

70

SOUTH AFRICAN  
BANTU IN INDUSTRY.

*Numbered Memo.*

by :

W. L. Campbell-Pitt.

During the last 100 years the Bantu have been connected with South African Commerce and Industry.

In the early days the vast majority of the Bantu employed were migratory.

They came from the lands reserved for their habitation, worked for several months and when they had saved enough for the purchase of essential commodities they returned to their homelands. There they were content to stay tending their cattle until a shortage of money once again compelled them to seek employment.

One of the main reasons why the Bantu male left the leisure security of the tribal kraal was the introduction of both hut and personal tax which had to be paid in coin instead of kind.

In other words the Bantu were mainly interested in "Buying Leisure". They were illiterate, unskilled and completely dominated by superstition and tribal customs.

The attitude of the employers, whilst generally kindly disposed towards them, was in the main one of indifference.

Bantu labour was regarded as cheap, was utilised on unskilled work and was easily replaceable. No thought was given to where the personnel came from, how they lived and, as they only stayed for a short while, no thought was given to training them in the occupations in the knowledge that once they left they were unlikely to return.

This type of labour was used by Commerce, Mining and Manufacturing Industry.

During  
After World War II considerable industrial expansion took place which influenced a great change in the role of Bantu in Industry. The white manpower was heavily committed to the war effort and the available Bantu labour was used to great advantage.

The Bantu were attracted to Manufacturing Industry due to better wages, were no longer content to return to their homeland and proceeded to squat and to live in shacks near the main industrial areas.

The movement from their homelands gathered momentum, encouraged by further industrial expansion. The type of life which could be indulged in, in the Urban Areas, was an equally powerful lure or attraction.

The migration of the population from the rural to the urban areas which had been a marked phenomena of the older industrial countries followed the same pattern in South Africa, bringing with it the same evils of slums, poverty, lack of water and proper hygiene.

Housing of this great labour force with their families around all the industrial areas, became a major problem.

South Africa, like many countries, was faced with a multitude of problems at the end of the war and it took several years before anything was done to provide suitable housing for this new urban population.

The vigorous action taken by the authorities throughout the country is an interesting story on its own and today the majority of the Urbanised Bantu are adequately housed in well laid out townships near all the Industrial Areas of the country.

The mining industry to this day is still staffed with predominantly migratory Native labour, but in manufacturing industry by contrast the trend over the last three decades has been progressively in the direction of non-migrant characteristics developing in the labour force and the adoption of urban domiciles.

This trend received a great boost as a result of slum clearance, the removal of squatter townships and the systematic housing of Natives in well planned townships equipped with all the amenities essential to life in the urban environment.

Thus an attitude of permanency has evolved, in less than four generations in the descendants of the erstwhile squatters and shanty town dwellers, in relation to their sojourn in the industrialised centres of the ~~Southern Transvaal~~ Country.

Bantu labour is one of South Africa's greatest human assets and during the last few years Manufacturing Industry has realised how vital it is to give this important natural resource very special consideration.

The Bantu labour employed in Manufacturing Industry can be classified under three main headings.

1. Migratory Labour.

We still find that a percentage of the Bantu employed are migratory. They are mainly domiciled in the native reserves where they leave their families. These men then take up employment in Industry for various periods, living in the compounds provided by their employers, or in the single hostel accommodation provided by the local authorities in the area where the Industry is situated. It is of interest to mention that the largest percentage of migratory labour in Manufacturing Industry is found in the "Mother Earth" <sup>the</sup> industries covering/Cement, Clay and Ceramics Industries.

In the main the accommodation is of a high standard and the labour is well catered for during their sojourn in the industrial areas. This type of labour varies in efficiency depending on the way it is guided.

Some of the men return to the same employers year after year. They attain a reasonable degree of efficiency whilst others drift from employer to employer and are mainly used as unskilled labour.

They all return to their homelands regularly for varying periods.

I classify this type of labour as unprogressive and the least efficient.

2. Semi-Urbanised Labour.

Then we have the urbanised worker which still retains very close contact with their tribal way of life and regularly visits their homeland.

A small percentage of this labour develops well in the semi-skilled and at times the skilled occupations, but the majority have great difficulty in fully adopting the industrial way of life.

The main reason why these good people have difficulty is due to their lack of education and, therefore, only a small percentage really become first class industrial workers.

### 3. Permanent Urbanised Labour.

The third category are the fully urbanised Bantu who live in the Townships adjoining the Industrial Areas.

A high percentage of these people both male and female have had some measure of education and many have been born in an urban environment.

Most have no tribal affiliation and do not know anything about the lands where their parents or grandparents came from.

In the main these Bantu people make good industrial workers and in many cases they are as efficient as the White, Coloured or Indian workers.

The longer the Bantu worker gets absorbed into work situations of the Western type, the more he begins to resemble the white worker in the satisfaction he expects to obtain from his work, in the role he expects to fill and the service conditions that he values or dislikes.

The Bantu likes to feel that the employer is working with him rather than for him. He prefers to be supervised by his own people who he understands much better than white supervisors. The most successful of the white supervisors is the one who understands the art of correct communication with the Bantu workers wins their confidence and develops responsible leadership.

A great deal is already being done by personnel managers to improve not only the understanding of the white supervisors but to see that the Bantu workers are correctly handled and instructed. When this is successfully achieved one finds a happy labour force which results in team work between all races employed in a factory.

In a recent survey conducted by the South African Institute of Personnel Management it was interesting to find that the extent of absenteeism in respect of the Bantu worker is considerably lower than had been generally assumed. Time lost in industry was found to be less than in countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

It was also found that the labour turnover rates of the urbanised Bantu are lower than those of the White worker and furthermore that the urbanised Bantu perform a work function better than the migratory or semi-migratory labour.

One finds that a comprehension of the importance of "Tradition of Employment" is starting to develop and that in an ever increasing number of instances both father and son are being employed in the same industry and it should be added that in certain industries the wife and daughters are also drawn into the same employment.

At present the labour force in Manufacturing Industry is composed of :-

26%	-	White
13%	-	Coloured
4%	-	Asiatic
57%	-	Bantu

The Bantu Industrial Workers employed by Manufacturing Industry now total 457,000 and the wages paid are approximately R150,000,000.00 or \$210,000,000.00 per annum.

From these figures it will be seen that the Bantu has acquired within a short span of history, a position of paramount importance in the economy.

It is good to see that Industry now recognises the importance of the Bantu which is borne out by the great deal that has already been done to improve both the wages paid and conditions of work, but a great deal more

remains to be done by everyone in South Africa for the Bantu people.

From a small beginning we are seeing that the human relations factor throughout industry is gaining momentum and I do feel that more attention is being given to personnel problems in South Africa than in many of the larger industrial countries and most definitely more than any other country on the continent of Africa.

~~You will appreciate that~~ Industry, ~~therefore~~, has a great number of problems in the employment of the various people. These problems are not only the usual industrial management problems but are real human problems that one experiences with simple people.

With the rapid industrial developments that have taken place in South Africa the wage scale of all employees has advanced considerably, the increase in the cost of living being a contributory influence. There is, however, and always has been, a wide gap between the remuneration of White skilled workers and Non-White unskilled workers which, unfortunately, has not narrowed down and, in fact, has widened in certain industries.

We, therefore, find that many of the Bantu people are living below the bread line, a state of affairs which is causing unhappiness and is contributing to the rising rate of crime and periodical unrest.

To combat this unfortunate state of affairs, during 1959 a number of leading businessmen in Commerce and Industry, being aware of the seriousness of the situation with regard to Bantu Wages and standards of living, decided to take positive and practical action to stimulate voluntary increase in Bantu Wages particularly in those industries where they were deemed to be too low.

They formed the Bantu Wage and Productivity Association which is essentially a propaganda association. It exists to propagate certain ideas throughout the Nation; the concept of better wages for the Bantu and the use of up-to-date productivity methods in the employment of the Bantu.

The Association amongst its own membership can already account for some R40m<sup>07</sup>(\$56m) being voluntarily added to the Bantu Wage Bill. Due

to its influence on public opinion, many employers of Bantu labour, not in membership with the association have also increased wages very considerably.

Furthermore, the two large industrial employer organisations, the South African Federated Chamber of Industries and the Steel & Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa, have both been unremitting in their efforts to influence the Minister of Labour to speed up the activities of the Wage Board. These representations have been met with a gratifying response as is exemplified in the large number of new wage determinations which have been Gazetted in the last eighteen months. The Wage Board is, furthermore, making more regular investigations of many industries and there is a marked trend perceivable towards narrowing down the wage gap between the White skilled and Non-White semi-skilled or unskilled workers and to improve the wages of the lower income employees.

I am doubtful whether anyother country in the world has seen such widespread and concerted action in regard to the improvement of wages of the lower income group by employers as is taking place in South Africa.

Although the wages paid to the totally unskilled Bantu are still low measured in terms of desirable standards of living, sight should not be lost of the fact that the rates paid in South Africa are in all cases very much higher than those paid in any other state in Africa or, for that matter, in the Oriental States.

If we use a unit of 100 to represent the average wages paid to the Bantu in South Africa then we find that the average wages paid to Africans in other parts of Africa are as follows :-

Central African Federation	48
Belgian Congo (before independence)	80
Ghana	66
Nigeria	64.

Whenever Bantu Wages are mentioned the question is posed "what about productivity?" In the first place, wages and productivity are economic twins which relate to all workers and I firmly believe that while the former is of great concern to the worker, the latter is the problem child of management rather than the worker. Truly productivity requires the co-operation of the worker but circumstances under which there can be greater production are the duty and function of management. The old saying that a bad workman blames his tools may be true but he can only work with such tools as he is given and in surroundings and circumstances which are provided for him by management.

Organised Industry firmly believes in the best utilisation of suitable and properly trained labour, regardless of the race of the workers. It believes that "job reservation" is not in the best interests of the country, the individual or industry as a whole, because it is calculated to create a sense of false security in the protected workers rather than a self-confidence based on pride in a job of work well done.

Organised Industry hopes that the time is not far distant when the concept of "job reservation" will be eliminated from our thinking and from the law. It is so very necessary for us to employ all our manpower resources effectively and efficiently to increase the per capita income.

At present there are no recognised Bantu Trade Unions in South Africa. In a limited number of industries Bantu employees are admitted as members of existing Trade Unions but this only takes place with a small percentage of the industrial labour force.

The large employer organisations realise that the whole structure of employer/employee relationship in modern business is based on negotiations between responsible representative bodies and there is no substitute in the Western World for bargaining between the two groups.

South Africa's excellent industrial conciliation machinery is based on this very fact and organised industry believes that all industrial workers - no matter what their colour - should have the benefit of this system.

Very serious consideration is, therefore, being given to extend the right of collective bargaining to the same group of Bantu to whom the Government is prepared to extend local government rights.

Many industries are now using scientifically controlled methods of testing the aptitude of the Bantu labour so that the workers are correctly directed to <sup>their</sup> ~~the~~ most favourable positions in industry.

Industry is also spending more time in the education of the Bantu in their own factories. Some public institutions are already doing sterling work in training the Bantu youth. But whatever is being done is only a beginning as so much more must be done to educate and train the Bantu labour.

Once employees have been correctly trained and are well treated, they have proved to be as good as any industrial worker in any part of the world. This applies to both male and female workers.

The male is particularly suited to the heavier types of industry and particularly the repetitive type of operations. Female Bantu labour has proved to be most suitable in the industries where the operation requires dexterity. I do believe that a great deal more use can be made of the female Bantu labour and that we have a vast source of untapped female labour in our many Bantu Townships.

If increased female labour was used then it will also help the economic position of the Bantu population and the country as a whole.

I have already mentioned that many human and personnel problems do exist and this particularly applies to the older men who do not have sufficient educational background to keep up with the production in modern industry. Many employers have handled this type of problem where the older, but loyal employee, is concerned <sup>the</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>of</sup> ~~in~~ these cases ~~by~~ granting special service wage <sup>have been used</sup> increments/to keep these loyal people happy.

Many/...

Many industries are now giving other matters their close attention such as both personal and industrial health. In many cases Industrial workers have a medical examination when employed and their health is watched continuously thereafter.

In terms of the Native Labour Regulations Act, all labour bureaux whether urban or rural must arrange for all work seekers to be examined by the District Surgeon before placing them in employment.

Other fringe benefits are now being provided by many South African Industries which include the following items :-

1. Canteens. Where wholesome meals are provided either on a "no charge" or "nominal charge" basis. Most of the Industrial Canteens are very heavily subsidised.
2. Clothing. Apart from the requirements of the Factories Act in regard to protective clothing and equipment, certain employers provide Industrial Clothing either free or on a subsidised basis.
3. Future Security. Is now being introduced by more and more industries either in the form of Death Benefits or Pension and Provident Fund Schemes.
4. Medical Benefit Schemes. Which also supplement loss of wages incurred during periods of illness.
5. Thrift and Saving Fund Schemes.

A number of industries have already introduced the Employees or Works Committee system into their respective organisations. The main purpose of these Committees is to improve Employer/Employee relations, develop the responsibility of the Bantu workers, help the Bantu to take a pride in the companies they work for and encourage them to make any type of suggestion to improve conditions at work.

These Committees are also used by management to help the Bantu to understand Government legislation and to help the Bantu employees with their Housing and Tax problems.

The Committees are properly constituted, regular Meetings are held in company time and they are proving to be of great assistance to both employer and employee in many industries.

I feel that the rapidity with which the Bantu in urban areas is developing is not fully comprehended by many South Africans who daily are in contact with them. The urbanised Bantu have adopted the Western way of life and are manifesting the same attributes and aspirations as Europeans in regard to pride in their dress and home life, as is proved beyond doubt when one visits any of the townships around Johannesburg. What may not be equally evident but is equally certain and of great importance in their progress and evolution is that the urban bantu are imbued with the desire to be recognised for their worth as workers and as citizens and that the spirit of self help and urge to be given a place in the sun is becoming a driving force.

Given the opportunity and treatment which is an essential to mutual respect, I feel convinced they will respond in a rational and responsible manner to the immeasurable advantage of this country and this will also cement the goodwill which we all desire between the two major races ~~of~~ South Africa.

In conclusion I must mention the great work that is being done by many Welfare Organisations. The work that is being done by these organisations and the benefits derived do not only benefit the Bantu employees but also their families.

It is indeed fortunate that in this great country there are men in Industry with the courage and determination to make South Africa a great Industrial country. I believe that economics will still prevail and that the Republic of South Africa will eventually lead the world in a successful multi-racial way of life with all races living happily together.

**Collection Number: A1132**

**Collection Name: Patrick LEWIS Papers, 1949-1987**

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:* Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

*Location:* Johannesburg

©2016

***LEGAL NOTICES:***

**Copyright Notice:** All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

**Disclaimer and Terms of Use:** Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

This collection forms part of a collection, held at the Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.