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NATIVE ECONOMIC COMMISSION.

FIFTH PUBLIC SITTING.

PIETERSBURG. AUGUST 7th, 1930.

10 a.m.

PRESENT :

Dr. J.E. Holloway (Chairman),

Major R.W. Anderson, Mr. A.M. Mostert,
Dr. H.C.M. Fourie, Dr. A.W. Roberts,
Mr. F.A.W. Lucas, K.C. Senator P.W. le Roux van Niekerk.

Mr. C. Faye (Secretary).

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

Mr. JOHN FREDERICK KIRSTEN, called and examined:

THE CHAIRMAN: I understand that you have lived in this district for a long time? - I have lived here for 37 years. I am an attorney. It is rather difficult to start giving any information on the points on which you wish to hear evidence. As regards the question of the conditions of the natives now and 37 years ago, it is difficult to say whether there has been any great change. One hardly notices it, because things go so gradually and so slowly really that unless you sit down deliberately and try to see what is taking place you cannot note any change. But I have no doubt that the condition of the native, that is of the country native, not of the town native, has improved tremendously. The reason one way is because of the extension of the locations and the number of natives who acquire land. The acquisition of land as you will know is always an inducement to the native. After all, today it is an inducement to the native to work and to save because he has got the opportunity now to acquire land for himself.

In the old days the native really had practically nothing to induce him to work, he had nothing to save for. It is true he could buy a few head of cattle, but beyond doing that there was nothing for him to look forward to. He had the grazing for his cattle, so why should he work? The native is passionately fond of owning his own land, and there is no doubt that the native, if you can get statistics, has acquired a tremendous amount of land. He has acquired that land under the Native Land Act; under Section 11 you will see what I mean.

MR. LE ROUX VAN NIEKERK: Section 11 of which Act - which Act gives him the right to acquire land? - I mean under the Act of 1911. You will see there is a tremendous amount of land which has been acquired by the native, and they have paid for it, and they are still paying for it. All this has induced the native to put much more energy into his work and to do more continuous work. A lot of it is done individually - a lot of the land is bought individually - but they also do it collectively. A lot of these farms are bought by the so-called, by these pseudo tribes. They are really not tribes at all, they are a combination of a certain number of natives who have come together for the purpose of securing land among themselves. It is wonderful to see the amount of money they collect and the amount of energy which they put into their farming operations and so on. I am talking now of the district native. You take the position as it is today. I do not know that formerly the native had any need for these combinations. They had a few head of

cattle and there was no need for them to produce more than would suffice for their own wants and to enable them to buy wives and blankets. You will find that today they have raised tens of thousands of bags of kaffir corn purely for market purposes, and the greater proportion of that money which they get for their corn is to pay for land and to buy land, and to buy more land, if it is available. I do not think they live luxuriously, but their great aim is to buy land. And for that reason, and through his own exertions, the native today is better off than he was in the past. He works on his own land and that is his great aim. And further, the native cannot help being improved by seeing how the European works and cultivates his land. And furthermore, the native realises that there is a market for his goods. Communications, too, are much better than they used to be in the past and that is an inducement to him to do better work. The main thing is the collecting of money for his lands, which is his great aim. I have no doubt that taking the native on the average that he is from three to four times better off than he was before. He has the inducement of being able to acquire land and the old condition of being kept on the farm has passed. What I mean to say is that the natives are no longer kept on the basis of farm tenants. I am not talking of farms that were unoccupied. But when the natives lived with the farmer the fact was that they did not have much scope for extension. They could keep only a certain number of cattle, because the owner of the land would not allow them to expand and extend indefinitely. But now that he can acquire his own land I think he works very much better than in the past. I am not going to say that they are good and economic workers; on the contrary, they are perhaps very wasteful in their methods, but cer-

tainly they do very much better and more work and you certainly can no longer say that the native is satisfied with the production of forty or fifty bags of corn. It is nothing for him today to reach 300 or 400 bags. His methods no doubt are primitive, but not to the extent that they were thirty or forty years ago. In lots of cases the native today gets better seed, and I even see natives on farms who are actually manuring their lands. It still happens that you can go to kraals and buy manure from him, but in places I have seen they use their own manure to fertilise their own land. They are making progress in their methods, and I think they work more and they work economically. The natives at this work are very much better off even than they were thirty years ago. There are native commissioners here who get much more in touch with them and they can tell you of the tremendous strides that they have made. There are tremendous improvements in their methods of cultivating their land. How long it will last with this extravagant way which they have is another question, but probably in time they will learn to apply modern methods in fertilising and so on. Now, in regard to cattle, of course they raise their cattle still in the same old way, and I do not think they have made very much progress in the way of improving their cattle breeding. They have their own methods, and I am afraid it is very largely a case of the survival of the fittest. They accumulate enormous numbers of cattle; I do not know whether they do it individually, but at one time there was a tremendous trade with scrub cattle done for the Johannesburg market. I do not know whether there is so much now. I think that when they bought their land they sold a lot of their scrub cattle and in addition the drought has probably

carried off a considerable number; not to the extent that they are suffering from want of milk and cattle; they are not short. Economically I think the native is better off in this part than he was 30 years ago, and even 20 years ago. At any rate, he has gone ahead within the last 17 years, since the 1913 act, and you could say that he has made tremendous strides in the last twenty years.

THE CHAIRMAN: You think that the advent of the Natives Land Act has given an incentive to the buying of land by natives? - Undoubtedly.

MR. LUCAS: Why should that be; it did not authorise them to buy land any more than they had the power to do before? - Yes, before they could not acquire land except with a lot of trouble.

THE CHAIRMAN: And they have taken full advantage of the Act? - Yes, they have taken very great advantage of it, and I think the native commissioners here can tell you about that. In the one part I know that there are a number of farms bought by natives and that those natives now are ploughing the bulk of the area. These natives have formed themselves into a tribe; they are perhaps small syndicates of perhaps thirty, or forty, or more.

Do you think that that acquisition of land by natives has had a favourable effect on their economic situation? - Most certainly.

Inasmuch that they have rather more room today? - Yes, rather more room and also that they own their own land, which a native has a tremendous attachment for, and in another way it is an inducement for the native to

work better with the object of acquiring land.

Is it not possible that it may have retarded the improvement --- has it not led rather to the acquisition of land and not to the better cultivation of land, Is it not a fact that they do not work their lands so well as they might - they do not adopt the best methods? - Well, one might argue that. You can argue with the native as much as you like, but you will find it very difficult to convince him. I am not an expert farmer myself, but if you were to take the average farmer - even with him, it is difficult to make him go in for the most modern ideas. If you are going to apply that to the native and confine him too much and if you are to say to him that he must learn more modern methods --- well I am afraid I do not know what will be the end.

DO you think the desire to have money to pay for a farm has had the effect of improving his agriculture? - It has to a certain extent. The native today of course cultivates much better than he did in the past, but of course there is still room for a lot of improvement.

You mentioned just now that natives reaped their 300 and 400 bags of kaffir corn. Is not that rather exceptional? - It is very difficult to say what it is. I have in mind the case of a small syndicate, I do not know how many there are of them but they are all concerned in it. They had a dispute over a farm and three or four of them did not get on with the others, and eventually the others decided that these four should go out and they had to pay them out £1500. Well, they raised a bond to enable them to do so, and in twelve months time an amount of £1,000 had been paid in reduction of that bond.

MAJOR ANDERSON: Had that £1,000 been paid out of the production of the farm?— It could only be that, or out of cattle.

MR. LUCAS: Or loans from friends?— Yes, that may be, I do not know where they borrowed it, but that was the case. Take last year, for instance. They had great trouble transporting their grain from their farm at Blaauwburg. One grain dealer told me that kaffir corn has gone down in price somewhat. But last year they were a bit short, and as a result kaffir corn would be up in price, but since then there has been such an increase in the production of kaffir corn in the Blaauwburg area that our northern supplies have practically regulated the price of the market. Before that of course I believe it was the Free State or the Western Transvaal which regulated the price, but now, owing to the tremendous production in this area, the Northern Transvaal has practically regulated the prices.

THE CHAIRMAN: These natives you think of who produce 300 to 400 bags, would they be individual natives; would one individual produce as many bags as that?— WELL, it is the man who is the chief or the headman who does; he gets assistance, and I would not say that he as an individual does that. It would be nothing for a native man to reap 100 bags. With a little bit of inquiry I could almost give you the names of the natives who have produced from 300 to 400 bags. I can tell you of one native who owns his own farm close to Bandolierkop. He is a very rich man, and he runs his own farm. That is Jacob Meela.

Do you notice in cases which you have just mentioned a tendency to better agriculture in the way of the lay-out of land and in the way of cultivating the land?— Yes, they do a tremendous lot of laying out and clearing.

Stumping?— Yes, but not otherwise.

They leave the stumps in the ground?— Well, I cannot say that I have looked at it so very carefully. I did not see so very many stumps; no, I think they took them out. They may leave an occasional one.

Most of the native land you can recognise by the fact that there are stumps and small bushes. All of them leave trees and the European farmers often do, too. But the more advanced native farmers do they take out the stumps?— They do take out bushes and most of the stumps, the larger proportion. Down there it is very bushy and unless they take the bushes out and also the stumps they would not be able to plough at all. They have to stump and they cannot just plough in between.

MR. LUCAS: Have you been on many of these native farms?— I have been over them.

Have you ever been on the lands?— No, I cannot say that I have been over the lands. You can see where the old kaffir used to work. Now he ploughs with an up-to-date American plough.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are ploughs in general use in all the locations now or do they still depend largely on the native hoe; I do not mean for cultivation, but for breaking up the soil?— You can practically say that the native hoe is up-to-date for that purpose.

They plough all round?— Yes, and in some parts of the summer, and particularly during the late season you may

find the native women picking all over, so you can say generally that the native hoe is out of commission.

DO they use other native implements of agriculture - hoes, and so on? - I could not say. I have seen a few harrows, but not many.

And cultivators? - No, I have not seen any at all.

Have you seen any planters? - I could not tell you, I have not seen any being used.

You mentioned cases of manuring. From the way you said it, it struck me that those were rather exceptional cases of advancement by natives? - There are actually a number of natives who are using ploughs, and who are using manure.

Do you find that there is any tendency to overstocking in this district, - No, I have not heard very much of overstocking.

MENEER LEROUX VAN NIEKERK: U sê dat die wet van 1913 verandering gemaak het in die metode van grond koop? - Ja, dit is my opinie.

Maar onder die wet is hul baie meer beperk in die koop van grond, want voordat die wet van krag was gewees het hul in staat gewees om te koop waar hul wil? - Nee, hul het dit nie so maklik kan doen nie.

Wat was die moeilikheid? - Dis moeilik om te sêwat die rede was, maar daar is nie twyfel aan nie dat die kaffer sedert die tyd meer land gekoop het.

Are there many who have bought land since that time? - Well where there was one in the past who had land there are ten today who have bought, and I think it is because of the law.

Can you give us any idea of the farms which they have bought in the last ten years? - I think the Native Com-

missioner can give you all these details. Here at Blaauwburg there are quite a number of farms which have been acquired by natives, and in the low veld too.

Those natives who have bought and who are farming today, are they mostly location natives?— Many are location natives. There are quite a number who have come from Ramaghupe. It is well known that they are very crowded and that they have had to pay a great deal for the land for their cattle. Many natives come from there. And in this area too farms have been sold to them.

Do they buy on their own or on behalf of their tribes?— Well, it is the tribe which buys here. In the past they used to buy individually, but nowadays you find that ten or fifteen families combine and then they form themselves into a tribe. That is what I call a pseudo tribe. They call themselves the Touw Tribe, and they elect their chief and their petty chief and then they go on the land, and then the natives take transfer on behalf of the tribe. They call themselves a tribe, but in reality they are nothing more nor less than a syndicate.

kaffers

Het plaas/ook land gekoop?— Hul het bygestaan, maar nie baie van hul. I cannot say that the natives on farms have formed themselves into a syndicate with a view to buying a farm. So it has not had a great effect on the farm natives. I do not know of farm natives who have left individual farmers' property in order to go and live on their own land. Of course, you have natives who have hired land, but I do not know of any cases of natives who have left another man's farm with a view to purchasing land.

But you say that they have helped others? - Yes, a few of them have.

Now, you said just now that there is an increase in the production of the native. Is this principally on the new farms, or is it in the old locations as well? - Well, so far as the locations are concerned, I have known them for years, and you cannot produce much more there because all our locations round about here are too much, and unless you drive the natives out, I do not know what is to become of them unless they go in for a better system of agriculture.

MENEER FOURIE: Dan sou dit mog moontlik wees? - Ja dit is wat ek meen. Daar is baie kaffers van Ramagup wat so beknop is dat hul nie daar kan blyf nie. Hul het nie weiding vir hul vee nie en dit kost baie geld om weiding vir hul te huur.

MENEER LEROUX VAN NIEKERK: Wat is die gehalte van die grond in hierdie streek wat deur kaffers beset is? - Omtrent gemiddeld. Dis nie van die beste nie. Dis die gewoon loop van grond hier.

En die land op Blaauwberg wat hul gekoop het, is dit goed? - Ja, dis ordentelik goed. Daar is naturelle wat by my gekom het en gesê het "hier is 'n plaas wat ons kan kry, maar ons wil dit nie hê nie; daardie plaas is deur kaffers bewerk gewees -- dis al jare lang deur kaffers bewerk gewees en dit beteken niks vir ons nie. Op Blaauwberg is die grond jare lang nie bewerk gewees nie en hul kry uitstekende grond.

Is it not due to that that they get good crops? - The land is good, especially for kaffir corn. In the days of the Malaboch wars, 35 years ago, they had excellent crops there.

Have you any knowledge of the natives on the farms here? - No, not generally speaking.

You could not express any opinion? - Well, I can only tell you this. I have a farm myself. I think it is a very bad system to let the native work two days in the week instead of ninety days right off. With the system of two days in the week it means that the kaffir has to work the whole year round. That is very bad for the kaffir and it is not very good for the farmer either. The kaffir has to come two days a week and then he goes home. But every week he comes a bit later and does a bit less work, and goes home earlier. He comes later and after three months he does not come at all. For the native of course it is a disadvantage because he cannot do anything for himself and has to sacrifice all his time to the farmer.

Has not a change come about in regard to that system of late? - Well, it is not as general as it used to be. I only want to say that I am of opinion that the two days a week system is a very bad thing for the farmer and also for the native.

Do any of the farmers use native women as well? - Some do and some do not.

But it is not a general practice to use the services of the women of the native who has to work ninety days? - No, it is not a general practice.

The farmers who employ the services of these women, of the kaffir-meid, are in the minority? - I cannot say that. Generally they let the kaffir women work in the kitchen. The woman is used for household work.

Are the kaffir women used under the contract with

the men - that is to say, if the farmer makes a contract with the man does that mean that the woman is contracted for at the same time? - That happens in some cases.

The woman has to work just the same as the man? - I could not say.

MR. FOURIE: Are you acquainted with the general economic condition of natives on farms? Do the natives generally find conditions to press very heavily on them? - Well, a native can exist on a great deal less than a white man. Of course, when the white man has bad times it follows that the native too suffers, but the native is able to stand bad times much better than his boss can. He can come out on a great deal less than a white man.

Is it better for the native to remain on the farm or is it better for him to come to town and take service there, as they do now? - In one way, it is better for the native to go to the town; I will not say it is better - he prefers to go to the town. That is a question which affects the white man as well as the native. It is a question of surroundings, and the question of whether he has an easy time or not really does not affect the position. The general rule nowadays seems to be for the young men to go to the towns. The young man who lives on a farm, only sees the farm life, and there is no amusement for him, and that is one of the reasons why he often runs away to the towns. That is also one of the reasons why the white man often leaves the land to go to the towns. It is not because he is experiencing such hard times, but because the town attracts him

and he wants the amusements of the town.

THE CHAIRMAN: So it is not exactly economic pressure which drives them to town?— No, they all want to live and have some excitement. That applies to the white man as well as to the native. That is my opinion. You have the piccanins too. A piccanin has to look after the cattle and he has to plough. He never sees a sixpence, but when he comes to the town he gets 10/- per month or whatever it is. The first month he spends 8/- on a broek and he has 2/- for pocket money, and in the evenings he has his friends about him. That native will not live on a farm if he can help it.

MENEER FOURIE: Is daar skole vir die kaffertjies? In die lokasiss is daar maar min skole?— Ja, op Pashlele is daar 'n groot skool wat die kaffers self gebou het. Maar in die meeste lokasies is daar sendelings skole.

Is hul altyd bereikbaar vir die kaffers?— Ja, die kinders kan altyd by die skole kom.

MR. LUCAS: At some places they are not?— Yes, in some places it is almost impossible. In Malitsi's Location there is a school. The Berlin Mission has a school there. More than half of the Malitse tribe do not live in the location, they are miles away and cannot get there.

DR. FOURIE: In any case they need not come to Pietersburg?— No, there are schools all over the place. They need not come to Pietersburg.

MR. FRANCIS CHARLES MENNE, called and examined:

THE CHAIRMAN: I believe you have been a long time in the district, Mr. Menne?— Yes. I have been about forty years in the district. I may say that I have not come here with a set case because I had no idea until late last night that I was going to say anything at all. I am an agent for the Transvaal Landowners Association. I may say that I have not always been in touch with the natives, but for the last thirty years I have. I can only speak of a certain area and I cannot speak of locations because they have never interested me in any way, except in passing through. I can only speak of the Eastern Low Country. In that part, most of which is now included in the released area, the natives have shown considerable improvement. There has been a lot of improvement in the conditions of the natives there. That is not due so much to their own efforts in agricultural advance as it is due to the gradual opening up of the country and its means of communication and development. And to my mind their advancement has been more dependent upon the result of their labour outside. Our natives do not go so much to the mines, but they come to town for employment, and they take domestic employment.

MR. LUCAS: About how many natives have you got on the farms which you are agents for?— From ten to twelve thousand.

That is men, women and children?— Yes.

That of course is a very rough estimate.

THE CHAIRMAN: What is the rental roll in respect of these natives?— It is about £6,000 per year.

That is about 10/- per head?— Yes. That includes stock rights, payments for their stock.

MR. LUCAS: Have you got a uniform rate?— Yes, on all these farms.

What is it?— £2 per male native, including one wife.

DR. ROBERTS: AND how much for the second wife?— £1.

And every additional wife?— £1. Old women and old men nothing. That of course is in the discretion of the agent. Widows £1, except in exceptional cases, where they are in a household or a kraal of their own, in which case they pay £. As to stock rights, 3/- per each head of stock, and for small stock 6d. for every head for the year.

MR. LUCAS: Are there any white people living on these farms?— No, they are all natives there.

MR. LE ROUX VAN NIEKERK: What is the extent of these farms?— Roughly 60,000 to 70,000 morgen.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are they all in the present Pietersburg District?— No, they are in the Pietersburg, Letaba and Zoutpansberg Districts.

They belong to all the various companies associated with the Transvaal Landowners Association?— Yes. I should like to refer to the natives' methods of cultivation in that area. In the first place, I would say this, that the natives there do not cultivate for profit or with the idea of saving, not to any extent at any rate. They cultivate more for the provision of their own requirements. If there happens to be anything over it goes to the nearest store in exchange for something else. Very little sale takes place for cash from what I have seen. Their method of cultivation of course

has developed from the pick, which is not used now, except in the gardens or in picking in the seed. They all use ploughs. The ploughs are very extensively used, but there is no attempt made to stump. They burn off and they simply cut off the branches of the trees and they pack them up together and set them on fire. Naturally, in the course of time you have a fairly level surface, but the stumps are always underneath, and ploughing becoming useless, although as I have said ploughs are used.

MR. VAN NIEKERK: They use a light plough do they not? - Yes.

MR* LUCAS: Is not that because it is cheaper? - Yes, and it is easier to handle. Invariably it is the little girls and boys who do the ploughing.

Is that because the men are away? - Yes, to a large extent that is so. The little chaps are supposed to be able to do it just as well, seeing that the oxen really do the work and they walk behind them.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Kirsten mentioned instances which he had seen - instances of natives manuring; are they exceptional? - Yes, I should say that they are very exceptional.

MR. LE ROUX VAN NIEKERK: Do they go in for any rotation in crops? - They do not go in for any actual rotation, but I think that probably through years of experience and through tradition they plant mealies and kaffir beans together, and that probably keeps the fields going longer than would otherwise be the case.

THE CHAIRMAN: They plant the two in the same year in the same crop? - Yes. I do not think that they really know the reason for it, but probably it is traditional.

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