

Parliamentary Question by Mr. Harbin for 2
Oral reply, Wednesday, 18 February 1931
(No. 1 on P.O. file)

1 Extract from "East African Standard" dated 4.11.30

X X X X X X X

Reductions in native wages are no doubt inevitable

(Sgd.) C.G. Eastwood.
23.1.31

There are, as yet, no native trade unions in E. Africa

The only employer I ever heard of who followed this principle was Mr. Ford.
(Intld)
J.F.N.G.

Africa; wages will presumably be determined by what the employer can afford to give and what the native is prepared to accept.

(Sgd.) A.C.C. Parkinson.
26.1.31

Dr. Shiels.

You should see No. 537 (1). Of course the native who goes in for home production is equally hit by the slump in prices.

(Intld.) W.C.B.
26.1.31

Seen

One feels the need of an Agricultural Wages Board here. There should be a tribunal with power to vary wage rates, keeping in mind the minimum subsistence requirements. We must keep our eye on this, and, if the wage reduction movement becomes general, get a report on it.

(Intld.) T.D.S.
2.2.31

Mr C. Bottomley.

To see Dr. Shiels's minute.

X.E.A. should note that minute - and it would be convenient, I think, if we had 537 (1) and minutes registered separately and recirculated in, say, 6 months.

Noted
4/8/31

(Sgd.) A.C.C. Parkinson
4.2.31

(Intld) W.C.B. at once.
4.2.31

Below minutes copied from 6001/30.

To go. tel. No. 54 cons. 18 Feb. 31. 1931

3. Gov's Rep. Moore Conf. 34. 11 March
Kenia extracted from Mr. L. W. Dobb's report on
his visit to Longha in July 1930 in a
discussion with Longha's former associates and
native labourers following which native refused
intention of working longer to avoid decrease
in wages.

Draft comm. to Mr. Horrocks.
J. B. Humboldt 8/4

Unfortunate Kenya is a
lady with a past & his consequent
actions however innocent or even
laudable are suspect. To wonder
how that his present conduct has
suspicion - the distinction between
Explanation & Persuasion is very fine
but I find it impossible to credit
his suspicion at the expense of the
good faith of Mr. Dobb & the new
Governor. It therefore seems
necessary in writing to Mr. Horrocks
to give more than a bare recital
of the facts & I have endeavored
to meet this in the revised
Draft herewith. Much than not
found easy! J. W. Miller
11.1.31

As all the showed me was
revised off before it was
fair copied.

If it is added, I think we
will then call this draft -
enclose a copy of the
letter - a while accepting
the accuracy in the last
para of the draft,
draw attention to the
risk of misunderstanding
of Govt. action in such a
matter & would it clear
that in opinion of Govt.

The view that Govt. officials
must do in this is
to explain the situation
impartially to the natives
& avoid anything which
may be construed as
Govt. pressure upon
natives to accept
reduced wages in
private employment.

As Parkinson
G. G. 15.4.31

Yes! I think this talk of Mr. Dobb was
wrong, however well intentioned, and he should
not have had to do it. The Govt. must show
outside these arrangements and allow the workers to find
their protect to their employers. The Govt. action
should be to help low wages to be accepted.

Mr. Parkerson

In view of our talks, I think
you will agree that we should cancel
draft and not trouble Mr. Horvath
unless he troubles us.

And that the letter to
Kerzga should make it clear that
this should not be done again, and
that any action on wages or/and conditions
of labor for private employer should not
be undertaken by Govt. in an arbitrary
capacity, and after investigation and
hearing of both sides of the case. And
that the incident shows the need for
considering the application of the
minimum wage fixing convention
which Govt. has ratified.

T.D. 25.4.53

Agreement to for. accord

ALP

27.4.53

atlas

4 No. Gov. Conf. (2) - 3. Howard - 18 MAY 1951

(Signature)

I Entirely agree
ALP

O. O.

X.17086/31 Kenya

O. D.
R
D
11 MAY

Mr. Allen

Mr. Parkinson

Mr.

Mr. Tomlinson

X Sir C. Bottomley 1.5

Sir J. Shuckburgh

Sir G. Grindle

Permt. U.S. of S.

X Parly. U.S. of S.

Secretary of State

For conson. v. minutes.

DRAFT.

KENYA

CONFIDENTIAL (2)

Gov.

Downing Street,

To go by air mail
as Circular (Despatch) 13 May
April, 1931.

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your confidential despatch No. 37 of the 11th March, regarding a report to the effect that the Commissioner of Kavirondo Province, during a visit to Songhor, endeavoured to persuade natives of that district to accept work for private employers at a reduced rate of wages.

2. While I accept the assurance in paragraph 3 of your despatch as to the intention of the Provincial Commissioner, and note that you entirely approve of his action, I cannot refrain from pointing out that the action taken has, as a matter of fact, lent itself to misunderstanding, and has been interpreted as Government pressure upon natives to accept reduced

reduced wages or to work longer hours in private employment. This possibility may not have been fully appreciated at the time, but it seems to me to have been inevitable, and I am sure that, in all the circumstances, you will agree with me that it is desirable that the action taken in this case should not be repeated, and that any Government intervention in the matter of wages and/or conditions of labour, should only be undertaken in an arbitral capacity, and after affording both employers and employed a full opportunity of stating their respective cases. I trust therefore that you will give instructions to ensure that in future any Government action is limited accordingly.

3. In my opinion, this incident shows the need for considering the application in Kenya of the Convention concerning the

creation of minimum wage fixing machinery,

as to which I am addressing you by separate letter which forms the subject of my report.

Col. F.W.S. in a circular despatch.
Circular (2) of the 5th April.

I have, etc.

(Signed) PASSFIELD

Handwritten signature

Downing Street,
8th April, 1931.

Sir,

I have the honour to transmit to you the accompanying copy of a Parliamentary Paper, Cmd. 3209, containing the texts of a Convention concerning the creation of minimum wage fixing machinery, and a Recommendation concerning the application of such machinery, which were adopted by the International Labour Conference at its Eleventh Session in June, 1928.

2. This Convention has been ratified by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, and it is accordingly necessary, in accordance with Article 421 of the Treaty of Versailles, to consider whether it is applicable (with or without modifications) in the non-self-governing Colonies, Protectorates, and Mandated Territories. In my Circular despatch of the 2nd of April I have drawn your attention to the nature and extent of the obligations of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom under that Article in regard to the "application" of such Conventions.

3. I have accordingly to request that I may be furnished with your observations as to the possibility of applying this Convention in the territory under your administration.

4. The Recommendation has also been accepted by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, subject to the reservation indicated in Cmd. 3337 of which a copy is also enclosed.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient, humble servant,

PASSFIELD.

The Officer Administering
the Government of

36



GOVERNMENT HOUSE,
NAIROBI,
KENYA.

KENYA.

No. 37

CONFIDENTIAL.

11th March 1931.

RECEIVED
7 APR 1931
COL. OFFICE

My Lord,

No. 2

I have the honour to refer to Your Lordship's telegram No. 54 of the 18th February 1931, on the subject of a report to the effect that the Commissioner of Kavirondo Province, during a visit to Songhor endeavoured to persuade natives of that district to accept work for private employers at a reduced rate of wages.

2. The visit referred to is presumably one that was made by the Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza Province, Mr. C. M. Dobbs, in July last. Mr. Dobbs at the time, reported to the Colonial Secretary what occurred at that Meeting. The following is an extract from his report:-

"At the request of the Songhor Farmers' Association the Provincial Commissioner and the District Commissioner Kisumu-Londiani attended a meeting of the Association at Songhor to try and explain the present financial condition of the world generally and this Colony in particular to a gathering of native farm labourers. The meeting began with a discussion among the members of the Association themselves which at times became almost acrimonious as to the rival advantages of a 20% cut in wages or a 20% increase in work. Such discussions are perfectly futile as no farmer will be bound by any agreement to keep wages down if he has a heavy coffee crop coming on and cannot get labour to pick it except by raising the rate of wages. Furthermore the conditions on each farm are different. A resolution recommending decreased wages and/or increased work was passed on the clear understanding that no one was bound by it. A further discussion took place on the question of giving advances a system which is generally condemned but from which farmers cannot break away. Subsequently I addressed the natives and tried to explain that owing to the low prices obtainable for produce farmers would have to economise in

Amund - Conf (2) - 13 MAY 1951

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
LORD PASSEFIELD, P.C.,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES,
DOWNING STREET,
LONDON, S. W. 1.

every ...

every possible way and that it was not the individual farmer's fault if he had to ask them to work harder or take lower wages. They seemed to understand the position and expressed the intention of working harder in preference to having wages decreased. Like every thing else the wages of labour is governed by supply and demand and there is no doubt that labour is being engaged now at a lower wage owing to the falling off in the demand."

3. From the above Your Lordship will appreciate that there is no foundation whatsoever for the suggestion that the Provincial Commissioner endeavoured to persuade the natives to accept reduced wages. I entirely approve of Mr. Dobbs' action and there is nothing that I can usefully add to his report.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient,
humble servant,

Wm. Willmors

GOVERNOR'S DEPUTY.

18 FEB 1931

008/31 Kenya 28

C. O.

Mr. *Recd 17.2.31*

Mr.

Mr.

Mr. Tomlinson

Sir C. Holtomley

Sir J. Shuckburgh

Sir G. Grindle

~~Parly. U.S. of S.~~

Parly. U.S. of S.

Secretary of State

Wesley

gc
and no 3

*Collected -
2.40 pm 18.2.31 GP*

DRAFT. Code etc.

*Forwards
Haiti*

No. 54 Question asked
in Parliament whether
Mps aware that
Commissioner Keviondo
Province during visit
to Songhor endeavored
to persuade natives
of the district to
accept work for
private employers
at reduction in
standard rate of
wages from 12/-
to 12^s/- a month
& whether Hon^g.
oppose this



Letter (c)
Statement of Kore
correspondent in East Africa
~~Standard~~
Standard 4 November
is presumably basis
of question (c)

Please send by ^{early} mail
Full report

See

537
9
END

Meeting of the Farmers' Association

20 PER CENT

STANDARD COOPERATIVE
Korn, Oct 1930

A special meeting of the Fort Ternan Farmers and Planters Association was held yesterday to discuss the need of a reduction in wages.

There to had prices falling in the long (these) reduction of wages of equally drastic was Two letters from the Kaimosi Farmers' Association respectively were read at the meeting by the Chairman, A. ... Both members of their association considered it advisable to reduce wages about 20 per cent. Their own wages, however, were not known, but we had no any sign of what the intentions were further that the ... paid ... a visit ... done ... to ... the ... this ... It was ... certain ... recognizing ... of his ... had proposed ... the reduction ... some discussion ... by Mr. Ad ... relation all native ... approximately 20 ... opinion ... a whole ... animals ... solve the ... the effect ... be made in ... It was pointed ... ing the ... on ... 12/- to Shs. 10/- ... could easily enough ... one's wage bill. As any reduction of a boy's wages could only be made with his consent, it was argued that if a boy were agreeable to a cut in his wages he would be equally agreeable to being stepped off at Shs. 12/- and stepped on again at Shs. 10/-. This would be no farmer's hand and farmers who had boys signed on for a number of years could not be accused of failing to pull their weight.

The chief objection to the latter proposal seemed to be that it involved unnecessary work, and it was therefore overruled while the former was carried by a large majority.

As soon as we hear from the Fort Ternan Farmers' Association who are holding a meeting to-day we propose to follow the example of the Soughor Association and to ask the F.O. to pay us a visit. Some of the farmers present considered this unnecessary. They thought that the natives fully understood the position and were prepared for a reduction.