

THE OPENING ADDRESS : SEVENTH BIENNIAL CONGRESS FOR
BANTU MEMBERS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN NURSING ASSOCIATION :
ALAN TAYLOR RESIDENCE, UNIVERSITY OF NATAL : DURBAN :
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ZULU TERRITORIAL AUTHORITY. JUNE 29th 1970.

a few copies

When I received the invitation to address you, I felt quite uneasy, as I came to think that this meant addressing such an august body, composed of members of the fair sex. This feeling was induced by my reminding myself of the place Women have occupied in what is largely a man's world, and the extent to which they have gate-crashed into this preserve, called 'the man's world', and their apparent determination to continue to do so. What at once indicated to me in no uncertain terms this determination on the part of Women, was your organising Secretary's letter of invitation, in which she orders me, a ^{consecutive} Zulu Tribal Chief to limit my address to not more than 15 minutes!. I said to myself well-done, it is high time we men, particularly we Zulu men, got used to commands such as this one from people who have for centuries been described as the 'weaker sex'.

Women have for years been regarded as people deserving respect only for their roles as mothers and wives! When we look at the advances they have made over the years, only then can we appreciate that men could not be where they are today without women. Our women have made such progress today that their general emancipation has become, a matter of urgency. I use the word 'emancipate' grudgingly, since it was originally used in connection with the freeing of slaves ! Although women have made it clear in various ways and throughout the centuries that they deserve nothing less than the same human dignity as men have arrogated to themselves, men keep on saying as a pretext, that they do not understand women. This pretext was beautifully illustrated in a strip cartoon, which some of you may have seen, sometime ago. You are all well acquainted with the ordeals of the poor down trodden Dagwood Bumsted, who invariably invokes so much male sympathy. In the strip I refer to Dagwood's teenage son Alexander asks his father : "Dad how old do you have to be to understand women?" and Dagwood answering with his usual puzzled look says: "I don't think anyone has ever lived that long!".

However, leaving jokes aside, I wish to say very seriously that there/.....

there is no other profession in which this determination of our women to take ^{full} part in serving the needs of their society and in which they feel so 'emancipated', as in the Nursing profession. Professor Hilda Kuper formerly attached to this University has the following to say in a chapter on "Nurses" which she contributes in a book written by her husband Professor Leo Kuper entitled "An African Bourgeoisie (Race, Class and Politics in South Africa 1965); "Over the past 80 years nursing has become one of the most highly rated professions open to African women. It carries more prestige in the Community, more power in the adult world and greater personal security than teaching, which was formerly the main ambition of the educated". Here Professor Kuper expresses beautifully what I have tried to say on your vocation and for this reason I feel it is an honour to have been asked to come here to perform the Official Opening of your congress.

The state of Health of our people in the Republic of South Africa gives great cause for concern and strikes a discordant note in our otherwise very beautiful song about how we have never had it so good!. I shall because of the little time at my disposal mention only a few warnings by medical practitioners and other experts on this situation. Professor John Reid of this Medical School said according to a report in the Star on May 10, 1969, that according to a survey conducted in 1966 almost half of the children born in a typical African Reserve in South Africa died before reaching the age of five years. On the 15th of July 1969, the Star quoted a report by the Nessie Knight Hospital in the Transkei in which it was stated that 40 per cent of African children in the districts of Qumbu, Tsolo, Mount Frere, Mount Fletsher and Libode died before reaching the age of ten years, as a direct or indirect result of manultrition. According to a report in 'The Rand Daily Mail' on the 2nd September 1969, Dr. Anthony Barker also talked of widespread manultrition in Nqutu district. The Director of the Department of Medical Missions of the Anglican Church sent a letter to "The Rand Daily Mail" published on the 18th November 1969: "Our Mission Doctors in the Transkei, Zululand, the Transvaal and South West Africa, as well as Lesotho and Mozambique have all said the same things a number of times. They have inter-alia, pointed out that while the conditions referred to are largely ascribed to poverty, periodic droughts, and to some extent to the system of migrant labour, much is due to ignorance, tribal traditions and taboos and prejudices among the African peoples themselves".

Then/.....

Then, in its annual report for the year ended 31st March 1969 the South African Tuberculosis Association stated that during 1968 there were 921 cases of tuberculosis notified among Whites, 7481 among Coloured, and 990 among Asians, all being lower than in the previous year. But the figure for Africans had grown by 2,500 to a total of 61,292.

I have quoted the above also to illustrate the immense tasks that fall on the shoulders of members of your noble profession under this state of affairs. Your profession is vital to our health the more so as there is such an acute lack of medical personnel in Bantu Hospitals. As a result of this shortage of medical staff, a great responsibility inevitably falls on the shoulders of the nursing staff.

In the light of these facts, the Bantu Community has heard with a great deal of alarm, of the promulgation of the new regulations for the training of Registered Nurses, Midwives and Enrolled Auxillary Nurses. We are told that this will have the effect of lengthening the training for Auxillary Nurses from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 years and that some lectures have to be given by doctors. This is disturbing in the light of the above-mentioned shortage. We also learn that the training for Registered Nurses and for Registered Midwives will be much more theoretical and less practical with emphasis on Social Science and Psychology. In view of the damage that has been done to our mastery of English and Afrikaans, one can foresee insurmountable difficulties in the grasping of these abstract subjects. And what is more we are told that the Social Science and Psychology lectures must be given by a person with a degree in Nursing or in Social Science. It is not clear at least in the foreseeable future where our hospitals are going to get qualified people to do this, particularly in the Homelands, in this era to use the Deputy-Minister's words, 'of Homeland Development'. The most serious snag as I see it is the raising of the entrance examination from J.C. to Matriculation, except in the case of enrolled auxillary nurses who may do these courses without passing Matriculation. When I looked at the 1968 Matriculation Results I did not feel very encouraged. In the Republic 1,941 candidates sat for the matriculation examination. Of these 65 passed in first class; 587 in second class. and 30 in third class; 222 got 2nd class School-leaving certificates, 167 3rd class School leaving certificates, and 870 failed. In the Transkei 334 candidates sat for the/.....

the examination and there was one first class pass, 89 second class passes and no third class pass. Then there were 96 who got 2nd class School Leaving Certificates and one third class School leaving certificate and 147 failed. The position I am told was slightly better last year. But this serves to indicate what a mere trickle of matriculants we are getting at present. So that although we are aware that the new regulations were issued in order to bring our Nurses' training into line with that of Europe and America, for a young Country like South Africa, the effect of these regulations will be to accentuate the problem of the acute lack of the nursing personnel.

Whether there can be an immediate solution to these problems, I do not have the qualifications to know. But as all seven Black ethnic groups have been given the task of shouldering the development of their peoples and its concomittant problems we feel that this may worsen what is already a very grave situation.

I am not passing these remarks by way of denigrating anybody, but having the opportunity to address you I wish you to know how vitally concerned we are in your problems. We share your worries particularly now that we are directly involved in the health of our people under the policy of our present government.

I am aware that you have more matters to deliberate upon than just this one aspect of your profession. For this reason I wish without any further waste of time to say that it is now my pleasure and privilege to declare this Seventh Biennial Congress Officially open.

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