**Vote count: Joseph Stalin is recalled!**

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My fellow columnist Yasmeen Aftab Ali who carries an impartial pen and expresses unbiased views on subjects of intriguing and controversial nature, has come up in Daily Times (March 14) with a forthright comment on the shocking results of the recent Senate elections. What she has described as a ‘closely followed match between Opposition and PTI for the two top slots for Senate.’ Ex-Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani who had pulled a surprising victory out of his hat in the last election much like his Captain Imran Khan’s selection, repeated history this March once again against heavy odds backing former Prime Minister PPP’s suave Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani. Yasmeen Ali rightly observed although all forecasts were contrary to the results beating Gilani and PTI-backed Senator Mirza Mohammad Afridi who was elected deputy chairman singing the beard of Maulana Haideri of JUI-F. As pointed by her as well as other observers, it was found to be a strange coincidence in both the elections that Number 7 was the key denominator. Magician Presiding Officer advertently rejected YRG’s seven fully legitimate votes.

Just before his polls Senator Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani when he paraded around, his gait was graceful and confident. He was supported by the Opposition Alliance, fully backed by their top leaders— PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and PMLN Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz Sharif. YRG won the seat from Islamabad with 169 votes against PTI backed Hafeez Sheikh who lost with 164 votes. I agree with Yasmeen Ali that Prime Minister Khan had given too much weight to the unelected goofs in the party igniting resentment and anger among the party’s elected members. They rightly felt let down by the party chief who played foul with them. Obviously Khan got a kick back when his own party members contemptuously showed boot to the often tried all-time available prophylactic financial wizard Hafiz Sheikh—favourite of IK–for the senate seat as well. Sanjrani’s election was much a surprise now as it was previously when some colonel of ISI, had won him the slot of Senate chairman. I was disappointed then as now for the non-selection of perhaps the most deserving candidate for a seat in the Senate—my old friend Senator Farhatullah Babar. His elections would have meant securing a professionally sound and experienced legislator who had the singular distinction of learning his politics under his party leader martyred Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. I am not fully privy to share as to who played dirty with Farhatullah Babar but a fly on the wall was spreading that the message to dump Farhat was conveyed by a man in uniform to the concerned political wheeler dealers who also out-manoeuvred Dr Rehman Malik from the game although he had been working hard and writing as well in support of the government and the Establishment. Indeed, his articles carried weight on Kashmir issue too.

“It’s not the people who vote that count, it’s the people who count the votes.” “It not who votes, but who counts the votes.” Joseph Stalin

Well the result is before us, we are all shocked by it and there are people who are dumb founded by it. Regretfully I am not. Until Bibi was alive I believed in her political philosophy that elections should be contested and not boycotted as they are an opportunity for the people to exercise their vote diligently, poll offer an opportunity as an agent for change. The closely contested run for the slots was predicted to be nail biting. Wastage of votes deliberate or inadvertent and veering away from party policy would have cost a win. Both sides were well aware of this reality.

Ever since elections in Pakistan got tainted or engineered my favourite quote is of the erstwhile Soviet leader Joseph Stalin who is perennially quoted as viral favourite in election time. The statement attributed to Joseph Stalin (leader of the U.S.S.R. from 1922 through 1953), about voting versus who wins in elections. There are several versions of the quote in circulation, but the most popular when the quote first gained Internet notoriety was during the Bush/Gore election recount debacle in 2000—it was on every voters lips: “It’s not the people who vote that count. It’s the people who count the votes.” Since there was no published source was cited at that time, it was widely assumed that the quote was apocryphal. The opinion of Slate‘s “Explainer” columnist on 13 December 2000 was representative: “But did Joe really say it? Almost certainly not! Let’s just say Joseph Stalin is not known to have waxed forth on the nature of voting and was singularly unconcerned with elections.” This in lieu of a suitable source.

The question that remained unanswered was: Did Joseph Stalin say it all–‘It’s Not the People Who Vote That Count …’? One version of the famous quote about those who count the votes determining the outcome of an election continues to be attributed to Joseph Stalin in his secretary’s memoir. Joseph Stalin said some version of “It’s not the people who vote that count, it’s the people who count the votes.” “It not who votes, but who counts the votes.” It is added that Joseph Stalin believed that “it is the people who caste the votes decide nothing. The people who count the votes decide everything” Indeed, in Pakistan’s case Presiding officer Senator Muzaffar Hussain Shah simply rejected SYRG ‘s seven precious votes, closing the matter now that it could be taken to election tribunal. It was sort of repetition of history…do whatever you want to do, go ahead, I have rejected the votes. Surely this was much similar to the remark made by Napoleon (attributed) ‘I care not who casts the votes of a nation if they will let me count the votes. (In 2006 Wikiquote dug up such a source: The Memoirs of Stalin’s Former Secretary by Boris Bazhanov, published in 2002. Translated from the Russian, the version which, according to Bazhanov, was uttered in 1923 by Stalin in reference to a vote in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was this).

Now PDM has decided to go to court to challenge Sanjrani’s win on grounds of 7 rejected votes. The 8th one stamped on line that allotted space to two candidates. It is highly unlikely prima facie for the court to overturn the judgment. And surely legally minded people in Pakistan would not expect Pakistani superior judiciary to come up with another doctrine of necessity or produce yet another Justice Anwarul Haq, Justice Maulvi Mushtaq or Justice Saqib Nisar.