FILE NAME: Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR)

DATE: 1949 June 14

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Private No. 243

AUSTRALIAN BLUE ASBESTOS LIMITED

PRODUCED IN MATTER OF
HEYS V. MIDALCO
NO 1161 OF 1987

PRODUCED IN MATTER OF
BARROW V MIDALCO
NO 1148 OF 1987

MINES & MILLS
WITTENOOM, W.A.

18 WILLIAM STREET
PERTH
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

G.P.O. BOX NO. 9
TELEPHONE B 2

Wittenoom Gorge

14th June, 1949

The Managing Director,
Australian Blue Asbestos Limited,
S Y D N E Y : N.S.W.

Dear Sir,

INDUSTRIAL MATTERS. After copies of the Industrial Agreement were forwarded to you about four weeks ago, the Carpenters and Painters entered a claim for an award and the Engineers Union raised some objection to the terms of the agreement. The position was discussed with the Unions, agreement reached on three occasions, followed by attempted alterations on the part of the Unions, but finally the matter was submitted to the Court without any alteration of note.

Evidence was submitted by the Union at Perth and transcript is enclosed. The Court then proceeded to Wittenoom where further evidence was called by the Unions and Mr. West has been asked to forward the Transcript to you when he receives copies from the Employers Federation. It has now been arranged for the Court to hear our evidence after completion of the Yampi case, probably the first or second week in July.

It will be noted that a good deal has been made of the possible effects of dust and fibre on health of employees, but except as a general disability, it has little direct bearing on any of the specific claims made by the Unions and although calling for improvements in working conditions in this regard, should not influence the Court's decisions.

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A somewhat vigorous attack was made on our diesel locomotives and this will be defended in principle both in Court and with the Mines Department. The local Workman's Inspector gave extraordinary evidence which is in keeping with his personal character and mental condition, but this can be effectively dealt with both in and out of Court. Unfortunately it may have some reperussions in dealings with Mines Department Inspectors for the time being.

The Unions claim a District Allowance of 30/- for single men and 40/- for married men. Although no mention has been made to the Court, or anyone, we have, in effect, agreed to this claim in principle by agreeing to subsidise rentals in the Township. The question now arises whether to put the subsidy into force before the formal hearing and hope to forestall the Court, or to await the Court's decision on the matter. We think it unlikely that the Court would grant an increase if we reduced rent. We await your decision on this matter and our proposal regarding rents is that we subsidise to the extent of 5/- per week at present, but if the Housing Commission increase rents the tenants should not be asked to pay more than 25/- per week. The latter would not, of course, be made public and could be decided after the Court's decision. If a rental of, say, 35/- for cottages at Wittenoom exists, it is considered that this will always be cause for claims by the Unions irrespective of concessions granted by the Court in the form of District Allowance and it is thought better to remove the cause as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully,

[redacted]

Manager.

Enclosures: Transcript - Industrial Matters.
Manager's Report for May, 1949
Financial Statement, May, 1949
Detailed Lists of Cheques Drawn, May, 1949.

Hill Mines
13-5-48

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A.W.U. ASKS FOR DEPARTMENTAL INSPECTION AT WITTENOOM

Says Workers' Health Endangered by Dust in Asbestos Mill

FIBRE CAUSES POWER UNIT TO FAIL; MEN NOT COVERED BY COMPENSATION

THE MINING DIVISION OF THE AUSTRALIAN WORKERS' UNION HAS ASKED THE STATE MINING ENGINEER, MR. FOXALL, TO HAVE AN INSPECTION OF THE MILL AT THE WITTENOOM GORGE ASBESTOS MINES, IN THE HAMERSLEY RANGES.

Announcing this yesterday, the secretary, Mr. C. T. Oliver, said the union was concerned with the danger to the health of the workers. In the mill, a large power unit had ceased to work when fine asbestos fibre was drawn into the engine.

Discussing conditions generally at Wittenoom, Mr. Oliver said that surroundings were pleasant, and there was plenty of water. However, accommodation was limited. Houses were provided for the staff, but the wages employees were housed in tents and barracks.

A township was planned seven miles from the mines, but only one house had been built and several were under construction.

Working conditions in the mine were fairly good, but the low back, which averaged only 5 ft., made mining conditions difficult.

No Dust Counts Taken

Mr. Oliver said the union had asked the State Mining Engineer, Mr. Foxall, to have an inspection of plant conditions at Wittenoom.

He said he was aware that the ventilation inspector, Mr. J. Lloyd, had made an inspection in January last, but the union believed that at that time the mill was closed and under repair, and for this reason dust counts could not be taken.

"However, the union feels it is not necessary to have the mill in operation for a proper appreciation of the amount of dust created during milling operations," Mr. Oliver said. "Everything about the mill is laden with a thick coating of dust.

"A large power unit failed because fine asbestos fibres were breathed into the engine and blocked the oil screen. I saw evidence of this, and I feel it adequately emphasises the dangers to which the mill workers are subjected.

"When the mill is operating, heavy clouds of dust drift through the plant, including the engine-room, fitting shop and offices. The whole atmosphere about the plant is dust-laden. There is no doubt that the health of workers in this section is exposed to serious danger."

No Compensation Risk

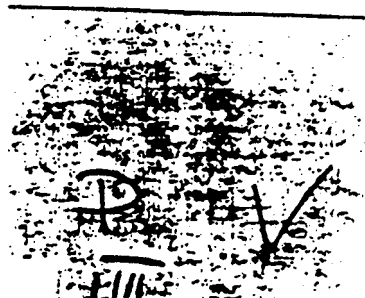
Mr. Oliver said the union objected to a Diesel locomotive being worked in dead ends underground in haulage work.

He said the union also took strong exception to men being engaged in Perth for work at Wittenoom Gorge on the authority of a provisional certificate.

He pointed out that these workers were not protected by the third schedule of the Workers' Compensation Act or by the Mine Workers' Relief Act.

The union thought that workers engaged in Perth could be X-rayed at the Perth Public Hospital. These facilities should be used by employers engaging labour for Wittenoom Gorge.

Mr. Oliver said that when he was at Wittenoom Gorge recently, 57 out of 117 men were employed on the authority of a provisional ticket.



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