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TEXT OF ADDRESS TO THE JOHANNESBURG ROTARY CLUB  
GIVEN BY COUNCILLOR P. R. B. LEWIS, ON TUESDAY THE 28TH  
APRIL, 1959.

Mr. President I would like to thank you for this opportunity of addressing your Club on a very ticklish problem which is very much in the news today, namely, the future of the beer-halls. The title of my address is "IS THE CLOSING OF THE BEERHALLS THE ANSWER".

In Johannesburg there are five beerhalls within the city limits. The largest of these is the Central Beerhall situated in Von Weilligh Street, the Mai Mai Beerhall is in Berea Road near the Jeppe Dip. There are two further beerhalls adjacent to Hostels, one at Wolhuter and the other at Denver. The fifth beerhall is adjacent to Western Native Township.

At the outset I would like to mention that it has been the custom amongst the African people for many generations for their menfolk to drink what is called Kaffir Beer, which is regarded by them as much as a food as a drink. The beerhalls also serve as a meeting place where friends can gather unmolested.

The beerhalls are open on weekdays from 10.30 a.m., to 2.30 p.m., and in the afternoons three of the beerhalls are open from 4 p.m., to 6.30 p.m., and the other two from 3 p.m., to 6:30 p.m. On Saturdays they are open from 10.45 a.m., to 3.30 p.m., and on Sundays from 12 noon to 4 p.m.

The daily average attendance at the three main beerhalls in the city, that is Central, Mai Mai and Wolhuter, is 28,000 during the first session and 37,000 in the afternoon session. On Saturday the daily average is 63,000 and on a Sunday 45,000. It is estimated that the maximum number at the Central Beerhall at any one time is 5,000. The average aggregate consumption at these three beerhalls is 21,000 gallons per day. Over the year the average consumption is  $\frac{1}{2}$  gallon per person through the turnstiles, a person can pass through the turnstile more than once.

The price at which beer is sold is 2/- per gallon, the maximum amount that a person can buy at any one time is  $\frac{1}{2}$  gallon.

The consumption of Kaffir Beer has increased over the last fifteen years. In 1942 consumption was approximately 1 million gallons, four years later this had doubled to over 2 millions. It increased to over 4 millions four years later and four years after that it was 8 millions. The last year 1957-1958 was over 10 millions. This increase can partly be attributed to the increase in population during that period.

In terms of the Urban Areas Act, Municipalities are granted a monopoly in the sale of Kaffir Beer, and the use to which profits can be put are strictly controlled. The profits now amount to over half a million pounds per year. Two-thirds of the profits are used to meet the loss on sub-economic housing schemes and the provision of medical services, and one-third has been used for recreation and social welfare services.

It is common cause that some of the beerhalls are incorrectly sited, and that the number of persons patronising them has become far too large. The Central Beerhall is approximately a quarter of a mile from Faraday Street Station. This station is used by approximately 15,000 African passengers during the peak hours of the morning and the afternoon, so that the large congregation of Africans in that area is not only because of the presence of the beerhall.

Before a Council can establish a beerhall it has to obtain approval from the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development of the site on which the proposed beerhall is to be erected. Approximately two years ago the Johannesburg Council decided that the Central Beerhall in Von Weilligh Street should be closed, but that in order to cater for the persons patronising that beerhall two or three smaller beerhalls should be erected in suitably selected sites in industrial areas, where the present problem of traffic congestion would not occur. The Government has not approved of this suggestion, and instead has requested the Council to close the Central, Mai Mai and Wolhuter Beerhalls on the 16th June, and that the Denver and Western Native Township Beerhalls be closed on Sundays thereafter. At the same time the Government approved the Council's request to be given permission to erect beer gardens in the Townships, to cater for those who wish to obtain the kaffir beer in their own residential areas. The erection of these beer gardens is proceeding apace, and it is hoped by the end of June to complete the erection of the



first seven beer gardens. More will be built in the new financial year. It is intended that these should cater for the people living in the immediate area, and that they should be kept reasonably small. Beerhalls, as distinct from beer gardens, have been or are being erected adjacent to the Hostels. There is one at Dube, one at Nancefield, and a further beerhall is being erected at Jabulani, where the other hostel is now in course of construction.

The arguments put forward in support of the case for the closing of the beerhalls in the centre of the city are that these facilities should only be available in the Africans' own residential areas, that the beerhalls create traffic problems because of the congestion around them, that they tend to become areas in which n'er-do-wells and loafers congregate, that Europeans are molested in these areas, that employees disappear from work and drink during working hours, that over the week-ends the immediate surroundings become like locations, that the beerhalls attract large number of Africans who have no legitimate reason to be there, and that the Police have to maintain a force in the neighbourhood of the beerhalls in case of incidents, and that public opinion demands it.

The arguments against the closing of the beerhalls.

1. If beerhalls are too large is there any reason why they should not be made smaller?
2. If they are unsuitably sited, why should they not be moved to suitable sites?
3. That the Africans should be encouraged to drink kaffir beer rather than the vile concoctions sold in shebeens.
4. That a further deterioration in the attitude of the African to the European will result if the African is deprived of this facility which he has enjoyed for a considerable time.
5. That the beerhalls serve as a meeting place where friends can gather unmolested.
6. That a further deterioration will take place in the relationship between the Police and the African population if, as a result of the closing of the beerhalls, the Police are called upon to intensify their unpleasant and hopeless task of endeavouring to enforce the Liquor Laws, which are regarded as bad laws by the African people.
7. That if the beerhalls were closed there would be a tremendous increase in the illicit sale of European liquor and the sale of liquor in shebeens.
8. While the beerhalls have been blamed for the incidents it is regrettably true today that in many parts of the city where there are no beerhalls incidents of a similar nature could happen, as today the African often takes the part of his compatriot irrespective of the merits of the case.

9. That if the beerhalls are removed no provision will be made within the city limits for those Africans who do not live in the African residential areas.
10. The considered opinion of numerous employers and industrialists is that a sudden closing of the beerhalls would create a greater problem than that which it is intended to solve.

The number of African males working in the city is 221,000. If the beerhalls are to be closed can it be expected that the present patrons will suddenly change their habits, go without what they regarded as their midday meal, reserve their thirsts for when they return to the Townships in the evening, and if they should live in the city are they suddenly going to drink ginger pop? I think the answer is to be found in some famous words of George Bernard Shaw -- "not bloody likely". When it is considered that the return fare from Johannesburg to Orlando at the weekend is 1/10d., and that the travelling time would be a minimum of 1½ hours, I think it more than likely that it will be the shebeens that will get the patronage.

It is my fear, and that of members of the Council, that the sudden closing of the central beerhalls will cause terrific resentment in the minds of the African people, and that it will result in an increase in the patronage of shebeens and the illicit sale of European liquor. A large number of people were resolutely opposed to the establishment of beerhalls, others felt that beerhalls were the lesser of two evils. People felt that the drinking of beer was such a traditional habit amongst the African people that it would be far better for them to obtain a beer which was manufactured under control, the ingredients of which were known, the alcoholic content of which was controlled at 3% by weight.

I would like to quote from a statement made by Brig. H. J. du Plooy, Assistant Commissioner of Police, C.I.D., in a paper he submitted during the 8th Annual Meeting of SABRA. This statement is a translation. "The contaminated concoctions and mixtures the Native now obtains in shebeens or brews himself affects him much more and in his maddened abnormal condition he commits serious crimes. If a Native now obtains a bottle of liquor he tries to store it as fast as possible in his stomach because if a Policeman catches him with the liquor still in his possession he is charged with the illegal possession of the liquor which means a fine and the loss of his liquor. Because he gulps it down so fast he naturally is affected faster



and in an abnormal manner with the resultant abnormal reactions.. If he is allowed to consume it unmolested it will naturally not be the position."

It is my contention that the unfortunate incidents that have occurred in the vicinity of the beerhalls will be as nothing to that which will follow if the beerhalls are closed and the shebeen traffic gets under way. The Police have at various times advocated the supply to Africans of European liquor in view of the fact that the illicit traffic cannot be controlled. I would like to stress that in my opinion we will never be able to have happy race relations in this country until the relationship between the Police and the African population is on a satisfactory footing. I do not think that we can expect the relationship between the Police and the Africans to be put right while the Police are called upon to administer the present liquor laws. In this connection I would like to quote from an article by Col. R. J. van den Bergh, Divisional Criminal Investigation Officer for the Transvaal. This article appeared in 'Dagbreek' of the 1st June, 1958. "Because the Native is committing an offence if he is found in possession of liquor, the liquor he obtains is gulped down in great haste with the result that he is affected much sooner than the case would have been if he took it slowly.

Have you ever thought of the adverse effect it must inevitably have on the relationship between Non-Europeans and the Police? If ever there was a period in the history of our country that the relationship between the Police and specially the Native should have been of the very best, then it is now, but because it is the unpleasant task of the Police to apply an unpopular law, the Natives today regard the Police as their natural enemies." And again - "If we had succeeded reasonably well in our efforts to keep liquor away from the Non-Europeans I would have advocated keeping it up because no price is too high to pay for the obviating of the bitter fruit of over indulgence in liquor; but to my mind there is no sense in trying to prevent one evil and in doing so, to create another and bigger one." Brig. du Plooy in his paper to the SABRA Conference already referred to, also states "The continual activities of the Police and the many raids conducted continually by them, day and night, Sundays and holidays, increase the feelings of hostility against the Police. This type of action cost the lives of Policemen at various times. The Native when drunk under the influence of the contaminated

concoctions of liquor, is as fierce as one possessed which leads to attacks on, and murders of the Police. How many members of the Force have not lost their lives? Pure healthy liquor will not change him into such a brute."

To me it is amazing that there has not been more trouble in the neighbourhood of the beerhalls. In the city there are 213 licensed premises for the supply of on-consumption liquor to Europeans. There are only five for the Africans. Yet there are as many adult male natives in the city during the day as adult European males. To me this is not a racial or colour problem as I am of the opinion that if the European bars were made to cater for 5,000 customers at one time incidents and quarrels would regularly occur. I also think that if at closing time that number of European drinkers found their way into the streets there would be trouble.

What then do I recommend as a solution?

Firstly it should be agreed that beerhalls should cater for a limited number of persons.

Secondly that the beerhalls should be carefully sited.

Thirdly that there should be adequate facilities in the African Townships for those who wish to obtain liquor in those areas.

Fourthly that it is time we faced up to a revision of the liquor laws in regard to the supply of European liquor to Non-Europeans. The present system is not working and is both demoralising to the Europeans who are engaged in the illicit traffic, and to the Africans who buy it, and causes bad race relations between the Police and the Non-European.

Fifthly that recognition must be made of the fact that there are over 100,000 Africans lawfully within the city limits and it is most unlikely they will travel to the Native Townships to obtain liquor.

Sixthly that the wishes of the African peoples must be considered and the Europeans must not be for ever depriving them of facilities, which the European has encouraged him to enjoy, as soon as the Europeans are inconvenienced.

It has been stated that public opinion is adamant that the beerhalls should be removed. I hope that after listening to me you will realise the complexity of the situation, and that the closing of the beerhalls would probably create worse problems than those it is proposed to solve.

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