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The road before us is rough and uncertain.

Poverty, ignorance and disease exist in our country and among our people. So long as this situation prevails, we cannot afford to fail. Despite the many odds that we have against us, I have faith and confidence in the future.

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK IN FRENCH WEST AFRICA

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FRENCH WEST AFRICA is one of the continent's "grey" areas; among its 17-18 million African inhabitants live some 63,000 Europeans—not only officials and traders, but businessmen, wage-earners, shopkeepers, planters. While few of them are settlers in the same sense as Europeans in Southern and Eastern Africa, there is a growing feeling of permanence among large sections of the European community, a permanence symbolized by the increasing number of small shopkeepers who have come to Dakar, Abidjan and other urban centres in recent years to serve the expanding European population. Even among the approximately 14,000 European wage-earners there are many who plan to spend their working lives in Africa (interrupted by long vacations in France). French West Africa thus has many of the characteristics of a plural or multiracial society, and the French Administration is faced with the general problem common to all such societies: working out the terms of a peaceful coexistence of the races.

In principle, the French have committed themselves to a policy of full equality of treatment for Europeans and Africans; the ideology of equality forms the doctrinal cornerstone of post-war French colonial policy. This post-war brand of colonialism is a peculiar arrangement. It is a colonialism on the defensive, sensitive to hostile world opinion, anxious to "maintain social peace", and aimed at keeping an equal and ultimately autonomous West Africa within the French Union. Under its reforms, the cruder features of the old colonialism have been planed away. Colour bar and other

forms of racial discrimination have been legally banished; civil and political rights have been extended to all Africans; African representation in the French Parliament has been increased¹ and local assemblies of limited but growing authority installed; African political parties have been formed, and a free, aggressive trade union movement, which directs its considerable energies into a continuing fight against racial discrimination in wage-employment, has taken solid root. The new colonial relationship is one in which the existence of racial discrimination of any sort has become intolerable to Africans on the grounds that it is a vestige of the outlawed colonial situation. And such discriminations have become, under the new system, morally inadmissible and politically embarrassing to a French Administration committed to their abolition.

French West Africa is therefore the scene of an unusual experiment in race relations, one taking place under a combination of conditions unique in tropical Africa. It is a country in which Africans have much the same civil rights and freedom of organization as in the Gold Coast, a country in which there is a larger European population than is found in Kenya, and a country whose colonial administration is pledged to ensuring full equality of treatment to both races. The extent to which this pledge is being met, and the difficulties inherent in meeting it can be most clearly seen in the field of wage-employment and especially in the civil service, for in no other group is the sensitivity to discrimination more acute and the passion for equality more deep-rooted than among these urban wage-earners.

As we will show below, this passion for equality is expressed in French West Africa in the form of African demands (for such things as paid vacations in France) which may seem bizarre or even amusing. Yet the fact that such demands are earnestly put forward by Africans in French areas is not without lessons for other areas in Africa where there is talk of "partnership". The future of white settler Africa may necessarily rest in some form of partnership. But the French difficulties in West Africa suggest that no real partnership, no stable plural society can be constructed in Africa on any basis other than ultimately full equality. The heritage of political domination, social humiliation and occupational restriction to which the African is heir can be expected to leave him for a long

¹ French West Africa elects 20 of the 626 deputies in the French National Assembly. It should be noted that if the people of the overseas territories were represented in proportion to their numbers they would elect 390 deputies.

time with an exaggerated sensitivity to discrimination; and his taste for equal treatment, once liberated, is unlikely to remain satisfied with political or economic half-measures.

Before World War II the problem of equal pay for equal work between European and African did not really exist in French West Africa (hereafter denoted AOF, after its French name, *Afrique Occidentale Française*). Skilled and educated Africans were few; unskilled Europeans were exceptional; and the *mystique* of equality was undeveloped (since there was no pretence at real equality). There were thus few places where Europeans and Africans held comparable jobs, and where they did the African either accepted the prevailing racial differentials as a matter of course or resented them silently.

Since the war all this has changed. With the economic expansion of the last decade the wage-earning labour force has more than doubled, from about 180,000 in the mid-thirties to about 370,000 in 1954. Though the great majority of African wage-earners are still unskilled, the number of trained workers is growing both absolutely and relatively: 72% of the 231,000 African wage-earners in 1947 were unskilled (mostly migrant) labourers; by 1952 the African work force had grown to 356,000, and the proportion of unskilled labourers had fallen to 65%. More significantly, the number of Africans with technical training and higher education is increasing steadily: in 1948 there were less than 5,000 Africans in secondary schools and teacher training establishments; in 1954 the number had grown to 12,000. Some 1,600 Africans were in technical training institutes in 1948; in 1954 there were 3,100 in AOF and over 550 in metropolitan France. And by 1954 there were over 800 Africans studying in universities, about half of them in France.²

The growth in the number of skilled and educated Africans is but one side of the problem. Coupled with it is the growing size and changing skill composition of the European work force. In 1952 there were some 14,000 European wage-earners in AOF. According to the official classifications none of these are unskilled: 6,000 are managers and supervisory employees; 4,000 are clerks and office workers; the remaining 4,000 are listed as technicians and

² The French have traditionally lagged behind most other colonial powers in the provision of elementary education facilities. Though the proportion of school-age children attending classes is still very low (about 10%), the number of pupils in elementary schools has grown seven-fold since 1948—from 60,000 to 262,000 in 1954. (The figures are those given in the official report of France to the United Nations under Article 73c of the Charter, *Afrique Occidentale Française*, 1954.)

specialized workers. While most of these Europeans are no doubt skilled and experienced workers, a not negligible and probably growing fraction is made up of slightly-skilled and inexperienced Frenchmen—those who form part of that amorphous and much-discussed group in French Africa called *petits blancs*. Since the end of the war there has been a considerable inflow of these so-called *petits blancs*: on the French West African labour market there can now be found European waiters and truck-drivers, semi-skilled labourers and machine operators, inexperienced clerks and book-keepers. A number of these lesser-skilled workers come from France under contracts with employers. But many are ex-service men who have served in Africa and decided to stay on, or men whose contracts have been dropped and who are looking for other jobs, or men who have come without a contract, knowing little more, as a Dakar newspaper editor once put it, than that one African franc is worth two metropolitan francs.³

The rising skill and educational level of the African work force, in conjunction with the falling skill level of the European wage-earners has opened the way for conflict over the problem of equal pay for equal work. In the civil service, and less frequently in private industry, Europeans and Africans of comparable training and ability are now found working in similar jobs. And with the planting of the ideology of equality and sensitivity of Africans to any wage differentials which are, or seem to be racially-determined, all inequalities in treatment are bitterly, actively and noisily protested.

To meet the demands of Africans that all wage differentials based on race be abolished, and to make concrete the affirmations regarding equality found in the 1947 Constitution and elsewhere, the principle of equal pay for equal work was inscribed by French legislators into the two basic labour laws of AOF—the Lamine Guye Law of 30 June 1950, concerning the conditions of employment in the civil service, and the omnibus labour law (covering all other workers), the Overseas Territories' Labour Code of 15 December 1952.

Despite these laws, Europeans continue to receive higher incomes than Africans doing essentially similar jobs. In private industry the lowest-graded European receives a higher basic salary than the

³ France and French West Africa form part of a single currency zone, but the African franc (the franc CFA) exchanges for the French franc at a rate of one franc CFA for two "francs metro". Savings on income earned in AOF can thus be doubled by conversion in France, and this is one factor inducing immigrants to come to AOF.

highest-graded African. This is not so in the civil service, where basic salaries are the same for Europeans and Africans in similarly-rated posts, but in the civil service as in private industry Africans are disadvantaged with respect to that substantial component of wages—income consisting of bonuses and accessory benefits. The European wage-earner generally receives a six-month-paid vacation in France after each tour of $2\frac{1}{2}$ years; he receives a special bonus for the hardships of overseas service (called the *complement special* in the civil service, and *indemnité de risque climatique* in private industry) most often amounting to 20 or 40% of his basic salary if he is a civil servant, depending on his grade, and 40% of his basic salary if he works in private industry. Finally, he receives the benefits of the French law of family allowances.

With respect to all these accessory benefits and in other ways, the African wage-earner is less favoured, especially in private industry. He gets a shorter vacation, substantially lower family allowances, and in the civil service, a smaller percentage (generally 10 or 20%) of his basic salary as *complement special*.⁴

We will not consider further the differentials in private industry, but will rather, for several reasons, focus on the problem of equal pay for equal work as it arises in the civil service. First, it is more difficult to define "equal work" in private industry than in the civil service (though it is nowhere easy). The argument used by employers in private industry—that the higher basic rates and bonuses they offer to European workers are justified by their greater productivity—is not ordinarily used in the civil service, where there exist relatively objective criteria of productivity or at least of capacity, such as amount of education, score on civil service examination, etc. The nature of the equal pay problem can

⁴ In 1954 the basic salaries of European clerks in commercial enterprises in Dakar ranged from 29,300 francs CFA (\$170 at the official exchange rate of 175 francs CFA to one U.S. dollar) to 52,595 francs CFA (\$300) per month, depending upon the number of tours the worker has had in Africa. African office workers' basic salaries in the same city were between 6,150 francs (\$35) and 25,810 francs (\$150) per month.

Under the new (January 1956) family allowance system for Africans in private industry, the African wage-earner receives about 350 francs per child (of his first wife) per month, and certain other advantages: payments at time of marriage pregnancy of wife, etc.). To give some idea of the extent of the differential involved, one trade union source estimated that the annual benefits awarded under the French family allowance law (which covers almost all Frenchmen in Africa) amount to 92,000 francs CFA for a man with two children. A similarly-placed African civil servant, covered by the law prevailing in AOF, receives about 42,000 francs a year. (*L'Afrique—Force Ouvrière*, No. 24, Nov. 15, 1953.)

Finally, Africans receive paid vacations of generally a day or a day and a half per month of work, whereas the European ordinarily gets five days; and with respect to accident compensation, the European is almost always considered as covered by the comprehensive French law on accident compensation, whereas the African enjoys the much more limited protection of an archaic law of 1932.

therefore be more clearly seen in the civil service.

Furthermore, because of the greater difficulty of defining "equal work" in private industry, because of the relative paucity of Africans in private industry who hold jobs comparable to those of Europeans, and for other reasons, the issue of equality has stimulated much less agitation among privately-employed Africans than among those in the civil service. It is only beginning to be an issue in private industry whereas it has been the main item of contention in the civil service since the end of World War II.

Finally, the civil servants are a large and strategic group in AOF, and their grievances have widespread social and political implications. The 30,000-odd African *fonctionnaires* (civil servants) form the best-educated and most articulate group in AOF; among them can be found significant numbers of Africans who hold responsible positions and who work side-by-side with Europeans. They are the Africans most aware of and sensitive to racial differentials, for they are most closely in contact with Europeans on the job and most often in conflict with them.

The Administration's position on the question of equality in the civil service is that the requirements of the Lamine-Geuye Law have been honestly met: all posts are impersonally indexed, the rate for the job is paid, and entrance into all posts is open on the same terms to Europeans and Africans. The African civil servants, on the other hand, point to the persistence of differentials in income which in practice fall along racial lines. They denounce the differentials in bonuses and allowances as discriminatory, as a deformation of the spirit of the Lamine-Geuye Law. Specifically, they want the "special bonus" (*complément spécial*) fixed at 40% of the basic salary for all grades of civil servants, not, as is presently the case, only for civil servants of the highest grade (the *cadres généraux*, who are in the main Europeans, since few Africans hold the university degree required for entrance into this grade). They demand also the extension to Africans of the provisions and rates of the French law on family allowances, and they put forward the claim for a six month paid vacation in France for African civil servants on the grounds that African service is as arduous for them as it is for Europeans, and that in any case since Europeans get the French vacation so should they.

Because the Administration has refused to accede to these demands, spokesmen of the African civil servants' unions accuse it of double-dealing, of withdrawing by subterfuge and legal trickery a policy of equality which was presented at home and

trumpeted abroad as a great step forward. There is weight in these accusations if by double-dealing is meant the unwillingness of the Administration to grant equality not only with respect to basic salaries, but in bonuses and allowances as well. It is true that a definite desire to hedge manifested itself in some quarters, notably the Ministry of Finance, where many officials were concerned about the impact on the budget of an all-out policy of equal pay for all in the civil service. It is also true that in the interpretation of the law there has been a tendency to favour Europeans.⁵ But it is hard to see in this an exercise in pure deception. The Administration has, after all, some strong arguments in defence of its policy. Granting of the African civil servants' demands would have a number of harmful economic and social consequences—retrenchments in personnel, cut-backs in plans for economic development, redistribution of income from the relatively poor peasant taxpayers to the relatively rich *fonctionnaires*. Moreover, the granting of the African civil servants' demands would further distort an already lopsided wage structure. Before the recent introduction of family allowances to workers in private industry, the African *fonctionnaires* enjoyed incomes which were often as much as two to four times as high as the incomes of equally-skilled Africans in private industry, and the differentials are still considerable to-day. To raise African civil servants' incomes to parity with equally-placed Europeans would widen the gap between Africans in private industry and Africans in the civil service and create widespread dissatisfaction among the former.

These arguments are substantial. They are quite convincing on objective grounds. The only trouble with them is that from the African civil servants' point of view they are irrelevant. The civil servants' demand is for absolute equality of payment with the European in the same job; comparison of his income with that of

⁵With regard to family allowances, for example, the Lamine-Geuye Law states that an identical system of family allowances should apply to all civil servants, whatever their race. But it goes on to state (and this kind of rule is the legal basis of all the bonus and accessory benefit differentials) that when the worker comes from any area in the French Union where he benefited from a more favourable system of allowances (e.g. metropolitan France) he should receive the advantages of the more favourable system. This principle of "vested rights" (*droits acquis*) has been interpreted, over the objections of Africans, in such a way that in practice all who are metropolitan Frenchmen receive the larger benefits of the French law on family allowances, while the more limited system of benefits adopted in AOF is restricted to Africans.

The Administration has also made some questionable and awkward "mistakes" in interpreting the law, mistakes which reflect its own uncertainty as to the meaning of "equality". A ministerial circular of May 21, 1951 gave certain Africans the right to a six months paid vacation in France; a year later, however, this was withdrawn, the Administration arguing that the earlier circular had been a mistake.

Africans in private industry or that of peasant farmers is to him completely beside the point. Equality is the issue; it is a question of ethics not economics.⁶ Europeans who take jobs in AOF do not have a wide range of choice. The only case in which they admit bonus differentials to be justifiable is that of metropolitan civil servants actually detached for service in AOF.

The mainsprings of this demand for equality with the Europeans must be clearly understood, for it operates on two quite different levels. On a superficial level it serves as a tactical weapon of considerable force: the working conditions of Europeans form concrete goals around which the civil servants, through their trade unions, can frame their demands; and the existence of "unjustified" differentials in accessory benefits invests the demands of the Africans for higher benefits with a certain high moral tone. "Justice" unsullied by group self-interest becomes the rationale for the African *fonctionnaires* as they bargain to better their position. And also, by continual agitation the African civil servants aim to push the Administration towards further Africanisation of the civil service: in answer to the argument that the straining budget could not support the charges involved in the African demands, the *fonctionnaires* ask for the firing of lower-graded Europeans "who have no skill and who thus have nothing to teach Africans . . ."⁷

On a deeper level, the demand for equality has its roots in the colonial situation, and it is here that its real significance lies. Lifted from their social and historical context the demands of the African civil servants—for hardship bonuses, vacations in France, etc., seem divorced from reality and without foundation in objective grievances or material needs. If they were put forward by people innocent of the colonial experience and therefore without its peculiar psychological inheritance, they could be dismissed out of hand. But they cannot be so dismissed in AOF where all differences in treatment between European and African—anything that can be construed as discriminatory—is regarded by Africans as a remnant of the colonial situation and is therefore objectionable. The quest for full equality thus reflects the sensitivity of a people which has known a colonial past to all reminders of that past which persist

⁶ Africans tend to avoid the problem of whether the bonuses are in principle necessary inducements for European skilled workers who would be irreplaceable from domestic sources. They argue that the bonuses are in fact often unnecessary, that many Europeans who take jobs in AOF do not have a wide range of choice. The only case in which they admit bonus differentials is that of metropolitan civil servants actually detached for service in AOF.

⁷ *Le Proletaire*, organ of the Confédération Générale du Travail du Senegal, Oct. 1, 1951.

in the uncertain present. Since "colonialism" is usually identified with unequal treatment for Africans, to suffer such inequalities is for them to continue the colonial experience. As the numerous strikes and protest demonstrations of the past several years show, the African *fonctionnaire* settles for nothing less than absolute equality of salary, working conditions and bonuses and allowances (with some "justifiable" exceptions), and he will continue to agitate until he gets it.

The granting of freedom of expression and organization to Africans, the official policy of equality, and the European presence have thus created for the French Administration in AOF a difficult situation, one full of internal contradictions. The demands of the African civil servants cannot be met without the effects noted above on the budget, on income distribution and on the wage structure. A policy of dropping European benefits to the African level would perhaps put at rest the problem of equal pay, but it is not certain at this stage that even African *fonctionnaires* would accept this, and it is clear that European *fonctionnaires* would not.

A fundamental attack on the source of the problem is what is required. This means increasing Africanisation of the civil service. It means also the institution of a more selective immigration policy, the stopping of the flow of *petits blancs*. The government has begun to act on the former problem: early in 1956 it prepared the way for more Africans to enter the training school for overseas administrators (the Ecole Nationale de la France d'Outre-Mer); whereas up to now only a handful of Africans (three or four), were students at the school, the new rule will make as many as half the places available to them. Also, under an enabling law (*loi-cadre*) passed by the French Parliament in March 1956, the overseas civil service is to be separated from the French civil service, a move intended to free local authorities in Africa from French civil service regulations and allow them to extend Africanisation. Action on the problem of the *petits blancs* has been less forthright. Though the *petit blanc* is the universally-denounced whipping boy in French Africa, at whose feet is laid the blame for many of the racial tensions that exist, the Administration has so far refused to screen immigrants more carefully. It remains possible for any Frenchman to come to AOF simply by depositing with the authorities the price of a return trip to France.

It is in any event clear that the present situation is unstable and cannot long continue, at least not without considerable political danger for the French. The persistence of a situation in which the

African wage-earners generally and civil servants particularly feel themselves the subjects of discrimination risks the political alienation of this dynamic and "mobilisable" group. From the point of view of a French Administration anxious to avoid repetitions of the Indo-Chinese, North African, and even Cameroon experiences, the alienation of this group would be disastrous. As suggested earlier, the African civil servants are perhaps the most strategic element in French West African society. They are part of a new social group which is now in process of formation, one which combines the qualities of a rising middle class with those of an intelligentsia. They are more aware politically and more captured ideologically than any other Africans in the country. And the civil servant is the dominant force in the African trade union movement, which groups between 70,000 and 115,000 wage earners and which has in recent years engineered many impressive demonstrations of strength. The trade unions are in fact the most potent organized social movement in the country. To frustrate the desire for full equality that moves its civil servant leaders is to hurry the crystallization of a nationalist sentiment thus far diffuse. It will invite the quick replacement of the current vague political demands (for autonomy with equality within a federal French Union) with a more radical nationalist program. With only slight exaggeration it is possible to say that the political future of France in West Africa rests in large measure on the satisfactory solution of the equal pay for equal work issue—in the civil service now and later in private industry, where it is sure to arise with equal intensity. How it is dealt with will suggest to Africans the direction toward which they must push the French-African partnership.