

Office

NATIVE ECONOMIC COMMISSION.
NATURELLE EKONOMIESE KOMMISSIE.

AD 1438
(Box 2)

Sitting at

Estcourt

October 13th 1930.

35

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

(Pages 2288-2328)

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G. H. Pitso (PP) all.)

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Official
Shorthand Writers,

I N D E X

ESCOURT OCTOBER 13th 1930

WITNESSES:

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Mr. W. ELLIOT
HOL. FD. CV. RMB. S. O. , C. M. G.

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(Town Clerk)
Dr. J. P. Odendal

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NATIVE ECONOMIC COMMISSION

WETCOURT, OCTOBER 13th 1930, 10 a.m.

THIRTYTHIRD PUBLIC SITTING

PRESENT:

Dr. J. E. Holloway (Chairman)
Major R.W. Anderson Mr. A.W. Roberts
Mr. F.A.W. Lucas, K.C. Senator F.W. de Roux van Niekerk
Mr. A.M. Kestart Dr. H.C.E. Fourie.

Mr. C. Faye (Secretary)

MINUTES OF MEETING

Mr. WILLIAM ELLIOTT
Mr. FRANCIS COTTEMAN ROBINSON
Col. DAVID WATT BAKER'S B.S.O., C.B.C. called and examined:

CHAIRMAN: You are Chairman of the Farmers Association?--
(MR. ELLIOTT) No, I am not the Chairman, but I have been requested to be the spokesman before your Commission. I was asked this morning to speak here. I have no written statement, but we are prepared to answer any questions which the commission may desire to put to us.

Can you tell me what are the customary conditions under which labour is engaged for your farms in this area? I presume that you have labour tenants here?-- Yes, we have.

Under what conditions are they engaged?-- They are usually engaged on a yearly basis, and I think I am correct in saying that the average wage for the six months' contract is ten shillings per month with their food. In addition to that, I know that in many instances they are allowed a certain quantity of stock per head. In most cases a working servant is allowed five head of stock, that is big stock, and from ten to twenty goats per kraal. The accommodation for housing is almost invariably the same. I think the natives have designed their own huts. These designs are mostly the same and the material for the huts is generally supplied by the farmer free of charge.

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Now most of the males belonging to a particular family put in a period of work?-- Yes, excepting the very young ones and the old kraal heads. They do not.

So that you get labour according to the size of the family?-- Yes, that is so.

And what about the women?-- The women give no labour, i.e. the married women. The girls give from six months, not all of them on some of the farms, but usually it is laid down in the contract that one of the girls shall supply the house when her labour is required. It is usually laid down in the contract that one girl in turn shall do the necessary domestic work.

Do they get any payment for that?-- They get five shillings per month and their board and lodging. (Col. MACKENZIE) They get from five to ten shillings per month.

Is female domestic service the general rule on the farms?-- Yes, I think so, wherever obtainable it would be.

In other cases you use males?-- I have not come across any cases in this district where males were used for housework. Of course, there are cases where they use males in the kitchens as cook boys, but the servant girls do the work in the house.

Do you have male cook boys on the farms as well?-- Yes we do.

Is that fairly general?-- Yes, I think so. (Mr. ELLIOTT) If you said that it was fifty-fifty, it would be about right. I know that on the high veld things are rather different. But round here, in the area with which I am mostly acquainted, the rule is to have a girl in the kitchen and other girls to do the housework.

Do you use daily paid labour as well?-- During certain seasons of the year, of course, we have to.

What are the wages paid to daily paid labour?-- Generally one shilling per day with their food.

That is three meals per day?-- Whatever they require. Some of them have only two meals as they go home in the evening

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and the others who sleep at the farms have all their meals there. It is their own option and the three meals are provided if they want to take them.

Is there any scarcity of labour in this district?-- The position with individual farmers would vary considerably in that respect. From my own experience I should say no, but I should not like to answer for all the others.

(MR. ROBINSON) It varies with the seasons. At certain parts of the year you can get as much labour as you require.

MR. LUCAS: Does it vary with the farmers too?--

(COL. MACKENZIE) It does vary with them.

In some of the district we are told that some of the farmers can get plenty of labour?-- Of course, if the natives have a good season themselves, then there is very little labour available, but if they do not have good seasons, then I should say there is plenty.

CHAIRMAN: You said that during certain parts of the year, labour is plentiful. Can you tell us during which parts of the year it is plentiful?-- (MR. ROBINSON) Usually after they have finished their ploughing. For instance at this time of the year it usually becomes scarce because just about this time they like to go home and do their own ploughing.

But that is the time when you require their labour isn't it?-- (CO. MACKENZIE) Yes. (MR. ROBINSON) My experience is that you require their labour all the year round but you need it more particularly at this time.

You require more labour now than later on?-- Yes, that is so. But you have got to look at the matter from this point of view, that the natives want to do their own work and that is the very time when the farmers also want

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labour. When you are haymaking, you require as much labour as you can get.

What sort of farming do you go in for?-- General farming. I go in for stock and also for filling the soil.

You are not a grain farmer in the first instance?-- No. (Mr. ELLIOTT) I think many farmers in this district would say with certainty and justification that the time when they require most labour is from January to the middle of March, i.e. during the cleaning season. You can do with less labour at other times for your planting, but you cannot delay your cleaning; you can delay your reaping to a certain extent but it is for that reason that I say that the labour is most required during the cleaning season.

Now from the farmer's point of view, is the native labour which you get here satisfactory?-- As a relative thing I should say that it is satisfactory. But from other points of view I should say it is not satisfactory. It is not as good as it might be, for instance, but there is one question which comes up later on where I shall perhaps widen out a bit. As a matter of fact, one rather tends to accept standards below what one would really like to follow, because of the inefficiency and the independence of the native labour, but personally I should say that it is not satisfactory.

Do the farmers more or less get accustomed to a given base?-- Yes, I suppose so. ~~XXXXXXXX~~

MR. LUCAS: In what way is it unsatisfactory?-- Well, it is inefficient in so far as you cannot set a couple or three boys on to a plough and tell them to go on and plough the land. You cannot trust these boys to do that work efficiently. That, of course, is the great trouble

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with our native labour. If you are not there three, four or five times a day yourself, you find that they have all done a lot of bad and inefficient work.

What is the effect of labour of that sort on European farming generally?-- That is a question which I was just going to allude to and I want to say that what I am going to say must be regarded as strictly my own personal opinion.

DR. ROBERTS: Before coming to that point, do not you think that if you pay men far below what they are worth, their worth will also be a good deal below what it should be?-- You can hardly expect good work for one shilling per day?-- Well, if we had to pay them here more than what their work is worth, we should all be in the bankruptcy court.

MR. LUCAS: Have you tried paying them higher wages?-- Yes we have tried it. The highest paid boy in my employ gets thirty shillings a month. He gets one pound more than others for six months of the year.

That is only a shilling a day?-- Yes.

Do they get paid for Sunday work?-- They get a shilling a day, that includes Sundays.

SENATOR VAN NINKERK: Does he live on the farm, that boy?-- Yes, he lives on the farm and he has an opportunity to graze his stock and everything.

And you pay him thirty shillings a month?-- Yes, I pay him that all the year round. His work is of a higher standard than that of others, but all the same it is far short of what I should like to see for thirty shillings a month.

DR. ROBERTS: Is he above the standard in his

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capacity, seeing that you pay him above the standard wages you say?-- I pay him that because his work is above the standard, but I say that it is very much below the standard it should be.

It is below the standard for that wage?-- It is.

MR. LUCAS: What is the effect of this labour on European farming?-- The effect of this native labour on the European farmer and, shall I say, on farmers as well, is very bad, very bad indeed.

In what way is it bad?-- In so far as I said a little while ago that it makes us satisfied with standards of farming which we know are very much below what they should be because we cannot get efficiency out of them. We simply cannot get it.

Do you mean that it lowers your standard?-- Yes, it does, and I believe that it has a very bad effect on the European population of this country also.

Now holding that view, is not it essential that you should take steps so as to improve that type of labour?-- From my point of view it is not.

But is not it serious that a standard of agriculture of the Europeans should be lowered?-- Yes, it is.

What steps have you taken at any time to try and improve the work of the natives?-- I have tried to get them to work all the year round and I have offered them better wages, but they simply won't do it. I have offered them all sorts of inducements in the shape of tobacco and soap and in some instances I have offered them cash prizes for efficient work, but all to no purpose.

That is one way, but have you approached it from the point of view of definitely trying to teach your natives how to do things better and why they should do things better?--

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Yes, I have tried that, but it has not lead to anything. I may say that I have been trained from my very youth to do things myself. There is nothing about a farm from putting down a drain to putting up a stack which I have not been taught and there is not a job which I put my natives on to where I do not try to teach them the right way to do it and where I do not explain to them why they should do it and how there should do it.

We have quite a lot of evidence that natives in many parts of Natal, when things are properly explained to them, do respond and improve very considerably?-- To a certain extent that is quite true, but you can never get them to do things, at least I cannot get them up to anything what I consider my own standard of efficiency.

But you would not consider yourself adequately remunerated with thirty shillings per month?-- I have to be satisfied in these times with something less.

I do not think you can expect us to accept that?-- I think you will find that many farmers have approached it from that point of view but they have had to give it up in despair. (MR. ROBINSON) I disagree there. I find that by paying £2 per month outside - i.e. outside the six months for which I pay 30/-, they work much more contentedly and I think they take a bigger interest, but I find that they work contentedly and they value their job more and they stay with me

SENATOR VAN NIEKERK: That is not quite the question. We, as practical farmers, know that the native always looks ahead at having to do three or six months as part of his contract for living on the farm. If he finishes his contract and you pay him £1/15/- or £2, or even the same wage, he is more contented. He does not realise the value

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accruing to him for living on the farm. Now, is your native, for the second six months, when he gets £2, instead of the 30/- for the first six months, a more efficient worker, does he look better after your ploughing, does he do his work better than he did in the first six months?-- No, I do not think so. (Col. HACKHEISE) Very few natives will finish their six months for the farmer and then stay on with him. As a rule when they have done their six months for the farmer and you ask them whether they will work another three months if they get a rise in wages - they stay on. Every farmer does that. But the real fact of the matter is that native labour is very inefficient. If you could teach the natives to work a little more than six months it would be a good thing. Generally, they go home after their six months and when they come back again they are just as green as when they started. It means that they have forgotten everything. That is my experience and it is also the experience of other farmers.

DR. FOURIE: Do not they go and earn money after they have been six months on the farm?-- Some of them may, but the majority just stay and loaf about on the farm.

MR. LUCAS: That £2 which you spoke about, is that for a calendar month?-- That is for thirty working days.

Do they work on Sundays?-- Not the whole day.

In effect, it works out at £2 per calendar month?-- Yes, it does work out at that.

MAJOR ANDERSON: Do not you find that by paying higher wages you can reduce the number of boys employed?-- No, I am afraid I do not find that.

It does not make any difference in the number you

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KRBP?-- No, it does not.

Do you get more service?-- I think I get better service. I think that is my experience.

You get more done for the £2 than for the 30/-?-- My experience is that you get more efficient service.

MR. LUGAS: It pays to have them contented?-- Yes, that is the position in a nutshell.

Do you feed them?-- They usually get two meals per day. They go home to their kraals in their evening and they have their evening meals at home, but those who stay get their three meals.

What do you feed them on?-- Principally mealie meal and occasionally they get a sheep, and when pumpkins are in season they get pumpkins and also potatoes. That is during certain times of the year.

SENATOR VAN NIEKERK and do they get skimmed milk?-- As much as they want.

DR. FOURIE: What is the standard of their cultivation when they work for themselves?-- (Col. WICKSTEIN) It is very poor indeed. The standard of their own lands, even on your own farm, although they have been working six months for you and you have shown them and helped them as much as you can - when they go and cultivate their own lands, they do not seem to have improved at all. Their lands are very badly cultivated. I was mentioning this only this morning. I have a third farm here with a lot of natives on it. I went there the other day to see how things were going on. Their kraals are full of manure and they are doing nothing with it. I said to them "Why do you not take that manure and plough it into your lands so that you will get better crops". They looked at me and said "No, it was too much work; besides farm manure is no good for the lands, it turns the

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soil and the crops. I said "It did not burn mine", but that was their argument and it was useless to try and shift them.

CHAIRMAN: Why do you not think that the natives will not apply your method of agriculture - why do they change your methods when they leave you?-- I do not know why it is, but it is a fact. If you look at their lands you see that they do everything in a very poor and haphazard manner.

Why is that?-- I cannot account for it. You can teach them what you want to, but when they go home they go and work anyhow. The majority of the work, of course, is left to the women. The men do the ploughing but everything else is left to the women.

MR. LUGAS: But the women have not been working for you and they have not had any training, and perhaps it is due to that?-- Yes, that may be so.

CHAIRMAN: The ploughing, of course, is done by the men is not it?-- Yes.

Do they plough as deeply for themselves as they do for you?-- No.

Is that due to the fact that they possibly have not the good ploughs?-- Yes, that may be. They buy cheap ploughs, and they do not seem to do very well.

Or possibly their oxen are not strong enough?-- No, their oxen are not good, that is so. But they are good enough for that work, they are in good condition on the whole and they do not do any other work except that little ploughing once a year. I do not think it is due to the oxen but to the fact that their ploughs are inferior and also to the fact that they want to get the work done as soon as possible

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(Mr. ELLIOTT) Speaking from personal experience, with regard to the native and his dislike of using kraal manure, I happen to live in the thorn country. My friends here who are appearing to give evidence here are on the High Veld. I have had the same experience as Col. Mackay has had, and it has always been practically of the same nature. It is very difficult to get them to use the kraal manure, as a matter of fact I have tried over and over again to get them to use it but they will not. On one occasion my most intelligent boy condescended to tell me what a fool I was to use the kraal manure. I asked him why and he told me the same thing as Col. Mackay has been telling us here, that the kraal manure burns the crops. Now you asked the question as to why they follow this lackadaisical method when they get back to their own kraals. I have over and over again put that very question to my own boys and I have not been able to fathom it, but I do believe that underlying it all is an ingrained fear inherited by the natives, at any rate, by ninety percent of them - they are afraid of doing anything outstanding from the general run of natives in their kraals. That, to my mind, is the cause of the lack of progress among the natives. I also want to say this, that in several instances, we ourselves have done the ploughing for our natives. We want to see that their lands on our farms are properly looked after and properly cultivated. I have given them my own plough and my own oxen and they have to do the ploughing of their lands in their own time, and then of course, if the ploughing is not done properly, then it is their own fault. I have taken endless trouble with them, but it does not seem to help a great deal.

(ERRATUM: Wherever the name "Col. Mackenzie" appears, please read "Col. Mackay".

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CHAIRMAN: In those cases, do they plough as deeply as they plough for you?-- In an odd case, yes, but generally speaking they do not. As far as the ploughing is concerned, if you do not watch them carefully they slip the plough out and they simply do not do their work. I have seen that happen time and again.

MR. LUCAS: Do they use your plough?-- In those instances which I have mentioned, I have lent them my plough and my oxen and there is no reason why their work on their lands should not be done as well as the work on my lands.

CHAIRMAN: Your own work is done under supervision?-- Yes, I supervise it.

And the work on their lands is not supervised?-- No, I cannot always supervise it.

MR. LUCAS: What is your experience Mr. Robinson of the natives doing their own work?-- (Mr. ROBINSON) My experience is very much the same as that of Mr. Elliott. I have one or two natives who do good work, but they are exceptions. As a general rule, their work is what Col. Mackay told you, very slipshod.

How many have you got on your farm?-- About five krabie. A fair number.

And how many work their own lands reasonably?-- Two out of the five do fairly well.

DR. FOURIE: Are those natives raw natives?-- Yes, they are all raw, but many of them can read and write, as a matter of fact most of them can. That makes a difference in the way they work their lands.

MAJOR ANDERSON: Do you have any hired labour in addition to these labour tenants?-- Now and again we have to engage hired labour but it depends on the season.

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but usually the native tenant supplies me with all the labour I require, except during the heeling and reaping seasons.

Do you prefer that?-- **YES (Mr. ELLIOTT)** Personally I would prefer to have the natives segregated and an European dependant absolutely on outside labour. I should like to have my own farm for my own use. Personally, I should prefer to have European labour and it is in my mind that we shall never be in a satisfactory position until we are much more segregated than we are at present and until we have our own European labour and until we have all our jobs done by European labourers.

SENATOR VAN NIEKERK: Is there a tendency for natives to leave your farm and trek to the farms?-- No, there is not. I had an unusual experience this year. I own one farm and I rent another. On the farm I rented I had a very great difficulty with the natives to get them to keep their stock within bounds. It was not unusual for them to have over 200 head of big and 500 head of small stock on the farm, and last January I had to put my foot down and give them a definite limit in respect of their stock, with the alternative of leaving the farm at the end of June. The whole body of the natives came to me as a deputation and said they could not possibly reduce their stock to the limit I had laid down. I said, "Very well, leave the farm". Not one single native has left the farm.

MR. LUCAS: Have they reduced their stock?-- Yes

Have they reduced it to your figure?-- Yes.

Unfortunately the owner of the farm died in March and the farm got into the market and it has now passed out of my control but the conditions which I laid down were complied with and not a boy left the farm.

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