

SPORTS DECISIONS

Anti-Apartheid Struggle Undermined

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DURING our freedom struggle, Jawaharlal Nehru used to quote Ernst Toller, the German anti-fascist writer, that it makes a world of difference, whether we place freedom first or second in the list of our priorities. I am reminded of that as our friends in the Anti-Apartheid Movement have begun to wonder in recent months, whether India has relegated its opposition to apartheid as second to its desire to host international sports competitions.

For, twice this year, the Government of India has seemingly ignored its own commitments against apartheid sport and allowed sportsmen on the United Nation's Register to play in India, without even an expression of disapproval of their collaboration with apartheid.

India, with its proud record in the struggle against racism in South Africa, pioneered in the boycott of apartheid sports. Already in the 1950's, even before many of the African States became independent, India took the lead in pressing international sports bodies to exclude White South African sports federations.

India has been an active member of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid, which has promoted the boycott of apartheid. It was a member of the UN Committee, which drafted the international Convention against Apartheid in Sport.

The campaign was initially against participation of White South African sports bodies and their members in international competitions. As

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the boycott movement and public demonstrations succeeded in preventing most South African teams from playing abroad, the South African Government began to spend fabulous amounts of money to entice foreign sportsmen to play in South Africa.

To counter this, the United Nations, in 1980, initiated the publication of a "Register of Sportsmen and Sportswomen" playing in South Africa for appropriate action by governments and organisations.

The Register has been a useful tool to persuade the sportsmen not to undertake to play any more in South Africa—so that their names will be deleted—and, if they resist, to exert appropriate pressure. It was so effective that a similar "Register of Musicians, Actors and Entertainers" was initiated by the United Nations in 1983.

Although the United Nations deliberately refrained from laying down precise action against "collaborators", African and other Non-Aligned Governments began to exclude them on the grounds that those who play for apartheid money could not be allowed to make money in their countries.

In recent years, even some Western governments have prohibited them. Hundreds of local authorities in Britain, Sweden, Norway and Netherlands have decided that municipal stadiums and other facilities cannot be used for sports fixtures that included South Africans or sportsmen on the UN Register.

Yet, India, which helped initiate these moves as a member of the UN Special Committee, allowed the Davis Cup match against Israel to be played in Delhi this year. There is no UN resolution for a sports boycott of Israel, but the Israeli players were on the UN Register of those playing in South Africa. There were reports in the Indian press that they had

given an undertaking to the United Nations, but that was without any foundation.

In the recent World Cup Cricket, five members of the English team were on the UN Register. They included Graham Gooch, who was in the English team, which toured India in 1982, after announcing that he was against apartheid. While in India, Gooch and Geoff Boycott, who covered the recent World Cup events as a journalist, secretly plotted to take a rebel cricket team to South Africa. Under strong Indian pressure, the English Cricket Board (TCCB) suspended them from test matches for three years.

Last year, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe banned the English cricket team from their countries as it included players on the UN Register. In Trinidad, government leaders decided not to attend the matches or give receptions and there were public demonstrations in several Caribbean countries.

The Indian Government, consistent with its anti-apartheid policy and tradition, could have announced well in advance that it would not grant visas to the players on the UN Register. Or at a very minimum, it could have explained to the world that it was granting visas, while expressing total disapproval of the collaborators, in the hope that the International Cricket Conference would take action against them soon.

Instead, the only statement by the official spokesman was that there would be no problem about visas as TCCB had apparently declared its "opposition to apartheid." The TCCB assurance is irrelevant and meaningless. The United Nations requires a specific undertaking by the sportsman that he would no longer play in South Africa.

Moreover, what does "opposition to apartheid" mean? Even the Botha regime declares in its propaganda that apartheid is dead and that it is against apartheid as understood by the rest of the world. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan — not to mention Graham Gooch — have all declared opposition to apartheid. The issue is not opposition in words but dissociation from, and non-cooperation with, apartheid.

No government or organisation in the anti-apartheid coalition has publicly criticised India because of the goodwill earned by the country, but many have conveyed their concern to Indian diplomatic missions — and to me.

It was ironic that several organisations dismissed the matter with me at the recent International Conference against Apartheid Sport, which met in Harare even as the World Cup finals were taking place in India.

The UN Special Committee gave me a citation at the Conference for my contribution to the sports boycott of apartheid, referring especially to my initiative in publishing the UN Register.

I have great respect for the deep commitment of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to the struggle against apartheid. I know that the Ministers concerned, Eduardo Faleiro and Margaret Alva, are equally committed. I can only guess that the decisions on the Davis Cup and World Cup were taken by the government at the urging of our sports administra-

tors, without taking into account our commitments in the United Nations.

This was in sharp contrast to the decision to boycott the Commonwealth Games last year. I am even more surprised by the silence of the Indian press and public, seemingly uninformed on the issue.

As a result, India's credibility has been undermined in the year when the Africa Fund was launched in New Delhi, when India set the lead in several anti-apartheid actions. All parties in the Indian Parliament appealed for action by other Parliaments, and Indian workers and youth have spontaneously and generously contributed for the African liberation.

I may also add that we have disappointed Indians in South Africa, who have played the leading role, even since 1946, in challenging apartheid sports. The late M.N. Pather and George Singh, Morgan Naidoo, Bobby Naidoo and M.R. Reddy and others have resisted intimidation to promote non-racial sport. SAN-ROC, the coordinating organisation of the international campaign against apartheid sport, is ably sustained by Sambasivan Ramasamy.

I hope that the matter will be seriously considered in the near future with a view to the formulation of a policy declaration on sports contacts to guide our diplomatic missions and sports bodies. □