

**BLACK, WHITE OR YELLOW? THE
SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR
PROBLEM. THE CASE FOR AND
AGAINST THE INTRODUCTION OF
CHINESE COOLIES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649533480

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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S. M. Gluckstein & W. C. H. Saxby.

"Audi Alteram Partem."

London:

The African News Agency,
130, Fleet Street, E.C.

1904.

PREFACE.

THE object of this brochure is to place before the public in a convenient form the arguments both in favour of and against the importation of Chinese Labour into the Transvaal. In each version the endeavour is made to deal with the intricate subject on practical rather than political grounds. It is hoped that the publication, for the first time, of the full text of the Labour Ordinance as amended in Council will be found a useful addition to the contents,

PHASE I.

THE CASE FOR CHINESE LABOUR.

In a situation such as has been created by the shortage of aboriginal labour in South Africa, a practical solution of the problem should not be sacrificed to sentiment. If there are strong presumptive grounds for opposing the employment of Chinese in the Transvaal, or elsewhere for that matter, there are even weightier grounds for supporting it. No greater mistake could be made than to suppose that the Rand mining magnates are alone in their desire for yellow workmen. And the same remark applies to the inference that supporters of Chinese labour are supporters of these millionaires—gentlemen who by no means command wide sympathy. The essence of all good government is to afford the greatest benefit to the greatest number. It is not good government to paralyse the industrial vitality of a

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large and rich country in order to defeat the aims of a few opulent, it may be also greedy, financiers. But that is the principle underlying the arguments of the anti-Asiatics. They would penalise everybody in the Transvaal for the purpose of striking at the rightly or wrongly abused Rand magnate. They vary this phase of the question by characterising the Imperial assent to Chinese labour as a reversion to slavery. What are the facts? What are the economic conditions of the Transvaal? Here then is a colony rich in mineral resources, but whose successful development is dependent upon an abundance of cheap unskilled workers. It abounds in large bodies of auriferous formation, the profitable treatment of which would be impossible in the majority of instances if the bulk of the labourers in the mines were paid on the basis of white men's wages in the Transvaal. It should not be difficult, of course, to secure the natives of South or Central Africa, of whom there are several millions. But the aboriginal is no lover of work, and will avoid it if he can, preferring to exist in lazy comfort on the energies of his wife or wives. Upon ethical grounds the refusal of the native to earn a

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livelihood cannot be defended. His freedom to be of the number who "toil not, neither do they spin," is, indeed, a menace to the peace of a country which has so often been the scene of serious native revolts. And yet one may not suggest the yoking of the native under a code of compulsory labour. The mere contemplation of an Act to compel the black man to work provokes vehement denunciation on the part of those who are silent as to the worst forms of slavery in Free Britain. It is the experience of all African travellers and residents that regular employment exercises a far greater and better moral influence on the aboriginal than the efforts of a thousand missionaries. But, no, compulsion is slavery, so we are told, and to indenture the yellow man is also slavery. In so many words it is immoral to do in the Transvaal what has been done for years without a word of protest in Natal and the Straits Settlements, which are also British Colonies. This, however, by the way. The whole question may be divided into three heads:—

- (a) The failure to obtain a local supply of Native Labour.
- (b) The cause and the effect of that failure.

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(c) The possible and probable effects of the employment of Chinese Coolies.

In regard to the first point, if the evidence given before the Labour Commission should not be conclusive, there is the fact that the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association has spent more than £300,000 in the endeavour to secure unskilled workers. They have succeeded by this heavy outlay in producing a steady increase in the supply of labour since the resumption of mining after the war; but from the conclusion of peace down to February, 1904, a period of almost three years, the augmentation has amounted to only 59,000, leaving the total of natives employed in the gold mines at 67,000 as against 100,000 in August, 1899. At this rate of recruiting, which, by the bye, has not been maintained in spite of the most strenuous efforts, even the immediate requirements of the mines could not be satisfied in less than five years from the present time. This estimate, however, comprehends only the properties which were gold producers before the war. Allowing, also, for the needs of mines brought to and nearing the productive stage, the shortage

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could never be made good, but would each year become more pronounced. Already that shortage is so acutely felt as to have created a serious position in South Africa—from Cape Town to the Zambesi. But on this score more anon. For the moment it will suffice to establish that the dearth of native labour is not exaggerated, and that, whatever course may be pursued to put an end to it, will be welcomed by all who have the interests of the sub-continent at heart. It is alleged that the capitalists who control the destinies of the mining industry in the Transvaal, for reasons of self-aggrandisement, purposely avoid an increase in the supply of "boys." They want, it is said, to starve the labour market, and by this means to produce such marked stagnation in the Colony as will break down all prejudice to the importation of Asiatics. As against the suggestion of disinclination to recruit "boys" in Africa, so that the demand for the Asiatics might be aided, there is the failure of the agents appointed by the Native Labour Association. They do not admit the impossibility of obtaining supplies, but if their contention could be justified, why is