

Report of Committee on Training of Sugar House Apprentices

The past year has shown a continuation of the good work done in the past towards the proper training of beginners in the Industry. In spite of the hard times through which we have all been passing, the Technical College Course continues to be well patronised. During the present off-season the attendance numbers 52, of which 36 are employees of the South African Cane Growers' Association and 16 of the Milling Companies. This is a record number. There are now three classes at work, and reports from the College indicate a marked improvement in the general standard.

The syllabus remains unaltered except that the proposed course of Sugar House Accounts and Statistics has now been finally dropped, as it has been impossible for three years in succession to find a lecturer for this subject. This is greatly regretted as it is felt that the subject is one of increasing importance with the growth of up-to-date business methods in sugar manufacture.

Last year there were eight entries for the preliminary section of the City of Guilds of London Technical Institute Examination in Sugar Technology, of which seven passed, two being 1st class. There were also two entries in the final examination, both of whom obtained a second class pass. This was the best percentage of any country in the Empire. This year there are twenty-three entries for the preliminary and nine for the final. The examinations take place on May 6th, and it is hoped that as good a percentage of passes will be obtained as last year.

Once again the Committee has given a good deal of thought to the question of the future prospects of these young men. The position at present is fairly promising. During the past three years 22

juniors employed by the South African Cane Growers' Association as cane testers have found positions on the staffs of the milling companies. Most of these can look forward to a prospect of promotion at least as good as in most of the skilled trades in the country. It must be borne in mind, however, that there has been an unusual expansion of chemical control in the Industry during the last three years, and that some measure of saturation may be expected during the next few years, and it is felt that every avenue of possible future employment should be explored, especially in the direction of using more European assistants in the fields. The co-operation of milling and planting companies and individual planters is confidently looked for in this respect.

The Committee feel very strongly that the time has arrived for the establishment of some form of scholarship to enable a picked few of the most promising beginners to obtain a first-class technical education overseas. As a guide in this matter information is being sought from Australia as to the working of the scholarships in Queensland and especially as to the nature of any obligation placed on the recipients to accept employment in their own country on completion of their training. On receipt of this it is hoped that a definite appeal will be made to the leaders of the Industry to assist us on these lines.

(Sgd.) "B. M. NARBETH."

"G. HULETT."

"C. D. GOLDING."

"N. S. TOBIAS."

"G. S. MOBERLY" (Convenor).

CHAIRMAN: It is pleasing to see that the South African Cane Growers' Association are continuing to look after the future of their young technical employees so thoroughly and are evidently giving the matter their careful attention. There are many interesting points in this short report, and I think we may congratulate the South African Sugar Industry on having such a large proportion of entries and passes at the London and City Guilds Examinations in Sugar Manufacture. With regard to the last paragraph but one, I think it ought to be urged upon all factories, individually and generally, through the Association, that they should as far as possible select new recruits to their staffs from those already in the employment of the South African Cane Growers' Association, or at all events from those residing in this country. I have heard of a case recently (I do not know whether it is really a fact) that one of the factories has recently sent to Mauritius for an assistant chemist. I think that this tendency indicates a very unfortunate state of affairs, if it actually exists, since we are training in this country sufficient chemists who are accustomed to our particular problems and conditions. In the last paragraph I notice the Committee makes a further reference to the establishment of some form of Scholarship. That was strongly urged in the opening address that was given to you at the last year's Conference, and I sincerely hope that some of the well-to-do organisations, or individuals in our Industry, will seriously consider this important matter.

Mr. MOBERLY: I would like to take this opportunity to support what has been said about bringing in chemists from Mauritius. I believe that the incident Mr. Dodds mentioned is a fact. While we regret it, I think we all feel that there is no slight intended on the chemists from Mauritius, for I think this Industry owes a very great debt to Mauritius. There was a time when the whole of the technical work of the Industry was carried on by men trained in that country, and if it had not been for the work they did in the early years, we would not be where we are now, but we do feel that the time has come when we can stand on our own feet, and in the future we shall have a reservoir of trained technical men on which we can draw. We can certainly express to the Milling Companies the opinion that in future they should draw their new men from the Cane Growers' staff and not look elsewhere for men to train.

CHAIRMAN: I would like to endorse Mr. Moberly's remarks in reference to the chemists we have already had from Mauritius and who have been the foundation of the technical work of our Industry. I was not objecting to chemists from Mauritius in particular, but I felt that as we are training our own juniors for our own special work, it was inadvisable to send to any other country for assistant chemists. It would be different if it was a case of bringing in a specially trained man for a particular purpose, but

I do not think that was the case in the instance I referred to.

Mr. PALAIRET: I entirely support what the previous speakers have said, and to some extent it applies to work on the estates. It is a sound policy and seems very much council of perfection, but in practice is not dissimilar to the practice in the British Army where a man who had one particular qualification was employed as far as possible in duties not requiring that qualification. I think the agricultural side looks rather more to the engineering than to the chemical side. I do feel, however, that the agricultural side wants its assistants well trained, but is much more likely to take an interest in the youngsters who have had an engineering than those who have had a chemical training.

Mr. J. RAULT: What are the conclusions of this report? I see the Committee advises or expresses no opinion in regard to scholarships for these young men. I would be the last to say it is a wrong policy, and yet I have an opinion to give on this question of scholarship. The Technical College is pushing these students along as much as it can, but it seems to me that while these scholarships would be all right in their way, it would take some time to train up the young fellows, and even then they would have no knowledge of local problems. Might it not be better to take experienced men and let them visit the other leading sugar countries and pick up information which would help them to clear up our local difficulties? These experienced men would quickly get at the points and they might come back with knowledge which they could apply to clear up a lot of our problems.

Mr. MOBERLY: There is a great deal in what Mr. Rault says. It is true we have only referred to beginners in this report, but if scholarships were started, there would be somebody to select the candidates, and presumably they would look around for the men most fitted to benefit the Industry. What we desire is that the principle be recognised. When this was discussed by the Committee several questions were raised, and one was: "What hope would such a man have of getting a good position when he came back?" Provided you do not have too many of them, I do not think there need be any doubt on that head. The man with a thorough overseas training should not have any difficulty in finding suitable employment when he comes back. Another thing is what is to prevent your sending a man overseas and paying his expenses, only to find in the end that he prefers to stay overseas? To safeguard against that, apart from sending an honourable man, there should be some form of contract by which the man undertakes to perform a certain amount of service in this country. Some men have been sent overseas by milling companies at their own expense to train, and these men have been under an obligation

to serve a certain number of years with the company on their return, and something of the kind could be done in this case. We are making inquiries in Australia as to what they are doing in the matter of working the scholarships in Queensland, where I think they offer three scholarships, but on what conditions I am not quite clear. They sent a man to all the leading sugar countries, and he went to Cuba, Java, Hawaii, America and other places.

Mr. BECHARD: I appreciate very much what Mr. Moberly has been telling us, and I would again emphasise the point raised by Mr. Rault. The danger in sending someone overseas is that you can always find somebody, but you want a man who will be of use to the Industry. What Mr. Rault

says is very true. To have a selection by examination from a number of young men who might only have a certain amount of theoretical knowledge is not likely to be the most successful. We want men who know what our problems are, who can pick out and discard what they do not want, and such men can only be found amongst the highly trained men in the Industry.

The usual vote of thanks was accorded to Mr. Moberly for the paper.

The next paper was No. 12: "Report of Committee on Cane Planting and Cultivation." Read by Mr. P. Fowlie, Convener.