

INDIANS GIVE SUGGLING FARMERS £18,000 CREDIT FREE OF INTEREST

But Bronkhorstspuit wants to

Kick the Indians out

By RALPH NICHOLSON

SUNDAY EXPRESS REPORTER

A HANDFUL of Bronkhorstspuit's leading citizens are agitating to have the town's 90-strong Indian community moved out of town, and their demands have put the whole district in a difficulty.

For a number of farmers in the district owe two Indian traders more than £18,000 in long-standing debts, and, if these Indians are moved, these interest-free "loans" would have to be liquidated at once.

This emerged at last week's hearing of a Group Areas Committee in Bronkhorstspuit, when the ledgers of two Indian traders were produced.

Even better than the Land Bank

Mr. Harry Bloom, who appeared for the Indians, told the committee that Indian traders in the town had for years been supporting struggling farmers with long-term, interest-free credit.

In some of these debts no repayments had been made for three or four years, and no interest was being charged. "The farmers are getting loans on far better conditions than even the Land Bank could grant," he added.

He produced at the hearing the ledgers of two traders. One showed that farmers owed one shop more than £11,000; the other showed long outstanding debts totalling more than £7,000.

And there were many other smaller debts owed to other traders, he added.

If the Indians were moved in the hasty manner that some of the townspeople were urging, a liquidator would have to collect these debts. It would be an overwhelming blow to many of the district's farmers.

"The Europeans are going to regret this move," said Mr. Bloom. "The whole scheme to move the Indians is apparently based on the assumption that the two races can get on without each other. . . on the assumption that there is no economic interdependence.

"But that is far from the real

facts. European traders and business men have admitted to this committee that the Indians spend a great deal of money with them.

"One wholesale firm, European owned, admits that Indian traders give him between £150 and £200 a month.

Farmers like the arrangement

"And for years now the Indians here have been buying farmers' butter for the manufacture of ghee on a big scale. The farmers like the arrangement. They have no marketing problems and no transport problems. The movement of the Indians would affect many dairymen."

For the Town Council, Mr. J. van Reenen, Q.C., advanced a scheme for the removal of the Indians that has left lawyers puzzled.

The town's Indian community was so small, he said, that it would be preferable to move them to some completely Indian area (still to be set up, if at all) than to set aside a special area for them near town.

If this scheme was unacceptable, he said, he would advance three other schemes to place the Indians out of town.

Nat. M.P. objects

One of the objectors to a portion of the alternative schemes was Mr. J. F. Schoonbee, Nationalist M.P. for the area, who told the committee that so far as he knew there had been no friction between Bronkhorstspuit's Whites and Indians.

Mr. Bloom said of the scheme to move the Indians to some yet undefined spot: "Apparently the theory is that if the Indians are gathered together in sufficient numbers they will be able to support themselves.

"It is a drastic step. Nobody is self-supporting, economically. The races depend on each other for a living. Bronkhorstspuit is an ideal example.

"Economic interdependence is a spontaneous thing. It cannot be created artificially. The whole scheme is like using dynamite to remove a fly."