

THE POSITION OF SOUTH AFRICA.

"A list submitted by the Secretary-General to the members of the Council of the League of Nations on 30th August 1928 shewed that at that date twenty-four States had ratified or definitively acceded to the Slavery Convention." One of these States was the Union of South Africa.

In returning the Draft Convention to the Secretary-General the South African Government had remarked that its provisions "would not affect any existing conditions or customs obtaining in South Africa."

This on the face of it is a very fortunate position for this country to be in, and would seem to justify the claim made by General Smuts at Oxford that for the solution of Central African Native problems the experience of South Africa should be called in. "For a century and more South Africa has laboured and suffered over the very problems which are beginning to agitate the young communities in the North. This experience should be helpful beyond the Union." A little reflection however tends to modify the optimism of such a conclusion.

With the exception of the indentured Indian labour which was brought to Natal to work the sugar estates and the Chinese employed for a short period at the gold mines, all, or practically all, the unskilled labour of South Africa on railways, roads, mines, farms, at the harbours and in the towns is being done by the Natives and has all along been done by them. Indeed, though General Smuts was obviously thinking only of the White people when he spoke of South Africa having laboured and suffered, the South African Natives might quite well claim that the labour had been all on their part and a large share of the suffering too, and that it is *their* experience that would be most instructive as a guide to Central African policy. No one who knows anything of the conditions under which for many years Native labourers worked in the gold mines and the coal mines and what the death-rate was among those unfortunate men will have any doubt about the suffering.