

MEMORANDUM.

SUBMITTED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE AFRICAN LAUNDRY
WORKERS' UNION

TO THE REGISTRAR AND SECRETARY OF THE WAGE BOARD,

PRETORIA :-

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The Wage Determination No. 43, which was brought into force on 15th July, 1932, has now been in operation for three years. Conditions of labour in the Laundries have undergone considerable change in that period. The general cost of living of the workers has risen about 50 per cent above what it was in 1932.

This wage determination was brought into force without any evidence having been submitted to the Wage Board by organised labour. Hence it is no surprise that the wages in this determination were lower than those laid down in the previous determination, giving a true reflection of the on-sidedness of the evidence submitted, which was definitely in favour of the Employers. This does not of course, cast any reflection on the Wage Board, which bases its decisions purely on the evidence submitted, to it by the employees and by Employers. The Laundry and Dyeing Industry has expanded rapidly during the last three years. Profits have also, accordingly increased as more modern methods of Laundering and Dyeing eliminated labour and increased the danger to the health of the Employees.

The wages laid down are not in proportion to the dangers to the health of Employees nor in relation to the severe arduousness of the work expected from them. Conditions under which Employees labour in this Industry are a disgrace to the humane Standards of Civilization. Workers in the laundering section work in a hot, moist, supersaturated atmosphere which is unbearable to the ordinary man not conditioned to this. Needless to say, the workers are affected by this after a period of years, their bodies swelling up due to the absorption of moisture. As soon as this happens they are sacked without compensation of any sort and left to starve having been unable to save from a wage insufficient to support them and their dependants.

In the Dyeing section, due mainly to the gross negligence of the Employers in not supplying the workers with rubber waders, the latter are subjected to the danger of having their whole bodies poisoned by dyes which may be absorbed through their feet into their bloodstream, this is no hypothetical danger as cases of this nature have actually occurred. Workers suffering from tuberculosis contracted in the laundering and dyeing industry are not the exception. On examination by doctors they are asked if they are employed in the mines. The conditions in the laundries are equivalent to those in the deepest mines, except that in the latter the most modern methods are employed to combat these unhealthy conditions, whereas the health of his employees is not considered by the employer in the former.

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The above may also be applied to the dry cleaning section of the industry where employees are forced to inhale the fumes emanating from petrol, benzine and trichloroethylidene as no provision is made for the ventilation of the premises in which this type of work is performed. These fumes not only attack the mucous membrane but also the lungs of the workers subject to them. The fumes also have a toxic effect on the blood thus lowering the resistance of the workers to disease.

The wages as laid down vary from £1. 5. 0. per week to £1. 2. 6 per week. In most cases the employees are forced to accept board and lodging from the employer for which 5/- per week are deducted although the determination lays down that this is optional. It is forced on them because those who do not avail themselves of this privilege soon find themselves without employment. Because most of the employees are married and must support a family, they do not avail themselves of the board and lodging for which they pay five shillings per week. Because they prefer to stay with their families they must pay bus or train fare amounting on the average to three shillings per week as Bantu workers are only allowed to stay in locations on the outskirts of the city.

Their weekly budget is as follows:-

	s.	d.
Board and lodging to their employer	5.	- per week.
Train or bus fare	3.	-
Rent for two rooms £1. 5. 0. per month		
for three rooms £1.10.0 per month		
Average	6.	6.
Food for the family	10.	-
Train fare for children to school	3.	-
School fees 6d per month each child Average		3
Clothes for the family	6.	-

£1. 12. 9.

This does not provide for doctor's fees or medicines for which they pay the same as Europeans, nor for any other extras. Wages are supplemented by the wife who is forced under the circumstances to work leaving the children to grow up as best they may.

In many of the establishments in the Industry workers are harried and nagged to speed up and are then put on short time. Thus usually every week he is two or three working days short and the wages of the employees suffer accordingly. Some employers pay their employees by the month and when they have made the employees work short time often amounting to fifteen days per month, they, by incorrect keeping of the books swindle the workers out of an extra day's pay. This is done by booking days worked instead of hours. For example, the worker works nine hours per day and the employer takes a working day as eight hours as workers are paid according to a forty-eight hour week, Saturdays being booked as half days. In one case where a worker had checked up on the employer he was given a beating and dismissed for being "cheeky". The police refused to prosecute, claiming lack of sufficient evidence as the witnesses were intimidated by the employer who insinuated to the effect that if they gave evidence they would be instantly dismissed.

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The Inspector of Labour is in most cases unable to see that the employer does not break the determination. It takes one Inspector to supervise adequately the Laundry Industry alone, whereas, in fact, the inspector allocated to the Laundry Industry attends to various other industries as well.

The employers break the determination with impunity. Their word is always taken before that of a Bantu worker and even when proved guilty, the fine is so negligible that it does not prevent him from repeating the offence.

In considering the demands which are put forward below the Wage Board must take into consideration the facts as stated above and also that in the clothing industry the wage laid down for ironers is £3. 10. 0. per week, whereas, the wage for the same class of work under much more arduous conditions in the laundries is only £1. 5. 0. per week.

It must also be borne in mind that the majority of workers in the industry are Bantu workers, and are subject to the payment of Poll Tax. In many cases the payment of this tax is impossible owing to the low wages received, short time and illness.

The following are our suggestions for the amelioration of the conditions existing in the laundering and drycleaning industry:-

WAGES AND REMUNERATION.

1. The minimum wages that shall be paid to the undermentioned classes of employees shall be as follows:-

A. Dyer &/or cleaner.....	£3. 0s. 0d.	Per Week
B. Canvasser.....	6 0. 0	Per week
C. Driver of a Motor van.....	6 0. 0.	Per week
DD Receiving Depot assistant, Examiner, checker or sorter..	5.10. 0	Per week
E. Ironer.....	5.10. 0	Per week
F. All employees not otherwise provided for in this determination	£3.10. 0.	Per week.

2. No piece work.

3. No employee shall be employed for less than four full days per week. Any employee so employed shall be considered as having been employed for four full days.

PAYMENT OF WAGES AND RATES.

1. All wages and rates shall become due and be paid in cash weekly on Saturdays and shall be in a sealed envelope on which is the Employee's name and the number of the hours worked per week and the amount in the envelope.

or
on termination of services if this takes place before the ordinary pay day of the employee.

2. No employee shall be permitted to accept food or lodging in part payment from an employer; nor shall an employer be permitted to deduct any sum for washing or for any/

any other services rendered by him to the employer.

3. No premium shall be charged or accepted for the training of an employee.

4. No fines or deductions of any description shall be made from or against an employee's wages or rates, other than the following:-

A. When an employee is absent from work a pro rata amount may be deducted for the period of such absence.

B. Upon the production of a doctor's certificate of illness or incapability and employee shall be paid his wages as though he has worked full time. He shall be paid full pay for the first three months: three-quarters for the second three months: half pay for the third three months and quarter pay thereafter until he resumes work.

C. No deductions shall be made from the wages and rates of an employee by the employer for any of the following:→

Holiday, Sick, Insurance, Provident or Pension Funds, or Board and Lodging.

5. Where short time is being worked in an establishment and employee who on any day attends at the establishment on the instructions of the employer or his representative, shall be entitled to be employed for at least four hours on such day or to receive a minimum of one-tenth of his weekly wage in lieu thereof, if an employee is not required to attend on any day he must be informed prior to such day that his services will not be required, otherwise, if he does attend he shall be deemed to be attending on the instructions of the employer.

6. Where in an establishment work is performed by employees organized in sets or teams, each employee shall be paid his wage or rates by the employer as laid down herein.

HOURS OF WORK.

1. The minimum wages prescribed in this Determination are for the usual working time in an establishment, not exceeding 40 hours in any week, and five days of eight $\frac{1}{2}$ hours each.

2. An employer shall grant to each employee a rest interval of not less than ten minutes at as early as practicable the middle of each morning work period, and such interval shall be reckoned as portion of the usual working hours, but no work shall be performed during such interval by the employee entitled to it.

3. All working time on any day shall be consecutive except for meal times.

4. An employee who is required to work -

A. On any one day or in any one week in excess of the number of working hours limited for such day or for such week by the Factories Act, 1918: or

By

B. On a Sunday: or

C. On a Public Holiday:

shall for each hour or part thereof so worked be paid not less than double his weekly wage divided by forty.

HOLIDAYS.

Each employee shall have the right to leave on each public holiday on full pay and shall be given two weeks holiday a year on full pay.

TERMINATION OF SERVICE.

A weekly employee or his employer shall give not less than one week's notice to terminate the contract of service. Such notice to run from the pay day laid down herein. This section shall not affect the employee's or the employer's right to terminate the Contract of service without notice for any good cause recognised by law as sufficient, nor shall it affect any agreement between an employer and an employee which provides for a longer period of notice than is prescribed in this section: provided, however, that an employee who is working short time in any week on the instructions of the employer shall not in such week be required to give notice to terminate his contract of service. This section shall not apply to casual employees.

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CONTRACTING IN RESTRAINT OF EMPLOYMENT.

It shall be a condition of the employment of any person that he shall be free immediately after the termination of such employment to be employed in or in connection with any branch of work in the laundering, cleaning and Dyeing Industry.

Minutes of meeting of the Committee of the African Laundry Workers Union held at 154 Marshall Street on 9th April 1935, at 7 p.m.

Present: Asane (Textile), Maboia (unemployed), Hendrik Matlaodile (New York), Stephan Matuna (New York), William Sethalogile (Model), Joe Chongwena (Leonardo's), Jan Mashele (Leonardo's), Edward Dimati (unemployed), Fredrick Levitso (Ideal), Abram Thihe (Ideal), Sikhale (Rand Steam), Isaaiah Moloto (Crystal), Piet Ditlobode (Crystal), Kahn, Gordon, Purdy, Lee (acting secretary).

Comrade Sikhale was appointed chairman.

Comrade Lee reported that the Union now owed the S.A. Trades and Labour Council £16 for arrears of affiliation fees.

Com Sikhale put this matter before the meeting.

Com Thihe said that the £16 should be paid. If wages were raised the money could soon be collected. The question of obtaining higher wages must be settled first.

Com Sikhale said that the strike was an example to us of the value of affiliation. The £16 must be raised by a levy on members and paid immediately.

Comrade Asane said that the most important question was the struggle for higher wages. The £16 should be levied by raising 6d per head from members.

Comrade Thihe said that the question of a debt must not be raised first. A fund must be raised for the fight for higher wages, and part of this paid towards the £16 owed. We must press a strong campaign to this end.

It was decided to send a letter to the S.A. Trades and Labour Council pointing out that the defeat of the strike had prevented the collection of funds, and that the dues would be paid in the near future.

Comrade Mngade moved (seconded by Com Dimati) that Com Lee be appointed delegate of the African Laundry Workers Union for the Durban Conference of the S.A. Trades and Labour Council. This was carried unanimously.

It was agreed to call a general meeting next Sunday, ^{fortnight} 28th. April, 1935.

Comrade Purdy explained that his work prevented him from resuming the position as the Secretary of the A.L.W.U. He therefore had to resign. He recommended Comrade Gordon to be elected to this position. He was ready to give his assistance whenever called upon. He spoke on the role of the Wage Board, which was aimed against the Bantu workers and urged the workers not to take part in the Wage Board which was harmful to them. The aim must be higher wages which can only come from a strong Union. It was decided to leave the matter of the secretaryship to the general meeting.

Comrade Lee raised the matter of the Wage Board. He said that children sometimes could not learn by being told that fire would burn them, and had to learn by being burnt; in the same way the workers who believed in the Wage Board in spite of our warning, will have to learn by actual experience. The workers must remember, however, that in applying for a wage determination, we, of the Workers' Party, were only carrying out the decision of the workers. We have been against the Wage Board and we still are. If the laundry workers burn their fingers, they must not forget that we warned them.

Comrade Thipe said that the important matter was to raise wages. How could this be done if not through the Wage Board? The wage determination was at least a basis for struggle. The strike had failed - there was no other way left except the Wage Board. Let the Wage Board convince us that it is harmful, then we can consider other ways. It must be called. Comrade Dimati said that it was necessary to go through the experience of the Wage Board for ourselves. The question was to decide upon what demands to present to the Wage Board. Comrade Maboza said that two contradicting points of view existed - to call the Wage Board, or alternatively if we did, we would burn our fingers. In order to raise the £16 dues and to keep the rent paid, it is necessary to call the Wage Board. If it is true that the Wage Board is a "fire", let the workers learn it for themselves.

Comrade Purdy said that when the bosses learnt that workers in the laundries could not be replaced by white workers, a new determination was made, unfavourable to native workers. Nothing could be expected from the Wage Board. It was the duty of the committee men as leaders of the Union to tell the workers this.

Comrade Sikhale said that it was late and he would now close the meeting by summing up. There were many different points of view put forward on the question of the Wage Board. He thought it was necessary for the workers to go through the experience of Wage Boards. It was also necessary for committee men patiently to explain these matters to the workers. There was no guarantee of victory in any particular way - we must learn to struggle, even though we burn our fingers in learning. By a show of hands it was decided that all committee men present were in favour of calling for a Wage Board, and that the matter must be raised at the General Meeting.

Comrade Gordon pointed out that many preparations were necessary; the Union must be drawn together, signatures obtained, complaints gathered, etc.

It was decided to discuss the application for a Wage determination again next Tuesday.

All committee men were instructed to bring membership lists, complaints, wage rates and signatures to the next meeting.

Comrade Mngade suggested having a sign outside the office.

Comrade Purdy said that Comrade Mngade's pass must be taken in the name of the new secretary of the Union.

Comrade Chairman asked the meeting if a sign should be obtained; the meeting agreed to this.

The matter of the pass was postponed to next Tuesday.

It was decided that the office must be open daily between one and two p.m.

It was decided to begin to collect half-crowns at once for the Union revival fund.

Comrade Mngade suggested that a Union doctor should be retained for members.

The meeting closed at 10 p.m.

Signed:
Chairman:

Secretary:

Collection Number: AG2722

WORKER'S PARTY OF SOUTH AFRICA, 1933-1935

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

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