

Native Income Labour wages N11.10

MEMO ON SUGGESTED WAGE INCREASE FOR MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES.

Introduction:

There have been several attempts to draw up a budget showing the minimum wage necessary to satisfy the fundamental needs of the urban African. One of the most recent is that of Miss Janisch, which has, however, been criticised in several ways, so that an amended budget has been issued. These budgets differ in the amount they consider necessary to satisfy the minimum requirements of an urban African family, but they are agreed upon the following conclusions:

(1) That the present scale of native wages is far too low to satisfy adequately the basic needs of housing, food, clothing, education, medical attention, etc.

(2) There is no surplus that can be used to meet emergency expenditure, e.g. in time of illness (so that, when the wage earner is in hospital it has been found that the family is left destitute, literally without food, and the hospital social workers, when such conditions come to their notice, have had to adopt the expedient of applying to the employers for assistance, even if no workman's compensation is due). There can be no provision for old age, so that the country and the younger portion of the Native population is burdened with a large number of penniless dependents... an added charge on the native family budget.

The Johannesburg Municipality, whose charge it is to act in the best interests of its citizens (both Black and White) cannot be satisfied with this state of affairs. It is against the principles of justice and humanity that a large proportion of the population should live below the breadline, and, in addition, it is against the interests of the country as a whole. It is stressed by all investigators that the deficit of expenditure over income can only be met by : a) illegal activities - beer brewing, prostitution and other crimes; b) work by women and children. This means that the young children are left alone without guardianship to run wild in the streets and that older children spend only a few years at school before they are either kept home to take over some of the mother's responsibilities or sent out to work...as newspaper boys, caddies, car attendants or petty criminals; c) taking in lodgers...resulting in overcrowding and unhygienic conditions; d) a cutting down of expenditure. It has been found that the first item to be cut down is food. Miss Janisch states that the average amount spent on food is £2.14.8 (1940). She produces figures to show that the minimum amount necessary for a sufficient diet is £4.15.4. Even this figure is criticised as being too low, for the natives do not buy in large quantities, so that their food costs more than Miss Janisch calculated (she quotes the price of tea as 2/3d per pound) - the natives buy by the ounce, paying 3d. per ounce or 4/- per pound). It must also be noted that this is a pre-war price.

It is ~~therefore~~ conclusively proved by Dr. Fox in his appendix to Miss Janisch's pamphlet, that the urban native does not get nearly enough of the necessary principal food constituents - vitamins, carbohydrates, calories, etc.

The results are : 1) The labour supply is underfed, the men not obtaining sufficient calories to supply fuel for their activities. 2) Resistance to disease is very low and consequently not only the African but also the European population is exposed to a great deal of preventable disease.

It is the duty of the Municipality to take the initiative in remedying this state of affairs. Employing, as it does, twelve to thirteen thousand unskilled workers (Non-European) it can set the standard for other employers, and the result of raising the wages of Municipal employees up to a subsistence level must inevitably result in a rise in the general wage level in Johannesburg.

Position of the Municipal Employees:

The municipal employees must be regarded as an integral part of the urban population. The budgets that have been drawn up on various occasions are for families living an urban life in the locations and it might be held that the estimates will not be suitable for municipal employees, since the compounds house only single men. But it must be realised that it is impossible to regard them as individuals divorced from family life and obligation. They are either heads of families, or contribute to the upkeep of kinsmen, so that, even though the items of rent and food are covered by compound provisions, they still have to provide these necessities for their dependants (whether these are wives and children or other family dependants). Miss Janisch's sample of 987 families shows that 90 wage earners employed by the Municipality actually live in the locations. Those who live in the compounds almost invariably have dependants either in the town or in the country. In the latter case, if we were to argue that the cost of maintaining their families is less because they are not living in the towns, we should be supporting the principle of low wages for transitory urban workers, and encouraging a practice whereby the wages of the urban workers are kept down through competition from a floating urban population whose wages are subsidised from the reserves. The Municipality must recognise that to stabilise the economic conditions in South Africa, there must be a permanent urban population, adequately housed, fed and clothed. To continue to draw on the reserves for cheap labour undermines the position of the permanent urban dweller.

We do not consider that the compound system ought to be perpetuated, and so we do not consider it necessary to draw up a budget on this basis. Provision of food and housing ought not to be a consideration in the drawing up of any labour contract.

(Further, it is the duty of the Municipality, under the Urban Areas Act, to provide housing for all natives within its Municipal area, and where it does not do this, in the case of other than municipal employees, it is merely being allowed by the employers of such labour to evade its responsibilities. It is therefore unnecessary to place the municipal employees in a special category, on the argument that they are being provided with lodging.)

There are a certain number of non-Europeans employed by the Municipality on a casual or occasional basis, and these we are prepared to exclude in fact, but not in principle, from the minimum wage we suggest.

We strongly oppose the recommendations put forward by the Johannesburg Municipality to the Wage Board. These recommendations were 21/- per week for the period 1942/43, 23/- per week in 1943/44 and 25/- in 1944/45. These recommendations must be contrasted with current unskilled wage rates of 30/- per week in Cape Town, 27/8 per week in Durban, and 27/- per week in Port Elizabeth. These rates, however, also fall below the minimum we urge the Johannesburg Municipality to pay their employees.

3. Calculation of a reasonable Minimum Wage:

The budgets drawn up have been based on the needs of an urban location dweller with his wife, two children and baby - this has been found to be an average location family, and following is the minimum expenditure we have found necessary :-

The latest monthly budget drawn up (and amendment based on Miss Janisch's calculations) is :-

	£	s	d
Food	4.	15.	4.
Rent	1.	0.	6.
Transport.. ...		6.	0.
Fuel & Light ...		13.	6.
Clothes		12.	6.
Poll Tax		1.	8.
Education, Religion & Burial Societies		5.	0.
Miscellaneous ...		10.	0.
Latest expenditure ?			
	8.	4.	6 + latest exp.

The separate items may now be considered :

FOOD:

Miss Janisch found that 75% of all expenditure is for food. Miss Janisch points out that only 57% of the amount necessary for proper feeding is spent, and, although her figures are adopted in the revised budget, it must be noted (1) that the prices used in calculating the necessary expenditure on each foodstuff are pre-war; (2) as has been shown before, the calculations are based on the erroneous assumption that the natives buy in bulk. This means again that the amounts needed for buying sufficient food are larger than has been quoted.

The figure of £4.15.4 is therefore the lowest possible quotation and ought really to be increased.

RENT & TRANSPORT:

In the locations, rent includes free medical and dental care, sanitary services, rubbish removal, and water supply. In addition, free maternity, ambulance and hospital services are given. Home visits from a doctor costs 1/- for the first visit.

Miss Janisch amends her original estimate of the amount spent on rent, stating that rent and transport together (since rents have been reduced) now amount to 20% of total expenditure. (£1.2.0 per month). The revised budget allows £1. 6. 6 for these services, but this is quite justifiable when it is realised that the figure given for transport cost is 6/- whereas Miss Janisch's statements show that in reality a man and his wife in Orlando or Pimville, in the course of their work, spend 3/6 per week (or about 14/- per month).

FUEL & LIGHT:

(Candles, matches, paraffin, wood & coal). Used for heating, cooking, washing (when the women do this at home). The expenditure is more in Winter, as the Natives make up for a lack of warm clothes by making fires in their rooms.

CLOTHES:

Miss Janisch estimates the cost of clothes at 5/6d per month. The cost of both new and secondhand clothes has risen so greatly that this item must be increased. Further, it is well-known that the clothes and blankets of the vast majority of natives are inadequate. In order to provide sufficient and adequate clothing at least 12/6 per month is necessary. This is a very conservative estimate compared with that of Dr. R. E. Phillips. ("Bantu in the City", 1938) who quoted 3/- to 10/- per week as the minimum necessary for adequate clothing.

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