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NOTES AND MEMORANDA

NOTES ON WAGES AND THE COST OF LIVING IN SOUTH AFRICA.

IN South Africa occupations are, in a general way, as varied and complex as they are at home, but division of labour has not been carried out to so minute an extent. A mason, for instance, in South Africa might find it necessary to have some knowledge of brick-making, joinery, and of machinery; a carpenter would be expected to know something about wagon-building, and a blacksmith is often called to do some fitting or engineering work. That is to say, occupations or trades are not so definitely marked as at home, and experience of work is more general.

Speaking broadly, wages in South Africa are higher than at home in all trades and occupations, owing mainly to the difference in the supply of skilled labour. The average wage, for example, of a good bookkeeper ranges from £15 to £25 a month in a moderate sized business. This in turn reacts on the unskilled labourers. The presence of a coloured race, moreover, undeniably gives a higher value to the labour of white men. This has an important effect on indigency, and makes a poor white's problem quite different from the unemployed and out of work question at home. It means that those unskilled white labourers, who, through no fault of their own, fail to maintain themselves in the aristocracy of labour which is theirs by right of colour or efficiency, fall far below the level of the coloured race. If a white man at any occupation can command only the equivalent wage of a Kaffir in the mines, for instance, his case is pitiable in the extreme. For the Kaffir on his wage is rather comfortably off; he needs little clothes, and these he buys secondhand, and his food is very inexpensive; his amusements and luxuries are very low, while in addition he probably has a plot of land around his kraal at home, and this is worked by his wives. He resorts thither at intervals to rest; his income is supplemented in this way. The white man, confronted with the high cost of living and his different standard of life, is badly off. A third element that conduces to high wages is really an extension of the first, yet different in

its application. A large percentage of the skilled workers in the mines hail from the old country ; and most of the expert engineers, draftsmen and surveyors have been imported for their particular branches of work. These men having left home and home comforts must be compensated by increased wages for their loss of home privileges. This element of sacrifice of comforts enters largely into all calculations. A man before going abroad as a colonist generally weighs up whether it is worth his while, from a mercenary point of view, to leave home, friends, and prospects for a position in the new country. If he sees that the higher wage obtained will enable him to save more *ceteris paribus*, he is better off. So this element of being able to save more enters into prominence.

Some high wages paid in the mines are, as at home, due to the character of the labour and of the work, apart from supply and demand. Some types of labour are dangerous and the mortality great. In the gold mines pneumonia and phthisis are caused by the fine dust which the miner encounters in drilling the rock. These diseases may or may not be prevented, but the fact that the danger exists enters somewhat into the money price paid for the labour. The wages in the gold mines on the Rand are greater than the wages in the coalmines. A miner's wage in a gold mine averages daily from 21s. to 35s., according as he works by shift or by contract. It is rare that an actual coal-miner gets 20s. a day. The average in the Natal mines is lower, and lies between 14s. and 21s. per diem. The average wage of a carpenter, bricklayer, fitter, or the like is 20s. a day ; and while the man is single he can save about 8s. out of this and live well on the remainder. But for the married man in Johannesburg to keep a wife and family on 20s. per day is not an easy matter at the present scale of prices. Certain firms in Johannesburg discourage marriage among employees earning a salary of under £300 a year.

In the early days of the mining industry the farmers of the Transvaal were able to supply mealies, meat, eggs and vegetables to the mines, and got very good prices for them. This local market proved a great impetus to the farming industry as a whole, but after the junction of Johannesburg with the Cape by rail in 1892, and subsequently with Natal and Delagoa Bay, great quantities of food were imported from overseas, and the farmer temporarily lost his control over the market. Incidentally it may also be noted that the appearance of the railway threw out of employment a vast number of transport riders, as previous to

this all goods, foods, and merchandise, machinery, &c., were carted to the mines by wagons. The competition for a time paralysed the farmers and dislocated the supply of labour. They received a further set back owing to the war, which disorganised them and dislocated the supply of labour. During this time most of the necessities of life were imported to Johannesburg, Pretoria and other towns, by rail from the Cape and England. However, the farmers latterly are making use of the market at their doors, and soon a time will come when they will be able to supply practically all that is necessary apart from luxuries.

A general examination of retail prices of food sold to-day at Johannesburg shows a difference of from 50 to 100 per cent. in price as compared with the prices of similar articles in England. This difference is due partly to the greater cost of production and partly to the high prices obtained for other articles, such as clothes, furniture, &c. For the prices paid for these articles tend to affect prices of food by the general economic levelling up which takes place; the baker and the market gardener, having to pay the high prices demanded for the other articles, raise prices accordingly. A characteristic instance of this occurred to the writer just after landing at Capetown. After the monotony of life on board ship, a glass of milk was thought to be a delicious beverage, for all milk on board was sterilised and not very palatable. Sixpence was charged for a glass which at home would be easily procurable for a penny or twopence.

Coming to conventional necessities, there is a great variation of prices according to the article in question. It must also be borne in mind that out of a total import in 1909 of £27,000,000, £6,000,000 were articles of food and drink; and in nearly all cases there is a tax on these articles. Therefore the prices obtaining throughout South Africa differ materially from those at home, not only by the extra cost of freights, but also by the amount of the duty. And as happens in nearly all protected countries where food and other necessities are taxed, the prices of luxuries and amusements are correspondingly greater than in those countries where the former are not taxed. This is simply an illustration of the interdependence of economic facts; we cannot raise the wages of the plasterer without at the same time affecting the wages of the carpenter. Crockery, articles of decoration, sweets, paintings and fixtures are from 50 to 200 per cent. dearer than at home. Tobacco, a conventional necessary, is cheaper, as a great deal is grown in the country, but if one wants English tobacco one has, of course, to pay more for it. Beer,

lemonade, &c., are all 100 per cent. more than at home, also prices of admission to theatres and other places of amusement, items which are really important factors in a town-dweller's expenditure.

But the greatest difference in the cost of living in South Africa as compared with home, especially in the towns, is undoubtedly rent. This factor stands pre-eminent. It is particularly so in Johannesburg and Pretoria. There are three main causes for this; firstly, the high value attached to the land in and near the gold mines; secondly, the scarcity of houses; thirdly, the cost of labour and material. People at first were too much engrossed in digging or speculating for gold to trouble about building houses. The dominating idea was to make money and get away. Again, materials and labour being high, houses could not be put up at a small cost. Since 1908, in and around the big towns of Cape-town, Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Durban, with the advent of tramways, suburbs are springing into existence, thus bringing cheaper land and healthier surroundings within reach of the townspeople.

To-day the building trade is very flourishing in all these districts and houses are being built remarkably quickly. This tends, of course, to lower rent and to bring a healthier tone to the municipality; but even now prices are high. Two rooms, very small and unfurnished, 8 feet by 10 feet, and 10 feet by 12 feet, two miles from the market square in a poor quarter of Johannesburg, fetched £5 a month. In the same quarter there were two rows of workmen's cottages with four rooms and a bathroom, but no kitchen, at £6 10s. a month. These, too, in a dusty, very dirty part of the town, quite near to the mines. In the suburbs a four-roomed house with kitchen and bathroom, suitable for an artisan, was obtainable for from £8 to £12 a month. In the country districts rent is, of course, lower, and a house of the latter description, with a good garden, at a place like Vryheid, in Zululand, ranges from £4 to £7 a month.

Mr. Aiken, in his report before the British Association on the "Cost of living in Johannesburg," says: (1) A brick house of four rooms and a kitchen costs as follows:—

<i>Materials.</i>			<i>Labour.</i>		
	£	s. d.		£	s. d.
House, brick, stone, and mortar	142	17 0	Skilled	194	14 0
Imported wood and iron gates and furnishings...	150	15 1	Unskilled native	44	7 0
	<u>£293</u>	<u>12 1</u>		<u>£239</u>	<u>1 0</u>

(2) For a brick house of three rooms, kitchen, and bathroom, the total cost would be a little less, viz., £495 15s. 8d. A wood and iron house costs less. The estimates given are contractors' costs, and in ordinary circumstances the costs to a proprietor, not a builder himself, will probably be at least 10 per cent. higher. This is to say a house of No. 1 description would cost £585, of No. 2 description £545. The value of the ground would be on an average £200, and in some cases much more. Thus, from the above, the total price must be £785 for No. 1, and £745 for No. 2, on which a rental of £96 to £144 per annum is charged.

Comparing above with figures given in the Board of Trade's report, Cd. 3864 (1908), we find the average English artisan pays on an average from 4s. 6d. to 5s. 6d. a week in the case of four roomed, and 5s. 6d. to 6s. 6d. in the case of a five-roomed house of this description. That is to say, at the most, about £16 18s. a year, as compared with anything from £60 to £96 and £144 per annum in South Africa, prices varying from country to town.

There are one or two other items which it would be well to note under this heading. The first is the cost of travelling. On the railways there are only two classes, first and second, third being usually reserved for natives. Generally speaking, everyone who is anybody travels first, and only the lower middle class travels second. Distances are greater and fares dearer than at home. Certain concessions are made for long distances and return fares, season holiday ticket, &c., but even then the cost is great. A return ticket from Vryheid to Johannesburg (622 miles) costs £5 first class. The railways of the whole of South Africa are now under one management; they are owned by the State, and in the past they have been worked at a large profit; naturally it has been pointed out that this is an indirect form of taxation. Since the Union great economies have become possible, some of which have already been carried out, while others are promised. As is natural in a country where high wages are general, holiday-making is proportionately expensive, as distances to the coast are very great, and the cost of accommodation is generally dear.

Another element is the cost of education. Primary education in the Transvaal is free, but not in Natal and Cape Colony. Under the Union it is proposed soon to make education free and compulsory. Great strides have been taken by Natal, which is pushing ahead rapidly; but even so there are only a few good high schools, and these are expensive, as the pupils in the country have to travel long distances and pay for board. Books and

stationery, too, are very expensive; in our opinion too much so considering the fact that they are imported free of duty. The booksellers must be making more than a fair remunerative profit on their sales. For example, all the 1s. net books in the Everyman or World's Classics are charged 1s. 6d. here, except at the coast towns and in one or two places in Johannesburg, where they are 1s. 3d. On books which are not net the increased charge is often much greater.

It will be seen on examining the import and export lists of South Africa that the country as yet does not produce sufficient articles of food and drink for itself; the main bulk of its energies is devoted to mining and not to manufactures, which therefore must be imported. It naturally follows that these will be dearer than at home, whence most of them come. In addition to the cost of freight thither, must be reckoned the tariff, varying according to different articles, on all manufactures.

Following the method passed by the Indigency Report of the Transvaal for 1908, certain comparative figures for the cost of living can be obtained to give a general idea of the difference in the cost of living of the working classes in both countries. (The basis of comparison being the report of the Board of Trade, Cd. 3864, 1908.) The figures given in the report are based on the working-class budgets of 1,944 families in 72 towns, whose weekly wages vary from 20s. a week to over 50s. The average wages of properly qualified artisans in such trades as the building, engineering, furniture-making, and printing trades, are between 30s. and 42s. per week, and the wages of their labourers and assistants vary from 18s. to 27s. per week.

Taking first the case of the qualified artisan whose earnings amount to 35s. to 40s. a week, an examination of 292 cases in England shows that on an average each family earns 36s. 6½d. per week, that the number of children is 3·4, and that 22s. 3d. is spent in food per week, viz., 60 per cent. of its income. The average weekly diet consists of the following articles :—

10 lbs. Flour	20 lbs. Bread	6½ lbs. Meat
1½ „ Bacon	¼ „ Cheese	2 „ Butter
16 „ Potatoes	2½ „ Rice	¾ „ Tea
¼ „ Coffee	5½ „ Sugar	10½ pints Milk
12 Eggs	2½ „ Tapioca and Oatmeal	

To these must be added a certain quantity of vegetables, jams, currants, and condiments, costing on an average 3s. 10½d. per week, under "Other Costs" heading.

By calculating the cost of these articles of the same quality in

Johannesburg and the rent, we get at an approximate comparison of costs at actual figures.

Artisan class, per week :—

<i>London.</i>				<i>Johannesburg.</i>	
			s. d.		
Food	...	...	25	2	34s. 9½d.
Rent	...	...	5	6	25s. to 40s.
Other costs	...	...	8	9½	18s. 7d.
Total	...	...	39	5½	78s. 4½d. to 93s. 4½d.

Thus these totals represent the weekly expenditure in London and Johannesburg respectively. An artisan, therefore, in Johannesburg would require at least from £16 to £20 a month in order to live at the same standard in the matter of food, style of house, clothing, &c., as he would require if living in England. As the standard of life is somewhat higher in the Transvaal this figure is somewhat low. Thus the cost of living is almost exactly double on an average. Taking the efficiency as being equal, his labour is probably over three times as expensive when we take into consideration the standard of life and comfort.

It is unnecessary to compare in detail the weekly budget of the labouring class, for in reality the white unskilled labourer, as a class, is at present hardly existent. Large numbers, if not the greater number, of unskilled labourers in England get less than 21s. 4d. per week. The labourer in Johannesburg, say, living at the standard of the English labourer, would require about £8 a month if he lived in a cheap two-roomed house (non-existent at present), and up to £10 a month if he lived in what would be a respectable house.

The cost of living is of course considerably less in country towns, mainly owing to the difference in rent. In the case of groceries the variation from Johannesburg prices is small; in fact in country towns it was found that groceries cost more because, though the railway and freight charges would be about the same, the turnover was less; competition and large turnovers in the big towns tend to lower prices. Johannesburg prices are highest in meat, country prices from 15 per cent. to 20 per cent. lower. Milk is 30 per cent. cheaper in the country than on the Rand. Eggs 40 per cent. lower in the country than in Johannesburg, bread is nearly the same in all towns, but in some country places it is up to 15 per cent. cheaper. Taking rent, food, and coal together, the cost of living in Pretoria, Pietersburg, and Vereeniging is from 8 per cent. to 12 per cent. less than it is along the Rand, while in other towns on the Transvaal it is from 15 to

20 per cent. cheaper. In rural districts the cost of living is on the whole considerably less. A fair idea may be obtained as follows : board and lodging for single men in the country costs £6 10s. a month, including washing ; the same type of room and food in Johannesburg would cost from £9 9s. to £10 10s. per month. In the coast towns the prices vary from £7 to £8 10s.

J. MORGAN REES

A NEW HISTORY OF THE POST OFFICE.

A SYSTEM of Posts has existed in this country for nearly five hundred years for the conveyance of Government despatches, and as a public service for about three hundred years. It is a curious fact that the first serious attempt to write a history of this service was not made until about fifty years ago. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the union of England and Scotland made the organisation of the Postal Service an important part of Government administration. The constitutional struggle between the Crown and Parliament which followed made the control of the Posts a matter of serious contention between the two parties. In the first half of the century proclamation followed proclamation for the control of Posts, and in the second half the importance of the Post Office as a source of revenue and as an instrument for the encouragement of trade and commerce became more fully recognised ; but although the journals of Parliament and the records of the public departments were considerably occupied with matters relating to the Postal Service, no general writings on the subject are available for the historical student.

In the eighteenth century the revenue of the Post Office increased rapidly, and attention was more and more turned to it as a source of supplies in support of the wars in which this country was engaged, the rates of postage being increased by successive Ministries. The extension of the system of Posts to meet commercial requirements also obtained much attention, although perhaps more in the interests of revenue than of the welfare of the country. Members of Parliament took a steady interest in the franking privileges which they enjoyed, and to such an extent that the interval between one Parliament and another caused a marked increase in the postal revenue of the year. Nevertheless, no history of the Post Office was written, and in those days public departments gave no account of their proceedings in annual reports.