

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR ON A CONFERENCE ON PROPOSED PENSIONS FOR NATIVES UNDER THE SILICOSIS ACT.

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On the 5th December 1946, a conference was held, convened by the Honourable the Minister of Mines, ~~to~~ which the Institute's Director was invited to attend, at which the principle of giving to Africans pensions under the Silicosis Act was discussed. There were present the Honourable the Minister of Mines, the Secretary for Mines, the Secretary for Native Affairs and other representatives of the Department of Native Affairs, representatives of the Chamber of Mines, the Miners' Phthisis Bureau, the Silicosis Board, Senator Dr. Edgar H. Brookes, and Mr. Rheinallt Jones, representing the Institute of Race Relations.

The Secretary for Native Affairs supported the principle of pensions, pointing out that under the War Pensions Acts Nos. 44/1942 and 33/1943, pensions for African disabled soldiers and the dependants of deceased disabled soldiers are being administered by the Department of Pensions which experiences little or no difficulty. The scheme is worked through the offices of magistrates and Native Commissioners. The War Pensions Act takes cognisance of customary unions including the wives and children of polygamous unions. Whilst he admitted there might be difficulties under the Silicosis Act in this connection he thought that his department would overcome them.

Mr. Barry, representing the Chamber of Mines, said that all present would agree to the principle of pensions, but he felt that the difficulties of applying the principle were too great. Of the 200,000 underground Native workers, only one-third (80,000) were Union subjects. It would, he held, be quite impossible to extend a pension system to extra-Union Natives. The lack of facilities for medical examinations both in the Union and outside would make it impossible to ascertain the progress of the disease. The attempt to provide ex-gratia further payments on the advance of the disease had not been a success. The Workmen's Compensation Commissioner had said he couldn't work a pension scheme under the Workmen's Compensation Act. He thought that, under a pension scheme the African sufferers would be worse off. *On the* *Edwin* *Paris* *2/26* In ante-primary cases they would only get £50 and without a proper system of medical examination (and having regard to the poor results from the attempt to provide ex-gratia payments) they would get no more in most cases.

During discussion on the existing facilities for X-Ray examination the medical expert present said that scarcely any of the hospitals in Native areas were adequately equipped for this and that the reports received from district surgeons are in most cases of no value. The discussion revealed a lack of any effort to organise the medical facilities which the successful carrying out of even the ex-gratia payment of further compension on the progress of the disease would require. The Minister spoke of the programme of health centres to which the Union Government is committed, but this programme will take many years to carry out, and even then the Centres may not be equipped for work under the Silicosis Act.

The Minister held that in the absence of Native life tables, registration of Native births and deaths, and other data it was not possible to institute pensions at the present time. The probable cost could not be ascertained. Mr. Rheinallt Jones, however, held that no life table would become available until pensions were instituted. He advocated as a beginning the institution of a uniform rate of pension, as recommended by the Majority Report of the Commission, which could be applied within the framework of the present Act.

Quoting from the Majority Report of the Miners' Phthisis Commission, he said that an average of 2,000 new cases of compensatable diseases of the lungs every year (in average of 275,000 Natives employed underground) would be a high figure, especially when over 1,000 of the cases for the year ended 31st July 1942 were in respect of

uncomplicated tuberculosis, and therefore greatly reducible by more stringent initial medical examination, and mass miniature radiography. But taking the high average of 2000 cases, it should be possible to take the European sufferers' life table as the basis of expectation of life, more especially as the medical expert at the meeting had been definite in his statement that the African sufferer had a very much shorter life than the European. He urged that this should be done, to begin with, under the present undifferentiated pensions. The provision of graduated pensions would follow as medical facilities became available.

The Minister, however, held that there were not sufficient data to enable him to introduce pensions at the present. When pressed to indicate the exact nature of the data required he suggested that Mr. Rheinallt Jones might enquire of the Government actuaries.

Senator Brookes pleaded for the introduction of pensions on a permissive basis.

There was discussion on the difficulties which might be encountered in making periodical payments to sufferers or their dependants. There was general agreement that periodical payments to sufferers were practicable.

The Director of Native Labour, whose office administers compensation payments to Africans under the Act, said that there would be many difficulties in respect of payments to dependants, e.g., in determining which of polygamous wives, and their children should benefit. There was considerable discussion on this aspect, Senator Brookes and Mr. Rheinallt Jones holding that such difficulties were not insurmountable, and could be dealt with in the same way as is done under the War Pensions Act, or in Native estates under the Native Administration Act.

The Director of Native Labour urged that the most urgent need was to provide sanatoria for sufferers.

Finally, the Minister declared that he was satisfied that no pension scheme could be introduced at the present time, and the meeting was then closed.

J.D. RHEINALLT JONES

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