

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON TECHNICAL TRAINING.

The following report was read by Mr. G. S. Moberly:—

The Committee held two Meetings. The main problems this year were the position arising from the discontinuance of the ordinary annual training course at the Technical College and the need for a more definite and uniform scheme for training junior employees in the chemical and manufacturing branches of the industry, and engineering apprentices.

It was felt to be desirable that the whole system of training should be investigated and systematised and that the Natal Sugar Millers' Association should be approached with a request to give this matter their attention.

It was a generally expressed opinion that there was a tendency to engage more juniors than was warranted by the number of careers available. The Committee believe that this situation might be met by training the same youths in the manufacturing and engineering branches of the industry.

It is also suggested that a regular channel of promotion in the factory should be arranged in such a way that an employee during his training would obtain experience in all the different departments of the factory, and it is believed that such an arrangement would not only provide a fuller and more useful training, but would considerably increase the usefulness of the men employed.

It is the opinion of the Committee that in this way many of the present type of workers in a sugar factory might be replaced by technically trained men without great additional cost to the Industry.

The Committee therefore recommend that this Association when making its annual report to the Natal Millers' Association should request them to make a sympathetic investigation of the whole question of technical training and to offer its assistance for this purpose.

Continuing, Mr. Moberly said:—

In this connection we brought forward tentatively some suggestions which we felt might provide useful avenues of investigation. With regard to the suggestion that the same men should be trained in both sides of the Industry, it is not necessarily intended that all engineers should be chemists, and all chemists should be engineers, but we have a larger volume of men to consider than merely those who are going to attain to the high position of Chief Chemist or Chief Engineer. We have a large number of young men joining the

industry now whose ultimate prospects are either to be Assistant Chemists or Overseers. We were hoping as a result of these investigations that more careers might be opened to them throughout the various branches, and that a good deal of the work at present being done by what we might call "rule of thumb" men,—without disparaging them in any way, because many of them by long experience are extremely useful—might be performed by technically trained men. If we could have trained men in these positions they would acquire that same experience, and at the same time more technical knowledge, which would make them more useful. A tremendous responsibility rests on the Industry if we are not to allow it to become a blind-alley occupation. The circumstances of the Industry, and especially cane testing, necessitates the employment of a large number of young men, and we have to get a good type. We can't have unreliable men, picked up anyhow. We have to have a type we can trust and rely on, and men of that type naturally look for some sort of prospects and future. They are not going to be content to remain in what you might almost call "poor white" occupations. This question is one which should not be allowed to drift. As the Technologists' Association perhaps we are not in a position to do very much ourselves, but we have now got the ear of the Millers, and this is one thing we feel should be brought to their attention, with the request that it should be given sympathetic consideration, so that the Industry should be above reproach in the matter of opening its ranks to people they can't employ.

Mr. BECHARD: On the question of training sugar house apprentices, there is one point which seems a weak one. In the engineering and building trades in this country young men who are taken on to-day are generally given a fair guarantee that for a certain number of years they are going to be allowed continuous employment during that time. We have not unfortunately such a thing in the training of sugar house apprentices.

CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bechard has pointed out a weak point. Unfortunately up to now the matter has been dealt with in mills in rather a haphazard manner, and that is why we are now asking the Millers to assist, and tackle the thing in an organised and systematic way.

Members of the Committee:—

- B. M. NARBETH (Principal, Natal Technical College).
- N. S. TOBIAS (Divisional Inspector of Labour).
- A. A. RAE (Inspector of Machinery).
- W. B. COVERDALE (C. G. Smith & Co., Ltd.).
- J. RAULT (Natal Estates, Ltd.).
- G. S. MOBERLY (S.A. Cane Growers' Association), *Convenor*.