

April 11, 1937

BOERS IN THE ARGENTINE

APRIL 11, 1937

“MANY WEALTHY MEN”
AMONG THEM

REPLY TO RECENT ATTACKS

NO REAL DEMAND FOR
REPATRIATION

The popular belief that the few hundred South African exiles, who left this country of their own free will for the Argentine at the close of the Boer War, are so poverty-stricken and ill-treated by the Argentine Government that repatriation is desirable immediately was flatly denied by two authorities yesterday.

Among the passengers in the outgoing mailboat was Mr. C. A. Willmers, a South African who is bound for South America, via Madeira, to rejoin this colony of Argentina Boers, after having already spent a year among them.

“None of them would improve their position by returning to South Africa, and few of them want to come,” Mr. Willmers told a representative of the Cape Times.

“Why should I be returning if their lot is as bad as is painted? I am not a rich man; I am going back to work with them. None of them

P.T.O

11 APRIL, 1931

s badly off as the poor whites of this country, but if they are repatriated most of them will certainly become poor whites."

SOME WEALTHY MEN

Mr. Willmers explained that in 1926 he joined his uncle, who was one of the original exiles and is now a fairly prosperous sheep farmer, although by no means one of the richest.

"Up to the time of the Great War," he said, "they were all comfortably off. The Argentine Government gave them every assistance from the beginning.

"Then came the war and a big rise in the price of wool. Those farmers in the low veld made plenty of money, but those in the high veld lost their sheep in the snow and were not so lucky. The rich men among them to-day are Messrs.

Visser, Deigo Venter, J. Behr, Eloff, and others, and I am now returning to work for Mr. Behr. Mr. Visser has retired and lives in Buenos Aires. He takes regular trips to South Africa,

has several sons, also farming, in good circumstances. Mr. Visser built the first house at Puerto Visser, and the town is named after him.

"Mr. J. Behr comes from Bloemfontein, and now lives at Canadon Logarto, where I am now going. He left Bloemfontein in 1900 with £400, bought some sheep, and after he had farmed his ranch for a year, oil was discovered, and the Argentine Government paid him a considerable sum for the farm. He was then able to buy many leagues of 'camp,' and to each of his five sons he gave 12 miles and 1,000 sheep. To-day all the sons are wealthy farmers.

SCHOOL WANTED

"A great deal of fuss has been made about the Government taking over the oil discovered by these farmers. In any case, all Governments have the right to do so, but to my knowledge Mr. Behr's farm was the only place where oil was found, and he was paid handsomely for it.

"I must admit that some of the farmers are lazy. They prefer to sit at home, drink coffee and dream of sunshine when now is on the ground. Coming from

P. T. O

11 APRIL 1931

South Africa, a land of sunshine and unmarked seasons, the older men find the winter trying; but the more industrious get out and make a few thousand by catching foxes, wild cats, skunks and other animals. In winter a fox skin fetches 15s. There is plenty of work for those who want to do it, and although a few work very little during winter, none are starving.

"Thousands of South Africans would envy the position of the poorest of them. They have their ups and downs, but taking them as a whole—and their farms are all adjoining—they are one big happy family. The rich among them always help the less fortunate, and nobody is really in want, as thousands are in South Africa.

"The one thing they sadly need is a school. The children are home taught. They speak Spanish outside and Afrikaans at home. English is practically unknown. I taught some of the children when I was last there, and a Mr. Melville, who once travelled as a schoolmaster from farm to farm, is now too old to continue.

"If the South African Government wants to assist them it would be doing a good service by providing money for a school. The farmers themselves could subscribe for a teacher, and I know of a headmaster in Johannesburg who is quite ready to go out if a school is provided."

DR. LINARES' PROTEST

Dr. J. M. Linares, Consul-General for the Argentine Republic, interviewed, drew attention to a recent article by Professor H. E. S. Fremantle.

"Against the contents of this article I protest energetically as the representative of that nation gratuitously offended thereby," he said.

Replying to the allegation that the Argentine Government had dispossessed the Boers of their property because of discoveries of petroleum, Dr. Linares explained that in nearly every country mineral rights were vested in the Crown.

As regards the statement that the unfortunate Boers resident in Punta Arenas had been turned out of their homes by the Argentine authorities, he pointed out that Punta Arenas belonged to Chile and was in no way controlled by the Argentine authorities. It was certainly not true that

11 APRIL. 1931

~~the~~ Spanish laws in Argentina were unjust to the Boers. The political constitution was most liberal and humane to any men of goodwill who had the courage to work.

“Why does Professor Fremantle refer only to the Boers who have failed, and not to the many who have succeeded in making respectable fortunes in my country, and after coming back here with the intention of settling down, have returned to Argentin-”
“?” asked Dr. Linares.
