



## *Race or Class? Community and Conflict amongst Indian Municipal Employees in Durban, 1914–1949<sup>1</sup>*

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*This article explores different facets of South African Indian identity between 1914 and 1949 by focusing on the Indian municipal workers resident in Magazine Barracks, Durban. In a situation of economic privation, heightened discrimination in Durban's racially segmented labour market, segregation and the growing radicalisation of Indian politics, the article seeks to explain the saliency and vigour of a sense of 'Indianness' amongst municipal workers. It thereby offers a perspective on the failure to develop a strong tradition of class and non-racial politics. Drawing on a rich municipal archive, the article offers a broad cultural, social and economic context for the struggles engaged by the municipal workers' union to better their members' lot. This case study illustrates that identities are forged historically and culturally and not determined by external referents such as 'class'.*

### **Introduction**

The years 1914–1949 were significant in the history of Indian South Africans. Rapid industrial growth, large-scale urbanisation, changing social and material conditions, and increased worker militancy had important consequences for Indian identity and consciousness. A number of studies have focused on this period,<sup>2</sup> their emphasis being primarily on 'race', ethnicity, class and community.<sup>3</sup> The major concern has been the politics of 'race' and ethnic consciousness. Few, however, have examined the reasons for the tenacity with which racial and ethnic consciousness endured. This article focuses on the social and material conditions under which Indian municipal employees lived, the formation of community structures, and the response of workers to the rapid growth of the trades union movement and radicalisation of Indian politics during the 1930s and 1940s. It thereby offers

<sup>1</sup> This period is not arbitrarily chosen. 1914 was the year that Gandhi left South Africa, marking the end of an epoch in the history of South African Indians. This year also marked the beginning of World War I and, with it, industrialisation and urbanisation in Durban. The end-point, 1949, saw the Indian–African riots, which took place shortly after the National Party's accession to power.

<sup>2</sup> See for example F. Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control: Indian South Africans, 1869–1946,' PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1974; V. Padayachee, S. Vawda and P. Tichmann, *Indian Workers and Trades Unions in Durban, 1930–1950*. (Durban: Institute for Social and Economic Research, UD-W, 1985); and M. Tayal, 'Ideology in Organized Indian Politics', unpublished paper presented to 'Conference on Class, Race and Nationalism', New York, September 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Since there is constant reference to race, ethnicity, class and community, these will be defined for the purposes of this study. Differences of religion, language and customs are so great amongst Indians that it is more useful to look at them as a designated racial group comprising a number of ethnic groups. While 'race' was an identity imposed on Indians by others, ethnicity was self-imposed and became relevant in relations amongst Indians. In this study, 'race' and ethnicity are used interchangeably though clear differences exist. A person's class is understood as being by his or her objective place in the network of ownership relations, however difficult this may be to identify. Community refers to both a sense of shared identity as well as a group living in a fixed local territory.

a detailed case study of the range of identities that Indians adopted in this period. The Magazine Barracks, where the majority of Indian municipal employees lived, was the largest site of Indian working class life in Durban and provides a valuable lens through which to explore notions of identity and consciousness.

A comprehensive study of Indian workers during the 1930s and 1940s was undertaken by Padayachee *et al.* For them, the failure to sustain non-racial unionism was due both to capital's 'swift and severe' reaction, which 'included tactics to split workers along racial lines and mass dismissals',<sup>4</sup> and to the 'absence of clear democratic structures in the unions (which) ... resulted almost directly in their subordination to the policies of political organisations.'<sup>5</sup> The premise of this article is that attempts to study trade unions in isolation from broader social and cultural developments can offer only a narrow economic perspective on what is a multifaceted phenomenon. As Bozzoli and Delius remind us, the process of determining identity is complex; it involves 'an examination of experience, community, the various historical forces impinging on a situation, the nature of the ruling class, and the operation of spatial and other kinds of factors'.<sup>6</sup> This study will therefore examine the experiences of Indian workers in Durban in the context of the 'community' being forged and of an emerging racially segmented labour market.<sup>7</sup> Given the realities of this segregated system, it will be seen that class identities were clearly shaped by experience of community and that ties of 'race', religion, and language affiliation often transcended class differences.

### Community: Municipal Employment and Barracks Life

Between 1860 and 1911, 152 641 Indians arrived in Natal as indentured labourers. Approximately 60 percent were allocated to the sugar industry; the remainder worked in the mines, hospitals, and as special servants.<sup>8</sup> The Durban Municipality was a significant employer of Indian labour, engaging an average of 2000 Indians per annum during the period under review.<sup>9</sup> This figure does not tell the whole story because a very large number of Indians were reliant on municipal employment. In 1949, for example, workers and their dependants totalled almost 10 000 when the Indian population in the Old Borough of

Durban was 25 000.<sup>10</sup> Municipal workers were provided with housing that was concentrated mainly at the Magazine Barracks that had been built in 1884 on 25 acres of land relatively close to the city centre. By 1940, workers and their families were distributed as follows: Magazine Barracks 5774, Congella 308, Point 120, Windsor Park 26, Botanic Gardens 50, Umgeni 45 and Beatrice Street 275.<sup>11</sup> Housing conditions were deplorable and condemned from the beginning. When the Wragg Commission inspected municipal housing in March 1885 they commented that 'latrine accommodation is insufficient', there were 'no urinals', and 'water is in short supply and the people have to dig holes in the adjoining vlei to collect surface water.'<sup>12</sup>

These conditions persisted into the next century. In the mid-1920s, it was reported that 'some Councillors have felt and said that the more wretchedly the Indians are housed and paid the more likely they will be willing to be repatriated' to India.<sup>13</sup> So appalled was Indira Nehru on a visit to the Barracks in 1935 that she referred to it as 'Durban's feudal rat hovel.'<sup>14</sup> A Commission concluded in 1950 that 'these conditions constitute a grave risk and should not have been allowed to develop to the stage they have now reached.'<sup>15</sup> Dr Gunn, the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) reported in 1943 that acute intestinal diseases like dysentery, diarrhoea and enteritis had accounted for 40 percent of deaths at the barracks for that year. The rate for the general Indian population was under 10 percent. Gunn attributed the high incidence of disease at the Barracks to fly plagues, overcrowding, and communal latrines.<sup>16</sup> He also noted that because of the inadequate facilities, residents had to use the kitchen for bathing, washing clothes and cooking.<sup>17</sup> Mr P. D. who lived at the barracks from 1926 to 1965 recalled that it 'was like a fowl run. The very poor lived there in dirty congested conditions ... No whites went to see how we lived. As long as you did the white man's work he didn't care about you.'<sup>18</sup> The Durban Town Council (DTC) did not improve the condition of housing because 'the site was too valuable and should therefore be allocated to a more appropriate purpose.'<sup>19</sup>

The DTC saw Magazine Barracks as playing a crucial role in ensuring the discipline of its workforce. The barracks were surrounded by a fence with entrances at the front and the rear. At each entrance stood sirdars charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order. These men were provided with batons and cuffs and given the status of 'Special Constables'.<sup>20</sup> The DTC supported its sirdars at all times to ensure that control was maintained. Two incidents illustrate the authorities' stance. After quarrelling with his neighbour, for example, one Veerasamy, was taken by sirdar Valir into the office where 'six Indian Hooligans got hold of me, and gave me a hiding saying I gave them trouble.' When Veerasamy complained to his supervisor he was told to 'drop the matter, otherwise he will have to sack me'. No action was taken against the sirdar and supervisor for

4 V Padayachee and S Vawda, 'Indian Workers and Worker Action in Durban, 1935-1945', in *South African Historical Journal* 40 (May 1999), 154-178: 154

5 Padayachee *et al.*, *Indian Workers*, p. 173. Although there is a 14 year gap between their first monograph on Indian workers and their very recent publication, the conclusions remain the same. Other important works on these themes include B. Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders. The Indian Working Class of Durban 1910-1990* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995); D Hemson, 'Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock Workers of Durban', (PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 1979) and I. L. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane Our Home': African Shantytown Society in Cato Manor Farm, 1946-1960', (PhD dissertation, University of Natal, 1989). For comparison with other areas see P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel (eds), *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935-1962* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994) and J. Western, *Outcast Cape Town* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

6 B. Bozzoli and P. Delius, 'Radical History and South African Society', *Radical History Review*, vols 46/47 (1990), p. 32

7 See Freund, *Insiders*, and D Hemson, 'Breaking the Impasse. Beginning the Change: Labour Market, Unions and Social Initiative in Durban', unpublished paper, 1999

8 S. Bhana, *Indentured Indian Emigrants to Natal 1860-1902. A Study Based on Ships Lists*. (New Delhi, 1991), p. 91

9 No. of Municipal Employees:

Year	No.
1923	1735
1930	2068
1941	2434
1947	2344

Extracted from letter from Indian Control Office to Town Clerk, 15/11/1933. NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1380, 642 and letter from City Treasurer to Town Clerk, 15/03/1948. NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2045

10 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2052. City Health Dept. to Town Clerk, 09/01/1949. The 'Old Borough' refers to the original boundaries of Durban. In 1932 the boundaries of Durban were extended from 13 sq. miles to 70 sq. miles. The population of Durban increased from 125 100 to 239 547, the number of Indians increasing from 17 860 to 80 384. There were 88 065 whites and 63 762 Africans. Source: University of Natal, *The Durban Housing Survey*, (Durban: University of Natal, 1952), p. 35

11 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2033. Acting City and Water Engineer, 14 March 1940.

12 Wragg Commission, in Meer, *Documents*, p. 536

13 'Indian Opinion', 03/12/1926

14 'Indian Opinion', 06/08/1935

15 Report of Commission of Enquiry into Hospital Services of Natal, 14/02/1950

16 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2045. To Town Clerk, 09/08/1943.

17 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2045. To Town Clerk, 21/08/1943.

18 Interview with Mr Poonsamy Daearinathan, 19/08/1990. He was born in 1910 and lived at Magazine Barracks from 1926 when he joined as a street sweeper. He later worked for the Parks and Gardens and Water Departments.

19 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2031. DTC Minutes, 17/12/1938.

20 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2045. Minutes of DTC Minutes, 17/07/1947.

'lack of evidence.'<sup>21</sup> In another incident, sirdars Nagiah and Doorsamy assaulted Mariemuthu. Although medical evidence indicated that Mariemuthu had been beaten with a *sjambok* (whip), and Doorsamy was found to be in possession of such an instrument, Mariemuthu was found guilty of creating a disturbance and the sirdars cleared of misconduct. It was concluded by the DTC that 'the area surrounding the Magazine Barracks is a notoriously bad one and the *sjambok* injuries must have been inflicted upon the accused Mariemuthu by his falling foul of someone outside the barracks, and prior to his apprehension by the sirdars.'<sup>22</sup>

A 1935 report alluded to the advantages offered by Magazine Barracks to employers and the authorities:

The situation, isolated as it is from European residential areas, and contiguous to other Indians and Africans must be regarded as the most suitable in the city area . . . . Apart from the economies obtained from the provision of communal sanitary washing and bathing blocks, there are undoubted advantages in having an adequate labour supply available at any hour for emergency work, and the possibility of following up all cases of absenteeism as they arise . . . . While admitting the objections which can be raised to housing large numbers of people on a relatively small area, we consider that any drawbacks are more than overcome by the continuous supervision which is only possible in large barracks and we are further of opinion that training and control they receive under that system are beneficial to the Indians themselves.<sup>23</sup>

Although living conditions were appalling, the barracks resulted in large numbers of Indians living together, with important consequences. Such dense concentrations of Indian residents were not confined to the barracks as there was almost total residential segregation by race between Indians, Africans and whites in Durban as a whole.<sup>24</sup> Clustering allowed Indians to rebuild aspects of their social and cultural life with the minimum of outside influence. Religion, language, family and joint participation in festivals promoted communal values. They influenced the way Indians acted in the workplace, made political choices and interacted with whites and Africans. The overwhelming majority, some 88 percent of residents at Magazine Barracks were Hindu. Only 10 and 2 percent were Christian and Muslim respectively.<sup>25</sup> A very important initial step in reconstructing religious life was the building of places of worship that became the centre of community life. A wood and iron temple originally built at Magazine Barracks in 1895 underwent an ambitious renovation at the hands of residents, Palanivel Sirdar and Chinnapaya in 1937. Alaga Pillay was employed to fashion the idols while the temple's front hall was built by residents. Devotees who periodically visited India brought back idols for the temple, which was the converging point of the barracks' social and cultural life.<sup>26</sup> It was here that communal worship took place, where birth, marriage and death ceremonies were observed and where festivals were celebrated. A Barracks Temple Committee saw to the upkeep of the temple, arranged the observance of religious festivals, and hired a full time priest. This was funded by residents.<sup>27</sup>

Festivals formed an integral part of the lives of residents. Hindu festivals such as Pongal

21 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1381, Correspondence between Veerasamy (Badge #1481) and Acting Town Clerk, December 1933.

22 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2045, H. A. Smith, City and Water Engineer, to Town Clerk, 01/09/1947.

23 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2025, Report by Chief Sanitary Inspector, R. Walker, General Storekeeper, D. Clark and J. L. Ford of the Indian Control office. Submitted to the Sub-Committee, re. Indian wages and conditions, 21/09/1935.

24 R. J. Davies, 'The Growth of the Durban Metropolitan Area', in *South African Geographical Journal*, (December 1963), p. 37

25 Naidoo, 'Survey', p. 42

26 P. Mikula et al., *Traditional Hindu Temples in South Africa*, (Durban, Hindu Temple Publications, 1982): p. 76

27 Mikula et al., *Traditional Temples*, pp. 14-15.

('harvest') and Draupadi (firewalking) were communally celebrated on a regular basis.<sup>28</sup> Whites saw Indian festivals as heathenistic, a view expressed in letters to the press or complaints to the authorities. Occasionally they resorted to force. The kavadi festival held annually on the seashore provides an example. In March 1936, when the residents of Magazine Barracks congregated on the beachfront with their 'Roth', a chariot carrying their gods and goddesses, they were attacked by 400 white men armed with sticks. The priest and about 50 Indians had to be treated for injuries. Incidents such as these served to draw Indians even closer together. In this instance, the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), led by a Parsee Sorabjee Rustomjee and A. I. Kajee, a Muslim, took up this matter with the DTC on behalf of Hindus.<sup>29</sup> Class and religious interpenetration connected Indians and reinforced bonds of racial community.

During their 'free' time, Indians involved themselves in drama festivals, music groups, movies and traditional dances that were performed at the Drama Hall in Magazine Barracks. From 1929 A. J. Peters showed 'Indian religious and social pictures'<sup>30</sup> while mythologically oriented theatre was the focal point of workers' lives. Informants recalled how they would gather together to sing verses of these epics or sit up all night to watch epics enacted as drama. Mr P. D. remembered: 'we acted the religious stories the whole night . . . . People also sang about other things, about the caste system, about how the rich abused the poor, about men and women, there was a lot of swearing and rude words. But people took a liking to the ancient stories because it gave them hope that their suffering will disappear.'<sup>31</sup> According to Mr B. R. 'life was good then. All Saturday night the whole community sat and enjoyed music. The music we played was about Rama and Hanuman. The wives cooked and we had a big feast. Anyone could sing or act. We had no TV or Hi-Fi so we spent more time with each other.'<sup>32</sup>

Education was a virtual obsession with Indians and another arena in which they rallied around common interests. Parents strongly believed that education held the key to occupational mobility and improvement in material conditions. This idea was repeatedly emphasised in the correspondence of Indians with the authorities. The following letter to the Town Clerk by one Tommy Govender illustrates this attitude:

I am writing to tell you my drawbacks in my ambitious life to make myself a useful citizen of your town. I am nineteen years of age, and I have obtained my primary school certificate with distinction. I was unable to enter secondary school because my parents could not meet the expenses. Ever since 1940 I tried my utmost to make money and advance in studies, but all my efforts were in vain. After much pondering I hit on a plan to seek your aid . . . . Sir, by your helping me to success I will constantly appreciate, and I will try and repay you in one way or the other. I like to make myself useful, to help, and to gain popularity in public life. I will endeavour to undertake any task you set me upon for I know without suffering we could not achieve victory in this modern world.<sup>33</sup>

In 1925, the municipal worker's trade union, the DMIEU<sup>34</sup> informed the DTC that education was vital in order for Indian children to be 'progressive and have modern ideas in the future, and to become good citizens.' Unlike their white counterparts, Indian children were not given free education by the government. The DMIEU therefore opened a school

28 Oral testimony of residents in P. Murugan, *The Lotus Blooms on the Eastern Vlei*, (Chennai: Parkar Computers, 1998), pp. 67-71

29 *The Natal Advertiser*, 16 March 1936.

30 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2050, A. J. Peters to Town Clerk, 17 November 1949.

31 Interview, 08/07/1990.

32 Interview with Mr Baiju Ramdeen, 08/07/1990.

33 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2043, T. Govender to Town Clerk, 25/02/1946.

34 The union of municipal employees was called Durban Municipal Indian Employees Union (DMIEU) when it was formed in 1917. In 1934 it was reconstituted as the Durban Indian Municipal Employees Union.

despite the fact that its request for £10 from the DTC to pay the salaries of two teachers was turned down.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, requests for assistance were repeatedly denied. In 1926, workers formed the 'Committee of the Durban Corporation Free Indian Night School' to impart 'free' education to children of Municipal employees. Volunteers instructed approximately 100 pupils each night. When they appealed to the DTC for assistance, they were advised to prepare children 'for the battle of life' and to apply to the Provincial Council.<sup>36</sup> Another request in 1933 that the Caretaker's Cottage be allocated for schooling purposes was denied because a white war widow was occupying the premises.<sup>37</sup> In April 1941, A. I. Kajee offered to build a school if the DTC provided land. This too was refused.<sup>38</sup> For merchants such as Kajee, personal and communal upliftment were inseparable. Education was not 'merely a sort of learning; its greatest task was to abolish poverty amongst Indians.'<sup>39</sup> Another purpose of education, according to *Indian Opinion*, was to 'make the different Indian races inhabiting South Africa think corporately by training the children, so that by reason of their power of intellect, they will remove prejudices which exist today [amongst Indians].'<sup>40</sup> In June 1941, only 763 of 1662 children of school-going age at the barracks were accommodated in schools.<sup>41</sup> An appeal in 1947 to hold double sessions at the existing schools or convert unused army huts close to the barracks, also fell on deaf ears.<sup>42</sup> A Memorandum of 1947 from the Durban Indian Municipal Employees Society (Dimes), a local Communist Party branch, the Young Communist Party, the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) and the Magazine Barracks Free Night School informed the Council that:

although inadequately paid and poor, the parents are unanimous in their desire to better their children's position by providing them with schooling even at considerable sacrifice to themselves. They realise that education goes hand in hand with better jobs and decent wages and they wish to achieve these for their children and rescue them from the rotten, poverty stricken conditions under which they themselves live.<sup>43</sup>

To compensate for the lack of schools, pre-schools were organised at the barracks where volunteers conducted classes for young children. The living rooms of residents became vernacular schools in the evenings with many classes held simultaneously for children between five and 12 years old. In 1948, six teachers who were not 'academics with degrees and titles, but ordinary working class folk with a great sense of duty taught approximately 500 pupils.'<sup>44</sup> A Magazine Barracks Parents Association organised the teaching of Hindi and Tamil at the barracks. From 1934, the Indian Technical Education Committee, which had been formed in 1930 by middle class Indians like Albert Christopher and B. M. Narbeth, provided classes in needlework, dressmaking, reading and writing for women and girls three afternoons a week, followed by general education classes for boys.<sup>45</sup> Dimes also demanded that the DTC erect a library at Magazine Barracks to be supervised by an Indian librarian and controlled by the City Librarian's Department. The DTC refused but was forced to accede to the request when Dimes took the matter to arbitration. The DTC agreed

to contribute £300 annually for the purchase of books and periodicals and the cost of supervision but refused to 'wholly' administer the library on the grounds that it was only mandated to establish 'public libraries'.<sup>46</sup> Dimes formed a Committee of Nine to administer the library, which was opened in January 1945.<sup>47</sup> The struggle for education had important consequences for Indian identities. Racially segregated facilities eliminated contact between Indians, Africans and whites and reinforced in children the idea that they belonged to a specific race by virtue of the absence of others. The failure of the local state to provide facilities also meant that it was left to Indians, including merchants and the middle classes to finance projects for the benefit of working class Indians. This eased class tensions and reinforced a sense of racial community. Correspondence also indicates clearly that upward economic mobility was a priority for workers.

Like religion and culture, sport failed to transcend the sectional divisions of Durban's social order. Segregated sport ensured that Indians spent most of their leisure time with other Indians. Soccer and cricket were the main pastimes. Workers in each section of the DTC had their own team and competed for trophies named after prominent Indians: Harry Narain's League Cup, Govindsamy Memorial Shield, Sreenavassen Nariadoo's Cup, Sons of India League Cup and Drs Naicker and Naidoo Cup.<sup>48</sup> Players like P. Naraidu-Varda, Titty Govender, and S. Nadaraj were chosen to represent a South African Indian XI.<sup>49</sup> The Municipal Indian Sports Club, formed in 1936, organised a Gala Sports Day annually on 31 December at the barracks.<sup>50</sup> The Sports Association organised its first Baby show on 1 January 1948.<sup>51</sup> Weightlifting was also very popular and Reuben Govender won the Mr Universe title in 1954.<sup>52</sup> For its annual gala, £30–35 was collected for sweets, cakes and cool drinks for children. Indian merchants contributed generously while 'Mayor Ellis Brown gave a customary donation.'<sup>53</sup> The December 1947 programme included bicycle races, marathons, sprint, long jump, golf and thunnee, a card game.<sup>54</sup> The Sports Day was held under the patronage of the mayor of Durban. The December 1947 Children's Gala was opened by Deputy Mayor Thomas while the guests of honour were the mayor and mayoress. Councillor and Mrs L Boyd also attended.<sup>55</sup> When it is considered that these events were held during the passive resistance campaign,<sup>56</sup> the fraternising of Dimes with representatives of the local state suggests a relative lack of interest in the campaign on the part of workers and a desire to get on with their lives.<sup>57</sup> The fact that sporting clubs and civic associations were formed along racial lines made it difficult to foster non-racial identifications. Religion, family, spatial concentration, language, and sport were all-important social building blocks and reinforced a sense of Indianness. Dimes itself recognises this:

For decades now our people have been distributed in pockets over the different suburbs of the city. In each of these areas a feeling of community has developed. Around the local school or

35 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1375, DMIEU to Town Clerk, 26/03/1925.

36 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1376, 02/07/1926.

37 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1379, Borough Valuator to Town Clerk, 22/08/1933.

38 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, April 1941.

39 *The Leader*, 26/03/1941.

40 *Indian Opinion*, 22/12/1916.

41 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, June 1941.

42 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2049, Memorandum by Dimes, the CP, Somtseu Road Branch, Magazine Barracks Free Night School, Young Communist party and NIC to the Department of Education, 25/02/1947.

43 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2049, Memorandum by Dimes, the CP, Somtseu Road Branch, Magazine Barracks Free Night School, Young Communist party and NIC to the Department of Education, 25/02/1947.

44 Murugan, *Lotus Blooms*, p. 53.

45 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1381, Narbeth to Town Clerk, 17/10/1934.

46 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2050, Conciliation Board: Dimes vs City Council, Magazine Barracks Library, 24/02/1947.

47 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, January 1948.

48 According to informants the cups were sponsored by local Indian traders and named after old Indian employees of the DTC. Dr Naicker was president of the 'radical' NIC and Dr Naidoo the first woman executive member of the NIC. Both were elected in 1944.

49 Murugan, *Lotus Blooms*, p. 37.

50 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, May 1941.

51 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, January 1948.

52 Murugan, *Lotus Blooms*, pp. 76–82.

53 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, December 1944.

54 'Thunnee', even today, is specific to Indians. Its origins are unknown but it is not played by Indians elsewhere in the world or by non-Indian South Africans.

55 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, January 1948.

56 Between 1946 and 1948 Indians engaged in passive resistance against residential segregation.

57 The participation of workers in the 1946–1948 passive resistance campaign never reached the high level of participation in the 1913 strike. See M. Tayal, 'Ideology in Organised Indian Politics 1890–1948, paper presented at Conference on 'South Africa in the Comparative Study of Class, Race and Nationalism', New York, 1982.

place of worship a feeling of belonging has evolved. The little communities had a structure and a form which characterised each one of them. A neighbourly affiliation developed. A common consensus resulted. The pattern helped to retain social and moral codes indicating lines of responsibility. And all this in spite of the homes being of poor structures and often assuming the feature of slums.<sup>58</sup>

### Class: Rising Consciousness of Municipal Workers

It is in a context of extreme poverty, poor living conditions and a vibrant community life that the actions of municipal workers must be examined. Given the historical role of racial segregation in South Africa, class-consciousness cannot be understood without reference to community experience.

The high price of staple foods and clothing during World War I caused a flurry of trades union activity amongst Indians. Food prices increased significantly. For example, between August 1914 and June 1915, the price of bread rose from 4d to 5.5d and flour (98 pounds) from 13/- to 20/-.<sup>59</sup> Between June 1914 and September 1917, rice (160 pounds) increased from 24s to 42s and dhol from 2d to 6d.<sup>60</sup> At the same time unemployment was a serious problem; the DTC noted in November 1914 that it 'threatened to assume embarrassing dimensions'.<sup>61</sup> An Unemployment Relief Fund was formed in October 1914 to take care of the needs of unemployed whites. The Committee urged the DTC to undertake Public Works 'with a view to providing employment for white labour'.<sup>62</sup> In November 1914, the DTC voted £100 to the Unemployment Committee and promised additional funds from the Mayor's War Relief Fund.<sup>63</sup> A month later, the Natal Federation of Trade and Labour Unions urged the DTC to relieve unemployment by engaging white labour for Public Works.<sup>64</sup> The local state and organised white labour were concerned with the problems of whites only. Their making 'race' a determining factor in all aspects of daily life played an important role in creating distance between Indians, whites and Africans.

While whites could count on the resources of the state for assistance, Indians had to fend for themselves. At a mass meeting of September 1917 attended by over a thousand Indians and addressed by prominent Indians such as the Reverend Koilpillai, the editor of an Indian newspaper *Viveka Banoo* and the Reverend B. L. Sigamoney told the crowd that the meeting had been organised to show solidarity with the 'poor suffering class. Our duty as Indians is to stand by our poorer brethren at this time.'<sup>65</sup> In March 1917, the Indian Workers Industrial Union was inaugurated with Gordon Lee of the Industrial Socialist League as chairman and Sigamoney as secretary.<sup>66</sup> By July 1917, Indian dockworkers, painters, hotel employees, tobacco workers, catering and garment workers were unionised.<sup>67</sup> Municipal workers formed the Durban Municipal Indian Employees Union (DMIEU) in 1917. The DTC refused to recognise DMIEU as the workers' representative even though it had 1200 registered members in 1918 and submitted a constitution in February 1920. The DTC also turned down DMIEU's request to deduct employees' monthly subscriptions, as was done

with white workers.<sup>68</sup> and ignored a petition of September 1919 asking that 'Councillors deal with the Secretary of the Union in all matters affecting the Union's members.'<sup>69</sup> By January 1925, 1500 of 1800 Indian municipal employees had signed stop-order subscriptions.<sup>70</sup> While the DTC never officially recognised DMIEU, the union actively pursued issues such as housing, pensions and medical treatment on behalf of workers.

Following a mass meeting at Magazine Barracks in February 1919, DMIEU petitioned the DTC for higher wages:

An Indian could wear a loin cloth and work on a sugar cane field but Indians in your employ could hardly be expected to wear a loin cloth and walk along the public thoroughfares of Durban with credit to their employers ... It is our desire to be enabled to raise the standard of our existence generally, in life, manner and custom, to that of Western ideals.<sup>71</sup>

This petition was ignored. Another petition in September 1919 demanded that workers be graded according to the work they performed. The DTC acceded to this request and graded Indians into four categories.<sup>72</sup> This was a hollow victory, however, since over 90 percent performed unskilled work in the transport, borough engineer and sanitary departments as street sweepers, grass cutters, and scavengers and comprised the lowest-paid category. There was little prospect for improving their position because the DTC resolved in 1920 that 'the practice of employing Indians in clerical positions be discontinued as vacancies occur, and that such appointments be offered to White youths and girls.'<sup>73</sup> The Town Clerk was pleased to report in 1935 that the 'policy of replacing Indians by Europeans has been carried out with advantage. There are certain jobs, however, of a "dead end" nature which an Indian values, ... and is prepared to spend his working lifetime thereat, which would not satisfy a European lad.'<sup>74</sup>

The grading scheme spawned a host of complaints. R. Sookdeo, for example, pointed out that, together, he and his father had served the Corporation for 50 years. He wanted his salary raised 'in view of the present cost of living, and more particularly as I and my family have always adopted the European standard of living - as far as my living will permit.'<sup>75</sup> Some individual appeals were successful. For example, Sookdeo was granted an increase of £1 above the grade rate while Abdul, Ismail and Muthusamy were also awarded small increases.<sup>76</sup> Suchitt Maharaj, a clerk at the Indian Market, appealed to the Market Master for an increase above the graded rates because 'I conform to the European standard of living.' The Market Master, in recommending the application, agreed: 'he keeps up a good appearance and conforms to the European standard of living.'<sup>77</sup>

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58 S. Jaggarnath. *DIMES. A Record in Prose and Pictures*, (Durban: Magenta Art & Design, 1994), p. 17.

59 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/821, Durban Town Clerk to East London Town Clerk, 03/07/1915.

60 *Indian Opinion*, 07/09/1917.

61 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/890, Minutes of DTC Meeting, 02/11/1914.

62 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/890, Robertson, Secretary, Committee on Unemployment, to Town Clerk, 31/10/1914.

63 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/890, Minutes of General Purposes Committee, 23/11/1914.

64 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/890, P K Fraser, NFTLU, to Mayor, 21/12/1914.

65 *Natal Advertiser*, 07/09/1917.

66 E. A. Mantzaris, 'The Indian Tobacco Workers Strike of 1920. A Socio-Historical Investigation', in *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* VI (1983), 115-125, p. 117.

67 *Indian Opinion*, 04/07/1919.

68 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1376, DMIEU to Town Clerk, 10/02/1925.

69 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1373, DMIEU to DTC, 16/09/1919.

70 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1376, Rungiah Naidoo, Secretary, DMIEU, to Town Clerk, 10/02/1925.

71 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1373, DMIEU to Mayor, 26/02/1919.

72 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1374, Minutes of DTC Meeting, 03/07/1920.

73 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1374, Minutes of DTC Meeting, 07/03/1920.

74 Freund, *Insiders*, p. 49.

75 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1374, 13/07/1920.

76 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1374, Minutes of General Purposes Committee, 07/10/1920.

77 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1379, 22/04/1930.

78 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1378, Report of Sub-Committee re Indian Wages and Conditions, 21/10/1929.

despite the fact that its request for £10 from the DTC to pay the salaries of two teachers was turned down.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, requests for assistance were repeatedly denied. In 1926, workers formed the 'Committee of the Durban Corporation Free Indian Night School' to impart 'free' education to children of Municipal employees. Volunteers instructed approximately 100 pupils each night. When they appealed to the DTC for assistance, they were advised to prepare children 'for the battle of life' and to apply to the Provincial Council.<sup>36</sup> Another request in 1933 that the Caretaker's Cottage be allocated for schooling purposes was denied because a white war widow was occupying the premises.<sup>37</sup> In April 1941, A. I. Kajee offered to build a school if the DTC provided land. This too was refused.<sup>38</sup> For merchants such as Kajee, personal and communal upliftment were inseparable. Education was not 'merely a sort of learning; its greatest task was to abolish poverty amongst Indians.'<sup>39</sup> Another purpose of education, according to *Indian Opinion*, was to 'make the different Indian races inhabiting South Africa think corporately by training the children, so that by reason of their power of intellect, they will remove prejudices which exist today [amongst Indians].'<sup>40</sup> In June 1941, only 763 of 1662 children of school-going age at the barracks were accommodated in schools.<sup>41</sup> An appeal in 1947 to hold double sessions at the existing schools or convert unused army huts close to the barracks, also fell on deaf ears.<sup>42</sup> A Memorandum of 1947 from the Durban Indian Municipal Employees Society (Dimes), a local Communist Party branch, the Young Communist Party, the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) and the Magazine Barracks Free Night School informed the Council that:

although inadequately paid and poor, the parents are unanimous in their desire to better their children's position by providing them with schooling even at considerable sacrifice to themselves. They realise that education goes hand in hand with better jobs and decent wages and they wish to achieve these for their children and rescue them from the rotten, poverty stricken conditions under which they themselves live.<sup>43</sup>

To compensate for the lack of schools, pre-schools were organised at the barracks where volunteers conducted classes for young children. The living rooms of residents became vernacular schools in the evenings with many classes held simultaneously for children between five and 12 years old. In 1948, six teachers who were not 'academics with degrees and titles, but ordinary working class folk with a great sense of duty taught approximately 500 pupils.'<sup>44</sup> A Magazine Barracks Parents Association organised the teaching of Hindi and Tamil at the barracks. From 1934, the Indian Technical Education Committee, which had been formed in 1930 by middle class Indians like Albert Christopher and B. M. Narbeth, provided classes in needlework, dressmaking, reading and writing for women and girls three afternoons a week, followed by general education classes for boys.<sup>45</sup> Dimes also demanded that the DTC erect a library at Magazine Barracks to be supervised by an Indian librarian and controlled by the City Librarian's Department. The DTC refused but was forced to accede to the request when Dimes took the matter to arbitration. The DTC agreed

to contribute £300 annually for the purchase of books and periodicals and the cost of supervision but refused to 'wholly' administer the library on the grounds that it was only mandated to establish 'public libraries'.<sup>46</sup> Dimes formed a Committee of Nine to administer the library, which was opened in January 1945.<sup>47</sup> The struggle for education had important consequences for Indian identities. Racially segregated facilities eliminated contact between Indians, Africans and whites and reinforced in children the idea that they belonged to a specific race by virtue of the absence of others. The failure of the local state to provide facilities also meant that it was left to Indians, including merchants and the middle classes to finance projects for the benefit of working class Indians. This eased class tensions and reinforced a sense of racial community. Correspondence also indicates clearly that upward economic mobility was a priority for workers.

Like religion and culture, sport failed to transcend the sectional divisions of Durban's social order. Segregated sport ensured that Indians spent most of their leisure time with other Indians. Soccer and cricket were the main pastimes. Workers in each section of the DTC had their own team and competed for trophies named after prominent Indians: Harry Narain's League Cup, Govindsamy Memorial Shield, Sreenavassen Nariadoo's Cup, Sons of India League Cup and Drs Naicker and Naidoo Cup.<sup>48</sup> Players like P. Naraidu-Varda, Titty Govender, and S. Nadaraj were chosen to represent a South African Indian XI.<sup>49</sup> The Municipal Indian Sports Club, formed in 1936, organised a Gala Sports Day annually on 31 December at the barracks.<sup>50</sup> The Sports Association organised its first Baby show on 1 January 1948.<sup>51</sup> Weightlifting was also very popular and Reuben Govender won the Mr Universe title in 1954.<sup>52</sup> For its annual gala, £30-35 was collected for sweets, cakes and cool drinks for children. Indian merchants contributed generously while 'Mayor Ellis Brown gave a customary donation.'<sup>53</sup> The December 1947 programme included bicycle races, marathons, sprint, long jump, golf and thunnee, a card game.<sup>54</sup> The Sports Day was held under the patronage of the mayor of Durban. The December 1947 Children's Gala was opened by Deputy Mayor Thomas while the guests of honour were the mayor and mayoress. Councillor and Mrs L. Boyd also attended.<sup>55</sup> When it is considered that these events were held during the passive resistance campaign,<sup>56</sup> the fraternising of Dimes with representatives of the local state suggests a relative lack of interest in the campaign on the part of workers and a desire to get on with their lives.<sup>57</sup> The fact that sporting clubs and civic associations were formed along racial lines made it difficult to foster non-racial identifications. Religion, family, spatial concentration, language, and sport were all-important social building blocks and reinforced a sense of Indianness. Dimes itself recognises this:

For decades now our people have been distributed in pockets over the different suburbs of the city. In each of these areas a feeling of community has developed. Around the local school or

46 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2050, Conciliation Board: Dimes vs City Council, Magazine Barracks Library, 24/02/1947.

47 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, January 1948.

48 According to informants the cups were sponsored by local Indian traders and named after old Indian employees of the DTC. Dr Naicker was president of the 'radical' NIC and Dr Naidoo the first woman executive member of the NIC. Both were elected in 1944.

49 Murugan, *Lotus Blooms*, p. 37.

50 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, May 1941.

51 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, January 1948.

52 Murugan, *Lotus Blooms*, pp. 76-82.

53 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, December 1944.

54 'Thunnee', even today, is specific to Indians. Its origins are unknown but it is not played by Indians elsewhere in the world or by non-Indian South Africans.

55 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, January 1948.

56 Between 1946 and 1948 Indians engaged in passive resistance against residential segregation.

57 The participation of workers in the 1946-1948 passive resistance campaign never reached the high level of participation in the 1913 strike. See M. Tayal, 'Ideology in Organised Indian Politics 1890-1948, paper presented at Conference on 'South Africa in the Comparative Study of Class, Race and Nationalism', New York, 1982.

35 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1375, DMIEU to Town Clerk, 26/03/1925.

36 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1376, 02/07/1926.

37 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1379, Borough Valuator to Town Clerk, 22/08/1933.

38 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, April 1941.

39 *The Leader*, 26/03/1941.

40 *Indian Opinion*, 22/12/1916.

41 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, June 1941.

42 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2049, Memorandum by Dimes, the CP, Somtseu Road Branch, Magazine Barracks Free Night School, Young Communist party and NIC to the Department of Education, 25/02/1947.

43 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2049, Memorandum by Dimes, the CP, Somtseu Road Branch, Magazine Barracks Free Night School, Young Communist party and NIC to the Department of Education, 25/02/1947.

44 Murugan, *Lotus Blooms*, p. 53.

45 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1381, Narbeth to Town Clerk, 17/10/1934.



place of worship a feeling of belonging has evolved. The little communities had a structure and a form which characterised each one of them. A neighbourly affiliation developed. A common consensus resulted. The pattern helped to retain social and moral codes indicating lines of responsibility. And all this in spite of the homes being of poor structures and often assuming the feature of slums.<sup>58</sup>

### Class: Rising Consciousness of Municipal Workers

It is in a context of extreme poverty, poor living conditions and a vibrant community life that the actions of municipal workers must be examined. Given the historical role of racial segregation in South Africa, class-consciousness cannot be understood without reference to community experience.

The high price of staple foods and clothing during World War I caused a flurry of trades union activity amongst Indians. Food prices increased significantly. For example, between August 1914 and June 1915, the price of bread rose from 4d to 5.5d and flour (98 pounds) from 13/- to 20/-.<sup>59</sup> Between June 1914 and September 1917, rice (160 pounds) increased from 24s to 42s and dholl from 2d to 6d.<sup>60</sup> At the same time unemployment was a serious problem; the DTC noted in November 1914 that it 'threatened to assume embarrassing dimensions'.<sup>61</sup> An Unemployment Relief Fund was formed in October 1914 to take care of the needs of unemployed whites. The Committee urged the DTC to undertake Public Works 'with a view to providing employment for white labour'.<sup>62</sup> In November 1914, the DTC voted £100 to the Unemployment Committee and promised additional funds from the Mayor's War Relief Fund.<sup>63</sup> A month later, the Natal Federation of Trade and Labour Unions urged the DTC to relieve unemployment by engaging white labour for Public Works.<sup>64</sup> The local state and organised white labour were concerned with the problems of whites only. Their making 'race' a determining factor in all aspects of daily life played an important role in creating distance between Indians, whites and Africans.

While whites could count on the resources of the state for assistance, Indians had to fend for themselves. At a mass meeting of September 1917 attended by over a thousand Indians and addressed by prominent Indians such as the Reverend Koilpillai, the editor of an Indian newspaper *Viveka Banoo* and the Reverend B. L. Sigamoney told the crowd that the meeting had been organised to show solidarity with the 'poor suffering class. Our duty as Indians is to stand by our poorer brethren at this time.'<sup>65</sup> In March 1917, the Indian Workers Industrial Union was inaugurated with Gordon Lee of the Industrial Socialist League as chairman and Sigamoney as secretary.<sup>66</sup> By July 1917, Indian dockworkers, painters, hotel employees, tobacco workers, catering and garment workers were unionised.<sup>67</sup> Municipal workers formed the Durban Municipal Indian Employees Union (DMIEU) in 1917. The DTC refused to recognise DMIEU as the workers' representative even though it had 1200 registered members in 1918 and submitted a constitution in February 1920. The DTC also turned down DMIEU's request to deduct employees' monthly subscriptions, as was done

with white workers.<sup>68</sup> and ignored a petition of September 1919 asking that 'Councillors deal with the Secretary of the Union in all matters affecting the Union's members.'<sup>69</sup> By January 1925, 1500 of 1800 Indian municipal employees had signed stop-order subscriptions.<sup>70</sup> While the DTC never officially recognised DMIEU, the union actively pursued issues such as housing, pensions and medical treatment on behalf of workers.

Following a mass meeting at Magazine Barracks in February 1919, DMIEU petitioned the DTC for higher wages:

An Indian could wear a loin cloth and work on a sugar cane field but Indians in your employ could hardly be expected to wear a loin cloth and walk along the public thoroughfares of Durban with credit to their employers . . . It is our desire to be enabled to raise the standard of our existence generally, in life, manner and custom, to that of Western ideals.<sup>71</sup>

This petition was ignored. Another petition in September 1919 demanded that workers be graded according to the work they performed. The DTC acceded to this request and graded Indians into four categories.<sup>72</sup> This was a hollow victory, however, since over 90 percent performed unskilled work in the transport, borough engineer and sanitary departments as street sweepers, grass cutters, and scavengers and comprised the lowest-paid category. There was little prospect for improving their position because the DTC resolved in 1920 that 'the practice of employing Indians in clerical positions be discontinued as vacancies occur, and that such appointments be offered to White youths and girls.'<sup>73</sup> The Town Clerk was pleased to report in 1935 that the 'policy of replacing Indians by Europeans has been carried out with advantage. There are certain jobs, however, of a "dead end" nature which an Indian values, . . . and is prepared to spend his working lifetime thereat, which would not satisfy a European lad.'<sup>74</sup>

The grading scheme spawned a host of complaints. R. Sookdeo, for example, pointed out that, together, he and his father had served the Corporation for 50 years. He wanted his salary raised 'in view of the present cost of living, and more particularly as I and my family have always adopted the European standard of living - as far as my living will permit.'<sup>75</sup> Some individual appeals were successful. For example, Sookdeo was granted an increase of £1 above the grade rate while Abdul, Ismail and Muthusamy were also awarded small increases.<sup>76</sup> Suchitt Maharaj, a clerk at the Indian Market, appealed to the Market Master for an increase above the graded rates because 'I conform to the European standard of living.' The Market Master, in recommending the application, agreed: 'he keeps up a good appearance and conforms to the European standard of living.'<sup>77</sup>

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58 S. Jaggarnath. *DIMES: A Record in Prose and Pictures*. (Durban: Magenta Art & Design, 1994), p. 17.

59 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/821, Durban Town Clerk to East London Town Clerk, 03/07/1915.

60 *Indian Opinion*, 07/09/1917.

61 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/890, Minutes of DTC Meeting, 02/11/1914.

62 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/890, Robertson, Secretary, Committee on Unemployment, to Town Clerk, 31/10/1914.

63 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/890, Minutes of General Purposes Committee, 23/11/1914.

64 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/890, P K Fraser, NFFLU, to Mayor, 21/12/1914.

65 *Natal Advertiser*, 07/09/1917.

66 E. A. Mantzaris, 'The Indian Tobacco Workers Strike of 1920. A Socio-Historical Investigation', in *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* VI (1983), 115-125, p. 117.

67 *Indian Opinion*, 04/07/1919.

68 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1376, DMIEU to Town Clerk, 10/02/1925.

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70 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1376, Rungiah Naidoo, Secretary, DMIEU, to Town Clerk, 10/02/1925.

71 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1373, DMIEU to Mayor, 26/02/1919.

72 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1374, Minutes of DTC Meeting, 03/07/1920.

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77 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1379, 22/04/1930.

78 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/1378, Report of Sub-Committee re Indian Wages and Conditions, 21/10/1929.

and S. Rustomjee, Dimes met with the Secretary of Labour in an attempt to get him to intervene on the wage issue, but to no avail.<sup>126</sup> In November 1941, Dimes and the DTC agreed to a deal whereby wages were increased to £4. They were to increase to £5 from 1 April 1942 and £6 from 1 August 1942. For Dimes, the weak position of Indians was due to the 'unrepresentative character of the Council', which was a compromise between the 'two exploiting parties in the local state, organised capital and organised White labour. In this the Indian has no place.' Moreover, as Dimes saw it, despite the fact that the 'pyramid of industry has been wrongly built upon the scandalous underpayment of non-European workers', as long as sugar barons dominated the legislature, there was no hope of justice. Talk of freedom meant nothing unless Indians had 'food, better housing, slums are cleared and medical attention was extended as a right.'<sup>127</sup> Despite the increase, Dimes considered wages to be too low. In December 1942 and August 1944, Dimes again requested an increase of the Allowance since the cost of living had gone up by 80 percent between 1938 and 1944.<sup>128</sup> Indians were earning £5 per month at a time when the Housewives' League reported that whites needed a minimum of £56 per month to survive. The DTC did not grant any further concessions.

Dimes also requested a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). It considered the existing committee that attended to Indian grievances to be 'dominated by reactionary and Fascist-imbued departmental officials whose sole ambition in life is to perpetuate the slave conditions under which our workers toil and sweat.'<sup>129</sup> The matter dragged on until Dimes threatened to take it to the Conciliation Board. In August 1942, the DTC agreed to form a JAC comprising three Councillors and three members of Dimes, who 'must be Indian Municipal Employees.' Dimes' request that at least one of its representatives be a non-employee official was rejected.<sup>130</sup> However, the Conciliation Board ruled that from October 1944, one non-employee representative could be included. Another of Dimes' complaints was that it was outnumbered because the Town Clerk and City Treasurer joined the three Councillors at meetings, making a total of five members. Dimes' request to include its Secretary and Organiser was denied.<sup>131</sup> Dimes did not participate in this forum for long. A mass meeting resolved in April 1945 that 'no good purpose will be served by the Dimes continuing'. The JAC had failed to settle the dispute over higher wages, the procedure involved lengthy delays without 'tangible' results and councillors had attempted to divide Dimes by insinuating that it was 'guided by outside influence'.<sup>132</sup> The JAC was abolished in June 1945 and replaced by a 'Sub-Committee re Indian Employees', which did not have Indian representation.<sup>133</sup>

Relations between Dimes and the DTC continued to deteriorate as Dimes' rhetoric and actions became more confrontational. The publication of a new monthly bulletin from April 1941 was one source of discord. When launched by Dimes, the mayor and several councillors were asked for messages of support for the introductory copy. Mayor Brown gave the project his 'Mayoral blessing', while Councillor Fyfe noted that Dimes' 'requests to the City Council have always been of a reasonable nature. It is my wish to the members of the Society to follow their progress on constitutional lines.' G. H. Payne, Secretary of the European Municipal Employees Society, Albert Christopher, legal adviser to the Society

and one of its founder members, and S. L. Singh, a founder member, all sent messages of goodwill. Edited by George Singh, the Bulletin focused on the grievances of workers.<sup>134</sup> It is notable that the term 'comrade' appeared for the first time in Dimes' 1945 Annual Report, showing the growing influence of the trade union movement. In turn, the militant tone of the bulletin made the DTC anxious about the impact of the radical rhetoric on Indian workers. The DTC wanted to sue Dimes for defamation but its Legal Assistant advised that there was 'nothing in this publication (November 1941) that could sustain an action for defamation'. Nevertheless, he continued, 'There is a good deal which is perilously near to being subversive under the National Security Code. I should be shown future issues. If it is left to itself it will get more hysterical (and more reckless) as time goes on.'<sup>135</sup>

In April 1945, the Town Clerk requested that Dimes not air its grievances through the press. Dimes' riposte was swift: 'the suggestion was made so that the general public would not know of grievances. Past experience of Municipal "red-tape" and departmental apathy is sufficient to convince the Dimes that the only resort is through the press.'<sup>136</sup> In September 1945, Dimes commented that 'attempts to settle matters amicably have been in vain. Departmental officials completely disregard representations from Dimes. Dimes, as being fully representative of the workers, must now come forward and maintain its status as being the mouthpiece of the workers.'

In his report, the City and Water Engineer made it clear that he 'did not intend opening the way for representatives of Dimes to be present any time I have occasion to put an employee on the carpet.' He was especially upset over Dimes' 'agitation and controversies': 'When I accused George Singh of being an agitator, he said: "If helping the down-trodden, under-paid workers of this Corporation is agitation, I am proud to be an agitator".'<sup>137</sup> As far as the DTC was concerned, 'the sweeping demands made by the Society cannot fail to make one believe that the object is to create a modern "Utopia". A survey of demands gives evidence of irresponsibility and lack of serious thought.'<sup>138</sup> Relations continued to deteriorate. When a dispute went to arbitration in April 1946, Dimes objected to the presence of Howes who had a degree in law but was a full time employee of the DTC. Dimes argued that the Industrial Conciliation Act did not allow either party to be represented by a legal practitioner.<sup>139</sup> Arbitrator M. G. Fannin ruled against Dimes, but the objection resulted in a delay of two months.<sup>140</sup> The DTC was equally obstinate. When Dimes had to tender evidence to the Industrial Legislation Commission in May 1949, it requested special leave for its chairman R. K. Gounden to appear before the Commission. The Town Clerk replied that Gounden should 'make application to the head of his Department in the usual way, either for unpaid leave or for one day of whatever leave may be due to him.'<sup>141</sup>

### Interaction: Class and Community Consciousness in the 1940s

Dimes' membership increased dramatically from the late 1930s as economic conditions deteriorated. Membership rose from around 1500 in 1939 to over 2000 as 532 members joined between March and August 1941.<sup>142</sup> By 1945, 2400 out of 2470 workers (98 percent) were members even though there was no compulsory membership.<sup>143</sup> Workers joined Dimes

126 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, April 1941.

127 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, November 1941.

128 *Daily News*, 27/09/1944.

129 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, December 1941.

130 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2052, DTC Meeting, 10/08/1942.

131 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2052, Minutes of DTC, 07/01/1944.

132 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2051, Memorandum to DTC, 19/04/1945.

133 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2052, Minutes of DTC, 11/06/1945.

134 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, April 1941.

135 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2036, Legal Assistant to Town Clerk, 18/12/1941.

136 *Dimes Annual Report and Balance Sheet*, 30/06/1945.

137 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2042, H. A. Smith, City and Water Engineer, to Town Clerk, 21/12/1945.

138 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2049, A. G. Cook, City Treasurer, to Town Clerk, 15/01/1943.

139 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2050, S. B. Somers, Dimes, to Secretary for Labour, Durban, 26/04/1946.

140 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2050, Report of M. G. Fannin, Arbitrator in Dispute between Dimes and DTC, 08/08/1946.

141 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2048, Correspondence between S. B. Somers, Dimes Sec., and Town Clerk, 11/05/1949.

142 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, September 1941.

143 *Dimes Annual Report and Balance Sheet*, 30/06/1945.



because it was seen as a means of improving their material conditions. As Mr P. D. points out, 'I was a founder member of Dimes. This was very good for our people. There was a lot of racism and poverty. Dimes worked hard to improve our condition.'<sup>144</sup> The growth in Dimes' membership was part of a general increase in trades union membership amongst Indian workers. Between 1934 and 1945, 43 unions were registered with Indian membership in Durban.<sup>145</sup> By 1943, 16 617 Indians were members of trades unions. Between 1937 and 1942, they were involved in 46 strikes in Durban.<sup>146</sup>

Dimes saw itself as part of this wider movement. Its bulletins reported regularly on the activities of other unions while workers were urged to read *The Guardian*, 'the premier union newspaper in South Africa.' Dimes wished 'success' to mineworkers at Glencoe Junction where H. A. Naidoo had helped form a union.<sup>147</sup> When Indian teachers were unionised and achieved a wage increase, Dimes regarded 'this success' as 'something we can justifiably be proud of.'<sup>148</sup> Dimes was also a member of the Trades and Labour Council. Dimes pointed out that the Cost of Living Allowance had only been made possible through the 'united representations' of the Trades and Labour Council.<sup>149</sup> On 20 November 1941, the president of Dimes, T. S. John, spoke at a rally organised by 'Friends of the Soviet Union', to raise money for Russia.<sup>150</sup> Dimes was pleased to report in July 1942 that it had assisted many new unions: 'In true Trade Union spirit Dimes has not failed to give assistance in a single instance. It is only right that a well established Union like Dimes should render assistance to fellow workers fighting for their economic emancipation.' On 5 July 1942, Dimes took part in a rally organised by the CP where £250 was raised for the Party.<sup>151</sup> At the barracks, residents formed the Red Rose social club, which had communist leanings, and held meetings in an area known as 'Stalingrad'.<sup>152</sup>

Dimes also involved itself in the evolving politics amongst Indians. The growth of trades union activity was accompanied by the formation of an Anti-Segregation Council (ASC) to oust the moderate leadership of the NIC by 'radical' Indian leaders, many of whom were leaders of unions and members of the CP.<sup>153</sup> Dimes was one of 31 organisations affiliated to the ASC, which had a membership of 25 231. Some 23 of the affiliated organisations were unions.<sup>154</sup> The ASC held regular meetings, which a 'large number of Dimes workers and their wives attended.' Dimes urged its members to attend the NIC General Meeting on 28 January 1945 because the NIC was 'the official national organ of the Indian people ... In the past the leadership of the NIC has neglected the rights and wishes of the working class. Today the position has changed and Indian workers throughout Durban can play an important role in their national organisation'.<sup>155</sup> As a result of the support of workers, the ASC took control of the NIC in 1945 under the leadership of Monty Naicker. The 'new' NIC embarked on a passive resistance campaign between June 1946 and June 1948 to protest the government's segregationist policies. Although 2000 Indians volunteered for arrest, the campaign never attained the same level of mass support as

Gandhi's campaign of 1913. However, the campaign reinforced Indianness in a number of ways. First, to encourage mass participation, the NIC's rhetoric was couched in racial terms. Tremendous faith was placed in the intervention of the Indian government on behalf of local Indians.<sup>156</sup> Secondly, welfare of the 'community' was crucial for those workers who volunteered. Typical of the sentiments was that of Jack Govender: 'I am a factory worker ... The Act applies to me as much as much as any other member of the Indian community. It is an act which gives my people an inferior status. The rich and poor are affected.'<sup>157</sup> Thirdly, Dr Goonam, an executive member of the NIC recalled that to support volunteers 'the mainstay of our donations were the moneys we collected locally from the storekeepers and professionals, that part of the community that had money to spare. It was an altogether Indian campaign, financially and ideologically.'<sup>158</sup> The persistence of racial identity is evident in many of Dimes' other activities. On 5 December 1941, Dimes met with the High Commissioner for India to explain the 'nature, scope and activities of trade union work.' He showed 'great keenness in improving the economic status of Indian masses and expressed his willingness to assist as much as possible.'<sup>159</sup> In July 1942, S. Singh, Organising Secretary of Dimes, wrote to the High Commissioner to visit the 'Black Hole' of Durban, the Magazine Barracks in the hope that he 'will make representations for the amelioration of the lot of our workers, not to the City Council but to higher authority.'<sup>160</sup> Identification with India as 'protector' remained pivotal to Indian identities and served to dilute radicalism.

Wider alliances were mainly at the level of leadership. Since affiliation to external bodies such as the ASC was not formally debated amongst members but decided upon by the leadership,<sup>161</sup> the class and non-racial identities that Indian leaders embraced cannot be imputed to workers. During the 1940s, Dimes leadership comprised George Singh (secretary), S. L. Singh (honorary organiser), Billy Peters (organising secretary) and T. S. John (president). John alone was an employee of the municipality. The rest were professional organisers who made the decisions. The general apathy of workers is reflected in the number of occasions that the leadership exhorted workers to get involved in union activities. In the 12 months between July 1941 and June 1942 Dimes held four general, and 12 Committee meetings. Attendance was poor: 'It is hoped that in future greater co-operation will be forthcoming from the workers themselves.'<sup>162</sup> Between July 1944 and June 1945, Dimes held 33 meetings: once again the refrain, 'Dimes Committee men are urged to attend more regularly and more punctually.'<sup>163</sup> The waning interest of workers was also reflected in the declining sales of *The Guardian*. Dimes noted in 1945: 'it is disappointing to note that the "Guardian" is not being systematically sold as in the past. It is South Africa's premier trade-union newspaper and the Dimes must in the future go all out to get every worker to buy his copy each week.'<sup>164</sup> M. Moodley, a university graduate and volunteer worker with Dimes, berated workers:

It has been my disappointment to find that a large number of you take little active interest in matters that affect you vitally. Though you work like medieval slaves from dawn to dusk, you hardly earn enough to feed and clothe yourselves and your families. Surely your tattered and dirty rags must daily remind you that something must be done by you yourselves for your

144 Interview with Mr Poonsamy Daearinathan, 19/08/1990.

145 Padayachee, *Indian Workers*, p. 53.

146 Padayachee, *Indian Workers*, p. 53.

147 Dimes Monthly Bulletin, August 1941.

148 Dimes Monthly Bulletin, September 1941.

149 Dimes Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 30/06/1945.

150 Dimes Monthly Bulletin, December 1941.

151 Dimes Monthly Bulletin, July 1942.

152 Murugan, *Lotus Blooms*, p. 43.

153 For a background on the many new leaders who rose to prominence during this period see 'The New Leaders' in S. Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy. The Natal Indian Congress 1894-1994*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1997).

154 Padayachee, *Indian Workers*, p. 216.

155 Dimes Monthly Bulletin, December 1944.

156 'NIC Manifesto of the Indian Community', in 'The Leader', 06/04/1946.

157 'The Leader', 03/08/1946.

158 K. Goonam, *Coolie Doctor* (Durban: Madiba Publishers 1991) p. 107.

159 Dimes Monthly Bulletin, December 1941.

160 Dimes Monthly Bulletin, July 1942.

161 Padayachee, *Indian Workers*, p. 153.

162 Dimes Monthly Bulletin, July 1942.

163 Dimes Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 30/06/1945.

164 Dimes Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 30/06/1945.

economic emancipation. Dimes is doing all in its power to get you higher wages and better homes. There is something you yourselves must do. In the first place you must take an active interest and participate in all Dimes activities. The key to your economic emancipation lies in your own hands.<sup>165</sup>

Working class Indians embraced unions to attain immediate material benefit in the context of escalating poverty. At the same time, nationalist struggles in India aroused political consciousness and drew many Indians into the activities of the NIC. Politicisation did not extend to support for non-Indian bodies. Only 'Indian' issues successfully mobilised the Indian masses who failed to embrace the broad non-racial and class alliances that were taking shape. In fact, this period witnessed both cooperation and competition between Indians and Africans for limited resources as Durban's population more than doubled between 1936 and 1951.<sup>166</sup> Initially, at least, Indians and Africans participated jointly in strike action. Between 1930 and 1950, there were 85 strikes involving 15 984 Indian and African workers.<sup>167</sup> One of the strategies used by capital and the state was to dismiss unionised Indian workers and replace them with African scab labour. This was particularly evident during the Dunlop strike of 1942–1943 when Africans brought in from the Transkei replaced 147 Indian workers.<sup>168</sup> This undermined radical leadership and led to antagonisms between Indian and African workers.<sup>169</sup> The threat to Indians was not lost on Dimes. A. B. Somers informed the Town Clerk in January 1947:

My Society is very perturbed at the recent policy of the Municipality to retrench Indian employees in various departments and the policy of employing Africans. In the Transport Department, for example, six Africans have been employed in January, although a fair number of Indians have been retrenched in the same department. My Society views the position with anxiety because there appears to be a tendency to deal more harshly with Indians because they are members of a registered Trade Union while the Africans are not. The Municipality's present policy is one that calculates to injure the Trade Union movement as a whole.<sup>170</sup>

The number of Indians in Municipal employment dropped from 2485 in July 1943 to 2344 in January 1947. At the same time, the number of Africans increased from 4604 to 4886.<sup>171</sup> In May 1947, Dimes wrote to the Town Clerk:

In the Animal Transport Department 12 Africans have been employed in the past two months. 5 Indians will be retrenched this month and a further 2 have been given notice to terminate their services. My Society is very much perturbed over the matter in which preference is shown to Africans ... It is in keeping with the principle of Trade Unionism to oppose the retrenchment of one class of worker in favour of another ... In July 1942 there were 141 Indian workers in this Department. At present there are only 84 Indian workers.<sup>172</sup>

In 1947, 17 Indian trades unions sent the following message through the NIC:

In the present situation of a contracting market ... we want to issue a warning to those employers who are seizing the present opportunity to embark upon a policy of indiscriminate victimisation of their Indian employees ... If European employers continue their policy of retrenching Indians as a political weapon, the direct consequence of such a policy would be to

drive Indian workers into the hands of Indian employers who would not hesitate to use the occasion to enter into unfair competition with their European counterparts.<sup>173</sup>

Dimes was concerned about protecting the jobs of its members, hence its request to the DTC that vacancies be filled by retrenched ex-employees, pensioners or sons of Indian employees.<sup>174</sup> The union also wanted experienced unskilled Indian workers to be promoted to 'graded' positions instead of such posts going to 'outsiders'.<sup>175</sup> This attitude cannot simply be ascribed to racist attitudes on the part of Indians. It must be viewed in the context of the segmented labour market that prevailed in Durban. The labour market was shaped by the need for cheap labour. For whites, 'race' was the most effective means of ensuring a cheap labour supply and it was used to separate the population into discrete groups by suggesting that Indians and Africans were naturally different and inferior. This resulted in a 'highly stratified and deeply segmented' labour force, with whites at one extreme, Africans at the other, and Indians sandwiched inbetween. Until the 1940s, the wages of Indians were not much higher than those of Africans. Africans earned 69 percent of the average Indian wage but only 19 percent of the average white wage.<sup>176</sup> There was a parallel insular development amongst African workers. At the launch of the Natal Federation of African Trade Unions in November 1943, Jacob Nyaose scorned non-racial unions as white- and Indian-dominated organisations. Jimmy Bolton and Hubert Sishi were other unionists who opposed both non-racialism and the radicalism of the CP. Such sentiments were the outcome of a racially segmented work place.<sup>177</sup>

At the same time, African middle class politicians such as A. W. G. Champion resorted to ethnic and racial mobilisation in areas of trade, housing and transport to improve the economic situation of Africans.<sup>178</sup> Zulu nationalism centred on a cultural identity to extract resources from the state. An important component of its ideology was anti-Indianism.<sup>179</sup> Hopes of a closer relationship between Indians and Africans vanished as a result of large scale Indian–African rioting over three days in January 1949 in which 142 people were killed. A further 1078 were injured and some 44 738 Indians were forced to flee their homes. A total of 268 Indian homes were completely burnt and 1690 partially destroyed. Some 47 Indian businesses were completely burnt and a further 791 were partially damaged.<sup>180</sup> The riot was sparked by a minor assault incident involving an Indian man and an African youth. That it led to such extensive damage is an indication of the deep-seated tensions that existed in day-to-day relations.

There was apparent and understandable social estrangement between Indians and Africans, some of which is communicated in Dimes' correspondence with the DTC.<sup>181</sup> For example, Dimes informed the DTC of their preference for 'educated and intelligent Indians' for the position of gatekeeper at the Magazine Barracks.<sup>182</sup> Another example

173 *The Leader*, 02/05/1947.

174 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2046, Dimes to Town Clerk, 06/04/1948.

175 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2046, Dimes to Town Clerk, 28/04/1948.

176 Hemson, 'Breaking the Impasse', p. 4. According to Hemson, Africans were mainly involved in domestic service, whaling, rickshaw pulling and the docks. Indians, in contrast, dominated municipal services, hotels, laundry work, furniture and sugar refining.

177 T. Nuttall, 'The Leaves in the Trees are Proclaiming our Slavery: African Trade-Union Organisation, 1937–1949', in P. Maylam and I. Edwards (eds) *The People's City. African Life in Twentieth-Century Durban*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996) 174–201: 192

178 See Edwards, 'Mkhumbane'

179 See Edwards, 'Mkhumbane' and S. Marks, *The Ambiguities of Independence in South Africa*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1985)

180 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/1582, Natal Indian Organisation. Supplementary Statement to Riots Commission, 1949, Schedules 3–4.5.

181 Hemson, 'Breaking the Impasse', p. 4.

182 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2026, Dimes to Sub-Committee re Indian Employees, 11/03/1936.

165 *Dimes Monthly Bulletin*, December 1941.

166 For a detailed discussion see T. Nuttall, 'It seems Peace but it could be War: The Durban Riots of 1949 and the Struggle for the City', unpublished paper. nd; I. Edwards, T. Nuttall, 'Seizing the Moment: the January 1949 Riots, Proletarian Populism and the Structures of African Urban Life in Durban during the 1940s', paper presented at the History Workshop on 'Structure and Experience in the Making of Apartheid', University of Witwatersrand, 6–10 February 1990.

167 Padayachee and Vawda, 'Indian Workers', p. 156.

168 Padayachee and Vawda, 'Indian Workers', p. 171.

169 Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 337.

170 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2044, A. B. Somers, Hon. Sec., Dimes, to Town Clerk, 16/01/1947.

171 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2045, Report of City Treasurer, 28/04/1947.

172 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2045, Dimes to Town Clerk, 28/05/1947.

reflects the role played by white employers' perceptions in generating this social estrangement. In a letter to the Town Clerk, the City Market Master urged that the watchman at the Indian Market should be an Indian and not an African: 'In my opinion an Indian is more suitable for the work as the tenants are all Indians.'<sup>183</sup> This division did not only concern material competition. It also resulted in stereotypes being built up. Africans, for example, saw Indians as traders who sent profits abroad, who were party to price-cutting and usurious lending practices, and who treated Africans insolently by referring to them as 'kaffirs'. Indians, it was said, had loose relations with African women, kept to themselves, and were guilty of the 'ill treatment of natives on buses'. Africans also complained that 'competition between natives and Indians for bus certificates, usually ended with the Indian successful' and they resented the 'apparent preference which Indians receive for better positions in commerce and industry'.<sup>184</sup> At a mass meeting of Africans on 19 February 1949, just one month after the riots, Africans resolved that the Indian landlords should stop the eviction of their African tenants. The authorities should 'impress on Indians that African economic progress can no longer be obstructed': 'Whenever the African expresses willingness to take over services at present in Indian hands in predominantly African areas, the Indian should give proof of his goodwill by disposing of these to Africans at reasonable prices'. 'Where Indian buses do run and shops are established African drivers and conductors and salesmen (should) be employed.'<sup>185</sup>

Many municipal workers were directly affected by the strike. The gates on both ends of the barracks were closed and workers were advised to remain indoors.<sup>186</sup> Three Indian workers were thrown into the Durban bay during the riots while the homes of workers who lived in the Cato Manor Housing Scheme were destroyed. The chairman of Dimes, for example, was left with overalls only.<sup>187</sup> Notwithstanding this, Dimes was pleased to report that 'the "essential" Municipal workers responded splendidly and without hesitation'.<sup>188</sup> In return, the Municipality deducted the wages of all employees who failed to report to work even though this was due to transport difficulties and concerns over security.<sup>189</sup> As a result of the riots, Dimes lodged a complaint about Africans frequenting the Cator Manor Housing Scheme and requested that the DTC act in accordance with the wishes of Indians: 'My society feels that the Housing Scheme should be prohibited to Natives.'<sup>190</sup> It is telling that such expressions of racial exclusivity should emanate from a union in a decade when it was at its most radical. This is further illustration that the lives of workers revolved around communal concerns. To an extent, these communal concerns explain why workers could not transcend the barriers of 'race' to develop workers' solidarity. Such community activities had the effect of creating distance between Indians, Africans and whites, and undermined notions of class solidarity. In contrast, the commonality of struggle between Indian workers, professionals and politicians blurred the distinctions between race and class amongst Indians. The impact of community was certainly more pivotal than class. This example shows that identities, which are complex, are forged historically by relations of power, rather than 'objective' class structures.

## Conclusions

Dimes' Annual Report for 1949 conceded that it 'had not achieved substantially many tangible results' with regard to wages and conditions of service. The polyclinic and school

had not been built, municipal workers did not benefit from the Unemployment Insurance Fund, hospital facilities remained inadequate and there was no improvement to the Magazine Barracks.<sup>191</sup> Notwithstanding this, many Indians joined Dimes because it attempted to address their day-to-day problems. Contrary to the assertion of Padayachee *et al* that, by the mid-1940s, Indian trades unions 'had hardly begun the task of addressing fundamental worker grievances such as low wages, poor working conditions, inadequate housing, education and the like'<sup>192</sup> this study has shown that Dimes had been actively addressing these issues since 1917. While Dimes' leadership constantly urged workers to partake more fully in its activities, workers only became involved when their specific grievances needed addressing. It is for this reason that they became more strident during the 1930s and 1940s, when economic conditions were unsustainable for many. The presence of more democratic structures, the lack of which is highlighted by Padayachee *et al* would not necessarily have led to class consciousness. Dimes represents an interesting case study in which collective interests took on a more communal than class expression. Workers organised themselves around traditional institutions that gave them a sense of belonging and anchoring. However, they were also employees of a municipality that cared little for their welfare, and they saw good reason to organise themselves into a body that addressed 'bread and butter' issues. There was no conflict in thus belonging to a worker-based union while participating in community-generated activities.

While a number of identities based on language, class, religion, and customs, co-existed within the category 'Indian', during critical periods of political and economic pressure, disparate community members were brought closer together and a common identity of 'Indian', emerged in relation to Africans and whites. A central part of this process was related to 'race' distinction. The appeals of Indian workers to Indian merchants for help, and the role of Indian merchants and the middle classes in assisting working-class Indians to effect material improvement in their lives shows that racial identification was a prominent feature of Durban society. The working class culture and community that evolved at the Magazine Barracks was restricted to Indians, and was thus based on racial identity; this clearly hampered the development of class and non-racial identities. Dimes itself acknowledged that, because of the 'existence of racially separated unions', it 'did not consciously identify and highlight the plight of other oppressed communities'.<sup>193</sup> While many 'radical' Indians would join the ANC from the 1950s, the mass of Indians, who had earlier access to education and better command of English, capitalised on their position by carving a niche for themselves in the local economy, between whites and Africans. They withdrew from wider alliances and became passive.<sup>194</sup> Hopes of sustaining non-racial class action disappeared in the early 1950s when some Municipal employees engaged in a political protest stay-away as part of the passive resistance campaign initiated by the ANC. Of 430 workers who were dismissed in August 1950, 350 were Indian. When Indian municipal workers engaged in another strike in June 1953, 300 workers lost their jobs and were evicted from the barracks. As a result the 'idea that the future for Indian workers lay in common anti-apartheid struggle was abandoned in favour of passivity'.<sup>195</sup>

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191 Dimes Annual Report, June 1949.

192 Padayachee *et al.* *Indian Workers*, p. 156.

193 S. Jaggarnath, DICES, p. 17.

194 Freund, *Insiders*, p. 62-63.

195 Freund, *Insiders*, p. 57.

183 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/2026, J. Davison, City Market Master, to Town Clerk, 12/10/1936.

184 UG 36-49, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Riots in Durban, 1949.

185 *The Natal Mercury*, 8 March 1949.

186 Interview with Mrs P. Murugan, 30 April 1999.

187 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/1580, Hon. Sec., Dimes, to Town Clerk, 24 January 1949.

189 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/1580, Hon. Sec., Dimes, to Town Clerk, 24 January 1949.

189 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/1580, Town Clerk to Heads of Department, 29 January 1949.

190 NA, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/1580, S. B. Somers, Secretary, Dimes, to Town Clerk, 22 June 1949.