

# Indian Opinion

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## The Immigration Petition

THE British Indian Association of the Transvaal has lost no time in petitioning Lord Elgin regarding the Immigrants' Restriction Bill of the Transvaal, which was gazetted as an Act on the 26th instant, containing the reservation clause that "it shall not take effect unless and until the Governor shall proclaim in the *Gazette* that it is His Majesty's pleasure not to disallow the same." It is of no force until the Royal pleasure becomes known. Lord Elgin, therefore, has now an opportunity of retrieving what we consider was an Imperial blunder in his having advised His Majesty to sanction the Asiatic Registration Act. Mr. Essop Ismail Mia, in the petition, has dealt with every point arising out of the Act. For the present, however, we propose to confine ourselves to the Act as it affects Indians domiciled in the Transvaal.

We recollect Mr. Duncan having stated emphatically that the Asiatic Registration Act was considered necessary because there was no Immigration Ordinance in force at the time, and that it was to be treated merely as a temporary step. It was also, undoubtedly, panic legislation to stop the so-called inflowing tide of Asiatic immigration at the rate, the Honorable Mr. Curtis told us, of at least 200 per month. It is a curious commentary on Mr. Duncan's statement, as also Mr. Curtis', that a year after the introductory speech by the then Colonial Secretary, registration has not yet been affected, and that the Asiatic Registration Act is still practically of no force, except for the fact that registering officers perambulate the Colony in search of Asiatic applicants for the benefits which, Lord Selborne states, the Registration Act confers upon them. And it is this very Act which the measure under consideration makes permanent, and thus, whilst it frees the white inhabitants of the Transvaal from the Peace Preservation Ordinance it draws the noose tighter round the necks of Asiatics.

Asiatics, then, find that a grant of greater liberty to white British subjects corresponds with a greater restraint on that of Asiatic British subjects. Unlike other and older self-governing Colonies, this new pet child of the Empire is to be allowed to set aside rights of British Indians who are already domiciled in the Transvaal, by reason of their having paid £3 to the old Dutch Government, for, under the Immigration Act, as the British Indian Association points out, only those Asiatics, who are registered in the terms of the Asiatic Act, are allowed to retain their domicile.

The last point dealt with by the Association outdoes the other two mentioned by us in severity. It provides for the physical deportation of those British Indians who fail to take out registration certificates under the new Act. Now the taking out of the certificate is, after all, a formality invested with many incidents of slavery. It is not as if the people who fail to take out registration certificates are not residents of the Transvaal. Indeed, most of the Indians, who are making a brave stand against the Asiatic Act, are old respectable inhabitants of that Colony, some of them, like the Chairman himself, of 20 years' standing, having all their earthly possessions in that Colony, having there even their families, places of worship, and everything they hold dear in the world. It is these men who, because they decline to take out a degrading document, are to be forcibly turned out from their home, and this deportation is to take place at the expense of the deported, and it is to create no obligation on the part of the Transvaal Government even to feed and house them! Well may Mr. Mia declare that this deportation will be much worse than deportation for heinous offences.

We shall be painfully astonished if Lord Elgin, with his declared sympathies and with his past Viceregal career before him, advises His Majesty to sanction a measure of this description. He has more than once stated that he does not like the Asiatic Act. He has now thrown into his hands a golden opportunity of treating with the Transvaal Government, with a view to having the Asiatic Act repealed, and the principle of re-registration being embodied in a modified form in the Immigration Act.

OUR TRANSVAAL CORRESPONDENT HAS interviewed Mr. L. Quinn, Acting Chairman of the Chinese Association of the

Transvaal, and the results of his investigations are of great interest. In this case, the Transvaal Government is dealing with a foreign Power, and not with British subjects. As a consequence, international complications are likely to arise, and it is not feasible to suppose that the Imperial Government is prepared to allow what is, after all, a small unit of the Empire to embroil it in an extremely unpleasant dispute. We can easily understand the Chinese Government saying: "Of course, you are at liberty to permit the persecution of your own subjects without intervention. That is a matter entirely between you and them. But you cannot do so."