. R. MASANI, MP AND OTHER SWATANTRA LEADERS FROM THE PARTY NATIONAL EXECUTIVE AND OTHER HIGH POSITIONS HAS CAUSED A CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL STIR.

Yet this decision, depressing in certain respects, is based on a principle that has been sadly neglected in political life in recent times — the principle that a politician's word should be as good as his bond.

Much of the chaos prevalent in India today springs from the fact that expediency often takes the place of moral norms and political convenience overrides honest convictions.

Floor-crossing, shifts of allegiance and similar phenomena have reduced politics to a mockery.

Sad to say, the infection has spread even to the ranks of the Swatantra Party in Gujarat, for the behaviour of certain members of the Gujarat Assembly in joining hands with the Congress to defeat the official Swatantra candidate, was not only morally wrong but a clear betrayal of solemn assurances given by the leaders of the Party.

NO OTHER WAY

In these circumstances it is not at all surprising that men who took the pledged word seriously should have preferred to resign rather than permit such betrayal.

As Mr Masani wrote to General Secretary N. Dandekar following his resignation, the Swatantra Party had in 1966 invited the support of the Independent Progressive Group, of which Mr Babubhai Vaidya was the leader in the Gujarat Assembly.

This support was at the time vital to ensure the success of Dr Beharilal Antani, the Swatantra candidate.

The Party had, in order to secure Mr Vaidya's support, given the latter a solemn assurance that he would be the Party candidate for the Rajya Sabha in the 1968 elections.

SOLEMN PLEDGE

Mr Masani, then General Secretary of the Party, had been approached by Jaideepsinghji of Baria for approval and had assured him that the Central Parliamentary Board of the Party would honour the arrangement in 1968.

A decision in this regard was in fact taken by the Board when it met in Bombay and recorded that Mr Vaidya would be the Party candidate in 1968.

When, however, the time came for the Rajya Sabha elections, certain members of the Swatantra Party, although fully aware of the pledge to Mr Vaidya, decided to ignore it and to vote against the Party candidate in conjunction with the Congress Party.

DETERIORATION

As Masani points out, this action was "one more example of how the general demoralisation in the political life of the country is finding its way into our own ranks."

As one who had pledged the Party's word to the Independent Progressive Group and its leader, Masani felt he had a personal responsibility in the matter, along with the leaders of the Party in Gujarat, Bhailalbhai Patel and Jaideepsinghji of Baria.

He therefore resigned from the National Executive and the Central Parliamentary Board "as an act of atonement . . . in the hope that this may stimulate the conscience of the Party".

That Masani's decision is not dictated by considerations of personal pique, is clear

from the fact that he has assured the General Secretary that he will continue to give the fullest support to the Party in all efforts to uphold its discipline and effective functioning.

ACTION NEEDED

It is yet to be seen what action the Party will take against those members of the Gujarat Assembly who have chosen to defy its mandate.

The rebels ignoring Dr Vaidya, elected another Swatantra Party member, U. N. Mahida, in violation of a whip issued by Bhailalbhai Patel, founder member of the Gujarat Swatantra Party and leader of the Party's group in the Assembly.

On previous occasions the Swatantra Party has preferred to expel members who did not conform to discipline. Although it is too early to say what concrete action will be taken in the present instance, it is difficult to see what



M. R. Masani

other course is possible.

In any event, Masani's resignation on a point of principle will do much to restore the public's confidence in the integrity of politicians which, during the past few years, has been badly shaken.