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A REPRESENTATIVE INDIAN COUNCIL

THE HON. MINISTER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,
MR. W. A. MAREE, M.P., REVIEWS THE
POSITION OF INDIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

University of Urban-Westville

ACCESSION NO. 548/160



The Hon. W. A. Maree, M.P., Minister of Indian Affairs.

INDIANS OF SOUTH AFRICA

Extract of an address by the Hon. Minister of Indian Affairs,
Mr. W. A. Maree, M.P., at the annual general meeting of the Natal
Chamber of Industries, in Durban, on November 21, 1963

MR. PRESIDENT, you are of course correct in ascribing to this Department the function of safeguarding the interest and seeing to the welfare of the Indian community in the Republic.

The Department has direct control of higher education, social welfare and the inter-provincial movement of Indians.

In other matters, the Department is the channel through which their needs and problems can be brought to the attention of the Government.

It is therefore right and proper that organisations such as the Chamber of Industries should bring to my attention matters of which they can be expected to have special knowledge and the solution of which is in the general interest.

The Government is of course aware of the problems to which reference have been made—problems such as inadequate housing, unemployment, lack of educational qualifications among the older generations, the fears of traders concerning the application of Government policies, and many others affecting the well-being of the Indian community.

When I say that the Government is aware of problems, I do not mean that the Government is in possession of all the facts concerning them.

In the past it was recognised that the problems did exist, but little out of the ordinary was done to establish the dimensions or to find solutions.

To some extent this was undoubtedly due to the fact that Indians were for practical purposes treated by all previous governments as non-permanent inhabitants of South Africa.

New Approach

This Government has now realistically decided that repatriation offers no solution to the problem. This new approach towards the Indians has necessitated greater attention to their particular problems and the manner of their absorption into the socio-economic structure of South Africa.

The Department of Indian Affairs was created for this specific purpose.

Certain problems, such as the social and religious differences between Hindu and Moslem, can only be solved by the Indians themselves.

These differences are fundamental and are rooted in Indian culture, traditions and mode of life and may possibly contribute to the complexities of Indian political attitudes and lack of unity amongst themselves—factors which hamper considerably the work of the Department.

One of the major social problems of the Indian community in Natal was the difference in legal status between so-called Passenger Indians and Indian Immigrants.

This was a legacy from colonial days.

Although the need for such legal differentiation ceased many years ago, previous governments for one reason or another had refrained from rectifying the situation.

It therefore became one of the first tasks of the Department of Indian Affairs to place all Indians on an equal footing, to apply to them as far as possible the ordinary laws of the land in regard to the registration of births, marriages and deaths and to remove certain registration requirements imposed on Indians in the Transvaal.

Self-government

The Government is satisfied that certain services to the Indian community can best be given by a department with specialised knowledge of the circumstances and problems involved. Such a department can devote all its time and attention to the Indians and, in consultation with them, plan the road which must be followed so that this group, with its Eastern orientation, can be fitted into and can occupy its rightful place in a country such as ours, which maintains Western standards of civilisation.

The ultimate objective is to guide the Indian population of the Republic to social, economic and political development in order that they may be enabled to accept, in conformity with separate development, a steadily increasing say and eventually self-government in those matters peculiar to them as, for instance, education, social services, local government, etc.

Improved Welfare Services

Social welfare services and higher education have already been taken over by the Department. Other services may be expected to follow in due course.

Without going into detail, I can say that important improvements have been made or are in the process of development in the field of social welfare. Apart from the improvements concerning social pensions and grants and the provision of certain institutions which at present are lacking, arrangements have been made for the training of graduate social welfare workers. When these become available, the Department will branch out further in this field.

Notwithstanding the suspicion with which Indians looked upon the University College for Indians, it is abundantly clear that this institution has been wholeheartedly accepted by them; so, too, have they accepted the control of the M. L. Sultan Technical Colleges and the University College by the Department of Indian Affairs.

As you are no doubt aware, land has been acquired in the region of Westville for a new university college to replace the present buildings on Salisbury Island. These buildings are already inadequate and will soon become hopelessly overcrowded. The planning of the new college is receiving priority treatment.

In the meantime the College has already made its mark in the academic field and as a centre for the advancement of Indian culture.

With the co-operation of the Government, the University College is giving attention to the academic training of Indians for careers in social and other sciences which have in the past not been followed by members of the Indian community of South Africa and which have now become essential if the Indians are to develop to their fullest potential in their own areas.

Avenues for Training

In this way also new avenues of employment will be opened to Indians in fields where they were previously dependent upon the services of other members of the community.

In anticipation of this eventuality, steps are already being taken by the institutions of technical and higher education to train the Indian youth in a greater diversity of trades and professions.

In contrast to the position a mere decade or two ago, the demand for Indian education is increasing by leaps and bounds, to such an extent that the greatest efforts of Indian private endeavour and governmental efforts experience difficulty in meeting the situation.

A particularly retarding factor is the shortage of teachers, instructors and lecturers.

More Employment Opportunities

This brings me to the objective of my Department to endeavour to create more opportunities for work and to study and make representations concerning unemployment among Indians.

At the time of the creation of the Department of Indian Affairs, certain Natal newspapers had much to say about the alarming proportions of unemployment among Indians in Durban.

Figures ranging from 20,000 to 30,000 were mentioned.

Figures of registration at labour bureaux at that time, however, reflected a reasonably satisfactory state of affairs when compared to unemployment among other race groups.

On the other hand figures extracted from the 1960 Population Census indicated that approximately 15,000 Indians were unemployed in the whole of South Africa.

No further information on the subject was available and no concrete suggestions for alleviation could be put forward.

Socio-economic Survey

The Department of Indian Affairs therefore decided to call on the services of the National Bureau of Social and Educational Research which agreed to carry out certain research projects.

The first of these, a socio-economic survey, was completed during this year and was designed to furnish information concerning the Indian population of Natal on matters such as age groups, religion, language, residence and migration, education, family life, children, housing, employment, health and nutrition, recreation, sport and cultural activities, income and expenditure.

Unfortunately some little while must still elapse before all the data obtained can be processed and made available, but preliminary figures of unemployment among the Indians of Natal indicate that there were in the middle of 1963 *far less* unemployed Indians in the whole of Natal than the figure for Durban alone obtained some time previously from the survey conducted by the University

of Natal which, at 15,000, was itself somewhat less than the figures mentioned by certain Natal newspapers.

If one assumes that the University's survey was a reasonably correct reflection of the position at the time when it was undertaken and when the position was apparently not very satisfactory, it must now be assumed that a considerable improvement has taken place, particularly since the end of 1962.

The preliminary figures made available by the Bureau for Social and Educational Research are still subject to final verification. Very understandably, therefore, the Bureau is loath to have the result made public at this stage.

While the figure is still large enough to cause a measure of concern it serves to substantiate the surmise that a fairly large percentage of unemployed Indians, for reasons best known to themselves, do not register at employment bureaux.

This state of affairs is highly unsatisfactory as it is not enough to know that people are unemployed.

Before anything can be done to alleviate the position, one must know why they are unemployed and what their qualifications are.

A Further Survey

I appeal to your organisation and other bodies concerned with the employment of Indian workers to take steps to encourage Indians to seek employment through the recognised employment agencies.

My Department is negotiating with the Bureau of Social and Educational Research to undertake a survey specifically designed to establish Indian employment patterns and reasons for unemployment.

The results of such a survey should be of great value to the Government and provincial authorities in planning future educational and training requirements and in the

efforts of the Department of Indian Affairs to find additional avenues of employment for Indians.

The Department has not been content to await the results of surveys, but has over the past two years with a satisfactory measure of success made representations in official quarters to increase opportunities for the employment of Indians, particularly in their own areas. The Department itself has set an example by an increase in the number of Indians employed by it in various capacities and by improving their prospects of advancement.

Climate for Prosperity

It can be said that the Government has made a fair contribution towards solving the employment position, not only directly but indirectly in ensuring the creation of the right climate for economic prosperity.

I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to make a serious appeal to all other employers of labour in Natal to investigate ways and means of finding employment for Indians.

I note with appreciation that the Durban City Council and other local authorities are giving attention to the matter. **As I have pointed out, however, the Government has already taken those steps now being advocated by the City Council as regards the investigation of the problem of Indian unemployment.**

It is pleasing to note further that the Chambers of Industry and Commerce, whose members are the most important employers of Indian labour in Natal, are carrying out investigations into possible solutions of the Indian unemployment problem.

The Term "Unemployed"

In regard to the assessment of the scope of unemployment, I should like to point out certain phenomena found by the Bureau of Social and Educational Research in the course of their recent survey.

Many young unmarried Indian women regard themselves as unemployed, but do not actively seek work and would decidedly not accept just any sort of work normally done by women.

Many Indian men regard themselves as unemployed notwithstanding that they are in fulltime or part-time employment. These persons include particularly those who are on the look-out for employment which would ensure a higher income from work for which they have been trained or which they previously performed.

There seems to be a tendency among those leaving school not to seek work immediately. The reason for this tendency is unknown.

These aspects will be further investigated.

I have already referred to the need for diversification of the economy of the Indian community and the part which their own residential areas will play in achieving this.

Future for Industrial Enterprise

It is evident—and leaders among Indian commercial men have recognised the fact—that industrial undertakings will play an important part in the future development of the Indian community.

Indians undoubtedly have many of the aptitudes and skills, including managerial know-how, to justify a successful entry into the field of industrial enterprise.

The Indians' efforts as entrepreneurs in industry are, with few exceptions, confined to such industrial undertakings as clothing and furniture factories, etc. I have already stated in Parliament that in order to enable the Indian Community to make a contribution to the diversification of its economy and thereby helping to solve unemployment, it should be made possible for them to invest capital to a greater extent in industry. **To this end Indian entrepreneurs will, wherever possible, be encouraged to**

establish industrial undertakings in and near their own group areas where they can create employment for an increasing number of their own people. Apart from relieving unemployment among Indians, this policy will also assist in relieving the vexed question of transportation of workers to industrial areas further afield.

Mr. President, as you and members of this Chamber are aware, facilities and opportunities for establishment of industries vary from place to place and no hard and fast rules can be laid down in regard to implementation of this policy, which must be left to the Ministers and their Departments concerned to put into practice, with due regard to the particular circumstances prevailing in each case.

Group Areas

I may, however, state that the Government has now decided that Indians may under certain circumstances be given permits to establish industries not only in their own group areas but also in proclaimed industrial areas especially where such areas are adjacent to their residential areas. In this regard I am particularly thinking of the Springfield flats industrial area which is on three sides bordered by Indian areas and which is, therefore, eminently suitable for Indian-owned industries.

This automatically brings me to the question of group areas.

R16,000,000 for Housing

Contrary to what a few land-owners and rent racketeers have tried to make people believe, the proclamation of group areas in Durban has for the first time in history brought hope to the Indian people—hope that they will at last be freed from relentless landlords and from the squalor of tin shanty slums; hope that at last they will have the opportunity of owning a house in an area where they will ultimately be able to have a voice in their own local government.

I think it is needless to remind you that since the first group areas for Indians have been proclaimed in Durban an amount of more than R16m. has already been made available by the Government for housing schemes for Indians.

You have, Mr. President, made it clear that your chamber is not so much perturbed over the residential aspect of group areas but that you are perturbed over the effect of the group area proclamations on Indian business interests.

Trading in Durban

I think that there is either ignorance or gross misrepresentation about the position of Indian traders in Durban and I therefore wish to give you a clearer picture of the situation.

In Durban there were on the 4th of October, 1963 a total of 3,191 Indian traders. Of this number 340 fall within proclaimed Indian areas. A further 2,057 are within the controlled areas. Of this number 527 are in proclaimed industrial areas and I wish to state very clearly that there is no intention of moving them from these areas. If they wish to sell to industrialists out of their own free will, it is their concern, but they will not be forced out of those areas by law.

The other 1,530 are in the Grey Street complex which has been left controlled only to prevent residential development. This area will remain and will further be developed as an Indian trading area.

That leaves 794 out of the total of 3191 Indian traders who are effected by the group area proclamation, because their businesses are situated in White and Coloured areas. But that does not mean that they will be uprooted and thrown to the wolves. **It must be remembered that vast residential expansion is taking place in the Chatsworth and the Brickfield-Springfield-Clare Estate-Reservoir Hills-complex and will shortly be taking place in the Isipingo Rail area.**

The plans for these areas must develop a trade potential for many more than the 794 effected traders, and it must be clearly understood that none of these will be required to move unless they can be suitably accommodated in their own areas.

Hope and Security

At present negotiations with the City Council of Durban are taking place at the highest level in order to develop a scheme for the suitable resettlement of effected traders.

No, Mr. President, group area proclamations did not bring misery and insecurity to Indian people—

except perhaps to a few racketeering landlords. **I have no doubt that time will prove that Indians, for the first time, now have hope and security!**

May I now in conclusion revert, Mr. President, to your opening remarks concerning *your* position under Roman-Dutch law. And may I take the liberty of reminding you, gentlemen, of two further principles of this magnificent legal system.

They are, firstly, that every person is innocent until he is, on evidence, found guilty. Secondly, that, if you may have doubts in your mind, remember the accused is always entitled to the benefit of the doubt.

A REPRESENTATIVE INDIAN COUNCIL

Government plans for the establishment of a representative Indian Council were announced by the Honourable the Minister of Indian Affairs in Pretoria on November 23, 1963.

The statement reads:

It is the intention, in accordance with Government policy, to establish in the course of time a representative Indian Council, which will eventually consist of elected representatives with legislative and administrative powers in respect of all matters directly affecting the Indian community, such as social services, education, local government etc. In addition the Council will, at the highest level, consult with the Government and with Ministers on all matters of importance to the Indian community, such as opportunities for employment, industrial development and the development of local government.

Before legislation is introduced in Parliament to permit of this development, it is my intention to consult with representatives of the Indian community. Initially I asked the community to identify their leaders through the medium of local committees so that I would know with whom I could negotiate.

Several Indian leaders have now informed me that due to dissension within the ranks of the community, they find it impossible to take the lead, and have requested me to take the initiative upon myself and to commence with a nominated advisory council in order to make consultation possible.

Discussions on Dec. 10/11, 1963

With this end in view, I have in consultation with senior officers of my Department, decided to hold discussions with prominent Indians as soon as possible.

Some will accordingly be invited for this purpose to a conference to be held at Pretoria, on the 10th and 11th December, 1963, as an initial step towards the creation of consultative machinery. The Department experienced some difficulty in deciding to whom invitations should be extended, for the very reason that there are no recognised and generally accepted leaders. Our criterion therefore was to invite some of those who by their actions or words, have proved that they have the interests of the community at heart and place them above self and personal interests. In the nature of things it was practicable to invite only a small number of such Indians. It might well be that persons were omitted who are actually able and willing to make a valuable contribution. This does not mean that they need stay out of the picture indefinitely as they will always have the opportunity of coming forward and by making contact with the offices of Indian Affairs or through word or deed make themselves known to the Department.

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