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~~XVI~~ for 18th issue

Raise Prodⁿ by Treating African Labour Humanely -

THE LONG VIEW

No sensible person objects to the taxation of African citizens of the Union. No sensible person objects to their being taxed as lightly or as heavily as anyone else. But the increase of the basic tax from £1 to £1.15.0, on all African men earning from £0 to £180 per annum, will be a serious matter.

There may be some who consider that an increase of 15/- can hardly be a serious matter, and who consider that in any case a political writer of my views must be expected - under almost any circumstances - to belabour the Government. I hope to convince such persons that the increase in the tax will be an unendurable burden to the poor.

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£180 per annum is £15 per month. There are many Africans who do not reach this level, but who as unskilled labourers earn from £8 to £10 per month working for our municipalities. On the average, a man, woman, and at least two children have to live on this £10 per month. Many European householders of average means spend that amount on feeding - not extravagantly - two domestic servants. But the married labourer must in addition clothe himself, his wife, and his children, he must pay for rent and transport, and for the schooling. His children, unlike other school-children, must pay for their own school equipment (except for readers which are supplied).

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It has been estimated that £25 to £27 is the absolute living minimum for such a family, to give them enough of the right kind of food to keep them well, to keep a roof over their heads, and decent but inexpensive clothing on their bodies. These estimates have been made by responsible persons and authorities. The Town Council of Benoni estimated £16/14/9 as an "absolute minimum", and its Senior Welfare Officer estimated that £24 a month was necessary if the family "is to live and not merely exist". This Council pays almost £10 per month to its labourers, which is the approximate average for all municipalities. The Johannesburg Council pays most so far as I know (nearly £13 per month) and so it should; but it is paying only half of the amount required for an austere life, with none of the luxuries enjoyed and deserved by all who work hard for a living.

It is not surprising when human nature rebels, and grasps the luxury at the cost of some essential need. Yet when it does, the gulf between income and expenditure becomes more unbridgeable, the hope of achieving a balance dies away, and liquor helps one to forget it all.

Seen against the background of these facts, the Congress campaign for £1 a day is absolutely justified. It is seen as a reasonable request, and an appeal that humanity should heed.

It is said of course that economics cannot justify such a wage, that production must increase and improve. All of us would agree that the standard of production should be raised. But there are two important reasons why it is difficult to raise; one is the

colour bar, the other is because the worker is beaten by it all; he cannot buy enough food, he cannot buy the right food, his spirit is broken by a struggle against odds that never get less. Raise the wages a Some will drink and gamble more - they are a loss already; but others will do what so many have done before them, eat better food, wear better clothes, keep children longer at school, take a little pride in the house, feel a little more joy in being alive.

And South African enterprises, especially the food and clothing industries, will take us another step forward in our struggle for a better life for all.

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No town-dweller earning from £0 to £180 per annum should pay any tax at all. He is not able to feed and clothe his family as it is. To add another fifteen shillings to his tax is to place on him an intolerable burden. People who are eating too little already will have to eat yet less.

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One hears that the Cabinet is considering ways and means of raising the wages of the very poor. May this be true.

When the wages of the poor white labourer were raised, the argument was humanity, not economics. And it worked.

Let humanity be the argument now. It will work too.