

THE TRIBUNE,

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1906.

THE GOVERNMENT AND THE CHINESE.

MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL'S statement of the intentions of the Government with regard to Chinese labour was somewhat wanting in precision at the critical point, but in the main served to emphasize and develop the principles which we have always understood from the speeches of the PRIME MINISTER to form the basis of Ministerial policy. No more difficult question of principle has been bequeathed by the late Government to their successors than this. A vicious system has been introduced into a newly-acquired territory, not by the will of the people themselves, but by the authority of the Home Government. Such a system cannot be destroyed in a day. Upon it labour is set to work, capital is expended, business arrangements are made. We agree with Mr. WINSTON CHURCHILL that it would be impossible for the Government immediately by their own fiat and without reference to the people of the Transvaal to withdraw the Chinese to a man from the Rand. That being so, several questions at once arise—questions which critics of the Government are by no means always careful to distinguish. The first and greatest of these is, On what principle is the permanent attitude of the Imperial Government to be based? Is this question at bottom one which falls within the limits of Imperial responsibility, or is it one which can be in the end relegated to the people of the Transvaal? If this question of principle be satisfactorily settled there will be no lack of tolerance or liberality in judging the temporary measures taken by the Government in dealing with the Chinese as they find them. The Government themselves, however, have dealt with the case from the other end. Naturally enough they have been compelled to attend

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But when we come to the possibility that such an Ordinance might become a permanent condition of Chinese labour in South Africa, we cannot leave these elements out of account. We cannot forget that although now permitted to return home if they so choose, and though protected from arbitrary punishment and illegal fines by improved judicial machinery, the Chinese are still confined to the compounds, and are still debarred from following any industry other than that of unskilled labour. Mr. CHURCHILL justly laid down the principle that no labourer ought to be imported into any country under the British flag except as a free man. That condition would still be violated if the importation of Chinese were to continue even under the relatively humane conditions now secured by the present Government.

We are therefore compelled to face the main question whether the permanent responsibility for the presence of the Chinese on the Rand is to lie with the Imperial Government or with the people of the Transvaal when they have received representative institutions. The question of principle here involved was admirably stated by Mr. CHURCHILL last night. He pointed out that while the whole fabric of our Colonial Empire rests upon the fullest self-government in every one of the white Colonies, and while this self-government must, in the nature of the case, entail the consequence that many things are done in one Colony or another which are repugnant to the feeling of the Mother-country, still this latitude must have its limits, and it is precisely upon the question of free labour that one of the limits is touched. Mr. CHURCHILL made perfectly clear that the Government appreciate and accept this point of principle. They recognize that even if the people of the Transvaal should unanimously desire the presence of the Chinese it would still be for the Government to decide whether

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For this reason we somewhat regret that Mr. CHURCHILL should have avoided precision of statement. In the interests of the mining industry itself it seems to us most desirable that this question of principle should be decided once and for all with the greatest possible despatch. As long as it is believed that it will be possible to intimidate or cozen the Imperial Government into allowing the continuance of the Ordinance or its revival by a representative Government in some modified form, so long no serious effort will be made on the part of the mine-owners to set their house in order and adapt themselves to the normal conditions of free labour. It is best in the interests of South Africa that the owners should make up their minds at once that the day of labour attended with any element of servility is over, and that they must do what other employers of labour have to do when they want work-people—namely, go into the free market and attract men by fair pay and good conditions.