

Mr. Gandhi's Speech

The following speech by Mr. Gandhi was unavoidably omitted from the report of the mass meeting, held at Johannesburg on the 23rd ulto.

I think that it is necessary for me to make a few remarks in connection with what has happened during the last few days in connection with the Asiatic community resident in the Transvaal. I have had to take the responsibility again, in spite of the Validation Bill having gone through both Houses practically unanimously, of advising my countrymen still to continue to burn their registration certificates, and to show to the Government that they are as determined as ever to suffer until full redress is given with reference to the demands made by the British Indian community. Mr. Chairman has explained to you that we have made no new demand. We have never shifted the ground, but we have been compelled, inch by inch, to regain the whole of the lost ground by undergoing sufferings heaped one upon another. It required the incarceration of over 200 Indians before we could gain the admission from General Smuts that his law was bad, that it was unworkable, and that it would be removed from the Statute Book. It again required the incarceration of nearly 100 Indians before we could gain what we have through the Validation Bill, and I have no hesitation in making this admission, that the Validation Bill, is a vast improvement on the old Asiatic Act, much of the irritating clauses have been removed, the great religious objection has been removed, our oath has been preserved, and, for this, all honour to the Government, all honour to the Progressive Party, and I am now in a position to tell my countrymen, that if they do not choose to fight for a principle but if they have wished to demonstrate to the world that they were fighting only that they might be able to keep their solemn obligation but not that they might be able to keep their own status in the country, I can freely advise them to accept the Validation Act, but if it is their desire, as I hope it ever was their desire, that we have undertaken this battle not merely for our personal benefits, but in order to fight for a principle or a bundle of principles, then I have no hesitation in asking my countrymen to undergo further suffering, but, whether they do so or not in a body, whether the majority of the Asiatics choose to accept the benefits that the Government have so liberally given, as they put it, it is open to them to do so; but so long as I remain in this country, it is my desire to oppose the measures of the Government until we get the redress to which we are entitled, until the promise that I still declare General Smuts made in connection with the repeal of the Act is fulfilled, and until the status of highly educated

Asiatics is placed on a firm footing. These are no new demands. The Colonists or the Government, by giving us a little, inch by inch, make the Colonists believe that they are conceding what they need not have conceded, but I deny that position absolutely. I take the position that the Chairman has taken, and it is only when these two things have been fulfilled that we shall have got what was our own or what should have been our own. I draw your attention to this fact, that General Smuts himself has told us now and told the world that the Natives of South Africa, the Zulus and the Bantus, get treated the same as the Europeans, if they possess the same educational qualifications as the European, but the poor Indian and the poor Chinaman cannot do that. If the Native of South Africa may not have the colour-bar, why should the British Indian, why should the Chinaman, have the colour-bar? Why should the Indian and Chinaman be subjected to the colour-bar, have to labour under this colour disability? It is quite enough that we consent to the influx from British India being stopped entirely; but the stopping of that influx does not mean, it never meant, that educated Indians were to be shut out of this country or that they could enter it only on a permit granted by the Governor in Council and which might be revoked at pleasure. That is not the position for which we have been fighting so long, and that is not a position which can ever be accepted by us if we wish to be called men. When we take up this position, it is not a position of defiance; and I am very sorry indeed that Sir Percy has thought it desirable to hint, although very distantly, that there might be in this Colony a racial conflict. A racial conflict is now going on. I do not know what the meaning of any further racial conflict may be, but I do know this, that if it covers any threat of physical violence, I standing here before this multitude of my countrymen shall ask you to suffer even that physical injury. I see before me to-day my fellow-countrymen, the Tamil gentlemen. Their sore backs I have seen. They have never been used to carry sandbags, but they were called upon to carry sandbags in the gaol—these were the Gaol Regulations, but they have suffered, all the same, physical injury under the Gaol Regulations. It has not pleased General Smuts in fighting this battle with a weak people, with a people who have no voice, it has not pleased General Smuts to order the Gaol Authorities to give no hard labour to these prisoners or to give them hard labour which they could bear, but, no, we have to drink the cup of difficulty up to the brim, and I ask my countrymen to drink that cup if they wish to fight for a principle. I do declare that our fight, my fight has always been for a principle, and it shall be for a principle. General

Smuts has been saying that we claim partnership. We do claim partnership. I claim it now, but I claim it as a younger brother. Their Christianity teaches them that every human being is a brother. The British Constitution teaches us, it taught me when yet a child, that every British subject was to be treated on a footing of equality in the eye of the law, and I do demand that equality in the eye of the law in the Transvaal also. So long as the Transvaal remains under the British flag, and so long as I may be allowed to remain in this Colony, so long must I continue that agitation until British Indians have equality in the eye of the law; it is purely and simply a question of time, but that equality must be given. It may not be given, then we may be driven out of the country and I should be quite content. If that is the position that the British Government have taken up, if that is the position that the Transvaal Government also have taken up, I am quite willing to take up the position that Parliament has taken up, namely, that the white Colonists, that Parliament, should occupy the fiduciary position, because we are vassals, because we have no representation in Parliament. I accept that position. What is the duty of a trustee, if not to make his ward fit for everything that the trustee has been doing for the ward? Are the Government fitting us, their wards, for full citizenship? Do they hold out any such hope at all? And if they do why is there so much resentment, why should there be sustained cheering in the House of Parliament when General Smuts derides the idea of partnership? Yes, partnership undoubtedly. British Indians will not remain in this country or in any country under the British flag as slaves. They will demand to remain in this country, as also in any part of the British Dominions, as men, and so long as we do not claim this, I think that we do not deserve British citizenship, and, seeing that it is my intense prayer to the Almighty that my countrymen live as full British citizens, so long must we continue to work that we may have given to us these rights. (Applause.)

Durban Higher Grade Old Boys' Association

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