

Address by The Rev. John L. Dube as representing the Native Viewpoint

It is expected of me that I shall say something of the view concerning the conditions under which we now live in this our Homeland—as dear to us as is England to the Englishman—and the task is one which I gladly take up, in the hope that it may do some good. I am asked to speak on what we find irksome. Naturally, in an address of this kind, I cannot hope to do more than merely touch on the fringe of things.

At the outset let me say I am proud of my people, proud of being a full-blooded African myself. I became a convert to the Christian faith in early boyhood, and largely through the influence of my mother was fortunate enough to get an education in Natal and in America. I have travelled in Europe, including Great Britain, Holland and Norway. It is with a full sense of responsibility, then, that I say the thinking Native has nothing but gratitude for the benefits conferred on us by the White man's civilisation, and particularly for the Word of Life, so diligently preached to us by that much criticised person, the missionary, our benefactor.

Let me say, further, that I give place to no one in my loyalty to our British Sovereign who, by the grace of God, is the mightiest monarch on earth. It was an unspeakable joy to us Natives to see the King's heir among us a year ago, and a great moment in my life when I was called upon to extend publicly to the Prince of Wales a welcome from the Natives of Natal. I am a firm believer in constitutional government, in the maintenance of peace and order, in the furtherance of goodwill among men.

It has been my lot in life—and I trust it will be so as long as I live—to further the cause of my people, to labour for their enlightenment and advancement, both in temporal and in spiritual matters. I live to serve them, however poor my service may be, and however disheartening at times the work may be.

Taking my stand there, and in that spirit, I will apply myself, with all moderation, to the task allotted to me, to speak about what we find burdensome under the White man's rule, but my address would fail to do our cause good were it not also to offer some suggestions for the improvement of things; and I shall try therefore to balance criticism with constructive suggestions.

We quite realise that no people under the sun are free from grievances, not even the White people: but I take it it is one of the main purposes of settled civilised governments, nay, their sacred duty, to strive to

right the legitimate grievances of the people whom they govern or represent, and that it is a particular aim of an organisation such as this Conference is to do all in its power to promote this Christian work, without necessarily entering into political controversies. There is the noble example of brave Archbishop Stephen Langton, who helped to secure the Great Charter for the British people. Taking those, then, to be functions of Church and State in a land with democratic government, it is altogether good and proper that we should openly ventilate our grievances, and suggest remedies, rather than harbour grievances in silence in our bosoms, until the bursting point is reached.

Condescending Kindness

How intricately and closely linked up with the activities of the White people in South Africa is the labour of my people needs no description from me. It is a commonplace; but what is commonplace is apt to be overlooked. Think of all that is done from end to end of this great country by the labour of the Native, and contemplate how far back the advancement of the country would be set were the White people to wake up to-morrow morning and find a South Africa clean and clear of the Natives—not a single African to be seen anywhere within the borders of the Sub-Continent—vanished! Yet how often are we slightly spoken of as “only Kafirs!” (unbelievers), or “Skepsels” (creatures). Often, though happily not always, children learn from their infancy to look down on us; they show us kindnesses in a condescending way, as they would to a dog or cat or other animal—indeed, some pet animals receive better treatment than many a Native—yet when the children become wearisome they are so often handed over to the self-same Natives, to look after or croon to sleep with a lullaby. It is only human that the impressions gained by the child should influence its life more or less, and to this is no doubt traceable some of the unfair treatment meted out to us in this our Homeland.

Let us for a moment consider the lot of the Native at work. How often does it happen that he cannot correctly understand what is required of him, owing to the faulty and confusing Zulu of his employer. If, to overcome this language difficulty, my people try to learn English, they are promptly either ridiculed for their efforts or accused of “putting on airs”—“imagine Jim Fish trying to speak English.” Misunderstandings arising out of confusing language are the cause of many

heartaches, and also of many physical aches. Often poor translation by Court interpreters land many of our people into gaols.

Imitating Europeans

The working Native is impressively told he must take care of his earnings. He sees how well dressed are his employers in their “Sunday best,” and even the Indians, who are a dark-skinned people like himself. He gives way to a natural impulse to imitate them, and uses part of his well-earned savings to buy clothes of colours he loves. In these he goes out for a walk on Sunday afternoon, when he is free: he is dressed up “to kill,” and takes off his hat, too, when occasion demands it, but he notices that the White people regard him with disfavour for this, and even his mistress will protest: “Oh, I say, look at Jim! What next?” and the children throw stones at him. Jim tumbles down with his finery from the sublime to the ridiculous. Yet the clothes he wears have been bought honestly and are made by the White people themselves. Jim can't help that fine clothes give him an air of “swank”—after all, it is not cheek, but only swank, and swank, or vanity, exists the world over.

Employers often take no account of how their Native servants are detained when sent on errands to banks and post offices and other places, and this repeatedly results in unjust blame being attached to servants for delay which is beyond their control. If there is anything a Native servant dreads more than anything else on such occasions, it is to find a “full house,” which will necessitate a long wait, or clerks or employees, ignoring his presence, earnestly engaged in “capping” one another's yarns or jokes. Is it any wonder that these things drive my people for their own business to Indian stores? The Indians are keen on the business, patient, and good-tempered with us.

The treatment of Natives on the Railways at times leaves much to be desired. I have seen cases of harsh treatment of our old people and women. There is the scandal of the “Bombella” trucks. All this helps to drive my people to Indian buses.

Employers often take no interest in the Native beyond what they can get out of him. “I don't believe in having anything to do with the affairs of my Kafirs—it's a mistake. Let them fight out their own battles, I say.” That is their attitude. Now, is that a right spirit? Is it not a selfish, dog-in-the-manger attitude? Does it square with common-sense? Does it square with the Bible? Is it realised that this self-

satisfied, easy-going shirking of responsibility largely helps to breed leita gangs and ruins our girls in White people's towns.

Lucky South Africa

My people generally make good servants. They are most devoted and loyal to good masters, performing disagreeable tasks, doing the donkey work, and even giving their lives for their masters sometimes. Anyone who cares to compare the servant question in Africa with the servant question in European countries will soon admit that the White people here in South Africa have much to be thankful for. Proof enough of this is found in the fact that those who have lived here for any length of time, and leave our shores, have a habit of coming back again, like the boomerang. Here I wish, with all respect and earnestness, to draw attention to the fact that in many instances on the labour field my people are shockingly accommodated, badly cared for, and badly paid, and I plead most earnestly for better conditions for them in those respects. These matters call for urgent attention, and I submit that it is for the Government to take immediate action. Now and again what is happening will peep out in the Courts and in the Press.

Turning to the spiritual life, I feel that employers on the whole might do more for my benighted people, by encouraging their Native servants to attend divine service, where a place of worship is within reasonable reach. Some employers may not care to do even this, but is it too much to ask of them that they at least do not hinder their servants from having the benefit of religion—often the only solace to a soul in distress, and certainly the best.

In moral matters, no one will deny that much harm is done to my people by the bad example of the vicious, which, like a poison, insinuates itself into all walks of life. This is a painful subject, and I ask you to allow me merely to mention it, and no more, for I know that the whole weight of all right-thinking people is set solidly against vice, and that the Churches are out to fight it, and will emphasise the evil effects of bad example on my people.

Forest of By-Laws

Conditions in towns are in many ways very trying to us. The veritable forests of Borough by-laws, which are so often unwittingly violated by my people, lead to much ill-usage of Natives, and anyone who has had experience of their administration can surely not blame us for looking on them as in some ways a method of raking in our money—for the fines are often heav-

ily disproportionate to the wages paid to the Native. The Borough Native Police are in some cases unduly rough, and will often handcuff their victims and march them through town, as though they had committed some dreadful crime—and so create a bad impression of them. Why do not the towns which have local government carry out the provisions of the Urban Areas Act, where this has not already been done, and provide suitable accommodation for my people, so that they can get away from the clutches of these by-laws after their day's work is done? I plead earnestly for this, and I also plead earnestly for the appointment of judicial officers nominated by the Native Affairs Department for the trial of by-law cases, where the cases affecting Natives takes up most of the time of the judicial officer.

As to the laws of the land which specially apply to Natives, I think the burden of our grievances may aptly be summarised in the famous declaration, "No taxation without representation," to which I would add, "And no legislation without representation," using the words in regard to legislation affecting Natives, for that is all that concerns us. I cannot believe that it is generally recognised by our White friends how irksome to us are many laws by which we are bound. I cannot tell you, for example, how many definitions of the word "Native" there are in South African laws—each for the purpose of laws differentially affecting us. It is something like describing the colours of the chameleon, with the addition that if he does certain things when he has a particular colour then he is liable to certain penalties.

Let me refer to two or three sides of this matter from the practical point of view, to show how these laws work out in practice.

Several Grievances

We pay a scavenger tax, which has steadily increased, for our faithful companion down the ages, the dog. This tax we freely admit may be quite justified on White people's farms, with all their irresistible temptations to dogs, but is it justified in our reservations, in the Native locations? Further, we have to pay for wood in our own forests in the locations. The Government sells the timber to White people, who are out for profit, whilst we urgently need it for domestic purposes or that we may get the profit, but we observe that the Government does not require these White people to replant trees to make good what is taken away, to save the best part of our forests from being wiped out by the White people. We cannot even move

about this ancient Homeland of ours without having to buy Government documents, called passes. The Pass Laws, after 15 years of Union, are still the same in South Africa as they were before Union, Indians are not burdened with these passes, nor of course are the White people. The obvious inference is that we are the most lawless people in South Africa, and have therefore to be herded in that way. Can it surprise anyone if we look on the whole pass system as most unjust in the extremes to which it goes, and dislike it intensely?

So I might go on. The law may be an ass; but we are human beings, with beating hearts and the attributes of men. We are a loyal, law-abiding, long-suffering people. Is it right, then, that we should be denied all voice in matters so closely affecting our lives and welfare in our own Homeland, denied it by our enlightened rulers.

The whirl of recent legislation by the Central Government, differentially affecting us, leaves us giddy and alarmed—and no wonder, when it is remembered that our experience of past legislation of that kind, Colonial and Union, is not exactly pleasant.

Man-made laws may go a long way, but they are always subject to the supreme Divine Will of a just God—and the spirit implanted in us by Him, the Almighty Creator, will prompt us to plead unceasingly with our rulers against unjust laws, and to press persistently for a voice in the making of laws affecting us until we are heard. There are among my people men and women quite capable of taking part in this great work. My most earnest plea then is for "No legislation without representation," and that includes taxation.

S.A.P. Preferred to Pact

It is sad to note how politicians play "political football" with us Natives. For example, General Smuts whilst Prime Minister and Minister of Native Affairs seemed to follow a policy of drift in Native affairs. He never had time to visit the Transkeian Territories, and on the only occasion he visited Zululand in that capacity, in September, 1922, he had no time for the Natives. He was too busy playing another political game, apparently against the Portuguese. But however unsatisfactory General Smuts' Government was, it was a great deal better than the present Government, that denies us the right to progress.

In the administration of Native affairs I also plead for the representation of the Natives.

I make bold to say that if the two principles of "no legislation without represen-

tation" and "no administration without representation" had been observed by the Natal Government of the day, there would have been, in all probability, no bloodshed at all in 1906, certainly no Bambata disturbance.

Incompetent Magistrates

I wish to emphasise further, most earnestly, that the Union authorities should make full use of members of the Public Service who show special aptitude for the administration of Native affairs. How very much this is needed will appear when I mention that there are instances of magistrates holding office in Native areas, in this present day and generation, who know little or nothing of the language or customs and usages of the Natives. Here is just one illustration of what can happen in these cases:

Not long ago a Native visited a certain magisterial district, whose magistrate knew no Zulu. The Native had to get permission to visit the district. On his way there he happened to meet the magistrate, who was out riding. He respectfully greeted the magistrate, announced who he was, and stated his business. The magistrate acknowledged the salute, and in reply to the speech said: "Ya, all right." Well, the Native took that to mean that everything was all right, that the visit was authorised and was profuse in his thanks. Imagine the man's surprise and horror later on, on being called upon to answer for his conduct in visiting the district without permission. The magistrate frankly admitted the meeting, but declared that he had no idea what the fellow was talking about. I venture to say that no community of White people would endure such a state of affairs—it is unthinkable. We want magistrates who are sympathetic with us. So far as I am aware, there is not a single official of the Native Affairs Department who is being specially trained to make a particular study of problems arising out of the administration of Native affairs. Our just grievances eloquently proclaim the great need for such an officer, who should act under the direct instructions of the Government, independently of the Native Affairs Commission—a father of the Natives, such as was Bishop Colenso.

Let me say, with all earnestness, and with the welfare of all the inhabitants of South Africa at heart, that unless there is a radical change soon in these matters, herein lies a fertile breeding ground for hot-headed agitators amongst us Natives, who might prove to be a bigger menace to this country than is generally realised to-

day. Let us all labour to forestall them: that is my purpose in life, even if I have to labour single-handed, for I hold that the Native who is out against the White man is an enemy to this country. I also hold that the White man who is out against the Native is equally an enemy to this country. Each may do incalculable harm. We are all of us here to stay, and there is plenty of room for us. Let our motto be, "Moderation and co-operation"—not "Dangerous living and racial animosity." Race co-operation must be the watchword.

The time has also come when the Government should take the leaders of the Natives into their confidence, and have at least one attached to each of the principal offices of the Native Affairs Department in South Africa, as consultative representatives of the Natives in administrative questions.

No one is more conscious than I am of the shortcomings of my people, but that is outside the scope of my address—it is Archdeacon Lee's subject. May I ask, though, whether my people are altogether to blame for their shortcomings, and whether they are so utterly beyond redemption as to justify the infliction on them and the perpetuation of what we find so irksome under the White man's rule?

It is popularly held by White people that we Africans are an inferior people. Well, in reply to that, I can only say that the civilised world owes not a little to Africa, from the earliest recorded times up to the present day. We have world-famous names in music, in education, in science, in sport, and—like the rest of frail mankind—even in war. We have at least one millionaire, if I am not mistaken.

If we have not the sympathy of most of the White people of this country, and if we can count perhaps on the practical support of only a comparatively few, I do most earnestly plead for the patience of the White people towards us, and for greater consideration from the country's legislators. Let it be remembered that their ways vary in almost every respect from our ways, and, finally, that they have gotten one of the finest countries in the world from us.

It requires no mandate from the world, no mandate even from the League of Nations, to point out what are the duties of the rulers of this country towards us Natives. Their most sacred mandate is their very presence here. Let them live happily up to it, so that we may all live as happily as mortals can in this great and glorious country of ours.