

Jeeva Rajgopal

MY CASE AGAINST SAIC PARTICIPATION

If the future of South Africa is to be determined by the majority people of this country then the time has come for the Black people to begin to think and act correctly. It is incumbent upon the intellectual and radical thinking Blacks to make correct assessments and to have the necessary foresight before arriving at conclusions. It is also incumbent on them to explain to the masses the necessity for principles and tactics to go together in the conduct of the struggle for freedom in South Africa, with particular regard to the conditions created by the White Government. It is essential that the Black leadership fully understands the situation prevailing in the country, as well as the changing circumstances and the factors influencing those changes in order not only to make correct deductions but also to explain to the masses the relevant weight to be placed on principles as on tactics from time to time.

To draw conclusions from historical decisions which in their context and in their time might well have been correct and to relate them to present South African conditions would be wholly incorrect.

It is one thing to learn lessons from History, but an entirely different matter when it comes to drawing parallels with historical events or suggesting a similar course of events to those adopted in other places and in other times such as in India, Germany, Russia etc. It would be equally incongruent to draw parallels with, and to suggest similar action to events in South Africa which occurred prior to the flood of repressive, intimidatory and discriminatory laws which have made this country not only a police state and a pariah in the world of nations, but also one which has no resemblance to the conditions prevailing in the other countries of historical concern, or for that matter in pre 1948 South Africa.

My attitude towards participation in the following SAIC elections is determined not only by taking into account the lessons that History teaches us but also the objective conditions in which we live and the rapidly growing intolerance of the world towards the White South African way of life.

I concede that the ultimate purpose of all Political activity among Blacks in South Africa is the upliftment of the oppressed masses and the destruction of the enforced apartheid system. I concede further that tactics are a necessary concomitant of a principled political struggle especially in South Africa and in the legally restrictive situation we find ourselves. But I cannot concede that the entitlement of Indians to elect an Indian Council or Parliament is really such a laudible dispensation as to hoodwink the oppressed peoples of South Africa into believing that it is anything but a fraud or that if a number of people participated in the elections excluding the radicals that our overseas campaigners or the world at large would abandon the pressure against South Africa or have their anti apartheid arguments weakened. Nor do I concede that it is necessary for radical thinking Democrats to capture the SAIC in order to deny the Government the argument that Indians are participating in its system of Government.

The NIC is unequivocally opposed to participating in the forthcoming SAIC elections because it refuses to make false promises to the people during the election campaign, because it refuses to enter the Indian Parliament or Council and operate and be seen to operate the apartheid system and the enslavement of Black poverty and suffering, because it refuses to demand and set to nought the Anti-apartheid campaign conducted by the exiles, because it refuses to hand to the government on a silver platter the most undervalued of gifts, because it refuses to be party to the total alienation of radical African sympathy.

THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The NIC readily concedes that the protagonists of participation intend participation with rejection, and to this end will accept their bona fides. It is essential to know what campaign promises will be made by them, what their manifesto will contain, and what the ultimate purpose of participation for radicals is. If there is going to be a demand for one-man, one-vote for all

people including Africans, Coloureds and Indians, if there is going to be a demand for a unitary state based on recognised Democratic principles, if there is going to be demand for the release of political leaders in prison and under restriction orders and if there is going to be a demand for the repeal of discriminatory and repressive legislation then it must be made clear that this is the policy of the group and they must also make it clear how they intend to carry out their mandate once they enter the Indian Council or Parliament. Some have even mooted the idea of not taking the oath, of not recognising the flag or the anthem, of not forming a cabinet and of returning their salary to their party ~~or~~ to charity. It is necessary to clarify how these things can be enforced. It is my submission that in the prevailing legal and political climate the campaign promises would be a fraud and would be readily rejected by the people to whom they are made. In any event, if no promises or campaign policy are clearly put to the people the motives of this group will be seriously suspect. It has also been mooted by some that the period prior to the election would give rise to, as usual, "election fever", and that this period could be used to mobilise the masses into activity. This group must state in clear terms what that activity could be, and what it is intended to lead to. In addition they must also state the post-election activity which they have in mind.

THE INDIAN COUNCIL OR PARLIAMENT

It is necessary for these people to state whether they will enter the Council or Parliament if successful and for how long. They must indicate how they intend to enter the Council if they refuse to take the oath. And if they take the oath and enter the Council whether they intend to make their demands in keeping with their campaign promises, and then walking out or sinking into the routine business of the Agenda as did the SAIC and the Labour Party in the CRC. In either case, they must make clear what they intend to achieve for the people in the course of conduct they choose. They must bear in mind that the Indian Council is to represent Indians only and to deal with Indian affairs only,

with very limited powers and functions and that, therefore, they would not be allowed by law and by its constitutional framework to indulge in one-way, one-vote or other democratic demands. The Speaker of the House will have to rule them out of order if he wants to act correctly but even if he closes his eyes to the applicable rules the best that the Council can do is to adopt a resolution and to refer it to the Super Parliament or the Joint Parliament where the built-in White majority is guaranteed to reject it out of hand. Of that there should be no doubt whatever. Even if such a resolution is allowed and discussion on it is unhindered it is necessary to know whether these Councillors would thereafter be prepared to face the wrath of the people in the everyday questions which will be aggravated by the fact that the Indian Council would be answerable to them instead of the White racist government.

THE OVERSEAS CAMPAIGN

It is common knowledge that our leaders overseas have conducted an Anti-Apartheid campaign in nearly every major centre of the world - in UNO, among the Third World nations, in the East, in the Labour movements, in the area of sports, justice, and in a variety of other fields. It is equally common knowledge that the almost total isolation of South Africa by the United Nations countries is the work of exiled leaders overseas who have been arguing that Democracy is denied to our people despite the workings of the Indian Council, the CRC and the Homelands. In any event, they argue that they represent the oppressed masses, the banned, the silent, the NIC, the BFC, SASO, etc. The protagonists of participation must consider the irreparable harm and the embarrassment they would cause to the overseas campaign against South Africa. No amount of fulminating can ever detract from that. In spite of all the propaganda and the massive sums of money spent by the Government the leaders overseas have not only been able to counter that propaganda but have over the years successfully brought the entire world's attention to focus on South Africa. In addition considerable pressure has been brought to bear on South Africa by the reluctant Western Nations as a result of Third World pressure for which the exiles have been largely responsible. If we should sit for working within

the Apartheid system, we would, despite all our protestations to the contrary, have delivered a very severe body blow to the exiled Leaders campaigns. Not only would we have given the impression that we have fallen victim to the brainwashing propaganda in South Africa, not only would we have brought to halt the successful overseas campaign, but we would have also placed ourselves in a position in which we would find it almost impossible to extricate ourselves. We would have also loudly demonstrated our total lack of concern for both the exiled leaders overseas and those in Roben Island, and our many mouthings for the release of these of these leaders as a prerequisite for a National Convention would have amounted to so much hot air. For my part any action by any group that will discredit the past or future work of the exiled leaders would be unforgivable.

THE SILVER PLATTER GIFT

These people must know, whether they like it or not, that for the first time in the History of South Africa they would have given the Government its most powerful argument with which to face its shrinking world of friends and to redeem its almost non-existent credibility in the world outside. The Government will say with apparent justification and great joy that the Indian Community has fully and voluntarily endorsed its policy of separate development. This they will emphasise is now acceptable even to former enemies, radicals, communists, etc. The Government will ask, with considerable force in their argument, to be left alone to solve the country's problems. They will ask that there should be no interference in South Africa's internal affairs and that there should be no more Anti-S.A. resolution in the various international forums. They will say with equal force in their arguments that opposition groups in the various parliaments do make demands in the normally acceptable democratic fashion. These arguments would receive considerable news coverage through all the media from the very beginning of the election campaign. I am satisfied that the demands of our radicals and their participation with rejection policy would hardly see the light of day. The media will see to that. It must also be remembered that there is no reason to

believe that the Government will not act against our so-called radicals if they should give the impression that they are succeeding or if they should become a threat to the Government's position.

This is one aspect of the argument the newly enthusiastic radicals cannot and dare not ignore.

THE AFRICAN INTELLECTUALS

It is a known fact that our African doctors and lawyers and all those others who may be categorized as the African intellectual do in fact exist. No one will dare suggest that with the banning of the ANC, PAC, BCP, SACC, etc, the membership and following of these organisations have disappeared from the face of South Africa. Nor will anyone suggest, even tentatively, that the calibre of thinking prevalent in the leadership of these organisations as well as the thinking of many of the African professionals does not represent the type of thinking which offers the most reasonable hope of a peaceful solution for all the peoples of South Africa, in which the fear of a white majority with retribution in its mind or a 1949 mentality will not exist. It is important to note that these African intellectuals are not only radical in their thinking but are also aware of the machinations and ultimate purpose of the White racist mentality and will have nothing to do with it. In addition, they know, and they have always been aware that the Indian intellectual has in like manner been a reliable ally with whom they could hope to build a safe and peaceful future for all South Africans. But if we should capitulate now or if we should abandon the path of true democracy how can we hope to retain their sympathy, or how can we escape the suspicion, to put it mildly, that we have joined the White laager out of fear of the African hordes and in opposition to African aspirations for the doubtful privilege of sitting in an Indian "Parliament". The feeling could gain currency that the present struggle between the racist oppressor and the Black oppressed majority will be turned into one between the latter (consisting of White, Indian and Coloured) and the African oppressed.

For how long can any one be expected to sift out the grain from the chaff when the hour "too ghastly to contemplate" finally comes around. It would also provide ready ammunition for the racially inclined African and those among the racist Whites who are inclined towards inciting, aiding and abetting Indo-African hostility as in 1949. In such a situation we would be the arbiters of our own misfortune. No reasonable man will come to any other conclusion, taking into account that the Indian is presently receiving navy training and is promised army and airforce training, than that he walked voluntarily into the White man's racist laager. Never in the history of any oppressed people have they courted mass suicide in such naked fashion.

It must always be borne in mind that the SAIC and the 3-tier system is a creation of the Apartheid policy of the White government which has been fully supported by the White minority. It must also be borne in mind that from the earliest of times this White minority has been concerned with creating one device after another to deny the Black man his birthright and to perpetuate its position, power and wealth. It has been trying equally hard to make its devices palatable to the Black communities on the one hand and on the other hand trying to give the outside world, particularly its Western civilized friends, the impression that these devices are the best solution to the "unique" S.African situation, and that Blacks are more and more working within the system having seen the merit in these devices and having accepted the governments bona fides.

Never once has there been prior consent from the Black people nor even consultation. It has always been the case of We (the White minority in power) know what's best for the Blacks. It has always been the case of we fear the Black majority and it will be unrealistic for the Blacks to expect Whites to share on a basis of equality which will lead to Whites being swamped. The White bona fides have led us with numerous Blacks dead from the beginning of times to Sharpeville to Soweto. The White bona fides have given birth to countless discriminatory and repressive laws on the 1948 White Book which

are no more than crimes against the people. These laws have led to our leaders and our people being imprisoned, tortured, banned, exiled and many living in a state of utter fear and degradation. This in turn has led to the emergence and re-awakening of the so-called moderates and in many cases the deliberate creation of "middle of the road" leaders to work within and give credibility to the system in order to enable the government to sell its nefarious plans to the outside world as a product of its genius and which it has found to be desirable by the people themselves. All this is well known -- including the poverty and imprisonment of the Blacks, the power and affluence of the Whites, their selfishness and their fears, the mink-coating of the middle class Blacks to perpetuate the White control. It is also well known that the government has not succeeded in winning over the Blacks to its way of thinking and it is not likely ever to do so despite all its machinations. Furthermore it is well known that the UNO, OAU and in fact the whole world including more and more of its own western civilized friends such as Britain, France, USA and West Germany, under pressure from Third World countries, are turning their backs on S.Africa and its unchristian and uncivilized policies. It is equally well known that Black leaders living in exile overseas are constantly harassing S.Africa in nearly all the major capitals of the world with the result that S.Africa's world of friends is rapidly shrinking to nil and that very soon when SWA and Rhodesia are finally out of the way S.Africa will face the full brunt of the world's attention. It is equally well known that White S.Africans credited with the greed, selfishness and diplomatic acumen so much a part of the English Colonial thinking and that of the late United Party together with the Afrikaaner determination and foresight since 1948, have been preparing for a last ditch stand to "fight like cornered animals" in defence of their privileged position.

What our Congress Party radicals overlook -- and this I consider is a serious omission -- is that the policy of Apartheid cannot survive in isolation and will certainly not be allowed to survive for ever by the rest of the world. Of this I am as sure as I am that day will follow night.

It remains for me to say that the alternatives to participation in the "elections" is not readily available. The government will see to it that opposition to the elections is frustrated. It has all the machinery available for it -- from policemen to BOSS-men, from spies to paid pimps, from Secret Funds to unlimited funds and the entire propaganda media, including newspapers, TV, radio, its overseas embassies and a host of paid agents. Already in the prevailing conditions of fear and frustration there is a reasonable possibility that a number of people will choose the line of safety and participate in the "elections". But for radical intellectuals to consider participation in the elections is, in my opinion, nothing short of capitulation to the fear-encrusted Apartheid system.

What I would consider as the only honourable avenue left to true Democrats is to take the risks in both hands and march forward with grit and determination until ultimate victory, when their leadership and advice will not only be respected but followed. They must know that along the road to victory, the losses would be very heavy and persistent, and victories few and far between. They must know however that the pace of change and the pressures on the country would be accelerated after Namibia and Zimbabwe are out of the way. Enthusiastic radicals should know also that rather than dissipate their energies and talents in fear-motivated endeavours detrimental to the cause of freedom, they should engage in rallying the people as far as possible to mass meetings called to reject the SAIC and the Apartheid system. In this exercise I include pamphleteering, house meetings, and door to door explanations to the masses who are as yet unaware that they need not vote or that if they should vote they would do more harm than good. If this is considered not much of an alternative in the light of sacrifices and risks involved, I would readily agree and give serious thought to any suggestions made by them or any one else. By the same token I would suggest that the Congress Party, if they should participate in the elections, would find the people equally reticent and the governments vast machinery an equally formidable obstacle.

I have confined my case to the foregoing matters only for two reasons. Firstly I believe that the arguments in respect of the various other matters are fairly well known , and secondly because I did not want this to become a lengthy and unwieldy essay.

My main purpose in dealing with the above matters is to enable the Congress Party and its supporters to present their arguments in these matters, if they can. So far they have stated that they have not applied their minds to these questions.

Finally, I believe that the publication of the two Memoranda putting up a case for participation in the elections are already being used to enhance the arguments of the SAIC and Reform Party members. I doubt if the authors foresaw this gift which they have unwittingly given the SAIC and government apologists.

M J NAIDOO

Vice President
NATAL INDIAN CONGRESS
28.5.79