

# ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN BOYCOTT

(By Janet Jagan)

I was Sunday. The telephone rang and I answered. The voice at the other end of the line said that he would like to seek my assistance in a matter. This was nothing new. I receive at least a dozen phone calls a day starting out with someone asking my assistance and help in a matter. But this one had me stunned. It was something entirely different from what I had expected.

"I represent rural shopkeepers," he said. "My name is Singh. We do not agree with the boycott of South African goods. We want to inform the Georgetown shopkeepers that if they do not stop the ban on South African goods, we will stop buying from them. We will take out our own licences and import our own goods. The Englishmen in South Africa have a perfect right to do what they are doing," he said.

"We want you to take up the matter," said the voice at the other end of the line. "We want you to inform the Georgetown shopkeepers." "I am afraid I cannot do that," I replied. "I do not agree with you." "We will boycott Dr. Jagan then," he said. "Good," I replied. "Do that." And I hung up.

## Another Ring

Five minutes later I had another phone call. This time it was from a man who identified himself as a member of the People's Progressive Party. "I have just talked to the representative of the rural shopkeepers Association," he said. "He told me he talked to you about the ban on South African goods, but did not get any satisfaction."

I then explained to the person that the People's Progressive Party had for long voiced its protest against the Apartheid policy of the South African Government. I reminded him that Dr. Jagan had spoken at length against the

policy of racial discrimination in South Africa in the Legislative Council when he was a member from 1947 to 1953.

I reminded him that many Party members had copies of Dr. Jagan's speech which was printed in the Party booklet 'Malan's Menace'. I told him emphatically that the party had a consistent policy of opposition to South Africa's policy and that our Party had urged a boycott of South African goods before. I also reminded him of Dr. Jagan's stand on the West Indian cricket team playing in South Africa and his urging that the non-white West Indian team should not play in a country where its members would bump into racial prejudice.

The voice at the other end of the line said then that he agreed with the Apartheid policy in South Africa. "Look how those Africans behave," he said, "They should be segregated. Look at the U.S.A. The Americans are right to do what they are doing."

## Talking Rubbish

"Wait a minute," I said. "You're talking a lot of rubbish. The P.P.P. believes that all men are created equal. We do not believe that any race is superior.

We do not stand for racial segregation. We cannot sit by and see human beings treated like animals, as they do in South Africa."

"You're wrong," he said. "Those people are no good. If you take a stand like that you won't get any votes in the next elections. The Indians won't support Dr. Jagan if he supports the black people in America and South Africa."

## India's Stand

"Well", I said, "if you want to bring the Indians into this, I would like to remind you that the Indian Government, along with many other Governments, has taken a strong stand on the South African question. It has severed diplomatic relations with South Africa because of its Apartheid policy. Many nations have taken a similar stand to express their disgust with that policy."

Well, he had an answer for that too. "We don't care what India does", he said. "People don't respect Pandit Nehru anymore".

I made one last try. "Go back to your history," I said. "Have you forgotten that Mahatma Gandhi began his activities in South Africa fighting the same practices?" Gandhi was no good, he said. What did he do for India? If you continue to support this ban on South African goods, we will withdraw all our support from Dr. Jagan, he warned.

My last remark to the so-called P.P.P. member was that I was sure that his point of view could not represent more than half a dozen persons. The Party had a consistent view on the oppression in South Africa and would not be influenced by his threats. I hung up the telephone.

## Mistaken View

Thinking about it afterwards, I could not help being amazed that people could think like that. Perhaps it all began with the belief that once Burnham's P.N.C. was advocating a ban on South African goods, the P.P.P. would have a different view. What nonsense!

Political parties, no matter how diverse their views may be and no matter what bitter opponents they may be, must meet on common ground in certain issues.

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BOYCOTT

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This is certainly one issue in which there is no difference of opinion. In fact it might well be said that the P.N.C. has adopted the P.P.P. view on South Africa, since it was not long ago that Dr. Jagan called for a boycott of the West Indian cricket team going to South Africa.