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IMPROVING THE LOT OF THE NINE LABOURER.

CORRECTION OF ILL-FOUNDED CRITICISM.

HUGE SUMS SPENT ON SOCIAL SERVICES AND AMENITIES

Ill-founded criticism of the conditions of employment of Native labour in South Africa, particularly on the gold mines of the Witwatersrand, has recently been given wide publicity, locally and overseas. The Gold Producers Committee of the Transvaal Chamber of Mines, without commenting on national policy, wishes to correct the two principal mis-statements of facts on which much of this criticism has been based.

It has recently and repeatedly been stated that wages of mine Native labourers have remained unchanged for 50 years at 2s.3d. a shift. In the United States this mis-statement takes the form of a catch-phrase "46 cents a day for 46 years" - 46 cents at the current rates of exchange being approximately 2s.3d.

The average cash wage of all Natives employed on the gold mines is not 2s.3d. but 2s. 8.3d. a shift. In addition the industry supplies, without cost to the Natives themselves, medical, hospital and recreational services, housing and feeding - all of a high standard. These amenities will, this year (1947), cost the industry more than £6,250,000; but were they to be purchased by the Natives, the cost to them would obviously be far greater. It has also been suggested that the recommendations of the Lansdown Commission have not been implemented to any extent. This is not so. The Commission recommended a cost of living allowance, a boot allowance and an increase in minimum wages at a total estimated cost of £2,642,000. In addition, the Commission recommended that Sunday work and overtime be paid at time-and-a-half rates.

OVERTIME RATES.

The Government decided "that, as recommended by the Commission, Native workers when employed on overtime or on Sunday work will receive pay at time-and-a-half rates" instead of at straight rates as before, and not that only minimum rates should be increased but that "the wages of all Native surface workers will be increased by 4d. a shift and of all Native underground workers by 5d. a shift".

In giving effect to the Government's decision, the minimum wage of Natives employed underground and on the surface on the gold mines associated with the Chamber of Mines has been increased from 2s. to 2s.5d. and from 1s.9d. to 2s.1d. a shift, respectively. The average wage of mine Natives is now 2s.8.3d. a shift, an increase of 20 per cent on the rate obtaining before the Lansdown Commission.

Moreover, the mine industry supplies boots to mine Natives at the pre-war cost price. The rise in price during the war and since, has not been passed on to the Native employee. Jackets and other forms of protective clothing are issued free.

The increased cash benefits to the Native labour force of the concessions listed above is estimated at a total of £2,600,000, of which £2,300,000 represents the increase in wages.

NATIVE MINE CLERKS.

The Lansdown Commission also considered the position of Native mine clerks, who, unlike employees, are detribalised and permanently domiciled on the mines. The Commission recommended increase in their rates of pay, payment on a monthly basis, and the granting of annual paid leave. Although the Government did not comment on these recommendations, the industry, nevertheless, adopted them and, in addition, now grants these employees paid sick leave.

Contrary to the frequent allegations that conditions of employment on the mines have remained static, there have been constant and considerable improvements in the lot of the Native mine labourer and so far as the recommendations of the Lansdown Commission can be measured in cash, they have been implemented by the Government and the Chamber of Mines nearly in full.

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