Chapter Four

The Origins of the South African Communist Party

The CPSA was formed in August 1921in Cape Town by disparate white socialists who stood to the left of the South African Labour Party. If South African Indian political organisations developed by drawing on existing social, cultural, and political frameworks created by international flows of people, political practices and organisational links, so did other organisations on the South African left. Migrants to South Africa brought their radical traditions with them, making the growth of oppositional politics there an eclectic mix of differing ideological traditions. In particular, radical Jews and British trade unionists brought their very different experiences to South Africa and, interacting with black and Afrikaner political developments, gave shape to the politics of the Communist Party of South Africa.

Jewish people have had a long association with militant socialist politics, partly as a response to their treatment within the Russian Empire, and many radical Jews became members of the Communist Party, bringing their own historical and cultural baggage with them. Welsh, Cornish and Australian miners and other workers likewise brought traditions of craft and union organisation, which were translated into political practice in South Africa. This chapter will examine the origins of the CPSA and look at the various ‘social threads’ that were woven into the ideological make up of the party. This will serve to illustrate the relationship between black[[1]](#footnote-1) and white workers and the difficulties of party policy in this respect, in order to explore the associations between the young party and burgeoning African organisations in the next chapter, where an analysis of the Black Republic thesis will demonstrate the beginnings of the dialogue in the party on the relationship between nationalism and socialism. This was a relationship that its Indian members had constantly to renegotiate, both between themselves and their political constituency. This will hopefully help us understand the complex relationships between African, Indian and white workers, and the heterogeneous nature of the Communist Party that Indians encountered in the 1930s. It will also, perhaps, illuminate why so many Indians began to join the CP in the 1930s.

Early Socialist Organisations in South Africa

Members of the Jewish community set up unions in South Africa from 1898, but by 1907, these organisations had begun to merge with British and Coloured unions. [[2]](#footnote-2) [[3]](#footnote-3) In the 1910s, as Smuts’ immigration policy increasingly threatened their position in South Africa, many Jews joined the South African Labour Party, which was then dominated by British trade unionists. When the First World War broke out in 1914, however, the SALP split between a pro-war faction, and those who saw the war as an inter-imperialist conflict, echoing events in the Second International? This signalled the division that was taking place internationally between parliamentary social democracy and a more radical socialist tradition, which was formulated as political Marxism through a vanguard party. Anti-war campaigners formed a War-On-War League, the forerunner of the International Socialist League.

The ISL, formed in 1915, had a large Jewish membership drawn from socialist organisations (who brought their Eastern European Marxist traditions with them), unions, and anarchist groups. It attracted members from both inside and outside the SALP. The International Socialist League also attracted British trade unionists, and an important number of ‘revolutionary syndicalists’. Men such as A. Z. Berman and Joe Pick split from the Socialist Democratic Federation to form the Industrial Socialist League, which also later merged with the ISL. The Industrial Socialist League’s activists were predominantly Jews from Eastern Europe who were politically active in the Cape.[[4]](#footnote-4) [[5]](#footnote-5) They tried to attract black workers into the organisation, as well as establishing a Coloured workers’ unions. These would eventually merge with the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa, founded in 1919 in Cape Town, by Albert Batty a one-time member of the SALP? and Clements Kadalie. In many ways, the political agitation of the InSL amongst Coloured dockworkers in the Cape laid the groundwork for future ICU success.6 The In.SL exemplified an important political stream of the South African labour movement which held that ‘racially integrated industrial unions should overthrow capitalism’ and believed in ‘direct action’ rather than political change through the institutions of the state. In this, they were influenced by the writings of Daniel De Leon, the Caribbean-born labour leader in the United States. They constituted an important socialist strand of non-racial organisation within the League, which was earned over to the CPSA in later days.

The ISL was, perhaps, not as directly the fore-runner of the CPSA as is sometimes suggested. It was shaped by its own eclectic influences, and less dominated by the political Marxism that was to become an important current of the CPSA.7 Nevertheless, it provided the CPSA with many of its leading figures, a large proportion of its membership and its weekly journal, The International. The first conference of the League reflected this eclectic coming together of various socialist traditions, with a report in their paper entitled ‘The First Conference of the League-Enthusiasm, Harmony, Diversity’.8 The leadership of the ISL also provided many future leaders of the CPSA. These included W.H. Andrews9, a fitter and turner by trade who had risen through the ranks of British trade unionism, and S. P. Bunting, a British solicitor who came from a family of Methodists who’s father was politically active in the Liberal party, while his mother supported ‘causes of the poor’.10 Bunting married Rebecca Notlowitz, a Russian Jewish emigre whom he met in the ISL. There was also Gabriel Weinstock, and David Ivon Jones, a Welshman, also from a Methodist background.[[6]](#footnote-6) These men placed an emphasis on organising on class lines across the racial divide. Reflecting the impact of the Russian Revolution in 1917, they tried to apply the lessons of the revolution to South Africa. The editorial of The International declared that:

1. B. Hirson 'The IWA and the ICU-1917-1920’, paper presented at The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries Seminar, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London 1996, pp. 1-7.
2. See L. van der Walt ‘The International Socialist League and Revolutionary Syndicalism in South Africa’ Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East vol. XIX no. 1 1999, pp. 5-30.
3. ‘The First Conference of the League-Enthusiasm, Harmony, Diversity’, Report in The International, Document 10, South African Communists Speak 1915-1980, (Inkululeko 1981), pp. 22-28.
4. R. K. Cope, Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers’ leader, (Cape Town, 1948).
5. E. Roux, S. P. Bunting: a political biography, (Belville, 1993), pp. 57-61.

What does sympathy with the Russian Revolution imply, comrades? It implies the solidarity of labour irrespective of race or colour. That phrase may be hackneyed so let us be precise. The Russian revolution in South Africa means the welcome hand to the native working man into the fullest social and economic equality he is capable of attaining with the white workingman.11 [[7]](#footnote-7)

This statement underlined one of the basic contradictions within the ISL and later the CPSA. Although there was a genuine commitment in some quarters to building an inter­racial solidarity, this was based firmly on a class perspective that prioritised workers at the point of production. In stark opposition to Gandhi’s creed, the industrial worker was to be the saviour of history. It assumed that a politically-conscious industrial working class would form the vanguard of the revolution. This was, in part, a reflection of the times, where the interpretation of classic Marxist texts laid stress on the scientific basis of Marxism within an implicit (and at times explicit) evolutionary framework.

Both class and race intersected in this evolutionary scheme, with agricultural workers lower down the evolutionary ladder than their industrial cousins and black workers lower placed than white. But, as with Indian workers, the majority of South Africa’s workers did not enjoy a stable position within the South African labour market; they moved between different sectors, whilst others remained firmly within agricultural production. Workers in South Africa at this time were an amorphous, fragmented and racially divided population with multiple political and social identities. Early ISL and CPSA policy had to grapple with this problem in the light of an interpretation of Marxist doctrine that outlined South African society in monolithic and reductionist class terms, and which saw class as a unified and coherent classification.

Conceptualisations of South Africa’s white industrial class also presented many problems to the party, as will be seen. And, muddying the waters further, even South Africa’s white industrial workers came into being through a complex and uneven process. On the one hand, some came from a white workers’ imperial labour disapora whose migrations coincided with mass movements of people from China and India. These streams of white workers brought their radical but exclusionary practices to South Africa. Many Afrikaners, on the other hand, were resistant to being forced off the land, and were reluctant to be incorporated into industrial production. South Africa’s white workers were not, by any means, a homogeneous entity, and the radical politics that they sometimes expressed were deeply racist and exclusionary. Workers had very different visions of South Africa and their place within its social landscape.

White Labour and the ‘Racial Vision’

The English-speaking, white working class that developed in South Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a product of imperial and colonial flows of political culture and people between different locations. This working class was fundamentally ‘shaped by radical labour militancy, an ideological hostility to capitalism but also an intense racism.’13 This was borne out of the fear of competition from relatively cheaper Asian and African labour white workers encountered during these migrations, and the discourse of racism that was prevalent in the Empire. The British trade union tradition had already developed political strategies primarily around the principle of protecting the interests of skilled workers.14

Workers, however, also wanted to be included in ‘white civilisation’ where ‘whiteness was the phenotype of civilisation.’ and underwrote notions of rights and citizenship.15 Whiteness was far more than merely a skin colour; it reflected a higher class position, and civilisational qualities. In early and mid-nineteenth century Britain, much of the working class and urban poor were denied the whiteness that would give them membership of a ‘civilised imperial brotherhood’.16 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a diaspora of ‘imperial workers’ struggled for an assured place in the international labour market through militant trade unionism and an intensely racist vision, where exclusionary practices were bolstered by biologically determinist ideas of differences

1. Hyslop, ‘The Imperial Working Class, p. 399.
2. See above, Introduction.
3. Hyslop ‘The Imperial Working Class’, pp. 398-421.
4. J. Marriott, Tn Darkest England: the Poor, the Crowd and Race in the Nineteenth-century Metropolis’, in P. Cohen, (ed.), New Ethnicities, Old Racisms, (London, 1999), pp. 82-110; A. Bonnet, ‘How the British between the races. This went hand in hand with the construction of a working-class idea of whiteness, which implied both inclusion in the white imperial brotherhood, and exclusion of inferior races.

This ‘white vision’ had a particularly virulent expression in Australia and South Africa, in notions of a ‘white Australia’ and a ‘white South Africa’. The migrant white workers who came to South Africa brought their experiences with them and helped shape the South African labour movement. This international labour movement was part of a wider series of out-migrations, which intensified the competition between workers from Europe, Australia, the United States, China and India. For example, in Australia, white workers developed strong, militant unions built around the principle of protectionism, excluding unskilled workers, especially Chinese labourers who came to work on the Australian goldfields from the 1850s.[[8]](#footnote-8) [[9]](#footnote-9) Protectionist trade unionism became couched within a strongly racist discourse. When Australian miners immigrated to the Rand after a depression in Australian mining in the 1890s, they took these political practices with them. In South Africa, they were joined by a large number of Australian soldiers, who had formed a 16000 strong military contingent during the South African War. Many of these soldiers stayed on in South Africa and found work, so that Australians formed an important part of the white traded unionism that developed in the Rand in the early 1900s. They helped white workers gain a powerful position in the labour market, especially the mining industry.

Cornish miners also made a crucial contribution to a militant white trade unionism that was also deeply racist. Cornish workers became part of a labour dispora because of a large demand for their particular mining skills, at a time when an exhaustion of ore deposits in Cornwall coincided with the opening up of mining opportunities in other places. Many of these miners carried a strong sense of a collective Cornish identity with them and had enjoyed a fiercely independent tradition of industrial organisation. In Cornwall, Stannary Courts had operated, where mineworkers were subject to the enforcement of their own laws. These Cornish miners migrated mainly between America, Australia, and South

Africa. From 1886, they came to the Rand in increasing numbers. As they moved from one location to another, they developed an international industrial culture based around ‘crews’ where members of the same crews ‘shared the same manners, customs, slang, prejudices, dress, leisure habits, virtues and vices...the same subculture...Crews were prefabricated communities into which new members could easily slot....(where members valued) strength, toughness and manual skills.’[[10]](#footnote-10) It was a competitive industrial culture, based on exclusivity, and preferential treatment for fellow Cornish workers. Often, members of a crew were all drawn from the same Cornish village, and in one instance ‘in one Rand mine, Ferreira Deep, the entire white workforce was made up of workers from a single Cornish pit.[[11]](#footnote-11) The tradition of Cornish ‘crews’ was part of the cultural background to the promotion of exclusive work practices and, along with other white trade unionists, Cornish workers used their industrial muscle and militant politics to shut out not only African and Indian workers, but Afrikaners and other whites as well. The founding leader of the Miners’ Association, which was started on the Rand in 1902, was a Comishman named Tom Matthews.

This section of the Cornish dispora on the Rand, which, by 1905, numbered some 7000 out of 16000 white miners,[[12]](#footnote-12) sent around £lm back to Cornwall each year. Their job protection in South Africa became pail of the wider question of their social and economic ties with Cornwall; they were crucially important to the Cornish economy, and Cornish social life also became entwined with events on the Rand. One example of this was Harry Laity, a Cornish miner who came from Praze-am-Beeble in West Cornwall. After training at the Camborne School of Mines, Laity, who was also a mason and a Methodist lay preacher, came to South Africa in 1894, 1897 and 1898. His family were due to join him, but he went back to Cornwall in 1899 because of the outbreak of the South African War. A ‘local proxy’ for Boschhoek Prospecting Company near Heidleburg, Laity sent enough money home to Cornwall to put his two brothers through the Mines school as well as pay for the upkeep of this wife and children, who were conceived on his trips home. In later years his daughter was to remark that every time she saw a pair of trousers on the end of her mother’s bed, she knew her father was back from South Africa and another baby was on the way. Laity went to work in Australia in 1901, only to return to Cornwall in 1906 to die of silicosis.[[13]](#footnote-13)

In the 1890s, 85 per cent of white workers on the Rand were British bom. They brought a highly developed trade union structure to the Rand, which they had successfully transplanted around the world. Unions such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, which had branches in Australia and North America, gave their members high levels of organisational training and literacy skills, which helped produce leaders for the wider trade union movement. The ISL and CPSA stalwart W. H. Andrews came from this background. At the same time, the British trade union tradition, which was an important strand within the ISL and the CPSA, came out of the working class customs of a ‘labour aristocracy’ in Britain which also bore the traces of its past cultural practices. When guilds and craft unions transplanted their practices into the industrial workplace, they mainly used their organisational skills to negotiate with owners for preferential rates of pay, initiating the practice of protecting the interests of skilled workers against the unskilled, and collaborating with capital for concessions and protection of their privileged position, rather than organising to overthrow capital. .

The British working class also included elites and strata who were able to articulate their own interests rather than those of all workers.[[14]](#footnote-14) Heterogeneity therefore also existed within classes as well as between them. All these practices were brought to South Africa and formed part of the complex articulation of differing interests and identities amongst workers and on the left. An important section of the white labour movement in South Africa came from these historical trajectories. They combined the use of radical ideologies and militant practices in order to achieve privileged access to jobs, using the discourse of race for the purpose of promoting exclusionary practices, as well as constructing a ‘white identity’ that would help access citizenship within the new nation state. Above all, these workers required a political party that would look after their interests.

These interests, however, did not coincide with the long-term vision of the ISL, nor did white workers favour non-racial political organisation. Forming multi-racial unions in a country where the ‘ideologies of its social worlds were many and complex’,[[15]](#footnote-15) deeply prejudiced and materially experienced, set up a specific series of obstacles. Thus the hurdles came not only from the state and its exclusionary practices towards ‘racial others’, but also from the South African white working class itself. This presented many problems for the ISL. The organisation believed in building inter-racial class solidarity and rejected the policy of the SALP, which supported the segregationist measures of the SAP and Unionists. After its initial attempts to inaugurate an all-encompassing multi-racial union were stillborn, the IWA became the ISL’s vehicle for work amongst South Africa’s ‘non­European’ population. In 1917, the ISL was forced to form separate trade unions for Africans and Asians. It thus helped organise Indian workers into trade unions in 1917 and formed the Industrial Workers of Africa in 1918, which was one of the precursors of the ICU.[[16]](#footnote-16) In 1918, S. P. Bunting, who later became the Treasurer of the CPSA, was still optimistic that ‘the different races of workers in this country, white, coloured, natives, Indians, are rapidly coming together to form one great Industrial Workers Union’.[[17]](#footnote-17) However, given the political make-up of the country, this was not to be, and the League’s relationship with different communities in South Africa remained deeply problematic. White and black workers found little in common from which to forge a ‘community of interest’.

On the Margins: Jewish Radicals and the Communist Party of South Africa

Jewish people also played an important part in the CPSA. Like Indians, their numbers in the party were disproportionate to their numbers in wider society. Also like Indians, they came to occupy many leadership positions within the organisation. Unlike white and black workers, Jews and Indians in the party often felt a ‘community of interest’ with one another. Both had experienced a series of social dislocations. Both had formed ‘identities and cultures of movement’.[[18]](#footnote-18) Both faced severe discrimination in South Africa. Both were ‘ambivalent parts of a social formation that left them marginalised by the white ruling class, but socially and politically privileged over black workers’.[[19]](#footnote-19) Both were subject to the radicalising potential of marginality, where they were ‘alienated from social order, conventions and ideological norms’ of wider society.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Many Jews and Indians also went into trade and provided basic services for black people, thus earning the contempt of white South Africans. For example, many ‘low class Russians’ i.e. Eastern European Jews, opened ‘kaffir’ eating houses on the Witswatersrand for African mineworkers. Indicating the attitude of English-speaking white South Africans to this phenomenon, the Johannesburg Evening Chronicle observed ‘a man who is content to serve food to kaffirs cannot expect to rank any higher than a kaffir, for what self­respecting white man would wait on a native at a table?’[[21]](#footnote-21) Indians and Jews ‘came to fill a gap created in the South African urban economy by racial discrimination and discovered in the process economic and social advantages stringently denied to blacks.’[[22]](#footnote-22) However, in filling these gaps, Jews and Indians were despised by English-speaking South Africans, and Afrikaners in the countryside, who, according to Charles Van Onselen ‘loathed Jews , as much as they later came to abhor Indian traders because they ‘not only lived off people by buying cheaply and selling dearly, but were alien.’[[23]](#footnote-23) In these trading enterprises, many Indians and Jews also employed members of their own communities for ‘exploitatively low wages’. In the process, they became both the ‘recipients and administrators of a many-sided exploitation’. Small but significant sections of both communities dealt with the ruptures, discontinuities, and discriminatory nature of their existence by turning to radical politics to renegotiate their place in a foreign environment. Jews and Indians were a crucial element of

the political culture of the CP SA and helped shape the debates and policies that the party adopted. On a social level, despite the deeply-held prejudices of society, several Jewish and Indian party members intermarried.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Internationally, Jewish radicals have played an important part in the history of left politics. The idea of the ‘radical Jew’ has been an important strand of Jewish identity in the diaspora. This has, in part, been compounded by the fact that many of the most prominent leaders in the socialist tradition have themselves been Jewish, for example, Rosa Luxembourg, Karl Marx and Leon Trotsky. As well as this, the experience of Jews in the Russian Empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century proved to be a breeding ground for radical politics. Severe political oppression led to the formation of a militant working class, and many workers’ circles were set up, including the Bund, a radical Jewish workers’ union, which was initiated in 1897.

Pogroms against Jews in Lithuania in the 1880s and 1890s also spumed ‘one of the most dramatic mass migrations in the history of the modem world.’ [[25]](#footnote-25) Between 1880 and 1914, more than three million Jewish people, around a third of Russia’s total Jewish population, had to leave their homes in the Pale of Settlement, ‘driven (out) by grinding poverty, escalating legal discrimination and savage pogroms’.[[26]](#footnote-26) By the 1890s, over half the breadwinners in the Pale had lost their jobs and only managed to survive on some form of charity, if at all. Others were denied access to education or certain professions. Out of these dispossessed and oppressed people, 40,000 Eastern European Jews immigrated to South Africa. They were spumed on by exaggerated tales of South African prosperity, where the streets of Johannesburg were said to be paved with gold, as well as the stories that reached home about the success of fellow Jewish countrymen. They comprised the majority of the South Africa’s Jewish community, which by 1946 formed 4.39 per cent of South Africa’s total population.[[27]](#footnote-27) Of these Eastern Europeans, the vast majority were working-class transmigrants from Lithuania, some members of whom had spent some time in other countries such as England before arriving in South Africa. Through all these experiences, many of them absorbed socialist ideals:

My grandfather....left Lithuania in the 1890s as a result of the pogroms against Jews, but also because he was an active Bundist, that is a Jewish socialist, and went to England and met my grandmother who worked in the sweatshops there and she had a history of trying to defend themselves against the bosses and exploitation. So when they arrived in South Africa...both of them had come out of Europe...imbued with ideas which were against racialism, ideas broadly supportive of socialism.35 [[28]](#footnote-28)

Many Jewish radicals entered politics through a process of ‘generational transmission’, where the parental home became ‘communist nurseries’, because of their parents’ experience of socialist organisations:

My parents were born in Britain and settled in South Africa with their communist identity already established. My fattier told me that the greatest moment in his life was while he was in New York in the USA on 7 November 1917. There, at the Grand Central Station he saw the triple-decker banner headlines,

**Revolution**

**Bolsheviks**

**Seize Power**

My mother had gone to regular meetings of the Hackney Socialist Sunday School in London in England. Her two brothers, Joseph and Abraham, had worked with Maxim Litvinov, first Minister Plenipotentiary to Great Britain of the new Bolshevik state.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Many Jews came to South Africa through a series of social dislocations and ruptures, with families tom apart, some only to be reunited after a considerable time, others never. As with Indians, to whom family life, build around ‘a mutual web of obligations’[[30]](#footnote-30) that lasted throughout their lives, helped define a person’s place within a social world, South Africa set new challenges for ways of being Jewish and recreated Jewish ways of life. Some challenged Jewish ‘traditions’: others reinvented older forms of community. In the Communist Party, as with Indians, many Jews found a ‘cosmopolitan home’,[[31]](#footnote-31) a sense of social and political belonging that could not be experienced within society at large.[[32]](#footnote-32)

In those early days apparently the reason for the strength of the CP in the small town Jewish communities and even in some of the cities was the social and community aspect as well as being an important link to getting news from their ‘shtetels’ where they left other family members. [My parents] were barely literate and religion was [also] and important aspect particularly as my father owned a kosher grocery store in town.41

Large-scale Jewish immigration in the 1880s and 1890s coincided with the beginnings of South Africa’s industrial revolution.42 This was a time of general upheaval and dislocation for South Africa’s disparate populations who were all competing to find a place in a rapidly changing environment. Eastern Europeans had to jostle for their own place within this social landscape and they drew on political and cultural practices that they brought with them from the Russian Empire. Most Jewish immigrants joined the ranks of the white urban poor and had to face virulent anti-semitism. They were ‘perhaps the most visible, dispossessed and unsuccessful group of workers on the Wit water srand... the unhappy recipients of the most vicious class and race prejudice that society could muster’.43 In Landsmanschaft associations,44 workers clubs and synagogues, craft unions, schools and book clubs, Jewish people set up institutions ‘through which consciousness was shaped and expressed’ in an effort to define themselves within an alien environment.45 The heterogeneous nature of these organisations was a reflection of a South African Jewish community that was ‘defined by diversity and conflict’, where seemingly contradictory hopes and aspirations would coincide:

My leaning towards left socialist politics was ...formed partly by tire bizarre and paradoxical embrace of socialism shared by most of the immigrants who filled the boarding houses where I lived. I say bizarre because they tended to combine a passionate devotion to the Soviet Union with a Zionism and vicious racism towards the majority of the South African population.46

Indeed, Zionist youth movements proved to be radical breeding grounds for potential communists, where nationalist aspirations, with ideals of *hagshama^* or ‘fulfillment’ interacted with a strong desire for socialist justice. A number of young Jews, including Baruch Hirson, found their way into the party through Hashomer Hatzair.[[33]](#footnote-33) In later years, as Zionsim became increasingly associated with right-wing nationalism, and the creation of the state of Israel, many radical Jews negated aspects of their Jewish identities,

1. H. Zarenda, interview with PR London July 2001.
2. Campbell, ‘Beyond the Pale’, p. 4.
3. C. van Onselen, ‘Randlords and Rotgut, 1886-1903’, in C. van Onselen, Studies in the Social and Economic Transformation of tire Witwatersrand 1886-1914, vol.l: New Babylon. (London, 1982), p. 74.
4. These were organisations set up to help newly arrived immigrants from a shared geographical area.
5. Campbell, ‘Beyond the Pale’, p. 4.
6. J. Slovo. Slovo: the unfinished autobiography (Johannesburg, 1995), p. 22.

but in the 1920s and 1930s, a ‘radical political ambivalence’47 [[34]](#footnote-34) [[35]](#footnote-35) produced by marginalisation and alienation from wider society wove together the seemingly contradictory ideals of nationalism and socialism, as it did for so many Indians, where a deep-seated pride in the motherland and Gandhi somehow coexisted with communist ideology. Another important aspect in the radicalisation of Jews, and another similarity with many South African Indians, was the liberal and humanitarian ideals that they picked up from English teachers . .49

during their education.

‘Universalist Cake, Segregated Tables’: the CPSA and South African Workers

The membership of the CPSA was mainly drawn from the ISL, as well as the Jewish Socialist Society of Cape Town and Jewish Socialist Society of Johannesburg. Amongst its all-male membership were Harry Haynes, Bill Andrews, Issy Diamond, Willie Kalk, Bernard and Solly Sachs and T.W. Thibedi, a schoolteacher and the only black member of the new organisation.[[36]](#footnote-36) These men would hold rallies on the steps of Johannesburg City Hall, later to be the scene of many running fights with South African fascist sympathisers, which would prove to be a fertile recruiting ground for many more CP members.[[37]](#footnote-37) For the party’s Jewish comrades, taking the lead against fascism in South Africa became ‘profoundly meaningful.’ Party members would deliver fiery speeches about the class enemy and the need for revolution, attracting large crowds of people. Similar meetings on the city steps in Durban attracted the CP’s first Indian members to the party.

The paity’s relationship with Africans was complex and ambivalent. Despite a belief in some quarters of the need for inter-racial class solidarity, attitudes towards African workers were couched at best, in terms of a barely concealed paternalism. There was also much confusion as to their actual role in the ‘forthcoming revolution’. This was, perhaps, not surprising. Despite the egalitarian underpinnings of communist ideology, Marx and Engels themselves were deeply influenced by the evolutionary aspects of late nineteenth century anthropological thought.52 And although they tried to rid this epistemological model of its cruder racist assumptions, the more ‘subtle’ racist presuppositions of the evolutionary model remained intact. Even the most prescient of white socialists in the early CPSA expressed contradictory attitudes towards Africans. W. H. Andrews believed that Africans would only play a significant part in the revolutionary process as they became proletarianised. He also believed that black political organisation should be left to black people themselves, and saw his own role as one of organisation within white trade unions. Bunting believed that black South Africans would provide the ‘shock troops’ of the revolution, but not the theoretical understanding. David Ivon Jones, despite some perceptive early comments about joint action between the races being unrealisable because the majority of white workers identified with their ‘top exploiters’, remained convinced that white workers would lead the African revolution.53 And despite Jones’s sympathetic attitude towards Africans, in 1922 he wrote from Moscow that they were ‘the lowest possible form of cheap, unskilled labour, drawn from the most primitive people in the world, politically passive and industrially unorganised’.54 Jones reflected the general attitude towards Africans in the party, and revealed his own evolutionist belief that Africans were not yet ready to form the ‘revolutionary vanguard’.

There was a general recognition within the CPSA that white workers were deeply racist. But they believed that this was an expression of ‘false consciousness’ that could be overcome by a recognition that only class solidarity could defeat the economic ‘crisis of capitalism’, which would reduce white workers to the level of Africans. To many CPSA members, it was as if racism was no more than an ‘unfortunate temporary ideological infection’.[[38]](#footnote-38) Some members of the party displayed little ambivalence about their racism, and many were to leave the organisation when the CPSA directed its agitational work towards Africans, Indians and Coloured workers after 1925. But in the early days of the CP, party organisation was focused primarily on white workers in trade unions. Their main argument for working class unity seemed to be its necessity if white workers were not to be

1. M. Bloch Marxism and Anthropology, (Oxford, 1983), pp. 1-20.
2. D. Ivon Jones, ‘Communism in South Africa’, Document 19, South African Communists Speak, p. 41-56; Simons and Simons, Class and Colour p. 207.
3. D. Ivon Jones, quoted in B. Hirson and G. A. Williams, The Delegate for Africa, p. 232.

reduced to the level of ‘natives’. A party leaflet produced against Hertzog’s White Labour Policy encapsulates these attitudes, and underlines the party’s perspective on the scientific basis of its theories:

The Communist Party calls for working class co-operation. That does imply political co­operation between the native and the european (sic). The Communist Party does this because **it is an essential for the preservation of the european worker as much as any.** (original emphasis). This can be scientifically proved and it is being tragically demonstrated in practice.55 [[39]](#footnote-39)

This pragmatic political observation was modified with a view of social relations between the races that reflected segregationist and evolutionary discourses. Addressing the common taunt of “How would you like your sister to marry a native?”, stemming from the general deep fear of miscegenation, the pamphlet goes on to declare:

This sort of talk shows a great want of confidence in South African women and is a cheap and unworthy insult to them. It overlooks the fact that neither race **wants** to mix with the other. Where racial mixing does take place, it is largely due to the poverty and backwardness of native women which leaves them without self-respect. If both races have the self-respect that come from a proper human status and a proper standard of living, mixing will be far less likely to take place.[[40]](#footnote-40)

It seems that the CPSA wanted to have its ‘universalist cake and yet eat it at racially segregated tables’.[[41]](#footnote-41) South African communists were formed within the social context of South Africa at that time, and this was reflected in their ideologies. Their feelings towards Africans were not dissimilar to those of many Indians, for Gandhi’s attitude towards Africans, discussed in the last chapter, was widespread among Indians. Indian ideas about Africans during the 1949 Durban Riots also demonstrate how this bigotry was reinscribed, rather than eradicated, indicating the deep-seated nature of these prejudices and their reproduction through material practices. It also situates South African communists within the wider traditions of socialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where radicalism was inexorably intertwined with racial prejudices, although to varying degrees. The pamphlet also reflects early theoretical understanding in the Party from orthodox Marxist classics. This emphasised the leadership role of white workers at the point of production, a doctrine which accepted the South African racial divide, segregationist discourse, and an evolutionary view of social relations.

A comprehension of the wider ideological debates prevalent in the 1920s in the international socialist community, which laid great emphasis on the relationship between class and nationalism, was at times hindered by the relative isolation of South African comrades from the world socialist movement. Although David Ivon Jones was in Moscow between 1919 and 1924 and helped maintain limited contact between the CPS A and the international communist movement, this rather tenuous link was severed with his death in 1924.[[42]](#footnote-42) At this time, the Communist International was becoming increasingly pre-occupied with the question of colonial liberation movements, because of their potential force as an anti-imperialist weapon. From 1920, the Communist International was also forced, albeit intermittently, to address the question of nationalism, recognising it as a powerful political factor in the world context, and the fonn that colonial struggles were taking. At the Second International in 1920, a heated debate took place between Lenin and the Indian delegate M. N. Roy on the nature of the relationship between the communist and nationalist movements[[43]](#footnote-43), a relationship that lies at the heart of the ‘Native Republic’ thesis of the late 1920s and ‘Colonialism of a Special Type’ in the 1950s. However, the CPSA never received a copy of Lenin’s 1920 draft on the National and Colonial question.

Despite the ambivalence of some of its party members, because of their experience of different social worlds, the early CPSA viewed nationalism as a reactionary force that had to be countered. Like racism, it was seen as another instance of ‘false consciousness’. The agrarian question was given even less attention in early CPSA days. By dismissing the peasantry as backward, over 85 per cent of the African population were disregarded. Because the majority of Africans in industry were migrant workers, they were not seen as ‘pure proletarians’. White workers therefore constituted the vanguard of the revolution, but little theoretical attention was paid as to how the ‘masses’ should be moved to follow this leadership, or how this white leadership, given its prejudices, would unite in action with black workers. Party members had a naive faith in working class unity, but this failed to analyse the political, social, and economic reality of South Africa at a time when unity on class lines across the races was little more than a utopian dream. The experience of the 1922 Miners’ Strike[[44]](#footnote-44) was a stark illustration of this and of the dilemmas the CPSA faced in its early days.

Although many CP members were involved in the strike, the SALP and the Afrikaner Nationalist Party were the most active political parties. They organised many meetings on a platform Tor a white South Africa’.[[45]](#footnote-45) Many of the Afrikaner workers, who formed a majority of white workers on the Rand, cared Tittle for Britain and less for Empire’ and thought of the Union Jack as ‘nothing more than a dirty dish cloth’.[[46]](#footnote-46) During the ‘Rand Revolt’, Afrikaner nationalism was an important element in the strike. Many of the speeches that strike leaders made to workers invoked the Afrikaner ‘fathers of the nation, the Voortrekkers’.[[47]](#footnote-47) At one such meeting at Jeppes in Johannesburg, strikers were told that they ‘had to be unanimous in standing by the victory of the Voortrekkers over (the Zulu King) Dingaan in 1838. It was nothing short of cheek for the Chamber of Mines to try and reverse this position.’[[48]](#footnote-48)

Afrikaners felt deeply resentful towards their ‘foreign’ bosses and their perceived subjugation by British imperialism. For them a ‘white South Africa’ was one where the Afrikaner occupied their rightful place within the South African nation state. Reflecting this anti-British feeling, the National Party couched much of its political discourse in terms of anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. Proclaiming itself to be the ‘small man’s party’, the NP denounced Smuts as the paid agent of the Chamber of Mines and ‘vowed to free South

Africa from capitalist domination’.[[49]](#footnote-49) Borrowing from, and in the process, transforming, socialist discourse was not a new phenomenon for the NP. In 1919, Hertzog had gone as far as to say ‘Do not let us be afraid of Bolshevism. Bolshevism is the will of the people to be free. Why do people want to suppress and kill Bolshevism? Because national freedom means death to capitalism and imperialism.’[[50]](#footnote-50) The rhetoric during the strike was couched in fiercely nationalist and racial terms but also framed within a socialist discourse of class equality, translated as white working-class equality. The strike became a fight to maintain the Colour Bar in employment practices, but it was also much more than that.

In analysing the nature of the rebellion, many members of the CP such as S. P. Bunting still emphasised the future prospects for inter-racial class-consciousness amongst white workers. And although some members did denounce the rampant racism of the white miners, the views of party members were, at least, ambivalent. The CPSA paid no attention to the African workers on the coalmines who stayed in their compounds and continued to work throughout the strike. No proposals were made to agitate for skilled employment for Africans at equal rates of pay with their white counterparts. And a party statement published in The International, described the strike as ‘the most glorious event in the history of white civilisation in South Africa’.[[51]](#footnote-51) In the eyes of African organisations, the CPSA must have seemed deeply compromised and seen to be colluding with white racism.

The strikers did borrow strands of communist ideology. The impact of the Russian Revolution still reverberated around the world. Red banners featured prominently during the strike. ‘The Red Flag’ was sung repeatedly. Many speeches included talk about the struggle between labour and capital.[[52]](#footnote-52) But within this discourse lay a tension between a racially specific international proletariat, and an ideology of industrial protectionism inherited and translated from British trade-union practices. Socialist ideology was also inteiwoven with South African racism and a developing Afrikaner nationalism during the strike, and some of these elements were expressed in the infamous slogan ‘workers of the world unite and fight for a white South Africa.’[[53]](#footnote-53)

The workers expressed a specific vision of South Africa and their place within it. Above all, their insistence on inclusion within this ‘white community’ was because as ‘civilised workers’, they wanted to have a stake in the building of a ‘civilised nation’. This in turn entitled them to ‘civilised’ wages. To be civilised, you had to be white. To be reduced to ‘kaffir’ work was the opposite. Importantly, membership of this white brotherhood included citizenship and rights.

The events of the first two decades of the twentieth century had left white workers deeply alienated and disillusioned. The mine-owners seemed to care little that many miners, through the nature of their jobs, died from fatal damage to their lungs.[[54]](#footnote-54) [[55]](#footnote-55) They were reluctant to spend money on expensive health and safety equipment. Furthermore, when mine magnets decided to cut costs, they proceeded to hand over ‘white man’s work’ to Africans. The Smuts government not only failed to protect white miners’ interests, but also had no hesitation in using troops against them. And those who fought in the war to protect the interests of Empire came home to face threatened redundancies and the powers of the state unleashed against them. In the words of the miner Taffy Long, who was hung along with several others after the strike:

Only a few years back I lay drenched in water and soaked in blood in the trenches of Flanders...But what did we find when we got back from the hell of war?...What do mineowners care about our homes and the dignity of our lives? If they thought they could grind an ounce of gold from the Union Jack they would put it through the mills of their ■ 72

mines.

A different, and white, South Africa, where white workers were respected, is what they were fighting for.

As Ivon Jones was to write acerbically from Moscow about the strike, ‘working class consciousness meant white working class consciousness’.[[56]](#footnote-56) Yet he was also to comment that it was ‘not a conflict of white against black, but a pure class struggle against politically conscious workers who happened to be white, and the capitalist class’.[[57]](#footnote-57) A privileged elite under threat, white workers wanted to be a part of ‘white civilisation’, to negotiate with sections of its bourgeoisie rather than organise to overthrow it. Enraged by Smuts and the policies of the United Party, white workers turned to the SALP and the National Party to protect their interests. They wanted representation within the South African capitalist system, and the NP’s anti-capitalist rhetoric was in reality a bid to have access to government institutions that would allow it to re-allocate the profits of capital amongst its political constituency. Marx and Engels had addressed the phenomenon of furthering class interests through a compromise with capital in relation to English workers and the Irish,[[58]](#footnote-58) but this was not a theoretical aspect developed by the CPSA in the 1920s. In 1961, the SACP was to comment, with hindsight, that the strike marked

the greatest defeat (of the white labour movement) as a force independent of the bourgeoisie. As the more farsighted of the ISL leaders had foreseen....the purely white labour movement in this country was transformed step by step into an emasculated adjunct of the boss class, exchanging their independence and privileges, the price of their support for white imperialism in its brutal oppression and exploitation of the African people.[[59]](#footnote-59)

The experience of the strike helped shape white and black politics for years to come. Smuts became the hated hangman and butcher and was personally held responsible for the suppression of the strike and the effects of the recession. The NP and the Labour Party formed a pact against the SAP and set about winning white workers to their political constituency. They won the 1924 election and encouraged the development of domestic capital, and there was some growth in secondary industry. The Pact government began to recognise the interests of white workers. Smuts’ SAP had already laid the groundwork for segregation. Hertzog continued these policies and extended the privileges of white workers, as well as accelerating the exclusion of black communities from constitutional politics. Through increasing segregation, Hertzog sought to constitute a white consensus against mounting black opposition. The Pact government also attempted to regulate the supply of black workers between the labour hungry sectors of the South African economy. A ‘civilised labour’ policy[[60]](#footnote-60) was introduced and African and Indian workers who were employed by the government were dismissed in their thousands. White workers took their place.

The CP SA’s first major political outing was not a huge success, but contained many lessons. Their espousal of inter-racial solidarity, however ambivalent, alienated them from white workers. Their collaboration with white miners gave black organisations reason to regard communists as the left-wing of an exclusively white labour movement. Alienated from black organisations, shunned by trade unionists, members deserted the ranks of the CPSA, leaving the fledgling organisation even weaker and less effectual. For the next two years the party continued to try to organise white workers in trade unions as well as to tap the discontent of the unemployed, but with little impact. The party also backed the Nationalist-SALP pact, convinced that once the pact was in government they would reveal their true credentials to white workers, who would then turn to the CP with a newly awakened class-consciousness. Characterising the pact as an ‘alliance between bourgeois nationalism and labour imperialism’ The Intel-national proclaimed:

the workers will rapidly discover that the administration of this country will not be materially different to the present time. New groupings will inevitably take place....The rank and file of both the Labour and Nationalist parties must sooner or later refuse to follow their bourgeois leaders, and will form a real workers party, not to be side-tracked either by British imperialism nor bourgeois republicanism, but organised, drilled and determined to unceasingly work for the overthrow of the capitalist system.[[61]](#footnote-61)

However, the ‘revolutionary vanguard’ failed to do this and the 1922 strike and the victory of the Pact government were major turning points in the history of the labour movement in South Africa. White workers were increasingly co-opted into the system and the CP had to look elsewhere for its political constituency. They had to move on to work with black organisations, which required a discussion of united front tactics and the question of the relationship between nationalism and socialism.

Chapter Five

Nationalism and Socialism: New Horizons

The International Origins of Indian Communism

Just as the CPSA was formed out of international flows of people and ideas, important aspects of Indian communism also had their roots in a radical Indian diaspora that gained experience and transformed their politics in the course of their travels, through the people they met, and the organisations they encountered. Many of these Indians were radical nationalists who opposed British colonial rule, who later became communists. They epitomised the threat of the ‘Indian radical terrorist’ in the British colonial imagination, a perception that was to grow and also caste its shadow over South African Indian communists in later years. M. N. Roy was a particularly significant example of these early Indian national revolutionaries who turned communist. In many respects, he was at the ‘opposite end of the spectrum’ to Gandhi in Indian politics in the first half of the twentieth century.

Roy also made an important contribution to the debate on the national and colonial question, which was discussed at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920.[[62]](#footnote-62) He disagreed fundamentally with Lenin’s perspective on Gandhi and Indian nationalists, whom Lenin considered were revolutionary because of their anti-imperialist potential.[[63]](#footnote-63) Roy believed the national bourgeoisie to be a reactionary force, which could not be trusted. In particular, he considered that Gandhi used ideas of religion and tradition to develop a mass following, whereas Roy despised religion and considered that ‘tradition’ did little more than keep India hidebound to a conservative past.[[64]](#footnote-64) Roy was a champion of ‘modern values,’ and his views on Gandhi were later shared by many communists in India, as well as by R. Palme Dutt, an influential Indian member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. This was in sharp contrast to South African Indian communists, who were to hold a very different view of Gandhi and what he represented.

Since the initial debate at the Second Congress, there have been endless interpretations of the national and colonial question. In the CPSA, it was the touchstone of the contentious issue of the ‘Black Republic’ and was to dominate discussions in the party in the late twenties and the early thirties.[[65]](#footnote-65) It set the terms of their relationship with the national congresses in South Africa for years to come. The debates on ‘Colonialism of a Special Type’ which started in the party as early as 1950 were also directly related to this discussion. The tensions, contradictions, and intersections that existed, and were reproduced, in the interplay between nationalism and socialism also lay at the heart of the contribution of Indian communists to the CPSA, and was manifest in the nature of their party work at grassroots level. In many ways, the evocation of Gandhi as symbol of ‘Indianness’ by CP members epitomised these tensions.

Indian Nationalists Abroad

Gandhi’s experiences in South Africa and his formulation of a political vision were very different to those of other groups of radicals who travelled from India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the time that Gandhi was returning to India from South Africa with his blend of political morality and expedient constitutional politics, other Indians were also travelling across the world and developing important political ideas that were woven out of different political traditions. Many of these Indian nationalists formulated a far more radical form of politics than Gandhi’s, which flowed from their experience of, and opposition to, British colonial rule in India. In the early part of the twentieth century, the INC still seemed a conservative and largely ineffective body. In their attempts to formulate an alternative discourse of liberation, many early Indian radicals were drawn to clandestine terrorist organisations which looked to support from countries abroad in order to fond their anti-British activities.5 Many were also Muslims, and they fused anti­British sentiments with a desire for Indian independence and a sense of an international Muslim brotherhood. They forged inter-textual translations of socialist ideals, nationalist aspirations and religious beliefs.

A considerable exodus of Indian militants had begun as early as 1908, following a split in from Indian National Congress between its radical and conservative wings.6 Radical Indian nationalists were ruthlessly hounded by British intelligence, and subsequently they fled overseas to America, Europe and other parts of Asia to set up revolutionary organisations in countries that were either hostile to Britain at the time, or at least would tolerate their presence. Gandhi met some of these ‘terrorists’ in London in 1909, and his talks with them served to confirm his belief in peaceful protest.

In the following years, Indian radicals who were opposed to Gandhi’s approach set up a number of international organisations which became networks of political ideas and organisation. Thus, in 1913, the Ghadar Party was established in America by Har Dayal and Mohammed В ar a к at tail ah. A typical example of the diasporic Indian political community, Barakatatullah taught Urdu at the University of Tokyo, where he also published a paper called Muslim Unity. In 1914, he was dismissed from his job in Tokyo on the insistence of the British because of his political activities, and moved to San Francisco, home to a number of Indian activists at the time. He later travelled to Kabul, and then to Tashkent in the Soviet Union.7

The Ghadar Party attempted to unify various smaller Indian political bodies across America and Canada, and also began centres in Argentina, France, Britain, and China and the Phillipines.[[66]](#footnote-66) Many of its organisers were amongst the group of Indian radicals who moved to Berlin after the outbreak of the First World War, hoping the Germans would help fond their anti-British political activities. They set up an Indian Revolutionary Committee

1. Persits, Revolutionaries of India, p.18.
2. Persits, Revolutionaries of India, p,18.
3. Documents of the History of the Communist party Of India, vol. 1, 1917-1922, (New Delhi 1971), p. 17. Barakatatullah returned to Tokyo after setting up the Ghadar Party in America.

there, and the German government promised them money and arms.8 [[67]](#footnote-67) Not surprisingly, these actions increased the British perception that they were dangerous terrorists. Much of their political activity was propaganda work directed at Indian army units abroad, as they believed that small groups of trained, aimed men would best be able to spark an uprising in India and drive out the British. Reflecting their social position in India, they often interspersed their views on how to overthrow British rule militarily with prejudices that derived from the caste ideology which was common to Hindu and Muslim communities alike. Thus, they believed that military operations could only be earned out by an educated elite, and that peasants and workers were, apparently, not capable, or intelligent enough for the task. One such revolutionary was to remark: ‘Anyone can buy and bribe a poor man, and what does a poor Indian know about the condition of India?’[[68]](#footnote-68)

M. N. Roy was an important member of this revolutionary Indian diaspora. Unlike the majority of Indian political exiles, Roy was not a Muslim. He was bom into a high- caste Brahmin family in an area of Bengal that had already produced a number of political activists and social reformers.[[69]](#footnote-69) He grew up in a political culture replete with anti-British sentiments, which also fostered his initial belief that Hindu culture was fundamentally superior to that of the west.[[70]](#footnote-70) His Brahmanic pride fuelled his anger against the British, who treated Indians as second class citizens in their own country. Roy became politically active whilst still at school, and eventually joined several nationalist groups that believed in direct terrorist action. In his early political life, he shot a policeman. By 1914, Roy had begun a series of abortive attempts to smuggle arms for the struggle for Indian independence, which took him abroad to China and Japan. At this time, he had a strong sense of racial self-determination as well as national pride, and believed that Japan would free Asia of the racial domination practised by the British. On one of his ill-fated gun­running expeditions, Roy met Sun Yat-sen and discussed the question of national independence in Asia. He also set up another arms deal with him.13

Unable to return home, as he was being hunted by British intelligence, Roy set sail for San Francisco, where he planned to finalise the details for the arms shipment. On the boat, he met a Miss Gray, a ‘Tamil orphan’ who had been brought up by American missionaries. Like many Americans whom he would meet in San Fransisco and New York, Miss Gray was ‘enthralled’ by Roy’s ‘cosmopolitanism’.14 The British government, however, took a very different view. On his arrival in the USA, he was greeted by a headline in a local newspaper which declared: ‘Mysterious Alien Reaches America, Famous Brahmin Revolutionary or Dangerous Communist Spy’.15

Once in America, Roy became a part of its Indian political community, but also began to mix with a broader group of intellectuals who were sympathetic towards the Indian struggle against British colonial rule. In America, sympathy for the Indian cause had already been fostered by the Theosophical Society, which was founded in New York in 1879.16 Amongst others, Roy met Isadora Duncan, Jack London, and Professor Arthur Pope, who taught philosophy at the University of California at Berkeley, as well as Evelyn Trent, who was to become Roy’s wife, and Agnes Smedly. Smedly later married the Indian radical political activist, Virenranath Chattopadya, who was the brother of Sarojini Naidu. In later years, Naidu was to visit South Africa in an attempt to intervene on behalf of the Indian community there. Yusuf Dadoo helped arrange a meeting during her visit, and Naidu persistently interceded on behalf of Indian South Africans in the 1930s and 40s.[[71]](#footnote-71) Roy also frequented Greenwich Village with Evelyn Trent, where he exchanged ideas with socialists, pacifists and anarchists.

During his sojourn in the States, Roy was constantly followed and harassed by British intelligence. The United States Attorney for Northern California described him as ‘a

1. S. Roy, M. N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, p. 6.
2. S. Roy, M. N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, p. 13.
3. S. Roy, M. N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, p. 9.
4. S. Roy, M. N. Roy, p. 19.

man steeped in crime, one of the most violent revolutionaries India has produced...altogether he is the most dangerous Indian still at large on the American subcontinent.’17 [[72]](#footnote-72) Because of these perceptions, it was not particularly safe to befriend him, and Arthur\* Pope lost several jobs because of their association. Roy was finally arrested in March 1917, but was released on bail and fled to Mexico. Once there, he continued to mix with the radical American bohemian diaspora he had encountered in New York, many of whom were in Mexico to avoid military service, and was increasingly seduced by European culture and ideas. Unlike Gandhi, who formulated an Indian ‘uniqueness’ in exile in opposition to the ‘perils’ of western civilisation, Roy felt a new world opening up which freed him from the constraints of caste and ‘Indian tradition’. It engendered a new internationalist spirit in him. He was drawn increasingly to socialist ideas and helped set up the Mexican Socialist Party, which later became the Communist party of Mexico. When Michael Borodin came to Mexico in 1919, he wanted to meet the Socialist Party’s ‘Hindu secretary’. It was Borodin who introduced Roy to communism. Roy later claimed that he had undergone profound intellectual changes in Mexico:

Mexico was the land of my rebirth. It is true that before coming there I had begun to feel dissatisfied with ideas and ideals of my earlier life. But it was during my stay in Mexico that the new vision became clear and dissatisfaction with a sterile past was replaced by a conviction to guide me in a more promising future. It was more than a change in political ideas and revolutionary ideals, I acquired a new outlook on life; there was a revolution in my mind-a philosophical revolution which knew no finality.[[73]](#footnote-73)

The Russian Revolution of 1917 also formed a backdrop to these changes in Roy, and altered the political perspective of many other Indian nationalists as well. They were inspired by the Russian Revolution for several reasons. Unlike social-democrats in the west, the Bolsheviks promoted the right of nations to self-determination, particularly in relation to the Muslim areas within the borders of the Soviet Union. Indian radicals felt this legitimated their fight for Indian political independence. In addition, the anti-capitalist rhetoric of Soviet communism was translated by many Indian radicals as specifically anti­British in the Indian context. Mohammad Barakatullah told an Izvestia correspondent for example, ‘a capitalist is synonymous to a foreigner, to be exact, the Englishman, for us.. .Therefore, the Soviet Government’s well-known appeal for a fight against capitalists... produced a colossal impression on us.’20

Many Muslims also chose to believe that there was a community of interest between the egalitarian and international aspects of communism and Islam. As a consequence of these ideas, a considerable number of Indian emigres headed for the Soviet Union after 1917, hoping to find a sympathetic reception for their political cause. In December 1919, Roy himself left for Moscow via Berlin, where he wrote an ‘Indian Communist Manifesto’.21 In Moscow, he was one of two Mexican delegates to the Second Congress of the Communist International. By late 1920, a small group of Indian revolutionaries were studying at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union. Many later returned to India and began work with various left-wing organisations. Others stayed in the Soviet Union. A small group of these Indian communists, including Roy, established the first Communist Party of India in Tashkent in 1920.22

The Second Congress of the Communist International

Roy was among the large group of Indian communists who attended the Second Congress of the Communist international, a number of them travelling from Tashkent.[[74]](#footnote-74) The Congress was significant because it was the first international meeting of the Comintern to include delegates from non-westem countries, and it attracted a diverse collection of people from around the world who were keen to see the ‘New Jerusalem’. The Congress also consolidated the split that had taken place within the Second International between social democrats and communists during the war, over whether or not the national bourgeoisie should be supported during the war (as it had in South Africa) and over the question of independence for the colonies. A new, radical perspective on the colonial question was therefore of central concern to the Second Congress of the Communist International. Two of the main issues on the agenda, which were to affect South Africa and India equally, were the national question, in the form of the right of nations to self-

1. Izvetsia May 6, 1919, quoted in Persits, Revolutionaries of India, p. 29.
2. M. N. Roy, Memoirs, p. 39.
3. M. A. Persits, ‘The Origin of the Indian Communist Movement and the Comintern’s Oriental Policy’, in R. A. Ulyanovsky (ed.), The Comintern and tire East: A Critique of the Critique. (USSR, 1978), p.122.

determination, and the question of the united front, or the nature of the relationship between communist and nationalist organisations, questions that have dogged the left ever since.23 [[75]](#footnote-75)

Although many at the Second Congress considered Roy an ‘Indian upstart’, Lenin gave him a considerable amount of time, listening carefully to his arguments, and trying to incorporate his views in amended form in the final draft on the memorandum on the ‘national question’. There was, however, a fatal flaw in the amended draft because there *was* a basic difference in their positions, a difference that could not be easily papered over in a ‘compromise’. The endless re-drafting of the national question by the CP internationally, including its ’Black Republic’ variant, is, in my view, evidence of the fact that party members were trying to reconcile two divergent approaches to the relationship between nationalism and socialism. Connected to this are the perennial permutations of the debate on ‘stages’ versus ‘permanent revolution’, where, most often, Trotsky is set up in a dichotomous opposition to ‘the devil’ Stalin (or vice versa according to ideological orientation).[[76]](#footnote-76)

Lenin thought of imperialism as a set of international, mutually transformative relationships, framed by unequal power relations.[[77]](#footnote-77) Within these, there were oppressor and oppressed nations, or the capitalist countries and their colonies. A programme of self­determination for the colonies therefore not only suggested a moral agenda, and one that would be attractive to much of the world’s population, but also seemingly had the capacity to fundamentally weaken imperialism and the capitalist powers. From this perspective, communists in the colonies should therefore support, and be a part of (but not be subsumed by) national movements, as they were anti-imperialist, and had the capacity to become anti­capitalist. The problem was, ‘how to unite with the national bourgeoisie without being completely absorbed by them.’27 Lenin, nevertheless, considered that national leaders such as Gandhi, had revolutionary potential. ‘Revolutionary Asia’ had to go through a democratic phase, and this had to be done in alliance with the ‘national bourgeoisie’.28

Roy, however, considered that the national bourgeoisie was corrupt, pro-capitalist and in league with an international bourgeoisie, because this is where their material interests lay. The working class therefore had to lead the ‘national revolution’.29 What was needed was a proletarian social revolution in the colonies rather than a bourgeois democratic one. To Lenin’s contention that the working class was insufficiently developed in the colonies, as they were ‘backward’, and consequently needed the ‘support’ of proletarian parties in the capitalist countries, Roy offered the rather dubious response that colonial countries were already largely capitalist, and did not need a ‘national stage’. By the seventh reformulation of the thesis, it read ‘the Revolution in the colonies is not going to be a communist revolution in its first stages...(the) co-operation of bourgeois nationalist revolutionary elements *is useful* for the overthrow of foreign capitalism’ (emphasis added).[[78]](#footnote-78) By the ninth version, this had been changed again to declaring that all communist parties *must give active support* to the revolutionary movements of liberation. ’ (emphasis added).

This vacillation on the national question led in its more extreme forms in the 1920s and 1930s, to the characterisation of all bourgeois democrats as social fascists. Lenin’s and

1. J. P. Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism in India: M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy 1920-1939, (Princeton, 1971), p. 216.
2. See Lenin’s Prediction on the Revolutionary Storms in the East, (People’s Republic of China, 1970), pp. 1­15.
3. This is clearly problematic. Taking a ‘classical’ Marxist approach to class, the proletariat can of course be the carriers of nationalist ideology, but if it is to lead a successful national democratic revolution in the absence of any bourgeoisie, this surely becomes synonymous with a workers and peasants government as they would already hold the levers of state power. Any further 'stage' would imply that the proletariat would have to struggle to overthrow itself! Whether a revolution has stages depends on the actual strength of class forces in the fight against the state, and carrying out a national-democratic revolution implies that there would have be an alliance between classes with nationalist forces, including the leadership of those nationalist forces, however critical that alliance might be. The question of stages then comes to the fore when, after the national democratic stage, yesterday's allies become todays enemies and under expanded democratic conditions a class struggle supposedly takes place between the working class, who have become class conscious, and the bourgeoisie. Workers and peasants can of course be nationalist before they are socialist but a workers and peasants government is not synonymous with a national democratic government.

Roy’s positions were replicated by the CP in many parts of the world, including in South Africa and India. Over the next few years, different permutations of the thesis on the national question were churned out by the Comintern, and by the late twenties, Roy himself had radically changed his position. I consider that the relationship between nationalism and socialism, as part of a revolutionary strategy, is so dependent on context that it is probably not possible to articulate a definitive centralised policy directive.

From the mid 1930s, Roy became active in Indian politics once again. Unlike his Indian South African comrades, however, he was highly critical of, and opposed to, Gandhi’s leadership of the Indian national movement. Palme Dutt, the prominent Indian communist in the Communist Party of Britain (which had been given guardianship of the Communist Party of India) held a similar position to Roy, and many communists in India were to repeat his criticisms of Gandhi.

Gandhi in India

In his analysis of Gandhi, Palme Dutt describes his return to India in terms that demonstrate a continuity with Gandhi’s political programme in South Africa. When Gandhi arrived in London en route from South Africa in 1914 after the outbreak of World War 1, he was quick to call on Indians to ‘think imperially’ and ‘do their duty’.30 [[79]](#footnote-79) As with the South African War and the Bambhatta Rebellion, he organised a volunteer ambulance corps, and when he was back in India, urged Gujurati peasants to join the British army, as the best, and speediest, way to win ‘swaraj’ for India.[[80]](#footnote-80)

He returned to India at a time when there was a reunion between the ‘moderate’ and ‘extremist’ wings of the national struggle, as well as plans for an alliance between Congress and the Muslim League, which had been founded in 1905. Annie Besant was also active in Indian politics at this time, and, in language heavily reminiscent of that used by Gandhi and the Indian merchant elite in South Africa, she was an ardent advocate of demonstrating the

‘keen loyalty’ of Indians to ‘His Majesty the King Emperor.’[[81]](#footnote-81) This new spirit of co­operation between different political forces, was, however, put quickly to the test. It was placed under severe strain as a wave of massive unrest began to shake India in 1919. In January that year, 125,000 workers were on strike, and the imperial government responded with ferocity. Drawing on his experience in South Africa, Gandhi organised a passive resistance movement against imperial legislation, and a ‘hartal’ was called for April 6th’ The response to this call overwhelmed the organisers, as demonstrations, strikes and riots swept the country. In the repression that followed, the ‘Amritsar massacre’ took place, where the British army fired indiscriminately into an unarmed Indian crowd. The British resorted to these extreme measures because, in their opinion, the revolts that swept India had the earmark of ‘ an organised revolt against the British raj.’[[82]](#footnote-82)

Gandhi was appalled at the outcome of events, proclaiming that he had committed ‘a blunder of Himalayan dimensions which had enabled ill-disposed persons, not true passive resisters at all, to perpetrate disorders’. As he was later to explain, ‘ a civil resister never seeks to embarrass the Government’.[[83]](#footnote-83) As with the 1913 strike in South Africa, Gandhi felt extremely uncomfortable when protest that he felt he had initiated under the name of passive resistance, took on a mass character, and seemed to move beyond his control. His intention had been to ‘settle down quietly’ to work with the government to initiate a programme of reforms, but his first experiment with satyagraha in India failed in achieving this. As in South Africa, he blamed the people involved in the protest for not understanding the ‘true’ nature of passive resistance.

However, mass civil unrest continued in India, and in 1920, Congress officially adopted a programme of non-violent non-cooperation in an attempt to assume leadership of the movement, which consisted of spontaneous acts of revolt and rebellion across the country. This was a part of a significant development, through which Congress became a truly national political party, with organisational networks down to the village level, and a programme which advocated national freedom, rather than devolved power.

Gandhi played a central part in these events. However, Palme Dutt suggests that although Gandhi conceived of passive resistance as part of a religious and philosophical world-view, he was ‘extremely vague’ about its specificity as a political programme.[[84]](#footnote-84) I ! consider that it was exactly this ‘vagueness’, or rather its fundamentally eclectic character,

that allowed people representing other political interests to adopt passive resistance as a part of an expedient tactic of the relatively dispossessed against a powerful, and aimed, enemy. It enabled passive resistance to become a series of acts of political translation, and in many ways, passive resistance became a site of struggle for contending political interests. In Dutt’s view, as with other Indian communists, Gandhi attempted to manipulate passive resistance in such a way as to use the masses to gain leverage with the government (as he had tried to do in South Africa), while at the same time preserving middle and upper class, and caste, interests. For Palme Dutt, this was the central contradiction in the political programme of Congress’s non-violent non-co-operation, a contradiction that was also going to emerge in the programme of South African Indian communists in the 1940s.

The Indian left were beginning to develop in the 1920s through trades union organisations, the influence of Marxist-Leninist ideas, and the literature which was sent back from the embryonic Indian communist movement in the Soviet Union. In the years to come, they had to fry to maintain a balancing act with the nationalist movement in India. On the one hand, Indian nationalists exhibited a capacity for harnessing an eclectic mass of discontent under the umbrella of passive resistance, whilst on the other, through using the concept of non-violence, they were wedded to an identity of interests, and a close interconnection with the landed classes, and bourgeois interests. E. M. S. Namboodiripad was a South Indian politician who was to become a member of both Congress and the Congress Socialist Party, before becoming a prominent member of the central committee of the Communist Party of India?7 Namboodiribad went on to lead the first democratically

elected Communist government in Kerela. Writing about Gandhi, he considered that:

Gandhiji’s idealism had its strong and its weak points. His strong points may be summed up in his ability to rouse the masses and organise them in the struggle against imperialism and feudalism; his weak points may be summed up in his insistence on a scrupulous adherence to what is called non-violence, which, in effect, served to restrain the mass of workers and peasants....This, incidentally, is precisely what the interests of the bourgeoisie demanded. They wanted the mass of people to be roused and organised against imperialism and feudalism; they however, wanted these masses to be severely restrained in their actions and straggles. It was this coincidence of what the bourgeoisie required and the totality of the results of Gandhiji’s leadership that is meant when I say that Gandhiji’s approach to life and history is a bourgeois-democratic approach.38

Jayaprakash Narayan, who was instrumental in forming the CPS, was another of

Gandhi’s critics at this time. In 1936 he claimed that ‘Gandhi...was inadvertently giving his approval to a system of “large-scale, organized theft and violence” [which was] being used as a “cloak for reaction and conservatism.’”39 He also refuted the notion that Gandhi’s approach was ‘uniquely Indian’, observing that many of his views ‘were also imported from the West.’40

In 1940, Gandhi made his position clear again:

It has been suggested to me by a Congressman wielding great influence that as soon as I declared civil disobedience I would find a staggering response this time. The whole labour world and the kisans41 in many parts of India will, he assures me, declare a simultaneous strike. I told him that if that happened, I should be most embarrassed, and all my plans would be upset...1 hope I am not expected knowingly to undertake a fight that must end in anarchy and red ruin.42

Gandhi had a general antipathy towards, and mistrust of, industrial workers,43 as well as the tenets of socialist doctrine, which drew its inspiration from the same, if differently

1. Socialists in Congress had formed the CPS because they did not trust Gandhi’s tactics and were sceptical of his philosophy. See Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism, pp. 218-222.
2. From E.M.S. Namboodiripad, ‘The Mahatma and the Ism’, p. xii, in S. Hay (ed.), Sources of Indian Tradition, pp. 354-355.
3. Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism, p. 221. Narayan had been introduced to Marxism in the 1920s when he was a student in America through the writings of M. N. Roy.
4. Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism, p. 221.
5. These were trade unions.
6. M. K, Gandhi, Harijan, January, 1940
7. R. Palme Dutt, Modem India, (London, 1927), p. 80; There were also many other times when his class prejudices were made abundantly clear. In an article in Young India in 1927 entitled ‘Horrible Practices’ on certain temple rituals involving animal sacrifice in Umbilo in South Africa, he observed: ‘The origin of these practices is easy enough to trace. There are three classes of Indians in South Africa. The free Indian trader has interpreted, modernist ideals so roundly condemned in Hind Swaraj. Why then did he enjoy such popularity with South African Indian communists? In order to begin to trace this history, I will now returned to the problematic narrative of nationalist-socialist relations in the South African CP.

South African Comrades at the Comintern

In contrast to the sizeable Indian contingent, there were no South African delegates at the Second Congress of the Comintern. The CPSA had still not been formed, and Comintern membership was reliant on the formation of one official communist organisation in South Africa. However, the Second Congress acted as a spur to several left organisations in South Africa to come together and form a communist party, which meant acceptance of the Comintern’s 21 conditions of membership.[[85]](#footnote-85) [[86]](#footnote-86) In late 1920, when this process had just begun, David Ivon Jones left for Moscow with Sam Barlin of the International Socialist League to attend the Third Congress in June 1921. According to Baruch Hirson, Ivon Jones was ‘still a learner.. .profoundly ignorant of Russian Revolutionary literature, knew little of the writings of the older generations of social democrats in Europe, and had only a fragmented knowledge of the works of Marx and Engels.’ [[87]](#footnote-87) It seems that this was true of many ISL and CPSA members at the time. They generally appeared cut off from the international communist community, and this may well have contributed to the chaos produced in the party in 1928 by the ‘Black Republic’ proposal[[88]](#footnote-88), which called for an ‘independent native republic as a stage towards a workers’ and peasants’ republic, with full equal rights for all races, black, coloured and white’[[89]](#footnote-89). No copy of Lenin’s preliminary thesis was to be found in South Africa, and party members must have felt that they were working, to some extent, in the dark. In the atmosphere at the Comintern, where so much emphasis was being laid on the colonial question and the ‘toiling masses’ the South African delegates must have seemed a curious couple. The apologetic tone of a leaflet written by Jones for the Comintern on ‘Communism in Africa’ is, perhaps, an indication of this:

The South African delegates were introduced to the bare footed, 12 year old delegate from the Novgorod Young Communist the other day. The first thing he asked us was ‘Why aren’t you black!’ Coming from South Africa, we feel quite apologetic about our colour. An African delegation should at least include Negroes. This will be remedied in time; but it would be a mistake to think that in future there should be no white South African delegates.

The African revolution will be led by white workers.[[90]](#footnote-90)

The debate on nationalism and socialism was at the heart of the continuing dialogue in the party about their relationship with nationalist organisations, and the party’s political programme. Jones’s statement cited above reflected his belief in the role of skilled workers in the revolution, and much like Roy and his opinion of Indian nationalists, Jones placed little trust in African nationalist organisations and held that they would soon transform into fully proletarian bodies. Again, like Roy on Indian workers, he thought that ‘national consciousness’ would not affect black workers.[[91]](#footnote-91) In contrast to this, Sidney Bunting took a more pragmatic approach to the ‘bourgeois democratic liberation movements’ and was prepared to work with them if this gave the party access to ‘potential revolutionary workers’. However, as discussed below, Bunting also fundamentally misunderstood the significance of the nationalist movement in South Africa, believing that it would be a ‘short lived phase’. In reality, the debate was part of the wider dialogue in the CPSA on the relationship between black and white workers in South Africa and the failure of a development of class alliances between the two. Moreover, by the time of the ‘Black Republic’ directive, the experience of CPSA members with the ICU may well have made some party members hesitant about renewing relations with nationalist organisations.

Black Workers and the CPSA

In Chapter Four, I illustrated the complex nature of the relationships between white and black workers in South Africa in the early pail of the twentieth century, a relationship that was formed not only through the particular patterns of capitalism that developed there, but also as a result of the interaction of different cultural practices and prejudices. Given their ‘classical’ Marxist orientation and their alignment towards workers at the point of production, this set the CP a complex range of tasks. The Party now began a painful redefinition of its role in South Africa during which it was dragged into a reconsideration of its relationship with nationalist organisations. This re-orientation seriously divided the party and led to the expulsion of many of its most committed white members. It was only by the end of the 1930s that it began to recover, and in the process, greatly increased its black membership, a trend which accelerated during World War Two.

The CPSA had called on black workers to support the 1922 Miners Strike, in the belief that defeat would signal a setback for the whole working class. In the context of attacks on black people by the strikers,[[92]](#footnote-92) black workers, unsurprisingly, responded primarily to the racist content of the strike. In practice, black workers were only too aware of the hostility of whites and found it hard to identify any community of interest.

However, the realisation that white workers were increasingly being co-opted as the popular constituency of the Nationalist-Labour alliance after 1924, as discussed in Chapter Four, strengthened the hand of those in the CPSA who emphasised the need for more consistent work with black South Africans, especially in the light of their increasing levels of militancy. Party members such as Eddie Roux and S. P. Bunting questioned the continued significance given to work in the white labour movement.

The party made its first concerted attempts to adopt united front tactics, which also reflected a change in direction for the international communist movement. As the prospect of revolution in the industrial countries seemed to be fading, the issue of the colonies, along with the national question within the Soviet Union, ‘became more acute’, where the relationship of national liberation movements to socialism became a pressing issue. Sidney and Rebecca Bunting attended the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in Moscow in 1922 where united front tactics were being discussed, and Sidney Bunting tried to formulate a version of the united front that he felt was appropriate to South Africa. In December 1924, at the third national conference of the CPSA, there was a historic shift to a stress on party work amongst Africans, when it was resolved that:

The Communist Party must recognise the necessity of supporting every form of native movement which tends to undermine or weaken capitalism, and must fight for race equality of the natives on the economic and political field. The Communist Party must use every instrument which will induce tire trade unions to admit native workers. Failing this, it must organise the natives into unions of their own, and apply United Front tactics.[[93]](#footnote-93)

Many party members were not happy with this attempt to re-direct the party towards black workers. W. H. Andrews, for example, ‘disagreed with the emphasis and speed with which the new leadership of the Party proposed to tackle the job (of organising black workers)’,[[94]](#footnote-94) and resigned from the party that he had helped to form. Others had more overtly racist objections, even before the official change of direction in 1924.[[95]](#footnote-95) Frank Glass also resigned from the party, claiming that it had become an anti-white sect.

The CPSA and African Nationalism

The CPSA had to decide on where to concentrate its work. On its own, the party had little influence on black South Africans. It was generally considered that it could best make an impact by joining a mass organisation. However, to a large extent, it still regarded the ANC with disdain. Party members considered that the Congress was made up of ‘petty bourgeois nationalists’, who, like the NIC, were constantly seeking help from the very forces that oppressed them. The obvious candidate for communist infiltration and agitation was the ICU, which, with its ‘young guns’, attracted more radical elements than the more conservative ANC. As a trade union body, it would also complement the CPSA's emphasis on union work. By 1925, the ICU enjoyed a mass following in South Africa. Communists joined the ICU and in the process they recruited the union’s Assistant General Secretary, James La Guma,[[96]](#footnote-96) amongst others, into its ranks. La Guma was to become a key figure in the party debate over the ‘Black Republic’.

The CPSA’s decision to join the ICU in 1925 helped radicalise the union and was also an important step for the party. It signalled the party’s attempt to form a united front in South Africa. Although the ‘official’ relationship between them was short lived, it left an important legacy. Communists brought their organisational skills and enthusiasm into the union. In the next three years, there was a steady increase in African members in the CPSA. It also gave members important experience of work at grass-roots level. In many ways, the ability of the ICU to link questions of national and democratic rights with class and mass action echoed latter day CP tactics, including those adopted by its Indian membership.

Communist members who joined the ICU where, however, critical of the amorphous nature of the ICU and argued for a more centralised body and tighter structures. In a letter to Eddie Roux, who was studying in London at this time, Thibedi complained that there was ‘no freedom of speech at all more especially [for those] who are known to be the revolutionary camp’.[[97]](#footnote-97) Relationships with the CP became strained and their members were eventually expelled.[[98]](#footnote-98) However, even after the expulsions, there continued to be some degree of cross-fertilisation between the ICU and the CPSA. In particular, Thibedi continued addressing ICU meetings and tried to organise protest to the expulsions from within the organisations although, as he confided in Roux, Kadalie and Champion were often unaware that he was still doing so.[[99]](#footnote-99) As part of the process whereby the CPSA re­orientated its policies towards black workers, its relationship with the ICU proved invaluable. As a result of the expulsion of communist officials from the ICU, the party had to reassess its relationship with the ANC.

By 1927 many members of the CPSA had come a long way from the party's earlier concentration on ‘white workers at the point of production’. But a new division was beginning to develop. If the earlier antagonism had been between those who questioned the very idea of work amongst black workers and those who saw it as primary, the latter still laid stress in the main on the need for class unity and belittled the role of nationalism. In particular, Bunting continued to believe that the nationalist stage of African consciousness had been embryonic and was now practically over, and continued to stress inter-racial class solidarity.

But the new wave of Africans who entered the organisation after 1925 were either recruited from, or had developed extensive experience in, the nationalist bodies such as the ICU and the ANC, and this led them to regard the issues of land, liberation and nationalism in a more sympathetic light. There was also an increase in white members who had actually been bom in South Africa, such as Eddie Roux and Willie Kalk, who recognised the need to examine the specifics of South African capitalist development, rather than try to apply 'universalist' notions of communist practise. The Cape Town branch in particular was more ready to examine new concepts of struggle. By the late 1920s, the contentious dialogue on the relationship between nationalism and socialism was already embedded in party practise and discourse, and the idea of an African ‘nation’ in South Africa was already being espoused in African nationalist organisations.[[100]](#footnote-100)

The CPSA and The Native Republic Thesis

At the sixth congress of the Communist International in July 1928, a resolution was passed calling on the CPSA to fight for ‘an independent South African Native Republic’.[[101]](#footnote-101) The reaction to this ‘diktat’ in the historiography of South Africa has been mixed, with writers either seeing the resolution as a solely Comintern-inspired directive that had little application in the South African context, or as a much-needed move towards a reconsideration of nationalism and the ‘class struggle’ in that country. In a series of articles in Searchlight South Africa, Baruch Hirson, for example, has described the slogan as ‘absurd’ for conditions in the 1920s,[[102]](#footnote-102) while Jack and Ray Simons consider it to be a ‘great advance in the analysis of the relations between national and class forces in the liberation movement.’[[103]](#footnote-103) According to Hirson, the new slogan greatly damaged the party, whilst Jack and Ray Simons consider it to be a positive development. Despite the misgivings of the majority of the CPSA, the Executive Committee of the Communist International instructed the party to implement the resolution as party policy, thereby supposedly signalling a new direction for party work. Within a short space of time after the directive, the CPSA was a shadow of its former self, decimated by internal purges, and unable to rally significant support. According to Hirson, the new policy ‘crippled the CPSA’. Nevertheless, it is important to examine the impact of the ‘Black Republic’ thesis as part of the dialogue that was already taking place within the party on the relationship of national liberation and socialist revolution.

In February 1927, James La Guma had been sent as a delegate to the League Against Imperialism in Brussels where a resolution for the ‘right of self determination through the complete overthrow of capitalism and imperial domination’ was passed.[[104]](#footnote-104) La Guma then travelled to Moscow, convinced that white workers in South Africa were too imbued with racist ideology to form meaningful alliances with their black counterparts, a belief that was also expressed by Bukharin of the Soviet Communist Party. La Guma also began to regard the agrarian and national struggle as a fundamental part of the revolutionary process in South Africa, a view that was reinforced after discussions with the international delegates at the League Against Imperialism and the Afro-American secretariat in Moscow. The air was thick with the rhetoric of self determination, and this coincided with several strands of thinking in South African where demands were beginning to be made by Africans for either a separate state and parliament as part of the British Empire as one response to segregation, or black majority rule. The call for a Black Republic was also part of the discourse of the international Pan-Africanist movement, and these ideas overlapped in this period with the Comintern's renewed focus on nationalist movements, and the 'Negro question',

Before La Guma returned from Moscow, a draft proposal for the Native Republic thesis was forwarded to the CPSA for discussion, but the debate continued long after his return. Although Douglas Wolton, an English member of the CP, La Guma and the Cape Town branch supported the Comintern proposal, the majority of the party, including Bunting, totally rejected it. Bunting considered the motion to be anti-white, claiming again that it pandered to a non-existent 'nationalism' at the expense of class. Bunting, his wife Rebecca, and Eddie Roux, all opponents of the Native Republic, were dispatched to Moscow to discuss the issue at the Comintern.[[105]](#footnote-105) [[106]](#footnote-106) The Simons's comment that it might have been 'a mistake ’ to send three white delegates, all opposed to the new line, is perhaps, an understatement.

Bunting at the Comintern

According to Hirson, Bunting ‘fought against the policy (of the Native Republic) at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, and dismissed the facile position of the proponents of the new policy with arguments that have stood the test of time’.[[107]](#footnote-107) However, an examination of Bunting's contributions at the Congress seem to indicate that the general content of his speeches was remarkably similar to the views that he had held since the formation of the party, and, rather than standing the test of time, compounded the serious analytical mistakes that had dogged the party since 1921.

Despite a recognition of the hostility of the white workers to black workers, Bunting still laid the main stress of party work on the need to build inter-racial working-class unity. He continued to under-value and misunderstand the force of African nationalist feeling, also saying that a ‘concentration of interest on a nationalist movement seems to involve a lack of interest in the day to day struggle against race oppression itself.[[108]](#footnote-108) Bunting did not elaborate why this should be the case. He maintained that white workers would fight on purely class lines, given the right approach, despite all the evidence that white workers eagerly supported Hertzog’s segregationist policies and were increasingly structurally alienated from their black counterparts. One of his major objections to the thesis was that ‘white workers are unquestionably going to be alienated by the present slogan’.[[109]](#footnote-109) As La Guma was to ask, was it

in accord with Communist principles, to sacrifice or delay the freedom of the large majority in the interests of a small minority of imperialistically imbued white workers?... In 1922 they rose in arms to perpetuate our serfdom; now through die Labour Party, they supported anti­native legislation and the enactment of colour bars in industry.[[110]](#footnote-110)

Bunting's analysis failed to give sufficient weight to the actual differences in class forces within South Africa in the 1920s. Whilst he rightly criticised the Comintern's frequent reference to the 'colonial masses' as an inadequate appraisal, one of the biggest failures within the CPSA itself was its lack of attention to the disparate nature of the class forces that were emerging with the initial stages of capitalist development in South Africa, and how these might form alliances in a popular struggle against the South African state.[[111]](#footnote-111) By positing the only divide as that between workers and capitalists, a very crude reading of Marxist ideas of class, they failed to assess the potential role of the ‘ill defined groups of dissidents characteristic of early industrialisation in the South African colonial situation’.[[112]](#footnote-112) By contrast, in both Russia and China, for example, there had been an analysis of class divisions within the peasantry itself in relation to revolutionary forces.

The National Question

The CPSA’s early obsession with proletarians, and with a particularly Eurocentric conception of proletarian consciousness as the only true one in opposition to ideologies of race and nationalism, also lay at the heart of the majority of the party's inability to conceptualise the evolution of the nationalist project in South Africa. It is true that in the 1920s, there had been little theoretical attention given to nationalism by the left. Once considered the product of primordial sentiments that bound people together in a common territory through language, culture and common descent, more recent analyses of nationalism have demonstrated that it is much more a product of 'imagined community', forged from the human imagination, above all in dialectical opposition to the construction of the other, although it is reflected and shaped by its engagement with the material world.71 In South Africa, nationalist feeling amongst the black population grew out of a reaction to the structural racism of the state, increasing white appropriation of African land, and the growth of Afrikaner nationalism, hi that race and class largely overlapped, there was a potential articulation between class and nationalist aspirations, although these aspirations were not identical. The changing emphasis in the writings of both Lenin and Marx on the national question stressed not only its potential role as a force for anti­imperialism, but also the need to contextualise it.72 The consequences of specific nationalist struggles have to be examined, and nationalism needs to be seen as a dynamic and reactive process. In other words, there was not one relationship between nationalist and class movements, rather this relationship would vary according to local conditions and change in the course of struggle itself.

At this stage, there was no creative elaboration of African nationalism in the CPSA, although there was certainly, in some sections, a more sympathetic reaction to it than Bunting's. The 'ultra-left' Douglas Wolton conceded that ‘ANC activities reveal a conscious desire of the African people to one day possess power and constitute a very strong national

1. The seminal text on this is, of course, B. Anderson’s Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism, (London 1983).
2. See K. Marx and F. Engels, Communist Manifesto, pp. 68-73, (New York, 1988); V. I. Lenin, ‘The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination’, Collected Works, vol. 22, 143-156; H. B. Davis, Nationalism and Socialism: marxist and labour theories of nationalism to 1917, (New York, 1967), expression of the people towards independent action.’ Of the ICU he remarked that ‘the mainspring of its astounding development was its appeal to the nationalist sentiments of the African people.’[[113]](#footnote-113) [[114]](#footnote-114). It is ironic that Wolton instigated the intercine purges that were to decimate the party in the early 1930s.

To be fair to Bunting, he accepted the Comintern’s decision and returned to South Africa to lay the new policy before the party, which was accepted. However, party work carried on much as before. It is highly unlikely a Native Republic or a Worker and Peasants Republic could have been established in the 1920s, whatever tactics the CPSA adopted in 1928. Nevertheless, the question that has to be asked is whether the party was able to grasp theoretically what slogans would reflect cun-ent material conditions. Putting the national and agrarian question on the agenda, and seeing how they ‘intersected,..(understanding) the major role envisaged for the peasantry and the emphasis placed on rural mobilisation’[[115]](#footnote-115) was not absurd, but necessary.

The CPSA did begin to undertake more work than previously in rural areas, but as Bundy comments, ‘not very much’.[[116]](#footnote-116) In the 1929 election, Sidney Bunting stood in Tembuland West and conducted a dogged campaign in the face of continual harassment from the police and managed to secure 289 votes.[[117]](#footnote-117) The Native Republic slogan was used, but in the main his election platform consisted of interim demands for equality as well as expanded social welfare. More importantly, the party fonned The League of African Rights in both cities and rural locations. The League organised around the extension of the native franchise, universal free education and freedom of speech. As Legassick remarks, with the collapse of the ICU, and the unwillingness of the ANC to organise mass protest due to a ‘rightward swing’, the way should have been open to the League.[[118]](#footnote-118) But a shift in Comintern policy now affected the party more profoundly than any slogan of a Native Republic.

By 1930, the Communist International was suggesting that capitalism was entering a new phase of disintegration. In preparation for the 'forthcoming revolution', all alliances with bourgeois democratic movements were rejected: overnight they had all become 'social fascist'. This change of policy was in part a reaction to the disastrous outcome of tactics adopted in China between 1926-27, where an alliance between the nationalist Kuomintang and Communists had resulted in a slaughter of Communist forces.

In South Africa, the CPSA was instructed to disband the League, which was pronounced 'reformist'. The CPSA complied. Worse still, Wolton returned from Moscow with instructions to 'bolshevise' the party which resulted in a series of intercine struggles which once again decimated CPSA ranks. Bunting was amongst those expelled. The expanded programme for party work lacked sufficient cadres to cany it out, and as Legassick remarks, the Native Republic policy ‘disappeared in Umsebenzi doctrine’.[[119]](#footnote-119). Long articles appeared in the party paper concerning ultra left or right deviations. Moses Kotane, future secretary of the party commented that the paper ‘was no more sold and read by the masses - in fact it was simply unreadable’.[[120]](#footnote-120) Membership had steadily risen to around 3000 in 1929 but now fell rapidly, until by 1935 there were only around 250, mainly white members left.[[121]](#footnote-121) The CP SA's fortunes were only to revive after this as it attracted Indian workers into its ranks from the mid 1930s, and with a further Comintern swing to United Front tactics in the build up to the Second World War.[[122]](#footnote-122)

The other factor 'crippling' the party was the extent of the repression by the new National government in the wake of the 'Black Peril' elections of 1929, as they attempted to stamp out the militant activity that had characterised the twenties and made the white minority feel threatened. Many Africans felt that there was simply no point in joining the CPSA, as the almost inevitable consequence was government harassment. This factor also contributed to the stagnation of the ANC and the collapse of the ICU. In this clamp-down, the Nationalists were aided by the onset of the worldwide depression.

It would therefore seem that the CPSA was crippled by far more than ‘implementing a policy’, which by Hirson's own admission had little immediate effect on party activities after its ratification in January 1929.[[123]](#footnote-123) However, the slogan did not represent ‘a great advance’ with regal'd to the national question as the Simons' suggest either. An analytical resolution of the national question was not forthcoming from the party in this period and the crisis within it was a reflection of the struggle between various political tendencies that had been developing since its inception, a crisis provoked by the Black Republic thesis but not caused by it. The CPSA's initial concentration with white workers at the point of production, one based on their understanding of orthodox Marxist dogma, was one that never fully disappeared. Bunting's continued concern with white workers at the Comintern was a reflection of this. The later move to the African 'masses' was still built around a belief in inter-racial class solidarity, and with one division between worker and capitalist. This ignored the lessons of the 1922 Miners Strike and of white worker support for the segregationist policies of the Pact government.

There was also no theorisation of either class fragmentation or the disparate class tendencies invoked by the early stages of capitalist development in the South African context. The experience of the phenomenon of the ICU illustrates the complexity of the South African situation. But if the ICU lacked any coherent ideology capable of harnessing the mass discontent of the twenties, the CPSA's analysis was also clearly inadequate. However, the Africanisation of the party brought new elements into its ranks that put questions of land and liberation to the fore. La Guma's contact with the Comintern coincided with the CPs renewed turn to questions of national liberation. The Black Republic thesis, if not frilly developed, was more in tune with the South African situation than CPSA analysis so far.

In the 1930s, before a fully-fledged relationship with African nationalist organisations took shape, the CPSA was to successfully form alliances with Indian nationalist organisations through the Indians it recruited into its ranks, and joint campaigns with the NIC and SAIC were to foreshadow later relations with the ANC. Indians helped shape the debate between nationalist and socialist organisation, and in many ways, Gandhi, reinterpreted and reinscribed onto South African soil, came to symbolises the mediation between the two. I now turn to an examination of why Indians were drawn to the CPSA, and their very different relationship to Gandhi to that of Indian communists in India in the 1930s and 40s.

**Chapter Six**

**Indian Worker Militancy and the CPSA 1932-46**

The Comintern in the 1930s

In Chapters Four and Five I discussed how the question of the relationship between national and socialist movements and workers at the point of production dominated both the policy decisions of the Comintern and the formative years of the Communist Party of South Africa around the question of the slogan of the ‘Black Republic’. By the 1930s, significant political shifts had taken place around the world. The president of the United States, Herbert Hoover, had predicted a ‘chicken in every pot and two cars in every garage’ in the heady days of 1920s prosperity. By the early 1930s, tens of millions were jobless, homeless and hungry in Western Europe and America.

Internationally, the world witnessed the rise of fascism. Not only did fascism begin to spread across, and beyond, the map of Europe; it also attempted to strangle communist movements worldwide. Salazar\* seized power in Portugal in 1932. In Germany, Nazis outlawed Communists in 1933. In the same year Vidkun Quisling formed a fascist party in Norway. In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia and Franco’s fascist militia commenced war against the democratically elected government of Spain. 1936 saw Samoza seize power in Nicaragua and Metaxas set up a dictatorship in Greece. Hitler invaded Austria in 1938. In such an international climate, the Comintern’s previous policy of renewed class struggle against all ‘social fascists’ as they had deemed all social democrats, not only seemed inappropriate but also suicidal. Communist movements were under attack and needed all the allies that they could get. More specifically, the Soviet Union was under attack and needed to form alliances. In July 1935, the seventh, and last, world congress of the Comintern took place in Moscow. Building on policy changes that had led to calls for the international resistance to fascism through the League of Nations, the seventh congress called for the formation of ‘broad anti-fascist popular fronts’ in the colonies.[[124]](#footnote-124) For the

CPSA, this shift in direction coincided with a changing political environment in South Africa, changes that were already being reflected in the party’s policies by 1934. The struggle against fascism in South Africa, fought out on the streets of Johannesburg, Durban and other towns and cities, attracted many new members to the party, including Jews and Indians who would become prominent in the organisation. For many, it seemed that the CP was the only organisation that was serious about combating fascism. These fights on the city hall steps in Durban and Johannesburg between communists and ‘brownshirts’ brought, amongst others, George Ponnen, H. A. Naidoo and Joe Slovo into the party. The struggle against fascism in South Africa also became inexorably intertwined with the struggle for democratic rights and citizenship and helped shape the nature of trade union organisation as well.

For the party, the 1920s were characterised by internal struggles around questions of class and nation and a socialist project. These were far from being fully resolved by the early 1930s. The party emerged from its early attempts to form alliances with African nationalist organisations somewhat battered and bruised. The new central committee of the late twenties and early thirties was dominated by the ‘ultra left’ Douglas and Molly Wolton and Lazar Bach. In 1931 they ‘masterminded’ a series of expulsions of all its ‘right-wing, social democrat and vacillating elements’ and the CPSA lost the bulk of its membership. At this time, the party’s influence had become almost negligible. According to Eddie Roux, Durban merely had a ‘subterranean’ Party presence.[[125]](#footnote-125) At its party conference in 1929, the CP purported to have 3000 members. But a series of expulsions seriously weakened the organisation. W. FLAndrews, Solly Sachs, Fanny Klenerman, and Sidney Bunting were all expelled. Many members only learned of their expulsion through reading their names in the columns of Umsebenzi, the party paper. Party meetings, according to Benny Sachs, came to resemble a ‘Witches Sabbath’.[[126]](#footnote-126) A large number of CP members who were expelled were trade unionists, accused of using ‘social democratic and reformist’ methods of struggle’.

By 1933, numbers in the CPSA had dwindled to a mere 150 members; the overwhelming majority was white.[[127]](#footnote-127) However, In the same year, Lazar Bach, who had assumed a leadership role in the party after the Woltons left South Africa, went to Moscow to report on the Party’s ‘newly cleansed’ membership to the Comintern in Moscow. By the time of his arrival, the tide had already turned from the ‘ultra leftism’ of the previous period, and after being sent into exile, Bach was sentenced to death in the Soviet Union.[[128]](#footnote-128) In South Africa, by 1934, Hertzog’s segregation bills and the threat of domestic fascism had already prompted a move towards broader united front policies on the left. Despite a lengthy spell of bitter infighting in the Party during these years, often expressing itself on race lines,[[129]](#footnote-129) the League Against Fascism and War was formed in 1934 in alliance with the Labour Party. Soon afterwards Cissy Gool and James La Guma, members of the CPSA’s Cape Town branch, launched the National Liberation League. At this same time, the Transvaal African Congress called for a national convention of Africans in order to build resistance to the proposed segregationist legislation of the United Party. As a result of this, the All Africa Convention was inaugurated in December 1935, and drew together the largest body of African politicians and activists the country had ever seen. For the party, despite the continuing divisive infighting, these events increased the possibility of working in broad front organisations. This tendency was given a boost in 1935, when the Comintern sent its agent, George Hardy, to South Africa. He set about forming broad white anti-fascist organisations with an assorted ragbag of political elements including the Labour Party, Afrikaner farmers, and white trade unionists.[[130]](#footnote-130) But these moves towards broad front activities were taking place alongside rapid industrialisation and militant activity amongst African and Indian workers. In a confluence of circumstances, it was the Party’s anti-fascist activities that attracted its first two Indian members, George Ponnen and H. A. Naidoo, men who were already actively involved in radical trade unionism. I will now examine the background to these events.

Emerging Indian militancy

From the mid 1930s, Indians in Natal were drawn to the CPSA in increasing numbers and became actively involved in trade union politics and broad democratic alliances. This renewal of trade union activity in the wake of increased industrialisation was welcomed by many CPSA members, who were starting to come back to the party after the purges of the early 1930s. It seemed to represent a return to familiar Marxist bread and butter issues around the point of production. This renewed trade unionism coincided with, and was in part facilitated by, circumstances which saw the radicalisation of Indian workers, many of them South Indian Hindus and Christians, who had become actively involved in trade union organisation before joining the CPSA. In the 1930s, Indian workers were becoming more militant because of their experiences in the workplace and through the relative growth in their access to education. As Indian workers were increasingly driven off the land and the move towards urban centres increased, many families settled on the edge of town and some of the offspring of indentured workers found work in factories, often while still very young. There was a ready market for the exploitation of cheap and supposedly docile child labour. Their meagre wages helped make ends meet in their families.

Many, such as George Ponnen spent their early lives fluctuating between school and the factory floor, depending on the family’s financial circumstances. Both environments fuelled Ponnen’s political consciousness. Bom on June 1, 1913, Ponnen’s family background was fairly typical example of the Indian working-class of the time in South Africa. From a very early age, he was influenced by his father’s tales of corruption and mismanagement at work. According to Ponnen, ‘although he [his father] was unable to read or write he was able to narrate glaring stories of exploitation. They played on my mind’[[131]](#footnote-131) Ponnen’s father had left the sugar estates where he originally worked, to take up employment with Durban’s Department of Tramways. He compensated for his inadequate salary by doing extra gardening work in his spare time with the help of his wife. After an accident at work he was forced to leave his job and acquired some land from a private white landowner. He was a small-scale farmer until his death in 1921. As Ponnen recalls:

We were brought up in a household where there was often talk of politics,. .my father had taken part in the 1913 Gandhi strike against the £3 tax...my eldest brother who was sixteen also took part in that strike, it had a big impact on me, that and seeing how my mother straggled to provide for us all after my father’s death .9

After his father died, Ponnen’s brother got married and moved nearer to town. His mother could not manage the farm on her own for very much longer and the rest of the family also moved nearer the city where they rented accommodation from an Indian landlord. At this point, Ponnen was sent to school. Two of his brothers found work in a sheet metal factory, and his mother got a hawker’s license which enabled her to buy vegetables from a local market and sell them from door-to-door in an African part of the outlying city. In 1920, Ponnen began to attend the St. Thomas Government-aided Indian Primary School. ‘Education was not free nor compulsory as it was for the whites. We had to pay fees and buy books. The school building was old and had no playground and other facilities.’10 Like many other Indians, Ponnen’s family struggled to send at least some of their members to school in order to open up possibilities for better prospects and higher paid work. Education played a large part in the consciousness of South African Indians. As the state still made inadequate provision for this, Indians themselves tried to set up and fund educational establishments. These became one of the crucial building blocks of notions of an Indian ‘community’ which organised around the ethos of‘self-help’.

The Role of Education in the Indian Community

For the first decade after Indians arrived in South Africa, there was no provision for their education. The matter was not even discussed until 1872 when the Coolie Commission recommended compulsory education for Indians, something that was only achieved over a 100 years later.[[132]](#footnote-132)

As teachers, South Indian Christians formed an important part of this early establishment of education for Indians. A teacher training college was also opened in Natal

1. Ponnen, interview with PR, Durban June 1995.
2. G. Ponnen, ‘Gangen-George Ponnen Speaks of His Life and Involvement in the Trade Union, Political and National Liberation Movements in His Country, South Africa’, unpublished undated mimeo, p. 2.

in 1869, but once trained, the newly qualified teachers often took up domestic work as the teaching profession was so poorly paid.11 [[133]](#footnote-133) By 1878, with the formation of the Indian Immigrant School Board, the government was vying with missionaries to take the initiative and control Indian education. This body created a two-tier system of education for Indians, in which the children of free or passenger Indians were allowed to attend European schools while those of indentured parents were to go to Board schools. Three of these were set up, but they received poor state support and they soon came to be seen as second rate ‘coolie schools’. In part, indentured labourers and their families rejected these schools and expressed a desire to transcend the ‘coolie’ education being offered to them, but economic considerations also played a significant role. For many families trying to eke out a living, education for their children was a luxury they could not afford.

By the early 1900s, some Indians were beginning to advance economically, and resented the increasing racial discrimination that seemed to stand in their way. They resented an education policy that attempted to peg them at the level of primary education. In the eyes of the state, this would prepare ‘good citizens’ for particular occupations but render them incapable of competing effectively beyond that point. On the one hand, the growing sophistication of Indians led to greater demands for education. On the other, stereotypical ideas of Indians dominated government educational policy and it was increasingly seen as a means of shaping a compliant and docile workforce. By 1905, attempts were made to remove Indian children from European schools and place them all in the small number of Indian schools provided by the state. But this was soon followed by cuts in Indian education, which looked set to destroy entirely what little educational provision there was.

Sections of the community began to think that the only effective way to combat this in the long-teim was to found their own educational institutions as well as provide their own staff. In 1909 the Natal Indian Patriotic Union was formed. It consisted of non-trader colonial- boms, a group that was to become highly influential in the politics of the 1940s and to whom education became an all-important means to an end.[[134]](#footnote-134) The pages of African Chronicle and Indian Opinion in the first three decades of the twentieth century are testament to the near obsession with education of the Indian community. At a series of mass meetings Indians called for an end to restrictions on Indians attending Natal University and for measures to overturn discrimination against Indians regarding educational opportunities in general. By 1914, the few existing government aided schools were overflowing and there were increased calls for the provision of higher education. Many Muslims set up madressas for their children, which were to have important consequences for subsequent forms of identity formation, Fatima Meer recalls:

Madressa is a Muslim idea, it’s a Muslim educational institution...it taught you the Indian languages...we learnt Arabic, we learned to read the Koran, then we learned Urdu, and then at a later stage we would be introduced to Gujurati, although Gujurati was the language of my parents..Arabic and Urdu took precedence..because madressas are basically Islamic institutions, so I would say that in my first years developing an identity outside of my family was an identity I developed in the madressa.[[135]](#footnote-135)

By the 1920s, a small number of technical and higher-grade schools for Indians began to appear, the most significant of which by far was Sastri College, which was named after the first Indian Agent-General to South Africa. At Sastri College, they combined teacher training and secondary education and a number of future community leaders and radicals obtained their education here. One of these was I. C. Meer, who has, however, suggested that there already existed a strong and growing impetus on the part of the Indian people to educate themselves in this period.[[136]](#footnote-136) He maintains that ‘whilst the college was named after India’s first agent in South Africa, who played a leading role in its founding, the credit for the building of this institution must go the community as a whole’.[[137]](#footnote-137) Meer considered that by the late 1920s, the Indian community was already strongly attached to the ethic of self-help. In illustration of this, he pointed out that 43 community built schools had already been established before Sastri arrived in South Africa. Most of the funding for these came from merchants and traders. According to Meer, Sastri College ‘attracted children from all economic, social and religious backgrounds’.[[138]](#footnote-138) Once there, they were encouraged to think of themselves as South African and appreciate the benefits of a western education. The four pillars of the college were dedicated to Culture, Civilisation, Truth and Beauty, suggesting ideas of assimilation and westernisation, and inculcating notions of democracy and citizenship that were to feed into the radical politics of the next three decades, not least because of the role of white liberals in Indian education.

The two first principals of Sastri College, W.M. Buss and B. Anderson, were both white liberals. White teaching staff were gradually replaced by Indian teachers especially brought over from India, while the training of local Indians eventually allowed them to take over. The syllabus centred mainly on teacher training or foundation courses for university.[[139]](#footnote-139) The next step, the straggle for a university education, proved to be a protracted affair. In 1933, two Indians applied for B.A. courses at Durban University College. The Registrar explained to Buss, then head of Sastri College that it would not possible to admit them. However, the Registrar’ was put under renewed pressure in 1934 when he received a visit from the then Agent General to India, Kunwar Sir Maharaj Singh, who requested that a few select places be opened to non-Europeans as was the case by this time at Cape Town and Witwatersrand Universities.[[140]](#footnote-140) In the impasse that followed, Durban based liberals proved to be influential in helping to provide non-European access to higher education, in the first instance through informal means.

Mabel Palmer, Maurice Webb and Edgar Brookes were part of a group of people who recommended that evening classes at Natal University be open to Indians, but given the unfeasibility of this, as a compromise, they proposed that classes be held separately in Sastri College so as to not upset white students and or ‘offend’ the parents of female pupils. Palmer, a Fabian socialist from Britain, had had a lifelong interest in the provision of adult education. She herself had entered Glasgow university in 1893, the year after it was opened to women. Here, like Durban’s Indians, women had studied in separate classes. Palmer helped launch the first Fabian Summer School for socialists in Britain in 1907 and became involved in the Worker’s Educational Association.[[141]](#footnote-141) It was through education that Palmer became a socialist.[[142]](#footnote-142) It was in her role as tutor and later organiser of the Workers Educational Association tutorial classes at the Technical Institute in Durban that Palmer came to the city and settled there. She tried to apply her Fabian principles to South Africa’s central question of race and for her, education was a driving force for change, opening the way for opportunity and equality. In the early 1930s she began to provide informal tutorial sessions for non-European students in her own home.

Segregated education, however, remained a contentious issue amongst Indians.[[143]](#footnote-143) As sections of the Indian community, including Sayed Sir Razia Ali, the new Agent General, debated whether to boycott separate classes, Palmer and Maurice Webb, a liberal with Quaker sympathies who was active on the Joint Councils and had earned out social work in African and Indian communities, helped sway influential Indian opinion to accept the ‘jam today’ as better than nothing in the context of South African society.[[144]](#footnote-144) Palmer used the analogy of women in Scotland who had accepted segregated university classes. The non­European evening classes proved to be a great success, with nineteen students attending five courses in 1936. By 1936 there were 80 students and nineteen courses.[[145]](#footnote-145)

Mabel Palmer was a vociferous champion of Indian South African rights. As far as providing education went, her perspective was straightforward:

Since they came here at the express (and sometimes pressing) invitation of our fore-fathers and not of their own initiative...(and) further by the Cape Town Agreement,[[146]](#footnote-146) they bound themselves to adopt a western standard of living and South Africa bound itself to provide the necessary means. Surely the Natal University College ought to be ready to play the very important role of providing for them under its own supervision and control.[[147]](#footnote-147)

To her it was ‘only fair’ that Indians should have access to higher education, and as a white liberal she played her part in making education a force for radicalising sections of the Indian population rather than reproducing a docile workforce. I. C. Meer considered that pupils at Sastri were aware of wider social and political issues and that the college helped develop a culture that was to become opposed to all social barriers.[[148]](#footnote-148) Many Sastri pupils of the 1930s and 40s joined and played important roles in political organisations including the Liberal Study Group, which drew many ex-pupils from the college. This body was formed in the late 1930s as a kind of left-wing think-tank, consisting mainly of progressive whites and Indians, although it also boasted African and Coloured members. The organisation became very active in the mid 1940s in the Anti-Segregation Council. According to A. K. M. Docrat, the LSG had an important co-ordinating role in the Indian community. It helped arrange meeting, book halls, and sort out finance as well as collating libraries for community organisations. The LSG also had connections with the India League.[[149]](#footnote-149) The Indian influence in the LSG in Durban was demonstrated by the fact that in 1941, the new officials of the organisation were all Indians: I. C.Meer was chair, S. N.Moodley was deputy chair, А. К. M. Docrat was secretary, J. P. Soni was assistant secretary, and E. I. Moola was the treasurer.[[150]](#footnote-150)

Sastri College also provided a nucleus of informed leaders who gave direction to trade union straggles and political groupings. Another of these organisations was the Non European United Front formed in 1938 by young members of the LSG.[[151]](#footnote-151) Both bodies were closely associated with the CPSA. The college also produced many of the radical educated Indians who helped take over the Natal Indian Congress in 1945. Calls for a full franchise and free and compulsory education for all were prominent in their political platform. For South African Indians, education was closely aligned to the overall upliftment of the community; it helped radicalise sections of the Indian population and was seen as a way of alleviating poverty.

Expansion in trade, commerce and industry created better job opportunities, but also required improved educational qualifications. Increased access to education acted on the Indian community in multiple ways. It increased patron-client relations between indentured workers and traders and developed community bonds, although at times these were ambivalent. It fed aspirations for better jobs and professional status. And, of political significance, the burgeoning ‘Indianness’ that was promoted through the ethic of self-help, was grounded in a South African specificity and framed within a liberal notion of rights and citizenship, partly as a result of the radical teachers and the liberal traditions that were prominent in establishing Indian education.

George Ponnen himself was aware that education held the key for improved job prospects but fluctuating family circumstances meant that he was taken in and out of school as he grew up. At the age of nine he had to leave St. Thomas’s Primary School as his mother was finding it hard to make ends meet:

I went to the city looking for work. I was about 10 years old and looked very small and this made it more difficult finding a job. Eventually, after days of searching, I found a job at the Standard Cigar Company in Alice Street, Durban for a wage of five shillings a month. My job was to strip tobacco and fill in moulds for cigars and cheroots. Working hours were nine hours a day and six days a week. If we were asked to work extra time there was no overtime pay-[[152]](#footnote-152)

This was the first of a series of factory jobs that Ponnen was forced to take up. Interspersed with his education, the factory floor proved to be another vital element in the radicalisation of his politics. When working at Wrights Knitting Mills in Durban, he had his first experience of working with white women and African men. When he tried to organise workers in order to reduce the disparities between the wages of the white women and black workers, he was sacked along with two other Indians. At his next job in a clothing manufacturers, George Ponnen met the man who was to become his lifelong comrade and fellow party member, H. A. Naidoo. Like Ponnen, Naidoo had had to give up his schooling because of his family circumstances. The two became inseparable and together they attended evening classes in the Indian Technical Institute in the Hindu Tamil Institute Building. They also attended Sastri College, but their education was soon to be interrupted again, this time because of their involvement in politics and trade union work. At this point in their lives, they were also attending lectures and public debates with other Indian students. In a debate which took place in 1933 in the Gandhi library in Durban, Ponnen and Naidoo won the argument that India was fit for self-government.31 [[153]](#footnote-153) Like other Indian students, the politics of the Indian independence movement, and the now internationally prominent Indian leader, Gandhi, exercised a powerful hold on their imaginations. Coupled with this, both were increasingly drawn into the fight against fascism in South Africa. In 1934, Hitler’s Grey Shirts were organising in South Africa.

Both Ponnen and Naidoo started attending meetings organised by the Anti-Fascist

League of South Africa, a coalition of left groups that included CPSA members.

The meetings were terrific and often ended by making the Grey Shirts run and their swastikas being burnt on the City hall steps....HA and I became very interested in the movement against fascism. We bought various literature that were sold by die Anti Fascist League at these meetings. At one of the meetings held at Durban City hall steps, we bought a paper called ‘Umzebenzi’ from an African person whose name was Ramoutla. We asked him what the paper was about, Ramoutla told us that it was an organ of the Communist party of South Africa.[[154]](#footnote-154)

Ponnen and Naidoo went on to meet Eddie Roux for discussions and joined the CPSA shortly afterward. Very soon they were in the thick of organisational activities:

The paity had become very small after the shooting of Johannes Nkosi[[155]](#footnote-155) in 1930, during the

Anti Pass demonstrations at Cartwright Flats,[[156]](#footnote-156) Durban. Many were imprisoned, deported and banished. The party had to be built up. HA and I got so much involved in work that we had to forego the evening classes at the Technical Institute.[[157]](#footnote-157)

Both Ponnen and Naidoo threw themselves into trade union activity. But it is clear that both of them were radicalised through a set of processes far wider than that experienced on the factory floor. Debates and experiences in their intermittent education had introduced them to ideas of equal rights, justice and citizenship, which resonated with the desire to right the wrongs of their South African existence. The Indian struggle for independence gave an added salience to the straggle for democracy as did the fight against fascism. And their experiences on the shop floor, where both men were organising before they joined the CPSA, gave a practical edge to their political identity. The Communist Party provided a forum where these various strands of political consciousness could be brought together and woven into what seemed like a coherent whole. If personal identity can be fluid and ambiguous, those of organisations can be even more so, and because of the series of internal and external factors described in this chapter, in the 1930s, the CPSA provided a focus for political organisation around a number of issues concerning trade union activity and democratic rights that had become intertwined. In the 1930s and 40s, a considerable amount of trade union activity, especially in Durban, took place under the leadership of Indian Communist members. I will now turn to the history of trade union politics within the Indian community in order to demonstrate the continuities of Indian radicalism, often espoused in nationalist terms, that fed into the agenda of the CPSA.

Indians and Trade Union Politics

After the 1913 strike and its repercussions, certain concerns became more pronounced within the Indian community. Between 1914 and 1920, the pages of Indian Opinion show that the issues of trading licences and property rights were still a central part of traders’ anxieties. The status and conditions of work of indentured workers was also given extensive coverage. Gandhi’s every move in India was reported, as were the twists and turns of the Indian independence movement. Increasing coverage was also given to the position of Indians in other parts of the Empire. Much ink was spilled over segregation as its effects began to bite, and access to transport and public buildings were segregated. Many of these anxieties took the form of trying to define ‘who an Indian was’ in relation to other members of South African society. Indian Opinion indignantly reported an example of this when a taxi driver refused to pick up an Indian on the grounds that he was a ‘native’. The article triumphantly concluded that when the matter came to court, the judge ruled that ‘native’ only referred to the ‘indigenous’ population of South Africa, and that the taxi driver was wrong to refuse to pick up the Indian. Indian Opinion went on to comment that the Indian involved ‘lives and conducts himself in a manner that would do credit to any European’.[[158]](#footnote-158)

In the light of several other similar cases earlier in the same year, Indian Opinion had cited an article from the London Standard to support its case for the particular position of Indians in South Africa, a position that differentiated them from ‘natives’. In an editorial entitled A Test of Empire, the Standard stated the ‘Afrikaner needed to treat Indians with more generosity’. It continued:

Possibly they might do so if the majority understood a little more clearly the distinction between the Indian settlers and the natives with whom they are more familiar. To the Colonist every coloured person is apt to be a “nigger”, a member of a barbarous race, and an inferior order of human species.. .but the Indian immigrant is also a different category from the semi-savages.[[159]](#footnote-159)

Not only were Indians trying to define themselves within the wider social landscape, but also in relation to each other, as changes were taking place within the community as well. As more Indians found jobs in industry and manufacture, in particular the sons and daughters of indentured labourers, the paper paid increasing attention to topics concerning workers and trade unions.

The colour bar was a particularly contentious issue. Initially, this was reflected by the stories of the racism of white workers and their exclusionary practices, even if at times this was framed within a hierarchical racial discourse. Commenting on a story taken from the Pretoria News, Indian Opinion declared: ‘To the socialists of South Africa, the brotherhood of man means the brotherhood of the white man... we have the Bakers Union positively demanding that no black labour shall be employed in making bread.. .(because it is)... able to work more cheaply.’ Taking up the question of unfair Indian competition, the paper remarked: ‘All such persons would, as a matter of fact, repudiate with scorn the suggestion that an Indian was equal to a European...we do not begrudge the European worker his superiority in his work’; however, it concluded, people were needed to ‘fill lower positions’.[[160]](#footnote-160) It should be borne in mind that Indian Opinion was talking about the offspring of indentured workers here, reflecting their caste and class prejudice, as well their ideas of the social negotiations needed to protect their position in wider South African society. This is borne out by other reports in the paper in this period, in which several Indians took action against whites who had called them ‘coolies’. This was not only because of its wider derogatory connotations, but specifically because, amongst Indians, it was a term used for someone from the ‘labouring classes’.[[161]](#footnote-161)

Nevertheless, Indian Opinion frequently addressed the question of the colour bar, especially in the mining industry: Attacking the Labour Party on their position on labour practices in the industry, in its editorial Indian Opinion declared:

The rights that the white workmen demand for themselves they have no intention of sharing with the native. The brotherhood of man, of which the socialists talk so glibly under the Red Flag, does not embrace the half-caste or the Bantu...But the native is also learning the stupidity of attempting to stand up unarmed against magazine rifles and machine guns. His weapon will not be a syndacalist strike, but a passive resistance...he will call attention to his grievances in a manner as amazingly effective as it is annoying.[[162]](#footnote-162)

Despite the many references to the formation of unions in this period, in parts of the Indian community, socialism came to be associated with the white chauvinism of the labour movement, and passive resistance was presented as a morally superior form of dissent, something that was to be reiterated through the decades. However, in this period, some aspects of this gradually began to change, partly as a result of the International Socialist League, which began to organise Indian workers in Natal as early as 1915. In October 1917, Indian Opinion reproduced a report on a conference called by the Social Democratic Party in Durban, expressing pleasant surprise that Indians were welcome in their midst. ‘Scores’ of Indians attended the meeting and Indian Opinion found ‘Europeans and Indians together on equal terms to discuss what is known as the “class struggle”.. .The object of the Socialist party is the complete overthrow of the present capitalist society and the establishment of a Co-operative Commonwealth’ it concluded.[[163]](#footnote-163) B. L. Sigamoney was the vice-chairman at the meeting and members of the ‘Indian Workers Union’ were also present.

Sigamoney, an Indian teacher who was bom in Durban, became a seminal figure in the organisation of Indian workers in this period.[[164]](#footnote-164) An important public and sporting figure within the community, in his youth he was a committed socialist and a leading member of the ISL. He helped organise mass public meetings of Indian workers as well as evening classes, where the works of Marx and Daniel DeLeon were studied. David Ivon Jones and W. H. Andrews came to Durban to address these meetings.[[165]](#footnote-165) Indian workers were also organising independently of the ISL around this time. An article in the Indian Opinion describes how the Indian Typographical Union had three hundred members by 1917, and shop assistants, hotel employees and Indian dockworkers had also formed unions.[[166]](#footnote-166) However, the ISL helped draw these organisations together.

From 1917, agitation amongst Indian workers intensified. Although the ISL advocated multi-racial unions in South Africa, because of the high concentration of Indian workers in Durban, and the prejudices and fears that mitigated against non-racial union association in this period, they opted to organise specifically within the Indian community, although they continued to stress inter-racial political action. The Indian Workers Industrial Union was formed in March 1917, and pamphlets were produced in Telegu and Tamil. By February 1920, the IWIU included Durban Tobacco Workers, Durban Hotel Employees, Furniture Workers, Printers, Dockworkers, Master Bakers, Vanmen and Indian Shop Assistants, covering all the main areas of work that Indians were employed in.[[167]](#footnote-167) At this time, the NIC was more or less ‘defunct’[[168]](#footnote-168), leaving the field clear for the ISL. The ISL paper, The International, expressed optimism that Indian workers had gained a clear understanding of class issues.

Meetings were held at the junction of Grey Street and Victoria Street where an Indian workers’ choir would sing a repertoire of left songs such as the Red Flag and The International under Sigamoney’s guidance.47 [[169]](#footnote-169) Importantly, Sigamoney was also generally active within the Indian community in a number of other areas. He attended meetings outside the orbit of purely trade union activity. One example among many was his presence at a meeting in May 1919, which was called to demonstrate sympathy with their ‘countrymen in the homeland’ who were involved in the Independence movement. Sigamoney was involved in many issues concerning Indian independence.[[170]](#footnote-170)

The International also ran articles about the political situation in India, which, it considered, was building into a ‘great mass movement, both industrial and political’. India, the paper suggested, was developing a ‘sense of unity’ under Gandhi, and reported that the । INC stressed the importance of trade union organisation. ‘With widespread labour unrest’ it

concluded, ‘India threatens to become another Ireland’ [[171]](#footnote-171) ‘Bennie’, as Sigamoney was popularly known, and was, according to Indian Opinion ‘easily distinguished as a well- known activist in the interest of Indian workers’, blazed a trail for other Indian activists. He acted as a conduit between the politics of the Indian community and a socialist organisation, and facilitated the spread of socialist ideas amongst Indians by being a part of the intricate web of relations in South African Indian politics at that time.

The 1920 Tobacco Workers Strike

George Ponnen had got first job in the tobacco industry at the age of ten. It was known for its exploitation of child labour and the poorest working conditions. The industry was also to witness a significant Indian strike in this period. The tobacco business was controlled by a small monopoly of businessmen in Durban who oversaw production, distribution and manufacture. Prominent amongst these businessmen was a Tamil Indian named R. B. Chetty, who had come to South Africa from Mauritius and was the head of Durban’s Cigar Manufacturing and Trading Company. He had been one of Gandhi’s wealthiest supporters and also represented Indian South Africans at the conference of Indian National Congress in Madras in 1908. For many years he was the vice-president of the Natal Indian Congress and, in particular, he championed education for Indian girls in South Africa.[[172]](#footnote-172) Chetty employed around 120 Indians in his factory. Like other tobacco manufacturers, a large proportion of ex-indentured workers and ‘free’ Indian labourers were employed in the industry as they could be paid relatively low wages. Chetty’s factory, where they processed tobacco came form his own plantations, was no exception.

Conditions in the workplace were very poor in terms of long hours, poor equipment and low pay. There were only two toilets for 120 men and none for the part-time women workers employed. In October 1920, the workers went on strike for improved pay, equipment and conditions. The ISL had organised sections of Indian tobacco workers before. Although many Indian workers supported the strike at Chetty’s factory, a large number felt obliged to stay with Chetty as they had been employed by him for many years and feared that finding work elsewhere would prove to be difficult. Within the factory, fifteen men were elected to a strike committee, and they immediately set out to canvass Indian neighbourhoods for financial and moral support. The lack of support from white workers and the wider trade union body meant that Indian workers had continually to draw on the resources of their own communities. Money was raised and some sections of Indian workers, for example railway workers, also came out in support.

However, factory owners combined against the workers whom they employed, imposing harsh conditions and joining forces with the racist South African League to stamp out workers’ militancy. The League, an Afrikaner nationalist organisation, was formed in December 1919 and one of its central aims was to protect white South Africa from the ‘Asiatics’ who were, allegedly, ‘affecting the very life and existence of our white civilisation’. In a circular issued after their first meeting, the League declared:

Your ancestors, the Voortrekkers, have made their name great in the history of the world as pioneers of white civilisation in this country, they fought their way through millions of black savages, and made this country a safe home for every man to live in. By supporting the Asiatic you are working contrary to the ideal of the Voortrekkers. The Asiatic is endangering the position of the white man every day more and more. Just look at your

beautiful village, the centre, practically the heart of it, is occupied by the miserable looking coolie. It gives the appearance more of an Indian Bazaar, than a dwelling place of a white man. Is that the ideal your forefathers fought for?[[173]](#footnote-173)

The South African League expressed the threatened position felt by many whites in this period, where increasing numbers of Afrikaners, Indians and Africans were moving into the towns and vying for space and jobs. Poor Afrikaners, in particular, found themselves in direct competition with Africans and Indians. The question of whiteness, and the preservation of it, was intimately linked to membership of ‘civilised society’ which implied access to jobs, housing and services. As we have seen, the question of ‘work’ was a central aspect of ideas of ‘whiteness’.

In general, most white trade unionists ignored the strike. Although Bill Andrews and David Ivon Jones came to Durban in support as representatives of the ISL, their political rhetoric lay at odds with the veiy practical manoeuvrings of the strike committee. Andrews called on workers to join the ISL in order to form a Worker’s Republic; Jones called for the formation of soviets in all factories.[[174]](#footnote-174) Meanwhile the Strike Committee continued to negotiate with Chetty for economic concessions, improved conditions and a closed shop. Perhaps Indian workers had not grasped ‘class politics’ as expressed by the ISL as effectively as the organisation wished. Sigamoney and Ramsamy of the ISL did not succeed in widening the political horizons of the strike, partly because the workers remained primarily concerned with ameliorating their material hardships. The cost of living had risen sharply in Durban after the war and rents, in particular, were proving hard to meet.[[175]](#footnote-175) In part, both Sigamoney and Albert Christopher, another notable Indian political leader of the time, recognised this. Sigamoney had previously pointed out that the organisation of Indian workers was necessary in order to promote Indian employment, that trade union activity was in fact a response to Indian exclusion rather than anti-capitalist.[[176]](#footnote-176)

Echoing this, Albert Christopher thought that the formation of Indian unions was necessary in order to enable Indians to rise within the industrial world.[[177]](#footnote-177)

In many ways, the Tobacco Workers Strike set precedents for South African Indian labour organisation. During the strike, the primary role of the trade unionism was a compromise between labour and capital. It was not essentially anti-capitalist, but sought to provide protection against the worst excesses of capital, and fight measures that excluded Indians from certain parts of the job market. Its inherent programme was therefore one of reform rather than revolution. Within this context, Indian workers were able to draw on the support of the community, including elements of its bourgeois leadership. But Indian workers were also held back from more radical action because of their clientist position within this environment. Their relationship with R. B. Chetty, on the one hand an educational philanthropist, on the other an exploitative factory owner, was a classic example of this. I will go on to argue that it was the organisational capacities of Indian Communist Party members, their ability to draw on community-based support, and their pursuit of material reforms which made them influential in the trade union movement in Durban in this period, rather than their organising on an anti-capitalist agenda as part of a CPSA platform.

The Tobacco Workers strike was a part of the wider tendency for Indian workers to organise in unions in this period, and the experience of Ponnen and Naidoo demonstrate that there was a continued culture of resistance by Indians in the workplace. Although both of them had been involved in trade union activity before, their first engagement in a full strike took place in November 1935, after they had joined the CPSA. This was at the Durban Clothing Co. where an Indian worker was caught stealing trouser material, which he had hidden under his clothes after a visit to the toilet. At this point, the employer punched the worker and told him not to return to the factory.[[178]](#footnote-178) On coming to work the next day, non-white workers discovered that the factory owner had drilled holes in their toilet doors, so that they could be spied on whenever one of them went for a break.

Every time the non-white male workers went to the toilet, the employer would follow them and peep through the holes, by lunchtime the whole procedure became most humiliating and there was resentment and protest by all the workers including the white women.[[179]](#footnote-179)

That evening Ponnen and Naidoo organised a meeting of all the non-European workers in the factory who then voted to go on strike. After further advice from the radical trade union organiser, A.T. Wanless, a CPSA executive meeting decided to go ahead with strike action until the holes in the toilet doors were blocked up. All the workers, including the white women, were unanimous in their support for strike action. However, when Ponnen and Naidoo got in touch with the Industrial Council, it ruled that the strike was illegal. Although the council put pressure on the factory manager to block up the holes, Naidoo and Ponnen were victimised as the organisers and were summonsed to appear in court.[[180]](#footnote-180) A Defence Council was set up to pay their costs, as they did not receive official union support.

Although Ponnen and H. A. Naidoo were Indian members of the CPSA, there was no attempt to widen the strike’s political platform. There was one important exception to this, however, which reflected the wider political trends affecting the party discussed earlier. By December 1935, Nazi Grey Shirts were organising in South Africa, and the League Against Fascism and War distributed leaflets to factory workers calling on them to elect delegates to attend a national conference against fascism in Johannesburg.[[181]](#footnote-181) At the Durban Clothing Factory, Ponnen and Naidoo were elected as delegates. The conference clearly made a big impression on them, especially its message that ‘Workers must be strongly organised into trade unions to keep fascism at bay’. According to Ponnen they ‘came back with a lot of literature pamphlets and leaflets against fascism and on trade union organisation’.[[182]](#footnote-182)

In this period anti fascism was the central aspect of the party’s political agenda and trade union organisation became an integral part of an agenda of a ‘bill of rights’. The anti­fascist struggle was increasingly tied to political demands for rights and citizenship in South Africa, including rights in the workplace, and this was to become more pronounced in the war years.

Naidoo and Ponnen both lost their jobs at the Durban Clothing Factory. Both of them found it difficult to secure another job and suspected that they had been blacklisted. Ponnen eventually found work in the Dunlop Rubber Company, the site of another famous strike by Indian workers in 1942. Before discussing that particular strike, it is necessary to discuss events at the Falkirk Iron factory in 1937.

The 1937 Falkirk Strike

The Falkirk Iron Works strike of 1937 where Indian workers and CPSA activists, H. A. Naidoo and Ponnen among them, were involved in a dispute with management for over three months, demonstrates some of the continuities of the trends in trade union organisation discussed above. Initially, all the workers at the factory, white, Indian and African, had gone on strike over wages. However, white workers came to a separate agreement with management and the majority of black unskilled workers understandably felt aggrieved as they were sidelined and did not receive a pay rise. According to George Ponnen, a group of workers from the factory came to see him at this point and asked for help with forming their own union as they felt that their interests were not being represented by the AEU.[[183]](#footnote-183) Management refused to recognise it. The workers reiterated that they had only formed a separate union because of continued wage discrimination and victimisation over a range of issues, including access to toilets. The workers went on strike but returned to work fairly quickly when management agreed to meet with them to discuss their demands. However, little was achieved and the company decided to a adopt a ‘hard­line’ approach as a way of dealing with the issue quickly. Shortly after 11 May, Naidoo was dismissed and 26 other workers, including the union chair P. M. Harry, were put on short time. In response the workers decided to work to rule. The management asked them all to leave the factory and the next day implemented a lockout and closed the workplace. When workers failed to show up the following day, the company declared that this constituted a strike and dismissed all of them.[[184]](#footnote-184) At this point, according to George Ponnen, the strike organisers approached the Natal Indian Congress for support. ‘We said, look, you are supposed to represent the Indian workers.. .we were able to convince them it was their duty to support the workers’.[[185]](#footnote-185) As already described, and for good material considerations, there were precedents for involving the community in strikes affecting Indian workers, especially as this was that this was one way of raising the financial support needed to keep it going.

Given the failure of white workers and the official union movement to support the strike, calling on community resources seemed to be the most obvious short-term solution. Involving the NIC directly, however, was to go one step further and had certain important political consequences. One was that the strike now became characterised as ‘Indian’. The NIC was not content to sit on the sidelines and just arrange financial support, and A. I. Kajee the ‘moderate’ NIC leader,[[186]](#footnote-186) became heavily involved in the negotiations. If the NIC was going to help financially and help organise the community as a whole, he was determined it should receive the political kudos. Kajee’s first act was to ask the Indian Agent General to South Africa to participate.[[187]](#footnote-187) NIC rhetoric talked of defending ‘Indian honour’ and demanded the amelioration of the conditions of the families of the workers involved in the dispute. The Indian press began referring to the strike as an ‘Indian dispute’, further marginalising the one hundred African workers who were involved.

The NIC now exacerbated this division by making the dispute specifically Indian in character, and by getting the Agent General to act specifically on behalf of Indian workers. On the 28 May the Secretary to the Agent General held talks with management on behalf of the Indian workers in the dispute.[[188]](#footnote-188) Shortly afterwards the South African Indian Congress also conferred with management and tided unsuccessfully to persuade the workers to return to work. When the Industrial Council ruled that the Falkirk factory had acted within its rights in dismissing its employees, it was Kajee and the secretary to the Agent general who gave the workers the news. [[189]](#footnote-189) According to the Industrial Council, Kajee had attended the meeting as ‘an official delegate of Congress’ to ‘support’ Indian workers whilst A. C. Wanless represented the union. But it was Kajee who ended up making a damning statement about the Industrial Council and its position on the dispute.[[190]](#footnote-190) He also attacked the AEU for not organising all of the workers at the factory. It had offered to take on NISUW as a subsidiary union but without the African members for fear of upsetting its own white membership. This was seen as too little too late and the offer was rejected.

Thus the NIC became deeply involved in the dispute, giving the strikers material and moral assistance. They also organised a mass meeting which was attended by around 1200 people, and received considerable press coverage. The NIC was to continue in its role as the representatives of the Indian workers, as part of the Indian community; this emphasised the Indian character of the dispute: ‘the attack on these men is because they are Indians, because they are without political power.’[[191]](#footnote-191) With this, the strike became subsumed under the broad political programme of the NIC. Kajee stated that ‘We are Indians first and foremost’.[[192]](#footnote-192) But Indian CP members were also involved in negotiations, both as members of the strike committee and as members of Congress. Yusuf Dadoo, who was to become a prominent Indian member of the CPSA in the 1940s was part of a delegation which included S. Nana, Moola, and Ahmed Kathrada, who met with the Minister of Labour, in another aborted attempt to resolve the dispute. CPSA members who were involved in the strike did not differentiate themselves sufficiently from the NIC, and were in fact using popular front rather than united front tactics. They were subsumed by the nationalist organisation.

The dispute at the Falkirk foundry has been characterised in several ways. White labour and the official trade union movement of the time, held patemalistically that the workers did not really understand what they were doing, were unfamiliar with proper trade union procedure, and were in any case the hapless dupes of ‘reds’ with ulterior motives. It seems that workers did go to party members for their help in establishing a union, but Ponnen and Naidoo already had a reputation as trade union activists before they joined the CPSA. ‘After our work in organising workers at the garment factory before we joined the party, we became well known as organisers and people would often come to us for advice if there was a dispute in their workplace.’71 [[193]](#footnote-193) They were more probably approached because of their union experience than their party membership. This is supported by the fact that those involved in the strike were rather disingenuous about their CP connections, as articles in Indian Opinion at the time show. Adopting a rather authoritarian tone, on 25 June the newspaper reported that the ‘dispute between Management and their Indian employees

(sic) remains unsettled...’ It repeated allegations that management believed that workers had been led by communist influences, and warned Indian workers against following the example of white workers who used the strike weapon, because they did not have the same political muscle and lacked the support of white workers.

The paper also quoted a letter to the Natal Advertiser from P. M. Hany, by now a party member. It began ‘We workers of the Falkirk Iron Company do not know what Communism means. We are entirely unorganised. We were not accepted as members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union.’[[194]](#footnote-194) After setting out the specific grievances of the non­European workers, Harry claimed that ‘If as a result of this dispute we are admitted as members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union we shall be fully satisfied, and our union will have served its purpose and will immediately be disbanded...(it) has been unfair to us (that) by raising the bogey of Communism...(they are) trying to alienate public sympathy from our cause.’[[195]](#footnote-195)

Hany’s attempt to distance the strikers from the Communist Party is perhaps not surprising, given the climate of the times. But to some extent it was given credence because all the demands of the workers made through the strike committee were in the terms of an industrial dispute, i.e. about wage discrimination, victimisation and the right to organise in a union. I have found no evidence that members of the CPSA who were also on the strike committee tried at any time to broaden the strike by adopting a wider political agenda. In line with earlier Indian trade union activity, Indian CPSA members were following a tradition of reformist Indian worker militancy, which drew on the resources and organisational experiences of the Indian community, rather than inaugurating a period of radical anti-capitalism, although their programme fed into some aspects of the CPSA agenda of the time.

The second important point to consider is the role of the NIC. A careful reading of events suggests that NIC spokesmen did in fact voice workers’ demands. Kajee, in particular, took pains to refute Industrial Council findings which suggested that management had not implemented a lockout and that workers involved in the dispute had intimidated other strikers. His attack on the AEU for not organising all the workers at the factory in the first place was, however, rather ironic, as Kajee, a prominent businessman, was bitterly opposed to the unionisation of his own workers.[[196]](#footnote-196) In addition to this, according to Ponnen, both he and Naidoo were on the strike committee with members of the NIC, and they worked together.[[197]](#footnote-197) Again, as with earlier Indian workers’ organisations, different sections of the community became involved in these struggles because differential discrimination made ‘Indianness’ an important category of identification. CP members organised around wresting concessions from capital rather than confronting it head on, and by allowing African workers in the dispute to be marginalised, helped accentuate the ‘Indianness’ of the strike. In the process they fractured the formation of a non-racial class identity. Indian CP members operated in the same way that radical Indian workers had done before.

In addition to this, the strike took place at a time when the Comintern, at its seventh congress in 1935, had once more turned to the politics of the popular front [[198]](#footnote-198) and was urging all communist parties to make alliances with bourgeois organisations; and as we have seen, anti-fascism, as a prerequisite of the struggle for democratic rights, provided the wider political agenda. These events suggest that there was no neat division between a ‘radical’ union politics and the bourgeois alliances of the 1940s. Indian CPSA members organised with bourgeois Indian organisations in a variety of contexts, including in the trade unions, well into the 1940s, as we will see. These tactics were also echoed in the relationship between the ANC and the unions in the 1950s.

The 1942 Dunlop Strike

In the early 1940s, strike action was still widespread in the Transvaal and Natal. In Durban there had been some strikes where joint action between African and Indian workers had secured some benefits for workers.[[199]](#footnote-199) In order to discourage this tendency, both the government and industry sought ways of curbing the power of radical unions in this period. In December 1942, the government implemented War Measure 145, which outlawed strikes by African workers, who would be liable for a £500 fine or three years imprisonment if they took strike action.[[200]](#footnote-200) Employers, for their part, endeavoured to co-ordinate between industrial sectors and formed the Natal Employers’ Association, which sought to co­ordinate employers and management in relation to trade unions. They also tried to suppress strikes more effectively and direct the flow of African labour more efficiently.[[201]](#footnote-201) One way in which they attempted to undermine radical union activity was to set up company unions as an alternative to the militant non-racial unions that were beginning to emerge in this period.

The attempt of management to do this at the Dunlop Rubber Plant formed the backdrop to the strike that broke out there in December 1942. From 1938, the non-racial

Natal Rubber Workers Industrial Union (NRWIU) had represented 450 ‘European, Asiatic and Native’ workers at the factory and had succeeded in winning them improved conditions and wages.[[202]](#footnote-202) By 1942, they boasted 625 members, the majority of them Indians and Africans. However, earlier in the year management at the factory had started on a policy of replacing Indian labour with African because it was cheaper. From March to December 1942, the number of Indian workers at the factory went down from 282 to 149, despite the fact that an industrial arbitration body had already ruled that 30 per cent of Dunlop’s employees were to be Indian, and further 40 per cent African. Dunlop tried to argue that the company was re-employing white workers who had left to join the army because it had promised it would take them back at the appropriate time. But an investigation by the Natal Indian Congress revealed that the white workers who were being hired at the factory were in fact new recruits, and that in any case the majority of the new employees were Africans.[[203]](#footnote-203)

At the same time, Dunlop set up a company union and through various means, including veiled threats that only ‘loyal employees’ would be kept on by the company, managed to get a significant number of the white workers, as well as a few Africans, to join. Up to that point, they had been members of NRWIU. In addition, in December, thirteen ‘militant Indian workers’, all of whom had been with the company for a long period were also dismissed. When management refused the request of the NRWIU to re­instate the men, the union called a strike. Neither white workers nor non-unionised Africans supported the strike. The strikers were quickly brought to court but once again Indians and Africans received differential treatment, as they had a different legal status. The Strike Committee elected at Dunlop reads like a Who’s Who of the CPSA Indian membership, with George Ponnen, H. A. Naidoo, M. D. Naidu and R. D. Naidoo all amongst its members. Pauline Podbury, the only woman on the picket line, and a member of the committee and the CPSA, who was soon to marry H. A. Naidoo, was arrested and charged with incitement to violence. R. D. Naidoo was a South Indian Christian who, like Ponnen, had had his education interrupted and spent his teenage year's selling bread from house to house. He had become politicised by reading Sidney and Beatrice Webb’s History of the British Trade Unions and became active in South African trade unions from the early 1930s. R. D. Naidoo joined the party through the Liberal Study Group.[[204]](#footnote-204). Along with members of the NIC, the strike committee at Dunlop’s was involved in collecting money and food and articulating the political demands of the strike. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union, however, neither the CPSA, nor the NIC wanted to disrupt the war effort, and this moderated their attitude towards the Dunlop strike. Kajee observed: T wish there was no war and this powerful octopus of Dunlops might have been made to feel the weapon of boycott of its goods both here and in India.’[[205]](#footnote-205)

A mass meeting was called outside Durban City Hall on 17 January 1943 and over 4000 people attended to show support for the strikers and protest against the introduction of company unions. The meeting was chaired by Alec Wanless, who declared, significantly, that the attempt to impose company unionism was a ‘manifestation of fascism and a direct threat against the war effort’.[[206]](#footnote-206) Continuing in the same vein, R. D. Naidoo stated that it was ‘contrary to the aims of the United Nations (who were) fighting for freedom of association’.[[207]](#footnote-207) The NIC also sent a message of support and voiced fears about a disruption of the war effort,[[208]](#footnote-208) but once again overtly ‘Indianised’ the dispute. It stated that it supported the strikers but would have liked to mediate on the workers behalf before strike action was taken. NIC members had approached the Indian High Commissioner to pursue the matter with the Minister of Labour, as the matter had now ‘passed beyond the borders of trade union activity and had assumed an Indian national aspect’ ,[[209]](#footnote-209)

In January 1943, the strike was lost. The Indian and African employees out on strike were dismissed by the Dunlop management. African strikers were accused of violence towards ‘scab’ labour. In the main, African workers replaced the strikers, over 580 of whom were especially brought in by truck from Pondoland and trained by the white

workforce.[[210]](#footnote-210) This ‘selective use of a reserve army of labour’ helped cause considerable distrust and ill-feeling amongst Indians and Africans, but this was not something new, merely old resentments and competition that were heightened and brought to the fore. These animosities were accentuated in this period as, although increasing industrialisation and the growth of the service sector provided more job opportunities, Africans felt that Indians blocked their chances.[[211]](#footnote-211) No Indians worked at Dunlop for a long time after the strike. After another seminal strike in Indian labour history, that of the Indian laundry workers in Durban in 1945, Indian labour was once again replaced by African, and Indians were never employed again.

In the 1930s, the spectre of fascism dictated the political strategies and policies of left organisations around the world. The international opposition to fascism and the pursuit of democratic rights articulated with the developing programme of the CPSA in the context of South African politics. The specific instances of trade union organisation discussed in this chapter demonstrate that Indian workers became a part of this agenda, and that trade union reforms were seen as part of a wider struggle for rights, citizenship, and anti-fascism. This organisational work was facilitated by the entry into the party of a number of Indian militant trade unionists who continued the tradition of Indian workers struggles, struggles that had a history of drawing on community support, both in South Africa and abroad. The ethos of self-help that fostered notions of community was particularly influential in education, where many Indians were politicised within a liberal tradition that encouraged ideas of equality and citizenship. Alliances with the NIC during these strikes took place within the context of changing Comintern policy and its anti-fascist platform, but were facilitated by wider notions of ‘community’, and by a convergence in the interests of NIC and CPSA leaders. The involvement of the NIC, however, intensified perceptions of the strikes as specifically ‘Indian’ and marginalised African workers in trade union disputes. The differential treatment afforded African workers by the state also encouraged the experience of class through the vector of nationality, promoting a sense of their being specifically ‘Indian’, African, or white workers’. However, the relationship between Indian

CPSA members and Indian nationalist organisations was complex, dynamic, and permeable. In the next chapter, I will examine the CPSA’s involvement with Indian broad­front organisations in greater detail, in relation to Gandhi and the Indian independence movement, and around issues of class. I will highlight some of the differences that emerged between Indians in the Communist Party and Indian nationalist organisations, with contested visions of Indianness, community, and political action. I will also discuss the continuities in the political programme of the CP, which contradict the idea of a distinct rupture between the radical politics of the 1930s and 40s, and the supposed accommodation with nationalist organisations in the 1950s.

Chapter Seven

‘Space to be Indian’: protecting ‘national honour’ in the 1940s

In Chapter Six, I examined the background to the continuing construction of ‘Indianness’ in South Africa, which, with other factors, militated against the development of an inter-racial class-consciousness. In this chapter, I will examine how struggles over urban space between Indians, Africans and whites in the 1940s exacerbated these divisions, but also accentuated differences amongst Indians themselves. In this period, the CPSA was increasingly drawn into broad front activities, which mobilised people around issues of democratic rights and citizenship, in a continuing agenda of a struggle against fascism. Indian communists were particularly active in these fields. They were also involved in radicalising the NIC, but, ironically, once in control of Congress, they organised around issues that primarily affected merchants’ interests, especially around the effects of the segregation of urban space.[[212]](#footnote-212) In many ways, the straggles over who controlled Congress illustrated the divisions within the community, but political action was mounted predominantly to protect trading and property rights, rather than primarily addressing the critical housing shortage and lack of amenities that affected most Indian workers. The failure to address these issues helped exacerbate the rapture that was developing in the community between workers and those who sought to be their political leaders.

Indian CP members such as Yusuf Dadoo were heavily influenced by the politics of the Indian nationalist movement which was gathering momentum in the 1940s. Dadoo was in constant contact with leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru, and formulated a politics that combined national and class dimensions, in a way that resonated with the agenda of the CPSA. In this period, political struggles were acted out against a backdrop of accelerating segregationist legislation, racial zoning, and attempts at the increasing exclusion of Indians from the political process. In the 1940s, the continuing threat to the status and location of Indians created an ‘endemic sense of anxiety and instability’ in their social life, causing many of them to crave places where they could ‘stay put’, where locality could be produced as a property of being, which facilitated setting down roots and the reproduction of communal ties. These straggles over social space helped reinforce a sense of Indianness, but the notion of what a South African Indian was varied considerably between different sections of the community. The growth of segregationist practices helped define the boundaries of identification between communities, but also gave rise to oppositional political practices.

Locating the ‘Coolie’ in ‘Other Spaces’: early attempts at segregation in South Africa

Segregation ‘arose out of the modernising dynamics of a newly industrialising society’. A complex of ideological beliefs and legislative practices that attempted to mediate relations between whites, Coloureds, Africans and Indians through an extreme form of racial discrimination, it set out to ‘legitimise social difference and economic activity in every aspect of life’.[[213]](#footnote-213) Older ‘Boer’ practices and British colonial racial attitudes, had, by the 1910s and 1920s, been woven together with liberal notions of cultural relativism derived from anthropology, in part, as a defence against ‘the forces unleashed by industrialisation’. Above all, segregation represented white anxieties about racial degeneration in the context of modernity, capitalist growth and urbanisation. These anxieties became particularly acute in the environment of the ‘urban melting pot’, which forced people to live ‘cheek by jowl’, and seemingly threatened to dissolve the differences that helped people define themselves in relation to ‘others’.

Early segregationist measures were directed at Indians settling in Durban, and these were justified as public health measures against the ‘Asiatic Menace’.[[214]](#footnote-214) From the 1870s onwards, the presence of Indians in the city helped shape its race relations, politics and public administration. Their impact was as much psychological as it was economic. The social and political landscape was drawn around a fear of crime, disease and concern over public health issues. In the late nineteenth century, Durban’s city rulers were more preoccupied with Indians than Africans, as the number of commercial and propertied ‘Arab’[[215]](#footnote-215) merchants increased. Indians were perceived as a threat, and an active menace to white commercial interests, ‘competing for space, place, trade and political influence with the imperial authority’.[[216]](#footnote-216) At the same time, they also posed a legal and political conundrum, claiming, as they did, political and civil rights as British subjects. Native Law did not apply to them and, as they acquired property, they became eligible for the franchise under Natal law. Thus they came to occupy a contradictory position within social and production relations. On the one hand, they made a significant contribution to the early development of the colony, and were ‘economically intertwined’ with their white counterparts. On the other hand, they increasingly came into competition with white South Africans. Indian merchants were scapegoated at local government and popular levels due to the economic and political frustrations of sections of the white community.

Until 1875, the Durban municipality tried to solve the problem by suggesting separate Indian and African residential locations, or ‘kaffir’ and ‘coolie’ villages ‘remote from each other...(where) coloured constables would probably have to be appointed specially to look after these villages’.[[217]](#footnote-217) This was one of the first attempts at group area segregation in a major South African city. For the next twenty years, there were continued efforts to implement these plans, with repeated endeavours to only sell plots of land to Indians on the urban periphery. However, the project failed, as Indians already had a foothold in Durban and wanted to remain. Even at that stage, they desired to produce neighbourhoods with communal kith and kin, shared histories, and ‘collectively traversed places and spaces’, of particular importance for displaced and detemtorialised people.[[218]](#footnote-218) How Indian workers understood the spaces that they experienced, and interacted with the spaces which they produced, given the continual threat of dislocation, helped shape their value systems and social landscapes and became a matter of acute concern in the 1940s.

The drive to put down roots meant that some Indian workers began to accept the political language of ‘voluntary’ segregation, to facilitate the creation of social space that was settled, that meant they had made the transition from ‘routes to roots’.[[219]](#footnote-219) This desire for permanent social space became a primary concern for workers.[[220]](#footnote-220)

As we have seen in Chapter Two, the Durban municipality only had limited powers in the early part of the twentieth century. It had to be cautious in its dealings with the imperial authorities, and in its treatment of ‘imperial’ citizens. The issue of public health became interconnected with the ‘problem’ of Indians in towns and the ‘sanitation question’ was used in an attempt to control the development of both the Indian commercial community and the growing number of ex-indentures ‘gathering on the margins of the city’. In 1871, a cholera epidemic was advancing from East Africa and smallpox was devastating the population of Cape Town.[[221]](#footnote-221) These epidemics fed into the question of ‘coolie habitation’ in Durban. Environmental pollution was the responsibility of local government, which perceived the issue of the ‘sanitary improvement’ and ‘public health’ of Durban not merely as police work and public services, but above all as a question of ‘coolie habitation’.[[222]](#footnote-222) ‘Coolies’ were equated with urban squalor and portrayed as a risk to public health, and building restrictions and sanitation codes (such as laws relating to the subdivision and overcrowding of social and commercial property) were used against Indians in an attempt to curtail their economic advance. A discourse of sanitation and hygiene resonated with real concerns amongst the white population. However, in reality, these fears were more apparent than real, reflecting a ‘panicked state of mind which dwelt on the substance of things feared and the vision of things unseen.’[[223]](#footnote-223) This is aptly illustrated in George Russell’s

The History of Old Durban, written at the end of the nineteenth century, in which he declares:

Idolatry, cholera and other epidemic and contagious evils were at our door. Skilled thieves, Dacoits and Indian mutineers more or less sanguinary, were certain to infect our native population.[[224]](#footnote-224)

The Vagrancy Laws were also used against Indians, but this often conflicted with their status as property owners with a right to franchise, and thus embarrassed the imperial government, which would not authorise the overt exclusion of Indians from economic and political rights in South Africa. In order to address the question of ‘who belonged’ in South Africa, some government authorities tried to make a distinction between ‘Arab merchants’ and ‘coolies’, deciding citizenship claims on grounds of economic class rather than race. Their strategy met with too much opposition, however. The majority of white South Africans sought to define all Indians as ‘coolies’, and race began to emerge as the criteria of citizenship over formal property requirements. By the time Natal acquired responsible government in July 1893, there were moves underfoot to disenfranchise Indians, step up anti-immigration laws, introduce the poll tax and deny them trading rights. These legislative measures ‘struck a crucial blow at civil rights and economic liberties vouchsafed to British subjects under the Empire...and signalled the final transference of those rights and liberties from criteria based on the possession of a stake in the political community to criteria based on racial conceptions’.[[225]](#footnote-225) In the first two decades of the twentieth century, local and central government authorities began to frame rights of -citizenship and to organise the spatial structures of communities, along with increasing the management of the social environment, but they met with limited success. Indians continued to move to the towns and were particularly keen to build permanent homes that would accommodate the extended family structures that they had transplanted to South Africa. The ownership of a permanent house was, for many, the ultimate goal, what they ‘planned, worked and saved for’.[[226]](#footnote-226) Building houses was one of the most fundamental ways that locality could be produced, neighbourhoods reproduced, and social life stabilised. Unlike the migrant, and mostly male, African population, Indians continually threatened to become a permanent presence in towns. They visibly put down roots, to the horror of white colonists.

Local and central government continued to try and solve the ‘Indian Problem’. In 1924, Indians were denied the municipal franchise in Natal, further restricting the tenuous links they had to local government power structures. In 1925, the Pact government tried to introduce an Indian Areas Reservation Bill, but it had to be dropped, due to vociferous opposition from the Indian government and Indian South Africans.[[227]](#footnote-227) With the Cape Town Agreement of 1927, a compromise was reached on the position of Indians. This tried to balance competing white interests at central and local level, along with concessions that would appease the Indian government. The agreement sought to ‘get rid’ of ‘impermanent elements’ from South Africa, whilst pledging to ‘improve the position’ of the remaining Indian population’.[[228]](#footnote-228) The government’s promise of ‘upliftment’ and the Indian community’s commitment to living according to ‘western standards’ framed much of the contentious dialogue between Indian political organisations and the South African state in the face of increasing anti-Indian legislation in the 1930s and 40s.

By the 1920s, the housing situation for Indians and Africans in South Africa was chronically bad. A ‘belt’ of shack settlements had spiung up on the margins of Durban. The people in them had no ‘electricity, piped water, or sewerage’. The Indian poor were expected to live in squalor. At the same time, there was also a shortage of better quality housing for middle-class Indians. As a result, many of them bought houses and land in ‘white areas’. This tendency became known as ‘Indian penetration’ and continued into the 1930s, when access to the private housing market in desirable residential areas of Durban became hotly contested between the Indian bourgeois, petty-bourgeoisie and white residents. This so-called ‘penetration’ of Indians into white areas was seen as a major problem for the Durban authorities, at a time when increasing numbers of white South Africans were also moving into Durban from small outlying towns, drawn by expanding industry and improving trading opportunities and service provision within the town. More and more, white South Africans wanted exclusive control of desirable areas of Durban, with African and Indian workers bussed in from surrounding areas to work in the factories and the industrial and service sectors. White South Africans wanted a built environment that reflected their social values and relationships.

By the 1940s, there was an intensification of the straggle for social space, in which issues of citizenship, property rights and segregationist measures became inexorably interlocked, and purportedly brought together an Indian ‘community’ in a political sense. The social and economic insecurity that many Indians faced in the 1940s made them identify with an Indianness that drew on the prestige of the Indian nationalist movement, and helped counter the series of dislocations that they faced in South Africa. Yet the notion of an Indian ‘community’ was a contested and fragile concept, because of very different readings of the inter-class ideologies of nation, citizenship, and the idea of democratic rights, within different sections of the community. Segregation acted on Indians in different ways, and the question of ‘rights’ also came to mean different things.

The Indian Working Class

In the 1940s, the vast majority of Indians in Durban lived in relative poverty. A survey undertaken in 1941 found that 36 per cent of Indian families were in debt and a 1944 University of Natal survey showed that 70.6 per cent of Indians were living below the poverty line compared to 5 per cent of whites, 38 per cent of coloureds and 25 per cent of Africans.[[229]](#footnote-229) 40 per cent of Indians were destitute. Unemployment figures were also high. A six-year study of the clothing industry found that 90 per cent of its Indian workers suffered from malnutrition and 60 per cent from amoebic dysentery. Average income per head was one-sixth that of whites. Contrary to the popular image of Indians as exploitative shopkeepers, the majority of Indians in South Africa were, in fact, poor members of the working class. As Indians steadily became a permanent presence in the urban environment their political straggles became centred on a desire to maintain their place within towns.

This was a time of rapidly changing work patterns for many Indians. The capitalisation of agriculture diminished the prospects for work in the rural economy, and Africans continued to replace Indian workers in agricultural production. These circumstances spurred on the movement of Indians to South African towns. In 1910, 88 per cent of the South African Indian population was engaged in rural labour. By 1945, this figure was dramatically reduced to 7 per cent.[[230]](#footnote-230) By 1949, 12,3165, Indians were living in Durban, constituting 32 per cent of the total population at that time.[[231]](#footnote-231) But whilst the population of Durban was increasing, especially after the outbreak of the Second World War, the Durban municipality had not developed an infrastructure to deal adequately with the new numbers ‘flooding’ the urban environment. Indians became prominent entrepreneurs in the informal sector that sprang up to fill the gap left by the state, in areas of petty trade, transport and housing. Here, however, they came into competition with both Africans and whites, often in geographical spaces beyond the direct control of state bodies, such as the police. In addition, the question of housing and property became a crucial issue to Indians in this period. For the economically deprived working classes, the lack of adequate social housing in town was particularly onerous. Many had no more than a shack in which

old tar drums, relics of corrugated iron, and old pieces of wood are pressed into the construction, which with its earth floor and smoke grimed walls offers more suitable accommodation for the cockroaches and other vermin who share the uneasy symbiosis. The water supply for these shacks is drawn from springs and streams which are frequently highly polluted, and commonly nothing but the most primitive methods of stercus disposal are attempted. [[232]](#footnote-232)

The process of urbanisation in Durban was heterogeneous and ad hoc. Different populations in Durban built their own housing within the poorly developed infrastructures of segregationist state planning. Capitalism may seek to create its own ‘rational geography’, but people’s own social actions often contribute towards the creation of a ‘second nature’, of built environments in informal types of spatial arrangements, often beyond direct state control.[[233]](#footnote-233) Another example of this was the ‘Shanty-town’ movement on the Witwatersrand where the housing situation for African workers became desperate by 1944. These

Shantytowns were controlled and administered by Africans themselves and became anathema to the white authorities.[[234]](#footnote-234) They became a focal point of political conflict over who had control over peri-urban spaces in the Witwatersrand and illustrate that the housing shortage, in the face of growing population movements to urban areas in the 1940s, was not confined to Durban. The Indian experience over housing in Durban was but one aspect of the multiple conflicts between the state and communities over jobs, services and urban housing which gave expression to political struggles and identities beyond those of class. As Harvey puts it, in circumstances such as these, the urban process itself became a series of active moments in the historical geography of class and ethnic struggles, of capital accumulation and political consciousness.[[235]](#footnote-235)

Urban conditions had deteriorated even further by the middle of the 1940s. Indian movement to towns grew, and severe overcrowding resulted from the lack of sufficient housing provision. At the same time, Indians were increasingly ousted from their market gardening enterprises on the margins of the city because Europeans wanted these sites, either for house building, or for the industries that were spreading along the coast.[[236]](#footnote-236) Dispossessed Indians were thus driven into the unskilled labour market, where they had to compete with Africans and poor whites for jobs.

‘I am colonial-born’

Colonial-bom South African Indians had emerged as a powerful and influential force within the community by the 1940s, and they wanted to mobilise workers in particular as part of their political constituency against repressive state policies. The offspring of indentured workers from Natal, they were members of the Indian lower-middle class who had managed to get a western education and had entered the white-collar professions. They were mostly Tamil-speaking Hindus and Christians and, to a large extent, their livelihoods depended on the colonial administration. Many also became teachers.

Colonial-born Indians began to cohere self consciously as a social group in the inter-war period when it became more difficult for this western educated elite to maintain its standard of living.26 In 1933, they formed the Colonial Bom Indian Association (later the Colonial Bom South African Indian Association) and once more started publishing their own newspaper, the African Chronicle. Their political platform consisted of agitating for the rights and privileges of citizenship for Indians, on the grounds that they were South African born. But, by the 1940s, they were being squeezed even further by they state and their fundamental fear was that their standard of living would be reduced to the growing squalor of Indian workers, which many of them felt they had only recently escaped.

In the 1930s and 40s, as the idea of a nation was taking shape in India, ‘colonial born’ activists in South Africa were creating a diaspora politics fuelled by a morality and rationality of statehood which fed into the Defiance Campaign of 1952. To protect their position as young South African Indian professionals, they challenged the compromising politics of the merchant class for more radical measures from the state that would protect Indian job security. They had been badly affected by the United Party’s ‘civilised labour’ policy in the 1920s, and now their urban residential status was also being challenged. Their straggles over urban space in the 1940s began a contest over citizenship and belonging which continued until the 1960s. Colonial-born Indians constructed their ‘Indianness’ in an ambiguous and ‘oppositional mode’, which was represented as ‘tradition’ through Gandhi’s cult of satyagraha and an anti-colonial nationalism.[[237]](#footnote-237) In the South African context, this framed their political struggle to gain rights of citizenship in the South African state. They were ‘being Indian in a South African way’.

Merchants

For Indian traders and merchants in town, the question of actual land tenure was the most pressing issue. The fact that Indians could purchase land, despite the fact that this was increasingly restricted, allowed them access to a form of capital accumulation denied to their African counterparts and, to some extent, explained their ability to compete so effectively with their entrepreneurial rivals. The use of family labour in Indian businesses

26 Swan ‘Ideology in Organised Indian Politics’, p. 198.

also gave them a competitive edge. In the early 1940s, elite Indians were flourishing and increasingly investing in property in Natal and the Transvaal. Between 1927 and 1940, the rateable value of Indian property in Durban rose from £1,441,210 to £3,448230.27 [[238]](#footnote-238) In the peripheral slum areas, where workers leased the urban land on which to erect their shacks, sometimes from Indian landlords, the rateable value increased from £1,736,910 in 1934 to £2,39400 in 1940.[[239]](#footnote-239) 70 per cent of these Indian land purchases were for investment purposes.[[240]](#footnote-240) In 1940, the government set up a commission under Justice F. N. Broome,[[241]](#footnote-241) to investigate Indian penetration into towns. In an attempt to protect their interests, Indian merchants collaborated with the commission. Durban City Council gave evidence that segregation was a ‘natural communal instinct and that penetration ran counter to this.’[[242]](#footnote-242) They brought forward an ‘expert’ witness, Professor Burrows of Natal University, who argued the case for an ‘ecological “invasion-Succession” model’, which suggested that Indian penetration arose because Indians felt a psychological need to prove their equality to whites. Local Ratepayer’s Associations also gave evidence, objecting to the ‘slaughter of goats, fowls, filth, cooking smells, noise and danger to daughters’ emanating from Indian residence in town.[[243]](#footnote-243)

The Broome Commission concluded that trading and property were to be the only two outlets for investment for middle-class Indians.[[244]](#footnote-244) As the licensing laws restricted the expansion of trade in the Transvaal, and the further Indian occupation of land was prohibited, the Durban property market became a crucial outlet for Indian middle-class capital accumulation. The Indian scramble for land accelerated as rumours spread that the government was planning a new Pegging Bill.

However, it could be said that the reality of Indian penetration was more imagined than real, configured as it was in the language of racial otherness and undesirability.[[245]](#footnote-245) By 1942, Indians made up 25 per cent of Durban’s population, but only owned 4 per cent of the city’s acreage of land. Despite this, whites feared being swamped by unhygienic and money grabbing Indians in white residential districts and this fear was fuelled by the very real competition between Durban’s racial populations in trade and in the workplace.

Meanwhile, international events were having their impact on CPSA policy and its organisation within communities.

The CPSA and the Second World War

In the 1930s, the CPSA was active in fighting the proto-fascist organisations that began to spring up in South Africa, such as the Ossewabradwag, the Defence League, and Oswald Pirow’s ‘New Order’ movement.[[246]](#footnote-246) Anti-fascism, especially for the party’s Jewish members, was a central aspect of party work, and crucial to their development of a ‘people’s front’ in South Africa. In the second half of the 1930s, the organisation attempted to bring together broad-front campaigns with trade unionists and nationalist organisations. In 1936, it passed a resolution at its annual conference calling for an anti-imperialist people’s front, which would require members to actively participate in ‘national reformist mass organisations’.[[247]](#footnote-247) In the same year, the CPSA organised a ‘Conference Against Fascism and War’ which was an attempt to draw in trade union and nationalist organisations under a ‘Minimum Programme’ of democratic rights.[[248]](#footnote-248) Despite this, when war broke out in 1939, CP members in South Africa took a little time to readjust to the international re-alignment of political forces. The Hitler-Stalin pact, announced in August 1939, was in part caused by the continued appeasement of Hitler by Britain and France, which led Stalin to believe that that he would receive little support from the axis powers if the Soviet Union were attacked.[[249]](#footnote-249) The international communist movement now described the war as an inter-imperialist conflict, and against the interests of workers. The anti-war position initially divided party members in South Africa. In Cape Town, the branch was strongly anti-war, whilst in Johannesburg, the majority of cadres were pro-war, and believed that fascism had to be fought at any cost. Although the majority of the party soon fell behind the anti-war position, many of them reluctantly, there was little hesitation on the part of Indian communists in the organisation, who were heavily influenced by the Indian nationalist movement and its anti-colonial and anti-British stance.[[250]](#footnote-250)

D. A. Seedat and Yusuf Dadoo were particularly vociferous anti-war campaigners. Seedat, a young Muslim bookkeeper who came to the party via the LSG and the NEUF, addressed several meetings denouncing the war and was imprisoned for treason.[[251]](#footnote-251) During this period, Yusuf Dadoo, who had recently joined the Communist Party, was prosecuted and imprisoned because of his ant-war activities and became one of the heroes of resistance politics. One reflection of this was a graffiti campaign that developed on the walls and streets of Durban, demanding his release.[[252]](#footnote-252) In a leaflet distributed in 1940, he touched a nerve by asking the mass of ‘non-European’ South Africans:

You are being asked to support a war for freedom, justice and democracy. Do you enjoy the fruits of freedom, justice and democracy? What you do enjoy are the pass and poll tax laws, segregation, and white labour policy. Low wages, high rents, poverty, unemployment and vicious colour bar laws.[[253]](#footnote-253)

Dadoo was locked up for his trouble, but at his trial he highlighted a point that was to become of vital significance for party policy in the years to come. He insisted that the only way that the war could be a just one for democracy and against fascism was if full democratic rights were given to all non-Europeans in South Africa, and the colonies were granted independence.[[254]](#footnote-254) This demand became central to the party programme, which was articulated through an agenda of democratic rights on an anti-fascist platform.

Dadoo was to become a particularly powerful example of a South African Indian communist who, influenced by Gandhi and the Indian nationalist movement, tried to combine this with socialist politics. Dadoo was born in Krugersdorp in the Western Rand in 1909. His father had come to South Africa from the village of Kholvad in the Gujurat. Mohamed Dadoo was a merchant, and, in 1920, when the local municipality attempted to evict the family from their premises and home, it was none other than Gandhi, all the way from India, who took up, and successfully defended, his case.44 [[255]](#footnote-255) Yusuf Dadoo’s childhood was heavily influenced by his family’s tales of life in India, which seemed to contrast sharply with his experience of being Indian in South Africa. While still at school, Dadoo went to several meetings organised by Gandhi’s former South African allies on Indian issues, and the need to support the INC in its fight for independence.[[256]](#footnote-256) He also arranged a meeting of students to hear Sarojini Naidu, the Indian nationalist leader and poet, when she toured South Africa.[[257]](#footnote-257) In 1921, because of the severe inadequacies of educational provision for Indian South African children, Dadoo’s family sent him to Aligargh in India to finish his schooling. There he was further influenced by Indian nationalist politics.[[258]](#footnote-258) However, like many other Indian South Africans, who had romantic images of an India that they had created from a distance, once there, Dadoo became somewhat disillusioned. Arriving in his village in the rainy season, he was to observe glumly, 'This place is full of mud and water. And it looks so grim and dismal. I don’t think India is the paradise I thought it to be.’[[259]](#footnote-259) [[260]](#footnote-260) He soon observed that India itself was rife with caste discrimination and glaring inequalities between rich and poor. His sentiments were to be echoed by many South African Indians who were to return ‘home’ to try and find the India they had conceived in their imaginations.

In 1929, Dadoo arrived in London to continue his studies. Within six months, he had been arrested at an anti-imperialist demonstration against British rule in India. His father dispatched him to Edinburgh in an attempt to keep him out of trouble. Whilst studying medicine there, he was joined by both G. M. Naicker and Kaisaval Goonam, who also became active in left-wing politics in South Africa. G. M. Naicker was introduced to radical politics through the Liberal Study Group.51 Among the Indian student community in Scotland, Dadoo found his imagination fired by an international politics of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. It was also there that Dadoo began to read Marxist literature,52 and his commitment to the Indian nationalist movement developed. He was also particularly influenced by Nehru’s advocacy of a union of ‘oppressed people and democratic whites’ and the anti-fascist struggles in Europe.53 Before returning home, he visited Krishna Menon in London for lengthy talks on the South African situation.[[261]](#footnote-261) Dadoo arrived back in South Africa in 1936, and his political philosophy there continued to reflect all these influences. Within this, a nationalist agenda of rights and citizenship was married to the socialist idea of class oppression. In 1938, Dadoo became one of the founders of the Non European United Front in the Transvaal, and early ini 939, he joined the CPSA. He also continued to have close, if at times contentious, relationships with South African Indian Gandhians in Congress organisations, such as P. S. Joshi and A. I. Cachalia.

A Community of Indian Communists?

As has been suggested, Dadoo’s route into the party, was very different from the working class and trade union experiences of Ponnen and H. A. Naidoo, or M. P. Naicker, another prominent CP activist who had been force to leave school prematurely. Naicker subsequently worked in factories and drove a bread van before becoming active in trade union politics. During interviews in Durban, both Kaisaval Goonam and А. К. M. Docrat suggested that there was some tension in the CP between South Indian Tamils and North Indian Gujatratis, with Tamils still mainly conversing in their mother tongue and coming from working class backgrounds, whilst the Gujuratis were generally considered better

1. New Dictionary of South African Biography, ( Pretoria, 1995), pp. 196-7. G. M. Naicker might be described as a ‘radical Gandhian Christian nationalist’. M. P. Naicker was a member of the CP.
2. Pahad A Proud History, p. 48.
3. Reddy ‘introduction’, Yusuf Dadoo, p. 51.

travelled, higher caste and class, supposedly more sophisticated, speaking mostly in English, and with far greater direct contact with India.54 [[262]](#footnote-262) This is not be entirely surprising, as it reflects prejudices transported from the Indian subcontinent, where south Indians were often considered the ‘country hick cousins’, of the nation, reflecting preconceptions of the ‘Dravidian’ south and the Aryan north, which intersected with caste prejudices about skin colour. South Indians were often darker, which was associated with lower castes.

Although all the CP’s Indian members were deeply attached to, and influenced by, events in India, north Indians seemed to have more links with, and were particularly closely connected to Gandhi and the leadership of the NIC. Dadoo was a prime example of this. As Indian CP members pursued a policy of infiltrating and taking over the NIC, they called themselves the ‘Nationalist bloc’, an ambivalent term that seemed to encompass both an acknowledgement of their alliance with, and support of, the Indian nationalist movement and their commitment to a South African ‘national community’.[[263]](#footnote-263) By the late 1930s, colonial-bom Indians hoped to challenge the conservative merchant politics of the NIC and entered into an alliance with CPSA members to do so. In 1939, this radical wing formed the Natal Indian Association. They began to organise against the segregationist measures which were being introduced by the government, and established the Anti-Segregation and Passive Resistance Councils.

Segregation was a pressing issue at the time, and was obviously causing major divisions amongst Indians. However, these were not always as clear cut as a fight between accommodationist merchants and radical political activists. In the latter half of the 1930s and early 1940s, amidst growing hysteria about Indian penetration, as well as alarm amongst Indians regarding their threatened interests, the Natal Municipal Association called for ‘voluntary Indian segregation’ as a way of resolving plans for racial zoning. The NIA and NIC were keen to accuse each other of collaborating with the authorities, but, in reality, they both seemed prepared to enter a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ in terms of which Indians would not buy residential property in white areas, but would vigorously defend their right to trade in non-Indian areas. Whites, after all, constituted the vast majority of the merchants’ customers.56 [[264]](#footnote-264) While each tried to outdo the other in calling for the protection of ‘Indian national honour’, they were nonetheless following a logic which required trading rights in all areas, but was ambivalent about residential segregation. They argued that while enforced segregation was a slur on ‘national honour’ because of its inference of racial inferiority, it was ‘natural’ for people of the same race to live together: ‘historical experiences show that the world over people of the same race find it congenial and convenient to live together and the Indians in South Africa are no exception to this rule.’[[265]](#footnote-265) Indians, they claimed, only moved into white areas because of a lack of amenities elsewhere: ‘it is our belief that if suitable residential sites and other amenities are provided for all Indians, this alleged problem would be solved.’[[266]](#footnote-266)

Though merchants wished to reach a compromise with the government which would protect their businesses, the popular perception, among South Africans of all ‘races’ at this time, was that it was a ‘sociologically accepted fact’ that people preferred to ‘live amongst their own’, and some Indian workers also saw a form of segregation as a solution to their acute lack of civic amenities. Writing in the Rand Daily Mail in June, 1939, B. L. Sigamoney, who had previously organised Indian workers through the ISL, voiced the opinions of many working-class Indians regarding voluntary segregation, stating that many of them considered it to be a solution to their problems.

Indian attitudes to segregation were complex. Merchants were not always against segregation per se; rather they wished to help shape segregationist legislation in ways that protected their interests. From a different perspective, many workers saw voluntary segregation as a solution to their material problems. On the other hand, although radicals advanced the interests of the business community in many ways, they saw opposition to *enforced* segregation as a central principle of their political platform of equality, democratic rights and citizenship, even if this opposition was often expressed in terms of ‘an affront to Indian honour’, or a ‘slur on the Mother country’.60

In 1939, Dadoo and the ‘Nationalist Bloc’ were considering a passive resistance campaign as a response to the Asiatic Land and Trading Act. For advice, Dadoo turned, not to the party, but to Gandhi to whom he wrote: ‘follow(ing) the path of Satyagraha to stop the act from passing on to the Statute Book.’61 This was followed by several telegrams sent by Dadoo and Gandhi’s son Manilal, to India. On April 30th, they wrote,

UNION GOVERNMENT INTRODUCING INTERTIM BILL TOMORROW. COMMUNITY RESOLVED. OFFER SATYAGRAHA EXPECTING YOUR BLESSING AND GUIDANCE.62

After a period of non-commital, Gandhi, advised Dadoo: ‘You have to suffer, not I; therefore let god be your guide’.63 By this time, Gandhi had begun a correspondence with Smuts, and wanted to see if he could negotiate a ‘favourable’ solution. Thus on July 19, 1939 he instructed Manilal and Dadoo to ‘postpone passive resistance till further instructions’. Dadoo was dismayed, and responded that all the preparations had been made and that supporters of the campaign would be confused. He would now have to tell his ‘Indian brethren’ that despite taking a ‘definite decision to launch the Passive Resistance struggle on August 1st...at that historic gathering of 6,000 Indians...we had to postpone that struggle at the eleventh hour on the advice of Mahatma Gandhi.’[[267]](#footnote-267) Nevertheless, Gandhi still hoped for a ‘honourable settlement’ through Smuts, and the campaign was delayed until further notice. This was not the last time that Dadoo was to follow Gandhi’s advice. After the decision to postpone the campaign, Dadoo issued a press statement:

1. Statement made by SAIC Deputation to India, March 1946, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 3.
2. Letter from Dr. Y. M. Dadoo and S. B. Mehd to Gandhiji, March 15 1939, Reddy, Yusuf Dadoo. p. 366.
3. Telegram from Dr. Dadoo and Manilal Gandhi to Gandhiji, April 22 1939, Reddy, Yusuf Dadoo, p. 366.
4. Telegram from Gandhiji to Dr. Dadoo, May 4 1939, Reddy, Yusuf Dadoo, p. 367.

Mahatma Gandhi has been our guide and mentor in all that the Passive Resistance Council has been doing in this matter, and we shall wholeheartedly await his advice; for we realise that his interest in the cause of the Indians of South Africa has not abated one whit, even though many years have elapsed since he left South Africa. *I desire however, to stress the fact that the Asiatic (Land and Trading) Act of 1939 aims at the virtual economic extinction of the Indian community of the Transvaal, and casts a slur of inferiority on the whole Indian nation.* (Original emphasis).64 [[268]](#footnote-268)

By October, 1939, Manilal Gandhi was appealing to Indians ‘in a spirit of tolerance to keep calm and abstain from giving the slightest cause or irritation to the European public’.[[269]](#footnote-269) It was not ‘right’ the time, and Indians were again asked to refrain from purchasing land or property in European areas.[[270]](#footnote-270)

A Change in Direction for the CPSA

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, it was to affect the CPSA in several ways. The CPSA had to rethink its policy towards the war. Now, the Soviet Union called on all socialists to support the war effort in order to help protect the world’s first, and to date, only, socialist state. The CPSA changed direction, declaring that the nature of the war had altered. Broad fronts of democratic forces had to be set up in order to fight fascism and defend the Soviet Union. For many people with socialist leanings, particularly left-wing white South Africans, this was a welcome move, and the Party became increasingly popular. Previously, the CPSA had occupied the ambiguous position of organising the only anti-war movement in South Africa apart from the far right that openly supported Hitler. Now, they seemed joined to a national cause, and in this new climate, they enjoyed some degree of tolerance from the government. As it was also fighting Hitler’s troops, the Soviet Union was no longer the hated and feared enemy. Stalin was transformed into a cuddly ‘Uncle Joe’. Sales of The Guardian, the party paper, soared from 1,200 in 1940 to 42,000 in 1943. Membership of the party also grew to over 1300.[[271]](#footnote-271)

But much of this expansion was amongst white South Africans, and members of the CPSA began to direct party work towards the white electorate. In 1943, Sam Kahn and Betty Radford were elected to Cape Town City Council. Party members subsequently participated on the controversial Advisory Boards[[272]](#footnote-272) and were ‘equivocal on issues of social integration’.[[273]](#footnote-273)

As a consequence of this, Indian and African members were, in the main, left to work within their own communities. This tended to emphasise the national character of their particular struggles. A considerable number of Africans were, in any case, ambivalent towards the Second World War. Many were sympathetic to the fight against fascism, and, in particular, supported Abbysinia’s struggle against Mussolini’s invasion of the country.[[274]](#footnote-274) In 1935, African and Coloured dockworkers in Durban and Cape Town refused to Toad Italian ships with chilled meat destined for Mussolini’s soldiers in East Africa.’[[275]](#footnote-275) But Japan’s entry into the war caused ambivalent feelings, as many Africans considered Japan to be a ‘coloured nation’ that might attack South Africa and liberate its black population.[[276]](#footnote-276) And the war in Europe for the defence of democracy failed to resonate in the same way as it did for other sections of South African society, given the lack of African democratic rights.

However, Indian party members responded to the new party line on the war quite quickly. By now, India itself had become heavily involved in the war. And Indian members of the CPSA continued their political dance with the NIC. At this time, communists, colonial-born Indians, and merchants alike, looked to Indian workers for their political constituency. Ideologically and practically, they had little choice. For their part, for Indian workers, the 1940s were fearful and uncertain times. As discussed in Chapter Six, by 1945, Indian workers had suffered defeat in their trade union struggles and were on the defensive, because of the possibility of their being replaced by African labour. They were retreating into a specifically Indian working-class identity, and mobilising to protect what they saw as specifically Indian jobs. White workers were also returning from the war at this time, and the labour market subsequently became even more competitive, with little room for militant trade union activity. Indians, on the whole, were uncertain of their present and fearful for their future. The lure of Indian nationalism and the attraction of imminent Indian independence played a powerful role in their consciousness, but in very contradictory ways. Pride in being Indian helped them deal with the way they were treated in South African society. However, whenever there was increased government legislation, threatening Indians with repatriation, as was frequent in this period, imaginings of India began to change quite dramatically. Echoing the reaction of the young Dadoo and his first experience of India, a memorable picture in The Leader, a Natal Indian newspaper, depicted a windswept village hut during the monsoon in India with the caption ‘Do you want to be sent home to this?’ 73 [[277]](#footnote-277)

4 A Slur on the Indian Nation’: The Pegging Act of 1943

The Trading and Occupation of Land Restriction Act of 1943 was an extension of the Transvaal Pegging Act of 1939. The act proposed to prohibit the further sale of any fixed property and to segregate Indians permanently in limited areas to prevent them from expanding from these areas in future. This was set up as yet another temporary measure and a second Broome Commission was organised in 1943 to investigate whether Indian ‘penetration’ had accelerated since 1940. The Smuts government was trying to juggle international opposition to anti-Indian legislation with white South African demands for action to be taken against Indian encroachment and economic competition. When the second Broome Commission did not conclude that Indians would soon be flooding urban areas, a third Broome Commission was set up in 1944, which was to co-operate and negotiate a settlement with the Natal Indian Congress.[[278]](#footnote-278) The result was the Pretoria Agreement of the 19th of April 1944.[[279]](#footnote-279)

It was the so-called conservative wing of the NIC that agreed to collaborate with the Smuts government at this time, representing the interests of the merchant class in the guise of providing leadership for the whole community. Their initial reaction to the Pegging Act had been to protest in the traditional political ways, calling for petitions, making statements to the government and calling on the international community to come to their aid. By compromising with the government in the third Broome Commission, they hoped to protect their commercial interests within the urban sector and to agree to some form of segregation, as long as housing and service provision met with European standards. In terms of the Pretoria Agreement, a board was established of two Indians and three Europeans under the aegis of a European legal adviser, who would allocate property under licence to Indians. Legally, this agreement recognised the right of Indians to own and occupy land anywhere in Natal except where it ‘engendered racial bickering due to juxtaposed living in residential areas’.[[280]](#footnote-280) In practice, this meant that the NIC had agreed to accept voluntary segregation as long as reasonable civic amenities were provided. This was intended not only to ensure their future commercial interests but also to protect current investments, which were threatened with confiscation.

Not only did the new Act seem to close all the opportunities for advancement that Indians had managed to carve out for themselves; it also contained an internal contradiction. While it did not recognise the right of India to intervene officially on behalf of Indian South Africans, they were being denied any right to equal citizenship precisely because they were Indians.[[281]](#footnote-281) The government of India severed relations with South Africa after the introduction of the Act and attempts at mediation through the United Nations also failed.[[282]](#footnote-282) The involvement of the Indian government, and its insistence on airing the ‘South African Indian problem’ in the international arena was to become an increasing irritant to the South African government.

Relations between different interest groups in the NIC were deeply contentious at this time. In 1943, a memorandum on Indian political activities in the Union was prepared by the High Commission in Pretoria for their Kenyan counterparts at the request of Clement Atlee. It reflected these divisions, observing that the ‘most obvious character’ of Indian political organisations in South Africa ‘was their disunity’. It also noted that ‘communism is spreading among the younger urban Indians and indeed the chairman of the Durban branch of the Communist Party is an Indian Hindu, H.A. Naidoo’.[[283]](#footnote-283)

At the SAIC conference in June 1943, there were many calls for unity amongst Indians in Natal, and the conference recorded a ‘deep sense of disappointment’ with the NIA, who were not given representation at the meeting.[[284]](#footnote-284) At the same conference, C. Ismail and A. I. Kajee called for a united front with other non-European organisations. After much discussion, the conference passed a motion limiting any joint political action to ‘specific issues’.[[285]](#footnote-285) Heated debates also centred on ‘alien ideological doctrines’, which threatened to split the Indian community. Councillor Ahmed Ismail declared: ‘Within recent times, I have noticed that there has been a tendency for certain groups to introduce into Indian organisations such as the TIC and NIC ideals where differ - are entirely alien - to the objects of Congress..! view this tendency with grave apprehension as harmful to the organisation of the Indian community.’ Radicals were told to maintain discipline when they suggested that ‘Indians are not a single class undivided in political thought.’[[286]](#footnote-286)

Radicals rejoined the NIC in 1944,[[287]](#footnote-287) not least because of the psychological importance of controlling the organisation founded by Gandhi, who was invoked in every letterhead and in many of the speeches and articles. Nevertheless, after they had stated their understanding of class, however limited, it seems even more incongruous that they were to highlight the interests of the Indian business community during the 1946-48 Passive Resistance campaign and beyond. They argued that if Indian commercial opportunities were curtailed, the prospects for Indian employment would also diminish. However, Indian employers used the same rationale of the competitive market place as their white counterparts, and were often the most exploitative landlords of working class Indians and Africans. Dadoo himself was acutely aware of the housing shortage, but saw it as an aspect of need for a political struggle for democratic rights. In an article published in The Guardian in March 1947, written as he was leaving for India with G. M. Naicker in the middle of the passive resistance campaign, he wrote:

In South Africa the situation is growing from bad to worse. The appalling and unbelievable housing shortage shows no signs of solution. Thousands of homeless people are forced to live in sacks and hessian shanties....the important task is to pursue with greater intensity.. .full democracy for all’,[[288]](#footnote-288)

It was not that Indian communists in nationalist organisations ignored the working class. Rather, like Gandhi and Polak and the £3 tax, workers’ interests were not concretely addressed, and often came lower down the agenda than property and trading rights and the ideal of citizenship. Numerous examples of this can be found in the working committees set up within the NIC after the radical take-over. In 1948, a report given by the Housing Sub­committee at the NIC conference in Durban illustrated this starkly. Tenants of the Indian merchant and political activist, E. M. Paruk, who were resident in Riverside, were given notice to vacate the shanties that they occupied on Paruk’s land. They asked the NIC to intervene on their behalf. Congress’s response was to obtain a promise from Paruk that ‘no­one would be evicted with undue harshness or severity’.[[289]](#footnote-289) The same report advocated defending Indian land investments from a government intervention which aimed at redistributing areas of Cato Manor to Africans, in an attempt to improve the squalid living conditions of African tenants, most of whom had Indian ‘shacklords’. In these circumstances, the creation of an overarching political identity was no easy task. In the next chapter I will examine how theses problems fed into the passive resistance campaign of 1946.

Chapter Eight

Being Indian the South African Way:  
finding a place in the urban landscape

In the 1940s, despite the deeply inscribed contradictions amongst Indian South Africans, workers still found some comfort in the wider politics of ‘community’ in the face of tightening state repression. Indian workers had an ambivalent relationship with merchants, not least because their relationship was defined by both patronage and exploitation. The contradictory political agenda of Indian radicals in 1946 in primarily pursuing merchant interests also complicated matters. However, a significant number of Indian workers joined the passive resistance campaign against the ‘Ghetto Act’. Through trade unions, they joined the political resistance organised by the Anti Segregationist Council, which was set up in 1944, in opposition to the accommodationist politics of the merchant elite.[[290]](#footnote-290) In the years between 1944 and 1946, it seemed that the category of class was proving an insufficient focus for Indian political organisation. A radical national consciousness was apparently in the ascendant. In 1945, a CP-SACB coalition took over the leadership of the NIC.

On the 21 October, 7,000 Indians attended an ‘historic’ NIC meeting at Curries Fountain in Durban, and elected all 46 nominees of the Anti Segregation Council to the NIC executive, including 13 CPSA members.[[291]](#footnote-291) As the incoming president, G. M. Naicker set out the aims of the new leadership:

‘the Anti-Segregation Council candidates had been elected because the Kajee-Pather leadership had become outdated - it had left the Indian people to drift to disaster.’ He continued ‘We offer you our earnest desire to serve the community. We have no ambition for power. We decided to fight because we felt that your voice was not being heard. We repudiate the charge that we want to pit the poor against the rich. We hold no ill-will against anybody. "We must mobilise all our strength to seek a better life... We are, after all, sons of South Africa; and all we want is to live as free citizens in a free world." Continuing, Dr. Naicker said that this was a great day for the members and officials of the Anti-Segregation Council. "There comes a time in the life of the people when the opinion of the common people jumps ahead of those few who are in control and the man-in-the-street becomes wiser than the politician." This was such a time in the life of the Indian community, he said. "We will not dilly-dally with our demands. We will be bold, sensible and decisive. We will never compromise on our principles and we make it clear to the authorities that we will not go down on bended knees for crumbs. We want to live as men." The policy of the new leadership could not possibly be broader, for it was based on national lines, Dr. Naicker said. The new leaders would fight against any measure directed against the Indian people. The immediate programme of tlie Congress would be: the demand for the unconditional repeal of the Pegging Act; the vetoing of the Natal Housing Ordinance; no segregation and no residential zoning; the removal of the provincial barriers, which were a stigma on the Indian people; adult suffrage for the Indian people; and free education for Indian children up to the Junior Certificate.[[292]](#footnote-292)

This meeting at Curries Fountain forms an integral part of the popular imagination of the Indian radicals that I interviewed. Like the 1913 Passive Resistance campaign, ‘everyone’ was at there, and the routing of ‘conservative’ leaders such as P.R. Pather and A.I. Kajee[[293]](#footnote-293) was seen as a seminal moment in radical Indian politics. Nevertheless, Naicker’s speech reinforces the desire to organise around specifically Indian issues. Membership of the NIC rose from 3000 to 22,000,[[294]](#footnote-294) and campaign members vowed to make Indians in India more aware of the situation of Indians in South Africa; there was a general celebration of being Indian, which fuelled defiance towards discriminatory state policies in South Africa.

The Politics of Space: passive resistance 1946-48

Opposition to the Pretoria Agreement of 1944, which the government soon reneged on, came both from radical Indians and whites. Within the Indian political community, the radicalised NIC began a new campaign of passive resistance which was co-ordinated by the Anti-Segregation Council.[[295]](#footnote-295) In February 1946, the SAIC held a conference in Cape Town. The concerns expressed at this meeting, and the terms in which they were framed, reveal, despite the radical take-over of the NIC, an agenda that was, at heart, nationalist.

The SAIC in conference assembled is gravely perturbed at tire proposals announced by the Prime Minister to deal with land tenure in the Transvaal and Natal provinces...which proposes seriously to limit the land rights and the free economic development of the Indian community in the Transvaal and Natal.[[296]](#footnote-296)

Their discourse was one of human rights, evoking the principles of the Atlantic Charter. The conference stressed the need for settlement through negotiation, whilst complaining again that the new measures were ‘an insult to national honour and the dignity of the Indian nation’, delegates were nominated to travel to India, England and America. The conference also called on its Executive, through the ‘action of its constituent bodies... immediately to prepare the Indian people of South Africa for a concerted and prolonged resistance’. [[297]](#footnote-297)

The proceedings of this conference illustrate the complex articulation of the different interests involved in the SAIC and NIC at this time. It still spoke of Indian honour, utilised petitions as a political tactic, and continued to highlight merchant interests. Passive resistance was reinscribed as a means to win democratic rights and citizenship. Despite its ‘radical’ take over in 1946, the dialogue of the NIC was still directed to radical national democratic rights, rather than a specific programme in the interests of the working class. And this was made possible because notions of equality and rights embody a ‘plurality of meanings’, which leave room for them to be translated, appropriated and differentially understood.

By this time, a campaign of passive resistance had support from both Gandhi and Nehru, who sent a message declaring that the time had come when ‘this theory and practice of racial arrogance and discrimination’ had to be challenged.’[[298]](#footnote-298) As India approached independence, its leaders sought to use the case of South African Indians in order to exercise their political muscle, particularly at the United Nations, much to the embarrassment of the British government.[[299]](#footnote-299)

The British government increasingly took the view that ‘the Indian problem’ was an internal matter for the South African government, and one that Smuts was genuinely trying to resolve since his return to power in 1939. [[300]](#footnote-300) They agreed with Smuts’ position, stated at length at the United Nations conference held in 1946, that Indian South Africans enjoyed a far higher standard of living than their counterparts in India, and were well rid of the ‘deep- seated’ caste prejudices that still prevailed there. Evidence was produced that Natal was, in fact, an ‘economic paradise’[[301]](#footnote-301) for Indians, and Smuts complained of UN interference in the domestic affairs of a member state.[[302]](#footnote-302) The British delegation also concluded that the Cape Town Agreement of 1927, which was continually invoked by the government of India and the NIC, was not binding, as it had not been registered with the League of Nations, and was merely a ‘gentleman’s agreement’.[[303]](#footnote-303) The consensus expressed in several British documents prior to, and during, the conference, was that the imperial government did not really want the ‘Indian problem’ discussed at the UN, and that ‘a number of Indians of moderate views’ felt the same way. The NIC’s many lengthy pleas and telegrams to ‘Socialist Britain’, some fi'om Dadoo to Attlee, were clearly an embarrassment that the British hoped would ‘go away’ if quietly ignored.[[304]](#footnote-304)

On behalf of the Indian government, Mrs. V. Pandit stated that the treatment of Indians in South Africa was an affront to ‘national pride, and the right of an individual to own land’, as well as a matter of racial discrimination, which deprived Indians of their ‘human rights’ and ‘fundamental freedoms’.[[305]](#footnote-305) The discussion of the Indian question at the

United Nations in 1946 did little to change the position of Indians in South Africa, but the ‘problem’ now received considerable international publicity. It was a profound embarrassment to the British government, who were also alarmed at the letters of support for Indian South Africans that were flooding in from communist and left-wing organisations.[[306]](#footnote-306) The issue hardened anti-Indian feeling on the part of the South African government, and further alienated its relations with India; in contradiction to the government’s previous position on the status of Indians, it was now felt that Indian South Africans were South African citizens. Therefore they should desist from appealing to external political bodies.

Passive resistance began in earnest in June 1946, when six Indian women took a train to Durban from the Transvaal without the permits required for border crossings. In a move designed to deliberately flout the Ghetto Act, a group of men and women then squatted a piece of municipal land in Durban, illegally pitching their tents to form a resistance camp. Everyone who came to the camp in support of the campaign faced arrest under the Riotous Assembly Act,[[307]](#footnote-307) and the tactical decision was made that as protesters got arrested, new volunteers would take their place. A ‘hartal’ was also called and many Indian shops and businesses were closed in Durban.[[308]](#footnote-308) Children were kept away from school. Although these actions drew on Gandhi’s example of passive resistance in South Africa in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and were also inspired by the growing importance of passive resistance as a weapon against the British in India, the campaign of 1946-48 was nevertheless also an act of political and cultural translation. Gandhi’s calls for ‘truth’ and conscience’ were replaced with ideals of ‘equality’ and ‘democracy’, giving voice to the programme of the CPSA and its contemporary platform of the popular front.[[309]](#footnote-309) Whilst Gandhi’s vision emphasised the attainment of spiritual truth through suffering, in 1946, passive resistance became a weapon in pursuit of democratic rights and citizenship. The campaign was able to draw on the networks of Indian political organisations and self-

help groups that had developed in South Africa in the past forty years, as well as its tradition of political journalism.

Unlike satyagraha in 1913, the campaign set out to mobilise workers from the start, and here, Indian members of the CP could draw on their experience and influence in trade unions.[[310]](#footnote-310) Despite calls for joint action between Indian, African, and Coloured congresses, many sections of the Indian community still felt that satyagraha was a ‘civilised weapon’, with its strict adherence to non-violence, one that Indians could ‘utilise because of their ancient heritage and culture’, but something that Africans were, as yet, not capable of.[[311]](#footnote-311) Despite marginal support from Africans and whites, the 1946-48 campaign was very much an Indian affair, mainly involving young people in the community. The radical leaders of the NIC, and most resisters, were in their twenties.[[312]](#footnote-312)

In much the same way that Gandhi had come to symbolise Indianness, satyagraha also represented something specifically Indian, which, in seeming contradiction, nevertheless had universal aspects as well. Upholding Indian honour could be combined with fighting for universal suffrage. But in 1946, although this Indianness was still rooted in an ancient Indian cultural tradition, it was transformed from its anti-modernist Gandhian antecedent into the concept of the Indian South African citizen of the modem nation-state. In the transformation, it fed into a diasporic, trans-national Indian political identity.[[313]](#footnote-313)

In order to rally support for passive resistance, Yusuf Dadoo made a personal visit to Kenya, and East African Indians contributed to campaign funds. Twenty-one South African trade unions with 25,000 Indian members also pledged support. The government of India severed relations with South Africa and a South African Indian delegation went to

America to petition the United Nations, where they produced propaganda outlining the conditions of Indian South Africans [[314]](#footnote-314)

When the campaign first began in June 1946, it was very much an affair of the whole community, and numerous extracts from Indian papers of the time quoted Indian South Africans as saying that the bill affected the ‘honour of the whole community’[[315]](#footnote-315). As noted above, factory workers, housewives, and students, as well as members of the radical political community offered themselves up for arrest.[[316]](#footnote-316) Kay Moonasamy, later to become an Indian member of the Communist Party gave up his job in a factory to join the passive resistance campaign after having been active in union politics from the age of 16.[[317]](#footnote-317) Yusuf Dadoo, G. M. Naicker and Dr. Kaisaval Goonam who was a member of the Indian Women’s Association, were amongst those thrown into jail. All in all, around two thousand people were arrested over a two-year period, around three hundred of them women. In a leaflet issued by the CP, Dadoo outlined the main points of the campaign, invoking both India, Gandhi, and the 1913 campaign:

It must not be forgotten that the Indian people are sons and daughters of a country with a proud and cultural heritage (sic). Their ancient motherland is the bearer of a tradition of civilisation as old as any in the world....Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the first Passive Resistance struggle was launched in South Africa in 1906. It lasted for eight years and ended in a victory. The Indian people cherish the memory of the heroes and martyrs, the many noble deeds and sacrifice and bravery, of that struggle. Whilst serving imprisonment, a young girl of only 16 contracted a fatal fever. She died within a few days of her release. Her name was Valliama R. Munuswami Mudliar.[[318]](#footnote-318)

Dadoo chose to recall the young girl who was transformed into a martyr and a symbol of passive resistance by Gandhi. Addressing the specifics of the Ghetto Act, Dadoo continued:

This Act condemns the Indian community to economic and social ruin. It takes away their fundamental and elementary right of land ownership and occupation... .it strikes at the heart of Indian commercial and economic life.[[319]](#footnote-319)

Dadoo added that as a consequence of this, all sections of the Indian community would be affected. However, beyond a bland reference to ‘Food, jobs and homes for all’, there is nothing of consequence in the pamphlet that specifically addresses issues affecting the Indian poor. Equal rights and citizenship are invoked as the means to achieve ‘a great and proud future for our beloved country’, and, although the pamphlet ends by calling for the end to all discrimination, it articulates its political demands by invoking an Indian identity, South African belonging, and a nationalist programme of democratic rights. Throughout the campaign, Gandhi and Nehru were Dadoo’s mentors. In 1947, Dadoo and G. M. Naicker visited India and discussed the campaign with both of them,[[320]](#footnote-320) and they continually sought their advice during its two-year duration. It was generally recognised that Dadoo and Gandhi had a ‘tremendous rapport’.[[321]](#footnote-321)

In April 1947, Nehru began to write to Smuts about the ‘Indian South African question’. Smuts’ response was: ‘Nehru is keeping bombarding me with his silly correspondence...solutions are made more difficult by a general election next year, the prospect of which prevents clear-cut solutions, even if they were otherwise possible.[[322]](#footnote-322) Smuts had to attempt a delicate balancing act on the ‘Indian question’, hamstrung by international pressures, but also having to heed the extent of anti-Indian feeling in South Africa.

The reaction of whites to the campaign was hostile and violent. They set fire to the satyagrahi camps at night, and women protesters were kicked and punched. An Indian policeman was attacked by a gang of Europeans and died from his injuries. Some whites also started a campaign called the Indian Boycott Congress (later the South African Protection Movement) which aimed to boycott Indian stores, refuse employment to Indians in European firms and generally promote anti-Indian feeling. However, if anything, this violence produced more publicity and sympathy for the passive resisters abroad.

Initially, passive resistance did enjoy some level of success. It is important to bear in mind however that overall, support for the campaign was very mixed; there was practically no activity in places such as Ladysmith and Escourt, whilst in Pietermaritzburg and Greytown it was, at best, lukewarm. Altogether, only 5 per cent of the total Indian population of South Africa actively took part.[[323]](#footnote-323) Only the community of politically active Indians participated, representing a cross-class alliance of differing political interests, that mobilised around dislocations in Durban’s urban environment which mainly affected middle-class Indians. The ideological articulation of this mobilisation was through a notion of Indian community umbilically connected to a motherland on the verge of statehood. August 15, 1947, the date when India achieved independence, was also a big day for Indian South Africans.[[324]](#footnote-324) With this re-affirmation of Indian political rights and the Doctor’s Pact between Drs Dadoo, Naicker and Guma in the same year, the stage should have been set for a show-down with government. Yet by the end of the second year of the campaign, support was beginning to decline seriously. The police decided to stop arresting protesters, hoping to choke the movement further by starving it of the oxygen of publicity. The campaign was called off on the election of the National Party to government, and leaders of the Passive Resistance Council even sent Malan, the new Prime Minister, their congratulations. They decided to wait and see what the intentions of the new government would be before taking further action: ‘The Indians are confident that you and your victorious party will make every effort to alleviate the grievances of the Indian minority in the Union amicably’.[[325]](#footnote-325) Although this decision to send congratulations to the Malan government was taken at an NIC conference, it was deeply contentious, and led to much acrimonious debate, further underlining divisions within the political community.[[326]](#footnote-326)

‘Making a Home’: community redefined

We can perhaps get closer to understanding of the collapse of passive resistance, and the failure of wider mobilisation, by looking at the campaign and the relations between groups within it in more detail. The Asiatic Land Tenure bill primarily affected the material interests of the merchants. Their place within the alliance was always an uneasy one. They had continued to collaborate with commissions set up by the government, and to have dialogue with Smuts. When the National Party came to power, the merchants’ main political strategy was to negotiate with the new government. Merchants wanted to protect their material interests and this included acceptance of some level of segregation. Despite the fact that the passive resistance campaign called for reforms that would benefit merchant interests, its methods were anathema to merchants.

The passive resistance campaign seriously split Indian political leadership. When merchants withdrew their political, and more importantly, their financial support from the campaign, and formed the Natal Indian Organisation in May 1947, it was seriously weakened. Not least, it gave the government an opportunity to fracture the fragile unity of the Indian community further. The NIC suggested that ‘the government ... inspired the formation of the Natal Indian Organisation in the time-honoured imperialist tradition of divide and rule: Smuts recognised it with indecent haste.’[[327]](#footnote-327) The ‘unholy alliance’ of Smuts and Kajee collaborated to oppose the radical leadership of the NIC, and win over other parts of the Indian community. In a letter addressed to the South Africa Indian Organisation in July 1948, a breakaway umbrella group consisting of the Natal Indian Organisation and the Transvaal Indian Organisation, the government minister of the interior, Dr. T. E. Donges, stated that he was ‘prepared to receive a deputation (from the SAIO) because he was aware that the NIO and TIO were ‘not communist in their orientation or leadership, .nor associated with any organised flouting of the laws of the country.’[[328]](#footnote-328) In a reply to the minister, the SAIO outlined proposals, which, as well as trading rights and land tenure, also called for housing for the ‘70 per cent of Indians below the poverty datum line’, and underlined the need for increased civic amenities, education facilities, and employment rights for Natal’s 7,000 unemployed Indians, as well as increased social welfare. It added: ‘We look on South Africa as our home.’[[329]](#footnote-329) Their proposals were very similar to those outlined by the NIC at the same time. If anything, there was more emphasis on workers’ issues in the SAIO statement. They wanted to collaborate with government to protect their interests, but they also wanted, and needed, Indian workers as part of their political constituency.

This was, potentially, possible because the programme and tactics of the NIC did not resonate with the whole community. One example of this was the boycott of the Royal Tour that was called by the NIC and the ANC in 1947. This decision was taken, for once, against the advice of Nehru, who was keen not to complicate negotiations at the U.N. regarding a series of Indian issues, including the South African question [[330]](#footnote-330) The proposed boycott did not enjoy popular support amongst Indians, and Kajee built on this. He formed the Durban Indian Royal Visit Committee, which organised a reception for the royal couple at Curries Fountain. They were seated on a dais shaped like the Taj Mahal and some 65,000 Indians attended the celebrations.[[331]](#footnote-331) Even given that the pomp and ceremony of Royal visits always attracts onlookers, these numbers illustrates the complexity, and ambivalence of Indian identity at this time, in which ideas of imperial citizenship interacted with identification with Indian independence and notions of Indianness within South Africa. The success of the celebrations seriously undermined the NIC’s leadership amongst Indians, whom it characterised as merely ‘politically less advanced groups’ and ‘a deluded and curious crowd’.[[332]](#footnote-332)

The Homeland Reimagined

Working-class support for the NIC began to fall off sharply after the early heady days of the passive resistance campaign. CP members had succeeded in involving workers through their trade union networks, but their enthusiasm declined quickly. Although the rhetoric of ‘Indian honour’ did mobilise workers initially, there was a failure to address the issues that affected workers in their everyday lives consistently. As we have seen, measures in the Ghetto Act did not directly affect workers adversely. Many of them resented the merchant community, which acted as their exploitative landlords, took their money in shops and benefited financially at their expense through extending loans and credit which were often hard to repay. Materially, Indian workers were in a class relationship with merchants, which often over-rode the ambiguous umbrella of their Indian identity. Their sense of India as an imaginary homeland was perhaps the weakest of all the groups involved, given their indentured past. Materially and ideologically, Indian workers had the least to gain from the passive resistance campaign. The manner in which the campaign addressed workers was also problematic in the long term:

It is for the removal of the difficulties of the Indian community and for the upholding of the honour of Indians that we have launched this campaign.. .We consider this inhuman Act derogatory to the honour and dignity of the Indian community as a whole and to the Indian nation.[[333]](#footnote-333)

This, and the many other calls on Indians to uphold Indian dignity, have pride in the Indian nation and recognise a kinship with Indians in the ‘Motherland’ were ineffective as a political programme that would actually address the inadequacies in the material living conditions of Indian workers. By the second half of the 1940s, the local state had begun to provide segregated municipal housing in a small way,[[334]](#footnote-334) and the Ghetto Act included measures for the expansion of the municipal housing programme to replace the overcrowded and squalid living conditions of poor Indians. These proposals were welcomed by significant sections of workers. As has been shown, poor accommodation and a lack of services directly affected large parts of the Indian population, and it is not surprising that some sections of the community chose to collaborate with the authorities in the creation of their new built environments.

The example of the Cato Manor Ratepayers Association provides an interesting illustration of the malleable nature of readings of identity, as Goolam Vahed has shown. This Indian association was willing to co-operate with the Durban municipality, but requested that Indian workers carry out the building work.[[335]](#footnote-335) These Indian ratepayers wove together notions of class and nation in a very particular configuration that was significantly different to that of the merchants, with their strong material ties to India. Indian workers, with their history of rural and urban dislocations, finally found in the promise of provision of municipal housing, a place to be, settle, put down roots, and ‘produce the locality’ so essential so social life. Ironically, the very process of segregation and apartheid in the development of capitalism in South Africa eventually created the conditions for a ‘home’. They too were being Indian in their own South African way.

The falling away of mass support in the passive resistance campaign also highlighted other factors. Despite its importance to communists and radical nationals, the issue of democratic rights and citizenship, for example, failed to appeal to workers, who were more concerned with issues of social space, access to jobs, and their place in the urban landscape. Within the Indian working class, this involved some acceptance of segregationist measures, because these went some way to meeting long-term housing requirements and service provision beyond those offered within the confines of their own community. Possibilities of more secure, long-term settlement shaped different readings of identity beyond a politics of national rights based on the franchise. Theirs was a fundamentally different compromise with segregationist measures than that of the merchant elite, who wished to protect their business interests. Above all, at this time, there was a reformulation of a sense of place and being, where being came to represent the specific, the concrete, the known and familiar sites of social practices within which they were shaped and formed, and with which their identities were so closely bound. There ‘place’ had become urban South Africa, where they worked, lived and experienced their social relations.

India may have provided a ‘resting place for their imagination’, a seeming comfort and haven in times of uncertainty about work and housing, but the landscape of South Africa had become the ‘real’. ‘Home’ was relocated after the dislocations of indenture and their experiences in South Africa, and India became the mirror image of identification. If India was the ‘motherland’, it was the motherland from which one had to separate.

Many Indian workers now wanted to arrest further displacement in order to clear a space for the formation of new relational histories, new shared codes of community:

I remember when we moved into our new home the sense of overwhelming relief, of feeling that this was something long term and not under continuous threat. I came from a family of indentured labourers and our family had had to shift several times.. .we were still Indian but South Africa was our home and where we had our livelihoods..India seemed very remote. What would I do if I went there? I’d never even been there and nor have my children.[[336]](#footnote-336)

We wanted to have secure jobs and places to live. We wanted to send our children to school, the traders, the merchant Indians, they were happy to exploit us but they couldn’t offer us that. They said we were part of an Indian community but I felt that this was only when it suited them. They kept on saying that the government was insulting the Indian nation. But what I wanted was work so I could support my family.[[337]](#footnote-337)

(we) are just ordinary workers endeavouring to eke out a living... We favour segregation, and do not consider it a stigma, or an affront to our national pride. We welcome townships well laid out with amenities, solely for Indian Occupation.[[338]](#footnote-338)

Community is both ‘a narrative product, and an organic achievement’, in which r there is a tension between ‘the representation of space’ (the conceived) and the spaces of

representation (the lived).[[339]](#footnote-339) In this period, a community of Indian workers began to move from the former to the latter. In doing so, they opened up another fissure in the wider politics of Indianness.

For some, the new urban housing schemes also reinforced a class identity as they differentiated themselves from merchants, but they conceived this identity in exclusive nationalist terms because of their antagonistic relations with other social groups. In housing and work, an identity of Indianness was becoming as important as that of class. Radical leaders had a different narrative of nation, one conceived out of India’s political struggle for independence, and articulated through the project of modernity and democratic rights within a nation state. This project of modernity did not necessarily accord with what workers perceived as their material interests, as a result of their daily altercations with other groups. Notions of a common citizenship and non-racial alliances became political abstractions. For instance, the Doctor’s Pact, a symbolic marker for non-racial and democratic politics, meant little to Indian workers who regarded both Africans and whites as competitors for jobs and urban space. In particular, relationships with Africans tended to be acrimonious and exploitative, perhaps because in part the relationship between Indian merchants and Africans was conflated to represent all Indian-African interaction. In the 1940s, this social hostility expressed itself in terms of increased competition over space, something that will be discussed in more detail in relation to the Durban Riots.[[340]](#footnote-340)

Integrated Spaces: ‘it was how we lived our lives’

From the point of view of Indian radicals and communists, however, non-racial democratic politics also had a social basis:

I would say that the Doctor’s Pact only had meaning at the level of the leadership, to workers on the ground, they felt differently you know. But it seemed real to us. We were caught up in bringing democracy to the non-European. Non racialism seemed like a real possibility to us. But this was because of the mix of people we would have contact with in our political activities. It was how we lived our lives.[[341]](#footnote-341)

M. D. Naidoo stressed, for example, the point that the politics practised by radicals in the 1940s were based on their perceptions of where their material interests lay and how their perceptions were framed within their social relations. Although many tensions existed within the CPSA, it was nevertheless a multi-racial organisation, as were many of the societies that it helped to create. A good example of this was the Liberal Study Group. As an article in Indian Opinion put it: ‘Perhaps very few organisations can boast of such a mixed membership as that of ours. In the Group we have Indians, Coloureds, Europeans, Africans and Chinese’.[[342]](#footnote-342) Such eclecticism was rare in wider South African society. Many communists saw the political struggle as necessitating the formation of a multi-racial anti­fascist movement, which incorporated democratic alliances and universal franchise and citizenship rights. This platform of liberal democracy was given a boost when it intersected with the political platform of radical sections within nationalist organisations.

‘Marvellous People’: Indian heroes and communist struggle

Because of their class positions, radical nationalists also had more to gain from a programme of democratic rights which provided greater opportunities to compete more effectively, on a level playing field, for white collar jobs and desirable housing in attractive social spaces shared with white South Africans. Moreover, it would be wrong to draw a firm line between Indian communists and radical nationalists. India, and in particular, Gandhi, provided a powerful bridgehead between them. Congress organisations all invoked Gandhi, ‘the greatest man of all time’. In Dadoo’s words: ‘This is the man - the pilot of India’s march to freedom — who is the source of inspiration of our joint straggle for democratic rights in South Africa.’53 [[343]](#footnote-343) By this time, Gandhi was an international folk-hero of resistance. Despite the hostile analysis of Indian communists in India, he was re-invented many times around the world, and came to symbolise disparate hopes and aspirations. In addition, in South Africa, there was a feeling of personal involvement in the ‘production’ of Gandhi as anti-colonial messenger.[[344]](#footnote-344) Contrary to the antagonism at that time between Indian communists and Congress in India, where for many communists, Gandhi was far from a national hero, in South Africa, Gandhians and communists shared many political ideals. Gandhi himself declared that Dadoo had ‘made a very favourable impression on everybody here.’[[345]](#footnote-345) It is telling that Gandhi was so favourably inclined to communist­nationalist co-operation in South Africa, at a time of such hostility between communists and nationalists in India. It is, perhaps, an indication that South African Indian communists were also, at heart, good nationalists.

In South Africa, Indian communists did not enjoy a discrete identity. They were Indian and South African and communist and they were not immune from the wider enticements of identification with the nationalist straggle in India. Indian national heroes were their heroes. In White Girl in Search of the Party, Pauline Podbury, a member of the CP who married HA Naidoo, recalls:

On Monday 31st of March 1941 I walked into the Liberal Study Group to work on our weekly magazine and found an atmosphere of extraordinary excitement, ‘have you heard die news?’ Seedat buttonholed me and without waiting for a reply announced triumphantly, ‘Indira Nehru is in town’.56 [[346]](#footnote-346)

Fatima Meer also remembers this identification with Indian national heroes:

We became very involved widi the Indian liberation movement in India, and Nehru and Gandhi were, you know, very great figures - they really loomed as superbeings, you know, tiiey could do no wrong. It wasn’t just a simple kind of heroism...they were marvellous people, wonderful people, and diey were involved in this whole liberation of India, and my father was constantly writing about that struggle[[347]](#footnote-347) -so we had a sense of goodness, and we had a sense of righteousness and we had a sense of freedom..the thing to do in life was to fight for one’s freedom.[[348]](#footnote-348)

The politics of Indian nationalism thus powerfully gripped the imagination of Indian party members. Men such as M. D. Naidoo had become politicised by reading about the history of India and joining the Indian Youth League in the 1930s.[[349]](#footnote-349) Many others were members of Indian community and religious organisations and became politicised through their treatment as Indians in South Africa. Radical nationalists had also come out of these organisations. Communists and nationalists formed overlapping communities and a key point of intersection was a shared Indian identity. When there was a need to raise funds for political activities or organise self-help, for example, radical Indians were not averse to turning to merchants and asking them to provide finance. Community could be, and was, invoked if and when necessary.

The Franchise and the Popular Front

The question of a universal franchise came to dominate the CPSA’s perspective within this period, and one of its central concerns developed into the question of democratic rights and citizenship within South Africa. An important reason for this growing emphasis was the change in policy regarding the Second World War. When war broke out in 1939, the Communist Party had characterised it as an inter-imperialist war and engaged in anti­war propaganda. When the Nazi government invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 and the party subsequently changed its position and advocated an anti-fascist front to defend the

USSR, this question of democratic rights and the franchise began to assume a increasing significance. It became an integral part of their demands within campaigns and was given added weight when the political mobilisation against the National Party after the war was also conducted in the language of anti-fascism. At a mass meeting in Durban to celebrate the release of Dadoo and M. P. Naicker from prison, Naicker informed the crowds: ‘We have reached a stage when we can no longer think in terms of the Indian people alone. We must form a United Democratic Front and challenge any force that will lead the land of our birth to the fate of fascist Germany or Japan.’[[350]](#footnote-350)

The spectre of fascism was not some remote question that was only aligned with events in Europe. According to M. D. Naidoo, Mein Kampf was translated and published as a weekly column in the Daily News in South Africa.[[351]](#footnote-351) Fascists and communists often came to blows on the streets of Johannesburg and Durban. Fascist ideology was seen as infecting the policies of the United Party and underlying the ideology of the National Party. The CP had its position clear five months before the elections of 1948:

While the United Party contains the seeds of Fascism, yet it provides opportunity for progressive advances; while the National Party policy, if adopted, would immediately place South Africa under a Fascist regime in which the right of the working people and the non­Europeans would become non-existent. [[352]](#footnote-352)

Anti-fascism, as a political strategy, generates the need to pursue democratic goals, not least, so that further political activity remains possible. In the long and short-term demands inherent in the Communist Party’s language of socialist change, notions of citizenship overlapped with the political agenda of radical nationals in resistance politics. The right to the franchise and to buy land that was demanded by the passive resistance movement were part of a wider democratic agenda against the forces of fascism rather than one plank of a political programme dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism. That, the communists argued, would come later.[[353]](#footnote-353)

Allied to this, was the shift in the party’s position on its capacity to organise on non- racial lines. In 1939, younger members of the LSG, including M. D. and R. D. Naidoo and Yusuf Dadoo formed the NEUF, and M. D. Naidoo was elected secretary of the group in 1940.65 As we have seen in Chapter Six, many of these men were also involved in intense trade union activity. On both fronts, there was a real desire, at leadership level, to form non- racial political organisations. However, by 1942, CP members were told to disband the NEUF and return to radicalising the nationalist organisations. The emphasis was now on an alliance between different national bodies, rather than multi-racial organisations. The Party saw this as a way of accepting the reality of South Africa, and learning to overcome problems of organisation, in a situation in which communities were geographically differentiated, often deeply hostile to one another, and, vitally, spoke in different languages.

In the 1940s, as segregation sharpened the oppression of groups of people perceived of and discriminated against as racial/national entities, the nationalist organisations were increasingly drawn into challenging the state. There thus seemed to be a real possibility of forming alliances that would feed into a wider struggle against repressive state legislation. As the party stated:

new forms of mass struggle are being evolved by the people themselves. The increasingly reactionary drive of the Smuts government is creating a new spirit of unity amongst the non-European peoples in particular which is laying the basis for an offensive against all oppressive legislation.66

The CPSA now made a real attempt to relate to political movements on the ground. Much of the political activity of the 1940s, such as actions around the Alexander bus strikes and the Shantytown movements, grew out of spontaneous workers’ actions rather than directed by the party. This also made it seem opportune to develop a closer relationship with radical nationalists. A confluence of interests emerged from the demands of radical nationalists on the one side and the Party’s anti-fascist platform on the other. And these overlapping interests articulated with multiple notions of self, place and nation within contemporary South Africa and beyond. Radicals and communists joined in a struggle against the more conservative forces within the nationalist organisations and a series of joint political actions ensued. The party’s justification for this was that in South Africa, class and national

1. M. D. Naidoo, interview with PR London April 1986.
2. The Guardian 18 July 1946.

oppression were intertwined.[[354]](#footnote-354) With the encouragement of CP members, NIC and the ANC leaders also co-operated closely. Although Indian political activity was mostly confined to a small politically conscious community, the Indian capacity for organisation and mobilisation impressed many African nationalist leaders. In addition to this, and despite its overall failure to force radical change in government policy, passive resistance nevertheless had become an important international symbol of resistance.

The party was particularly eager to build links with the ANC. In June 1944, the CP was heavily involved in the Anti-Pass Laws campaign with the ANC. At its second conference, the Campaign passed a resolution pledging full support for the Indian people with talk of joint action through an elected committee. Moses Kotane stated ‘you are fighting against the Ghetto Act, we against the Pass Laws’[[355]](#footnote-355) In this political forum communists also repeatedly put the question of a universal franchise on the agenda. On August 15, exactly a year before Indian independence, a joint meeting was called condemning both the Ghetto Act and the Pass Laws by the CP, NIC, APC and APO. Over 2000 people were present. By this time, the Communist Party enjoyed a small degree of influence with some members of the ANC Youth League, which seemed to represent a breakthrough, although the Youth League as a whole still remained deeply suspicious of links with Indian organisations. Many members of the NIC were equally wary about links with the ANC. The two organisations also worked together on deciding how to challenge the Native Representative Councils politically.[[356]](#footnote-356) In 1946, the Party also accepted the ANC tactic of a boycott, launched in that year. This was in opposition to its previous position, where challenging the system through participation and agitating for universal franchise had held sway. In his biography of Moses Kotane, Brian Bunting states with some pride, that contrary to common accusations, this was evidence that the nationalist movement influenced the Communist Party and not the other way around.[[357]](#footnote-357) This trend was to grow significantly over time, and perhaps indicated that the CP did not want to risk losing the wider political constituency that it had reached in its alliances with the nationalist movement. In order to preserve ‘unity’ party policies were, to some extent, subsumed in those of its Congress allies.

In 1946, the biggest strike by African miners ever seen in South Africa took place. The number of Africans in the mining industry had risen steadily in the pre-war years; by 1939, they numbered over 400,000, and in 1941 they formed a trade union in order to improve their conditions within the workplace. Although the union acted with some restraint between 1939 and 1945 because its leadership shared the Communist Party’s position on the war, by 1946, this constraint had been removed, and on August the 12th a strike began, involving up to 60,000 miners. Communist Party members were active in the strike and were immediately targeted by the government. Despite the fact that he was in jail, Yusuf Dadoo was accused of promoting the strike and was brought from his cell in Newcastle jail to stand trial in Johannesburg, where he was already serving a sentence for defying the Ghetto Act. This was an indication of the government’s fear of Indian radicals at this time. Many CP members were accused of treason as the government cracked down on those believed to be behind the strike. The British government was almost equally alarmed, noting that ‘communist activities among the natives as well as other non­Europeans, have greatly increased in recent years.’[[358]](#footnote-358) Several British newspapers also laid the blame for the strike on local ‘communist agitators’.[[359]](#footnote-359) The involvement of Indian communist was also noted.[[360]](#footnote-360)

When, a day into the strike, the Natal Indian Congress in Durban voted £100 towards assisting the strikers, it was seen as significant. The donation fed into notions of cross-national congress-CP alliances against the government on several fronts, union-based

and otherwise, and it fed into the government belief that Indians were dangerous trouble­makers intent on ‘stilling up the natives’. Although the United Party smashed the strike within a week, it was in the context of all these gestures of solidarity, with joint committees I issuing joint statements, that the ‘Doctors Pact’ between Dadoo, Naicker and Xuma was

I signed on March 1947. Their joint meeting’s Declaration of Co-operation stated:

This Joint Meeting declares its sincerest conviction that for the future progress, goodwill, good race relations, and for the building of a united, greater and free South Africa, full franchise rights must be extended to all sections of the South African people, and to this end this Joint Meeting pledges the fullest co-operation between the African and Indian people and appeals to all democratic and freedom loving citizens of South Africa to support fully and co-operate in the struggle.... This joint meeting is therefore of the opinion that for the attainment of these objectives it is urgently necessary that a campaign be immediately launched and that every effort be made to compel the Union Government to implement the United Nations’ decision and to treat the Non-European peoples in South Africa in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter.74

[ Perceptions at ground level were very different to those of the leaders in the organisations

involved however, and events over the next two years were to prove a bitter testament to the hopes enshrined in the declaration.

The Communist Party may have forged alliances with Congress, but it was also intent on contesting the all-white elections in 1948. It fielded candidates, running on an anti-fascist platform, and called for a democratic South Africa, which entailed keeping the National Party out of government. As a part of this programme, in January, 1948, Yusuf Dadoo called for a national convention of the organisations of the Non-European peoples against fascism. He stated ‘the future lies with the struggle of the Non-European people for the franchise.’[[361]](#footnote-361) There was also a call for a People’s Assembly for Votes for All. The CPSA called on workers to vote for their candidates in the forthcoming election, and crucially, where there was no CP candidate, to vote for the United Party. The party’s position was that, however bad the United Party seemed, the National Party was explicitly fascist, and therefore the difference between them was fundamental.

By 1948, the CPSA was involved in trying to create a broad multi-racial coalition of nationalist organisations in an anti-fascist struggle with rights to franchise and citizenship as a central pivot of its programme. Indian communists were a crucial part of this agenda,

74 ‘The Xuma-Naicker-Dadoo Pact’ 1947’, S. Bhana and B. Pachai, A Documentary History, p. 193.

engendering political activity around a nationalist rhetoric and demands for democratic rights. This was recognised by the mainstream parties fighting the 1948 election. The National Party election manifesto declared: ‘The Party will take drastic action against Indians who incite the Non-European races against the Europeans.75 [[362]](#footnote-362) But in June of that year, the National Party won the election, rejected the United Nations Human Rights Charter, and set about disenfranchising wider sections of the population.

The victory of the National Party came as a shock to the left. The Communist Party line was that the victory of the National Party was due to the limited franchise in South Africa.[[363]](#footnote-363) It strengthened their commitment to the ‘struggle for democracy’ which had been adopted at the party conference in January of the same year.[[364]](#footnote-364) The NP victory came at a time when it was increasingly difficult to maintain the momentum in the levels of political activity within and between the nationalist organisations. The passive resistance campaign collapsed, and relationships began to deteriorate with the ANC over the issue of boycotts. Creating a united movement for the franchise also proved difficult, and within a year, the Durban Riots had erupted between Africans and Asians. The CPSA programme may have appealed to radical South Africans, but mass mobilisation was a different question.

The suspension of the passive resistance campaign and the message of congratulations sent by some of the leadership to the NP were indications of the confusion, even in the radical community. Yusuf Dadoo, who was interviewed in jail when the National Party came to power commented ‘when the most reactionary political party in the country wins control of the government, organisations fighting for democracy and freedom do not congratulate it on its success. It was a stupid blunder’.[[365]](#footnote-365) Indians had become deeply divided. Far fi’om the 1940s representing a radical coming together of ‘community’, Indians were splintered in terms of their political and material aspirations. Responses to government plans to extend the social control of urban spaces reflected how different sections of the community wanted to negotiate their sense of place and belonging in South Africa. In Chapter Nine, I will examine whether the Durban riots succeeded in bringing together an Indian political community in ways that managed to heal the rifts of the 1940s.

79 The Guardian, 8 July 1948.

Chapter Nine

Remembering the Durban Riots

In January 1949, the Durban Riots left 87 Africans, 50 Indians, 1 white person and a further 4 unidentified people dead. In the region of 1,087 people were injured and 1 factory, 58 shops and 247 houses were destroyed. Another 2 factories, 652 stores and 1,285 houses were badly damaged.[[366]](#footnote-366) The riots were sparked by a relatively minor incident. Late in the afternoon of the 13 th of January 1949, an Indian shopkeeper attacked an African youth named George Madondo, suspicious that the boy had not paid for an item taken from his shop. Madondo’s head was injured on a broken window and although he only suffered a superficial wound, it resulted in heavy bleeding. The incident took place in the busy vicinity of Victoria Street, where Africans and Indians were queuing for buses to take them home from the central bus depot. In addition to this, hostel dwellers from the middle city district were shopping after work. Durban’s largest beerhall was also close by, packed with domestic workers enjoying an afternoon drink. In the context of these crowds, the wounded Madondo attracted a lot of attention. What Africans saw was an adult Indian shopkeeper attacking an African youth. Violence quickly erupted, and Indians, as well as their stores and buses, were attacked. Stones and bricks were thrown, looting began in earnest, and Indians began to turn on Africans as well. Some semblance of order was not restored until later that night. In the meantime, rumours spread like wildfire about the incident that had lead to the riots. The informal networks employed by African hostel dwellers, and the lack of early, effective police intervention paved the way for the riots to spread and levels of violence to escalate. George Madondo was released from hospital after being treated for minor injuries. But in its retelling, the story had taken a dynamic of its own. In the most extreme account Madondo’s head had been cut off and impaled on the railings outside a mosque.[[367]](#footnote-367) Violence erupted once more and spread to the residential areas of the city:

Houses were now being burnt by the score, all in the vicinity of Booth Road. Almost all the Indians not evacuated from the area were burnt to death, or left dying. While the men were clubbed to death, Indian women and young girls were raped by infuriated natives.[[368]](#footnote-368)

There had been riots in Durban before, but not on this scale. Anti-Indian feeling on the part of Africans, to some degree spurred on by whites, had reached a new height. In analysing the riots, Fatima Meer has emphasised the role of the white population and the apartheid state, suggesting on the one hand that the non-racial alliance politics of the 1950s were premature, and on the other, giving whites the leading role as manipulators of African frustration and desires[[369]](#footnote-369). This sentiment was echoed by many of my Indian South African informants. However, apart from being over conspiratorial, this view leaves little room for African agency, the nuances of the situation, or cleavages that were appearing within, as well as between, communities at this time. Leo Kuper’s account of the riots is a necessary corrective to this, and illustrates how sections of Durban’s African middle classes gained from the ‘disturbances’ and their consequences.[[370]](#footnote-370) In a different vein, E.L.Webster[[371]](#footnote-371), and Tim Nuttall and Iain Edwards[[372]](#footnote-372) have attempted to locate the riots in their political context, highlighting class divisions and their articulations with race and identity. In particular, Nuttall sees the riots as a key moment when Africans challenged authority within the city as part of an attempt to carve a space for themselves in the urban environment. In this chapter, I want to explore the ways in which people remembered the riots, to chart a passage from personal to collective and public memory, to describe how Indians viewed their relations with African workers, and how members of the CP sought to portray these events and translate them into party policy. Competing histories of the riot tend to represent not only competing visions of South Africa, but also alternative agendas for political action. In one sense, the riots helped reinscribe notions of an identity of community for Indians, but on other levels, reactions to it were indicative of sectional interests and underlined the growing rift between politics at organised party level, between radicals and merchants, and that of workers’ experience on the ground.

In the last chapter, I examined the way the SACP saw their political agenda as an anti-fascist straggle in South Africa, with their main objective the straggle for universal democratic rights. Within this formulation, there was a growing disparity between workers’ consciousness, which meant in some quarters there was some acceptance of segregationist discourse (in relation to municipal housing projects, for example,) and the SACP’s call for a non-racial politics of alliance and full citizenship within a framework of liberal democracy. Additionally, Indian members of the CP increasingly addressed the Indian ‘community’ in terms of an Indian identity tied to notions of the ’motherland’ and ‘national honour’, inspired as they had been by the political writings of Gandhi and Nehru and the prestige of Indian independence. Yusuf Dadoo, in particular, was a keen advocate and practitioner of an Indian nationalist discourse. There was an attempt to reconcile these two elements in the 1946 Doctors’ Pact that was formed in 1946. Behind this alliance between African and Asian leaders was a suggestion that Africans and Indians had their own national identities but could unite politically against discriminatory and oppressive government policies. But, as discussed in Chapter Eight, the question of alliance politics was problematic. Many workers had very different views of their identity and their political allegiances, especially as there was usually intense competition with other white and black groups, both in the labour market and over social space, particularly on the margins of the urban environment. This disjuncture between the Indian leadership of the CP and their political constituency was tragically underlined in January 1949 when the riots erupted in Durban. The utopian ideal of non-racial politics rapidly collapsed into the dystopian reality of existing South African relations between Europeans, Africans and Indians in the city.

By 1949, Durban was undergoing profound changes in social and labour relations with an ensuing increase in competition over trading, transport and residency rights. Communities were uprooted, and the process of redefining boundaries had an impact on Europeans, Africans and Indians alike, although to varying degrees. The riots were one expression of this. But the competing histories of the riots that emerged perhaps also demonstrate the ambiguities and interdependencies of political and social identities in this period. As a consequence of growing competition and resentment from both Africans and whites in the face of what they saw as continuing ‘Indian success’, Indians became increasingly targeted, and were blamed for blocking business and social opportunities in the three key areas mentioned above. In this chapter I examine the riots and political responses to them through contemporary newspaper reports, as these provided a space for a wider public discourse on the riots. I draw on the personal memory and recollections of interviewees in Durban, for whom the past had become a place which helped define their present notions of identity and belonging. As Edwards and Chetty have both observed, the riots are still talked about today, and are celebrated by some Africans as the ‘day they beat the Indian’.8

It took the state over two days to regain control of events after the riots broke out. According to many of the Indian papers, one reason for this was the tentative character of police intervention. Initially, only a small number of unprepared police had gone to the area in question where they maintained a low profile, hoping that the violence would die down. However, some eyewitness reports suggested their more direct involvement, and that the police specifically incited Africans to attack Indians and their property. A statement made to The Leader by a European who believed in ‘segregation with human rights’, proclaimed, T saw an Indian being assaulted by Natives. I saw about eight European policemen on the spot. Three of them definitely encouraged the natives. One of them said “We don’t want coolies in Africa”.’ The witness then spoke to ‘a Native’ who told him ‘they gave us petrol and sticks. They gave us drink and told us to kill all the Indians and bum their places. Then they come up there and shot us for doing it. The next time we will start on the Europeans.’[[373]](#footnote-373) Police presence was at best ambiguous, at worst absent, or directly inciting violence. This reflected the uneven control of the state in the urban environment, where Indians and Africans inhabited spaces which were no-go areas for whites and the police, and where Indian and African competition over social space sporadically spilt over into violence. Urban violence was not unusual in Durban in the 1940 and 1950s, as increasing migrant

8 See Edwards, ‘Seizing the Moment’; Chetty, ‘The Durban Riots and Popular Memory’, p. 1.

labour, and the growth of industrialisation fuelled not only population expansion but also an intensifying straggle for the control of resources and public services, especially by poorer whites, as well as between Africans and Indians. South Africa’s entry into the Second World War had increased industrial production and subsequently saw the relaxation of controls over African migration into urban areas in order to fill expanded requirements for labour.9 [[374]](#footnote-374) Little infrastructure existed for this increase in the population and many newly arrived Africans squatted on land rented from Indian landlords in places such as Cato Manor, as they were excluded from other areas. Between 1939 and 1943, the number of African squatters living in shacks in Cato Manor increased from 2,500 to 17,000.[[375]](#footnote-375)

Contested Space: the growth of Cato Manor

Although the ‘disturbances’ as they came to be known, erupted in the centre of town and were intimately connected with competition over trade, transport and housing, the background of how these antagonisms unfolded socially can perhaps be best illustrated through looking at the development of Cato Manor, a ‘contested space in which various parties claimed authority’. Originally owned by George Cato, the first mayor of Durban, it covered an area of roughly 4500 hectacres.[[376]](#footnote-376) It was a ‘marshy, animal-infested jungle’, and the land varied in quality. Even in the early 1940s, Cato Manor was not a suburb of Durban but an agricultural district where Indian families held small plots of land. It was one of the marginal locations of a modernising city, beyond the range of direct state control and public order, consisting of people who were rooted in their own group but were not wholly part of, or fully recognised by, the wider society in which they lived. Ex-indentured labourers had bought land in this district from as early as 1878.[[377]](#footnote-377) The joint family system enabled Indians to pool their resources and build simple accommodation. Many of them were market gardeners who supplied Durban with fruit and vegetables. One reason why Indians were attracted to Cato Manor was because, until 1932, it was located outside the jurisdiction of the Durban City Council, and they were therefore able to erect housing that would have been considered substandard in terms of council regulations, but was cheap. From these small beginnings, there was a development from small-scale fanning practices to intermittent wage labour interspersed with petty trade. From 1928, buses began to run from Cato Manor, and Indian entrepreneurs, such as the Seebran and Jughoo Brothers, were pioneers in setting up public transport in this part of town.

The Durban periphery had a poorly developed infrastructure, and this facilitated the growth of Indian entrepreneurial activity as Indians stepped in to fill the gap. There was generally little in the way of utilities until the early 1930s and by the 1940s, and a significant number of Indians landowners and rentiers found renting land to Africans financially lucrative.[[378]](#footnote-378) A growing number of Africans found it difficult to find accommodation in Durban as the city council continued to move them out of areas such as Overport and Putan’s Hill. Cato Manor was near to their work and Indian landlords known as ‘shacklords’ proved to be more accommodating than whites. The post-war years saw a reversal in the relaxation of the Pass Laws, which had been a necessary part of utilising large numbers of Africans in industry during the war. This restricted the movement of Africans in Durban itself even further, and the number of African shacks built on Indian land on its periphery increased; as one informant recalled, ‘planting shacks proved more profitable than planting crops’[[379]](#footnote-379) A flourishing trade in providing provisions to the growing African population also mushroomed. By 1949, according to Mr M, ‘Cato Manor was booming with thousands of squatters, One hundred to one hundred and fifty thousand Africans were settled in the Booth Road - Umkumbaan complex.’[[380]](#footnote-380)

Sometimes Indians rented a large plot of land for a nominal sum to an African, who would then subdivide it. Other Africans would subsequently build shacks on this land and pay rent. In this way, a significant group of ‘tenant-landlords’ came into existence; many of them also opened ‘shackshops’. From the start, these enterprises were harassed by the authorities and came into direct competition with Indian traders. These environments soon became home to a range of illegal activities such as gambling and the sale of alcohol by both Africans and Indians.

Indians employed Africans in their small-scale businesses. Many wealthy Indian families had African servants, whom they often called Mary or John, irrespective of their African names, aping the ‘idioms of domination’ of white South Africans. The recollections of Stanley Chetty suggest the ways that relationships between the races also could become acts of cultural translation:

my mother’s mother had a stall in an Indian market. And I was there when my Granny used to have lots of beautiful tomatoes. And my Granny was seated, my mother and I were standing and a white Afrikaner woman (sic), [came up to us] I can understand an Afrikaner, a very guttural language (sic). She addressed my Granny as Mary, so my mother got up....My mother said ‘Yes Jane what do you want?’. Who are you calling Jane? Who are you calling Jane? Who the hell are you to call my mother Mary. See that was the gap, the big gap between us and the whites. But we too called our maids Mary. We never said Mrs. Mkhise or Mrs. Khumalo. We too were guilty of that. And we addressed our gardener as John. But that was all derived from the whites, .this is what whites did to address their servants and this became adopted by the Indians.[[381]](#footnote-381)

Chetty also suggests that Africans increasingly became the clients of Indians not just in services but also in housing, and transport. Many Cato Manor Indians began to flourish socially and economically, but at the same time, relations between the two groups deteriorated, although many Indians still interacted socially with their African neighbours and the children of both communities continued to play together. More and more Indians bought property in Cato Manor because of its proximity to town, and a significant minority became increasingly rich. This affluence was reflected in the houses that were built, the growing number of places of worship that sprang up, and the establishment of community centres such as the Arya Samaj, which had a long history of community care in the area and expanded its activities in the 1940s. [[382]](#footnote-382) Many new schools were also established. To quote Mr M again, ‘By 1949...nineteen community schools [had been] built by the community with Indian money, blood, sweat, labour and initiative. Not a cent came from the authorities then, they were out to stifle the Indian community’.[[383]](#footnote-383)

As disparities of wealth increased between middle-class Indians and poor Africans, Indians appeared increasingly to be thriving, while Africans, separated from their families, were exploited by them, and were often abused and harassed in the process. To Africans, Indians seemed to inhabit a privileged space. They were not subject to the Pass Laws, were able to consume liquor legally, and, despite growing restrictions, still had land rights. Moreover, whites and Africans viewed Indians as outsiders and interlopers who were growing rich on the backs of Africans, and this must have made the situation even more intolerable for them. ‘The reason for their [Indian] resistance [to repatriation] is of course, clear. They are not producers of any importance. They live on the labour of other racial groups. They get their wealth from Europeans, Coloureds and Natives.’ [[384]](#footnote-384) This view of Indians as ‘outsiders’ was continually repeated and can be seen in the resentment of Indian entitlement to land, particularly by Africans, in the state’s plans for their repatriation, and in the sustained attempts by whites in Durban to segregate the city.[[385]](#footnote-385)

‘The Children of Shaka\*: Indians on Africans

Cato Manor also had a thriving Indian political culture. In the 1930s, the Colonial Born Settlers Association had an office in Cato Manor. N.T. Naicker and George Poonen grew up there, and NIC activities also originated there. Much of the political symbolism of Indians in Cato Manor was drawn from the Indian nationalist movement, as Stanley Chetty recalls: ‘It was Indians in white saris with the Nehru cap - - identifying non-violence. That was the old cap saying non-violence we won’t fight you, we will talk to you.’[[386]](#footnote-386) But in the 1940s, the increasing emphasis on Alliance politics by Congress and the CP seems to have had little effect on day-to-day inter-community political activism. Many of my Indians interviewees, who would have described themselves as left-wing, argued that Africans ‘knew no better’ (i.e. were considered ‘ignorant’) and very few activists attempted to organise amongst them. As Mr. M. told D. Chetty, ‘For a start, we did not sell them the paper23 as they were illiterate’.24 Others held that Africans were ‘newly arrived from the country’ and were therefore unable to deal with, or understand, the politics of the city.

At the same time, competition intensified between Indians and more established Africans over who would provide lucrative services for the continuing influx of migrants. Africans were at a disadvantage, as the municipal authorities turned down their applications for trading licences and the provision of bus services. Although this was a result of state policies, Indians became the most visible scapegoats, as they were allowed to run local shops and control the bus services. This was exacerbated by the deeply held prejudices of both communities, with Indians generally treating Africans with some degree of contempt if not outright racism in their everyday transactions. Even where Indians were broadly sympathetic towards African, their prejudices came through. Thus Mr Singh, in recounting why Africans resented Indians remarked,

.. .blacks had to move away from their traditional areas in which they lived because there was no industrial activity there. And if they wanted to find work they had to leave their families and come to town to find employment. And the living without a family has an adverse effect on them.. .but these people were looking at Indians happily living with their families and here were these people living in compounds, all male compounds...there weren’t any areas where they could own land...they couldn’t open business because they didn’t have finance. Not only that. If you look at their culture, their background, they were not businessmen. If you went back a few generations, they were in old Shaka’s days and Shaka was one of those old black chiefs..the male blacks were all warriors...they were not fanners.[[387]](#footnote-387)

These stereotypes of ‘African warriors’, ill-suited to certain occupations, echoed the prejudices voiced by Gandhi some fifty years earlier, indicating the deep-seated nature of the preconceptions Indians held of Africans.

It seemed as if Africans were barely tolerated in the city. In contrast, despite the fact that they were seen as outsiders, Indians had somehow carved out a comfortable niche for themselves in urban areas, and seemed to have an unfair access to resources, which provided them with a flourishing livelihood. When Cato Manor was zoned as an Indian area under the 1946 Asiatic Land Tenure Act, Africans felt that Durban was being divided

1. The Guardian was a CP paper that was generally regarded and sold as a workers paper.
2. Mr M, interview with Chetty, in ‘The Durban Riots and Popular Memory’, p. 7.

between Indians and whites, in an attempt to push them out completely. Quite frequently their hostility expressed itself in the form of a distinct Zulu cultural identity, which was invoked as a way of obtaining resources from the state, as segregationist and apartheid discourses encouraged them to do. This interacted with the development of a self-defined cultural identity. The radical union leader, Zulu Phungula, and A.W. Champion both gave vent to anti-Indian sentiments which were articulated around notions of a discrete Zulu cultural identity. A central aspect of this identity was through evoking their close relationship to the land, something that Africans had lost but felt they had to regain. From a different perspective, the language adopted by the newspapers, which specifically highlighted tensions between lower-class Zulus and middle-class Indians, reinforced this Zulu identity.25 [[388]](#footnote-388) The report of the Riot Commission also talked specifically of ‘Zulus’ in terms of a distinct and essentialised cultural identity: ‘the Zulu is by tradition a warrior’ and ‘one of the braves of Chaka’ whose ‘blood boils at the so-called preferential treatment of Indians.’ [[389]](#footnote-389) ‘The mobs of Natives swelled into impis chanting the Zulu war cry and indulged in bestial orgies’, it decaired.[[390]](#footnote-390)

The two communities lived cheek by jowl, and tensions ran high between them. Coupled with this, state control of certain sections of Durban was still tenuous. As recounted previously, the police were reluctant to intervene in any meaningful way when violence erupted, as the ‘coolie quarters’ were seen as no-go areas. Two years earlier, when African-Indian violence broke out in Victoria Street in 1947, for example, involving a crowd of over 200 people, there were merely thirteen arrests, eight African, one Coloured and four Indian; all of these cases were acquitted when they came to court.[[391]](#footnote-391) This seeming lack of legal sanction gave an added impetus to the rioters to continue their anti-Indian onslaught in January 1949. These violent events shook Durban’s residents and brought to the fore many of the fears and cleavages in the city’s population.

*As* far as whites were concerned, they emphatically did not wish to see Durban divided between themselves and Indians. They were still afraid of being ‘swamped’ by the Indians who were moving into white areas. These concerns become apparent in contemporary accounts in the white press, in particular, the Natal Daily News, but also in The Natal Witness and The Mail, and illustrate some aspects of white opinion in South Africa at this time. The press accounts also demonstrate the divisions amongst whites. Even before the riots, the Daily News gave extensive coverage to the issues that were to form the backdrop to the ‘disturbances’. Clearly, whites felt frustrated with the practical difficulties they encountered in making Durban a ‘white city’. On 9 January 1949, there was a report in the paper on the City Council’s plans to strengthen the ‘European’ hold on property in the city. The Council also wanted to counteract further ‘non-European’ penetration into ‘European’ zones. It also proposed further amendments to the 1946 Asiatic Land Tenure Act, which, it alleged, was ineffective. The paper argued that there would be a ‘constant state of war’ between the two communities, Indian and white, as long as this state of affairs continued and the act remained in its present form. Much of this rivalry was, of course, informed by competition in business between Indians and whites. It was also further fuelled by negative European perceptions of Indians. Indians were constantly scapegoated as an urban threat, as they had been ever since their arrival in the city towards the end of the nineteenth century. White South Africans seemed to believe that Indians had no valid presence on South African soil, and that their only real ambition was to exploit both Africans and whites. Renewed calls for repatriation suggested that only their physical removal could solve the problem.

On the other hand, Africans were increasingly referred to by whites as ignorant and child-like ‘natives’, ‘savages’ who erupted irrationally into violence. In this instance, Africans’ thwarted ambitions had spilled over into bloodshed. They were portrayed as being in need of the help of the white community and the state, not only to facilitate their business practices (within limits), but also to prevent this kind of violent incident ever happening again. The implicit subtext was that this should be done at the expense of Indian businesses, so that white ambitions for expansion in trade would not be hampered. Poor whites severely resented municipal housing schemes that seemed to give preferential treatment to black and Indian communities, and felt deeply frustrated. Re-housing schemes for Africans and Indians, which were still embryonic in the second half of the 1940s, and which were intended to provide the basis for the implementation of the Group Areas Act, were interpreted by poor whites as unnecessary fillips to communities which had contributed to their social impoverishment. A letter to the Natal Daily News of January 10 1949, by ‘Sardine’ described how he, his wife and two children had lived in one room for well over a year, and calls on the newly elected National Party to provide adequate housing for whites, instead of building more homes for black communities. Poor whites more generally formed a significant section of the political constituency of the National Party. They looked to the NP to redress the failure of the United Party and to prioritise their interests.

The Daily News, the Witness and the Mercury broke the story of the riots on the morning of Friday January 14, and the tone of the reports convey the sense of shock felt by Durban’s European population. This is hardly surprising given their scale, and the violence had taken place in an area of town generally unfrequented by whites, who were sleeping soundly in their beds at the time. The shock was accompanied by fear that the disturbances would spill over into adjacent white residential districts. Amid reassurances from MPs such as D.R. Shearer that the permanent forces were standing by to regain control of the situation, came more sensational reports of ‘natives’ ‘out of control’ on beer and ‘dagga’, and of men with ‘menacing, jeering Zulu faces’ smashing new Indian cars.[[392]](#footnote-392) But the very emotive eye-witness accounts also included some from young white soldiers voicing their extreme reluctance at having to shoot at ‘natives’, as well as their frustration at having to deal with a situation for which they felt ill equipped. ‘As soon as we turn our backs on these people they start hell raising. When we rush to the spot they look as innocent as angels’ said one policeman on the spot.[[393]](#footnote-393)

The National Party and ‘native policy’

By Saturday January 15, the editorial in the Daily News suggests that sections of the press had begun to formulate a moral language within which to frame recent events. Heavily couched in tones of ‘mea culpa’, blame was nevertheless largely apportioned to the newly elected National Party. Their editor warned that

when people are ill housed, packed into congested areas, deprived of proper transport, denied recreational facilities, subject to political frustration and some degree of economic exploitation, then the ground has been well prepared for terrorist outbreaks...people whose whole way of life has been changed (i.e. Africans coming from a rural to an urban environment).Our politics is deeply sectionalised and our outlook is coloured with prejudices and discriminations. There are natives that can pretend, not without some foundation, that any anti-Indian measures they take earn the covert sympathy of many Europeans and are justified by their rasher words.[[394]](#footnote-394)

In the same paper on the following day, Senator Heaton Nicholls openly blamed apartheid, and cited current government ‘native policy’ for the riots. He observed that the African rioters were drawn from different ‘tribes’ but were united by a common feeling that Indians had no rights to residence in Natal. Under apartheid, separate tribal identities were supposedly the best way forward for development; nevertheless, according to Nicholls, discriminatory state measures were creating a common bond between Africans, and, most dangerously, as far as he was concerned, these nationalist sentiments were being fused with communist ideals. In particular, Nicholls singled out Indian communist leaders who were trying to form a united front with Africans. Nicholls had expressed similar anti-communist views equally forcefully in the late 1920s and early 1930s, but his observations at the time of the riots linked up with widening concerns amongst sections of the population about a growing ‘communist threat.’

On the same day the Daily News also quoted a cross-section of international opinion on the riots, which had attracted wide coverage, especially in England and India, but also in the United States and Europe. According to the Hindustan Times ‘India was profoundly stirred by the riots’. It concluded that to suggest that the riots were started by someone slapping a boy was equivalent to saying that World War One was started by the

shooting of Archduke Ferdinand. Echoing sentiments voiced by the CPSA about the riot, the paper asserted that the ‘disturbances’ had been deliberately inspired by forces seeking to prevent a ‘non-European front of Africans and Indians.’32 [[395]](#footnote-395) Contemporary British and American newspapers echoed opinion in the Daily News. The Manchester Guardian, for example, condemned the colour policy of the Nationalist government and compared it unfavourably to its United Party predecessors. The same sentiment was to be found in the Daily Mail, and in this reformulation of the past, General Jan Smuts became the hero of the hour. His opinion was eagerly sought, not only on the cause of the riots, but also for a solution to the ‘native problem’. It was generally assumed that under his governance such an occurrence would have been unthinkable. This popular account of a political schism before and after 1948 informs much of liberal South African historiography, and the position of the Communist Party and its characterisation of this period as one that specifically required an anti-fascist platform was, in some ways, similar.

Segregation and apartheid may have both been described as the irrational ideology of ignorant whites, anachronisms that were directly detrimental to the development of a capitalist economy in South Africa; but at the same time, apartheid was somehow seen as a distinctly new phenomenon which represented a particular rupture with the past. This analysis suggested that, prior to 1948, the urban policies of the United Party were leading to the modification of segregation as a result of the efforts of educated liberals and the rationale of capital development. This was partly because of the temporary relaxation of influx controls and the Pass Laws during the war. On the other hand, the National Party, it was proclaimed, was ready to sacrifice ‘economic rationality’ and the interests of capital in order to perpetuate an outmoded racist hierarchy.

A substantial body of the revisionist scholarship of the 1970s and 80s has ably challenged this dichotomous view of the 1948 ‘watershed’, and has shown how the National Patty’s ideology and economic strategy contained many threads of continuity with their United Party predecessors.34 In previous chapters I have also discussed the effects of the Pegging Acts of 1942-3 and the Ghetto Act of 1946, both initiated by the United Party, and have touched on the notion of a constructed ideological and political watershed post 1948 which sought to erase the continuities between segregationist and apartheid discourse. In particular, the uprooting of Indians from parts of Durban and their relocation in other areas was clearly not a new phenomenon under the Nationalists, but was part of a wider straggle for place and space in the city between different interest groups in the context of an unevenly developing urban modernity. However, the NP’s policies were often contradictory in content and poorly executed - ad hoc responses to emerging conditions rather than pre­laid plans at the level of ideology or economic rationale. The very ambiguities in these political dialogues facilitated their appeal to different parts of a political constituency. As Smuts himself said shortly after the 1948 election

our policy ...has been European paramountcy., it has not been equal rights...we have always stood and stand for social and residential separation in this country and the avoidance of all racial mixture...there is a great deal about apartheid that is common to all parties in this country.[[396]](#footnote-396)

The ‘historical amnesia’ surrounding Smuts in the late 1940s, in light of the clarity of some of the statements that he made at the time, as well as his own past record in relation to Indian South Africans perhaps seems remarkable. It can posibly be best understood as an attempt by liberals and some radicals to distant themselves from the policies and practices of the South African state. By counterposing a ‘liberal past’ to a reactionary present they could both deny the continuities of South African history and their own implication in that process.

The riots and their aftermath presented problems to the state of how to construct cartographies of social control within a city that had an inadequate infrastructure, and still contained peripheral urban spaces out of direct state authority. For sections of Indians these in-between-spaces provided business opportunities in which their customers were mainly

34 For some different aspects of the debate, see D. Posel, ‘The Meaning of Apartheid before 1948: conflicting interests and forces within the Afrikaner nationalist alliance’, Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 14, no. 1, October 1987, pp. 123-139; M, Legassick, ‘Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post-1948 South Africa’, Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 1, no. 1, 1974, pp. 5-35; H. Wolpe, ‘Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid’, Economy and Society, vol. 1, 1976, pp, 425­56;. M. Lipton, Capitalism and Apartheid in South Africa, 1910-1986, (Aidershot, 1986).

Africans and poor whites. From the Indian perspective, they were providing services for the burgeoning African population, which were woefully neglected by the state. Indian businessmen provided Africans, who were overcrowded in hostels and barracks, land to squat on, cheap housing, trade and transport facilities. Indians were therefore fundamentally shaken by the scale of the rioting on January 13' Newspaper reports vividly described the violence inflicted on Indians and their families, and give some indication of the deep psychological trauma they suffered. By Saturday 15 January, about a hundred people had already been killed and over a thousand injured. The chaired bodies of Indians were found in their homes and the bodies of Africans who had been shot by troops lay around the district of Cato Manor. At a crisis meeting held to discuss the situation, the NIO and NIC tried to sink their differences and co-operate on emergency measures. The ANC and TIC also issued a joint statement, asking Transvaal Africans and Indians to remain calm.

fiPetrol, Sticks and Blackened Faces’: Europeans and the Riot

Two features of the situation emerge powerfully in the Indian press reports of the time. By Monday 17 January, there were 25,000 Indians in refugee camps and there was a strong feeling that the government was not doing enough to help. Once again, Indian self­help became the key to the amelioration of the situation and the network of Indian political and cultural organisations was a central element in organising this successfully. The second issue was the bitterness that Indians felt about the role of whites in the whole episode. Stories of plots or deliberate instigation repeatedly appeared in the pages of The Leader and Indian Opinion. Although the white press admitted that the riots were partly caused by the way Europeans fanned anti-Asian feeling, many Indians considered that there was a much more direct relationship. Several of my informants told stories of how Europeans openly incited African attacks and even joined in the violence and looting themselves. Others suggested pre-laid plans by whites:

I saw the Europeans draw up in a truck, they were handing out sticks to the Africans, and others had blackened faces and were joining in the looting. The Europeans had a great deal of animosity towards Indians and they basically used the Africans to get back at us.35 [[397]](#footnote-397)

There were many Europeans in Durban who felt a lot of resentment towards Indians. They didn’t like our success, they thought we were ‘too big for our boots’ and they thought that we needed putting in our place. Africans were frustrated with their lot and Europeans used this in order to turn them against us. My family had always lived peaceably with Africans, but the riots caused a terrible rift in our relations. I saw many Europeans egging them on, giving them weapons to attack us and some were also joining in as well. The Europeans felt that they would gain from making Indians and Africans be at each other’s throats.[[398]](#footnote-398)

These stories of ‘Europeans with blackened faces’ even got back to India. Government of India intelligence reports tell of interviews with Indians returning to Madras on 6 May 1950. Some of these returnees were questioned and repeated these allegations.[[399]](#footnote-399)

A few days after the riots, a pamphlet produced by an organisation called the Afrikaner Protection Movement was circulated which, according to the TIC, ‘preached naked and organised violence’. It stated ‘if you are a white man, you should understand better than a Zulu what threatens you and you should be able better to organise and fight’[[400]](#footnote-400) The Minister for Justice ordered an investigation into this rumour but, as it was produced for an Afrikaner Protection Movement meeting which was held on 29 January, nearly two weeks after the outbreak of the riots, the pamphlet was clearly an opportunist attempt to cash in on recent events. It helped Indian newspapers repeat the refrain, however, that there were ‘earmarks of an organised movement’ and that ‘certain Europeans were behind the riots’.[[401]](#footnote-401)

The Riots Commission, as it became known, was an all-white body. It interviewed 146 witnesses[[402]](#footnote-402), 60 white, 34 Indian and 52 African. The Indian witnesses were mainly merchants and businessmen from the NIO, as other Indian organisations had boycotted it. The African witnesses did not speak English on the whole and, as a result, many of their accounts had to be translated. The subsequent published report was generally considered a disappointment and was popularly regarded on the left as a mouthpiece for the state. An article in Inkululeko concluded that it

In fact (this) reveals the true character of the report itself, which consciously or unconsciously is a political polemic designed to prove that the African is happy with his lot, that apartheid is lovely, and anyone inside or outside tire country who says something different is a liar, or at any rate ‘out of touch with the native’ and misinformed.[[403]](#footnote-403)

Much of the report attempted to deflect blame from government bodies, arguing instead that certain ’fundamental’ racial differences were responsible for the riot. In particular it stressed Indian passivity and, as already discussed, contrasted this with the ‘warlike children of Chaka’. On the one hand it stated that it was ‘satisfied that the police [had] acted with promptitude and discretion, considering the unexpectedness of the situation which developed and the forces at their disposal’. On the other, it suggested that ‘while the disturbance was at its height they [the Indians] were pathetically passive and allowed themselves to be slaughtered like sheep.’[[404]](#footnote-404) Indians were thus to blame for their own deaths, and the state, seemingly, was absolved of responsibility for the safety of its citizens. Many African and Indian organisations as well as the CPSA boycotted the commission because of its all-white membership, its pro-state bias, and its refusal to allow the cross-examination of witnesses.[[405]](#footnote-405)

The Commission’s sole recommendation was that the Immorality Act should be extended, as many Africans complained that middle-class Indians took advantage of their positions and had sexual relations with African women. There is evidence that this was, indeed, a real bone of contention for Africans. Moses Kotane of the CPSA came to Durban after the riots to question Africans about what had happened. When he asked some Africans ‘why did you hit the Indians?’ their response was ‘Because they despise us; they make our girls pregnant’. [[406]](#footnote-406) But the commission prioritised this single issue, making it the most frequently stated and important African expression of anti-Indian feeling. It considered that if the Immorality Act ‘could be extended to illicit carnal intercourse between Natives and Indians it would in some measure repress this evil’.[[407]](#footnote-407) They were displaying their own obsession with miscegenation. The police were absolved of any blame for exacerbating the violence, and African complaints were generally said to be unfounded or exaggerated. Indeed, Africans were thought to be ‘generally happy with their lot’ and keen ‘supporters of segregation’.47 The Commission did suggest, however, that European incitement intensified the riots, although these Europeans were ‘rare exceptions (and) degraded specimens of their race

These conclusions failed to address the many issues that the riots revealed. The report issued a warning about Indians who ‘have tried to unite African and Indian against the government and use international opinion to cause feelings of unrest with a section of the community not yet ripe for responsibility’.49 This was to become an increasingly vocal complaint by the government and its agencies, as Indian radicals were alleged to be ‘stirring up the Natives’. ‘From all sides’, the report proclaimed, ‘it is dinned into the heads of the natives that they have grievances’50 The passive resistance campaign, ‘shorn of its quasi philosophical trappings’, was ‘defiance of the law’, and seen as setting Africans ‘a bad example’, and these ideas fed into the wider fears about the ‘communist menace’:

In the result the Indians were hoist with their own petard. .. .in the recent passive resistance movement in Durban the Indians ostentatiously contravened the law of the land, attracting much attention as they could to the fact that they were flouting authority...it set the Natives a bad example.51

The government is gravely concerned at the considerable dimensions already assumed by communist activities among certain sections of the population and is considering steps to combat them effectively.[[408]](#footnote-408)

The riots thus became part of the justification for the suppression of radical politics and activists, and were held to illustrate the impossibility of inter-racial harmony. The report became part of a wider state discourse serving to justify the implementation of apartheid. It also helped pave the way for a more direct state presence in peripheral no-go areas.

Some degree of white incitement of Africans during the riots seems highly probable. Evidence of any more wide-spread organisation, however, seems tenuous. Indian concerns about white involvement helped them neatly side-step a more serious debate about

1. Report of the Riots Commission, p. 14.
2. Report of the Riots Commission, p. 16.
3. Report of the Riots Commission, p. 14.
4. Report of the Riots Commission, p. 9.
5. Report of the Riots Commission, p. 12.

the nature of African-Indian relations in Durban in the 1940s. Indians felt most bitter about the indiscriminate nature of the attacks. Some of the more radical reporting pointed out that the majority of Indian workers were as exploited by the Indian merchant elite as were Africans and shared many of the same social and economic hardships. Many working-class Indians probably felt a degree of sympathy for African frustrations:

My family were poor workers. We lived in a crowded shack and often there was very little to eat, there wasn’t always work. We lived much like our African neighbours. We too resented how rich Indians exploited us. Some of us sympathised with their shops and property being attacked. But Africans turned on us too. I cannot tell you how that made me feel.52 [[409]](#footnote-409)

But things seemed very different from an African perspective. African violence and destruction did not discriminate and was meted out to all sections of the community. Although 70 per cent of Indians in Durban at this time were workers who endured social and economic conditions of hardship, Indian business clearly did exploit poor Africans, who were not only viewed through the prism of a hierarchical racial ideology, but were seen as doubly ignorant because many of them had recently arrived from the country and lacked the savoir-faire of their urban fellows. They were not considered ‘modem’, and often enough this construction of naive ignorance was exploited to the full. The white press reported instances of inflated prices in Indian shops for their African customers as well as general abusive treatment in everyday relations. Africans who gave evidence at the Commission were particularly vociferous about their mistreatment on Indian buses. Also, illegal marketeering and the highly inflated prices that accompanied the practice had been particularly rife during the war and to some extent this had continued after it. The NIC made a special statement in the Indian newspaper, The Leader, to try and counteract claims of the wholesale exploitation of Africans, including illegal marketeering and bad treatment, and insisted that this was only the behaviour of the few. For the NIC, the rising price of goods and general inflation was pushing Africans into further poverty as they had failed to gain any rise in wages.[[410]](#footnote-410) It did not occur to them that the two factors were not mutually exclusive.

It is also true that many Indians held Africans in contempt, whether openly or through an implicit discourse around the ‘simple native mentality’. This notion accorded with Indian ideas of caste, in which ideas of ‘darkness’ was correlated with ‘low-caste’ characteristics. The general view that Africans were unsuited for certain jobs and the wide­spread use of African servants by middle-class Indians (including political activists) were aspects of this. Many Indian businessmen aspired to the lifestyle of ‘civilised whites’ and implicitly placed themselves higher up on the ladder of South Africa’s racial hierarchy. The Riot Commission also noted this and tied it in part to the impact of Indian independence in 1947:

Events in India had repercussions here. A certain type of Indian began to ride the high horse. The native thinks on colour lines and could not understand why a man of colour should exalt himself above his fellow men.[[411]](#footnote-411)

All this suggests that there were real problems between Africans and Indians on both an ideological and a material level, which could not be addressed solely through accusations of white involvement. Yet Indians seemed unable to address these issues. Thus, according to The Leader, before the riots, Indians and Africans had always got on well; ‘natives’ had the monopoly in the unskilled labour market while Indians were in the more skilled occupations, i.e. ‘everyone knew their place’. Again, this fitted well with caste rhetoric. In interviews, I was repeatedly given anecdotal evidence of the exceptions to African violence, such as the important role of ‘Bantu’ nurses in the hospitals where Indians were taken for treatment. Dr Goonam repeated to me the celebrated story in her autobiography detailing her arrival in Cato Manor to tend to the wounded during the riots.[[412]](#footnote-412) Initially, Africans blocked her path. They eventually let her pass when they realised that she was a doctor who had come to tend the wounded.[[413]](#footnote-413) Undoubtedly, these incidents did occur, and some testimonies describe how African servants also protected their Indian employers.[[414]](#footnote-414) While these stories reflected liberal and left attempts to absolve Africans from blame, at heart they revealed a view of Africans as child-like innocents who could easily be manipulated. Like white liberal and left opinion, these Indian narratives also sought to distance Indians from complicity in the circumstances that had led to the outbreak of violence in the first place.

Where African violence was recollected, the narrator often expressed a sense of disbelief or perplexity:

The family which my uncle was, (sic) they had black tenants, they had black servants. But their own tenants turned against them. Their own servants turned against them....there was also a bus owner. And his drivers were blacks when it started, the first thing they did was they were working, they were earning a living, they burnt the bus. And they burnt the home of the person who was employing them and they killed him., in my uncle’s house the blacks came in..they were thrusting spears under the bed to see if anyone was there...We could never understand...,[[415]](#footnote-415)

The riots helped fracture even further the limited social and political contact that existed between Indians and Africans, often tilting the balance to open animosity. To quote Mr M:

The 1949 riots made us have nothing to do with tire African, beware of the African...That suffering we underwent, the misery which has been caused at the hands of the Africans made us more anti-African..We hated the Africans to be quite honest with you and you can’t blame us too.[[416]](#footnote-416)

Mr. M. adds, however, ‘I’m a leftist and I make no bones about it.’

The Response of the CPSA

Articles by CP members attempted to address the issues raised but did so primarily from an economic and moral perspective, which, like white liberal opinion, blamed the policies of D. F.Malan and his NP government. A statement was issued on the riots by Yusuf Dadoo while he was in London in January 1949, addressing a multiracial demonstration of Indian, African and Colonial students against the National Party, during which a life-size effigy of Malan was burned in Trafalgar Square. In his speech to the two hundred demonstrators present, Dadoo neatly summarised some of these views. He placed ‘primary and main responsibility for the pogrom on the shoulders of the extremely and fascist Government (sic) of Dr Malan and the Nationalist Party’:[[417]](#footnote-417)

One cannot escape the conclusion that the outbreak here has some resemblance of organised attack, that it was premeditated, although something went wrong with the timing, that a hidden hand of instigators lurks behind the events, that such events eminently suited the Government in order to weaken the growing opposition to Government policy, that it may be used as a weapon to impose further repression on both Indian and African people... .the hands of the Malan government are stained with blood.62

In South Africa, an alarmed NIO denounced Dadoo’s statement because of its anti­government sentiments, highlighting the growing rift between South African Indian merchants and radicals. Dadoo’s other main concern was to refute accusations of communism.

Mr Louw’s63 charge that the Congress (NIC) was dominated by Communists is a canard which I hurl back into his teeth the Natal Indian Congress was founded by that great

apostle of truth and non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi. He has given it the great tradition of his matchless weapon of passive resistance, first tried out in South Africa.64

Dadoo’s rather vociferous denial of communist influence was, of course, partly inspired by the beginnings of the Cold War and the growing anti-Communist climate in South Africa. But his evocation of Gandhi indicated his increasingly close relationship with the Indian Congress. As outlined in the previous chapter, Dadoo had corresponded with Gandhi and at several key points of the passive resistance campaign, had sought his advice. Many felt that Dadoo was being groomed to take on a Gandhian role in South African politics. After Gandhi’s death, Nehru became his principal adviser. The prestige of Indian independence and Indian representation in the United Nations, gave the political struggle of Indians in South Africa increasing international prominence.

The Durban Riots and the narratives that stem from them describe the complex ways in which communities relate to one another in changing social, economic and political circumstances. They help illustrate the heterogeneous process of identity formation in South Africa, and the difficulties of organising class actions across the racial divide. Martin Legassick has remarked that early industrialisation in South African had given rise to ‘ill defined groups of dissidents’ rather than pure categories of class.[[418]](#footnote-418) By the 1940s, capitalism had continued to develop unevenly and identities continued to be heterogeneous rather than ‘fully proletarianised’. Most African and Asian workers worked in, but also between, industry, the service sector, petty trade, and agriculture. In these circumstances, identity was differentiated on the individual, group and national level in all communities. But, as

1. ‘Statement’. Reddy, Yusuf Dadoo, p.145.
2. Cabinet Minister Eric Louw was a prominent member of the National Party, the Minister for Economic Affairs, and chief South African delegate to the United Nations in 1949.
3. ‘Statement’, Reddy, Yusuf Dadoo, p.146

Franz Fanon65 [[419]](#footnote-419) and Homi Bhaba have observed, colonialism produces its own particular forms of hybrid identity.[[420]](#footnote-420) For Indian South Africans, cultural transformations gave rise to a particular form of hybridity, based on an identity that was not fixed, but a point of identification, an act of becoming in relation to Africans and whites. However, political action around a set of demands often still required a more essentialised vision of self and community.

For some, the fragmented and fundamentally competitive experience of class in South Africa undermined its ability to act as a vector for mass mobilisation. Dadoo returned to a nationalist narrative because this discourse enabled him to call on a ‘true self, which recognised a common history, culture and links with India. It provided a sense of ‘oneness, continuity, and coherence, in opposition to the experience of dispersal and fragmentation’ under colonialism.[[421]](#footnote-421) Gandhian notions of Indianness became the vector through which a ‘true Indian self5 could be reinscribed as a political identity which outlined specific forms of action. It was one essentialising discourse amongst many. Apartheid itself was an essentialising discourse that sought to unite the disparate interest groups and classes within Afrikaner society.

On January the 13th 1948, Gandhi began his famous, and last, fast to stop the communal bloodshed between Hindus and Muslims that had broken out after partition in India. A year to the day later, the Durban Riots broke out in South Africa. There was a deep chasm between African and Indian residents of the city. Despite Dadoo’s brave words, Gandhi’s philosophy had not as yet provided a ‘matchless weapon’ with which to forge a non-racial unity that would effectively counter discriminatory state policies. In the next chapter I will examine how these difficulties fed into the Defiance Campaign of the 1952 and the changing relationship between community and party.

Chapter 10

Conclusions

At the beginning of the 1950s, as the policies of apartheid intensified in South Africa, qualitative shifts were taking place within the CPSA as well. It was in the process of re-defining its relationship to other organisations around a nationalist programme for democratic rights. The CP’s relationship with the national congresses became closer in this period, although this had been foreshadowed by the party’s activities prior to, during, and immediately after World War Two. Grassroots activity had provided the CPSA with broad­based support and access to widespread organisational networks.1 These circumstances helped accommodate a South African Indian nationalist discourse within the CPSA. The ideological framework for this was provided by the party’s characterisation of South Africa as of ‘Colonialism of a Special Type’. This implicitly continued the issues raised by ‘Black Republic’ thesis discussed in Chapter Five.

The Black Republic thesis advocated a ‘two-stage’ process, suggesting that a nationalist group would have to execute the first stage of a bourgeois democratic revolution, which would then be followed by the struggle for a workers and peasants republic. The CP therefore had to constantly evaluate its relationship to the nationalist groups, no easy task given the vacillation of the international communist movement on this matter. While Indian communists had more or less successfully maintained a bridgehead between the Communist Party and the Indian Congresses, relations between the CP and the ANC were not quite so straightforward, especially after formation of the Youth League in September 1944. The League aimed to challenge the ‘petty bourgeois’ politics of an ANC which was led predominantly by white-collar professionals, with a more directly Africanist agenda of democratic rights. As the League’s influence began to spread within the ANC, two difficulties soon became apparent. One was the hostility towards communist ideology displayed by some Youth League members because it was seen as inherently ‘foreign’; the other was the unease that some party members felt with collaborating with such overtly

1. T. Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa, (New York, 1983), pp. 33-66; H. Sapire, ‘Apartheid’s Testing Ground; urban native policy and African Politics in Brakpan, South Africa, 1943-1948’, Journal of African History, vol. 35, 1994, pp. 99-123.

nationalist aims, which, according to some, obscured the party’s supposed principle focus on class.[[422]](#footnote-422)

A series of resolutions were passed at CP conferences requesting its African members to join the ANC, although many were reluctant to do so as 'the ANC was dominated by sophisticated intellectuals who only spoke in English'.[[423]](#footnote-423) They felt that there was a wide gap between the political constituency of the ANC and the workers’ movements that the Communist Party was used to working in. But at this time, the ANC was in a process of change, and the CP was trying to formulate a political programme, which would encourage an alliance of the unions, the party and the national organisations. The programme that was produced at the end of the Second World War by the CP called for universal equal rights and a welfare system, both of which could be implemented through a nationalist organisation in the first pail of a ‘two stage revolution’.

As with its Indian members, in the Transvaal, and also in to some extent in Durban, leading communists were also leading Congress officials. CP members Bopape, Marks and Thloome were also members of Congress. Congress politics and CP politics became intrinsically intertwined. ‘Progressive’ nationalism was viewed as capable of providing a platform for an agenda of equal rights and an end to racial discrimination, and CP members, particularly in the Transvaal, began to articulate an official reorientation within the party which prioritised the national liberation movement. [[424]](#footnote-424) In 1949, CP members Rusty Bernstein and Michael Harmel began to formulate the beginnings of the notion of ‘Colonialism of a Special Type’ which would provide a theoretical basis from which to direct this increasing realignment towards nationalist organisations. The thesis behind ‘Colonialism of a Special Type’ was first officially put forward in a CP Central Committee Report of the last official conference convened by the party in January 1950. The CP dissolved itself and went underground in June of that same year. The document was trying to deal with changes taking place within South Africa that seemed undeniable to a significant section of the party’s membership:

Conflicting Nationalisms: South Africa is entering a period of bitter *national* conflict [original emphasis]. An intensive racial oppression, an aggressive and virulent Afrikaner nationalism, are provoking an exclusive nationalist consciousness among the Indian, the African, the Coloured, and even among the English-speaking Whites, whose former unchallenged pre­eminence is now being threatened. On all sides the national and racial differences are being emphasised, and the realities of the *class* divisions are being obscured. All but a small majority of class-conscious South Africans view the clash of interests, not as one between worker and employer, but as a clash between white and black, or between English and Afrikaner.[[425]](#footnote-425)

The report argued that a theory of Colonialism of a Special Type was necessary because an internal colony existed in South Africa. This new formulation was an attempt to articulate a pragmatic and indigenous response to the circumstances of South Africa and it underwent much fine-tuning in the party over the next few years. Broadly speaking, CP theoreticians argued that black South Africans actually suffered a double oppression, in that they were oppressed as a nation and as workers. South Africa contained a permanent white population that was the colonising power. This population controlled the political system of exploitation and this system had the same characteristics that were found in other parts of colonial Africa, such as a racially divided working class and a system of migrant labour. The white population of South Africa, however, had no metropolitan centre to return to. In South Africa, the colonisers and the colonised inhabited the same national boundaries. On top of this, segregation and apartheid had stunted the formation of a black bourgeoisie as all racial groups were treated as homogenous entities by the state, both politically and economically, and therefore differentiation within them was obscured or minimal. And, as this was a colonial straggle, the correct response to it was a struggle of national liberation.[[426]](#footnote-426)

The report went on to deal with the actual nationalist organisations which, it considered, were predominantly petty-bourgeois and economically dependent on the white ruling class, because of conditions in South Africa at that time. It characterised them as mainly weak and ineffectual, except for the Indian bourgeoisie, who ‘in conjunction with Indian workers have been able to conduct a mass struggle of limited dimensions.’7 The other organisations, it concluded, could only develop into powerful, mass movements to the extent that the interests of the workers and peasants determined their content and aims. The document tried hard to reconcile the two main trends in the party at that time, those calling for a closer relationship with the nationalist organisations, and those who were anxious to retain a fundamental commitment to class politics. It suggested implicitly that the CP should try to do this by acknowledging that there could be no clear line between bourgeois and working-class demands, around issues of residential segregation, pass laws and employment legislation for example, as these affected all non-Europeans and therefore were ‘national interests.’ And the straggle against racial discrimination had to be played out in terms of the straggle against capitalism and by ‘ensuring the dominant role of class conscious workers in the national organisations’.8 It therefore suggested that the nationalist organisations be

transformed into a revolutionary party of workers, peasants and intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie, linked together in a firm organisation, subject to strict discipline and guided by a definite programme of struggle against all forms of racial discrimination in alliance with class conscious European workers and intellectuals.9

The argument for Colonialism of a Special Type and for stronger links with nationalist organisations was facilitated by the less exclusivist, but radical, leadership that had emerged in the Youth League ( including Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo), and a discourse within the ANC which talked of colonial oppression and capitalism as the enemy - a discourse which co-incided to some extent with Marxist analysis. In 1949, the Youth League had six members elected to the Executive of the ANC, which adopted the Programme of Action, committing itself to a grassroots programme of mass action. It also coincided with yet another change in direction in the internationally Communist movement regarding the relationship between communist parties and the national bourgeoisie. In 1949, the Cominform (which had replaced the Comintern) reversed its previous position and advocated alliances between workers and the colonial national bourgeoisie.

’‘Nationalism and the Class Struggle’, p. 208.

1. ‘Nationalism and the Class Struggle’, p. 211.
2. ‘Nationalism and the Class Struggle’, p. 211.

Colonialism of a Special Type was a part of a much wider debate than that taking place within the international communist movement:

The first cogent statement of internal colonialism was made in 1952 by Joe Mathews, the president of the ANC Youth League and not a member at that time of the Communist Party. The first major theoretical support for internal colonialism came, not from any of the leading communists, but from Leo Marquard - president of the South African Institute for Race Relation, and vice-president of the Liberal Party.. ..When looking at CST, one should remember that it was in the air as it were. It was the era of decolonisation and national liberation struggle, and CST was the result of a widespread debate which took place across party political boundaries on the liberal/left in the early and mid 1950s.[[427]](#footnote-427)

In this climate, the Indian radical nationalism espoused by Dadoo fitted like a glove. And it was given extra resonance through its strong relationship with Congress in India, which seemed to represent the very epitome of a ‘progressive’ nationalism. Congress advocated a modernist agenda; It enjoyed a close, if at times fraught, relationship, with the Soviet Union; its framework of socialist orientation for economic and technological development was to be implemented through five year plans; and it exercised a democratic voice at the UN. In addition, the INC emphasised, in theory, a secular politics of democratic rights that would wash away centuries of caste discrimination. But this political orientation was combined in Congress with Gandhian notions of tradition and an essential Indian character.[[428]](#footnote-428) If Congress’s socialist tendencies co-incided in some respects with a communist programme, the Gandhian ‘true self, a political and moral being, appealed to Indian South Africans in reaction to their place in the racialised landscape of South Africa.

The contradiction of having Gandhi as model for political action (who, as we have seen, made no bones about his anti-socialist sentiments and often displayed an anti-worker ethic) for a Communist Party and its members could be blurred at a time when the party was in alliance with nationalist organisations. In this context, the highly eclectic nature of the philosophical underpinnings of passive resistance meant that it could act as an overarching vehicle for mobilisation, and extra-parliamentary mass protest. Passive resistance became transformed, yet again, like a vessel of ‘fluid signs’, which could signify different things at different moments in time, in order to articulate different political demands. In the early twentieth century, Gandhi had formulated it as a moral weapon of truth and conscience against a corrupting modernity. In the 1940s, it was appropriated by Indian communist members as a tool in the struggle for democratic rights and citizenship. In the 1950s, it was transformed once more, now by Africans, to represent Christian values of justice and truth,[[429]](#footnote-429) and a means of mobilising extra-parliamentary opposition to the apartheid state. These ideas of truth and justice interacted with a broad-based political platform of national democratic rights and citizenship against a ‘fascist’ state.

There were many contradictions in the new direction the party was taking. The claim that certain issues were equally relevant to workers and the bourgeoisie is questionable. Residential segregation, for one, did not affect all non-Europeans in the same way, while discriminatory laws regarding the purchase of land primarily affected middle­class Indians.[[430]](#footnote-430) Employment legislation also had a differential impact on communities, depending on such variables as class, gender, and access to capital. Nonetheless, ‘Colonialism of a Special Type’ represented an attempt to synthesise a position between class and nation. It provided party members with a theoretical basis for increasing involvement with the nationalist struggle and membership of the nationalist organisations, as well as a legal platform from which to cany on illegal work. Indian communists had already employed these tactics for some time.

Anti-communist legislation introduced by the NP after 1948 enabled the government to contain and eliminate political opposition in a decade which saw increasing control over the lives of black people. The Pass Laws stepped up the constraints on African movement. Stock limitation and the Bantu Authorities Act sought to alter economic and political relations in the reserves. The Bantu Education Act tried to break the monopoly on African schooling held by the Christian Missions and replace it with an African education system geared towards training Africans for ‘their station in life’, with a special emphasis on manual training. The Group Areas Act extended the racial boundaries of segregation and created further rigid racial boundaries in the occupation and use of space. The control and the racialisation of urban space was extended even further in 1951 with the introduction of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act which gave the state powers to ‘resettle’ the ‘surplus peasants’ living in ‘black spots’ in designated white areas in reserves.[[431]](#footnote-431)

The Communist Party, in conjunction with nationalist groups, organised a May Day strike in 1950 to protest against the Unlawful Organisations Bill. On 20 June, the Communist Party dissolved itself. In the House of Assembly in Cape Town, Sam Kahn stated:

Recognising that the day the Suppression of Communism Bill becomes law every one of our members, merely by virtue of their membership, may be liable to be imprisoned without the option of a fine for a maximum period of ten years, the central Committee of the Communist party has decided to dissolve the Party as from today... .Adopting the technique of all Fascists, the government destroys what it claims to defend...Communism will outlive the nationalist Party. Democracy will still be triumphant when members of this government will be manuring the fields of history. Millions in South Africa will echo my final words: Long live communism.[[432]](#footnote-432)

Dadoo, by this time an established and important party leader chaired the meeting in Johannesburg when the decision to dissolve the party was announced.. The decision to dissolve the CP was contentious for its members. Rusty Bernstein suggests that many part members were left with a deep sense of shock and disorientation, and were unhappy with the legalistic reasons they were given for the decision.[[433]](#footnote-433) [[434]](#footnote-434) Nor was the decision by any means 17 unanimous.

However, as Bernstein also points out, freed from their party membership, many ex­CP members were now more readily welcomed into mass organisations, and were not viewed with the same suspicion as before.[[435]](#footnote-435) Some party members such as Jack and Ray Simons felt that a broad-based movement, based around the nationalist organisations, would be the driving force in this period, and that the party was not really needed at that time.[[436]](#footnote-436) Whatever the internal disagreements, there is little doubt that party members took their organisational skills into the nationalist political bodies.

Communist Party members began to take their first practical steps in redefining their relationship with the nationalist organisations. White, African and Indian, they were determined to advance non-racial organisation against the Malan government and actively promoted this through their membership of the Congresses. A significant section in the Congress supported them. The CP had 1500 African members at the time of its dissolution and many of them were already in the ANC.

By 1951, a ‘Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws’ was beginning to take shape as the government passed 75 pieces of apartheid legislation in one parliamentary session.[[437]](#footnote-437) The ANC invited the SAIC and the FAC to a meeting of its National Executive Committee in June, 1951, to discuss a joint campaign of ‘civil disobedience’. The subsequent Joint Planning Council consisted of J.B. Marks, Walter Sisulu, Y.M. Dadoo and Y.A. Cachalia, who between represented a spectrum of communist, nationalist and Gandhian influences. The proposed campaign also began to attract international support, from newly communist China, Kwame Nkrumah, who was leading the fight for independence on the Gold Coast, and Indian Congress, amongst others. Again, passive resistance, or Civil Disobedience as it now became known, also helped put the situation in South Africa in the international public arena, when the issues it raised were placed before the UN. It also became identified with a wider anti-colonial struggle, and added to the considerable growth of international hostility to the policies of the National Party.

The campaign was launched on the 26 June, the same month that the Indian campaign of passive resistance had started in 1946. The tactic of the ‘stay-at-home’, first tried out in 1950, similar to the Indian ‘hartal’, was one strategy employed in non-violent resistance. Others, as in the Indian campaign, included breaking apartheid laws, crossing borders, and courting arrest.

There was generally a positive response to Civil Disobedience, but the actual Indian participation was relatively small, confined by now to a radical minority which managed to negotiate, or at least work alongside, communist ideals and nationalist sentiments, in a campaign for democratic rights and citizenship. I have discussed the reasons for the loss of their wider political constituency in previous chapters. Nevertheless, Indians were prominent in leading some of the initial campaigns, and brought their previous experience with them, and many of the organisational structures, such as setting up volunteer corps, and taking an oath of allegiance, were derived from the methods that Gandhi had initiated in South Africa. Gandhian tactics were also popular because of India’s recently gained independence, which was often represented as a direct result of his methods of struggle. If passive resistance could defeat the British, could it not be used to gain concessions from the National Party?, There were, however, also important differences from earlier campaigns. In the 1950s, the methods of passive resistance were reinscribed as a means to win democratic rights and citizenship, but this time, through predominantly Christian notions of justice and truth. They were also translated beyond the supposedly specific Indian character that passive resistance had acquired in South Africa, where it had been regarded a particularly compatible with ‘Indian philosophy’ or state of mind:[[438]](#footnote-438) ‘Passive resistance comes readily to the Hindu mind, whereas it would be incomprehensible to a Zulu or a Sioux.’[[439]](#footnote-439) In the course of this reappropriation, passive resistance was emphasised as an activity of ‘civilised men’, African citizens who were now calling for full democratic rights for all races in an ‘integrated South Africa.’ This was a direct challenge to notions of ‘primitive, savage, warlike’ Africans’ who were seen as intrinsically incapable of embracing non-violent protest. There were overt comparisons to the violent methods of Mau Mau in Kenya, which at this time haunted the European imagination, and were fuelled by primitive archetypes of ‘African savagery’. These stereotypical views had, of course, also been expressed during the Durban Riots, both through ‘common sense’ discourse and in the language of official state bodies, and one important aspect of adopting passive resistance as a weapon of political expedience was to emphasise that Africans were capable of responsible political behaviour.[[440]](#footnote-440) [[441]](#footnote-441)

The movement was now also increasingly translated largely in Christian terms, and the principles of Christianity used to challenge the government to change its racist policies. The organisational structures of the campaign were often framed around prayer meetings, the singing of hymns, and Bible readings; this was particularly marked in the Eastern Cape. 24 The combination of politics and prayer also assumed a significant practical aspect as, soon after the campaign started, the government outlawed all public meetings, apart from religious gatherings. This espousal of Christian values were was also part of a stark challenge to the supposedly Christian principles of the National Party, where the Congress bodies issued a moral challenge to the government in terms of its own Christian morality.

This evocation of Christian principles was also to be found at meetings of the Indian congress. Many Indian South Africans were Christians, and during the Civil Disobedience campaign they espoused their views with increased conviction. Indian participants in the campaign spoke of a suffering that would bring about justice and truth, and these notions also appealed to Gandhian ideas of suffering through moral conviction. Indian politics in South Africa had always had a strong religious element. Congress meetings often started with prayers. In the early 1950s, there were also many direct references to Christianity. In October 1951, G. M. Naicker declared: ‘Christianity is based on the brotherhood of man...and apartheid is the very negation of the noble principles which humanity has inherited from Christ.’[[442]](#footnote-442) Other Indian campaign members also emphasised issues of human rights and the teachings of Christianity.

Many ex-party members, such as R. D. Naidoo and Kay Moonasamy, remained active in their trade union organisations.[[443]](#footnote-443) Others who were banned by the state, found it more difficult to stay politically active in this period. For example, In 1950, George

Ponnen, the first party member to be banned in Natal, was ordered to resign from all unions, as well as Indian Congress, and forbidden to enter any factory. He consequently also lost his means of living, and was forced, first and foremost, to try and feed his family.27 A number of Indian and African women, many of whose husbands were members of Congress, also started the Durban and District Women’s League in 1952, which organised functions to raise money for the campaign.28

In many ways, Dadoo, who fought the campaign on the slogan of ‘unity against fascism’, came to symbolise an Indian communist narrative of class and nation that fed into the Defiance Campaign of 1952. By this time, Dadoo had become a transnational Indian political hero. In South Africa, in the ‘vast majority of Indian homes, every one carried a photo of Dadoo’, and he also had achieved a very high profile in India. Promoted as ‘Gandhi’s favorite son’, who also had the ear of Nehru, Dadoo appealed to a wide political constituency, in part because he did not see a contradiction between being ‘a real activist in the national liberation movement and being a communist at the same time.’29 Dadoo’s image, seen as a badge of Indian South African identity, transcended the boundaries of the politically active.

There was also, however, a new emphasis in the constitution of radical Indian political identity in this period. South African Indian communists had used the passive resistance campaign of 1946 to bring their plight to an international audience. This had caused considerable annoyance to Smuts and the South African government, but also produced wider anger amongst white South Africans, and under the Nationalists, Indians were increasingly pressurised to demonstrate where exactly their loyalties lay. How could they lay claim to South African citizenship *and* keep calling on India to champion their interests? As the Natal Mercury bluntly put it: ‘if Indians belong here, stop appealing to outside bodies’.[[444]](#footnote-444) In NIC conference minutes and agenda books in this period, there were far fewer references to the Motherland, to Indian honour and dignity, or to racial

1. G. Ponnen, George Ponnen Speaks, p. 19. Penned ended up starting a factory run on ‘egalitarian lines’, where trade union and ANC meetings took place during the Defiance Campaign.
2. F. Meer, interview with JF, Durban August, 1985.
3. E. Pahad, interview with JF, Durban 1985.

discrimination as a ‘slur on the Indian nation’. Their oppression was expressed in ways that emphasised their belonging in South Africa, and their community of interest with other ‘non-Europeans’. The demand that they make a choice about where they ‘belonged’ brought a shift in their political language, and led to an emphasis on the joint struggle for democratic rights in a multiracial partnership. Leaders of the African National Congress now regularly attended their meetings and addressed the audience. In the 1950s, Chief Albert Luthuli was a regular guest at annual NIC conferences.

The government responded swiftly to the political unrest of 1952, cracking down both on campaigners, and their leadership. Ahmed Kathrada and Dadoo were both arrested in August. Chief Albert Luthuli, who was elected President of the ANC in December, 1952, called off the campaign in April 1953. The Defiance Campaign of 1952 was not intended as a challenge to state power in South Africa. The leadership sought the repeal of the accelerating apartheid legislation in this period. It did not succeed. However, the campaign brought together forms of political protest and political alliances that were to increasingly form the basis for opposition to the apartheid state, a method of mass, inter-racial and cross class extra parliamentary protest that would later be termed a ‘social movement’.

The influence of Indian communists helped shape the civil disobedience of the 1950s in several ways, and it fed into an international anti-colonial discourse of socialism and nationalism.31

Conclusion

In the period under discussion, the Communist Party of South Africa significantly changed its political orientation, and Indian South African communists were an important part of redirecting that change. Initially, the party’s theoretical basis and its practical work were centred on white workers at the point of production. Although many members considered that they had to alter their perspective because of the ‘specifics’ of a South African ‘reality’ which could not be ignored, their response was a reflection of the fact that they was no pure category of class that would selflessly fulfil its historic mission, in South 30

Africa or elsewhere. All classes in South Africa were a product of their complex histories, bore traces of their past cultural practices, and were entangled with other forms of identification. Classes became divided on racial and gendered lines, but also came to be experienced through forms of national identity and the struggle for social space. For Indians, an important element of this national identity was derived through their diasporic experiences, and their continuing relationship with their ‘homeland’. These national identities was reinforced through state legislation which sought to spatialise its racially hierachical practices, and also sought to determine access to jobs, housing, and public services. The growth of partially formed urban spaces, where many Indians lived in the margins of the modernising city, helped fuel a radical politics of inclusion and citizenship.

Indians had a history of trade union organisation, but it was the wider politics of anti-fascism that brought many into contact with the party. Although the Indians who came into the CP initially organised around issues which arose in the workplace, their fight was primarily around rights for Indian workers, even when this had not specifically been the intention. Moreover, party members conflated union organisation with the wider antifascist struggle for democratic rights in South Africa. Workplace issues also became further Indianised through the involvement of Indian Congress community leaders (despite the contested and fragile nature of community) as well as representatives of the Indian government. The strong ties with India, and Indian national liberation politics, also gave radical Indian political organisation in South Africa a strong anti-colonial flavour, and an attachment to the ‘progressive nationalism’ being championed by the international communist movement in this period, because of its anti-imperialist potential.

The international political landscape witnessed the rise of fascism at this time, which profoundly affected the strategy of communist parties world-wide. There were significant points in time when the party’s primary focus shifted to a popular front against fascism, which also proved to be a major recruiting point for the organisation. In South Africa, this interacted with the perceived threat of a growing domestic fascism, which accelerated the need for forming broad front organisations. When the CP switched its position on the

31 Dr. Debi Singh, NIC Fifth Annual Conference, 29 September-1 October, ANC Papers, ICS, No.28.

Second World War, it seemed tied to a national cause and subsequently grew in popularity, giving it experience of working in grassroots organisations on a wide variety of workers issues, such as access to housing and jobs, and struggles over urban space.

After 1948, when the National Party initiated its anti-communist legislation, forcing the CP to dissolve itself, the party decided that the way forward was to join a broad-front democratic alliance, but this was the outcome of strategies and tactics already in place, and in particular, reflected modes of organisation already adopted by Indian party members. Indians in the CP had developed a complex political subjectivity, which tried to combine a diasporic national politics, South African belonging, and, at least in principle, a socialist political programme. Gandhi had become a symbol of resistance and ‘Indianness’ in South Africa. But Dadoo took over the mantle, and also came to represent a political identity that was Indian, South African and in some sense, communist. The fact that he became such a prominent figure in the organisation symbolised the disparate ways that Indians were to influence the Communist Party of South Africa in this period, and the ease with which Indian radicals became a part of, and influenced, the Defiance Campaign of 1952. That this was initiated by such a small number of Indians makes this all the more remarkable. They helped formulate a particular articulation between nationalism and socialism in the CPSA, which was itself part of a wider dialogue taking place in twentieth century international politics.

1. Despite the fact that the term black has become a contested badge of identity in contemporary South Africa, I am using it here to refer collectively to African, Indian and Coloured communities due to the lack of a viable alternative. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. M. Israel and S. Adams, ‘That Spells Trouble’: Jews and the Communist Party of South Africa’, in Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 26, no. 1, p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This was an international grouping of socialist and labour parties that was set up in 1889. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A. Drew Discordant Comrades: identities and loyalties on the South African Left, (Aidershot, 2000), p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. By the time Batty helped form the ICU he had left the SALP to set up the Labour Democratic Party. See R, Simons and H. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950, (London, 1983), p. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. B. Hirson and G.A. Williams, The Delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones, 1883-1924, (London 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ‘The First Conference of the League’, Document 10, pp. 27-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Working Class Became White: the symbolic (re)formation of racialised capitalism,’ Journal of Historical Sociology, 1998, No. 11: pp. 316-340. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Hyslop ‘The Imperial Working Class’, p. 406. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. J. Belich, The Making of a People: a history of New Zealanders from Polynesian settlement to the end of the nineteenth century, (Auckland, 1996), pp. 428-431. See also G. Burke, ‘The Cornish Diaspora of the Nineteenth Century’, in S. Marks and P. Richardson, (eds), International Migration: historical perspectives, pp. 57-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Hyslop, ‘The Imperial Working Class’, p. 413. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Hyslop, ‘The Imperial Working Class’, p. 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. R. Crabb, interview, with PR, London July 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See above Introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Hyslop, ‘The Imperial Working Class’, p. 418. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See below, Chapter Six. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Simons and Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950, p. 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. G. Shimoni ‘Accounting for Jewish Radicals in Apartheid South Africa’, in M. Shaun and R. Mendelsohn (eds), Jews and Apartheid (forthcoming), unpaginated. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. J. Sherman ‘Serving the Natives; Whiteness as the Price of Hospitality in South African Jewish Literature’, Journal of Southern African Studies vol. 26, no. 3, September 2000, p. 506. He is talking specifically about Jews here. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. G. Shimoni ‘Accounting for Jewish Radicals’. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Evening Chronicle December 1916, quoted in Sherman ‘Serving the Natives’, p. 507. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Sherman, ‘Serving the Natives’, p. 507. He is again referring specifically to Jews. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. C. van Onselen, The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, (Cape Town, 1996), p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The first of these ‘mixed marriages’ was between Pauline Podbury and H.A. Naidoo, one of the first Indians to join the CP. See P. Podbury, White Girl in Search of the Party, (Pietermaritzburg, 1993), p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. M. Israel, S. Adams ‘That Spells Trouble’ p. 147, [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. J. T. Campbell ‘Beyond the Pale: Jewish Immigration and the South African Left’, (forthcoming) p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Drew Discordant Comrades, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Interview with Barry Feinberg by Wolfie Kodesh, quoted in Israel and Adams ‘That Spells Trouble’ p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. D. Goldberg, ‘Impressions and Memories of Communism in South Africa’, (forthcoming) p. 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Campbell, ‘Beyond the Pale’, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. I met M. D, Naidoo while he was in exile in London in 1986, and this is very much the way he talked to me about how he saw the Communist Party as part of his social life as much as his political life. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Shimoni, ‘Accounting for Jewish Radicals’. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. ‘The Young Sentinel’ [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Shimoni, ‘Accounting for Jewish Radicals’ [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Shimoni, ‘Accounting for Jewish Radicals’. See below Chapter Six for further discussion on Indians and education. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Drew, Discordant Comrades, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Drew, Discordant Comrades, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Hyslop, ‘The Imperial Working Class’, p. 400. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. CPSA pamphlet, Communism and the Native Question (Johannesburg no date) p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Communism and the Native Question, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Hyslop, ‘The Imperial Working Class’, p. 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. M. Legassick, ‘Class and Nationalism in South African Protest: The CPSA and the Native Republic, 1928- 1934, Occasional Papers, (Syracuse University, 1973), p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See below, Chapter Five. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. On the ‘Rand Revolt’ see S. Jolins, Raising the Red Flag: The International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932, (Belville, 1995), pp. 128-145; on some of the complexities of class identity during the strike see J. Krikler, ‘White Working Class Identity and the Rand Revolt’, paper presented at conference The Burden of Race? ‘Whiteness and ‘Blackness in Modem South Africa, History Workshop and Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 5-8 July 2001; J. Krikler, ‘Women, Violence and the Rand Revolt of 1922’, Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 22, no. 3, September 1996, pp. 349-372. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Roux S. P. Bunting, p. 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Quoted in Krikler ‘White Working Class Identity’, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Krikler ‘White Working Class Identity, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Rand Daily Mail, 12 January 1922, quoted in Krikler, ‘White Working Class Identity’, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. A. Lerumo Fifty Fighting Years: The South African Communist Party 1921-1971 (Inkululeko 197If p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Hertzog, quoted in Fifty Fighting Years p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Simons and Simons, Class and Colour, p. 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Krikler, ‘White Working Class Identity’ pp. 11-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Hirson, The Delegate, pp. 228-230; Drew, Discordant Comrades, p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. See G. Burke and P. Richardson, ‘The Profits of Death: a comparative study of miners’ phthisis in Cornwall and the Transvaal, 1876-1908’, Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 14, no. 2, April 1978, pp. 147-171. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Quoted in Drew Discordant Comrades, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. D. Ivon Jones, quoted in Hirson, The Delegate, p. 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. D. Ivon Jones, quoted in Hirson, The Delegate, p. 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. K. Marx, Collected Letters, quoted in R. Palme Dutt, The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire, (London 1953) p. 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. ‘After Forty Years’, SACP pamphlet, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. This set out to create employment for unskilled whites, as well as protect those in the semi-skilled sector from black workers. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. The International, 27 April 1923. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. M. A. Persits, Revolutionarie of India in Soviet Russia, (Moscow, 1973) pp, 124-158. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. S. Roy, M. N. Roy: a political biography, ( London, 1997), p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. S. Roy, M.N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi (Calcutta, 1987), p.15. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. See B. Bunting, Moses Kotane; South African revolutionary. (London, 1975), pp. 14-42; E. Roux, S. P. Bunting, pp. 118- 130; B. Hirson, ‘Bukharin, Bunting and the ‘Native Republic Slogan’, Searchlight South Africa, vol. 1, no. 3, July 1989, pp. 51-65; B. Hirson, ‘The Black Republic Slogan-Part 11: The Response of the Trotskyists’ Searchlight South Africa, vol. 1, no. 4, February 1990, pp. 43-56; M. Legassick, ‘Class and Nationalism; M. Legassick, ‘The 1928 ‘Black Republic’ resolution of the CPSA and the struggle for national liberation and socialism’ unpublished paper, 2001; For the CPSA programme on the Black Republic see ‘Programme of the Communist Party of South Africa adopted at the seventh annual conference of the party on January 1, 1929, Document 44, South African Communists Speak, pp. 100-106. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Persits, Revolutionaries of India, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. M. N. Roy, Memoirs (Bombay, 1964), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. M. Pavlovich, V. Gurko-Kryahin and S. Weltman, India in the Battle for Independence, (Moscow 1925), quoted in Persits, Revolutionaries of India, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. S. Roy, M. N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. S. Roy, M. N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Bhana, Gandhi’s Legacy, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Quoted in S. Roy, M.N. Roy, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. M. N. Roy, Memoirs, p. 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. M. Ahmad, Myself and the Communist Party of India, (Calcutta, 1970), pp. 67-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. A united front is built on the assumption that communist organisations can form alliances with other social groups, but must maintain their own political identity. See V. I. Lenin, ‘Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions’, July 26 1920, Collected Works, (Moscow, 1977), pp. 241-245. In contrast, a ‘popular front’ results in communist organisations subsuming their politics to nationalist groupings, and adopting a nationalist agenda. Many would argue that this was the fate of the CPSA by the 1950s. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. See M. Legassick ‘The 1928 ‘black republic thesis’ (sic) as a good contemporary example of this. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. V.I. Lenin, ‘Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (a popular outline)’, Collected Works, vol. 22, pp. 185-304. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Persits, Revolutionaries of India, p.137, [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. M. K. Gandhi, quoted in R. Palme Dutt, India Today, (London 1940), p. 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Palme Dutt, India Today, p. 300. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Palme Dutt, India Today, p. 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Sir Valentine Chirol, India, 1926, p.207, quoted in Palme Dutt, India Today, p. 304. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. M. K. Gandhi, quoted in Palme Dutt, India Today, pp. 304-305. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Nerhu himself, amongst others, was to comment on this ‘delightful vagueness’. See J. Nehru, An Autobiography, with musings on recent events in India, (Bombay, 1962), p. 76. The general consensus, seems to have been that Gandhi was given a ‘blank cheque’ because of his ability to ‘rouse the masses’ something that even Roy was aware of, and paid tribute to. See M.N. Roy, Men I Have Met. (Bombay, 1968), pp. 26-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. nothing to do with these practices. Nor have the large number of Colonial-bom Indians who have received in tire face of terrible odds a tolerably liberal education. The third class is the indentured Indian, now become free. He is drawn mainly from the poorest class here. Nothing has ever been done by the Government or the employers or by the free Indian community to help these unfortunate men and women out of their ignorance and superstition.’ Gandhi, Collected Works, vol. 33, pp. 339-40; Gandhi also often cited the basically hierarchical position of Hinduism: ‘All are born to serve God’s creation, the Brahmin, with his knowledge, the Kshatriya, with his power of protection, the Vaishya, with his commercial ability, the Shudra, with his bodily labour.’ Gandhi, quoted in R. Palme Dutt, Modem India. (London, 1927), p. 80; He also commented on the ‘moral lapses’ of low-caste Indians. See Indian Opinion 14 January 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. See ‘The Twenty-one Points-Conditions of Admission to the Communist International’, Document 21, South African Communists Speak, pp. 58-62, for tire full Twenty-one Points. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. B. Hirson, The Delegate, p. 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. This was a document produced by the Comintern in 1928 which outlined how the Communist Party should approach the national question in South Africa. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. ‘Resolution on ‘The South African Question’ adopted by the Executive Committee of the Communist International following the Sixth Comintern Congress’, Document 42, South African Communists Speak pp. 93-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. D. Ivon Jones ‘Communism in Africa’ Moscow Organ of the 111 Congress of the Communist International, vol.l, no. 14, 9 June 1921; Document 19, South African Communists Speak, pp. 41-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. See ‘The White Workers’ Burden’, The International 11 April 1919. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. See J. Krickler, ‘The Inner Mechanics of a South African Racial Massacre’, The Historical Journal, vol. 42, no. 4, (1999), pp. 1051-1075. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. W. Kalk, ‘Report on Native Affairs’ presented at tire 3rd Congress of the Communist Party, Johannesburg, December 1924, Document 34, South African Communists Speak, p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Lerumo, Fifty Fighting Years, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Drew, Discordant Comrades, p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. La Guma was a ‘Cape Coloured’ who had previously worked in the diamond mines before joining the ICU. See M. Adhikari, (ed.), Jimmy La Guma: a biography by A. La Guma. (Cape Town, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Letter from Thibedi to Roux, E.R.Roux Papers. ICS, No. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. On the ICU see H. Bradford, A Taste of Freedom: the ICU in rural South Africa, (London, 1987); on its origins see C. Kadalie, Mv Life and the ICU, (London, 1970); B. Hirson, ‘The IWA and the ICU’. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Letter from Thibedi to Roux, E. R. Roux Papers, ICS, NO. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. See See Worker’s Herald 15 December 1925; A. D. Kemp and R. Trent Vinson, ‘“Poking Holes in the Sky”: Professor James Thael, American negroes and modernity in 1920s segregationist South Africa’, African Studies Review, vol. 43, no. 1, April 2000, pp. 146-155; R. A. Hill and G. A. Pirio, “Africa for the Africans’: the Garvey Movement in South Africa’, S. Marks and S. Trapido, (eds) The Politics of Race, pp. 209-253. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. See ‘Resolution on The South African Question’, Document 42, South African Communists Speak, pp. 91­97, for details of the statement issued by the Executive Committee of the Communist International on the Black Republic. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. B. Hirson ‘Bukharin, Bunting and the ‘Native Republic’ Slogan’, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Simons and Simons, Class and Colour, p. 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Simons and Simons, Class and Colour, p. 389; H. Haywood, Black Bolshevik: autobiography of an Afro- American communist, (Chicago, 1978), p. 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Hirson, ‘Bukharin, Bunting, and the Native Republic Slogan’, p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Simons and Simons, Class and Colour, p. 406. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Hirson, ‘Bukharin, Bunting, and the Native Republic Slogan’, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. S. P. Bunting, ‘S. P. Bunting at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, 1928’Serachlight South Africa, vol. 1, no. 3, July 1989, p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Bunting, ‘S. P. Bunting at the Sixth Congress’, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. J. La Guma, quoted in Simons and Simons, Class and Colour, p. 409. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Ivon Jones did acknowledge the ‘corrupt’ nature of white workers, but again this was seen as a ‘temporary infection’ that would be replaced by a ‘real’ class consciousness. See ‘Communism in South Africa’, pp. 45- 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. M. Legassick Class and Nationalism, p.27. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. pp. 1-82; W. Connor, The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy. (Princeton, 1984), pp. 5-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Bunting, Moses Kotane p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. C. Bundy ‘Land and Liberation: Popular Rural Protest and the National Liberation Movements in South Africa, 1920-1960.’ S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), The Politics of Race, Class, p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Bundy ‘Land and Liberation’, p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Roux, S. P. Bunting, pp. 131-140. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Legassick, ‘Class and Nationalism’, pp. 17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Umsebenzi was the name of the Party’s theoretical paper. Legassick, ‘Class and Nationalism’, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Bunting Moses Kotane, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Legassick, ‘Class and Nationalism’, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. See below, Chapter Six, Seven and Eight, where I discuss this further. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Hirson, ‘Bukharin, Bunting and the Native Republic Thesis’, p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. C. Bundy ‘Left, Right, Left, Right: The CPSA in the 1930s and 1940s’ The History of the Communist Party of South Africa, (University of Cape Town Department of Extra Mural Studies 1991), p. 27. It is significant that by this point the terms ‘united front’ and ‘popular front’ were being used almost interchangeably and the distinction between them was largely lost. Increasingly in this period, it was the politics of the ‘popular front’ that was practised by some CPs. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Roux, Time Longer Than Rope, p. 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Drew, Discordant Comrades p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Roux, Time Longer Than Rope p. 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Johannesburg Sunday Express, 18 July 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. See Drew, Discordant Comrades, pp. 167-187. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Bundy, ‘Left, Right’, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. G. Ponnen interview with PR Durban, June 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. P. Thakur, ‘Education for Upliftment: A History of Sastri College 1927-198Г, MA Dissertation, (University of Natal, 1992), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Thakur, ‘Education for Upliftment’, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Swan, Gandhi, p.203. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. F. Meer, interview with JF, Durban 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Thakur, ‘Education for Upliftment’, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. I. C. Meer, quoted in Thakur, ‘Education for Upliftment’, p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Thakur, ‘Education for Upliftment’, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Thakur, ‘Education for Upliftment’, p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. S. Vietzen. ‘Mabel Palmer and Higher Education in Natal 1936-42’ Journal of Natal and Zulu History vol.

     VI, 1983, p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Vietzen, ‘Mabel Palmer’, p.106. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. See ‘Socialism in Daily Life’: an essay read before the Fabian Society of Glasgow University by Mabel Atkinson, (Mabel Palmer), 14 February, 1899, Killie Campbell Africana Library, Mabel Palmer Papers, KCM 17352. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. See Indian Opinion, 31 January 1936; see also ‘How non-European classes began at Natal University’, by Mabel Palmer, Daily News 15 March 1957, for Palmer’s reasons for accepting segregated classes. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Vietzen, ‘Mabel Palmer, p. 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Vietzen, ‘Mabel Palmer, p. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. See Chapters Seven and Eight below. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Vietzen, ‘Mabel Palmer’, p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Thakur, ‘Education for Upliftment’, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. A. К. M. Docrat, interview with PR, Durban August 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Indian Opinion, 25 January 1941. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. R. D. Naidoo Interview with JF, Durban August, 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Ponnen, ‘George Ponnen Speaks\p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Ponnen, ‘George Ponnen Speaks’, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Ponnen, ‘George Ponnen Speaks’, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Johannes Nkosi was one of the few Zulu-speaking members of tire early CPSA. A former farm labourer, he became a communist through joining the CP night school in 1926. He was shot and killed by the police. See: ‘Comrade Johannes Nkosie, First African Revolutionary Martyr’ by A. Nzula, editorial in Umsebenzi, January 9, 1931 Document 50, South African Communists Speak; Roux, Time Longer Than Rope, pp. 247- 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. According to Roux, this was part of the beginnings of attempts by the Party to organise mass based non­violent protest, which he calls ‘passive resistance’. See Roux, ‘Time Longer Than Rope’, pp. 243-244. Legassick remarks that the failure of these demonstrations, and the tragedy of Nkosi’s death, illustrate the inadequacies of ‘Chartist-style non-violent demonstrations’. See Legassick, ‘Class and Nationalism’, p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Ponnen, ‘George Ponnen Speaks’, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Indian Opinion 1 July 1914. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Quoted in Indian Opinion 10 January 1914. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Indian Opinion 15 April 1914. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Indian Opinion 16 May 1919. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Indian Opinion 15 April 1914. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Indian Opinion 5 October 1917. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. E. Mantzaris. ‘The Indian Tobacco Workers Strike of 1920’, Journal of Natal and Zulu Studies, vol. VI, pp. 116. Sigamoney later became a minister of the Anglican Church and tried to combine Christianity and socialism. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. International, 2 June 1918. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Indian Opinion 21 November 1919. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Indian Opinion 20 February 1920. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Indian Opinion 25 January 1918. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. 4S Mantzaris, ‘Tobacco Workers’, p. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Indian Opinion 3 May 1919. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Quoted in Indian Opinion, 3 December 1920. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Mantzaris, ‘Tobacco Workers’ p. 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Quoted in Indian Opinion, 11 October 1920; see also Natal Mercury, 11 October 1920; Natal Witness, 11 October 1920. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Mantzaris, ‘Tobacco Workers’, p. 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Mantzaris, ‘Tobacco Workers’, p. 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Ponnen Interview with PR, Durban June 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Ponnen, ‘George Ponnen Speaks’, p. 8; P. Podbury, White Girl, p. 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Ponnen, ‘George Ponnen Speaks’, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Ponnen, interview with PR, Durban July, 1995 [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Ponen, ‘George Ponnen Speaks’, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Ponnen interview with PR, Durban July 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. V. Padyachee, S. Vawda and P. Tichmann Indian Workers and Trade Unions in Durban, 1930-50, Report no. 20, Durban, University of Durban-Westville, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1985, p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Ponnen, Interview with Iain Edwards, Durban, 1985, quoted in G. Vahed, ‘Indian Politics’, p. 13; Ponnen, ‘George Ponnen Speaks’, p. 12-13. It seems likely from Ponnen’s account that the organisers believed that getting Congress involved in this way was a means of ‘radicalising’ the organisation. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Kajee was a prominent political activist and businessman, often at odds with ‘radicals’, who became director of the firm Kajee, Moosa and Co, who ran a country-wide chain of ‘non European cinemas’. See G. C. Calpin, Indians in South Africa, (Pietermaritzburg, 1949), p. 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Padyachee et al, p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Padyachee et al, p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Padyachee et al, p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Padyachee et al, p.100. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. E.M. Paruk, quoted in Padyachee et al., p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Padyachee et al, p.104. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Ponnen inteiview with PR, Durban July 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Indian Opinion 25 June 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Indian Opinion 25 June 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. G.C. Calpin, A.I. Kajee: his work for the Indian community, (Durban, n.d.), p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Ponnen, ‘George Ponnen Speaks’, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Bundy ‘Left, Right’, p.29. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. See P. Alexander, Workers, War and the Origins of Apartheid: labour and politics in South Africa, 1939­1948, (Oxford, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. D. Hemson ‘Dock Workers, Labour Circulation, and Class Struggles in Durban, 1940-1959’, Journal Of Southern African Studies, vol. 4, 1977, p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Padyachee et al., p.107. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Padyachee et al., p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Padyachee et al., p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. R.D.Naidoo, interview with JF, Durban, August 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Alexander, Workers, War, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Padyachee et al., p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Indian Opinion 23 January 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Indian Opinion 28 January 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Indian Views 29 January 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Padyachee et al., p. 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Hemson, 'Dock Workers’, p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. See M. Swan, ‘Ideology in Organised Indian Politics’, S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds) The Politics of Race, Class and Nationlaism, pp. 198-205. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. W. Beinart and S. Dubow ‘Introduction’ in W. Beinart and S. Dubow (eds), Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Centurt South Africa (London 1995), pp. 1-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Indians in the Dominions: Memorandum regarding the British Indian Problem in the Dominions during the last twenty five years, Dominions Office (hereafter DO), 35, G717/2, 1/6/1944, Public Records Office, pp. 2­4; M. Swanson ‘The Asiatic Menace’, p. 401. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. It is interesting to note that in contemporary South Africa, where many Indians are in the process of re­defining themselves in terms of a religious identity, many Muslims are now reclaiming the term ‘Arab’. See Thomas Blum Hansen, ‘We are Arabs from the Gujurat!: the purification of Muslim identity in contemporary South Africa’, paper presented at The Centre for Southern Asian Studies Seminar, School of Oriental and African Studies, 6 February 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Swanson, The Asiatic Menace, p. 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Swanson The Asiatic Menace p. 406. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Appadurai ‘The Production of Locality’, p. 215-217. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. P. Gilroy, ‘ Diaspora, Utopia, and the Critique of Capitalism, There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: the cultural politics of race and nation, (London, 1987), pp. 153-222. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. To some extent, this was also recognised by the government from the late 1930s and 1940s, and they hoped to play on these desires in order to encourage ideas of ‘voluntary’ segregation. See J. H. Basan, ‘..in the case of Lichtenburg, where Indians had informed my office that, Congress, or no Congress, they were prepared to collaborate with the local authority,.. .Indians can acquire their own properties and at last experience a feeling of security and permanence’. ‘Commissioner for Immigration and Asiatic Affairs’ Memorandum, Cape Town 27/3/45, ANC Papers, ICSA GB 101 (ICS) ANC (RF/1/4/1-4), No. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Swanson, The Asiatic Menace, p. 407. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Swanson, The Asiatic Menace, p. 407. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Swanson, The Asiatic Menace, p. 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. G. Russell The History of Old Durban (Durban 1899), p. 490, quoted in Swanson. The Asiatic Menace p. 401. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Swanson, The Asiatic Menace, p. 414. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. J. Grest ‘The Durban City Council and the “Indian Problem”: Local Politics in the 1940s’, unpublished paper presented at the ASSA Conference, Cape Town, July 1985, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. M. Palmer The History of Indians in Natal Natal Regional Survey, vol. X, (Cape Town 1957), pp. 97-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. ‘Memorandum submitted by a Deputation of the South African Indian Organisation to the Honorary Minister of the Interior’ August 1948, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 11; F. Ginwala ‘Class, Consciouness’, p. 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Vahed, ‘The Making of “Indianness”’, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. The Durban Housing Survey, (Durban, 1952), p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. ‘A Preliminary Report on the Housing of the Indian Community in the City of Durban’, Oct. 1940, p.l, quoted in Maureen Swan ‘Ideology in organised Indian politics’, p. 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Harvey, The Urbanization of Capital, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. See E. Baring, ‘Race and Colour Problems in South Africa: a commentary on the situation’, DO 35,1122, G. 6 89/3 5A, Native Affairs Union, where the author links the inadequate provision of native housing, natives ‘squatting’ in shelters and shanties on the Rand , and the growth of communist activity amongst natives; Lerumo. Fifty Fighting Years.p.73. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Harvey, The Urbanization of Capital, p. xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, pp. 31-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. D. Chetty ‘Identity and ‘Indianness’, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Swan, ‘Ideology in Organised Indian Politics’, p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Swan, Gandhi, p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Swan, Gandhi, p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. This was called Report of the Indian Penetration Commission, (Pretoria, 1942) [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Grest ‘Indian Problem’, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. D. R. Bhagwandeen ‘The Question of “Indian Penetration” in the Durban Area and Indian Politics 1940- 46’, PhD thesis, University of Natal, 1983, pp. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Report of the Indian Penetration Commission, (1942) p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. The British government, however, saw the question of Indian penetration in South Africa by 1944 as ‘no figment of the imagination’ and considered that segregation was not working. See DO 35, 1122, G.715/31; G.689/1. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Drew Discordant Comrades p. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Extract from resolution on ‘The Liberation Movement and the Tasks of the Party’, passed at Communist Party conference on September 5 and 6, 1936’, Document 60, South African Communists Speak, pp. 127-128. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. ‘Towards the People’s Front-Conference Against Fascism and War’ report in the South African Worker, October 16, 1936, Document 61, South African Communists Speak , p. 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. See D.N. Pritt, Light On Moscow, (London, 1939), for a contemporary analysis of this. Pritt was also an advocate of rights for Indian South Africans. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. А. К. M. Docrat, interview with PR, Durban July 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Natal Mercury 8 April 1941. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. E. Roux. Time Longer Than Rope, p. 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Y. Dadoo, quoted in E.Roux. Time Longer than Rope p. 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. E. Roux. Time Longer Than Rope p. 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. M. K. Gandhi, Collected Works, vol. 16, pp. 501-3; V. Soobrayan They Fought For freedom: Yusuf Dadoo, (Cape Town 1993), p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. E. Pahad ‘A Proud History of Struggle’ African Communist, no. 78, 3rd Quarter 1979, p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. E. S. Reddy, ‘introduction’, in Yusuf Dadoo: His Speeches, Articles and Correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi (1939-1983), (Durban 1991), p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Ginwala, ‘Class, Consciousness,’, pp. 409-410. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Soobravan They Fought for Freedom, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Many of the younger political Indian South Africans I met during my fieldwork had undertaken ‘roots’ tourism, and returned to India to visit their villages of origin, and most of them were highly ambivalent about their Indian experiences. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Soobrayan pp. 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. А. К. M. Docrat, interview with PR, Durban, August 1995; Dr. K. Goonam, interview with PR, Durban August 1995. This perception of Tamils as ‘ the lowest of the low’ was at times also reinforced by British officials; see DO 35, 1122, G.715/2, where, in a communique written in December 1944 on the ‘Indian Political Question’ the writer speaks of ‘Tamil workers’ who are even ‘lower than the Natives’ and who were despised by the ‘Zulu, with their great war-like traditions’ because of their ‘puny’ size and passivity. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. А. К. M Docrat, interview with PR, Durban August 1995; Freund Insiders and Outsiders p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. This was also recognised in a report entitled ‘Indian Political Activists in the Union’ which was produced for the British government at the request of Atlee. It noted that ‘the Indian merchant .. .is not ready to risk his investment or trade by pressing the whites, who purchase 95 per cent of his goods to far’. Office of the High Commission for Pretoria, 19 October 1943, DO 35 1122 G.715/10. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. NIC Pamphlet, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 18. This was a sentiment that voiced by CP members, colonial bom Indians and merchants alike, as well as the Broome Commissions and government bodies. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. NIC Pamphlet, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Reddy, Yusuf Dadoo p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Reddy, Yusuf Dadoo p. 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. This was Gandhi’s refrain when he left South Africa in 1914, and was to become his mantra to South African Indians at times of radical resistance. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Indian Opinion, 20 October 1939. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Drew Discordant Comrades p. 235; The Guardian, had been started by Cape Town left-wing activists, many of whom were members of the Left Book Club. Many prominent Indian activists, such as H. A. Naidoo, Ismail Meer, Dawood Seedat,and M.P. Naicker, both party and congress members, were regular contributors to the paper. Seedat was the editor of the paper in the Durban office in the early 1950s. Dadoo met his future wife, Winnie Kramer, at the Johannesburg Guardian office when she started work there as a bookkeeper. See L.

     Switzer, ‘Socialism and the Resistance Movement: the life and times of The Guradian, 1937-1952’, in L Switzer, (ed.), South Africa’s Alternative Press, pp.267-307. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. These were boards that were set up with the government, in order to co-operate with the national organisations on questions of housing and municipal planning. They proved to be largely ineffectual. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Drew, Discordant Comrades, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. 11 Drew, Discordant Comrades, p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. ‘Refuse to Ship Goods to Abysinnia!’, Umsebenzi, June 22, 1935, Document 58, South African Communists Speak, p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. E. Pahad, ‘A Proud History of Struggle’, p. 53. Similar views were expressed in India. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. The Leader 23 February 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. By this time, the NIA had folded and radicals were once more directly involved in the NIC. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. ‘Memorandum submitted on behalf of the NIC to the Select Committee of the Provisional Council on the Subject of the Draft Ordinance for the Licensing Regulations and Control of Occupation of Dwellings’, ANC Papers, ICS, No.20. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. S. B. Mukherji, Indian Minority in South Africa. (New Delhi, 1959), p.132, [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Mukherii, Indian Minority, p.142. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. E. Roux. Time Longer Than Rope, p. 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. ‘Indian Political Activities in the Union’, DO 35, 1122, G.715/10. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. SAIC Conference, Gandhi Hall, 26-29 June 1943, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. SAIC Conference, Gandhi Hall, 26-29 June 1943, ANC Papers. ICS, No. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Councillor A. Ismail, ‘Statement made to bodies of Congress’ on 24 May 1945, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. The list of members attending the provincial conference in Durban in February 1944, includes D. A. Seedat, M. D. Naidu, P. M. Harry and G. Ponnen. See Provincial Conference, Durban, 19-20 February 1944, Agenda Book, ANC Papers, ICS, No.24. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. Y. Dadoo, The Guardian, March 13, 1947. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. ‘Report of The Sub-Committee on Housing’, NIC Second Provisional Conference, 29-31 May 1948, ANC Papers, ICS, No.26. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. For example, see interview with Mr. M in Chetty ‘The Durban Riots and Popular Memory’, paper presented at History Workshop, University of Witwatersrand, February 1990, p. 6; Kay Moonasamy, interview with PR, Johannesburg August 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Kay Moonasamy, interview with PR, Johannesburg August, 1995; Minutes of Annual General Meeting of NIC held at Curries Fountain, 21 October 1945, ANC Papers, ICS, No.25. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. The Leader, 27 October, 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. I have qualified the word conservative here because at times it is extremely hard to tell where people fall across the political divide, and there were moments when the ‘reactionaries’ were just as happy to use a socialist discourse and push workers interests as the communists were to adopt nationalist sentiments. As well as Kajee’s involvement in trade union issues, ( in addition to those discussed in Chapter Six, he was vice­president of the Natal Workers Congress, formed by the NIC in 1928), he wrote an article for Race Relations in 1946, in which he gave a class analysis of Indian South Africans, outlining how ‘the Indian community, like every other community, has reacted to class struggle, and .this struggle is now super imposed upon the racial struggle’, Race Relations, vol. xiii, no. 1, 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. The Leader 12 January 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Inkululeko, the party newspaper, ran an article in July, 1946, criticising the resisters for their pacifist tactics, claiming that ‘turning die other cheek brings defeat and disillusionment’, indicating dissent in the party ranks regarding passive resistance, despite the high profile of many Indian communists in the campaign, and a CPSA message of support to the NIC conference. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. ‘Resolution passed at the seventeenth session held at the Mayor’s Hall, SAIC, Cape Town, 8-13 February 1946, ANC Papers, ICS, No.l. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. ‘Resolution on the Subject Matter of Round table Conference Between India and South Africa’, SAIC ANC Papers, ICS, No.l. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Natal Daily News 1 June 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. See DO 35, 1122, G.715/30, where in a preliminary report in preparation for the forthcoming UN conference, it is stated that it would be ‘ a great potential embarrassment for us if India is allowed her head’. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. See DO 35, 1122, G.715/36, where the government is ‘formulating views on an official level’ for the UN conference in September 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. This was according to the Durban City Council, who produced a pamphlet in 1947 called The Indian in Natal, illustrated with pictures of well-dressed, smiling Indian school children, a view of the Springfield municipal housing scheme, and Indian men playing golf. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. General Smuts Address to Assembly, United Nations Organisation General Assembly Papers, 7 December 1946, DO 35, 1123, G.715/40. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. DO 35, 1122, G.715/36. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Several telegrams were sent by the NIC and TIC to Atlee in 1946, prior to, and after the start of passive resistance. Atlee did not respond. In other correspondence to the Prime Minister’s Office from the TIC regarding the Asiatic Land Tenure Bill, there is a scribbled note underneath stating ‘don’t reply’ and another saying T agree’. See also DO 35, 1122, G.713/5; when Labour MP, A. Henderson unofficially received two Indian representatives from South Africa, the secretary of state, C. Dixon, wrote a confidential letter in April 1946, stating ‘it is rather a pity that Mr. Henderson has found it necessary to receive these two representatives.. .no doubt he will do no more than listen to what they have to say.’ DO 35, 1122, G.715/33. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Mrs. V. Pandit, Press Release, United Nations Organisation General Assembly Papers, 7 December 1946, DO 35, 1123, G.715/40 [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. See letter to Sir J. Stevensen, 16 Nov 1946 from the Dominions Office, DO 35, 1123, G.715/40. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Mukherji, Indian Minority, p.142. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. ‘Report on Passive Resistance’, Passive Resistance Council of NIC: 13 June 1946-13 May 1947, ANC Papers, ICS, No.25 [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. See Y. Dadoo, Facts About the Ghetto Act, CPSA pamphlet, 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Kay Moonasamy, interview with PR, Johannesburg August 1995; See also ‘Report on Passive Resistance’, as above, which lists the occupations of the resisters. The majority were workers including bus conductors, builders, municipal and factory workers, and most (1,175 out of 1,710,) were aged between 20-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. See E.S. Reddy ,’Indian Passive Resistance in South Africa’, Mainstream, New Delhi April 5, 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Of the 1, 710 passive resisters who went to jail, 1,476 were between 18 and 30. Of these, 1,175 were between 20 and 25. ‘Report On Passive Resistance’, NIC First Biennial Conference, 31May-l June 1947, 13 June 1946-13 May 1947, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Soon after the ‘radical’ NIC was formed, it suggested setting up a federation of Indians in the diaspora, ‘to protect and champion the cause of Indians abroad’. See The Leader, 8 June 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. See A. LKajee, P. R. Father, A, Christopher, The Treatment of Indians in South Africa: a memorandum of die facts, (Washington, 1946); Roux, Time Longer Than Rope, p. 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Vahed, ‘The Making of ‘Indianness’, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. The records show 492 Factory workers, 117 waiters, 77 shop assistants, 21 bus conductors, and 43 builders and 53 municipal workers amongst the resisters. ‘Report on Passive Resistance’, NIC First Biennial Conference, 31 May-1 June 1947, ANC Papers, ICS, No.25. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Kay Moonasamy interview with PR, Johannesburg August 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. CPSA pamphlet, Johannesburg, 1946, unpaginated. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. CPSA pamphlet, Johannesburg, 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. In particular, G. M. Naicker and Dadoo consulted several times with Nehru, and although they also met P. S. Joshi, leader of the Communist Party of India, on this trip, he hardly gets mentioned in subsequent speeches and political literature. See Report on Passive Resistance, as above. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. E. Pahad, interview with JF, 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. J. van der Poel, Selections from Smuts Papers: vol. 11 p. 137, quoted in W. B. White, ‘Passive Resistance in Natal’, Journal of Natal and Zulu History, vol. 1982, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. White, ‘Passive Resistance’, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. See the Presidential Speech, NIC Second Provincial Conference, 29-31 May 1948, where B.T. Chetty declares: ‘On the 15 August, 1947, our great motherland, the fountain head of our traditions and ways of life, the inspiration of our struggle for freedom attained political freedom’ and goes on to emphasise the importance for South African Indians. ‘Independence Day’ became the ‘happiest day of the year’, and schools and businesses closed in celebration, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Natal Daily News 28 May 1948. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Whilst A. I. Meer claimed that he had ‘merely acted with an open mind’, M. P.Naicker, M. D.Naidoo and I. C. Meer were deeply critical of the decision, calling for its withdrawal. See NIC Provincial Conference, 29-31 May, 1948, Agenda Book, ANC Papers, ICS, No.26. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. NIC First Biennial Conference 31 May - 1 June, 1947, ANC Papers ICS, No.25. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. South African Indian Organisation, Memorandum to Dr. T.E. Donges, 23 July, 1948. ANC Papers, ICS, No.ll. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. SAIO, Memorandum to Dr. T.E. Donges, July 1948, ANC Papers, ICS, No.l 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Indian Views 26 February 1947. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. The Leader 22 March 1947. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. ‘Presidential Address’, NIC First Biennial Conference, 31 May - 1 June 1947, ANC Papers, ICS, No.25. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Y. Dadoo.The Guardian July 4 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. By June 1946, according to official sources, the Durban City Council had built 675 Indian houses under the Municipal Housing Scheme, and promised another 18,533. See The Indian In Natal. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Vahed ‘The Making of “Indianness”’, p. 29; the SAIO also suggested using Indian workers for specifically Indian municipal projects as a way of creating employment opportunities in Natal. See SAIO Memorandum, July 1948, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. SK, interview with PR, Durban June 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. KD, interview with PR, Durban July 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. The Natal Mercury 19 February 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. This is drawn from Lefebvre, The Production of Space, pp. 68-168. See also L. Back and M. Keith, ‘Rights and Wrongs’: Youth, Community and Narratives of Racial Violence’, in P. Cohen (ed.), New Ethnicities, Old Racisms, pp. 131-153. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. See below, Chapter Nine. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. M. D. Naidoo, interview with PR, London April 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Indian Opinion, 25 January 1941. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Y.S. Dadoo, statement to the court, 1948, Annexure No.5, NIC Provincial Conference, 29-31 May, 1948, ANC Papers, ICS, No.26. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. JK interview with PR, Durban June 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. E. S. Reddy, Gandhiji’s Vision of a Free South Africa, (New Delhi, 1995), p. 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. P. Podbury. White Girl in Search of the Party, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Fatima Meer’s father was running the newspaper Indian Views at this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. F. Meer, interview with J.F., Durban 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. M. D. Naidoo, interview with JF, London June 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. M. P. Naicker, ‘Statement on Release from Prison’, Annexure no. 2, NIC Provincial Conference, 19-20 February, 1944, ANC Papers, ICS. No. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. M. D. Naidoo interview witli JF, London June 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. The Guardian, 29 April, 1948. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. M, D. Naidoo, interview with PR London April, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Bunting. Moses Kotane p.139. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Bunting, Moses Kotane. P.131. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. For an interesting outsiders’ perspective on the Native Representative Councils, see Ralph J. Bunche. An African American in South Africa: the travel notes of Ralph J. Bunche, 28 September 1937 - 1 January 1938, R.R. Edgar, (ed.), (Ohio, 2001), pp.229-242. Bunche, the first African American to be awarded a PhD in political science, who also met A.I. Kajee whilst travelling in South Africa, was scathing about the NRCs, attacking their condescending attitude, their incompetence and ineffectiveness. He was convinced that their main purpose was to reinforce African dependence on whites. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. Bunting. Moses Kotane . p.139. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. Race and Colour Problems in South Africa: a commentary by E, Baring, Native Affairs Union, DO 35, 1122, G.689/35. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. See Financial Times 13 September, 1946; Manchester Guardian 13 September, 1946; The Observer 1 September, 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Memorandum, Native Affairs, DO 35, 1122, G.689/24. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Bunting. Moses Kotane, p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Quoted in E.S. Reddy ‘Passive Resistance’, Mainstream. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. ‘The Lessons of the Election Result’, statement by the Central Committee of the Communist Party published in The Guardian, June 3 1948, Document 89, South African Communists Speak. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. ‘Resolution on the ‘The Struggle for Democracy’ adopted at the national conference of the Communist [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Party held in Johannesburg on January 2.3, and 4, 1948’, Document 88, South African Communists Speak. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
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367. R. D. Naidoo, interview with JF Durban, August 1985; The Leader 23 April 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
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369. F. Meer, Portrait of Indian South Africans, (Durban, 1969), [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. L. Kuper An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa, (New Haven, 1965). [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. E. L.Webster ‘ The 1949 Durban Riots - A Case Study in Race and Class’, In P.Bonner (ed.), Working Papers in South African Studies (Johannesburg 1979), pp. 1-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. I. Edwards and T. Nuttall ‘Seizing the Moment: The January 1949 Riots, Proletarian Populism and the Structures of African Urban Life in Durban during the late 1940s’, paper presented at History Workshop, University of Witwatersrand, February 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. The Leader 26 February 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. Durban became particularly significant during the Second World War as it was a stopping point for British ships taking troops to the east. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. T. Nuttal ‘Class, Race and Nation: African Politics in Durban, 1929-1949’, PliD thesis, Oxford University 1991, p. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. 1. A. Edwards, ‘Mkhubane Our Home: African Shantytown Society in Cato Manor Farm’, 1946-1960, PhD thesis, University of Natal, Durban 1989, p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Chetty, ‘The Durban Riots and Popular Memory’, p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Mr. M, interview with Chetty, in ‘The Durban Riots and Popular Memory’, p. 4.. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Mr. M, interview with Chetty, in ‘The Durban Riots and Popular Memory’, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Stanley Chetty, interview with PP, Durban 12 June 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Shisupal Rambharos, interview with PP, Durban 19 May 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Mr M, interview with Chetty, in ‘The Durban Riots and Popular Memory’, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Quoted in The Leader from Die Transvaler 11 December 1948. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
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391. Nuttal, Class, Race and Nation p. 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
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393. Natal Daily News 14 January 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. Natal Daily News 15 January 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
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398. А. К. M. Docrat, interview with PR, Durban August 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
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400. The Leader January 29 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. The Leader April 23 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
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403. Quoted in The Leader, 30 April, 1949 [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
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406. Bunting, Moses Kotane, p. 162-163. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
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416. Mr. M, interview with Chetty, in ‘The Durban Riots and Popular Memory’, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
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418. Legassick, Class and Nationalism, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. F. Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, (London, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. H. Bhaba, The Location of Culture, (London, 1994), pp. 40-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. See S. Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and the Diaspora’, P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds), Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: a reader, (Hemel Hempstead, ), pp. 392-403. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. See D. Everatt, ‘The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party 1945-1955’, The History of The South African Communist Party, pp. 36-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. Everatt ‘The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party’,p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Everatt makes the valid point that this was not the experience of the party on a national level. The CapeTown branch, in particular, was anxious to maintain a line that continued to give primacy to the ‘class straggle’. See Everatt, ‘The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party’, pp. 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. ‘Nationalism and the Class Straggle’, extract from Central Committee report to the National Conference of the Communist Party in Johannesburg on January 6, 7 and 8, 1950’, Document 91, South African Communists Speak, p. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. Everatt ‘The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party’, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. Everatt, ‘The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party’, P- 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. This contradiction at the heart of Congress policy is most visibly demonstrated in its post-independence development programmes, where there are attempts to apply a modernist development agenda around ideas of ‘traditional village India’. See S. Sinha, S. Gururani and B. Greenburg, ‘The “New Traditionalist” Discourse of Indian Environmentalism’, Journal of Peasant Studies, vol. 24, no. 3, April 1997, pp. 65-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. A similar political movement was, of course, taking place under Martin Luther King in the United States, who specifically evoked Gandhi as the inspiration for the methods adopted in the Civil Rights Movement, and combined this within a Christian agenda. See G. M. Fredrickson, The Comparative Imagination: on the history of racism, nationalism and social movements, (London, 1997), pp. 173-188. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. See above, Chapter Eight. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. D. O’Meara, Forty Lost Years: the apartheid state and the politics of the National Party, 1948-1994, ((Randburg, 1996), p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. Central Commmittee statement read out in the House of Assembly, Cape Town on June20, 1950, by the Communist M.P. Sam Kalin, Document 94, South African Communists Speak, p. 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. R. Berstein, Memory Against Forgetting: memoirs from a life in South African Politics 1938-1964,. (London 1999), pp. 114-124 [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
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440. E, S. Reddy, ‘Defiance Campaign in South Africa, Recalled’, Asian Times, June 26, 1987. [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. Kuper Passive Resistance, p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. NIC Agenda Book, Fifth Annual Provincial Conference, 29 September-1 October, 1951, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. R. D. Naidoo, interview with JF, Durban August 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. Natal Mercury, October 2 1951. [↑](#footnote-ref-444)