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INDIAN PROBLEM SURVEY BY

W. P. M. HENDERSON

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INDIAN PROBLEM

SURVEY

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PROPERTY HELD IN NATAL

MR. HENDERSON SUGGESTS LOCAL OPTION

A full survey of the South African Indian problem was given last night to the Durban Library Group by Mr. W. P. M. Henderson, ex-Town Clerk of Durban.

Mr. Henderson's lecture was an impartial summary of the events from the first steps taken to obtain indentured Indian labour for the development of coastal Natal to the present day position. He told of the exciting days in 1897 when 10,000 burghesses marched to the Point to prevent the landing of two ship loads of Indians and of the oratory of Mr. Harry Escombe, who sent the mob away pacified with the promise of immediate restriction of immigration.

"M. K. Gandhi that day returned from India to Durban," said Mr. Henderson, "and he was mobbed in West Street. Violence was offered him and he was saved by the courageous action of the wife of Superintendent Alexander, who stood by him until her husband arrived. Gandhi was escorted to the house of friends and was eventually smuggled away in the uniform of an Indian employed by the Corporation. He spent a week under the protection of the police."

Mr. Henderson produced figures showing the increase of the value of property held in Durban by Indians. In 1875 there were 698 Indians in Durban holding property valued at £3,000. To-day property held by Indians in Durban was valued at £1,575,520 and the capital owned or controlled by them was estimated at £15,000,000.

Gentlemen's Agreement

Dealing with the "gentlemen's agreement" reached at the Capetown Conference in 1927, when the Union Government promised to shelve all proposed Indian legislation for five years, Mr. Henderson said that the Government had honoured that promise. One aim of the Class Areas Bill which led to the Conference was to limit ownership by Indians to the "coastal belt"—that was 30 miles inland. During the years since 1927 it was common knowledge that Indians had acquired farms and other properties in the Natal Midlands.

At one time, said Mr. Henderson, there had been a cry for repatriation by compulsion of all Indians. That, however, was impossible. From an economic point of view it would have far-reaching results. The spending power of the 165,000 Indians in Natal was not an inconsiderable item. The loss of labour to planters would be serious and the effect of the closing of the Indian accounts with wholesalers and the banks could only result in a decreased business and consequent retrenchment of staffs.

In conclusion, Mr. Henderson urged the establishment of "boards of control which would give local control to the districts." These, he said, would consider the applications for the transfer to Asiatics of land, freehold or leasehold, and receive

