

now believe (p. 65), coldly activist rather than passionately conciliatory in 1946-7, which I certainly do not believe (pp. 102-7), and with not a suggestion of the Christian conviction which those who knew him recognised so clearly. William Ballinger seems to start too buoyantly, in view of his early quarrel with Kadalie, but is subsequently cut down to size – credibly – when measured against Max Gordon and the flamboyant Hymie Basner. What is much harder to pass over is the relatively slight attention paid to his wife, who had a much closer relationship with her constituents – on the evidence of her massive constituency correspondence – than Rich allows, and whose activities as a parliamentarian before 1948, and likely influence on Smuts during the difficult negotiations leading up to the Fagan Report do not reflect a person ‘taken very much unawares by events’ so much as an alert mind weighing the limited possibilities of the situation and opting for a course which she recognised as no more than a strategy to buy ten years for real reform to take root.

Hoernle, by contrast, is handled in a few deft strokes, his honest pessimism properly stressed and accounted for,

and his ability to confuse his liberal successors and provide escape routes for their later governmental opponents well set out (pp. 66-73). Similarly, the insight shown with regard to Leo Marquard’s quality of mind is appreciated by this reader.

The overall impact of the book is uneven. It is the insufficiently imaginative work of an intellectually sensitive mind, and clearly a product of immense industry. The topic is not an easy one. The temptation to assume that the liberals were wrong, or hypocritical, or victims of some kind of false consciousness, would not be easy to avoid if the only alternative were to see them as the only ones in step. But the issues were far more complex than that, and at least the stage needs to be set fairly for them. Thus the author’s awareness of the power of Afrikaner nationalism is greater than the solitary reference in the index suggests; but he hardly concerns himself at all with the liberals’ confrontation with their most immediate political rivals, and that is to throw the whole liberal-black relationship under a distorting lens. With a lot more about white power, and a bit more about the liberal conscience, this could have been an important book. □

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by YUSSUF BHAMJEE

## UNFAMILIAR PERSPECTIVES

**A Documentary history of Indian South Africans Edited by Surendra Bhana and Bridglal Pachai (David Philip 1984)**

This documentary history edited by Surendra Bhana and Bridglal Pachai is most welcome as a contribution to understanding the history of Indian South Africans. In a sense it follows on ‘Documents in Indentured Labour’ by Y.S. Meer et al and reminds one of the excellent collection of political documents of extra-parliamentary organisations in ‘From Protest to Challenge’, edited by Karis and Carter.

While the sample of documents put together by Bhana and Pachai speak solely from an Indian perspective, they are in a sense, making up for the lack of insight into this area of the history of South Africa. However the documents ultimately transcend this limited perspective by

showing that the political evolution of this group of people cannot be divorced from the political evolution of other Blacks.

Although some of the documents are anecdotes, they give an account of the socio-economic, political and cultural experience of a ‘non-white’ group rejected by both the English and Afrikaner sections of the white dominant group. As a result of this rejection, Indian South Africans were forced to develop a broader political consciousness and came to see themselves as part of the wider Black collectivity. The continuous threat of repatriation, the imposition of the £3.00 poll tax, the immigration laws, forced segregation, the denial of economic opportunities and the withdrawal of political and trading rights forced them to develop, through political struggle, a common cause with other ‘non-white’ South Africans.

This development, as the documents show, involved a gradual process. When Indians were denied equal status

with whites, they demanded equality on the basis of being colonial-born South Africans. In 1914 Albert Christopher articulated the view that the future status of colonial-born Indian South Africans would be determined by South African-born Indians. In 1923 when the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) was formed to oppose the 'principle of segregation' embodied in the Class Areas Bill, SAIC enjoyed the support of the Indian community. However, in 1927 when the SAIC agreed to repatriation and again in 1932, when it participated in talks to consider the possible colonial relocation of Indians outside South Africa, there resulted a polarisation and growing antipathy between the SAIC and the Indians who had opted to make South Africa their home. As Indians permanently settled in South Africa they responded by forming the Colonial Born and Settlers' Indian Association in 1934 and declared their South African identity by claiming that they were 'nationals of South Africa'.

### ALLIANCES

This historical conjuncture produced a new tradition in Indian politics which pointed in the direction of forging alliances with 'non-European peoples and other democratic forces'. This tendency having captured the leadership of the Indian Congresses by 1946 reflected itself as the dominant ideological force in Indian politics. It committed itself to struggle 'for the full implementation of the rights of all peoples of South Africa'. Hence the Xuma, Naicker, Dadoo pact of 1947. The 1949 riots notwithstanding, Indian leadership appreciated that the rights of Indian South Africans could only be guaranteed when the aspirations of Africans are realised. Thus by virtue of joint political struggle in the Defiance Campaign of 1952, the Indian Congresses consolidated their alliance with the African National Congress. In 1955 the SAIC was recognised as an integral part of 'the organisational forces of the liberatory movement' in South Africa. It joined the African National Congress, the Congress of Democrats, and the South African Coloured People's Organisation in forming the Congress of the People (COP). As the COP these organisations adopted the Freedom Charter as their minimum programme for a future South Africa. Amongst its other clauses, the Freedom Charter declared 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white and no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people'.

However, there still exists a fraction of Indian opinion which believes that the aspirations of Indian South Africans would be best served by negotiating and participating in state created institutions; the documents show that the main-stream of Indian political consciousness identifies with the broad democratic principles of the Freedom Charter. Supporters of this approach call for a national

convention which will decide the future of all South Africans. All this is captured by the documents in Part I: 'Aliens in South Africa (1860 – 1914)' and Part II: 'The Search for Equality (1914 – 1984)'.

Each part has an introduction which briefly outlines the historical period. This, and the brief editorial commentary attached to each document, allow the reader to situate and appreciate the document in its historical context, but each document is allowed to speak for itself.

### INSIGHTS

The documents provide a fascinating glimpse of the trials and tribulations of Indian South Africans. The 'coolies' complaining of their low wages and poor work conditions; Hureebhukut, an indentured worker who is struck with a whip to return to work even though 'suffering from loose bowels'; Goolam Khader's dilemma that his wives would be abused in his absence; and Pethuyee Themalarajinpattanam's frustration on realising that his daughter had pickled a money-order receipt which his son had posted from South Africa to him in India – all offer insights into Indian South African life. The documents also expose the frustrations of the indentured workers by revealing the exceptionally high incidence of suicide amongst them.

In 1895 all ex-indentured labourers (workers, hawkers, traders) were denied the right of free citizen status as promised in the initial contracts, unless they paid a £3 poll tax. This burden on ex-indentured labourers and those serving indenture was compounded when their wives and children also had to pay this 'oppressive' tax. Failure of payment meant denial of free citizen status and the return of indenture or 'voluntary' repatriation.

Labourers responded to the call of women resisters in 1913, to use the weapon of the industrial strike to achieve a repeal of the poll tax. Nearly the whole of the work force in Natal withdrew their labour power. The economy of Natal was virtually at a stand-still. Pressurised by mine owners, Smuts was forced to abolish the £3 tax in 1914. The success of the worker's struggle, as Gandhi observed, lay with the workers as 'they were their own leaders'. It is a pity that this general strike is not documented in the book in its own right, for it would have added to the history of the labour movement in South Africa. This, of course, may be an omission due to the lack of documents dealing primarily with the strike.

Gandhi, Albert Christopher, Dadoo, Naicker, Pat Poovalingum, M.J. Naidoo, A Rajbansi, Dr A.D. Lazarus and Jerry Coovadia, all receive attention – so do a whole range of other personalities not so familiar.

Teachers, students and researchers of Indian South African history will find this a most useful documentation – and so probably will anybody with any interest in South African history. □

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