



Colonization Enquiry

S. A. I. Congress's Statement

This long-awaited statement of the S. A. I. Congress was presented to the Colonization Enquiry Committee, appointed to explore the possibilities of a Colonization scheme for settling South African Indian outside the Union and to find out to what extent Indians would participate in such a scheme, at Cape Town on January 9.

After relating the history of Indian immigration and quoting elaborately from the reports of the India Commission in Natal in the year 1886, and the Clayton Commission of 1907, the Congress directs attention to the obligation that Natal owes to its Indian population and proceeds to refer to the gradual change that has taken place in the attitude of the European population towards the Indians.

"We have been at some pains," it is submitted, "to give the history of our community in this country, as far as we are able, to present a picture of our position today, because we think it essential to explain to the committee the background and atmosphere which influences us in the statement we draw regarding the possibility of colonization from South Africa."

"A very large majority—certainly more than 80 per cent.—of the Indians now in South Africa are colonial-born descendants of the immigrant Indians. Their ancestors came to this country not with any spirit of adventure but on account of the adverse economic and social conditions prevailing in the vast country like India, and at the special invitation of the Europeans. The majority of them were drawn from Madras and Bengal Presidencies and among the poorer peasant class. This type of Indian is fast diminishing and in the course of a decade or so will have almost, if not entirely, disappeared.

"The preponderant element to-day, consisting of the colonial-born Indians, are such that to all intents and purposes they are South African-born, both in their character and outlook, having come in contact with Western influence and civilization. Their national character and aspirations are gradually being lost, the knowledge of their mother tongue is dying out and their mode of dress and living is fast changing toward Western ideas. They are accustomed to the climatic conditions of South Africa, and the tropical climate would have the same disadvantages for them as for a European South African."

The Congress frankly confesses its suspicion in its attitude to the colonization scheme.

"The whole history of our community here warrants the assumption that any such scheme is intended to reduce our numbers, to get rid of those who would never have been here but for the insistent demands of the European population and without whom Natal could hardly have attained the present state of development and prosperity. But even if we set aside such suspicion we feel that logic compels us to the conclusions that a colonization scheme of the kind now envisaged cannot be attractive to us."

So, for Indians in India, the Congress conceives of a land settlement scheme, but for Indians to leave their homeland in considerable numbers their must be a real inducement in the nature of a guarantee of profitable land.

"As for South Africa," in the first place there are now about 150,000 male Indians engaged in agricultural pursuits. This number includes Indians of all ages. It is reasonable to assume that normally a man of 35 or more will be unwilling to uproot himself unless very special advantages are expected to accrue. The urge to travel and explore, the spirit of adventure, if, indeed, they existed originally, have by that time vanished. We

should be inclined to put the maximum number for the would-be colonist even lower, but if we set the maximum at 35, that must naturally decrease, as it has been shown to be available for such a scheme. In the second place, we, who have been in South Africa and have lived here all our lives, know little or nothing of tropical conditions.

Different Standards

Apart from climatic considerations, there was another consideration of supreme importance. The Indians in South Africa had become accustomed to a certain standard of life. Of the last 20 years a stream of immigrants from both sides to populate some districts, from those to which South African Indians were accustomed. It was difficult to see how Indians in general in South Africa could ever fit into such a country, their habits of mind, their habits of dress, their habits of work were all different. It was of course true that in the last few years a number of Indians had joined the Union for India, but they were exactly the people who were accustomed to live in countries where their standards did not prevail. The Indians who had gone would be found to be in a great majority of cases children who were brought to India born people. In addition there were a number of cases of European descent, but that in other parts of the world would welcome a large influx of colonists. The present was the worst possible time to consider and examine possibilities of colonization on a large scale.

"Moreover, so far as we are aware," the statement continues, "the desire to seek a new country and homes as in the past is mainly from thickly populated countries where the struggle to exist has turned men's thoughts in the direction of new outlets. No such desire has ever been evinced by the Indian community in South Africa, nor is it reasonable to expect such a desire to rise in a country that is sparsely populated, has vast tracts of undeveloped land and offers within its boundaries ample opportunity for its whole population. We feel strongly that the solution of the Indian problem, such as it is, lies close to the hand of the Government in South Africa. We have already shown that the Indian community must now be regarded as a permanent section of the population, and to fulfil the ideal of the Union of South Africa we urge that the breaking down of the Provincial barriers, with permission to our community to disperse itself over the whole Union, will not only afford a valuable example of the true union of the Provinces, but will also dispel once and for all on account of our small numbers the bogey of Indian invasion and Asiatic menace."

Fort Hare Reunion

Bishop C. J. Ferganion Davis, who is the present warden of the Anglican Hostel at Fort Hare, and assisted by Bishop W. E. Smyth has sent out a circular, which it is hoped, will catch the eye of old members of the hostel.

The Reverend Bishop intends to hold a reunion of the old members of the hostel, at the hostel, Fort Hare, over the week-end beginning Feb. 17, to Monday 19 Old Fort Hareans desirous of participating in this reunion and capable of being at Fort Hare during the above dates, are advised to communicate immediately with Bishop C. J. Ferganion Davis.

In the same circular the Reverend Bishop writes:—This will probably be the last time that we shall be able to meet in the old buildings, which must have very happy memories for all, for the plans for two New Hostels are nearing completion and we hope that before the end of 1934 we shall be occupying them and then others will be in the old Anglican Hostel. It would be pleasant therefore if we could have a good gathering on this occasion.