

THE CRIME OF ALEXANDRA TOWNSHIP.

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By

DR. A. B. XUMA,

Inde...

PRESIDENT-GENERAL,

AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS.

The problem of the 'removal' of Alexandra Township, at the instance of the Johannesburg North Eastern Protection Association, supported by the Johannesburg Municipality, is now under consideration with the Union and Provincial Governments. The conditions at the township reflect a union-wide general situation, thus making the issue a national one with a local bias.

The reasons for abolition were given during a recent conference which I attended in the Conference Room, Union Buildings, Pretoria, on October 23rd 1942. These were some of the statements made about Alexandra township by some of the advocates for its removal that "despite the Commissions which have considered the question of the control of the township, and despite chops and changes the position was growing worse" "The present population is estimated at between 50,000 and 60,000 a mild estimate as there are some 30,000 unemployed and unemployable natives in the township." These statements show a great flight of imagination and are not borne out by fact; as the following facts will show. The township's population is less than 45,000. Besides since the Feetham's Commission in 1937, the township has made appreciable progress in many ways. They employ a Medical Officer and Sanitary Inspectors with special qualification in Public Health and Sanitation. They have purchased a new depositing sit and a cemetery which are properly run to the satisfaction of the Union Public Health Department. The Committee has, since 1937, bought a road-grader, improved and continues to improve the roads, continues to build bridges across the natural dongas and streams that pass through the township. It has now more Scotch-carts engaged in refuse-removal and reclamation of dongas. The Alexandra Health Centre and University Clinic is doing curative work and health visiting service that is second to none in efficiency and staff, compared with clinics run by any municipal location in Johannesburg or elsewhere. Most important of all the Health Committee has installed a pipe-water system and two-thirds of the township has been reticulated with stand pipes and water is being lain on into houses as meters and other equipment is being secured under the difficult war conditions. And let it be noted that this essential amenity has been added to the township's improvements since the survey and valuation of the township by the Johannesburg City Council officials.

It must be pointed out that to put the population at 60,000 is to overstate the case but to say "there are some 30,000 unemployed and unemployable" is to make figures say things contrary to fact. Are women and children classed as unemployed and unemployable? However, this shows how this case of abolition is being exaggerated in order to raise the hair of the unsuspecting South African white public.

Further it was stated that "The township is a menace to Europeans living in the surrounding areas from a public health point of view." "The menace cannot be removed by effecting improvements." "In any case the inhabitants cannot finance the improvements which would have to be effected." ... "Europeans would have to pay for installation of light and water into the houses". "86% of the houses are slums and in some cases 60 to 80 souls live on one piece of ground. Thousands of criminals live there. There are no decent streets."

Before we make our brief comments on these points it is well to ask certain relevant questions.

Why do these slum conditions obtain in 'native' areas? Is it not
2. because/.....

because government departments including the Provincial departments and municipalities and other employers of native labour have so far refused to pay the native worker who lives at Alexandra township, Sophiatown, Newclare, and elsewhere a living wage? Did not the Johannesburg Municipality, for instance try hard to evade its full obligation under the Wage Board Award for the Distributive Trade and Municipal workers and yet these Wage Board Awards were even far below the primitive standards of living, averaging about £8 a month, worked out for an average 'native family' by various independent investigators? Are not the Government departments shielded and exempted from the Wage Board Awards? All this goes to show that the authorities concerned about the future of Alexandra are thus directly or indirectly responsible for the unfavourable conditions that obtain there. Overcrowding, slums, high mortality and morbidity rates and even criminal tendencies are largely direct effects of poverty and low socio-economic status. Removing slum material even to a haven of a township "under municipal control with good roads, water, light and sewage", as was suggested, would avail nothing if the economic status of the people is not raised. If these people cannot maintain the improvements effected at Alexandra township, as it has been stated, one finds it difficult to see how the same people are expected to maintain the improvements when they are moved to the new municipal township 20 miles out of Johannesburg. Overcrowding, bad housing, high deaths, and crime, are the effect and not the cause. The solution, therefore, is not to remove these poverty-stricken people but to remove the causes of their bad environment, poverty and ignorance which breed the other evils which have been given as justification for the township's removal. Europeans would develop a similar environment under like conditions of employment and wage-discriminations such as are the lot of the Non-Europeans. If these people were educated and paid adequate wages they would buy, build or hire decent accommodation, develop better health standards and cultivate high moral attitudes.

Admitting that some of the people seem inclined to use every artifice to achieve their objective, can anyone reasonable say that there is more overcrowding in Alexandra than in Vrededorp below 17th Street? Considering even coverage of ground with buildings, Alexandra township becomes a health resort. Have the people who make the statements, such as were quoted above, ever seen the structural conditions of the Municipal buildings at lower Fordsburg and Vrededorp? What do they think of overcrowding there? What is their opinion of the Municipal tanks at Pimville which were put there as an emergency make-shift during the bubonic plague in 1903 and are still there occupied by human beings ever since? Where are the vaunted public health standards of Johannesburg? Pimville location is, three-quarters, surrounded by sewage farms. Every Johannesburg location or township has had impassable roads and yet some of these places are as old a Alexandra and even older. There is overcrowding in Johannesburg areas, in locations as well as in townships including Orlando. The municipally built houses are shells of four walls, one door to the whole house, no flooring, no ceiling, walls not plastered. These municipal houses are not electrically wired and water is not laid on in them. There are stand pipes at Western Native township and not at other townships. Water borne sewage has just been laid on at Western Native Township. After her golden jubilee Johannesburg is beginning to work on roads and instal water-borne sewage and water reticulation in her townships and locations. She is yet still far from clearing her clums and putting her house in order. And yet this ultra-rich municipality is solicitous about conditions at Alexandra township. To improve them? No, that would not be like Johannesburg. If she did, it would be to further neglect the clearance of her own slums. It is the case of Johannesburg seeing the mote in Alexandra's eye instead of the beam in its own eye. It would be well for Johannesburg to remember that "charity begins at home." She does not want to do anything exemplary for Alexandra by improving the township. She only wants to borrow a million pounds because she is better able to do so than Alexandra

to destroy the township with the help of the Union and Provincial governments. This means three million pounds is to be spent on the scheme if we include the one-third share for each of the two government departments. Some taxpayers, as a result, will be paying thrice for this wild scheme as rate-payers, Provincial and Union Income taxpayers respectively. The writer being one of them.

Improvements would be cheaper and could be effected with abiding benefits to all concerned. The proposed scheme of abolition would certainly not benefit the standholders of Alexandra. It would, perhaps, benefit certain political party politicians, career-seekers and some real-estate agents and building societies. The Johannesburg Councillors have nothing to lose. Their task is merely to borrow the million odd pounds and leave it to the ratepayers to foot the bill.

The crime of Alexandra is not the alleged conditions, for such conditions are universal in South Africa among natives including Johannesburg areas. The real crime is that to some Europeans, Alexandra is a "Black island in a white sea" and that the township has a form of self-government in which the Non-Europeans are directly represented. That they must be brought under white control in keeping with tradition and policy seems to be the ardent prayer and hope of some.

There is no doubt that all thoughtful and fairminded people, white and black, hope to see a reasoned, constructive, and equitable solution of the Alexandra dispute at its present site.

In the past, for good reasons and sound judgement the Government and the Province, through impartial Commissions of eminent experienced Administrators had rejected abolition as a solution because no valid case, except racial and colour prejudice, had been made. To-day, with the Non-Europeans dying to protect the little they have and what they hope to gain in reward for the supreme sacrifices, we can imagine no responsible Government yielding to this unjustified demand for the removal of Alexandra township and thus causing the Non-Europeans to lose faith and confidence in the Government.

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The reasons for abolition were given during a recent conference which I attended in the Conference Room, Union Buildings, Pretoria, on October 23rd 1942. These were some of the statements made about Alexandra township by some of the advocates for its removal that "despite the Commissions which have considered the question of the control of the township, and despite chops and changes the position was growing worse"....."The present population is estimated at between 50,000 and 60,000 a mild estimate as there are some 30,000 unemployed and unemployable natives in the township." These statements show a great flight of imagination and are not borne out by facts as the following facts will show. The township's population is less than 45,000. ^{Since} ~~Since~~ the Feetham's Commission in 1937, the township has made appreciable progress in many ways. They employ a Medical Officer and Sanitary Inspectors with special qualification in Public Health and Sanitation. They have purchased a new depositing site and a cemetery which are properly run to the satisfaction of the Union Public Health Department. The Committee has, since 1937, bought a road-grader, improved and continues to improve the roads, continues to build bridges across the natural dongas and streams that pass through the township. It has now more Scotch-carts engaged in refuse-removal and reclamation of dongas. The Alexandra Health Centre and University Clinic is doing curative work and health visiting service that is second to none in efficiency and staff, compared with clinics run by any municipal location in Johannesburg or elsewhere. Most important of all the Health Committee has installed a pipe-water system and two-thirds of the township has been reticulated with stand pipes and water is being laid on into houses as meters and other equipment is being secured under the difficult war conditions. And let it be noted that this essential amenity has been added to the township's improvements since the survey and valuation of the township by the Johannesburg City Council officials.

It must be pointed out that to put the population at 60,000 is to overstate the case but to say "there are some 30,000 unemployed and unemployable" is to make figures ^{say} things contrary to fact. Are women and children classed as unemployed and unemployable? However, this shows how this case of abolition is being exaggerated in order to raise the hair of the unsuspecting South African white public.

Further it was stated that "The township is a menace to Europeans living in the surrounding areas from a public health point of view."... "The menace cannot be removed by effecting improvements."...."In any case the inhabitants cannot finance the improvements which would have to be effected.""Europeans would have to pay for installation of light and water into the houses"...."86% of the houses are slums and in some cases 60 to 80 live on one piece of ground.""There are no decent streets." "Thousands of criminals live there."

Before we make our brief comments on these points it is well to ask certain relevant questions.

Why do these slum conditions obtain in 'native' areas? Is it not because government departments including the Provincial departments and municipalities and other employers of native labour have so far refused to pay the native worker who lives at Alexandra township, Sophiatown, Newclare, and elsewhere a living wage? ^{And not} ~~has tried~~ hard to evade its full obligation under the Wage Board Award for the Distributive Trade and Municipal workers and yet these Wage Board Awards ^{were} ~~are~~ even far below the primitive ^{standards of living} ~~cost of living standards~~, averaging about £8 a month worked out for an average 'native' family by various independent ^{workers.} ~~workers.~~ The Government departments ^{are} ~~are~~ exempted from the Wage Board Awards?

Send off in duddy

All this goes to show that the authorities concerned about the future of Alexandra are thus directly or indirectly responsible for the unfavourable conditions that obtain there. Overcrowding, slums, high mortality and morbidity rates and even criminal tendencies are largely direct effects of poverty and low socio-economic status. Removing slum material even to a haven of a township "under municipal control with good roads, water, light and sewage", as was suggested, would avail nothing if the economic status of the people is not raised. If these people cannot maintain the improvements effected at Alexandra township, at it has been stated, one finds it difficult to see how the same people are expected to maintain the improvements when they are moved to the new municipal township 20 miles out of Johannesburg. Overcrowding, bad housing, high deaths, and crime, are the effect and not the cause. The solution, therefore, is not to remove these poverty-stricken people but to remove ^{the cause of their bad environment} ~~the cause of their bad environment~~ poverty and ignorance which breed the other evils which are ^{used as} ~~used as~~ reason for the township's removal.*

Admitting that some of the people seem inclined to use every artifice to achieve their objective, can anyone ^{reasonable} say that there is more overcrowding in Alexandra than in Vrededorp below 17th Street. Considering even coverage of ground with buildings, Alexandra township becomes a health resort. Have these people who make the statements ^{as} ~~as~~ such as ^{were} ~~as~~ I have quoted above, ever seen the structural conditions of the Municipal buildings at lower Fordsburg and Vrededorp? What do they think of overcrowding there? What is their opinion ^{make shift} of the Municipal tanks at Pimville which were put there as an emergency during the bubonic plague in 1903 and are still there occupied by human being ever since? Where are the vaunted public health standards ^{of Johannesburg?} ~~of Johannesburg?~~ Pimville Location itself is, three-quarters, surrounded by ^{sewer} ~~sewer~~ ^{roads} ~~roads~~. Every Johannesburg location or township has bad impassable ^{roads} ~~roads~~ and yet some of these places are as old as Alexandra and even older. There is over-crowding in Johannesburg areas, in locations as well as in townships ^{inclusive of land} ~~inclusive of land~~. The municipally built houses are shells of four walls, ^{one} ~~one~~ door to the whole house, no flooring, no ceiling, walls not plastered. ^{These municipal houses} ~~These municipal houses~~ ^{are not electrically wired} ~~are not electrically wired~~ and ^{no} ~~no~~ water is laid on in them. ^{are not} ~~are not~~ municipal houses. There are stand pipes at Western Native township and not at other townships. Water borne sewage has just been laid on at Western Native Township. ^{After her garden is filled Johannesburg is beginning to be run} ~~After her garden is filled Johannesburg is beginning to be run~~ ^{worked. How long has it taken Johannesburg to begin these improvements?} ~~worked. How long has it taken Johannesburg to begin these improvements?~~ She is ^{not} ~~not still far from clearing her slums and putting her house in order. And yet this ultra-rich municipality is solicitous about conditions at Alexandra townshi. To improve them? No, that would not be like Johannesburg. If she did, it would be to further neglect the clearance of her own slums. It is the case of Johannesburg seeing the mote in Alexandra's eye instead of the beam in its own eye. ^{It would be well for} ~~It would be well for~~ ^{to remember} ~~to remember~~ that "charity begins at home!"~~

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Improvements would be cheaper and ^{could} ~~could~~ be effected with ^{benefits} ~~benefits~~ to all concerned. The proposed scheme of abolition would not benefit the standholders of Alexandra. It ^{would} ~~would perhaps, benefit certain political party politicians, career-seekers, ^{some} ~~some~~ real-estate agents and building societies ^{will} ~~will~~ benefit. The Johannesburg Councillors have nothing to lose ^{leave it to} ~~leave it to~~ their task is merely to borrow the million odd pounds and the ratepayers ^{to} ~~to~~ foot the bill.~~

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The conditions at Alexandra Township are socio-economic problems conditioned by poverty and aggravated by a policy of racial bias and discrimination against the Non-Europeans particularly the African. The life and conditions at Alexandra are not an isolated incidence but reflect the conditions of the Africans throughout the Union not excluding municipal locations.

with the... at the... she reasons were given by some of the... for abolition
The problem of removal of Alexandra Township is under consideration at the instance of the F. I. C. Association supported by some of the members of the Union. The removal of Alexandra reflects a general situation Union-wide. The reasons for abolition during a recent conference which I attended in the Conference Room, Union Buildings, Pretoria, on October 23rd 1943.

There were some of the statements made about Alexandra township by some of the advocates for its removal despite the commissions which have considered the question of the control of the township, and "despite chops and changes the position was growing worse"....."the present population is estimated at between 50,000 and 60,000 a mild estimate as there are some 30,000 unemployed and unemployable natives in the township." These statements show a great flight of imagination and are not borne out by fact. *as the following facts will show*
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Why do these slum conditions obtain in 'native' areas?

Is it not because government departments including the Provincial departments and municipalities have so far refused to pay the native worker who lives at Alexandra township, Sophiatown, Newclare and elsewhere a living wage? The Johannesburg Municipality *and other employers of native labour* has tried hard to discharge its full obligation under the Wage Board Award for the distributive trade and Municipal workers and yet these Wage Board Awards are even *below* the primitive cost of living standards averaging about £8 a month for an average 'native family' *by various independent and disinterested workers*. The Government departments, the Railways, Agriculture, etc., are exempted from the Wage Board Awards. All this goes to show that the authorities *responsible* concerned about the future of Alexandra are thus directly or indirectly *for the unfavourable conditions that obtain there.* Overcrowding, slums, *high mortality and morbidity rates* and even criminal tendencies are largely direct effects of poverty *and low socio-economic standards*. Removing slum material even to a haven of a township "under municipal control with good roads, water, light and sewage, as was suggested, would avail nothing if the economic status of the people is not raised. If the people cannot maintain the improvements *affected* at Alexandra township,

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Collection Number: AD843

XUMA, A.B., Papers

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- **Historical Papers Research Archive**

Location:- **Johannesburg**

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