

Mr. Thornton

but in reality he is not paid at all by the landowner ?--  
Quite so.

Now, how is that wage worked to get round the Land Act?

Well, in reality the man produces crops which are sold and he is paid out of the sale of these crops. It covers him as far as the law is concerned. I hope you do not want me to point out any individual on that particular point, but I do think that there can be no doubt that that system restricts the labour supplies - for one thing, the man is not a free agent -- it restricts labour for agriculture and for other purposes.

DR. ROBERTS: It comes down to this, that he is tied. ?-- Yes; and then that necessarily must lead to this; that man may lie there and do nothing. He may be called upon by the owner of the property at any time, but, in the meantime, he simply loaf about. Now, that must encourage laziness and unthrifty methods which is a most undesirable thing, because, after all, industry is the result of training. You can train a man to be lazy or hardworking. This simply means that you are training him to be lazy.

He is naturally lazy and that simply adds to it ?-- Yes. Then I think speaking on the European side of it, - it leads to unprogressive methods. It is through that type of labour, under which he can be called upon at any time that unprogressive methods are created. If the farmer had to employ labour and pay for it, and that labour lay idle for a time, say for a day, it would mean that that farmer would be paying his 2/- or whatever it was, for nothing, so you would soon see to it that he found something to keep his labour employed right through and that would induce him to go looking for better farming methods. I say that this system reacts

Mr. Thornton

just as badly on the European.

CHAIRMAN: Under the present system, he has no method of management or control?-- No. The other man who has to pay for his labour will say, "I cannot afford to leave my workmen to stand idle today and I shall have to give them something to do, - I shall have to introduce new methods. I had better have a few cows which have to be milked and looked after." But to the man who has not got to pay for his labour it does not matter and he will simply leave them idle, unless there is something definite for them to do.

Your cure for that position is dealt with in the next paragraph and it seems to be that one of the main principles of the Land Act should be given up. You say there if we did away with the squatting system and replaced it by the metayage or share-tenant system, this system would give the reverse results to those shown in my first paragraph, and, in addition, efficiency of agricultural labour would increase?-- Yes.

That is your considered view?-- Yes.

MR. LUCAS: Will you explain that a bit more clearly please?-- If I had a good farm, I would say, I shall pick 50 Natives and give each 20 or 40 acres, whatever a family can work, and we would work that on a share basis. I would say, "I shall supply the seeds and fertilizers and the stock to work the land". Well, the worker would receive one half-share in the crop and I would receive the other half-share. The labour, which would be the great factor in the cost of production, would be removed, we would share and share alike in good and bad seasons. My cost of production would be comparatively low and so would the Native's cost of production

Mr. Thornton

DR. ROBERTS: Has that not proved unsatisfactory where it has been tried?-- (No answer)?

CHAIRMAN: You want something different from the share system, you want the metayage system?-- I may say this system was introduced by Napoleon and it was that which largely made France. They have gone on with it until these people owned the land, but it started through that system. The great advantage of it is that that person is thoroughly educated and shewn how to work by the organizing head over him.

MR. LUCAS: Your proposal differs from anything we have had, in that the owner of the land supplies the seed and the fertilizer and the stock and the only thing which the tenant supplies is his labour?-- Yes.

Whereas today the tenant has to take the risk of the seed and the fertilizer?-- Yes.

DR. ROBERTS: Not always?-- Generally. The great thing is to ensure good seed and good fertilization of the land and good management of the land and you supply the stock to work that land properly and then you have to see that the labourer himself does the work.

CHAIRMAN: This would involve direct supervision by the landowner?-- Yes.

In that way, it would mean an improvement of the pre-1913 Share system?-- Yes, that is an essential part of it. Each man would be a first class small holder under that system.

MAJOR ANDERSON: How could you do that? You would make it only legal if the owner did these things?-- It would have to be done under a definite contract and we must have a law to bring that about.

Mr. Thornton

It would be very difficult to carry out; would it not probably go back to the old share system?-- A man would have the right to appeal under the law at once.

The Native would have the right?-- Yes, but you could not do it without a legal backing - it would be impossible

Then it would be a contract, just the same as if I entered into a contract with ~~them~~ him.

MR. LUCAS: What period would you lay down so as to give some sense of security?-- I think there should be at least a minimum of 5 years with an option of renewal for a further five years and in really difficult bush-covered land, which has to be cleared, even a longer period would have to be given, say ten years.

DR. ROBERTS: Would you be prepared to go a little further and say that at the end of, say, the fifth year, the onus of proving that the man was incapable would be on the proprietor of the land? Unless he were able to prove that the crofter was incapable or that there was something wrong with him, he should be able to remain?-- I do not know that I would be prepared to say that, because both would be making a profit out of the business and, if there were one individual who would be working badly and did not shew a profit, one should be able to get rid of him, to get him off the land.

CHAIRMAN: Native witnesses all over the country have put this point very strongly before us, that that particular clause of the Land Act should be abolished, but then they wanted a reversion to the pre-1919 system and incidentally the right of renting. Do you think that a reversion to the pre-1919 system would be a good thing?-- I do not think

Mr. Thornton

that that system would lead to as good a system of production as the other, and I do not think it will be as advantageous to the Natives and the Europeans. After all, this system will ensure a big output from this country along right lines at low costs, which will render the whole of the country economically well off, and I do not think that the other system will do that.

Do you think that European farmers, excepting unprogressive ones, would be prepared to revert to the 1919 system?-- No, I do not think so.

Whereas, if they can have this system which at the same time would produce a decent production per morgen of ground, they would be prepared to go in for that?-- There are hundreds who would jump at it.

This would be a further ingress on territorial segregation?-- Yes, it is the parting of the ways. What I am trying to visualise is this. If we cannot segregate territorially, then rather adopt a policy which does not mean the extinction of European civilisation which is to the disadvantage of Natives and Europeans -- in other words, do not let us set up a state of competition such as exists in certain American States today, where the Native wage has dragged the European down to the Native level, as far as wages are concerned, -- and that is the thing which has caused the crash.

Q/ I take it that the explanation which you have just given about the cost of production is what you referred to in paragraph 2 on page 5, "If this system were once brought into vogue, it would make South Africa one of the countries where the cost of production would, in certain lines of farming, be the lowest in the world."?-- Yes, that would bring us to the lowest possible cost of production.

Mr. Thornton

MR. LUCAS: Your idea would be that the owner of this land would occupy himself with supervising his tenants?-- Yes.

He himself would not be a farmer in the sense of the word today ?-- No, he would not.

MAJOR ANDERSON: Would you apply the same system to pastoral stock-owning by Natives ?-- No, you cannot apply it in the same sense, except on a much wider scale. It is not really a possible system, except where you can have diversified farming.

It includes dairying ?-- Yes.

Where the stock would be the property of the tenant ?-- It might be the property of the tenant or of the landlord.

MR. LUCAS: There would have to be different conditions ?-- Yes, you would have to have different conditions.

CHAIRMAN: Pure pastoralism in small areas is bound to fail ?-- Yes.

You must have something rather better?-- Yes.

The Commission adjourned at 12.45 p.m. until 2.30 p.m.

-----

On the Commission resuming at 2.30 p.m., the examination of Mr. Thornton was continued.

CHAIRMAN: On page 5 of your statement, section (5), you say, "Expansion of the European rural population would cease. In any case, such degree of expansion as is possible at present will not be possible under this system. But, in any case, such expansion will be negligible." You say expansion of the European rural population would cease. I do not know that that follows ?-- It might ultimately expand very greatly. If these people were cleared off the land again,-- but you would have nowhere to put them. If the land is once

Mr. Thornton

occupied by these share tenants, then where is the European going to? There is no space.

MR. LUCAS: Are there not some forms of agriculture where the Europeans even under a system like this, could find a resting place?-- I do not think so.

It would mean that you would have these supervisors in the rural areas and the Europeans elsewhere -- in industries and so on?-- Your stock districts would remain the same, but they can only take a very small percentage more of people and the increase would be very small. The area which you would cultivate would carry a dense population. That would mean restricting your European population if you are to have these tenants.

Is not the mechanisation of agriculture likely in some of the richer areas and so likely to lead to openings for Whites?-- Not if this system is adopted, because the land will be worked on the share tenant system and, if the landlord considers that it will be better to introduce more machinery to work it more <sup>econom</sup>~~mechanically~~, he will do that with his tenants. I have here definitely and I say distinctly it is the parting of the ways.

MAJOR ANDERSON: What is the system - you are contemplating the Native worker being content with something like his present low standard of living, but if he wants to rise in the scale, may not your system be inclined to break down?-- This is a system of peasant-farming, the same as in Denmark. It is a permanent system. You will get ~~the~~ people who want greater salvation than what they will secure through this system, but supposing it happens in a hundred years time. The only place where they will get a greater share in this world's wealth will be through industry.

Mr. Thornton

MR. LUCAS: Large numbers of Natives have a very much higher standard of living than it is possible for the Native farm labourer to get today, and probably higher than the majority of your share tenant Natives will be able to get?-- I do not think so. I think that today you are right, there are many Natives who have a much higher standard of living than their neighbours, but if we reach the stage in 50 or 100 years' time of the standard of living of the Danish land owner, your peasant of today will then, under this system, support that standard of living. If you take the standard of living at £36, the average standard on, say, another 50 years will be £72 and the land will bring up that additional amount through the better system of diversified farming, because you cannot introduce the most complete system to start with. These people will have to be trained to it.

MAJOR ANDERSON: You know Mr. Henry Ford's theory is that it will not pay any farmer to dairy on a small scale, but he has to do it on a factory scale and he must have 50 or 60 tractors and so on. That practically means the mechanization of farming. If he is right, can a peasant system stand up against it?-- No, then you reach the stage which Dean Inge mentioned, that England has a population of 20 million. That 20 million will be reaping the benefit of the present millions that you have in England. Then you must have a decrease in your population. Mr. Ford's arrangement allows of a small population, a very small population occupying a huge area, but that is not possible in the world today, it is not practical politics. But when you get your population standing still and decreasing, as it

Mr. Thornton

will do and as it does in every country, then you arrive at that standard.

Unless you find other occupations for the people at present on the lands ?-- Yes, in industries and even then it is doubtful whether they will make any more than they make at this per family unit, because, in the manufacturing centres, the individual makes very little more than the man on the land, when you take all the disabilities in the shape of rents, water supply and more costly food and things of that description.

MR. LUCAS: There the difference is merely in the degree of freedom ?-- Yes.

MAJOR ANDERSON: There is another difference. The Russians are trying to work it on their State farm, and they claim that they are succeeding, but one cannot say whether they are ?-- If you go into it carefully, as I have done, through the literature which I have been able to get hold of, I think it amounts very much to slavery, to slave labour.

DR. ROBERTS: It is slave labour ?-- It is very close to it.

It is the Government ordering a man that he must do as he is told. (No answer):

That may be a feature of it, but it does not seem a necessary part of the system. They may be working it on a basis which you may consider is slave labour, but that may be only a passing phase ?-- If that system were evolved along right lines, it would develop into this system in which each man takes a fair share of the profits, as Mr. Ford's men do. In that gigantic factory, things are equivalent to a gigantic farming scheme, and then they are not slaves.

Mr. Thornton

MAJOR ANDERSON: The Russian system is one of central management?-- Yes. Mr. Ford's scheme is one of central management on a great big farm.

Under your scheme, you go in for the very opposite?-- No; also central management.

MR. LUCAS: It would be central management for each farm?-- Yes. If there is a farm with 100 tenants on it, central management is vested in the landlord who has these tenants.

DR. ROBERTS: He is a dictator?-- Yes, under this scheme of mine, he is. But you are giving that power of dictatorship under the law which lays down certain requirements which have to be fulfilled by both contracting parties.

MR. LUCAS: We have not got that system now and it would involve an alteration of several of our laws. Supposing we just made these alterations and adopted a policy which certainly was not hostile to this, do you think that this would develop by itself in a reasonably short time?-- Yes, it would develop very rapidly.

Could you visualise what the effects would be in an area where one or two farmers took this up and their neighbours did not?-- Yes; the result would be that the one or two who took it up would be extremely prosperous and their prosperity would force the others to take it up --- if your neighbour is making £5,000 a year and you are making only £500 a year, it stands to reason that you must follow his lead.

DR. ROBERTS: Have you taken into account too what the attitude of the Native, with his conservative quality of mind, would be to an organization of that kind?-- Yes, I think he would welcome it.

You know the Native better than anybody, but I am not

Mr. Thornton

so sure in my own mind ?-- Yes, I think he would welcome it.

MR. LUCAS: The type of Natives who would be affected are those who are already on the farms ?-- That is so.

And they have broken away from tribal control and from the general conservatism of the Native ?-- Yes, you take that lot whom I have at Middelton. If I had a group of men like those, I would make a very great success of it.

DR. ROBERTS: And you think that they are common in mind and in outlook with the general body of Natives ?-- No; there are a big section today who would still say "We would rather stay in the reserves". That undoubtedly is so.

It is a new idea altogether ?-- The thing is this. The other side of the picture is, can we retain them in their areas. If not, on account of their vastly greater numbers, what are we going to do with them. I do not like the idea. As I put it here, the idea of Native tenants surrounding Europeans is certainly not enticing. I do not want the Natives to have ownership of land. If this is not considered, which it would not be by the Government, we presume then we must then get permanency of tenure with a sufficiency of land in the Native areas -- we must get permanency of tenure and sufficient land in the Native areas. That means this, that we have got a Germany and a France. We will say the European section is France and the other is Germany. We have then to work out the salvation of the Natives in that area and we cannot do that; under the communal system, there is no hope of our doing that.

You mean, there is no progress under the communal system ?-- No.

That is to say that the communal system is only fit

Mr. Thornton

for a backward people ?-- That is so. We have to face the two issues.

MAJOR ANDERSON: If the Russians do succeed in their experimenting with the communal system, - the communal system would suit them. They have expropriated all the land and they have made it communal property. If they are going to produce cheaper, as they claim, than can be produced by individuals, is there not a chance of the rest of the world having to follow suit, or else allow Russia to become the sole provider of agricultural produce which <sup>she</sup> is out to become?-- Russia will produce, under that system, at a cost which Canada or Australia will not be able to touch. They have expropriated the land. They will farm on a large scale, with mechanical means. If they had expropriated and farmed with the tenants on the land, they would have built up a very sound national scheme of agriculture for their people. But they dispossessed the land, dispossessed the people from the land, they mechanised everything and used the people as slaves in the machine. From the point of production costs today, they may carry on. Whether they will be able to carry on for any length of time - I do not know. They will certainly kill us from the point of production costs, but we may be able to stand up under this scheme.

DR. ROBERTS: Your scheme, as I understand it, has nothing of communism in it, in fact, it is the very antithesis of communism ?-- That is so.

MAJOR ANDERSON: If they had succeeded, and if they had succeeded and if they were able to produce at a lower cost and at the same time gave a better living to the in-

Mr. Thornton

individuals engaged in farming, it would mean making it very attractive to other countries?-- Will any democratic country permit such a state of affairs. At the present time if outside of the Transvaal, some system of permanency of tenure of land with restriction of stock were provided for, there is no doubt that we would enable the Natives to produce a great deal more and live satisfactorily in the Native areas. In the Transvaal, we have not got enough land. Half the population live on other people's land. We have to meet their requirements. Supposing we were able to put those conditions into force and meet the requirements of the population. In the good areas we can halve the land, halve the 40 acres and they can still manage even if they increase to £72 instead of £36. When we reach that limit, unless the population will become stationary, if it reaches the point of saturation, they must brim over out of these Territories.

DR. ROBERTS: Are you visualising a body of overseers of a quality which we do not possess in large numbers?-- Do you mean under this metayage system?

Yes, they might grow up to it?-- I think we have a large number.

MR. LUCAS: Yes, you have a large number, but there will not be room for their sons?-- No.

Their sons will have to find something else?-- Just so. That cannot be avoided. As I say, it is one of two courses, individual tenure of some description on the one hand with certain strong measures taken, or this other system which I have referred to.

CHAIRMAN: You seem to think that the increase of the European population will not be able to compete under this

Mr. Thornton

system with the increased Native population ?-- I have tried to puzzle that out. Taking it on the one side that the Natives have taken all the land -- 17 million morgen of land out of 143 million ----

DR. ROBERTS: According to the new idea, they are to obtain almost another 10 millions ?-- I am taking it as the figure stands today, 17 millions out of 143 millions. The White population will increase more rapidly than the Native population; I do not think there is any doubt about that.

CHAIRMAN: Why ?-- On account of the greater facilities, the better health condition of the Europeans generally. The European land owner's family is decreasing, but it has not decreased to such a marked extent as the Native family has. I think, for a time, there will perhaps be a better increase for the Europeans on that account, but I doubt whether they could keep pace. If we can get a population saturation on both sides before another 200 years' time, so that the population in both cases would become stationary, I think everything would be alright, but it seems to me that in the 17 million morgen you will find a condition of great congestion and the Natives will have to look for more land to meet their requirements with the result that there will be so much less for the European requirements, and they will say we must extend that land. My first calculation was purely on securing saturation on both sides in 200 years.

DR. ROBERTS: Do you not think that saturation will be reached in 100 years' time for the Natives, if it is not reached now ?-- It may be that we shall get that on account

Mr. Thornton

of the improved medical attention which we are now providing for them. If we see the improvement which we have made from the livestock point of view, then there is no saying what we may do from the population point of view.

Take the case of Scotland, where they have been absolutely stationary for the last 20 years?-- Yes.

And you would not say that they are not fertile in Scotland?-- No, I would not.

MR. LUCAS: Why do you take this 17 million figure?-- I take 17 million on account of the other types of land on which the Natives are.

Are you taking 6 millions as representing the farm lands occupied by Natives?-- I am taking mission lands, lands that have been purchased, etc. I have some figures here: Native reserves and locations, 11,164,000 morgen; Mission land and reserves, that is, mission reserves and mission lands, 538,343 morgen: Native owned farms, 1 million morgen; Crown land occupied by Natives, 942,000 morgen, Land owned by Europeans, but occupied by Natives, 4,156,000 morgen, giving a total of 17,800,000 morgen.

What did you mean by that last figure of 4,000,000 morgen?-- Out of that total of 4 million, 3 million is in the Transvaal. Most of that is Company land occupied by Natives today, where they have Native tenants. A small portion of it is private farms.

That is apart from Natives on European farms?-- Yes, it has nothing to do with Natives on European farms.

It is not acres?-- No, morgen.

Now, on page 6 of your statement, you say that the present communal location system will result in the Native driving the European from this country through economic

Mr. Thornton

pressure. The Europeans must choose now before economic conditions force the position beyond control. I do not quite see how you arrive at this?-- Yes; because the land, the 11 million morgen of land today is rapidly being rendered valueless from the farming point of view. What are we going to do with it, it is being ruined, and they have to have a place to live somewhere. They are turning a large portion of that land into what will become, as it has become in North Africa, desert land.

Yes, but how does that drive the European from the country?-- Where is he going to? We cannot support millions of indigents. The drones will be far more than the worker bees. If we have to spend millions on maintaining these people, we cannot do it. I am putting the case in its extreme, of course.

They are not entirely drones, even if their area is rendered worthless?-- But a farmer cannot employ more than is necessary to run his farm. Supposing we had on our hands today 500,000 Natives for whom we had no work, we would have to pay for relief work to keep these people alive, and can we afford to do that for ever-increasing numbers?

That 500,000 will not appear as a sudden phenomenon, it will gradually creep up to it?-- I will grant you that.

And that will mean a depression of wage rates which will mean that certain lands now beyond the margin of cultivation, will come within the margin of cultivation?-- You can only depress the wage rates to a subsistence level.

Yes, but that subsistence level can still be maintained by working zones just outside the margin of cultivation now?-- No. I think that margin will be covered by mechanical means.

**Collection Number: AD1438**

**NATIVE ECONOMIC COMMISSION 1930-1932, Evidence and Memoranda**

**PUBLISHER:**

*Collection funder:- Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation*

*Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive*

*Location:- Johannesburg*

**©2013**

**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.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of the archive of the South African Institute of Race Relations, held at the Historical Papers Research Archive at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.