

Indian Opinion

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NOTES AND NEWS

THE emergency session of the South African Indian Congress to be held during the beginning of next week will be a unique and a most important occasion in the history of the Indian community of South Africa—unique because for the first in the history of its inception the Congress will be presided over by a most distinguished representative of our Motherland in the person of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, and important because the occasion demanding the summoning of the Congress is a most important one. The future of Indians throughout the Union is at stake and the time has now arrived when a united action should be taken. We are said to be a menace to this country politically, socially and economically, because, it is said that, we are progressing in civilisation, education and efficiency. Steps are now under contemplation whereby to retard our progress and to place us under humiliating conditions by segregating us. It will be necessary, therefore, to decide once and for all whether we wish to live in this country as self-respecting human-beings or anything but that. If we wish to live as self-respecting human-beings we will have to fight for the right to do so. And to fight, it will be necessary for us to combine our forces. The purpose of the forthcoming Congress is to get to know the views of our brethren in the different Provinces and come to a unanimous decision as to what line of action should be adopted. Fortunately or unfortunately for us the Class Areas Bill has, owing to the crises reached in the Government of the country, been hung up for the present at least but it hangs like the sword of Damocles and we do not know when it may fall on us. It will be wise, therefore, to be ever on our guard. The work of the Congress will also be to place the body on a sound footing and it is the duty of every Indian to help towards achieving that object.

The colonial-born Indians are at last moving. According to an advertisement published elsewhere in this issue a meeting of the Natal Colonial-born Indian Association is to be held on Sunday next for the purpose of adopting the constitution and electing officials. There was a Colonial-born Indian Association in existence some years ago but, for reasons unknown to us, that body has become defunct and it is proposed now to establish a new one. We have on many an occasion suggested in these columns that the future laws of the country relating to Indians are going to affect, more than any one else, the Colonial-born Indians whose only home is in this country and who are to live and die in this country. The sooner they realise the seriousness of the situation the better it will be for them and it is most essential that they should be thoroughly organized. We were privileged to be present at the last meeting of the Association but were disappointed to see a very small attendance. It was probably due to the meeting not being properly advertised. The number of Colonial-born Indians far exceeds that of Indian-born and the attendance at a Colonial-born Indian meeting should naturally be much larger. We are glad of this move on the part of the colonial-born Indians and we wish them every success.

A question has been raised as to who should be allowed to be members of the above Association. In the ordinary sense of the term, of course, only those

that are born in the Colony can become members, but what about those who have been brought in their babyhood and have spent their life time in this country. They are just as much Colonial-born as the Colonial-borns are, and their Mother country is just as strange to them as it is to the Colonial-borns. It would be unreasonable to ignore the interests of these people who, owing merely to an accident of birth, are Indians in name only but Colonialists in reality.

The Crescent Debating Society has been organised by the young Moslems of Durban, under the organisation of Messrs. G. H. M. Mayet, G. H. M. Haffjee, M. Adam, M. E. Paruk, I. E. Patel. The following officials were elected: G. H. M. Haffjee, chairman; M. Adam, secretary and treasurer.

A correspondent writes from Stanger:—A movement was on foot since 1922 to erect a School to provide vernacular education to the Indian children of the Lower Tugela District. With this object in view a society was formed and styled itself the "Lower Tugela District Hindu Veda Dharma Sabha" and has been active since its inception and collected in the District a large sum of money. At a recent special general meeting of the society it was decided to take advantage of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu's visit to South Africa by asking her to lay the foundation stone of the School building on the 21st inst., provided that day would be convenient to her. The society intends erecting school premises to the value of £1000, on the property already purchased by the society for the purpose. A pleasing feature of the whole movement is that the wealthy Indian sugar planters of the district have promised their moral and financial support. The society is now in communication with the Congress to arrange Mrs. Sarojini Naidu's visit to Stanger. The society is to be congratulated on the work undertaken for the welfare of the Indian children.

A meeting under the auspices of the Satya Vardhak Sabha was held in the City on Saturday the 5th instant in connection with the erection of a crematorium in the cemetery ground on Greytown Road. Mr. Paterson Wheeler, the architect, gave detailed information in regard to the plan of the building. The meeting adopted the plan, and the secretaries of the society gave a report of the collections made to date towards the erection of the building. It was decided by the meeting to form a deputation of the leading members of public institutions in the city to interview the Town Council in regard to the grant of the site by the society. It is hoped that by the end of this month the building will be commenced.

Capetown, April 18 (Reuter).—Reuter is informed that the inauguration of a United non-European Congress, to protect and further the educational, commercial, political and industrial interests of the non-European peoples of South Africa, has been successfully accomplished, and that the following organisations have been affiliated:—African People's Organisations, Cape British Indian Council, African National Congress, Universal Negro Improvement Association, South African Inter-

Racial Association, and Industrial and Commercial Workers Union. S. Reagon has been elected president. A. Ismail vice-president, M. de Vries treasurer, and J. A. la Guina secretary.

THE FATE OF THE BILL

THE Parliament having been dissolved all of a sudden owing to the defeat of the Government in the Wakkerstroom by-election, in which a S. A. P. seat was lost by 213 votes by Mr. A. G. Robertson, the seat being taken by Mr. A. S. Naude (Nationalist), the Class Areas Bill for the present at least is doomed. It is not an easy matter to conjecture as to who will be next in power but whoever does come the Bill is sure to pass either in its present form or with some modification which in all probability will affect the Indian community adversely.

Mr. Duncan's speech in the House of Assembly on the Class Areas Bill was considered mild by the extremists of this country. It did not, however, seem to us so, nor was it apologetic when he declared that "they did not intend to be deterred by any threats of resistance in South Africa, or by any threats of political action outside South Africa." Mr. Duncan also said that "they intended to legislate in this matter with every consideration for the alien people who were being affected by their acts," when Dr. Forsyth very rightly interposed and said "they are not aliens if they are born here." This is certainly for the first time that we learn that British Indians can be considered aliens in any part of the British Empire.

Mr. Duncan said, it was generally understood when the Immigration Act of 1913 was passed that, "the Immigration of Asiatics into South Africa should cease." And so the Immigration of Asiatics into South Africa has ceased; but it was also definitely understood at the time of the passing of the Bill that the rights of those Asiatics that are already here will not be interfered with.

"What was being felt as an Indian menace," said Mr. Duncan, "was due to a gradual rise in civilisation, in efficiency and in education of Indian people who had been here for many years." The Government cannot pride itself of having done very much towards Indian education and yet if that community has risen in civilisation, efficiency and in education could it be an asset to this country or a menace? And how could it possibly be a social, political or economic menace when it is rising in the scale of civilisation? And what purpose is there in segregating them but pure jealousy? These are questions which every intelligent man should be able to answer for himself.

Mr. Duncan talked of the incompatibility among people and said that legislature could not shut its eyes to that. He said there were other countries besides South Africa who also had class feelings and even India was not exempt from those feelings. But a progressive Government in a progressive country should not copy the evils of other countries but should endeavour to destroy such evils.

In defence of the charge against the Government of a breach of the 1914 settlement Mr. Duncan admits that "a general undertaking was given at the time on behalf of the Government that if and when the immigration of Indians in South Africa was stopped the Indians who were actually here would be given due consideration of their rights" but refuses to regard this Bill as any breach of that undertaking. It depends on how the undertaking

is interpreted. If it was to apply to all Indians that were here at the time of the 1914 settlement and their descendants, and that was certainly how it was meant to apply, then this Bill is undoubtedly a breach of that undertaking, for in future Indians will not be able to possess the same rights as they have done in the past. But Mr. Duncan denies that any understanding was given by the Government that the vested rights of Indians would be respected—"vested rights" in the sense that "the rights of Indians who were now trading here or those who might succeed them as traders here or any other traders who might be trading here to go on trading under the same conditions and in the same parts as they were trading in now." Mr. Duncan denies that that interpretation was given to "vested rights" by Mr. Gandhi in his settlement correspondence with the Government and says, "what he was dealing with at the time was the question of the rights of certain traders who had been allowed to trade on the goldfields against the strict terms of the law, and he was dealing with the question of what should be done in regard to these men." This is on the face of it ridiculous, because the settlement arrived at in 1914 was not in regard to Indian traders in the Transvaal goldfields alone but in regard to Indians throughout the Union, and it is impossible that after so strenuous a struggle the Indian community would give such a narrow interpretation to the term "vested rights."

This question of "Vested rights" was first brought up when the Transvaal Act of 1919 was under consideration and having decided to commit a breach of the settlement at that time, the Government produced as a safeguard a purely personal letter addressed by Mr. Gandhi to Mr. Gorges in which Mr. Gandhi had expressed his own personal views about "vested rights in connection with the Gold Law and Townships Amendment Act." This letter had nothing whatsoever to do with the settlement and did not constitute a part of the settlement correspondence and it was highly dishonest on the part of the Government to make use as they have done of this personal letter.

When this letter was referred to at the time, Mr. Gandhi wrote a letter to the *Times of India* explaining the actual position. To clear the mind of the public from confusion we have deemed it necessary to reproduce this letter again in these columns and we would ask our readers to read it carefully.

In his message to Mrs. Sarojini Naidu Mr. Gandhi has reminded the Union Government of the assurance given to the late Mr. Gokhale that no further disabling legislation would be passed against Indians. Since the Governments of the present day attach no value to assurances and promises given verbally, however solemnly they may have been given, and since Mr. Gokhale is no more to contradict its statement it will be quite safe for the Government to deny having given any such assurance.

But in his statement issued to the Press in India, which we reproduced in our issue of the 4th of April Mr. Gandhi says: "The main terms of the compromise were settled before Sir Benjamin Robertson who represented the Indian Government and returned to India in accordance with that compromise that no further Anti Asiatic legislation was to be passed by the Union Government. The understanding at the time," Mr. Gandhi goes on further to say, "was that the legal position of Indians would be gradually improved and that the then existing Anti-Asiatic legislation would in time to come be repealed."