

L Chiba Interview (2)

LC – L Chiba

JS – Jonny Selemani

LC: You see, the ANC only accepted African people as members of the ANC. That is why you find these different national organisations, which made up the Congress Alliance, right. That was then. Now a member of the South African Indian congress. Now what is my status? When me, in 1961, joined the MK, which is the military wing of the ANC, what is my situation? Am I member of the ANC? And this happened, and it's a question that applied to everybody, colored people from the Western Cape especially joining the MK, Indian people especially in Johannesburg and in Durban, joined MK, now what is your position? That situation was then resolved when the ANC was thrown open in 1969, to members of other ethnic groupings, you see. Now what I am trying to say here, that in terms of our constitution, in terms of the policy documents of the ANC, non-racialism in my opinion basically means that there should be no discrimination between people who belong to other ethnic groupings, who have different social backgrounds, cultures, traditions. Let's take the example of, our policy documents want to talk about a non-sexist society too, right. Just as it is a reality that there are different genders, male and female, there should be no discrimination, and that is what we call a non-sexist approach. So despite the existence of different national groupings in the country, there should be no discrimination on the basis of those differences. In other words, that actually means that's what non-racialism signifies to me.

JS: Now how close would you say we have come to achieving those values in today's society, in today's day and age?

LC: You see, I think we have come a long way in achieving that, but there are still issues, that we are moving away from the core principles of the ANC. I don't say that that is the official policy of the ANC, of the democratic movement. That is still non-racialism, as has been talked about in the freedom charter. It is there. But there is also the emergence of what I can describe as national black Africanism, right. On behalf of the majority, of what is termed black people. The term black people is a political term, which includes members of the historically disadvantaged communities, so the African people, right, the colored people and the Indian people. These were historically disadvantaged and discriminated against, although the degree of oppression was far greater for the African majority, then for the colored people and the Indian people. The degree of discrimination was less than the degree of discrimination against the African people. But the totality of those who were historically disadvantaged can be termed black people. Now what is actually happening is that we tend to interpret black as only African people, whereas black is really refers to what I have described, and I think Nelson Mandela had made it very clear that black means the Africans in particular, but the Indian people and the colored people. In other words, generally all those who were historically disadvantaged. Now obviously two things, if I may. I might be diverting from the actual questions, but it's all related. I can't remember, when president Thabo Mbeki made his Limpopo speech in parliament, he made a beautiful speech, really a classic speech in parliament, that was I am An African. Now, that speech, you know it was like poetry, it was a class piece of work. What he meant by an African, in my opinion, was those who were citizens of the

African continent, were termed African. That I think is what he felt, and that's what I think I interpret what he actually meant. I am an African, I am a citizen of the African continent. Now, as I said, there is the emergence of narrow black nationalism, there's an emergence of Africanism, as it were. And I think those people are exploiting and manipulating the term I am and African in a different way. Whereas I believe that Mbeki meant by African a citizen of the African continent, this new development, seems to be interpreting African within the context of narrow black nationalism. So I think this is the one point I am trying to convey, that there is this idea of moving away from black nationalism. When we talk about black economic empowerment, for example, it's interpreted as black, not as applied to all those who were previously historically disadvantaged, but to members of the African community. That is what black economic empowerment, it's a narrow interpretation of it, if you follow what I am trying to say. So I think you should bare that in mind. Then the second point I want to make, is a recent development, recent unfortunate public spat as it were, as a result of comments made by Jimmy Manye, I think he actually made those comments in march or April last year, he didn't make them this year. Now I think he made them when he was still the director general of the dept of labour. And there in that statement, it was only, by the way, released or fed into the media, although it was made a year ago, it was only fed by the DA into the media in the time just before the elections, and I suppose they had their own agenda, but in terms of the comments he made, he made comments to the effect that there was an oversupply of colored people, a concentration of colored people in the Western Cape, and as a result of that oversupply of colored people, what they should be doing is to move into other areas of South Africa. I think we all know about the spat that took place. In addition to that, the same Jimmy Manye, who actually is the president of the black management forum, and of course commands respect and enormous influence, he also said in Kwa Zulu Natal, something about the Indian people. And what he actually said, was that too many Indians are holding management positions in South Africa, and that they have a tendency to worm their way up into those positions. He also made another statement against whites, and he said that the whites don't have to go to Australia, or something about that. What he was trying to convey is that Jimmy Manye, and influential people, make the wrong derogatory statements. Now that's not in the spirit of non-racialism the way I understand it, the way the ANC understands it, actually, people like Trevor Manuel, actually climbed into Jimmy Manje, and this fellow, Trevor Manuel., actually went so far as to say that he is a resident in the same mould as our oppressors. And I accept that. Those are actually racialistic statements. And such statements goes against the grain of the ANC, on the question of non-racialism. That's the two things I would like to draw your attention to. And things of this nature, developments of this nature, tend to mitigate against the movement, the preservation and promotion of the concept of non-racialism as espoused in the Freedom Charter, and equally as important, as espoused in our democratic constitution.

JS: Just out of curiosity, do you think we will ever see a non-black president in this country in the future ever again?

LC: I think that it's a possibility. If you recall correctly, a couple of years ago, there were ideas that were being exchanged, at the time of elections, of who would be the deputy president of the country. And one of the names that came up as a possible, was the name of Trevor Manuel. Now that was, it was only in the discussion phase, or the exchange of views phase, so I believe that although theoretically it is

possible, that the majority, it is theoretically possible that we will have a non-African president. It is possible. Within the ranks of the ANC, as long as it is the governing party. The reality I think is different, because I think it is correct that a president should govern from that grouping of people that constitutes the largest proportion of the population. But let's look at the theoretical possibility. Today there is no doubt in my mind that the ANC has been empowered in the last 17 years, and for the next 5 or 10 years I can still see the ANC as the ruling party in this country. And as long as this persists, as far as I can see, although the ANC is still an entirely non-racial organisation, despite that, I think that a black president will be there. Now, let's change the scenario. Let's say for example, Zuma's statement that the ANC will rule until Jesus comes, let's say that scenario doesn't exist. Let us say for one moment the DA comes into power. As you know, let's look at the last 3 elections, in 1999, 2006, 2011 local government elections, well in all 3 elections, the ANC came in with a decreased majority. Now theoretically, it is possible that in the next 2 or 3 elections, the opposition can become the ruling party. If it does become the ruling party in the country, we can not dismiss the possibility for having a non-African president in the country. It's possible.

JS: I think to put it into context, what I was trying to allude to is if we see the youth of today being tomorrow's future, what do you think the youth of today is doing on following up with the original vision of a non-racial state.

LC: I think as far as the youth in this country, I think that one of the problems of the youth of today, and it is not their fault by the way, it is totally the fault of the ANC, the problem with the youth is that by and large they do not know the history of the ANC, the traditions of the ANC, and they do not know the role of other people apart from the African people in the struggle for liberation in this country. They don't know that history at all. Today if I go to a youth meeting today, and I say that, people know Dr Dadu, I think that 95% of those present would not know who Dr Dadu is. Dr Dadu was a prominent member of the SACP, he was a member of the Transvaal Indian Congress, and he was in exile for years. They don't know that, and in that way they don't know the role that many non-African people played. And that is the fault of the ANC. We haven't promoted the history of the struggle adequately. You know, let's take 1994. People who were born in 1994, are 17 years old today. Next year, they are going to be 18, they are going to be 20 in the year 2014 when the next general election takes place. And if they are not well versed in the policies, traditions and culture, especially the aspect of non-racialism, then I think we are going to have a problem. You see, today the youth league wants to play a very important role in shaping the leadership of this country. I believe they have their own agenda. The youth league under the presidency of Julius Malema, he's actually a populist. He talks disparagingly about the whites, I think quite recently, he issued a statement to the effect the whites are thieves. They have stolen our land, we must get that land back, that type of statements. I mean, don't force the South Africa of the future, it doesn't go well at all. Now Malema is a very popular chap. Why is he a very popular chap? He speaks, I think, the language of the youth of today, who are ignorant of the role, the history of the ANC, it's policies, especially its writings on the question of non-racialism. They are ignorant of that. Let me give you a couple of examples that happened to us last year. The Ahmed Kathrada foundation came out with a publication called the men of dynamite. It is a summary of the activities of a number of Indian activists in MK, in the early 60s. That book was published and launched in December 2009. And as it was

circulated, a number of people, African people, intelligent, you know what they said? We didn't know that the Indians were involved in MK. Now, if they don't know that the struggle for liberation involved many non-Africans, then what do you expect? And it can only be the fault of the ANC, who hasn't conducted sufficient political education to inform and educate the younger generation of the role of all the people in this country, black and white. We had a tremendous amount of white people who made a significant contribution in the struggle for liberation. Now if this ignorance persists, and if nothing is done about it, then I'm afraid that the question of non-racialism, the concept, the idea, is going to be at risk, that is what I am saying. I do see that there's a very deep and urgent need to correct these perceptions. From time to time the ANC makes statements and so on, in the case of the spat between Jimmy and Trevor Manuel, the ANC did come out. They did say this is not ANC policy. When Julius Malema talked about land without compensation, the nationalization of the mines, President Zuma and other spokespersons of the ANC made a public statement that that is not ANC policy. They make these statements, nevertheless the idea has taken root, the concept of nationalization and expropriation of land without compensation are gaining ground increasingly, and that's also our fault. But at some stage I suppose in discussion it will be discussed, but this is what we have to bear in mind.

JS: What do you think of the role of things like the media (37.12), you mentioned political parties, but the media, education, that kind of thing, in advancing the cause of non-racialism?

LC: You see, one of the things we must also bear in mind, that as far as the media goes, the media has a particular bias. There's no doubt about it, not the slightest doubt about it. Let us be absolutely clear, the media has a right to publish things, sometimes they do go overboard, but by and large they are not very sympathetic to the ANC. And you can see this hostility between the ANC and the media in general. I don't say the entire media, I don't say it happens all the time, but one can detect quite clearly the tensions between the ruling party and the media. The media can also play a very negative role, the media can be utilized as an important instrument of educating the people. Very often, there are articles in the media, every now and again you find articles on a whole host of things, you think it is not possible for the editors to launch an education campaign, go through the history of the ANC, etc. You see the media is a very powerful instrument, and the relationship between the ruling party and the media must be a cordial relationship. If it's not cordial, you can have a very very antagonist media that portrays the government in less than flattering terms, and that's putting it mildly. But there you are, the role of the media is very important. Many papers have black education, you know, there's this editor, who was Mail and Guardian editor, today she is with the Sowetan, but they play an important role. And I think we must play an important role. But for them to play an important role, is to also have the ruling party, the approach of the ruling party, and say that we must have a cordial relationship, I think that's important. If you don't have that, I think you will have a media that will increasingly remain hostile. So even though they can play a constructive role, they might not say anything, silence can sometimes be as dangerous as saying things negatively, but I think it is important for the media and the ANC to have a cordial relationship. It's in the interests of the ruling party, it's in the interests of all the media, and it is in the interests of the people of South Africa. The media mustn't be seen to be attacking, that attitude. The media mustn't go overboard by exaggerating things and stating things without, you know, a fair amount of investigating the accuracy of allegations and claims and whatever.

JS: What would you say are the key challenges in today's society? I mean we have raised a few things, but I wanted to look at that in relation to the economic issues in the country, the social challenges. Firstly what do you think are the challenges towards building a non-racial society, what according to you are the key challenges?

LC: I think, I'm not too sure how to answer this question, to identify the real challenges. How we must overcome the challenges is what I think we should focus on. We can say the concept of Africanism is a challenge, but how to overcome that, I really don't know. We can say this hostility against foreigners which often assumes xenophobic proportions, it is a big challenge it's a problem. How we can overcome that, I really don't know. In other words I can see that this is a challenge, but I haven't formulated the manner in which these challenges can be overcome. I think that I can see the challenges, but I haven't thought deeply enough on how those challenges could be overcome. Apart from the fact that constantly we need to remind ourselves, we need to popularize the policies of the Freedom Charter, popularize the essence and core values of our constitution. Apart from that, I really don't know what exact measures we can put in place to overcome those challenges.

JS: So can I ask you, black economic empowerment, or the empowerment of previously disadvantaged, whatever you want to call it, economic, socio-economic issues like poverty and the like, do you think those need to be addressed before we can obtain non-racialism, or is it possible to obtain non-racialism first and then economic redress?

LC: No, I think the two things go hand in hand. You see there's one thing that is quite clear. In 1994, we actually achieved the political emancipation, at that stage, we knew already that the political emancipation of our people would not be enough. That we would have to have a second revolution, the socio-economic emancipation of our people. That is going to take a hell of a long time, it's not going to be easy. You know there are a lot of things wrong with this country. Let us take the question of corruption, the concept of tenders, corruption in tenders on a large scale. You see it is the attitude for a lot of people, today public servants, many public servants, are involved in corruption. They are. Black economic empowerment, what benefit did black economic empowerment bring about to the vast majority of ordinary people in this country? Black economic empowerment was actually meant for a handful, a small elite. It has done nothing more than that. For the ordinary man in the street, it means nothing. The few have become enormously rich. That is a problem. So we must rethink these things, we have to think about it, how we can alleviate poverty. Let me give you a simple example, let's take an example of what happened last week. Now in my view, I think the constitution guarantees the right of workers to go on strike. And I support that, I support the ideals of strikes in order to negotiate better working conditions for the workers. Now the strike that is taking place now, according to the papers and the news, I see that petroleum workers have already joined the strike, as a result of which many petrol pumps have run dry. That is going to affect the transport. So even if the deli workers are not on strike, they can not get those goods delivered. The bakeries are not on strike, but they cannot get the flour transported to the bakery from the flour mills. So what is going to happen? These very strikers, they go on strike, tomorrow there won't be any petrol. How are they going to assemble at their strike place? How are they going to do it? What happens, and this strike is going to be a serious one, I think. Already we are losing R1 billion a day, the strike is in its 10th day today. It's going to cause enormous problems.

And I think that on the one hand, that the onus cannot be rigid and stubborn. At the same time, the leadership of the unions cannot be adamant and maintain that this is what we want and nothing else. Because the long term consequences are going to be serious. You know right now, I personally believe, I'm not a trade unionist or economist, I really don't know, but I can say this much. Coming from this strike, not only will it cause a lot of harm and suffering etc, but the long term consequences are that there are going to be job losses. So in the end, a strike that is designed to improve conditions, will to some extent do so, but it will also be costly. So I think that we cannot have, we cannot remain hard and fast on certain things, I think there must be compromise. I mean I'm not an economist, but goodness gracious I mean I think we can't carry on the way we carry on. The strikers also. Look, it is alleged that there has been violence, and when there is violence, you generate ill feelings on the part of the people who are on the receiving end. You know, our strikes, while we must respect that it is their constitutional right, but the conduct on the part of the strikers must be such that it must be dignified, you can't alienate the people and that is what is actually happening now. Can you imagine if this strike lasts for a month? Let's take the municipal workers strike. Now they have a right to strike and they must get better wages, better working conditions, that's very important. But they can't trash the streets the way they do. I mean that's low. So the unions, the leadership of the unions must also educate and keep those striking workers under control. You can't do that.

JS: Just coming back to a point you made about the idea about policies being used to benefit a select few, talking about BEE. Do you think that those who have been advanced before non-racialism?

LC: no, the two can go hand in hand together, can proceed on a parallel basis. It doesn't mean that, if you want to achieve your objectives of broad-based black economic empowerment, it can only be achieved only you have built a strong base of non-racialism. It doesn't mean that. It means that, what I am saying is that both movements can proceed at more or less the same time. It doesn't mean that the one can only be achieved after or before the other one, I don't think, I think, I mean I haven't got the solutions, but personally I don't think it is a pre condition that one movement should be achieved before we start realizing the second movement.

JS: Final question, from the foundation's point of view, what more do you think the foundation can do to advance the cause of non-racialism?

LC: See, I think that the foundation is, must do three things. Firstly I think the foundation has the duty of educating the people about the history of non-racialism. I think they can do that. And the way it can be done, is how they have already started, publishing the Men of Dynamite, they are undertaking a series of works, they are doing that, they are writing small biographies of people who participated in the struggle of liberation, and demonstrated that it was all part and parcel of the non-racial movement. That is very very important.