

ADDRESS
BY DR. C.R. WALKER
MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY FOR
THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW PROVIDENCE
ON BEHALF OF THE LABOURING MASSES
TO
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE DUKE OF WINDSOR
AND OFFICIAL GUESTS
AT
GOVERNMENT HOUSE
NASSAU, BAHAMAS
JUNE, 1942
(IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE BURMA ROAD RIOT)

Your Royal Highness, Gentlemen:

The underlying causes for this social unrest are manifold. We are in the majority but we have minority problems. We are poorly housed, poorly fed and poorly educated. Truth to tell, we are the wretched of the earth.

Many years ago, England and American missionaries walked among us intent on souls to save and bodies to enslave, until one day one of my ancestral brothers was forced to remark, 'Fadder, when firs' you come to Bahamas, you had da Bible and we had da land. Today, Fadder, we gat da Bible and you gat da land!

Land is an important factor in the production of wealth. When strangers grab the land of the natives they are tampering not only with their economic existence but with their cultural and political lives as well. That is why 'land snatching' as it is practised today is the most concrete proof of the thorough enslavement of a people to an alien will.

For over two hundred years, a locally based Governor vested with autocratic powers directed the affairs of The Bahamas on behalf of the British Crown. He did this through a wholly appointed Executive Council, a wholly appointed Legislative Council, and a House of Assembly, the members of which were elected once every seven years on a male franchise hemmed in by property qualifications, company and plural voting.

All males were required to vote openly, and face victimization if their choice of candidates displeased their employers. More than half of the adult population - the women - could not vote at all.

This iniquitous electoral system continues to secure the political and economic supremacy of the white landed gentry. They own and manage both land and labour through numerous attorneys, accountants, foremen and skilled artisans.

Next on the social pyramid were the merchants. The high prices of the middle-class group played havoc with the poor on whose shoulders fell the full burden of an administrative system in which the rich pay no income taxes whatsoever.

Warrants for the arrest of ringleaders - would-be social reformers - are frequently issued for the most trivial of offences. In this way the law is made a weapon to club the natives into submission. Since there is no Bahamian Court of Appeal from a conviction on an indictable offence, the English judges with the help of their 'special' white juries often mete out draconian sentences against the black people.

Recently, my brother told me that when Columbus made his historic voyage to the New World the English simultaneously dispatched two ships from London. The name of the first ship was Law, and of the second, Justice.

The ship, Law, arrived safely into port, but, Gentlemen, Justice was lost somewhere in the mid-Atlantic.

But something equally as precious as Justice was also lost, and this was the real tragedy. Untold millions, uprooted from their native cultures in Africa, were scattered as slaves in North, Central, and South America, in the Caribbean, and elsewhere. Diaspora, which means a scattering or

dispersal of a people, originally referred to the Jewish historical experience; but it has never been more descriptive than when applied to the children of Africa.

We Bahamians are the sons and grandsons, the daughters and grand daughters, of those who arrived. We seek today to reclaim that which was snatched from us over 300 years ago - our dignity and self-respect as human beings.

During the interval between then and now, we have become the most brainwashed people of the world. We were made to believe that we were not fit to govern ourselves. You see, teachers and missionaries did not tell us that there was a period in ancient history - at a time when Rome was barbarous, and Greece slept - when Africa flourished with its own governments, economic systems, military forces, religious and social organizations. Indeed, in the very beginning of mankind, the African nation of Egypt occupied a central role in world history.

We were taught that our ancestors contributed nothing to the advancement of civilization. Yet it was common knowledge that Africans were the first to practice agriculture – the first of the cultures - along the banks of the Niger River. Africa was the place where mankind first fashioned tools – a significant step in the evolution of civilization. Neither did they tell my people, Gentlemen, that the earliest known pottery was created in Africa more than thirty thousand years ago, during the Paleolithic period of the Stone Age.

It is a tragic fact that Bahamians have suffered many a serious social and psychological trauma from the decades of contempt and calumny which characterized traditional Western historical thought on the subject of Africa. Most of our fathers and mothers were compelled to live out their lives in submission to the dominant cultural values and attitudes of the hostile whites. They were forced to tolerate the racist ideologies of their white countrymen in order to survive. It is a psychological truism that an oppressed and rejected people soon come to see themselves through the eyes of their oppressors. As a result, the black man soon learned how to hate himself and others of his own race.

In the past, the schoolroom was not primarily an educational institution but a political one which sought only to maintain the power base of the white colonialist society.

The Emancipation Act of the United Kingdom Parliament, though designed to come into force in the Colonies on August 1, 1834, did not immediately give the slave his freedom. There was a compulsory 'apprenticeship' period similar in all but name to indentured labour. Now over one hundred years after the Emancipation Act, the colonial bosses offer sons of former slaves four shillings per day!

O ye nominal Christians! Might not the son of an African slave ask you: 'Learned you this from your own God?' Is not the labourer worthy of his hire? What dignity is there in slaving for a dollar a day? Can a man maintain his self-respect when he cannot feed himself and his family? I think not.

Can a dollar a day pay his medical expenses if he falls ill on the job site? I think not.

Can the poor purchase enough food to strengthen him to perform heavy duty labour efficiently? No, Gentlemen. No!

Poor wages mean a poor community, and a poor community is the breeding ground for crime and disease. Furthermore, if these labourers are not paid a decent wage they will not have the purchasing power to buy the goods in the Bay Street stores.

Gentlemen, your own self-interest should persuade you to give my brothers a decent wage!

Will the labourers return to their job site for four shillings per day?

Why should men who worked for four shillings yesterday want eight shillings today?

Pray, let me tell you a story.

My eldest son's bitch had a litter of pups. One day a neighbor came and asked the price for one.

My son replied, "One shilling for each puppy".

The following day, the same lady returned with the shilling to complete the purchase. On approaching Roland she was rebuffed.

"No, no," he said, "the puppies are now two shillings each!"

"Yesterday, puppy one shilling; today, puppy, two shillings! How come?' she inquired.

"Well you see, Ma'am, yesterday the puppies' eyes were closed; today, their eyes are opened. Yesterday, they were blind; today, they can see".

Gentlemen, the scales have been peeled off the eyes of the labourers. They now see opportunities beyond their status quo. They have discovered new insights - new strength in unity and no one can purchase their labour now for so cheap a price as four shillings a day. The winds of change of World War II have blown in their direction and they have inhaled the air of freedom. Once they have tasted it, they can no longer live without it.

And now I wish to conclude with a personal word to His Royal Highness, the Duke of Windsor himself.

Two years ago when the radio waves brought the news of Your Royal Highness' appointment as Governor of The Bahamas, the Deaf heard, and the Dumb spoke, the Blind saw and the Crippled leaped for joy. Your reputation as an humanitarian and King had preceded you.

Surely, we said to ourselves, the Duke of Windsor will not allow us to continue to live amidst social inequities that sap our self-respect and prevent us from attaining our full status as first-class citizens.'

Fifty-four Governors have preceded Your Excellency, but not one ever brought a ray of hope to the poor and oppressed.

We believe that you are not just another Governor for one class of people, but the Governor for all colours and classes of people.

In faith believing, I ask on behalf of all my brothers and sisters:

Art thou he that cometh or look we for another?
