

Indian Opinion

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NOTES AND NEWS

WE gather from a Reuter interview that Mr. W. Hughes, the Australian Prime Minister, referring to statements that the rejection of the Japanese amendment for racial equality in the Peace Treaty was due entirely to the attitude of himself as the representative of Australia, said:—

"It is most emphatically untrue to say that Australia alone is responsible for the rejection of the Japanese amendment." Mr. Hughes went on to say that certain sections of the Japanese people seemed to think that by the rejection of the amendment the world had refused to admit the Japanese nation on a footing of equality with the other nations of the League, but, in his opinion, there was not the slightest justification for such a conclusion.

Mr. Hughes argued that all he had done was to support the traditional policy of Australia, which was well known throughout the world, and which he believed essential to the industrial welfare of the people. After many years' agitation and struggling a high standard of living had been secured in Australia, which they hoped and intended to raise still higher. Workmen insisted on high wages and good working conditions, but the industrial position in Japan was not the same. Only the other day the Peace Conference adopted a proposal for the establishment of a permanent International Labour Convention for the purpose of improving the industrial position of workers all over the world. That proposal contained a clause inserted at the suggestion of Japan and other Eastern countries which, in effect, exempted them from paying the same wages working the same hours as other nations. This, to Mr. Hughes, was a plain admission that Japanese industrial conditions were very different from those of other nations. Mr. Hughes said that he did not ask the Japanese people to vary their domestic policy to suit Australia, so he thought the Japanese people would concede to Australia the same right.

Our contemporary *India*, dealing with the same subject, says:—

"So far as the Labour Charter affects her, she has successfully fought for a recognition of existing inequalities as between the economic and industrial conditions of Europe and America, on the one hand, and Asia on the other. In this respect, especially, her representatives have done well and are deserving of their country's thanks."

We are sorry we cannot quite agree that such an arrangement is altogether good. To fight for "existing inequalities" even though they may be economic and industrial is dangerous. At any rate Mr. Hughes has used the incident very powerfully in support of Australia's Asiatic exclusion policy.

We in South Africa are coming to realise more and more every day that there is only one way of successfully fighting the racial bar, and that is to establish standards of efficiency, based on skilled or unskilled labour at the case may be, without distinction of race or colour.

To admit that Asiatics may work longer hours for less wages than Europeans, Americans or Australians, furnishes, we venture to think a splendid argument for the exclusion of Asiatics from countries where a higher standard exists. However, such policy may suit the conditions in India and Japan, it certainly will not fit in with the aims of Indians born in the Dominions.

Here is another paragraph published by *India* which shows which way the wind blows:—

We may expect to hear interesting news from Vancouver, British Columbia, very soon. The Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, appointed by the Dominion Government to investigate the conditions of labour, with a view to procuring permanent improvement in the relation between employers and employees, has concluded its investigations at Victoria. According to the evidence heard, unemployment and the high cost of living are the principal factors in the unrest in British Columbia, with the employment of Orientals as a contributing factor. Labour representatives stated that the expulsion of Orientals would remove one cause of grievance. The mill owners stated that such a policy would mean that they must close down entirely, as approximately 40 per cent of the employees in the lumber trade in British Columbia are Orientals, and their wages average considerably less than white men's wages. A substantial proportion of these "Orientals" are British Indians, mostly Sikhs, and we shall watch with interest the industrial developments promised by the attitude of the white labour unions.

The *Independent* (Allahabad), prints the following from Sir Rabindranath Tagore:—

Independence can never be given from outside. Slavishness has its roots in our fear and self-distrust, in the treacherous meanness of our self-seeking ambitions, in our intellectual timidity which shuts its eyes to truth and seeks shelter in the dark holes of sophistry, and our moral cowardice which feels itself safe in the abject acceptance of all impositions from tyrannical power that resides in society or outside it. Those who are always ready ruthlessly to crush all signs of independence in their own community where they have authority to exercise their power, and are never ashamed loudly to denounce the helpless minority's claims for freedom of conscience, will never be able to retain the idols of independence given to them in their beggar's bowls, full of cracks; and any accession to power will give them freedom for tyranny, which is another aspect of the cactus born in the desert soil.

Commenting upon the recommendations of the Committee on the Disabilities of Indians in the Transvaal, *India* says:—

"These recommendations will be regarded with the utmost dismay and alarm by Indians throughout the Union and in India, for they appear to be in the nature of a challenge. It is extraordinary that, after four years of such a war as that which is now on the point of conclusion, South Africa should propose to enact further racial legislation aimed at destroying Indian enterprise, and dealing a death-blow to the freedom of

the resident Indian population to employ its energies in any lawful enterprise. The effect of these recommendations, if enacted in the form of legislation, will be to make it impossible for even a Transvaal-born Indian to live in that Province save as a helot. We earnestly hope that the India and Colonial Offices are on the alert to prevent what will be one of the most flagrant abuses of opportunity in the history of the Empire. It is certain that the Indian community will not accept without a struggle the position marked out for them by their European trade-rivals, and they will, in their struggle for life, have the moral and material support of their countrymen in India and elsewhere."

We are informed that preparations are being made in Johannesburg to hold a South African Indian Emergency Conference in the month of August to discuss the present position of Indians in South Africa. A committee of sixty members for the purpose has been formed with Mr. N. A. Camay as the Secretary. Those who desire to communicate are requested to do so at the following address—Mr. N. A. Camay, Secretary S.A. Indian Emergency Conference, Box 6522, Johannesburg.

We acknowledge with thanks the receipt of £1 10 towards the upkeep of INDIAN OPINION from Messrs. Trekamdas Bros., Kimberley.

The Indian community of Durban has suffered a great loss by the death of Mr. M. H. Ismail. The late Mr. Ismail was one of the most enterprising merchants and had by ability and perseverance, raised himself to a position of wealth and influence. His happy disposition drew towards him many friends who to-day mourn their loss. It is only a few months ago that he married, and the utmost sympathy will go out to the young widow and other relatives in their bereavement.

It is proposed to alter the scale of rations issued to Indian employees of the Durban Corporation. Instead of the weekly ration of 10 lbs. rice, this will be reduced to 6 lbs., and, in place of the 4 lbs. rice deducted, an optional issue of either 5 lbs. flour or 8 lbs. meal; meal will be given. The total of each man's weekly ration will thus be either—6 lbs. rice and 18 lbs. meal or 6 lbs. rice and 10 lbs. meal and 5 lbs. flour. In lieu of the monthly ration of dholl an endeavour is being made to obtain samples of peas, beans, or other suitable substitute. The change was to operate as from the 7th instant.

The Asiatics (Land and Trading) Amendment Act (Transvaal) 1919, is now gazetted. His Excellency the Governor-General having given his assent.

The stallholders and market gardeners attending the Indian Market, Durban, contributed a large quantity of fruit and vegetables to the Victory Fair, held last week at Lord's Ground, in aid of the Governor-General's Fund.

Distrust of the motives of the European nations is a factor to be taken into consideration (says India) in dealing with Eastern affairs and the seeking of solutions of Eastern problems. Asiatic countries will justly resent attempts at Imperialist domination, racial differentiation, and foreign economic exploitation. Western statesmanship will be severely tested in the coming years. Meanwhile, Japan has sounded a rallying-cry that will be emblazoned on every Eastern banner: "Equality of legislative and administrative treatment." Asia will not rest content until this ideal is achieved. Everything that stands in the way of its achievement is a source of friction that may at any time result in a world-wide conflagration.

The Mayor of Durban, addressing a conference of Native Teachers the other day, stated that there were at present over twenty night schools supported by the Corporation, and attended by more than 600 Natives. Why should there not be as many Indian night schools? Perhaps some kind reader will give the reason.

SHOP HOURS

ON the 1st of this month the new Natal Shop Hours Ordinance came into force. Instead of applying only to Boroughs and Townships it covers the whole Province. The hours during which shops may remain open for business are as follows: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Friday 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. These hours apply to town and country stores and to all places of business, either wholesale or retail, except certain specified stores such as Confectioners, etc. The object of this ordinance is, of course, to benefit the assistants who have often to work very long hours which is injurious to health. The number of hours which assistants may be employed during one week is now 48. Hawkers and pedlars must observe the same hours as shopkeepers. In the case of a mining district, the Administrator may appoint special closing hours if desirable. The last named provision is a recognition of the fact that the workers have a right to be considered. In many cases they would find it almost impossible ever to make their own purchases. It is only right, therefore, that special arrangements should be made in their behalf. But if the miner finds it impossible to do his shopping between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. so also will the bulk of the Native and Indian population, who are mainly manual workers, commencing work at 7 a.m. and leaving at 5 p.m. or later. But still the Shop Assistants and Commercial Workers Union are not satisfied, and they are making a bold and successful effort to compel, by abuse and ridicule, shopkeepers to close on Friday at 5 p.m. as other days, thus depriving the general public of the only time, outside working hours, to make their purchases. This, to our mind, is going a step too far. It seems that one lot of workers do not care about the needs of another and larger section of workers so long as they get what they want. We, of course, are mainly concerned about the poorer Indians who will now be severely handicapped, especially if the movement organised by the Shop Assistants in favour of Friday night closing succeeds. Even though the European workers are willing to make sacrifices on behalf of the shop assistants, this may be because they realise that all workers are aiming at the same thing—reduction of working hours. But it is poor comfort for the Indian or Native labourer to know this, as he is on quite a different footing. We feel that the mass of the population is in this case made the victim for the benefit of the comparatively few shop assistants. By all means reduce the hours for assistants, still more if needful, but let there be some way whereby the working men may be able to purchase necessities of life. This is our view of the matter; but, in the absence of any protest, either by European, Native or Indian workers against the restrictions, it is not possible to say exactly what is the popular wish. It is up to those who are inconvenienced, either to support the present hours of business or raise a strong protest against them. Business men have no cause to grumble so long as the purchasing public are satisfied.