

undated

NATIVE UNEMPLOYMENT

"The General Missionary Conference of South Africa whose membership is derived from all parts of South Africa, both rural and urban, draws the attention of Government, Provincial Councils, municipalities, and the public generally to the fact that the Native people are gravely affected by the prevailing conditions of unemployment and economic distress, and the conference is satisfied that there is urgent need for active measures to relieve the sufferings of the Native population. The evidence placed before the committee of the Conference shows:

"(1) In the reserves of the Transkei, the Ciskei, Natal, Zululand, British Bechuanaland and the Northern Transvaal there is distress partly due to the shortage of food, caused by drought, partly to lack of cash through low prices and loss of employment in towns by the male adults, and partly to the return to the reserves of many unemployed Natives.

"(2) The shortage of food is manifesting itself more directly as the resources of the Native people for mutual help are being exhausted.

"(3) That even the disposal of stock - the last resource of any self-respecting Native - offers little relief as the animals are in poor condition and the prices almost negligible.

"(4) On European farms in the O.F.S. and the Cape, many Native families have been abandoned, as European families have moved into towns for relief for themselves.

"(5) In many areas wages in any form have ceased to exist and the resources of Native families are being exhausted.

"(6) The closing down of the Premier and De Beers mines added considerably to the Native distress.

"(7) On the diamond diggings many Natives are starving because they receive no wages and others are unable to maintain their families because of the low and intermittent wages.

"(8) In consequence of these factors Natives have been trying to obtain relief by entering the towns.

"(9) In most towns there is serious distress among the Natives, partly due to unemployment, the great drop in wages, and the extent to which Natives try to respond to the traditional calls of hospitality and mutual help for those in need - a response that has hitherto served to hide the extent of the distress.

"(10) Municipalities and bodies like Joint Councils are finding the growing distress quite beyond their resources.

"(11) In rural and urban areas the resources of the Natives for self-help and mutual aid have been depleted, and merely to send Natives to rural areas from the towns will cause suffering and increase the distress. The Conference has had impressed upon it by the Native members that the self-respect of the Native people requires that help to earn relief should be given rather than charity, and that this view is emphasised by the suffering everywhere.

"In the light of all the facts, the Conference feels bound to appeal to the Government and the people of the Union on behalf of the Native people and urges:

"(1) That the Government should authorise the Native Commissioners to call together those in their district having personal knowledge of the existing conditions among the Native people in the rural areas with a view to (a) ascertaining the full facts, and (b) considering relief schemes.

"(2) That the Government and municipalities should consider the inauguration of relief works in the town locations.

"(3) That as in the case of European and Coloured unemployed, the Government should set aside from the general revenue a sum to be used as grants in aid of relief schemes, especially in view of four-fifths of the proceeds of Native taxation being paid into the general revenue fund of the Union. In making these suggestions the Conference offers to secure the co-operation of members in the various areas, and pleads with all concerned to give sympathetic and humane consideration to the needs of the whole population at this critical time."

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