

26th February, 1988.

The Editor,  
The Natal Witness,  
P.O.Box 362,  
Pietermaritzburg,  
3200.

Sir,

I was not able to be at the protest meeting against the State President's recent spate of bannings, but I would like to add my protest to those which were expressed there.

I have known Archie Gumede for some 35 years, Saravanan Chetty for 30 and Simon Gqubule since soon after he moved to Pietermaritzburg from Umtata with the Federal Theological Seminary. During those years I have heard all three of them say many angry things about apartheid and the Nationalist Government, but I have never heard any of them advocating violence. They have certainly had enough provocation.

Both Mr. Gumede and Mr. Chetty have spent a large part of the time that I have known them either in detention or under banning orders. Mr. Gumede has twice been involved in 'treason' trials, one of which was dragged out by the State for months, the other for years, at the end of both of which, in spite of the vast scope of our security laws, he could be found guilty of nothing. This is not surprising. He has been a firm proponent of non-violence all his life and has done all he could to bring the UDF to the negotiating table with Inkatha over the conflict between the two in Pietermaritzburg and elsewhere. Only the week before his banning, when I happened to call on him, I found him poring over a draft press release, making sure that there was nothing in it which might jeopardise the course of negotiations.

If these are the kind of people the Government is going to persist in silencing what chance is there of peace returning, not only to Pietermaritzburg and Natal, but to the country as a whole? Not much, I wouldn't think. As for the banning of whole organisations, it has been tried before. The long term effects, as far as stamping out opposition to government policies is concerned, have been precisely nil. Otherwise, how is it that, almost exactly 28 years after this tactic was first tried, we find ourselves living under a permanent state of emergency?

One suspects that Mr. Botha's action has nothing to do with the security of the state but quite a lot to do with by-elections he now faces against the Conservatives, and that the freedom of Messrs. Chetty, Gqubule and Gumede, and the future prospects for peace for the rest of us, are being sacrificed at the feet of that tawdry altar.

Yours faithfully,

Peter Brown.