

THEY WORK FOR YOU

HOW 15,000 NON-EUROPEAN
MUNICIPAL WORKERS LIVE

A SPEECH MADE IN THE JHGG
CITY COUNCIL BY COUNCILLOR
HILDA WATTS



A COMMUNIST
PARTY
PAMPHLET
PRICE 10

INTRODUCING THIS PAMPHLET....

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THIS pamphlet is a shortened version of a speech made by Hilda Watts - Communist City Councillor, at a meeting of the Johannesburg City Council held in November, 1946.

IT deals with the conditions - wages, pensions and gratuities and compound living conditions of the 15,000 odd unskilled African labourers in the employ of the Johannesburg City Council.

Addressing the Council, Hilda Watts pointed out -

"At the present time, the spotlight of world attention is focused on South Africa, particularly regarding her treatment of Non-Europeans. Johannesburg City Council, the largest Municipality in South Africa, should certainly make sure that its own affairs are strictly in order in this respect. Our Council is the third largest employer of native labour in this country - third only to the mines and the railways. We should set the tone for the large industrialists and manufacturers, giving them high standards to which to conform making our own conditions a model.

The blame for these conditions certainly does not rest squarely on City Councils of the past; on individual Councillors who did not concern themselves to improve matters; and on the voting public of Johannesburg as a whole who have been indifferent to these matters.

I am approaching the subject not for the purpose of "propaganda" - but with the object of getting things done."

EXISTING CONDITIONS

THE Johannesburg Municipality has more than 15,000 employees, the vast majority of whom are unskilled African labourers. This number fluctuates considerably according to requirements. The overwhelming majority of these workers are weekly wage-earners, on a daily wage rate, subject to 24 hours' notice. They are not permanent members of our staff, and although they are not termed "casual labourers", the insecurity of their jobs put them very much in that category. They are covered mainly by Government Wage Determination 105 of 1937, which gives them two weeks' holiday and twelve days sick leave per day, and they also get a minimum of four public holidays a year.

THE WAGES WE PAY.

This Wage Determination lays down a minimum wage, but this is treated by the Council as a maximum. Official figures show the minimum wage to be £5.17.0. a month plus cost of living allowance; the maximum that any of these workers receives is £11.5.4. per month plus cost of living allowance, but the average is £5.18.11. plus cost of living.

If the average wage is only 1/11d. higher than the minimum, very few workers indeed can be getting more than the minimum.

I found on investigation this question that there is a difference in the wages paid in the same department.

A policeman in the Library Department gets 6/- a day, while in the Market Department he gets 4/10 and in the Tramways 5/1. A boss-boy gets anything from 4/6 in one department to 5/6 in another, and there is the same variation for cleaners.

There should be a BASIC MINIMUM RATE for each type of job, so that each man knows what he is entitled to receive when doing a certain job.

Under present circumstances the workers themselves can never be sure of the hours and wages to which they

are entitled, and this is probably what contributes to the very many queries in pay which are received by the Time Office each week.

WAGES AND INCREASES

Pay and increments vary from job to job. When the men leave the municipality to return to the country for a break of three or six months, in most cases, when they return they are started again at the bottom, even if they were on a higher grade when they left. This, however, seems to depend entirely on the individual compound manager. Some of them keep records and start a man again on the grade at which he left, but this does not apply generally. Increments are rarely given, and then only on the recommendation of the overseer, who passes it to the Compound Manager, who if he agrees passes it on to the Department Head, who, if he agrees, will see that the increase is effected. Increments are given in a very haphazard fashion, and are not based on years of service. Thus, the vast majority of unskilled workers on the Council's payroll may work all their lives and never receive an increase.

I found large numbers of men who have been with us for twenty, thirty or more years, with only small breaks in their service.

In one case a man had worked in one department for forty years without a break. They were all on the basic minimum wage.

One Compound Manager pointed out that men with vastly different responsibilities received the same rate. The drivers of Cleansing Carts, for instance, who had in addition the care of the animals after their work is finished, are paid the same as men who load the carts.

PENSIONS AND GRATUITIES

According to a Council resolution, after fifteen years or more continuous service, the Head of a Department MAY recommend a gratuity of one month's pay for each year of service. This is usually paid out at the rate of £2, £3 or £4 a month, through the Magistrate or Native Commissioner on the district to which the worker retires, and if any money is left over when he dies, it is paid to his dependants.

This gratuity is only paid to workers who are too old or too ill to continue for the Council, if he dies while he is still working his family is not entitled to any gratuity.

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In record after record I found "37 years. Too old and infirm to continue...The following have given long and faithful service.....30 years, 36 years, 37 years, 39 years, 40 years....."

But no age limit. They went on working until they were too old or too ill. If

RECORDS OF SERVICE

Records of service are kept, in a most unsatisfactory and careless fashion, depending very largely on the individual who keeps the records. I examined records of many Compound Managers and found them widely different, varying from the simplest, and most ineffective - a single large book with all particulars of each worker entered on one line - to a useful cardex system used by one large compound, in which full particulars of rates of pay, leave, transfers, etc. are entered. Some Compound Managers give their workers chitz when they return to the countryside, ensuring them a job in the same department when they

workers are fit, and wish to retire, or leave for another job, they will not get a gratuity, no matter how long they have worked for the Council. And in addition, different Compound Managers condone breaks in service of different lengths, varying from three months to a year.

return, and so that they are permitted to return. Others do not do this, so that if the worker returns there is no guarantee of his job. Often workers will go from one department to another, and due to this unsatisfactory and uncentralised method of keeping records, a worker who has proved inefficient may easily go and get a job in another department.

Conversely, good workers returning from the country may be prevented from getting their jobs back, thus contributing to the instability of service.

Workers are usually recruited by the Compound Manager, again in a most haphazard fashion. They do not undergo any kind of medical examination or test, and as a result, a worker with any kind of contagious disease - T.B., V.D., or anything else - is put in a compound with hundreds of others. Equally as there is no kind of examination or test, men totally unfit for the type of labour for which they are recruited are put on jobs, with resulting harm to the Council and the individual inefficiency of labour and ill-effects on the men concerned.

The present methods of recruiting and conditions of employment also raise the whole question of the place of the African in urban life. The Compound system presupposes a transitory, temporary position.

Yet during the past year we have devoted a great deal of time and much heart-burning to discussing the question of "influx", from which, so some think, all our housing and other troubles spring. Over and over again our Non-European Affairs Department

has spoken of the need to build a stable urban population, and discourage new labour coming from the countryside. We speak to the public with two different mouths.

Over and over again we should "Stop the influx" and then in another way, we encourage it. Our Non-European Affairs Department runs a recruiting depot in an attempt to stabilise labour, and constantly complain that large industrialists do not make use of their services. The largest Johannesburg Employer, the Council, does not use this depot.

We have to make up our minds in principle on this matter. If we are really disturbed about the increase in population, and set our faces against completely uncontrolled movements of labour back and forth, then we must set ourselves, with our 15,000 workers, rules and standards of employment to which we want the others to conform.

But while we recruit and employ as we do, we simply have no right to kick against what is happening in Johannesburg today.

This casual way of recruiting labour is contributing towards the terrific turnover every month. The Council hires and fires workers as they are needed

for a certain job, and thus workers also adopt a casual attitude to this type of work, coming for a couple of weeks, or months, and then drifting away.

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RECRUITING AND SERVICE

ALL this adds up to one most obvious need - a central office for recruiting, keeping records, and dealing with matters affecting this branch of labour. This office should be responsible for hiring men, seeing they have a medical examination, and allotting them to the branch of work for which they appear most suited; keeping all records of work so that present difficulties regarding gratuities, etc. are done away with; seeing they get their leave as and when they are entitled to it, and so on.

EVERY single person employed by the Council should be on the same basis, that is, after a period of probation, they should automatically be on the permanent staff, subject to dismissal only for breaches of discipline or similar offences. This is the only fair way to employ people. It is the only way to stabilise our labour force. It is the only way to obtain good service from the workers, to build a tradition of service so that working for the Council becomes having a worth-while job.

THIS should not be left to the discretion of the department head. Our regulations should lay down the period of service after which a gratuity will be given, and it should be given regardless of whether the worker is physically fit or not. There must be a retiring age. Either there should be a proper pensions scheme - or alternatively gratuities should be made

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available from a certain time, in proportion to service given. That is to say, if we pay a man a gratuity of one month's wages for every year's service after fifteen years, after five we should pay one-third of a month's wages, after ten, two-thirds, if the worker wishes to leave or retire. All regulations should be clearly posted in compounds and at the recruiting office, so that each man knows exactly to what he is entitled.

It can easily be seen that if these few reforms were introduced there would be a tremendous change and improvement in the work we obtain and the service. Labour would with these incentives, become more stable, and would be better adjusted through medical examinations and proper allocation by men who would then take more interest in their jobs.

If we really wish to put our house in order, one of the most immediately necessary changes is in regard to the conditions under which the workers are housed.

COMPOUNDS - HOUSING CONDITIONS

The idea of compounds, with all its faults, has been inherited from the mines, and we have even inherited a couple of mine compounds. More than 12,000 of our non-European workers are housed in our 38 compounds and hostels. I have seen individuals living under fould conditions, but I have never seen a mass of workers so disgustingly housed as in some of our compounds. The conditions are absolutely scandalous. The Council employs a great body of inspectors who go round seeing that people conform to our bye-

laws, in streets, flats, houses buildings, public places. The only places where there appears to be no kind of standard to enforce is in our compounds.

The Council, as a large employer of labour, must supply quarters for its employees, and provision will always be needed for some single men or men whose families are still in the country. What is wrong, however, is the type of accommodation provided, and the fact that we make no provision for the needs of married men and their families, so that

workers are forced to live in the compounds, whether their families are in town or not.

LATRINES & WASHING FACILITIES

The Factories Act lays down that every employer must provide a minimum of one wash-basin, one urinal, and one lavatory for every 20 male workers employed. This is for people at their place of work. We evidently think this is over-generous. Let me tell you what we provide.

HUDDLE PARK COMPOUND has one shower for every 31 workers.

VAN BEEK STREET COMPOUND has one basin and 1 shower for every 40 workers.

SOLOMON STREET COMPOUND has 1 shower and 1 basin for every 45, and 1 latrine for 60.

VREBEDQRP COMPOUND has 1 bath and 12 showers for 496 workers.

ORLANDO COMPOUND has 1 shower for every 50.

POLLY STREET HOSTEL provides 1 shower and 1 lavatory for every 51 residents.

SPRINGFIELD COMPOUND, 1 shower for every 54.

SELBY COMPOUND, one of our largest, with 2,100 men, provides 1 shower and 1 basin for every 100 workers.

WATER BRANCH COMPOUND, 1 shower to nearly 70.

NANCEFIELD COMPOUND, 1 shower and 1 latrine to 80 men.

OLIPHANTSVLEI COMPOUND, 1 shower and 3 latrines for its 93 workers.

CITY DEEP COMPOUND, another large place, where, when I enquired as to bathing facilities, I was given the reply "Adequate", has 24 showers in its main compound for 1,120 workers. (about 1 to 47), and an indescribable tin hut with four showerpoints in a smaller compound for 360 workers (1 to every 90).

BEZ. VALLEY COMPOUND has 2 showers and 7 latrines for its 184 workers.

SANITARY SERVICES COMPOUND where workers are engaged on night-soil removal, has 1 bathroom for 125 workers, and a few quite indescribable lavatories.

NORWOOD COMPOUND has 1 shower for every 133 workers.

NEWTOWN COMPOUND has 1 shower for every 165 workers, and 1 latrine for 55.

There are two small farm compounds that don't pro-

vide any latrines at all, thus encouraging the type of habit which is so difficult to break and so annoying to us when these workers come to town.

Most of the compounds fall under the City Engineer's Department, Johannesburg - night-soil removal, Cleansing Department. Some

Compound Managers provide hot water in buckets, some have it in taps, but in very few cases are there hot-water showers. In the newer places, hot water and other improvements made a tremendous difference to the general appearance and cleanliness of the place. So we provide hot water to clean the buckets and carts but the workers who look after the carts must be washed with cold.

Many compounds - all the older ones - have inherited the mines two-tier concrete shelves for bunks, about 40 workers to a room, many of the upper tiers without guide rails or partitions. A doctor at Waterval Hospital told me that in the four months that he had been there, he had had three serious cases, two of

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them fatal, caused by falls from upper bunks. Most of the rooms have no shelves or lockers, so that the rooms are strung from side to side with a maze of clothes and rags, meat on wire, bicycles hung from ceilings, and all the workers' possessions. No description can adequately convey to you the darkness, the dinginess, the stuffiness and smells, the cramped and sordid atmosphere of overcrowded rooms where workers are on shift, and sleeping, cooking and living goes on day and night.

Many of these places are "temporary" huts, erected in most cases about eight years ago. Like many of our "temporary" measures, they seem to have become permanent. Some huts have 50 men, packed together, some sleeping on the concrete floor. In one case, a large compound has 300 more men than it is licensed for. In another case a temporary compound was erected more than eight years ago for 109 night-soil workers, and today is occupied by more than 360, with no signs of rebuilding, although this particular place has been condemned. The shacks are

in a horrible condition, and in many cases lavatories and showers are too foul to describe. 26 out of 36 for which I obtained particulars have no recreation room whatsoever, or common room, or mess room. And in many other cases the room or hall is quite inadequate, as for example in the case of Wolhuter Hostel, where one small hall about 47' x 28' is supposed to cater for more than 4,000 men. In this place, the use of two basements, originally built for rickshaws and bicycles, to house several hundred men, should definitely be stopped. The basements are called "The Black Holes of Calcutta".

In the yard at Selby Compound, 300 horses and 2,000 men are stabled close together, with the cleaning carts, appropriately labelled "Keep your City Clean" parked in between. Recently we had a lot of agitation to prohibit Africans keeping an animal in the locations. From the hygienic point of view it may be quite correct to prohibit a family from keeping a mule in their backyard. But please do not expect Africans to under-

stand why it is right and correct for the Council itself, who makes the rules, to keep 300 horses in the backyard with 2,000 men. In this compound, terribly overcrowded, there is one piece of wasteland used for exercising men and horses alike, and as they are shift workers, it is used in the day as well as week-ends.

Conditions very widely from place to place. In the newest, recreation rooms and spotlessly white tiled bathrooms and lavatories give the lie to the idea some have that even given decent conditions the workers would not keep them clean. Compounds in areas such as Vrededorp provide good trade for the local shebeens. Everything we have said during the past year about recreational facilities for non-Europeans - let me quote from the 'Star' of 26th Oct. - "while the housewife gives instructions to her houseboy, the non-European Affairs Department is planning that he shall have recreation over the week-end" - this all sounds ~~as~~ like the most dreadful hypocrisy in view of what I saw at our compounds.

We set the standards for the workers. What regulations can be enforced when there is no means of carrying them out? You can't keep rooms free of hanging workclothes and food, unless you provide shelves and lockers and kitchens. You can't expect people to keep clean when 165 must make use of 1 shower.

What should be done about the
COMPOUNDS

★ PERHAPS the most serious aspect of compound life is the corroding effects on family life, the long and often so unnecessary separations, the herding together of so many men with nothing to do apart from their work. It is the inhuman side of a concern that demands work - hard, dirty work - but will give nothing in return. The first need is for the Council to provide married quarters for workers with families, and to convert the single quarters more into hostels. Workers on essential services should be provided with proper homes, near their job.

★ BYE-LAWS should include such rules as minimum space allocated to each person, in no circumstances to be exceeded. The Factories Act lays

down regulations regarding communications between lavatories and working places. Councils regulations should lay down such rules, and give standards regarding type and quantity of latrines, wash and shower provided, and, of course, hot water.

★ LOCKERS and shelves must be provided for hanging clothes. The Council could also provide small inexpensive refrigerator units for the workers' food.

★ COOKING FACILITIES: Provision of these in places other than the sleeping quarters is absolutely essential. Most compounds have kitchens with disused pots where food used to be cooked. The men insist on preparing their own food, and must be given facilities for this. Can-

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teens should be opened in all large hostels and compounds for raw and cooked meals.

RECREATION: Facilities should be provided. Night classes (which are very popular where they are held) encouraged. Concerts and games encouraged, loudspeakers installed in all compounds.

TREES and grass planted where possible.

INSPECTION: Staff of welfare officers should inspect all compounds, conditions, discussing details as difficulties with C.M. Committees of residents can be encouraged to maintain certain standards.

IT has been proved over and over again that decent living conditions always repay the employer, and I'm positive the cost would be recovered in better work and increased work from the men.

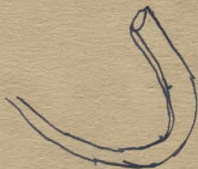
REMEMBER, that these conditions have not been accepted by the workers without a deep and growing sense of bitterness and distrust towards the Council. It can be summed up in their attitude towards our feeding scheme. They were fed once by the Council, and money was deducted from their wages for the food. They rebelled, and were permitted to feed themselves. Then the Council wanted to start feeding again - free. The workers did not want it. One said "Does a dog return to his own vomit?" They distrust our motives in offering free food. They think it means a perpetuation of low wages and rotten conditions. That is how they regard the Council.

LET those who are so fond of speaking about "agitators" among the Africans go and see some of these places, investigate these conditions. The Council itself is the greatest agitator of its own vast army of non-European employees. These unskilled, lowly, and often dirty workers are the ones who keep our essential services going. They look after our streets, our sewage, keep our city free from dirt and rubbish. This council, the richest Council in Southern Africa, should repay them a little better for the unpleasant but very necessary work that they do for us.

WHAT THE CITY COUNCIL DOES IS
YOUR AFFAIR - YOUR HEALTH,
HOUSING and RECREATION IS
THEIR AFFAIR!

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