

Jews, and the uneasiness is there; because for them, as for all thinking South Africans, the test is not past assurances of goodwill, but the actions and pronouncements of Afrikaner nationalism from day to day.

## THE NATAL MENACE

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SOME years ago I delivered a lecture to the Durban Indo-European Council after which questions were invited. A quiet, friendly, Indian business man stood up and asked: "Why do the White people hate us?"

Just that. I had known the questioner for many years. This was the first and the only time that I have known him to speak in public.

I gave the only truthful answer that I could: "I do not know." It is useless to deny that Indians are hated in South Africa. The commonly advanced reasons for the hatred do not hold water.

In this article I am mainly concerned with Natal, where I live and where four-fifths of the Indians in South Africa live. This former British Colony is still the predominantly English speaking province of the Union. To me, an English speaking South African, the question becomes: "Why do the people of Natal, who are predominantly British, hate the Indians?" Or, "Why are the English in Natal so un-English in their hatred of Indians?"

English settlement in Natal began around 1830. Natal was annexed by Britain in 1845. The first indentured Indian labourers, many of them for work in the sugar plantations, arrived in 1860. Does the trouble go back to there? Did the white settlers who came a little earlier resent the arrival of newcomers in the way that even the best mannered of a ship's passengers will resent new arrivals who come aboard at a port of call? They may have felt that the large strange Zulu population that they had not yet had time to know was problem enough without another strange element being added. Whatever the cause, English-Indian relations in Natal did not start off so well as those of the British settlers in New Zealand with the Maoris they found well established there when they arrived in 1840.

From 1860 until nearly the end of the century majority opinion, as far as we know it, was favourable to the Indians who had made possible the rapid growth of the sugar industry and afforded appreciated labour in homes, on railways and on mines. At the end of their indentures many elected, as they were entitled to do, to remain in Natal, where they became, as the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Henry Bulwer, reported in 1878, "in all respects free men, with rights and privileges not inferior to those of any class of the Queen's subjects in the Colony. There are many who have acquired the right of voting and are registered as voters."

But there were those who hated Indians right from the start. The Rev. W. Holden, a Methodist Minister, opposed the importation of Indian labour in 1855 as did Dr. Charles Johnston, a member of the Durban Town Council and an elected member of the Natal Legislative Council. He lost his seat on the Legislative Council in 1859 because of his anti-Indian views, surely the only time that an anti-Indian ticket has caused electoral defeat in Natal?

In 1864, four years after the arrival of the first indentured Indians, Daniel Lindley, an American Missionary living at Inanda who had formerly been Predikant to a section of the Voortrekkers, wrote:

"The skins of these imported Indians is with some exceptions intensely black. Some have a mullatto complexion; but at heart they are all jet black. They are indescribably wicked and seem to me hopelessly lost now and forever. They are the dregs of wickedness. They are under contract to the planters for a certain period. When the time of their servitude shall have expired, they will be free to go and come as they may like. Then we shall have crime and criminals to our heart's content."

It may be assumed that Daniel Lindley expressed views which were common among at least some of his Natal neighbours. Such feelings have persisted. A letter signed "Cockney" in the *Natal Mercury* of November 10, 1921 reads:

"It is difficult to understand the mentality of people like 'Fairplay' (a previous correspondent) on the Asiatic problem. His idea is that the Asiatic is with us and we must make the best of him. One might say the same of the rat, or the fly or the mosquito or any other dangerous visitor."

In 1948 Mr. (now Senator) S. M. Pettersen was reported as

having said of Indians in an election speech: "Personally I would like to solve the problem by shooting them, but a man cannot lay himself open to a charge of murder."

That before the end of last century anti-Indian feeling had ceased to lose politicians their seats and instead had become increasingly powerful is shown by these dates and events:

- 1893 Parliamentary franchise withdrawn.
- 1896 Riots in Durban on the arrival of a shipload of free Indians. Gandhi was rescued from the mob by the Chief Constable.
- 1913 New Indian immigrants other than wives or children of established settlers prohibited.
- 1922-23 Anti-asiatic clauses in title deeds legalised.
- 1924 Municipal franchise withdrawn.
- 1943 Transfer of property between Indians and Whites controlled by the "Pegging Act."
- 1946 The Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act confirmed the restrictions of the "Pegging" Act but gave a limited measure of franchise in compensation. The franchise provisions were never promulgated.
- 1948 Franchise provisions of 1946 withdrawn by amending Act.
- 1950 Group Areas Act from the operation of which Indians are clearly destined to be the chief victims.

There have been 60 years of declining status for the Indian of South Africa. To-day he stands before the door of South Africa with surprising patience and says: "I belong. I belong to the human family by right of my manhood. I belong to the South African nation which I and my forefathers have helped to build. I have earned admittance by hard work and sober ways." But South Africa replies: "Voetsak. Begone. Get into your Group Areas, out of my sight."

Why has Natal particularly, with its largely English speaking population, been so un-English in its attitude to South Africans of Indian origin? In other respects Natal is pro-British to the point of being jingo. It is loud in protestation of loyalty to the Crown yet betrays the concept of a family of different but equal nations and peoples of which the Crown is the symbol and which is at the heart of the Commonwealth.

It was Smuts, the Afrikaner, who, when his largely English speaking Party in Natal demanded the Asiatic Land Tenure Act, insisted on the second chapter that gave some measure of compensation by way of franchise. When Malan won his Apartheid election in 1948 and promptly repealed this second chapter, it was

four English speaking United Party MPs, three from Durban, one from Maritzburg, who walked out of the Assembly rather than vote against him.

Elsewhere during this century the English have been ready to understand and to foster the desire of dependent people for independence, to admit the claim to manhood and human dignity on the part of non-White people. But in Natal it was as if the evil of Apartheid had entered into them before that word was known, stunting their spiritual growth, isolating them not only from their fellow South Africans of another colour but also from the stream of thought and vision that was moving in the English in other parts of the world. There have been exceptions of course, the Provincial Administration has shown real public responsibility in respect of Indian education and hospitalisation, but hatred of Indians is widespread and politically dominant.

Professor Gordon Allport in his "Prejudice in Modern Perspective" says a sign of prejudice is "basing love or hate on beliefs that are wholly or partially erroneous" and quotes St. Thomas Aquinas: "Prejudice is thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant."

The beliefs on which hatred of Indians in Natal is based are, I believe, these:

1. *The Indian does not belong here. He should go back to India.*

This was said to me the day I first arrived in South Africa by an English missionary who had devoted his life to the service of Africans. The fact is that Indians belong here as much as any other immigrants, whether from Holland, Germany, France, Britain, or elsewhere. The English beat them to Natal by only about 30 years. The first Indians came because they were wanted, others came for exactly the same reasons that brought White settlers. The only difference is that the first Indians came because they were asked while the first Whites came without being asked.

2. *Indians are too prolific. They threaten to swamp us.*

This is not a reason for dislike but a result of it. Those who like children or like chocolate welcome more children or more chocolate. Those who dislike onions object to more onions. In a rapidly developing industrial country, which South Africa is, it would be reasonable to expect that more Indians, who readily acquire industrial skill if given the chance to do so, would be welcomed. If there were anything in the belief that race hatred goes by numbers it would be far less in the Transvaal where there are 25 Whites to every Indian than in Natal where their numbers

are approximately equal. The evidence of Miss Horrell's book, "The Group Areas Act", is that anti-Indian feeling is even greater in the Transvaal than in Natal. It is true that Indian families often look large in this contraceptive age, but fears on the score of birthrate might be calmed by the fact that the Indian birthrate has been falling steadily since 1947 and now closely approximates that of the Whites, who have the advantage of being able to add to their numbers by immigration. In any case Indians are less than 3% of the population.

3. *Indians practise polygamy.*

The number of Muslims who, although permitted by their law the doubtful privilege of having more than one wife, actually do so, is insignificantly small.

4. *Indians are strange people who eat odd food and worship strange Gods.*

This is true enough but presumably Indians are no more strange to us than we are to them. It should be recognised, however, that in matters of food, dress, games, habits, South African Indians increasingly adopt "Western" or White patterns, the strangeness being more and more confined to skin colour.

5. *Indians are dishonest traders. They undercut, overcharge, evade price and wage regulations.*

There is probably some substance in this widely held belief. Business honesty is a wayward thing. A practice condemned by one group may be applauded by another. Consistent overcharging in a competitive market would soon put the trader out of business. The same laws as to wage and price regulations apply to White and non-White.

6. *Indians in South Africa cause trouble by running to India with their grievances.*

This is a recent complaint arising from the appeal made to India in respect of the "Pegging" Act of 1943 and the subsequent action by India in severing trade and diplomatic relations with the Union and invoking the United Nations. Certainly this made a bad situation worse but it should be remembered that South African Indians did not appeal to India until all appeals to the South African government had failed.

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These are, I believe, the objections to Indians commonly heard in Natal. Obviously they are not reasons for hatred but excuses for it. By Professor Allport's and St. Thomas Aquinas's

definitions Natal is deeply convicted of race prejudice.

Had the English of Natal only been more English in spirit, had they kept their word to the early Indian immigrants and given them the citizenship that they were promised, things might have been very different. Natal might have developed as a truly multi-racial community in which Africans as they emerged into Western ways would have found a place and it might have been here that the experiment in inter-racial partnership could have been made that the great Federation to the North is now making.

The present position cannot long continue. South Africans of Indian descent will not for ever (and perhaps not for long) be kept in subordination, denied many professional and skilled occupations, disfranchised, and threatened with eviction from their homes and the loss of their property in the land of their birth. Nor will the Africans who increasingly outgrow tribal ways be kept indefinitely from the Western world which they have qualified to enter.

Elsewhere the English have met situations similar to this in time, if only just in time. If South Africans of Dutch origin learn nothing from Indonesia, of French origin from Algeria, cannot those of English origin read the lessons of India, Burma, Ghana?

It is hard to see whence hope might come. Facts have not saved us. Facts regarding South Africa's Indians are known, their numbers, birthrate, crime rate; but prejudice persists. A Christian revival, a great stirring of the mind and spirit, could save South Africa overnight and there should be hope of this, for South Africa is, at least nominally, an exceptionally Christian country. But there is no sign of such a stirring of faith. Instead there is fear and hatred and preoccupation with cricket.

If South Africa found itself unable to hold a place in international cricket with a team drawn from only one, the White, section of the people would not the cause of cricket rise above race prejudice and a truly South African team come into being? Then the way would be open for an Indian, a modern counterpart of the "Ranji" who was the hero of every English cricket enthusiast in my boyhood, to go in to bat when all seemed lost and with skill and courage restore hope to his side. Then perhaps hatred of Indians, even in Natal, might suddenly depart.

A silly and a childish fancy? Yes, indeed, but a harmless one; and neither so silly nor so childish as South Africa's hatred of its Indian citizens which, so far from being harmless, may well spell its doom.