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MADRAS PROTEST MEETING.

Wholehearted Support Enlisted By Our Deputation.

An all-parties public meeting was held on 15th January 1926 at the Triplicane Beach, Madras to hear three of the members of the S. African Indian Deputation, Messrs. James Godfrey (Advocate, Natal), V. S. C. Pather and A. A. Mirza, on what they had to say of the proposed Anti-Asiatic Bill to be introduced in the S. African Parliament by Dr. Malan, the Minister of the Interior, to curtail the already limited rights and liberties of the Indians resident in the Union and also to segregate them, on the ground that the Asiatics have affected the economic standards of living of the whites in S. Africa. The meeting was very largely attended. Among those present were Dr. P. Varadarejulu Naidu, Messrs. Sami Venkatachellam Chetty, O. Thanikachellam Chetty, and O. Kandaswamy Chetty, Dr. C. Natesan Mudaliar, Messrs. S. Satyamurthi, S. Muthiah Mudaliar, T. V. Venkatarama Iyer, U. Rama Rao, T. Prakasam, Yakub Hussan Sait, C. Rajagopalachariar, Hameed Khan, Shafee Muhammad and C. Venkatarangam Naidu.

PRESIDENT'S OBSERVATIONS.

Mr. S. Srinivasa Iyengar, in introducing the members of the deputation, said that there was a view that in the British Empire there was a good deal of advantage to be gained. But the question of South African Indians and East African Indians, had shown them that it was not so. How Mahatma Gandhi made his name and his leadership in South Africa was a matter of history. What was suggested in South Africa was that Indians should be allotted separate areas from the Europeans. There were very many objectionable clauses in the Anti-Asiatic Bill. Bombay was giving the deputation all that it needed. This struggle for equality of rights had passed the moral stage. They in India must give material support. It was impossible for India to function any longer except as a greater India in tackling with the question. It was necessary for them to see whether unity on that question was not possible. On three questions they have had unity. On the question of S. African and East African Indians, they had unity. In spite of it the problem had been left as it was. Again on the prohibition question there had been unity. But the Government had not yielded. On the Bengal Ordinance there was unanimity. Yet Government had not done anything. So what he wanted was unity in method and unity in spirit.

In South Africa, Indians in Natal were at liberty to buy, sell or live anywhere. The present Bill tried to restrict this freedom. In certain places only they could live hereafter as a result of this Bill. Not only in the cities this was attempted but also in rural parts. The primary duty of the people of India was to give as much importance to this question as to anything else. If that was done, all talk of equality in the British Empire would be exposed. The latest news was that the Bill had been postponed. So they must carry on active agitation. In this, Madras must bear the brunt as most of the labourers have gone from this Presidency.

Englishmen understood any movement, whenever a movement had financial support. What was necessary was continued financial help. He was thankful to South African Indians for their contribution to the Swaraj movement. The Indian people would make it clear to the British Government that they would not stand any nonsense, for making their brethren chattels in the Empire.

MR. JAMES GODFREY.

Mr. James Godfrey, who spoke first said that in South Africa, when the struggle for passive resistance needed prompting, it was the Madras section that came forward. In such meetings, concerning the very existence of the nation they must invite ladies. He was almost tempted to address them as fellow-citizens of the British Empire but he was prevented from doing so, because in S. Africa he was a helot and the Indians' status there was most disgraceful. In 1860 they went there. In 1895, Mahatmajee issued a pamphlet and in 1896 the Legislature very clearly passed a law by which they took away the franchise. Then Mr. Gandhi came to India and told the people about the true state. He related the treatment meted out to Mr. Gandhi and said that it was then that the whites began their anti-Asiatic movement. In 1897 to protect themselves they introduced the Emigration Act. From 1897 to 1903 they found many people satisfied their tests of education and proof of domicile. The Natal Union Act curtailed the privileges of the Indian emigrant. In 1913, the passive resistance struggle was at its height, out of which came the Gandhi-Smuts Settlement of 1914 which crystallised into the Indian Relief Bill of 1914. That was the basis for the Indian demand to remove any legislation against them. They believed that it was a complete settlement and that no repressive or anti-Asiatic legislation would be passed against them. In 1919 in Transvaal some Indians thought of buying properties in companies. They commenced a little and the Europeans got alarmed at this. The Government appointed a Commission to go into the Asiatic question. The headline "Asiatic Menace" appeared in newspapers. The Commission said that the menace was an obsession. It was an ill-founded alarm. The Asiatic menace they heard so much about was engineered by hirelings of the Anti-Asiatic League. From 1921 till to-day, he had not been able to find out one reason for the introduction of this Bill except that the party-in power would strengthen itself by pandering to popular taste. He was doubtful even of that. The Bill that Dr. Malan had introduced was a direct insult to them and a stigma to Indian honour. He had told him that this small community would not barter away their honour. If the position in South Africa could be fought out, then their position in India could be fought out. They cried for Swaraj. No doubt they wanted it. Among the things that Englishmen respected, one thing was force. They must show such a strong force, that the Union Government would respect Indian opinion.

The Bill that was being brought forward was a far-reaching Bill. At the present time Indians were allowed to buy and live wherever they pleased. The first object of this Bill was to segregate Indians. Wherever in South Africa Indians had been allotted territory, the Municipalities there have neglected the sanitary conditions of Indians quarters. They were worse than slums. If such were the places they were going to be segregated into, they were not prepared to go into those areas. The Bill defined trading areas and residential areas. The areas were not in such places in towns where trade could be carried on by Indians. If they had any sense of honour and race pride, they must say they would not accept it. Again they said that the coast belt of 30 miles area would be demarcated, wherein Indians would have to live and trade. The Governor-General had the power to make it small or large as he felt. This was all to make the life of the Indians impossible in South Africa. So they were nowhere. On the question of their personal rights they imposed drastic and severe restriction. The Transvaal Indians could only go as labourers. In the other parts of the South African Union, Indians had business relations etc. Under this Bill it would be impossible for an Indian to have business in Natal and supervise it from Transvaal because his domicile would be taken away. This would force them to choose which business they would conduct and which they would not. Why should Dr. Malan or anybody else say that they could not go out to India and bring an Indian wife ! They had a right to claim protection. They had been told that it was a domestic question and S. Africa would not tolerate interference from India or Britain. But it was at the call of the whites while they were starving that the Indians went and made S. Africa a garden. In 1908 when the

S. African Act was passed, Indians represented their grievances and they were assured of their rights. But everything that had been done till now had been otherwise. To-day the position was that the King-Emperor had the power of vetoing any legislation passed by the South African Government within one year. If there was any time to exercise that right, this was the time. The duty of Indians in India was to make a united effort to force the exercise of that veto. If that was not exercised, then it would show the inability of the British Government to protect them. They would have to speak out strongly and be men, show that they were capable of being independent and that they had great powers of amalgamation. If they had not been able to co-operate before, this was an excellent opportunity to sink their differences, and work on the platform of the S. African question and fight the common enemy. They could not hope for Swaraj as long as there was one dissident amongst them. They had talked and pleaded without result.

Speaking further, he said that even if they went to England and pleaded for the exercise of the veto and if it happened what would be next? The anti-Asiatics would refuse to obey. The Indians must adopt civil disobedience. But they were a small and poor community. Money was required there and now, to carry on propaganda. He wanted them to realise that without their material co-operation, they in S. Africa could not carry on the struggle. This struggle was a greater one than that carried on by Mahatmajee in S. Africa. This struck at the very roots of their honour. He felt that they had the heartiest sympathy of Indians there and finally appealed for material support.

MR. PATHER.

Mr. Pather speaking in Tamil said that 65 years ago Indians went there at the request of Europeans to make the land there productive. After their having converted a desert into a veritable garden, the Europeans began to trouble the Indians. Their coming to India was like the child who went to a stranger's house and getting insulted came back to its mother for protection. They had come to India, their mother-country, to give them an idea of the insult offered them, their children in South Africa. The whites in South Africa numbered 15 lakhs while the Indians were only a lakh and fifty thousand. Now they had brought a Bill to drive them out of South Africa. The speaker then touched upon some of the provisions of the Anti-Asiatic Bill and suggested that the King's power of veto must be exercised at this juncture. To carry an effective agitation and even adopt civil disobedience, people in India must help them with money.

MR. MIRZA.

Mr. Mirza speaking next said that the salvation of Indians in South Africa depended upon the unity of Indians in India. Their disunion was the fountain from which tyranny derived its strength in South Africa. Since his coming into India, he had heard a good deal of political doctrines. The very fact of their having come there was evidence of the support, moral and material, of India. At the hands of the Government of India they received a verbose assurance. Now the South African Government would know how far the Indian Government would go. The question was that India's honour should be saved. In the political life of a nation, if people at home got Swaraj, their brethren outside would also become free. He asked them to make every other consideration subordinate to the national consideration. If that was done, then the question of South African Indians would be solved. If this Bill became law, the position of Indians in South Africa would be doomed. That was why they were prepared to die in resisting such a law rather than submit to it, which would mean the death-knell of Indians in South Africa. Finally, he appealed to them to unite on this question.

RESOLUTIONS.

Resolutions were then moved which were supported by various speakers of different political persuasions.

Mr. Sami Venkatachallam Chetti moved :—

“ This meeting of the citizens of Madras views with the gravest apprehension and strongly condemns the areas reservation, immigration and registration (Further Provision) Bill which is in violation of the 1914 Gandhi-Smuts Agreement ; and has for its object the compulsory segregation of Indians, the deprivation of their trading and property rights and the consequent elimination of the Indian community as openly declared by the Minister of the Interior, and hopes the Government of India will urge upon the Union Government the necessity for a Round Table Conference before further action is taken by the Union Government in respect of the proposed Bill and should that reasonable proposal be declined and the Bill forced through Parliament, the meeting suggests to H. E. the Viceroy if he is sincerely interested in the cause of Indians in South Africa to advise the Imperial Government to disallow the measure in terms of Sec. 65 of the Union Act.”

In doing so, he said that the humiliating conditions and restrictions placed on Indians in South Africa were so intolerable that no self-respecting Indian could brook them. The European there had trampled on the rights of Indians who were in such a minority as they could not deserve the name of a nation. This was a question which seemed to show a semblance of agreement between the Government and people in India. Lord Reading's speech showed the utter futility of the Empire ; yet he hoped that the Viceroy and the Government of India would urge upon the South African Government to stop the anti-Asiatic legislation.

Dr. C. Natesan Mudaliar in seconding the resolution said that the question at issue affected the honour of Indians. The 350 millions of Indians should not take the insult lying down. That was why he appeared that evening on the platform with his Swarajist brethren. Indians in South Africa actually evolved a garden out of a desert and they were not to have even the rights of the slaves of old.

The Indians were insulted and not the small community of Indians in S. Africa. Thanks were due to the Government of India Deputation which was in S. Africa for interviewing the leading Indians there. But the leading men were in India, the much respected country of old had now been shunned and defied because of her disunity, of her people being disarmed. He agreed with Mr. M. K. Acharya that if the Bill was passed then, they must wage war against S. Africa. Now that S. Africa had insulted them, what was the Empire going to do ? What would the phrase 'Self-Government within the British Empire' mean, if that Empire did not see that Indians were not insulted in S. Africa. India must pass retaliatory laws against S. Africa and even go to the extent of deporting S. African whites if they came into this country.

Mr. S. Muthiah Mudaliar supported the resolution.

Mr. G. A. Natesan said that the Indians were threatened with their very life's existence. Mr. Pather's grandfather was taken away by the Union Government and the Government of India were a party to it. The new legislation was of a horrid character because they had the virtues of simplicity and cheap living and the European traders were jealous of the prosperous trade carried on by Indians. The deputationists had come there to save the honour of 350 millions of Indians. The Government of India must exhaust all possible constitutional means for protecting the claims of Indians in South Africa. In all conscience, this Government was bound to advice His Majesty to disallow the legislation which affected the honour and self respect of Indians.

The resolution was put and adopted Moulana Yakub Hassan next moved “ That this meeting gives its heartfelt support to Indians in South Africa morally as well as financially in the just, noble and honourable struggle for their existence in that part of the British Empire.”

He said that their sympathy and support were at the disposal of Indians in South Africa. 15 years ago Madras had given its support to South African Indians as much as it lay within her power. He assured them now also of their support.

Mr. O. Thanikachallam Chetti seconded the resolution, said any effective result of the sympathy must come out of the pressure of the Government of India on the Home Government. The South African white settlers had no more claim for rights than South African Indians who had been there longer. Possession which was from points of the law seemed to be nothing to the white settlers in South Africa. No sympathy would avail unless the Government of India and the Home Government exerted their pressure effectively.

Mr. T. Prakasam supported. He said that they had come there to show that the S. African Indians had no communal differences. India of 1926 was not the India of old, with whose feelings the British Government played. If the whole of India had been spinning to-day would S. Africa dare to bring in such a measure? The forces of Mahatma Gandhi have been scattered owing to some causes, whether they were in the Councils or were spinning. The forces of Mahatma Gandhi were ready to help the South African Indians in fighting to a finish. He assured them of all their sympathy and support.

Mr. C. Rajagopalachariar further supporting the resolution said that the only question troubling them was what they should do, and how they should do it. The matter of declaring war against South Africa was not feasible but it showed the depth of feeling in the country. The Government of India need not declare war but they could finance the non-violent war that would be carried by Indians in South Africa. So he proposed the bringing in of such a proposal in the Assembly, considering the seriousness of the situation. Let them put the British Empire's sense of justice and honesty to the test and hoped that the Government of India would vote a large sum for the cause; at least let the people of India finance them. The resolution was adopted.

Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu in moving the third resolution suggesting to the Government of India to send a deputation in consultation with the Assembly, fully representative of all parties in India and also of the S. African Indian Congress, to England to put their case before the Home Government and if need be before the League of Nations, mentioned that though men like Dr. Natesan Mudaliar and Mr. Thanikachallam Chetti had supported them that evening, had they supported non-co-operationist in 1921, the Government of this country would have been shattered by this time and no S. African Indian question would have arisen. Unless they had Swaraj in India they could not force other Governments to recognise their rights. So he appealed to men of all parties to make the South African question their main common plank in their programme at least for a year.

Rao Bahadur O. Kandaswami Chettiar seconded the resolution. He observed that punishment would be meted out to those who humiliated and committed atrocities on other people. He cited the instance of the Belgian rule of Congo and of the ruin that befell her during the war. It was upon the strength they were going to put into this struggle, they would be able to unite and achieve Swaraj for India. The South African Government, knowing that India was not free, had imposed all sorts of restrictions and indignities on India. So their political status had a great deal to do with the political status of their brethren in other countries. They owed much to Lord Hardinge who stood forth in this struggle at an earlier stage. Later Viceroys had gone away from it. So it was their duty to make the Government of India an Indian Government. Then the Government of S. Africa would pay heed to the wishes of the Indian Government.

The resolution when put was carried.

The President in concluding the evening's proceedings touched upon the unity of all parties on this question affecting the Indians in S. Africa and appealed to leaders of all parties to work on that common platform for the common cause, sinking their minor differences.

THE VICEROY'S STATEMENT

TO THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

His Excellency the Viceroy Lord Reading in opening the Winter Session of the Legislative Assembly at Delhi, referring to the Indian Situation in South Africa said that the question which had an important bearing on the Empire was now at the stage of negotiation and it could not be said whether they would succeed in impressing their views on South Africa, but he hoped that a cause which had reason and equity would ultimately prevail.

Let me now turn to a question which I know is uppermost in the minds of the members of the Legislatures and which is causing me and my Government most anxious thought. I need not recapitulate the whole situation as regards the position of Indians in South Africa, but I may observe that out of the total number of the Indian community in South Africa about one-third, approximately 1,02,000, are South African born and are the descendants of indentured labourers in Natal who were permitted to settle in the country on the expiration of their indentures. These people have made South Africa their home. I need not refer at length to the disabilities which have been imposed on Indians in South Africa and are already in existence. They are of a serious and varied nature and embrace galling social disabilities, restrictions on the acquisition of political and municipal franchise (except in the Cape Province,) regulations regarding interprovincial movements, licensing laws and restrictions on the acquisition of land. There has been a continuous progress in the legislation in South Africa prejudicial to the position of Indians and tending to make it increasingly difficult for them to prosper or even to exist in the Dominion. Against this legislation my Government has made repeated representations with varying degrees of success.

In reply to an address recently presented to me by a deputation from South Africa I have dwelt on the representations made by my Government regarding the past legislation in some detail and I need not traverse this part of the history again. In addition to these disabilities further anti-Asiatic legislation has been recently introduced and is now pending before the Union Parliament. The purpose of this legislation is to empower urban authorities compulsorily to segregate Indians and to confine their rights of trading and of acquiring property to the limits of the areas assigned to them. The Bill also contains further restrictive provisions regarding the acquiring or leasing of land outside the coastal belt in Natal, immigration, importation of wives and families and inter provincial movements. The principle of segregation is not new. It was recognised by a Transvaal Act of 1885, but it was not rigidly applied. Such locations as rose as a result of that bill led the Asiatic Committee to condemn the compulsory principle. Indian sentiment has always been strenuously opposed to compulsory segregation as inflicting a racial stigma. It is felt to be a breach of the Smuts-Gandhi Agreement and a repudiation of a policy believed to have been established consequent on the recommendations of the Asiatic Enquiry Committee.

A RADICALLY OBJECTIONABLE PRINCIPLE.

The principle has been denounced by the Government of India and in Kenya His Majesty's Government have decided that it is not to be applied in townships. The Bill therefore contains what appears to my Government to be a radically objectionable principle and the existing aversion to this policy has been intensified by the statement of Dr. Malan in introducing the Bill in the Union Assembly last July, when he said that the measure was based on the general proposition that no solution of the question would be acceptable to the population of the Union unless it resulted in a very

considerable reduction of the Indian population. I and my Government have kept His Majesty's Government in close touch with our general views regarding the position of Indians in the Union and this Bill in particular and with the strength of the feeling which the general disabilities imposed on Indians in South Africa and this measure in particular have evoked. We have also made it clear that we fully sympathise with the sentiment which all classes in India have expressed on these questions.

ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE.

Since April last we have been in continuous correspondence with the Government of the Union regarding this legislation and communications are still passing. We have repeatedly pressed upon them the suggestion that the situation in our view calls for a conference as regards their general policy towards Indians. In the alternative we invited them to make other suggestions likely to result in a permanent and satisfactory settlement. The Union Government have not found themselves able to agree to our proposals for a conference although they seem ed inclined to agree to a conference restricted to the consideration of a more effective repatriation scheme which in their words will result in a considerable reduction of the Indian population in South Africa and to proposals for the mitigation of economic competition between Indians and other classes in South Africa and they asked us to formulate concrete suggestions regarding the latter. We could not accept a conference whose main object would be to reduce considerably the numbers of Indians in South Africa.

We were, however, prepared to consider the possibility of smoothing any difficulties that may have been found in their existing scheme of purely voluntary repatriation and to make suggestions regarding vocational employment when we had sufficient data, but we asked for assent before entering upon any discussion about voluntary repatriation or making suggestions regarding competition to our sending a deputation to South Africa to collect information regarding the economic and general position of Indians in the Union.

THE PADDISON DEPUTATION.

On November 10 the Union Government acceded to this request and we forthwith despatched our deputation the purpose of which has been announced and published. In sending the deputation the immediate object we had in mind was the collection of information urgently required by us and we still kept in view the possibility of a conference to which we attach the greatest weight. Some criticism was at first directed in India to the despatch of our deputation. This was chiefly based on the fact that news of the visit of a deputation of Indians from South Africa was received about the same time, but in fact our decision to send a deputation was reached long before the arrival of the first news of the deputation from South Africa which only came to us in a Reuter's telegram on November 19, just before it sailed. It was obviously desirable for us to take immediate advantage of the assent of the Union Government to the visit of our deputation. We desired in the first place to lose no time in collecting information which would enable us to deal with the suggestions of the Union Government. We were faced with, besides this critical situation, that it was contemplated in South Africa to proceed at an early date in the new year with this bill. It was, therefore, essential that we should at once take steps to put ourselves in possession of facts which would enable us to make effective representations before the bill passed to the second reading stage and became accepted in principle. The interim reports received from the deputation have given us valuable information and the deputation has collected facts which have been most useful to us in our representations and may assist in suggesting eventually a basis for fresh proposals. We still do not despair of persuading the Union Government that there is the strongest ground for a conference or in the alternative for an enquiry before further parliamentary steps are taken in regard to the pending legislation. The deputation had to be hurriedly despatched. This was inevitable in the circumstances and I cannot too highly commend the expedition with

which the members left India at very short notice and got to work on their task at a crisis, when a delay of a few days even was a matter of very great moment.

DR. ABDURAHMAN'S DEPUTATION.

Dr. Abdurahman's deputation is engaged on a different task and is putting the cause of Indians in South Africa before the Government and the people of India on behalf of the section of public opinion in South Africa which it represents. Its purpose is not, therefore, identical with the object of ours. Moreover, the deputation from South Africa has been able to supply me and my Government with facts of considerable importance and to explain points which, in the absence of local information, may previously have been imperfectly appreciated or understood. The whole question at the moment is at the stage of negotiation. Bear in mind that in our attitude towards the position of Indians in South Africa and to the principle of the latest legislation I and my Government are at one with the general feelings in India. You may have confidence that we are striving our utmost to find a basis of discussion with the Union Government before the latter are committed to the principle of the bill.

WIDER PRINCIPLES INVOLVED.

The question has now to be dealt with in South Africa and it must be remembered that the Government and the Ministry of the Union are responsible to their electorate and that this legislation is regarded by them as domestic in its character. We have never doubted the right of South Africa to guide the course of their own domestic and economic legislation, but in our view there are far wider considerations involved in this legislation than local economic policy alone. In our opinion they have an important bearing upon the Empire as a whole. The proposed measures are not in our view in accordance with those principles which bind the Empire together in a community of sentiment and we hope that this aspect of the proposals may yet commend itself to South African opinion. Even on the narrower issue of economic necessity we believe from the information now received by us that the situation may be capable of adjustment in other ways.

Our negotiations are still proceeding and we shall continue to press our views to the utmost of our ability. We cannot say whether we shall succeed in our endeavours, but I hope that a cause which as it appears to us has reason and equity on its side will ultimately prevail.

Meanwhile, I rely on the legislature to give me and my Government their confidence and support in a question upon which they are aware that our sentiments are agreed and especially to remember as I gratefully acknowledge they have hitherto borne in mind that we are still in the course of negotiation with the Government of the Union in whose hands the initiative in conducting their own legislative programme lies. The principle of the bill has not yet been finally accepted and I hope that the basis of discussion with the Union Government may be arrived at which will give the opportunity of stating and proving our case before any question arises of proceeding with that stage of legislation.