

Dr. Park-Poli-8.7.09 The parameters of political discourse

VIEWPOINT



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dragged her down?" That did it.

What, I want to know, are the parameters of political debate in this country? Must it start and end with whether or not Asif Zardari — and only Asif Zardari — is corrupt? Are we not to be allowed to discuss other people similarly accused of corruption? Must the terms of reference include only politicians from smaller provinces? Are they to be always castigated, imprisoned, and sentenced by the 'courts' and their cousins in the Punjab spared (except those following a Sindhi leader)? What are the parameters anyway?

We don't have to go far to expose the utter

mendacity of the Pakistani Establishment. Just look at the Kasuri murder case. So many of us remember it well. It was tried so dishonestly and heartlessly that it is now known the world over as the judicial procedure that resulted in the accused being 'murdered', not executed. Leave aside for the argument the fact that the man so murdered was a former head of state who had pulled the country out of the morass of a military defeat and the loss of half of the country; negotiated the release of 95,000 prisoners of war and got back 5,000 square miles from a rampant enemy. Ignore also the fact that he made Pakistan's armed forces stronger than they had ever been before. Leave these facts aside and the fact that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a Pakistani, was wantonly murdered because the then military dictator willed it, remains. The judges did the dictator's bidding because they were his pliable handmaidens.

Before an advocate of the Establishment decides to take exception to what I have said regarding the Kasuri murder case, let him see former Justice Nasim Hassan Shah's December 2003 interview to the Geo TV in which he said that being Bhutto's avowed enemy, Justice Maulvi Mushtaq Hussain should not have heard the case; that Chief Justice Anwarul Haq had been told by Zia to hang Bhutto; that Justice Haq had then told other judges, including Justice Shah, that Bhutto must hang; and that Yahya Bakhtiar, the defence counsel, had 'annoyed' the judges into hanging Bhutto by not throwing himself and his client at the Supreme Court's mercy!

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If such is the morality of the Establishment, why should we, the citizens, most of us decent men and women, do its bidding? Why should we even give it the time of the day? Why should we not repeatedly ask who killed Liaquat Ali Khan?

Why should we not keep asking why the ambulance carrying the dying Quaid-i-Azam broke down and why were there no back-up vehicles? Why should we not rattle the many festering skeletons in the Establishment's cupboard? Why should we not, say, question the source of the riches of Humayun Akhtar Khan, Ijazul Haq, the house of Zahoor Elahi, and so many other wealthy scions of military men whose JCO grandfathers had but a few kanals of land when they retired to their villages.

What are the terms of reference then? Only the alleged riches of Asif Zardari and Benazir Bhutto, because they are not Punjabis? No. We must change the parameters of political discourse. We must demand that all Pakistanis be judged by the same standards.

The General said just the other day that the 'other politicians' should look after their own affairs and leave the Muslim League alone. Would that he left other parties alone and limited his attentions to the Muslim League? What is good for the goose should jolly well be good for the gander.

In the end, I have a word for Syed Faisal Saleh Hayat. Barring his turning a turncoat, I have always been quite fond of him. I have particularly admired him for uncomplainingly undergoing the worst torture imaginable in the Lahore Fort, courtesy Ziaul Haq. I have to say, however, that I was mortified to hear him lay into Imran Khan on Geo TV the other day so unfairly and in such ungentelemanly a fashion. All I want to say is that before accusing anyone of an infraction of the Hudood Laws one must look hard under one's own bed.

Faisal, you should never have said what you did for there are many among us who could be proceeded against under the Hudood Laws bequeathed to this country by Zia. Imran has my support (so long, of course, as he retracts his praise for the *jirga* justice).

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ALL MY LIFE, AND I AM 58, THE Establishment has played, ducks and drakes with us, the people. (Despite much abuse, the cliché is irresistibly appropriate). It is high time we forced a change in the parameters of political discourse — the terms of reference, so to say.

To speak bluntly, we must take away from the Establishment what it considers its God-given right: to set the political agenda; to talk down to those of us it considers enemies and exact punishment of its choice; to forgive its friends-for-the-time-being no matter what their crimes; to arrogate to itself the right to make war according to its own lights and for its own self-serving reasons; and generally doing as it wills.

Well, enough is bloody enough! Readers of this column are aware of my objections to ill-intentioned, inefficient, lazy and plain stupid bureaucrats and *agency-wallahs* acting blindly in service of their master while not only bringing Pakistan and Pakistanis a bad name, but also causing them much pain.

The recent shenanigans, tomfoolery, shamelessness — call it what you will — in sacking a prime minister and announcing two replacements has finally done it for me. It has incensed me enough — as I hope, dear reader, it has incensed you — to demand a change. Enough, because I cannot show my face to the world and because it is none of my fault.

But let me tell you what finally pushed me over the edge. About three hours after poor Jamali's much-heralded, if eminently deserved, humiliation, an old friend came to see me at my son's home in Karachi where I was recovering from the worst attack of flu I have had in a long time. He is a widely respected senior journalist whose brave writings were one of the rays of hope that kept me going during the Zia era. "Do you think," he asked me, "Benazir will return to power?" I said I was no seer, but she had every right to. "Well," he said, "I think she will. But don't you think Asif Zardari has really been a bad influence and