

Chapter Five

SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN COUNCIL

Constitutional Development

THERE HAS been no major change in development or status for the South African Indian Council in the past year.

What did create concern in the minds of the public was that SAIC meetings were held behind closed doors. Members of the Press were barred from attending. This ruling for the SAIC came out into the open when one of the members of the Council complained against the 'rulings that kept the Press out of important meetings' (*Daily News* 25/7/73).

This was shortly after an incident in which the Press could not attend an important SAIC meeting that was being held to discuss the possibilities of making the SAIC an elected body.

The SAIC is still Government-appointed. In the said meeting, the sixth one for the Council, it was announced that the Council would become a half-elected and half-nominated body. Fifteen members will be elected through an electoral college system on a provincial/regional basis. The other fifteen will be nominated by the Government.

At present the 25 members of the Council are Government-nominated. There is an Act, passed last year, which provided for 5 elected members in a Council of 30, instead of the proposed 15 members.

There is no voters' roll for Indians.

The first elections are planned for October 1974.

A device has been worked out by the Government and the SAIC Executive whereby 15 elected members will be voted for by means of the system of electoral colleges on a provincial/regional basis.

Informed sources claimed that only about 400 Indians would be able to vote in the election of the 15 members. They would consist of members of Local Affairs Committees and members of the existing Indian Town Boards who would vote through the electoral college system. Candidates need not be members of the SAIC or of the Town Boards.

However, the Secretary for Indian Affairs, Mr H.A. Prinsloo has said that the constitution of electoral colleges was not final.

It has been felt by some members of the SAIC that it was better to have 75% of the SAIC members elected, with only 25% being nominated members.

Indian Council members have promised they will not accept nominated positions if they are defeated in election seats.

The Government has increased the allowances granted to members of the South African Indian Council. The increases were as follows:

1. Chairman: from R2 400 p.a. to R4 800 p.a.
2. Executive Members: from R1 600 p.a. to R3 840 p.a.
3. Ordinary members: from R600 p.a. to R1 200 p.a.

Travelling allowances were also raised from R5,00 to R8,00 a day for ordinary members. Allowances for executive members were not disclosed. (*Mercury* 14/2/73).

The leader of the Indian Council, Mr A.M. Rajab died of a heart attack on 7 October, 1973. Mr Rajab was succeeded by Mr J.N. Reddy, another member of the South African Indian Council (*Post* 14/10/73). Mr Reddy is Managing Director of the Indian controlled New Republican Bank.

Controversy arose when the Memorial Service held at the Durban-Westville University to commemorate Mr Rajab's death was boycotted by students of that university. The Minister of Indian Affairs, Professor Horwood, also attended the service.

Another incident occurred when at a Sunday soccer match at Durban's Curries Fountain most football fans did not show respect for the minute of silence, announced by one of the soccer officials, to mark Mr Rajab's death.

These incidents, sad as they are, were seen by many to be a demonstration of non-allegiance to the South African Indian Council leadership.

Issues taken up by the Council

The Indian Council, through negotiation with the central Government, managed to have Durban's Grey Street complex declared an Indian area after long deliberation on the issue. It was in February when the chairman of the SAIC announced assurances that Grey Street would be re-declared Indian.

What the Council leader did not mention was that the position of Africans who once made their living in the Grey Street area was being put at the back of the picture.

Further, it was learned from Government sources that the delay in the proclamation had been caused by the South African Indian Council itself (*Daily News* 21/2/73).

The SAIC saw the Marriages Act as not being accommodative to Hindu marriage rites. The Council tried to have the Marriages Act amended so that most Hindu marriages could be recognised by the Law (*Natal Mercury* 16/2/73).

Like all the other Government-created platforms the SAIC also joined in the demands for improved wages for Black workers (*Mercury* 9/2/73).

When the Government failed to recognise the Indian-formed Association of Education and School Fund Committees, a SAIC member, Mr M.B. Naidoo, levelled dissatisfaction with the Government treatment of that body (*Leader* 6/4/73).

On the question of foreign investment the SAIC has expressed support for investment by foreign companies. Following in the steps of homeland leadership the Council argues that foreign investment will be to the advantage of the Black population.

The Council under the leadership of Mr J.N. Reddy reiterated its claim it was not a stooge body. According to Mr Reddy the aims being pursued by the SAIC were:

1. Having qualified Indians in senior education posts.
2. Placing emphasis on technical and vocational training for Indians.
3. Pushing to have Indians make a break into industry.
4. Seeing to it that Chatsworth is extended to Shallcross and Mariannhill, in a bid to increase Indian housing.

The bid to have Chatsworth extended was seen by many as carrying latent racism in the SAIC. The argument propped being that the area between Chatsworth and Mariannhill also had a dense African population. Already Chatsworth, it was claimed, went as far as Welbedacht—an area said to have once been thickly African. And therefore that the regardless attitude of the SAIC was just as prejudiced as White pretence against the fact that Africans onced lived in what is now Durban and the Bluff. Not all Africans came from outside Durban and became squatters; instead white expansion gradually pushed Africans out of areas that whites decided to occupy and 'develop'. In view of this fact therefore it has to be taken into consideration that there are some Africans around the Shallcross-Mariannhill area who could claim their fathers had lived in the area long before Union and the Land Acts.

The South African Indian Council also pleaded with the South African Government to waive duty charges on imported rice. This call came at the time when rice prices were escalating at an unprecedented rate since the last World War. Since rice is staple food for the Indian community the rise in rice prices was likely to affect the lowly paid sector amongst Indians (*Rand Daily Mail* 6/11/73).

General Issues

The SAIC is a half-nominated and half-elected body. Widely expressed opinion holds that the Indian community would prefer to have SAIC members elected directly by Indians rather than have half of the Council nominated by the Government (*Natal Mercury* 3/11/73).

During the year the Council seemed to have created resentment amongst the Indian Community. The argument was that the SAIC was isolating the Indian group from the other Black groups by supporting the given framework for operation. By hoping on the sharing of power with the whites (*Mercury* 21/5/73), and at the same time rejecting Black awareness, the SAIC was treading on dangerous grounds. It became clear that the SAIC had vested interests in the status quo. SAIC's counter argument was that by their persistence and persuasion they had managed to win concessions from the Government (*Leader* 10/8/73).

The plea by a SAIC member, Mr H.E. Joosub, to have the Government allow Indian business in multi-racial areas (*Daily News* 20/8/73) was an example of such contradiction within the Council, more so because SAIC had openly gone against Cannavassan, near the Newlands and Greenwood Park areas, being declared a Coloured group area.

Another SAIC member had expressed concern over the proposed removal of Indians from the Glendale area near Stanger. This area was to go KwaZulu, according to Government consolidation plans. Yet the plight of Africans in the Inanda, Stanger, Verulam, Mariannahill and Newlands areas had however received no attention or sympathy from the South African Indian Council.

Bitter resentment was expressed when India rejected an offer of R10 000 from South Africa's Indian group (*Rand Daily Mail* 6/1/73).

The sum, donated by the South African Indian group mainly, was refused acceptance by the Indian Government.

General comment from some circles was that India's refusal was justified. The South African Indian community (the business and leadership sectors) was interested in sending money to relieve Bengal's masses when South Africa herself had thousands of starving masses within the three Black groups. Charity, it was claimed, had to begin at home.

Opposition Against the South African Indian Council

Opposition against the SAIC increased during the year.

Students at the Durban-Westville University campus boycotted the opening of that University by the Prime Minister, Mr B.J. Vorster, in the presence of SAIC leaders. This student attitude was repeated at the death of the SAIC Executive leader, Mr A.M. Rajab, when the memorial service for him was boycotted by students.

Opposition from the Natal Indian Congress

The NIC decided to continue in its stand against the South African Indian Council and Government policies.

At the same time NIC claimed that its Constitution did not bar its followers from serving on Local Affairs Committees in terms of Government Legislation or from joining the South African Indian Council. Local Affairs Committee members and members of the SAIC were also free to join the NIC (*Mercury* 23/7/73).

This new stand by the NIC has been interpreted as a compromising move by the more militant organisations such as SASO and BPC. A leading member of the NIC however 'unofficially' stated that this 'tactical move' by the NIC did not spell any change in the 'overall strategy' of that organisation, namely, the realisation of a non-racial South Africa with equal rights for all. This was after a weekly newspaper (*Leader* 27/7/73) had carried a scathing attack against what it regarded as 'verbal gymnastics' by NIC leaders who chose the prudence of working within the scope of separatism 'where necessary'.

At the Sharpeville anniversary meeting held in the Kajee Hall in Leopold Street on March 21, the chairman and president of the NIC urged that Blacks continue in their efforts for true freedom.

The chairman, Mr Chanderdeo Sewpershad, was subsequently charged with incitement of racial hostility.

Others charged on racial hostility urgings were the banned Public Relations Officer of the BPC, Mr Saths Cooper, and other members of the BPC.

The court magistrate however found no substantial evidence to the charge and Mr Sewpershad was acquitted on June 29, 1973 (*Daily News* 29/6/73).

Opposition from SASO

SASO is against organisations or bodies working within the present Government-created system of operation. SASO has therefore openly rejected SAIC policies and the role played by the SAIC in student affairs at

