

Treatment of Indians in the Union of South Africa

Discussion on the complaint of the Government of India concerning the treatment of Indians in South Africa was much less heated than in the General Assemblies of 1946 and 1947, partly because the question was by now a familiar one, partly because of the moderation with which the Indian case was presented, and partly because only one of the disputants directly concerned dealt with the substance of the problem. The leader of the *South African* delegation announced that he intended to deal only with the question of the competence of the General Assembly to discuss the question, and after delivering a very long address on that subject withdrew one seat from the Council table, resuming his place only to speak further on the question of competence and to participate in voting. Although he did not indeed make a formal statement on the question at issue, he did, however, deal incidentally with the argument of the delegation of India in sufficient detail for the South African attitude to be assessed with some precision.

The Substantive Issue

The case presented by the *Indian* delegation and its supporters was in its simplest outline as follows. In South Africa, it was asserted, policies of racial discrimination were being practised which if allowed to go unchecked were likely to lead to widespread international friction. Of the 300,000 persons of Indian origin in South Africa (the descendants of Indian merchants and of agricultural workers introduced between 1860 and 1911) over 90 per cent. were now legally nationals of the Union. Together with other Asiatic people they had, however, been subjected to particularly harsh and humiliating discrimination because of their race and colour and had been denied human rights and fundamental freedoms. They were refused equal social, political, and economic opportunities; they were deprived of freedom of movement and were subjected to isolation and segregation. Under the so-called Capetown Agreements of 1927 and 1932 all racial segregation was to have been abolished. Indians were to have enjoyed the same standard of living as Europeans and the Government of South Africa was to have co-operated with the Indian Government. Instead these two agreements had been violated. Moreover the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946 had inflicted strict residential and commercial segregation on Indians in Natal and now the new Government of Dr. Malan had exceeded all previous racial persecution and discrimination in the pursuit of its policy of "apartheid"—a policy of complete racial segregation intended to maintain European superiority. The measures adopted by the Government of South Africa were in conflict with the Charter and with the previous Assembly resolution