MEMORANDUM ON NATIVE POLICY IN THE BELGIAN CONGO
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1. Introductory Remarks.

This memorandum is based on observations made by the writer during a 10-day stay in the Belgian Congo in January 1949 as a guest of the Union Miniere du Haut Katanga, visits being made to the Company's activities at Elizabethville, Jadotville and Kolwezi.

In view of the very brief stay no pretence at all is made, nor would it be possible, to submit an exhaustive survey of native policy; all that is possible is to give a mere outline of the salient features.

2. Factors conditioning Native Policy.

Before outlining certain aspects of Native Policy, it is essential to have in mind the geographic, climatic and racial factors which have largely influenced the present policy being pursued by the Union Miniere.

(a) The Belgian Congo has an area twice that of South Africa.
(b) The native population, consisting of 180 tribes and dialects, totals 13½ million and the European population totals 45,000, as against the figures for South Africa of 8 million natives and 2½ million Europeans.
(c) Owing to the decimation and carrying off into slavery of the native population of the Katanga region by Arab traders prior to the advent of the Union Miniere, the Company has had to import its labour force, mainly from the Kasai and other areas of the Congo.


From its inception in 1906 up to 1925 the Union Miniere pursued a migrant labour policy as obtains in the South African gold industry. The Union Miniere, however, realised that this policy was wasteful, inefficient and the cause of much labour trouble. In 1925, the Company introduced a stabilised
labour policy and this has been consistently followed ever since, notwithstanding that the Company has had to recruit its labour force from outside areas for the reasons already mentioned.

In deciding on the stabilised labour policy the Company at the same time determined that native employees should engage in such types of skilled and semi-skilled work as their ability, aptitude and training fitted them to carry out.

4. Types of Employment.

There being no ban to being employed in skilled and semi-skilled work, native employees of the Union Miniere are employed as, brick-layers, carpenters, welders, turners, and fitters, plumbers, drivers of steam and electric locomotives, cranes, mechanical excavators, bull dozers, road-graders, and as hospital orderlies and laboratory assistants.

The above avenues of employment in the Congo are not peculiar to the Union Miniere, as will be evident from the following extract from an official document - "Natives work in the banks and commercial houses as clerks and typists and operate adding machines etc. In the Post Office they work as telephone operators and telegraphists, on the railways as engine drivers and Mechanics. In industry too one finds the Natives as electricians, brick-layers, carpenters, welders, Motor Mechanics, tailors and in a great variety of other skilled trades normally performed by white persons in the Union.


Rates of pay of Native employees vary considerably according to degree of skill and length of service, and on retirement native employees receive a pension based on length of service and wage rate at time of retiring. As to rates of pay the following are examples: -

**Locomotive Conductor** - 1050 francs per month (Note 174 Congo francs = £1 South African). After 30 years service pension is 105 francs per month, (minimum) plus supplement for children.
Mechanics - 16 francs per day (1-3 years of service) up to 39 francs per day after 21 years service.

Brick-layers - 25 to 30 francs per day according to efficiency. Average number of bricks laid per day is 1,200 per brick-layer.

Unskilled - 6 to 20 francs per day.

Qualified - It is possible for a skilled native employee to earn up to 4,000 per month, plus free house, rations, medical care etc.

The average capital cost per native employee is £400, and there are at present 16,000 native employees.

This figure covers cost of housing, hospital and educational buildings and equipment. The charge against revenue per native employee averages 75 francs per day and this figure will soon be 100 francs per day. This figure covers cost of wages, educational services, hospitalisation, rations, pensions, housing maintenance etc.

The period of service of native employees varies from 15 years if employed on underground mining to 21 years if employed on surface mining, and 30 years if employed on work other than mining. On retirement native employees receive a pension.

6. Education.

In order to maintain an efficient and contented labour force the Union Miniere has an Educational Service Department which controls very comprehensive facilities for educating not only its employees but also the children and wives of its native employees. 20,000 children are the responsibility of the Company and the cost per child is £3 per annum for educational services alone.

In matters of educational policy the Union Miniere has sought to avoid what it considers unwise developments by other nations in Africa. For example, the Company considers that the British Administration in West Africa has allowed and encouraged the native to develop too far and too fast, with the consequent
strained relations now existing between the European and the native in that area. Similarly, as regards South Africa, the Company considers that an upper strata of academically trained natives has been brought into existence whilst the bulk of the South African Native population has been kept in a backward and primitive state. This has resulted in the creation of a vacuum between the two sections, and unless an intermediate class is permitted comprising artisans and skilled and semi-skilled workers in industry and commerce, then a very fertile field is being provided for Communists, agitators, and general labour unrest.

The policy of the Union Miniere is not to provide academic or even secondary education but to gradually raise the mass of the native population at a rate adequate to its present economic and social needs and within the degree of receptibility which the native mind is able to absorb and apply. For this reason, all primary and trade schooling syllabi are modified and adapted to the requirements of the work and conditions existing in the Congo.

Native education by the Union Miniere commences with instruction to pregnant mothers on pre-natal care and hygiene. Maternity wards are provided under proper European Medical care and the mortality rate for births is comparable with the European rate in other countries.

Up to the age of three years native children are regularly examined by the Company's doctors, and treated when necessary, and the mothers are given twice per week rations of adequate calorific content.

From the age of 3 to 6 years both boys and girls attend nursery schools, and from 6 to 12 years girls attend primary schools, while boys attend from 6 to 13 years. After their primary education girls are then transferred to an "Ecole de Formation Familiale" where they are taught domestic science, needlework etc. The boys are transferred to an "Ecole Pre-Professional" where they undergo a two years course in the
following subjects:

1st Year
- Masonry: 6 weeks
- Plumbing: 6 weeks
- Woodwork: 12 weeks
- Metalwork: 18 weeks

2nd Year
- Woodwork: 20 weeks
- Metalwork: 20 weeks

The object of this "Pre-Professional" course is to give a boy a general grounding in artisan work and to enable him and his instructors to decide for which type of trade he has the most aptitude and interest.

This year (1949) the Union Miniere commences "Ecole Professional" where boys who have completed the "Pre-Professional" course will receive a 2 years training in the particular trade for which they have been found suited.

After their primary schooling, boys who show themselves suitable are selected for a 4 years training as primary school or trade teachers.

In the "Ecole de Formation Familiale" mothers are given instruction on housecraft, rearing of children, and the duties of a wife and mother under the 'family' concept of human society as distinguished from the 'tribal' concept with its different social pattern.

In connection with education it is important to note the conspicuous part played by the Roman Catholic Church in this sphere of the Company's activities. The Company realises that the well being of its employees demands the recognition not only of physical health and harmonious conditions but outlets and opportunities also for Mental and spiritual development. There is a very marked degree of integration, and harmony, between the Company and the Church not only in spiritual matters but generally in all matters affecting human relationships.

On retirement native employees live in special villages provided by the Company in rural areas: it being realised that
natives who have received and adopted European education and social customs cause friction if they are subjected to the laws and customs of tribal chiefs.

7. Housing.

It is of interest to note that all employees of large labour forces in the Congo are obliged to provide adequate housing for their employees and in Municipal native locations areas are set aside for houses built by employers.

The Union Miniere builds its own native townships where brick dwellings of various types are provided free for its employees.

8. Relationship between European and Natives.

European in the Congo are in executive positions, whether in the field of business or in the technical field. They act chiefly as supervisors. Competition between whites and Natives in the labour market very seldom occur therefore. Nevertheless, the relationship has to be continually watched, as the following example will illustrate. Owing to the war, European employees of the Union Miniere were unable to return to Belgium on being pensioned, as they usually do, and others were not able to take their long leave after their normal three years period of service. This has resulted in 650 of the Company's total of 1,200 European employees since the war ended, being new to the Congo and unaccustomed to handling natives. The usual attitude of a new arrival is to treat the native as a sort of long lost brother; by the end of 6 months however, the European's attitude hardens towards the natives and usually swings over to the other extreme. In view of the resultant increasing friction the Union Miniere has now instituted classes which new European employees are obliged to attend. At these classes employees are instructed in the proper manner of handling natives and in the general human relationships between black and white.

It is important to realise that the small number of
European compared to the native population, and the separate functions which they respectively perform, results in there being no 'poor whites'. It is also of interest to note that a recent proposal to increase the European population of the Congo from 45,000 to 100,000 was vigorously opposed by the lately retired Governor-General of the Congo, Monseigneur Ryckmanns on the grounds that it would upset the present harmonious relationship between Europeans and natives, and give rise to a 'poor white' problem. There is a very noticeable absence of sullenness on the faces of native employees as compared with South African native employees. The absence of a sense of frustration on the part of the native employees of the Union Miniere has been one of the main factors in the Company having a contented labour force. In fact, the Company most strongly asserts that it has no native problem, only a labour problem, that is, the Company, owing to its expanding activities, is always ahead of its labour supply. That the Union Miniere to-day produces 10% of the world's output of copper and 90% of the world's output of cobalt, and that this is achieved with labour recruited from primitive natives is a remarkable tribute to its native policy.


As far as the South African Gold Mining industry is concerned, the financial cost alone would make it prohibitive to adopt in toto the policy of the Union Miniere as regards housing and stabilisation of labour. But there is no justifiable reason why the policy of the Union Miniere in gradually raising the standard and skill of its native employees should not be introduced into the gold mining industry. Although, owing to political considerations, natives in South Africa are barred from apprenticeship and skilled trades, there is no adequate reason why native artisans should not be allowed to train for employment in native reserves or by their own people wherever situated.
In the Congo there are now 750,000 natives directly and indirectly in the employ of Europeans and this figure is approaching the maximum number employable without disturbing the general economy of the Country. Further industrial expansion in the Congo will entail drawing on the labour supplies of neighbouring countries, and the Union Miniere is most emphatic that owing to the liberal and progressive policy being followed in the Congo and the Rhodesias, and the industrial expansion taking place in Central Africa, within 20 years the labour supply at present being drawn to the Union from beyond its border will have dried up. The significance of this to the gold mining industry needs no emphasis.

It is natural to ask what will be the eventual outcome of the present policy being pursued in the Congo.

It is admitted that ultimately the Congo will be a black republic, but having a standard of living and a way of life in no way unfavourable to European concepts.

Johannesburg,
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