

# CONTACT

FEBRUARY 1956

## INDIAN SOUTH AFRICANS

**B**EFORE the Coloured voters stole the limelight the people to receive most publicity in South Africa this year had been its Indian citizens. Suddenly they had found themselves involved in one of those periodic anti-Indian outbursts which seem to satisfy some deep-seated psychological deficiency in many white South Africans. The SABRA conference in Port Elizabeth, having apparently noted a debate, calm, reasonable, informed and constructive, which took place in Durban under the aegis of the Institute of Race Relations, found a ball of contention to set in motion. From SABRA the ball was kicked into and about the Senate: the game was on.

It would in future be foolish to hope for either dignified discussion or responsible action from the Government's racks of rubber stamps in the Senate, but one is entitled to expect something of value to come from SABRA. It is now some weeks since its meetings were held and the initial fire and fury which greeted some of the statements made at its conference have died down. How do these statements look, when examined in the calm induced by a month's consideration?

Some of the more important, and more highly-publicised, points made at Port Elizabeth were these. It was contended that India had imperialist ambitions in Africa and that the Indian population of Africa was the "wooden horse" which would help to see these ambitions realised. It was contended that a disproportionate number of Indians were engaged in commerce and that Indians constituted a "parasitic" element in the population. It was contended that Indians were unassimilable, a branch of a foreign nation, and therefore not entitled to political rights in South Africa. It was finally contended that "repatriation" remained a possible solution to the "Indian question" and it was suggested that Britain, as one of the parties responsible for the original immigration of Indians to South Africa, should be asked to help in providing for them elsewhere.

These were important points made by prominent speakers at the SABRA conference. How do they square up to the facts? What evidence, for instance, supports the view that India has imperialist aims in Africa?

A study of India's professed foreign policy and her statements concerning Africa could hardly be used as a basis for such a conclusion. India's foreign policy is expressly anti-colonial and anti-imperialist. Mr. Nehru himself has told Indians in Africa categorically that they need expect no support from him if they hope to maintain a privileged position in the continent at the expense of Africans. Could this all just be a colossal bluff behind which the wily Indian government subtly plans the slow infiltration and eventual conquest of Africa? To say the least, it seems unlikely. Not only has no real evidence been produced to support such a contention but, if it were true, it would involve complete reversal of India's repeatedly expressed aims in the international field and would amount to an abdication from that position of prestige which her policies of neutrality and non-aggression have slowly won her.

Is it true that an abnormally large percentage of Indians is engaged in commerce? Of course it is, and the reasons are not far to seek. The most important is the great difficulty Indians have experienced in gaining entry to other avenues of employment. In all directions they meet legal and conventional bars. And so they stick to commerce. But even if *all* Indians were in commerce, would there be any justification in labelling them parasitic? An economist would not think so. He would regard them as providing an essential service, demanded by the public. And we would do well to remember that in many remote areas of

the Transvaal and Natal it was only the Indian businessman who was willing to run the risks involved in providing his scattered clientele with this service. It is also interesting to note that, while an Indian in commerce may be regarded as a parasite, an African or an Afrikaner or anyone else who follows the same line of business is almost invariably regarded as a fine, respectable fellow, an asset to the community. What logic is there here?

An extension of this idea of Indian "parasitism" is the commonly-heard remark that Indians only came to South Africa to make what they could out of it and that they only stay here because they know they are much better off than they would be in India. We quite concede that most Indians came to South Africa because they hoped to be better off here. Who didn't? Did the advancing Bantu tribes, or the Free-burghers, or the Huguenots, or the 1820 Settlers, or the Trekkers not consider that the risks they expected to face would be amply rewarded? Of course they did, and they looked for a better future ahead. So did the Indians. Why should what is regarded as adventurous virtue in others be treated as avaricious vice in them? And the main reason why Indian South Africans would not, under any circumstances, consider returning to India is not because they would be worse off there but simply because they are part of South Africa, it is there home, and they have come to love it.

Are Indians unassimilable? Can it seriously be claimed that they are still "temporary guests" in this country, when they have already been here for nearly a hundred years? Would it not be truer to say that, over the years, Indian South Africans have become more and more attuned to a Western way of life? Why, while one SABRA speaker was emphasising the "unassimilable" nature of Indians, another was admitting that many Indians were "European in all but colour".

Finally, we come to the suggestion that "repatriation" is the only acceptable solution to this ticklish problem and that the British Government should be asked to help in carrying it out. The truth is, of course, that the British Government bears no responsibility for the presence of Indians in South Africa. They were brought here because of the insistent demand of the Natal settlers and despite considerable opposition from the British and Indian Governments. So to try to blame the British Government for the present position is nonsense. Even if Britain had encouraged the demands of the Natal settlers it is idle to suppose that she would now assist in removing over 300,000 people from their long-established homes. Nor has a South African government the faintest hope of getting co-operation from either India or Pakistan for this sort of plan. Repatriation is not only an idle dream, it is an evil one. It cannot be emphasised too strongly or too often that the Indian people of South Africa have every right to be here. This is their home and they have contributed in no small way towards its prosperity. No amount of specious argument can alter these facts. Talk of "repatriation" is simply a device to justify the denial to Indians of their rights in this country.

SABRA occupies a position of considerable prestige. Its personnel and its claim to be an impartial and scientific body, pledged to the study of South Africa's racial problems, entitled it to that position at its foundation. It is, therefore, disheartening and disturbing to find it dealing in the sort of catch-phrases, half-truths and wishful-thinking, which were so evident at Port Elizabeth. One gains the impression that SABRA decides first on its solution to a problem and then devotes itself to producing a rationalised argument which will justify its conclusions. In the process it provides nourishment for those whose prejudices threaten to bring the whole structure of our society crashing down. It is to be hoped that the Port Elizabeth meeting will not set the standard for its future discussions.

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## PARTY NEWS

### *NATIONAL AND CAPE*

As from Monday, February 13th the National Office of the Party started to operate from its new headquarters at 240 Church Street, Pietermaritzburg. Some branches of the Party's activities will continue to be run temporarily from Cape Town, so members and friends are asked to put up with any slight delays they may meet with in having their letters answered, until the change-over is complete. The financial side will continue in Cape Town until the books have been audited.

When this section is transferred to Natal Mr. E. V. Mahomed will become national treasurer of the Party.

Congratulations to Dr. E. N. Keen and Mr. Sam Aaron, who were elected chairman and vice-chairman respectively of the Cape Provincial Division, at the January Congress. They have behind them a strong committee of thirty members, representative of all sections of the community, and we wish them a year in which the Party in the Cape may prosper greatly.

On the day of the announcement of the closing of Christ the King School, Sophiatown, the following national statement was issued by the Party:

"The closing of the Mission School of Christ the King in Sophiatown, Johannesburg, is a matter for deep concern.

"The initial notice from the Secretary for Native Affairs ordered the immediate closure of the school. This was subsequently explained by an official of the Native Affairs Department as an 'unfortunate mistake'; the school is only required to close at the end of the quarter. It is unpardonable that there should be such gross incompetence on a matter of public importance, affecting the education of 600 children. The incompetence is aggravated by the fact that the children had been at school for only two weeks in the new year when the notice was served. Surely the notice could be given at the end of the academic year, to enable parents to make proper arrangements for the schooling of their children? But, this incompetence is a small issue compared with the decision to close the school. It is difficult to believe that there could be any valid reason for closing an excellent school, established under the authority of the Bishop of Johannesburg, with the Rev. G. Sidebotham as principal. The school is not a charge on public revenue, the pupils pay fees, and we can only suppose that the true ground for the Government's decision is the insistence that it should have the monopoly for its particular brand of Bantu Education.

"It is these dictatorial acts of contemptuous disregard for human values which earn South Africa an invidious reputation abroad, and undermine harmonious race relations at home. The Government complains that its actions are misrepresented and it proposes to extend its publicity. What is needed is common human decency, not expenditure on propaganda. Our actions speak more loudly than the pamphlets of the State Information Service."

*Subscriptions:* We apologise for the fact that last month's *Contact* didn't mention how much the annual subscription is. It is 2/6. Have you paid yours yet? How about sending it—and any donation you feel you can stand—today?

## NATAL

During the first week of February meetings of the Provincial Committee and of the Coastal and Inland Regions of the Party were held. The same week saw the first branch meeting of 1956, when the Greytown Branch met, and a number of new members were recruited.

As a result of discussions at the Provincial and Regional committee meetings it has been decided to hold a series of public meetings in Durban, of which the first will take place at the Caxton Hall. Mr. J. K. Ngubane will speak on "African Political Movements". The second meeting will be addressed on "Indian Political Movements" and a third meeting will then be held at which members will discuss relations between the Liberal Party and the movements discussed in the two addresses. A small meeting was planned to take place at Clermont Township, near Pinetown, on February 22, and arrangements are being made to hold a private meeting in the Red Hill area of Durban. The Coastal Region is also planning to extend its activities to include the small towns on the North and South Coasts.

A public meeting will take place at Pentrich, near Maritzburg, late in February or early in March. This meeting will be addressed by Professor Leo Kuper and Mr. Pat Poovalingam, and will deal mainly with the Group Areas Act. During March the annual general meetings of the Edendale and Pietermaritzburg Branches of the Party will also be held. Over the whole Province it is hoped to hold about four house-meetings monthly.

The Provincial Secretary will pay two visits to Northern Natal within the next fortnight, to follow up investigations carried out there last year. A three-man

sub-committee will then present a suggested plan of action for these areas, to the next Provincial Committee meeting.

The Transvaal office, which has been on the move for months has finally (we hope) come to rest at 69 New Kempsey Buildings, corner Fox and Joubert Streets, Johannesburg. Please take a note of this new address and of the new telephone number, which is 33-8883.

While the office has been moving the Division has been rather handicapped in its work. Nevertheless, copious plans have been drawn up for activities in the Division during 1956 and it is hoped to publish something about these in our next issue.

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## LIBERAL PARTY BALANCE SHEET

### DEBIT

1. After demonstrations at the University of Alabama, Miss A. Lucy, a Negro student, was ordered to be barred from classes until further notice.
2. The Governor of Georgia has asked the state legislature to declare null and void the U.S. Supreme Court's decision outlawing public school segregation. Similar resolutions have been passed in Alabama and Virginia.
3. A "new" version of the Ku Klux Klan has filed an application for a South Carolina charter with the American Secretary of State.
4. State officials have ordered "White" and "Coloured" signs to be posted at all Alabama bus and railway stations.
5. It is reported that Indian women, banned wives of Union nationals, had been detained for some three weeks in the Durban Central Gaol, pending appeals to the Immigrants' Appeal Board.

### CREDIT

1. Referring to the ban on Miss A. Lucy's attendance at Alabama University President Eisenhower said: "All of us deplore what has happened in Alabama." At the University itself, Dennis Holt, president of the student body of the College of Arts and Sciences, led a movement to readmit Miss Lucy.
2. The executive council of the American Association for the Advancement of Science has voted by 219 to 28 votes not to hold future meetings in cities where race segregation is practised.
3. In a speech in New York, Rev. S. M. Cavert, executive secretary of the World Council of Churches, said that there had been a movement away from extreme apartheid in South African churches, but it might be too little and too late to avoid tragedy.
4. Professor B. B. Keet, of the Theological Seminary at the Stellenbosch University, has described apartheid as "a flight from the Christian calling".
5. Sir Roy Welensky, speaking in Broken Hill, described apartheid as "unreal and impracticable and the biggest swindle any politician has ever tried to put across on the electorate".

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Liberal Party addresses in the larger centres are: 47 Parliament Street, Cape Town; 240 Church Street, Pietermaritzburg; 25 Plowright Buildings, Plowright Lane, Durban; c/o Mrs. S. Stakemire, 21 Princes Road, East London; c/o Mrs. P. Lange, 2b Lawrence Street, Port Elizabeth; 69 New Kempsey Buildings, Fox and Joubert Streets, Johannesburg.

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