

Indian Opinion

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HOUSING PROBLEM IN DURBAN

DEBATE IN THE TOWN COUNCIL

THE housing question formed the subject of a long debate at last Monday's meeting of the Durban Town Council, when the Health Committee submitted a report by the Borough Medical Officer of Health on the question of housing conditions in Durban.

The Committee stated: In the main conditions in Durban have been shown to be similar to those obtaining elsewhere, and as private enterprise has failed to meet the situation, the Council being representatives of the community as a whole must shoulder the responsibility towards that section of the people who by force of circumstances are unable to help themselves, apart from the statutory duty of safeguarding the public health of the town. Before any scheme of providing additional houses or rehousing the present occupants of premises, unfit for human habitation, however it is undertaken, it is necessary that the Council should obtain additional powers of expropriation to apply to land already laid out, both inside and outside the Borough. We have given this subject very serious consideration, and are of the opinion that the Council should take steps to give effect to the recommendations contained in the report of the Borough Medical Officer of Health. The Committee recommended as follows:—

(a) That this Council accepts the responsibility of the adequate housing of the poorer-paid section of the community.

(b) That this Council obtain powers of expropriation to apply to land already laid out, both within and without the Borough.

(c) That the Government be approached with a view to their assisting any scheme of rehousing which may possibly be non-remunerative but which would affect, among others, Government employees.

(d) That this Council realises the necessity for providing alternative accommodation prior to proceeding with the closure of existing dwellings unfit for human habitation.

MRS. BENSON'S ATTITUDE

Councillor Mrs. Benson (Chairman of the Health Committee) was unable to accept clause (a). She was keenly anxious the Board should do all in its power to improve housing conditions, particularly in view of the revelations during the recent smallpox outbreak, but at present there was a Sub-Committee sitting dealing with houses, and a recommendation had practically gone forward to erect 20 semi-detached houses which they hoped to dispose of at £5 per month. There was much discussion as to whether the Council as a body was entirely responsible for housing, which she felt was asking too much. She felt clause (c) was quite sound.

Councillor Wadley congratulated Mrs. Benson upon her statement. Never in the wildest dreams had he imagined the Durban Town Council rising to such heights of Socialism—it was Socialism out-socialised. Personally he did not perceive the particular virtue of housing over and above "common or garden" sustenance. He should feel more inclined to support a policy of first ensuring work and food for the people.

"If the Council were willing to assume in full cold-bloodedness the responsibility for housing probably 9-10ths of the people of Durban," Councillor Wadley added, "it is willing to assume obligations the extent of which

Councillors do not realise."

Councillor Mrs. Knight declared that the last speaker was very wide of the mark. The Committee's recommendation did not mean that the Council should build thousands of houses; that would be an impossible proposition.

Councillor Wadley (interposing): You say the recommendation does not mean what it says?

HOUSING OF THE POOR

Councillor Mrs. Knight contended that the resolution meant that the Council should see the poor were properly housed. A lot of poorly paid people were being brought into the town for whom there was no possible housing accommodation; if they were not strong enough to prevent people coming in in this way and living under impossible conditions, then they were useless as a Council. She did not care whether they built more houses, put the people outside the Borough where there was more room, or told the Government that they would not have people put down in the streets without shelter. It was immaterial what lines they took, but the resolution simply meant that the Council undertook that there should be no slumdom in Durban, and that as far as possible they would only have in the Borough a population that was properly housed.

DUPLICATION

Councillor Kemp said the resolution on the agenda was not the one to which he agreed in committee, which was that the Council should accept the principle of the responsibility, etc. He was not prepared to see the Council accept responsibility without Mr. Boydell coming into line on this matter. Who were the poorer-paid section? Some of the Councillors might be put in that class. What he agreed to was that the Council accept the principle of the responsibility of the adequate housing of the poorer-paid sections of the community.

Councillor Eaton complained that the Council was troubled with the weakness of doing work twice over.

"If I were Mussolini," he added amid laughter, "I would stop it immediately."

Councillor Acutt pointed out that there was a great deal to be done before the resolution could be carried into effect. It was bound to come, and he was convinced Durban would see it was a good investment. He would not agree to any housing scheme if he did not think it would pay its own way. Clause (c) presupposed a scheme that might not pay; he did not agree with that. He believed they could put up houses for which the working people could afford to pay, the rent of which would meet the outlay. Clause (b) was very sweeping, and he did not like it to be thought they were going to seek powers to expropriate property without any real cause for such a step. When this matter came before the town solicitors to frame the necessary clause, there would have to be very sound reasons for empowering the Corporation to expropriate land. It would not be carried out without some qualification.

Councillor Wadley interposed with a remark, which led Councillor Acutt to retort with some feeling: If Councillor Wadley has no consideration for the welfare of the town, I don't see why he should sling mud at anything we are trying to do."

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Councillor Eaton was struck by the fact that every

member of the Committee who had spoken had stated the resolution did not mean what it said. The Council had to vote on the words before them, and nothing else.

Councillor Burman did not remember Clause (a) put forward in the form stated, and he was not a party to it. He moved as an amendment to Clause (a) : "That the Council accepts the view that the proper housing of the poorer section of the community is inadequate."

The Mayor said there was a tremendous amount of confusion over Clause (a), and a difference of opinion with regard to (b), and he urged that the whole matter should be referred back to the Health Committee for further consideration. He was very glad Councillor Mrs. Benson had started the ball rolling with regard to (a).

Councillor Murray could not support the clause in view of previous action by the Council. A Sub-Committee which was appointed to go into the housing question tried to get rid of slumdom, but their recommendations were turned down. He supported the amendment.

Councillor Mrs. Benson suggested that Clause (c) should be added to Councillor Burman's amendment.

Councillor Eaton again pointed out that they were already doing what the Committee wanted, although they did not accept the sweeping responsibility suggested in the resolution. Plans were already being prepared for additional housing.

REFERRED TO HEALTH COMMITTEE

Councillor Acuti suggested the addition of (d) to the amendment, which, he said, was the gist of the whole thing.

Councillor Kemp argued that it was the Government's duty to look after its own employees.

Councillor Olark said it seemed the Committee's report did not mean what it said, and it should certainly be referred back to ascertain exactly what the Committee did mean. His own view was that the Town Council as a public body ought to take the responsibility upon its shoulders of seeing to the housing of the people. While he was prepared to accept the Committee's report, he agreed it was the Government's duty to deal with this matter, but the Council should do its duty here as well. As to the suggestion that the report out-Heroded Herod, he pointed out that socialism was a system of society and that the housing of the people was merely a small part of socialism.

By this time the Council appeared to be thoroughly confused upon the issue and readily agreed to refer the whole matter back to the Health Committee.

A HEARTY WELCOME

WE extend to the Government of India Delegation a cordial welcome to Natal. The major portion of the Indian community of South Africa is centralised in Natal. It was from Natal that Indians spread out to the four corners of South Africa. And it is Natal where the fruits of the Indian labours can be found. And it is pleasing in the circumstances, that the members of the Delegation should visit Natal before they leave South Africa. Unlike other parts of South Africa, the Delegation will find that Natal is a Garden to the fullest sense of the word, the laying out of which, had been carried out with the sweated labour supplied by India. Natal will bring to them memories of a protracted struggle commenced by the Indian community. This is by the way however.

The crux of the whole Indian question

lies in Natal. The members of the Delegation have made this visit to South Africa an enormous sacrifice. Notwithstanding his failing health, the Rt. Hon. V. Srinivasa Sastri undertook to come out to South Africa with the fullest hope that some benefit will be derived from the visit. Natal Indians will receive the Delegation with open arms.

We are indeed disappointed that the Delegation is not in a position to spend more than two full days in Natal. Though the programme arranged for the entertainment of the members will be heavy, we feel sure the Indian community of Natal will be excused for their exuberance, for, gratitude is a trait in the character of the Indian. He will spend his all, if only he is allowed to show his gratitude.

The statement made by the Rt. Hon. V. Srinivasa Sastri at the reception given at Capetown augurs well for the future. Our desire has been that there shall be a final settlement of the Indian question in South Africa and we are pleased to learn that the Round Table Conference will bring about this settlement.

The Delegation's stay will be a short one and we have every hope that within that short period they will have seen everything of Natal as to carry with them the best recollections of this memorable visit to Natal.

The Story of My Experiments With Truth

[BY M. K. GANDHI]

PART II.

Chapter X

THE FIRST DAY IN PRETORIA

I had expected some one on behalf of Dadu Abdulla's attorney to meet me at Pretoria station. I knew that no Indian would be there to receive me since I had particularly promised not to put up at an Indian house. But the attorney had sent no one. I understood later that as I had arrived on a Sunday he could not have sent any one without inconvenience. I was perplexed and wondered where to go, as I feared that no hotel would accept me.

Pretoria station in 1893 was quite different from what it was in 1914. The lights were burning dimly. The travellers were few. I let all the other passengers go, and thought that as soon as the ticket-collector was fairly free I would hand him my ticket and ask him if he could direct me to some hotel or any such place where I might go; otherwise I would spend the night at the station. I must confess I shrank from asking him even this, for I was afraid of being insulted.

AN AMERICAN NEGRO'S OFFER

The station became clear of all passengers. I gave my ticket to the ticket-collector and began my inquiries. He replied to me courteously but I saw that he could not be of any considerable help. But

an American Negro who was standing near by broke into the conversation.

"I see," said he, "that you are an utter stranger here, without any friends. If you will come with me, I will take you to a small hotel, of which the proprietor is an American who is very well known to me. I think he will accept you."

I had my own doubts about the offer, but I thanked him and accepted his suggestion. He took me to Johnston's Family Hotel. He drew Mr. Johnston aside to speak to him, and the latter agreed to accommodate me for the night, on condition that I should have my dinner served in my room.

"I assure you," said he, "that I have no colour prejudice. But I have only European custom, and if I allowed you to eat in the dining room my guests might be offended and even go away."

"Thank you," said I, "even for accommodating me for the night. I am now more or less acquainted with the conditions here and I understand your difficulty. I do not mind your serving the dinner in my room. I hope to be able to make some other arrangement to-morrow."

I was shown into a room, where I now sat waiting for the dinner, and musing, as I was quite alone. There were not many guests in the hotel, and I had expected the waiter to come very shortly with the dinner. Instead Mr. Johnston appeared. He said: "I was ashamed of having asked you to have your dinner here. So I spoke to the other guests about you and asked them if they would mind your having your dinner in the dining-room. They said they had no objection, and that they did not mind your staying here as long as you liked. Please, therefore, come to the dining-room, if you will, and stay here as long as you wish."

I thanked him again, went to the dining-room and had a hearty dinner.

WITH THE ATTORNEY

Next morning I called on the attorney, Mr. A. W. Baker. Abdulla Seth had given some description of him, so his cordial reception did not surprise me. He received me very warmly and made kind inquiries. I explained all about myself. Thereupon he said: "We have no work for you here as a barrister for we have engaged the best counsel. The case is a prolonged and complicated one, so I shall take your assistance only to the extent of getting necessary information. And of course you will make communication with my client easy for me, as I shall now ask for all the information I want from him through you. That is certainly an advantage. I have not yet found rooms for you. I thought I had better do so after having seen you. There is a fearful amount of colour prejudice here and therefore it is not easy to find lodgings for such as you. But I know a poor woman. She is the wife of a baker. I think she will accept you, and thus add to her income at the same time. Come, let us go to her place."

So he took me to her house. He spoke with her privately about me and she agreed to accept me as a boarder at 35 shillings a week.

Mr. Baker, besides being an attorney was a staunch lay preacher. He is still alive and now engaged purely in missionary work having given up the legal profession. He is quite well-to-do. He has still kept up correspondence with me. In his letters he always dwells on the same theme. He upholds the excellence of Christianity from various points of view, and contends that it is impossible to find eternal peace unless one accepts Jesus as the only son of God and the Saviour of mankind.

During the very first interview Mr. Baker ascertained from me my religious views. I said to him: "I am a Hindu by birth. And yet I do not know much of Hinduism and I know less of other religions. In fact I do not know where I am and what is and what should be my belief. I intend to

make a careful study of my own religion and as far as I can of other religions as well."

Mr. Baker was glad to hear all this and said: "I am one of the Directors of the South African General Mission. I have built a church at my own expense, and I deliver sermons in it regularly. I am free from colour prejudice. I have some co-workers and we meet at one o'clock every day for a few minutes a pray for peace and light. I shall be glad if you will join us there. I shall introduce you to my co-workers who will be happy to meet you and I dare say you will also like their company. I shall give you, besides, some religious books to read, though of course the one book is the Holy Bible which I would specially recommend to you."

I thanked Mr. Baker and agreed to attend the one o'clock prayers as regularly as possible.

"So I shall expect you here to-morrow at one o'clock and we shall go together to pray," added Mr. Baker, and we said good-bye.

TO HIS NEW LODGINGS

There was still little time for reflection. I went to Mr. Johnston, paid the bill and removed to the new lodgings, where I had my dinner. The landlady was a good woman. She had cooked a vegetarian meal for me. It was not long before I made myself quite at home with the family.

I next went to see the friend to whom Dadā Abdulla had given me a note. From him I learnt more about the hardships of Indians in South Africa. He insisted that I should stay with him. I thanked him and told him that I had already made arrangements. He urged me not to hesitate to ask for anything that I might need.

It was now dark. I returned home, had my supper, went to my room and sat there absorbed in deep thought. There was not any immediate work for me. I informed Abdulla Seth of it. What, I thought, can be the meaning of Mr. Baker's friendship? What shall I gain from his religious co-workers? How long should I interest myself in the study of Christianity? How was I to obtain literature about Hinduism? And how was I to understand Christianity in its proper perspective without thoroughly knowing my own religion? It came to only one conclusion: I should make a dispassionate study of all that came to me, and deal with Mr. Baker's group as God might guide me. I should not think of embracing another religion before I had fully understood my own.

Thus musing I fell off to sleep.

Indian Students and South Africa

In response to Mr. Andrews' appeal for union in prayer on the 19th December, the date set aside by the South African Indian community as a day of prayer for the success of the Round Table Conference, a representative group of Indian students met on Sunday morning in the Public Hall of the Indian Students' Union and Hostel at 112, Gower Street, under the chairmanship of Mr. J. M. Isaac, the Acting Warden. After an opening prayer in Sanskrit, translated into English by Dr. K. S. V. Aiyar, Mr. H. S. L. Polak in a brief address outlined the history of the Indian problem in South Africa and the circumstances in which the Round Table Conference came to be set up and the day of prayer to be appointed. He appealed to those present to join in prayer for the success of the Conference, the improvement of racial relations in South Africa and the broadening of the basis of understanding between the peoples of the East and West in the interests of human solidarity. He was followed by Mr. A. G. Mnlgaonker, and by Dr. Rahaman, who, two, offered a prayer. The proceedings, which lasted about three-quarters of an hour, were brought to a close by an eloquent appeal by the chairman to Almighty God for a peaceful and happy solution of the problem, and the success of the efforts of the negotiations at Capetown.

The Passing of a Friend

Among those who have passed over during the last few days to the great majority is Miss Florence Winterbottom, whose name is unknown to almost everyone to whom these few words of tribute will come. Miss Winterbottom belonged to a good English middle class family, and at a comparatively early age stepped out of the rut of orthodoxy and associated herself with the Ethical Movement. She was at one time president of the Union of Ethical Societies in England. Her chief claim to remembrance in India, however, lies due to the fact that during the Passive Resistance struggle of the Indians in South Africa, having already made the acquaintance of Mr. Gandhi in England, Miss Winterbottom had, for years, been one of the most hardworking advocates of Indian rights in South Africa and had served continuously as a member of the old South Africa British Indian Committee in London. During recent years ill-health had badly handicapped her, but her great spirit remained supreme to the end. She never failed in her sympathy with the South African Indian cause and offered those competent to do so many an opportunity to advocate that cause through one or other of the activities of the Ethical Movement and the Emerson Club.

OUR LONDON LETTER

[FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT]

4th November 1926.

Colonel F. S. Jackson, the well-known cricketer, who until recently was chairman of the Conservative Association, has been appointed to succeed Lord Lytton as Governor of Bengal. Etiquette or custom demands that the head of this important Indian Presidency should be a noble man. Colonel Jackson before his departure will be made a Peer. As he is a Yorkshireman he will probably take his title from some place in that country. The Jacksons who are of the House of Lord Allerton are of the Leeds country, the present Lord Allerton is a nephew of Colonel Jackson. The Government House, Calcutta, which Colonel Jackson occupy as Governor is a replica of Kedleston Hall the seat in Derbyshire of the Scarsdale Curzons.

Mrs. Kate Perugini, Charles Dickens's sole surviving daughter is 88 years to-day. Her home is in Kensington where she lives in retirement. Her sole surviving brother Sir Henry Dickens also lives in Kensington close to his sister. With her sister Mary when she was ten, she taught her father the Polka, so that they might dance it with him on their brother Charles's birthday. Dickens enjoined Foster to remember that for his biography which Foster did. In 1860 she married J. Alston Collins who died in 1873. Subsequently she married Charles Edward Perugini an Italian artist. She was an artist herself, a painter of children's portraits and subjects connected with child-life.

The pleasantest feature of English public life is that differences in political views between persons is no bar to intimate personal friendship. Recently Lord Oxford, Lord Birkenhead and Sir John Simon met at Oxford to praise with a sincerity which is beyond all doubt, the late Lord Curzon. Lord Oxford epitomised the feeling of the company by saying that although politically he and Lord Curzon were on opposite sides he was glad to remember that he enjoyed from first to last throughout the whole of his active life the close personal friendship of the late Lord Curzon. It is no small thing that so fine a spirit can be found which is the rule rather than the exception in English public life, notwithstanding the bitternesses and the frequent pettinesses in political life.

Mr. Neville Chamberlain the Health Minister,

proposes next year to introduce legislation to amend the Poor Law system to the extent of abolishing Boards of Guardians and transferring their powers and duties to Municipalities. The London County Council has accepted the basis of his scheme for centralising Poor Law administration. But there is a doubt whether in 1927 room will be found for it in the Government's programme of legislation, as the Government is sure to deal with the question of trade unions, the House of Lords Reform and financial matters. The *Times* publishes facts relating to two such wealthy districts as Westminster and Marylebone which disclose startling slum conditions in these areas. It was reported to the Housing League that 2066 persons live three in a room; 332 persons four in a room and there were 98 persons who lived 5 in a room.

Mr. Baldwin, the Prime Minister, speaking at the Annual Meeting of the British School in Athens, held in London, among other things, said: Western civilisation we know, with all its merits and faults, was saved in its infancy at Marathon, and ten years later by Leonidas. Had it not been for that decade, Rome being then in its infancy, there was nothing to prevent Eastern Europe being Orientalised. Had it not been for the Greeks, not only could there have been no civilisation as we have known it, but we and all of us would have been dark-skinned people with long noses.

Dr. Nansen, the famous explorer, in his rectorial address to the students of St. Andrews University, speaking the same week as Mr. Baldwin, had some hard things to say of civilisation. For instance, he said, let us be modest. The rising tide of evolution, which carried our ancestors from the level of apes to that of the Cro-Magnon people, stopped thousands of years ago owing to the conditions of modern social life. Nations have hardly begun as yet to have real morality. They are little more than collections of beasts of prey.

Particulars of Sub-Committees Which Met at Capetown

In Connection With the Statement Presented
by the South African Indian Congress
To the Government of India Delegation

Date.	SUBJECT.	GOVT. OF INDIA DELEGATION SUB-COMMITTEE.	S. A. I. CONGRESS SUB-COMMITTEE.
27-12-26	Industrial Legislation	Sir George Paddison (Chairman), Sir Pheroze Sethna, and Rt. Hon. V. Srinivasa Sastri.	Messrs. A. I. Kajee, V. S. C. Pather, S. R. Naidoo and D. M. Nursoo.
28-12-25	Immig- ration	Mr. Corbett, (Chairman), Sir Pheroze Sethna, and Rt. Hon. V. Srinivasa Sastri.	Messrs. V. S. C. Pather, A. I. Kajee, A. Ismail, Goolam Rasool, N. A. Camay, H. K. Gool, and S. R. Naidoo.
30-12-26	Education	Rt. Hon. V. Srinivasa Sastri, (Chairman), Sir D'Archy Lindsay, and Sir P. Sethna	Messrs. V. S. C. Pather, A. I. Kajee, A. Ismail, N. A. Camay and S. R. Naidoo.
31-12-26	Licensing and Land	Mr. Corbett (Chairman), Sir Pheroze Sethna and Rt. Hon. V. Srinivasa Sastri	Messrs. S. R. Naidoo, V. S. C. Pather, A. I. Kajee, M. Y. Hawa, A. Ismail, N. A. Camay and G. Rasool.
1-1-27	Housing and Sanitation	Sir Muhammed Habibullah (Chairman), Sir George Paddison, Sir P. Sethna and Rt. Hon. V. Srinivasa Sastri	Messrs. V. S. C. Pather, A. I. Kajee, S. R. Naidoo, H. M. Khan and D. Nursoo.