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# **ECONOMIC POLICY AND LABOUR**

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS (*Continued*)

Government Organisation of Labour Flow .. ..	41
Ruanda-Urundi Immigrants .. ..	42
Sir William Gowers and a New Labour Policy .. ..	43
The Position of the Baganda .. ..	47
Lack of Precision in Government Labour Policy ..	48
Committee of 1927 .. ..	49
Attitude of Belgian Authorities .. ..	50
The Famine of 1928-29 and Labour Migration .. ..	50
Wages .. ..	53
Condition of Employment .. ..	55
The Elliot Report .. ..	57
The Committee of Enquiry of 1938 .. ..	60
Government Conclusions on Report of the Committee ..	63
Labour Policy in the Inter-War Period .. ..	64
Labour, Wages, and Commodity Prices .. ..	64
IV. ECONOMIC POLICY AND THE ATTRACTION OF LABOUR, 1939-1952	
Government Policy at the Outbreak of the Second World War .. ..	67
Relationship between Belgian Territories and Uganda ..	67
Report on Ruanda-Urundi .. ..	68
Devaluation of the Congolese Franc, 1940 .. ..	69
Labour Surplus and Shortages .. ..	70
Changes in Social Policy .. ..	72
Government Control in the Economy .. ..	74
Responsibilities of Employers .. ..	76
Labour Stabilisation .. ..	77
Post-War, Inter-Territorial Liaison .. ..	78
Government Policy and Labour Stabilisation .. ..	79
APPENDIX	
Immigrants entering Uganda from the South-West, 1938-1951	81

In addition to this general uncertainty and mobility of labour, Uganda has had to contend with three particular difficulties. In the first place, the supply of labour has tended to vary inversely with the demand. High world prices for raw materials prompt an increase in the demand for labour at the very moment when peasant farmers themselves earn higher incomes from the sale of their crops and are therefore less inclined to offer their services in the labour market. Secondly, a majority of workers have tended to be migrants from a distance. The greatest demand for labour has been in those regions where the supply is least, i.e., in the regions most favoured with a good climate, fertile soils, and easy access to the world's markets. But it is in these very regions that the indigenous people have themselves had ample opportunity to earn incomes from the sale of crops grown on their own farms or smallholdings, and their supply price to potential employers has therefore been far higher than that of migrants from a distance. Consequently, the supply of labour is very largely a supply of migrants from the less favoured to the more favoured regions. The migrant workers who come each year from Ruanda-Urundi to Buganda are a typical example. The importance to the Uganda economy of these Banyaruanda immigrants in fact confronts Uganda with a third particular difficulty. Because they come from outside Uganda's boundaries, the Government's employment policies have been wrecked time and again, as Powesland shows, by sudden fluctuations in the number of immigrants, occasioned by circumstances or events which might have been amenable to control had they occurred within Uganda.

A feature that distinguishes Uganda and other similar areas from the economically advanced countries of the West is not only that their income is low, but that it is very unevenly distributed between one region and another. In the central area of Buganda and Busoga, the early introduction into the indigenous farming system of crops like cotton and coffee, grown not for subsistence but for sale, has by now created a volume of money income which is in marked contrast with the level of farm incomes reached in the remoter parts of Uganda. Moreover, the infusion of money into the economy of this central area has been amplified with the wages paid by employers. Buganda and Busoga contain the two principal towns, Kampala and Jinja, the two large sugar estates, and a variety of other large-scale, alien businesses. Of the total enumerated labour force of some 225,000, over one-half are employed in Buganda and Busoga, and the enumerations do not include an estimated 20-30,000 who are employed mostly in one's and two's by Baganda cotton and coffee farmers. Only a minority of this labour force are Baganda and Basoga ; the overwhelming majority have come to the central area from the less favoured outlying districts or from across the Belgian border. Their willingness to come has tended to depress the wage level in the central area below the point at which it is attractive to the local indigenous population.

The geographical origin of these migrant workers in Buganda and Busoga has changed from time to time as the extension of economic agriculture has reduced the supply of labour from one place, or as a new or higher tax had initiated a supply from another. But throughout the period covered by this study, migrant labour as such has remained the characteristic feature of the labour market and, furthermore, the inflow from Ruanda-Urundi has assumed ever greater proportions.

Migrant labour tends to be inefficient and to generate for the community as a whole heavy social and medical burdens. Time and again the Uganda Government has therefore attempted to pursue policies which would free the economy from its dependence on migrant labour and to create in each of the employing regions a stabilised labour force or " permanent working class ".

In Kenya and Tanganyika some degree of stability has begun to emerge. But it has not been the result of measures the Governments have taken.

THE PEOPLES OF UGANDA



## CHAPTER I

### THE IMPACT OF MONEY

From the standpoint of economics, human migration may be regarded as an attempt to substitute one geographical environment for another, temporarily or permanently, in pursuit of a higher level of real income, or, more precisely, of a new equilibrium between economic activity and the enjoyment of leisure.

Migration may, of course, be the outcome of motives not primarily economic. Religious persecution or power of attraction may be responsible. The dispersal of the Huguenots is a classic example of the first, and the vast journeys made by pilgrims from French Equatorial Africa and even Nigeria across the Sudan to Arabia provide a present-day example of the second. In such movements as these, the economic aspects, though they may be of great importance, are a consequence rather than a cause of the movement itself. Fear, feud, or oppression may also be the impulse setting a migration in motion, and in the history of migration into and within Uganda examples of such motives are easy to find.

Nevertheless, in the past fifty years in East Africa it is the economic motive that has been by far the most important stimulus to internal migration. Migration through and within East Africa is certainly no new phenomenon. Its complex and disputed course has left visible evidence in the distinguishing physical characteristics of different tribes and, most notably in Uganda and Ruanda-Urundi, in the varying extent to which the successive waves of cattle-owning Hima have produced a more or less clearly defined element of caste in the communities found at the terminus of migratory movements.

The migrations of more recent times clearly differ in character from the older ones in many ways, though less, perhaps, in basic motivation than might at first be assumed. In the extent to which members of different tribes have intermingled, in the directions which the more recent moves have followed, in the diversity of the objectives pursued, in the speed with which new displacements of population begin and gather momentum, and in the attraction, for the first time, towards growing towns and industrial areas, the population movements of the modern colonial period have little in common with the shifts of population that occurred in earlier centuries.

Most of the distinctive features that characterise the East African migrations of the twentieth century can be seen as repercussions, of one sort or another, of the native inhabitants' gradual recognition and adoption of modern money as part of the indispensable apparatus of life. In Uganda, some of the chief effects of the impact of money upon different tribes can be traced fairly well by piecing together scattered references from the early literature and from administrative records.

At the turn of the century, concurrently with the establishment of settled British Administration in Central Uganda, modern money took effect upon the Baganda with remarkable rapidity, and within a short space of time many of these people were stirred by the lure of money to a variety of unaccustomed activities, including a willingness to travel far and wide in search of profitable trade or paid employment. The exceptional eagerness with which the Baganda reacted to the introduction of a stable medium of exchange and to the greatly increased influx of trade goods—especially after the arrival of the railway at the Lake Victoria port of Kisumu in 1901—can best be appreciated in the light of earlier Buganda history.

There is much evidence for the view that a people whose material culture has hitherto been sheltered from outside influences and has remained

relatively undeveloped will react to the sudden opening-up of lines of communication with the outside world in a characteristic manner. They will at first be most interested in types of imported goods that can be readily and advantageously substituted for goods they have already been in the habit of employing and that therefore seem unlikely to involve a serious disruption of their accustomed way of life. They may also react favourably to goods which, while not desired as improved substitutes for something already in use, catch their fancy as *curiosa* and can easily find a suitable niche in the fabric of their culture.<sup>1</sup>

In the early days of the opening-up of the Lake Victoria area, when costs of transport by head-porterage over hundreds of miles were extremely high, cloth, beads, and brass and copper wire were at first the chief articles brought in by the traders from the coast who visited Uganda in increasing numbers after the middle of the nineteenth century. The cloth brought by the Arabs was highly prized by the Kabaka, or ruler of Buganda, and the members of his entourage. Native barkcloth was not by any means entirely superseded, but cloth was adopted as a finer substitute by persons holding high office, and at the time of Chaille Long's visit to Kakaba Mutesa's palace in 1874, only members of the court were allowed the privilege of dressing in white cotton.<sup>2</sup> The Baganda were by tradition punctilious in matters of dress: the explorer Speke had, in the early 1860's, noted the dire penalties which might be inflicted for breaches of sartorial etiquette.<sup>3</sup> The adoption of white cloth as a mark of exclusive privilege in a country controlled by a powerful, numerous, and status-conscious feudal hierarchy of chiefs made it the more probable that later, when cloth, along with other foreign manufactures, became rather less rare and expensive, and when the native government came to exercise a less arbitrary power over its people, imported textiles would be among the goods in most popular demand. The prestige attaching to cloth was increased with the introduction and adoption of Christianity, especially in the eyes of the women. It is not surprising that by 1904 public opinion in Buganda had come to demand that cloth, exclusively, should be worn in church on important occasions.<sup>4</sup>

Beads and wire, which in Speke's time (around 1860) were in brisk demand in Buganda as in other parts of East Africa, later became of little importance in trade. By 1876 Emin Pasha noted<sup>5</sup> that in Buganda they were not much in demand. Beads no doubt shared the well-known economic characteristics of diamonds, so that when communications improved and they became abundant, they lost much of their allure. Wire, similarly, went out of favour for personal adornment as foreign influence increased and Europeans were observed not to use it for such purposes. But the Baganda's long familiarity with traffic in these and similar goods possessing some of the characteristics of money must have facilitated their ready adoption of modern currency when it was introduced in the course of the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Felkin, one of the very first Christian missionaries to work in Uganda, in describing the barter carried on in the 'eighties between the Zanzibar traders and the Baganda, mentions "an arm's-length of calico and a string of 100 cowries" as "the standard articles". A fat cow cost about 2,500 cowries or three arm's-length of cloth or two needles, or fifty percussion caps, or twenty charges of powder. A young boy-slave was worth 100 caps, four needles, or about 4,000 cowries. A young girl-slave was worth about a third more. (But the price of slaves at the time was "rising enormously".<sup>6</sup>) The awkward calculations which such a list of relative values might seem to imply probably did not often prove troublesome in practice, for, as Dr. Mair has

1. Cf. G. St. J. Orde Browne, *The African Labourer*, London, Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 34.
2. C. C. Long, *Central Africa*, London, Sampson Low, 1876, pp. 104, 113.
3. J. H. Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, Edinburgh, Wm. Blackwood and Son, 1863, p. 255.
4. *The Church Missionary Intelligence*, Vol. LV, 1904, p. 494.
5. I was unable to trace the source of this.—Ed.
6. R. W. Felkin, "Uganda," *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol. II, 1886, p. 217.

pointed out, trade was to the primitive Muganda a means of acquiring specific objects for which some need arose, rather than a perpetual process of increasing his total possessions by profitable exchanges.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, one important type of exchange—the exchange of labour for a wage to the best advantage of both parties—could scarcely have established itself so long as rewards were only receivable in kind, at rates that were constantly subject to wide variations, because employers would time and again have to negotiate and re-negotiate agreements with each individual concerned. It was not, in fact, until the rupee began to circulate from the last years of the century onward that the growth of a supply of voluntary, paid labour became possible.

At a missionary gathering in 1900 the collection consisted of “ thirty-six rupees, 25,383 shells, cloth and a can ”.<sup>8</sup> The rupee was coming in ; but it did not immediately displace the earlier media. The cowrie, in particular, though it ceased to be acceptable for tax payments in 1901, long continued to circulate among natives for the settlement of small transactions<sup>9</sup> and also to be used in estimating the value of domestic goods, such as cows or bark-cloth.<sup>10</sup> But for the purposes of wage-earning, the payment of taxes, and obtaining imported goods, the rupee soon became the unit in terms of which people made their calculations. Ham Mukasa recalls how, early in the century, the surrounding tribes were increasingly attracted by rumours from Buganda to the effect that the old money was no longer of any use, and that the Europeans had brought new and better money with them, and how some of them therefore came into central Buganda to try to obtain it.<sup>11</sup>

The rupee, unlike the earlier cloth and other primitive money, possessed comparatively little intrinsic commodity value and was therefore from the start likely to be a more stable medium than the items it was superseding. The pressure of demand on limited quantities of trade goods that were used as quasi-money might raise their internal value far above their value at the port plus the costs of transport, very heavy though these were. The relative value of the needles referred to by Felkin is an extreme illustration of this. In these circumstances a sudden influx of new supplies might speedily reduce their relative purchasing power as the commodity demand became increasingly satisfied. Since the rupee was not demanded as a commodity its exchange value was therefore less likely first to become fixed at a very high level, only to fall suddenly as supplies increased. On the other hand, so long as transport costs accounted for a large and variable part of the cost of conveying imported goods to Uganda, as was the case with all but the most compact and valuable items before the arrival of the Uganda Railway at Kisumu in 1901,<sup>12</sup> the purchasing power of the rupee must still have been very uncertain.

Despite this uncertainty, the prestige of European goods in the eyes of the Baganda in the last decade of the century was such that between 1895 and 1900 there was an adequate supply of paid labour available for all the needs of the time. It was said that by 1897 the Baganda had begun to develop “ a very considerable readiness ” for voluntary work. Roughly 600 were being used as labourers at Entebbe and Kampala, at a wage equivalent to Shs. 6/- a month.

Undoubtedly the presence and the teaching of the Christian missionaries, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, was a potent influence behind

7. L. P. Mair, *An African People in the Twentieth Century*, London, Routledge and Co. Ltd., 1934, p. 144.  
8. Held to mark the sending out of a group of twenty-nine Baganda missionaries to “distant outlying districts”: an illustration of one of the chief ways by which the legend of Baganda superiority was being powerfully reinforced at this time, and therefore a factor contributing to Buganda's later magnetic power as the main centre of attraction for immigrant labour.  
9. H. B. Thomas and R. Scott, *Uganda*, London, Geoffrey Cumberlege, 1935, p. 231.  
10. Mair, *op. cit.*, p. 144.  
11. Former Saza chief of Kyagwe county, Buganda, and author of *Uganda's Katikiro in England*, London, Hutchinson & Co., 1904. (Probably a personal communication to the author.—Ed.)  
12. In 1896 the cost of bringing loads to Uganda was described as “almost prohibitive”. It cost £8 and took 24 months to bring a load of 65 lbs. from Mombasa. A similar load could be brought from Bagamoyo to Bukumbi, south of the Lake, but it was liable to take much longer and there was the risk of total loss on the Lake. (Letter from Bishop Hanlon, *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. XII, 1896, p. 81.)



this enthusiasm on the part of the Baganda. " Au début de leur séjour dans l'Ouganda, les Pères Blancs avaient constaté les vices entretenus chez les Bagandas par l'oisiveté . . . Le contact avec les Européens devait, en créant de nouveaux besoins pour les indigènes, exiger de leur part des habitudes plus laborieuses. Par les conditions imposées pour l'admission dans la Société chrétienne, les Pères préparaient l'évolution économique nécessaire."<sup>13</sup> The rapidity with which the zeal of the missionaries infected the Baganda was as remarkable as were the economic consequences that flowed from it. The Bishop of Uganda said in 1908 that the number of baptised Christians in Buganda had increased from about 200 to 62,000 in the space of seventeen years.<sup>14</sup>

For many of the Baganda it was no longer a question of obtaining a few particularly attractive items, which could easily find a place in their traditional way of life. The way of life itself was in many cases undergoing marked transformation under the influence of Christian teaching. As early as 1896, for instance, by force of European example, better types of houses were being built, especially by the chiefs, and in 1899 Sir Harry Johnston, Uganda's first Special Commissioner, was surprised at the range of commercial tastes he found, especially where Christianity was making headway. The people were "greedy for cloth and almost every manufactured article up to a phonograph and a brougham".<sup>15</sup> No doubt the fever of enthusiasm for imported novelties was most marked among the leading chiefs, but it had evidently gripped many other Baganda by 1904. C. W. Hattersley, a missionary, commented that the principle that the supply creates the want had been well vindicated in Buganda: when people discovered what attractive things could be bought, they woke up to the necessity of somehow getting money.<sup>16</sup>

The arrival of the railway at the eastern shore of Lake Victoria made an enormous difference to prices, and this must have had the effect of bringing many goods for the first time within the range of objectives worth-while to work for. Even after the completion of a cart-road from Mombasa to Lake Victoria in 1898, the rate for carriage from England to Mengo was still reckoned at Shs. 3/- a pound, whereas by 1904 it had dropped to between 4d. and 6d. a pound.<sup>17</sup> The completion of the railway link with the coast revolutionised living conditions on the western side of the Lake, for the range of goods available in Uganda was greatly extended. Chiefs began to equip their improved houses with "the more ordinary pieces of furniture" and to appreciate many of the articles in daily use in England; and in such an elaborately organised hierarchical society as that of Buganda, the habits of the higher-ranking chiefs would naturally become the model for imitation lower down the scale. Barkcloth continued gradually to be displaced by cotton clothing, and the rising imports of this commodity were pointed to as a fair indication of the standard of material prosperity which had been attained.<sup>18</sup> J. B. Purvis in his *Handbook to British East Africa and Uganda* of 1900, refers to a great, though discriminating, demand in Buganda and Toro for such items as steel knives and forks, "clocks and watches that are not toys", boots, travelling trunks of a handy size, enamelled ware of every description, blankets of good quality, black jackets and vests, best calico, and linen of good stamp.<sup>19</sup>

By this time, however, another factor—one of much importance in the genesis of the labour movements in Uganda as elsewhere—had reinforced the existing incentives to wage-earning and provided one previously lacking, namely, the need for money to pay the Hut Tax of three rupees introduced with the signing of the Uganda Agreement of 1900, which established settled

13. I was unable to trace the source of this quotation.—Ed.

14. A. R. Tucker, *Eighteen Years in Uganda and East Africa*, London, Edward Arnold, 1911, p. 336.

15. H. H. Johnston, Preliminary Report on the Protectorate of Uganda, F. O. Correspondence, Enclosure in No. 101, April 27th, 1900.

16. *Uganda Notes*, June, 1904, p. 85.

17. *Uganda Notes*, June, 1904, p. 83.

18. *Uganda Notes*, June, 1904, p. 85 and p. 87.

19. J. B. Purvis, *Handbook to British East Africa and Uganda*, London, Swan Sonnenschein, 1900, p. 56.

administration in Buganda. Bishop Tucker, who fully recognised the objections to the tax on grounds of morality and hygiene, saw in it none the less this great merit: "it stirred to action and electrified into life the whole nation. Men knew that by a certain date the requisite rupees must be forthcoming . . . They set to work immediately to raise the needed amounts. Men from the more distant parts of the country poured into such centres of population as Mengo and Entebbe seeking work, the reward of which would be rupees. Thus it came about that the element of wages was introduced into the life of the Baganda, and another revolution—the economic one—was effected".<sup>20</sup> It was also recorded: "Where before labour was not easy to get, for some months now men have been crowding round asking for work, for loads to carry, and bringing all kinds of things for sale".<sup>21</sup>

Hattersley, looking back in 1904 on the changes brought about in the space of a few years, said, "It was the imposition of the hut tax . . . and the new Treaty, that gave the first great impetus to work and paid labour. It became at once understood that whatever the peasant got for his work belonged to himself, and had not to be handed over, wholly or in part, to his chief . . . Serfdom came practically to an end, and very soon even chiefs had to pay for labour to build their own houses".<sup>22</sup>

This reference to the new immunity of the emergent wage-earner from unlimited exactions by his chief, brings out another of the pre-conditions of a voluntary labour supply: a sufficient measure of personal security. In former days and, indeed, almost down to the time of the Uganda Agreement, the peasant would have had little incentive to offering his labour for hire, in the absence of any certainty of being allowed to keep the proceeds of his efforts for his own enjoyment. At the time of Speke's visit, the peasant was forbidden to have in his possession any articles of foreign manufacture other than beads and brass wire (exchanged, as they were, for ivory or slaves). Should cloth, for example, be discovered in his possession, his property would be confiscated and his life taken.<sup>23</sup> So late as 1896 an explorer who had recently visited Uganda expressed the view that the chiefs would undoubtedly oppose their people's wishing to work for the white man and would take from them part of their wages. Without the security in which to enjoy the fruits of his labour, no one would trouble to work for more than a bare living. "At present Europeans practically pay the chiefs, who tell their men to do the work . . ."—a practice the explorer strongly criticised.<sup>24</sup> Writing a few years later, another observer said, "The system of paid labour came only gradually into force [in Buganda] owing to the passive hostility of the chiefs who declined to send labourers . . . they prevented their peasants from accepting the paid labour offered by the Government. In 1894 a few natives applied voluntarily for work and when they found . . . that they were allowed to keep what they had earned, more and more came forward. . . ."<sup>25</sup>

Increasing familiarity with modern monetary habits was one of several simultaneous developments which, in Buganda at least, quickly began to break down these restraints upon the free movement of potential labour. The 1900 Agreement, by bringing the exercise of power by the chiefs more closely under the surveillance of Her Majesty's representative in Buganda, directly promoted the personal security of the peasant. But the land settlement incorporated in the Agreement was also responsible for lessening the ties which formerly bound the peasant to his chief, and thus for facilitating the mobility of labour.

In the days before the settled administration of Buganda under the Protectorate Government's over-rule, the chiefs would have had reason enough for discouraging their people from wandering off in search of wealth (to the

20. A. R. Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

21. *Mengo Notes*, December, 1900, p. 32.

22. *Uganda Notes*, June, 1904, p. 85.

23. J. H. Speke, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

24. G. F. Scott Elliot, *A Naturalist in Mid-Africa*, London, Innes, 1896, p. 53.

25. W. J. Ansorge, *Under the African Sun*, London, Heinemann, 1899, p. 92.

limit set by the risk of driving them to shelter under a less exigent rival). Chiefs would have been motivated not by mere covetousness but by the desire to have their adherents close at hand. The merits of a chief were judged very largely by the popularity indicated by the number of his peasants, and a chief whose following was noticeably on the decline might be removed by the Kabaka to a lesser station.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, a chief's wealth consisted mainly in personal services and tribute in kind contributed by those claiming his protection and the right to cultivate land under his jurisdiction. The greater the number of contributors, the better off the chief, and the better able to display the degree of lavishness and liberality in feast-giving and other manifestations of generosity on which his popularity in turn to a large extent depended.<sup>27</sup>

With the implementation of the land clauses of the Uganda Agreement of 1900, which allocated 8,000 square miles to be distributed amongst 1,000 chiefs and private landowners (the number had increased to about 3,700 by 1905),<sup>28</sup> the more important chiefs acquired a new source of wealth and therefore had less reason to restrain their people from going off to seek their fortune in rupees. Besides, the older forms of tribute were no longer the only forms of wealth the chiefs could derive from their peasantry. It was among the chiefs that the desire for European goods was strongest, and many soon began to accept personal tribute in rupees instead of in the form of personal services, which did not possess the novel attraction of ready convertibility into the marvels of European manufacture which the traders were bringing into the country in ever-increasing variety.

As early as 1905 the payment of a money "rent" by tenants seems to have become an established practice: it was decided by the Government in that year to fix a rental of two rupees per annum for allotments of Crown Land held under temporary occupation by natives, on the principle that if they were occupying "the land of a native chief" they would pay him a similar amount.<sup>29</sup> A few years later, when the profitable possibilities of cotton-growing came to be recognised and when, partly as a consequence, the current wage rate had risen, the chiefs discovered to their embarrassment that their tenants were getting the better of them. For a tradition had incautiously been allowed to spring up of commutation being accepted at the fixed rate of two rupees. Despite their early acceptance of a money payment from tenants in lieu of labour services, the chiefs clung to the idea that they had a right to receive their due in the old form if it suited them better. It is significant, however, that when in February, 1910, the Buganda native authority placed the predicament of the landlords before the Provincial Commissioner, it did not suggest going back on the newly established tradition of commutation at the option of the tenant: it simply asked for authority to increase the rent from two to three-and-a-half rupees, this sum to be paid by "any tenant who refuses to work for his landlord", so as to enable the latter "to get a porter [labourer] to do his work in place of his tenant". The request was granted, and the Government, taking its cue, proceeded to raise the rental on Crown Land plots in Buganda to the same level.<sup>30</sup>

This meant the removal of a large stumbling-block in the way of labour movement at an early stage in Buganda's development, whereas elsewhere—in Busoga for example—the labour tribute owed personally by peasants to their chiefs continued much longer to hinder the free movement of labour. Even in Buganda the peasant was still subject to *luwalo*, the traditional corvée of one month's unpaid labour for the upkeep of local roads and native public works, an obligation which did not become universally commutable by the Baganda until 1930.

The consensus of contemporary writing leaves little doubt that, in the

26. W. J. Ansonge, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

27. L. P. Mair, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

28. A. B. Mukwaya, *Land Tenure in Buganda*, Kampala, East African Institute of Social Research, 1953, p. 23.

29. Entebbe Secretariat Archive, Circular No. 8 of 1905, dated 31st March, 1905.

30. Entebbe Secretariat Archive, Secretariat Minute Paper (henceforth E.S.A. SMP) 451 (O.S.)/1a; 40.

first decade of the present century, it was the Baganda who attracted attention as the great travellers of the day, as a result of the new freedom from restraint and of the unprecedented demand for cash for buying imports and for meeting the hut tax. Baganda were frequently to be found far from home, in search of some attractive way of earning money, although later they themselves were to become the chief employers of others on a similar quest. Statistics that would illustrate the range of their movements are, unfortunately, almost totally lacking, but the unusual activity of the Baganda in unaccustomed ways and places gave rise to considerable surprised comment. Hattersley, who was an acute observer of the economic aspects of the conversion of the Baganda to the Christian faith, commented in 1904: "Now great numbers of men are constantly employed carrying about goods for barter, and for various expeditions. Not only foreign traders but Baganda send out large trading caravans to the Congo Free State and to German East Africa . . . and require a large number of porters to carry their barter goods and ivory".<sup>31</sup>

Another writer in 1904 likened the Baganda to the Jews: they were no longer confined within their own country, but were to be found in every important trading centre in and around the Protectorate, in isolated stations down the railway line and in unexpected corners of remote districts—as far north as the Sudan border, in Bunyoro, Toro and Ankole, and eastwards as far off as the coast. They were there trading or working as labourers.<sup>32</sup> In 1906 the same story was being told: "Wherever houses are to be built, Government stations established, roads constructed, there the Baganda will be found. Not only in British territory on both sides of the Lake, but in German territory to the South and Belgian to the West . . . wherever prospects of trade open up, the Baganda will go".<sup>33</sup> There are several references to a substantial labour force of Baganda working at Kisumu during this early period. Estimates of their number varied between 200 and 500. Most of them stayed there for a few months at a time, working as porters or general labourers. The inducement was a rate of pay more than double what could be earned in Buganda, although food prices were correspondingly higher.<sup>34</sup>

The long-established habit amongst travellers and missionaries of comparing the Baganda favourably with other tribes was further confirmed by the initiative they were displaying in seeking out the best markets for their services. "The Baganda have *ambition*, and the Kavirondo [on the opposite side of Lake Victoria] have none. The Baganda travel widely in search of wealth, while the Kavirondo stay at home. The Baganda are keen to learn new trades, to build better houses, to gain a better education; they are willing to pay the price for these things, and to go through the drudgery necessary for their acquisition. . . ."<sup>35</sup>

The fact that so many Baganda were at this time willing to forsake the comforts of home and to go abroad in search of money reward, and that they were quite willing on occasion "to engage themselves for six months at a time to carry loads or work as labourers"<sup>36</sup>—work of a type that formerly and subsequently they were reputed to despise—can be seen as evidence of the exceptionally large gap between new and consciously felt wants and the domestic or local means available for their satisfaction, rather than as any indication, either that they were migrating far from their own country because they enjoyed travel for its own sake, or that their prejudices against certain types of work were undergoing a permanent change. After the middle of the first decade of 1900, Baganda Odysseys seem to have become less common. They first took to growing cotton at home; later, in the years immediately preceding World War I, the opening-up of European plantations provided

31. C. W. Hattersley, "Uganda, Progress of Commerce," *Mengo Notes*, 1904, pp. 85-6.

32. "The Eastern Province: from Mengo to Masaka," *Uganda Notes*, November, 1904, p. 160.

33. J. J. Willis, "The Mission of the Uganda Church," *Uganda Notes*, April, 1906, p. 60.

34. J. J. Willis, "Christian or Mohammedan," *Uganda Notes*, May, 1904; cf. also *Native Labour Commission Report*, 1911-12 (Nairobi), pp. 101, 140.

35. "Kavirondo, a Comparison and Contrast," *Uganda Notes*, January, 1906, p. 15.

36. J. B. Purvis, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

them with opportunities to earn money nearer home, although the predilection of many Baganda for occupations requiring literacy or skill undoubtedly still held a considerable number in distant stations and towns.

The great ambition of many Baganda, however, whether earning money away from home or growing cotton or coffee as tenant farmers, has long been the same : to save sufficient cash for the purchase of a plot of freehold land. In Buganda, the easy transferability of land has, indeed, provided a powerful additional incentive, of a kind which in the past has rarely been operative in tropical Africa, to economic activity in general. It has not only spurred some Baganda to seek remunerative employment, if need be in urban centres away from home, but it has also stimulated others to a more intensive development of their rented acres, often with the aid of immigrant labourers drawn from other tribes, in order to provide the savings required to purchase land.<sup>37</sup>

Outside Buganda, the reaction to the opening-up of trade and to penetration by modern money came later, but in the Eastern Province especially the first changes associated with such contact occurred rapidly. North and east of Lake Kyoga, where Baganda influence had been little exerted, or had only recently begun to make itself felt through the arrival of Baganda missionaries, administrative intermediaries, or colonists,<sup>38</sup> there was evidently much less familiarity at first with the idea of money and its uses than there had been in Buganda itself. In 1906, when the first Governor of Uganda, Sir Hesketh Bell, visited Acholi in the remote Northern Province, there was clearly not much scope for the displacement of native goods by European substitutes : household possessions were limited to " a few calabashes and pots and a grass mat or two " ; and the taste for imported objects was still in the embryo stage of " small white beads " and " turkey red cloth ".<sup>39</sup> Among the less remote Bakedi<sup>40</sup> in the Eastern Province, there were already signs of change : the vast majority, as their name implied, still did without clothing altogether, but a desire for it was growing, and there were cotton goods on sale in the Mbale bazaar, as well as such items as looking-glasses and brass wire,<sup>41</sup> characteristic of the earliest stage in the evolution of African commercial tastes.

The Governor also commented that year on the willingness of the Bakedi to work on the roads for nothing ; this " happy state of affairs ", he said, could not be expected to last very long. The facilities for trade which were being brought to these people would soon give them a sense of the value of their time, and each year would show a slackening in their willingness to give their due to the State.<sup>42</sup> Only four years later, in 1910, the Bakedi were selling " enormous crops " of cotton.<sup>43</sup>

This swift change owed much to the stimulus given to cotton-growing by the administrators and by the Baganda agents whom they were using with marked success as demonstrators and intermediaries, although there was at first a formidable barrier of incomprehension to be overcome. The District Commissioner at Mbale had recently commented upon how difficult it was to get the people to take up a new crop, and more especially cotton, because, " owing to their entire indifference in money matters ", they could not see any object in growing anything but food products.<sup>44</sup> Even when baskets of cotton were brought into the buying-posts in 1910, it was said that some of the " sellers " had to be held back so as to be paid.<sup>45</sup> But this was the very

37. The present-day role of the Baganda as employers of immigrant labour is described in detail by Dr. Audrey Richards in Chapters V and VII of *Economic Development and Tribal Change*, Cambridge, Heffer, n.d.

38. Notably the outstanding chief Kakunguru and his Baganda followers who established themselves near Mbale in 1901-2 and paved the way for British administration in that region. (Thomas and Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 445-6.)

39. Sir Hesketh Bell, *Glimpses of a Governor's Life*, London, Sampson Low, Marsten and Co. Ltd., n.d., pp. 138-9.

40. The term, meaning " the naked people " was often used somewhat indiscriminately in the early days to describe a whole group of tribes living westward from Mount Elgon roughly as far as Serere and Pallisa.

41. G.B. Colonial Reports, Misc. No. 57, Uganda. (London, H.M.S.O., 1909) Cd. 4524, p. 9.

42. E.S.A. SMP 1054 (O.S.)/Report on His Excellency's tour through the Eastern Province.

43. *Uganda Notes*, July, 1910, p. 107.

44. Supplement to the *Uganda Gazette*, 1st June, 1909, p. 156.

45. *Uganda Notes*, July, 1910, p. 107.

end of the pre-monetary age for these tribes : the Poll Tax Ordinances had been proclaimed operative in Bukedi from 1st April, 1909,<sup>46</sup> and henceforth there would always have to be at least a bare minimum of cash for all able-bodied adult males to find. There were signs, too, that apart from an incipient demand for cloth there would soon be interest in some of those imported goods that could most advantageously replace indigenous ones. News soon spread of some of the outstanding bargains to be obtained for rupees. For example, in 1909, one of the first requests made by some of the Teso chiefs in Eastern Province, with whom the Baganda agents had been making preliminary administrative contacts, was that traders might be sent up into their country so that their people might obtain iron hoes.<sup>47</sup> But these remoter tribes were unlikely to catch up at one step with the Baganda in the extent and diversity of money needs. Where the range of indigenous equipment was very narrow, the demand for imported substitutes, like iron hoes or enamelled ware, was unlikely to be large. A more varied demand for imports had to await the spread of literacy, and there were as yet far fewer schools in these newly encountered areas than in Buganda, where one estimate put the number of children in school by 1913 at the remarkable figure of 80,000.<sup>48</sup>

The need to find money for the payment of tax often gave the first impulse to entering the exchange sphere of the country's economy. The two chief methods by which the money could be found were to grow cotton or to work for wages. The fact that they were not equally available to all meant that the real burden of any given tax obligation could vary greatly between one person and another and even more between the inhabitants of different districts.

While in Buganda, for example, by 1908 there were still those who preferred to earn money by trading or hawking cloth and other goods up and down the country, cotton was being grown by increasing numbers, and Hattersley commented on the ease with which Baganda could earn the hut tax by growing cotton.<sup>49</sup> For some of the neighbouring tribes, however, accidents of geography—unsuitable climate or soil, and remoteness from communications—meant that the real cost of finding the tax was much greater than for the Baganda or Eastern Province peoples, whose soil and climate happened to suit the cotton plant. And this was true in spite of the fact that poll-tax rates have always varied in amount from one district to another, so as to allow for differences in the average capacity to pay. These disparities between one tribe and another and between one part of the country and another in the relative availability of opportunities for cash earning, whether for taxes or for other money needs that developed, very largely explain the tribal composition of the immigrant labour force on which Buganda, and most recently the Jinja zone, have come to depend.

The imposition of the poll tax in the districts surrounding Buganda was undoubtedly of first importance in setting in motion this supply of migrant labour for the central employment areas. Thus, in 1922, when Alur tribesmen of the West Nile District in the north were first beginning to come down into Bunyoro and Buganda in search of employment, it was said that for many of them it was the only way of finding their tax.<sup>50</sup>

Many Ankole people, too, at about the same period, found themselves in great difficulties over poll tax, in striking contrast to the neighbouring Baganda who could rely on cotton to produce the cash they required—though even the cotton-growers were not immune from the risks of bad weather or a capricious market. The difficulty in the case of the people of Ankole was that the inhabitants, like the Bagisu living on the cool slopes of Mount Elgon, had really nothing but their livestock to convert into money, and even this—"the only riches of our country", as the *Omugabe*, ruler of

46. *Uganda Gazette*, 1st April, 1909, p. 72.

47. Supplement to the *Uganda Gazette*, 1st June, 1909, p. 183.

48. *The Uganda Herald*, Kampala, 1st August, 1913, p. 13.

49. C. W. Hattersley, *The Baganda at Home*, London, Religious Tract Society, 1908, p. 114.

50. E.S.A. SMP 2002 (O.S.)/569.

Ankole, had described them in an appeal to the Governor against any immediate tax increase—had recently been decimated by rinderpest.<sup>51</sup> By 1920, however, the way seemed open for the imposition of the higher tax, which was accordingly raised from Rs. 5/- to Rs. 7/50 from January 1st, 1921, with the agreement of the *Omugabe* and his council. The effects of the increase soon began to make themselves felt on the Banyankole with a severity that was quite unforeseen, for the increase coincided with the first post-war depression.

The Bishop of Uganda, in August, 1921, called the Government's attention to the grave repercussions of the tax on Ankole life. Losses among herds through disease had almost eliminated the trade in hides and in salt for the cattle. There were no European plantations in Ankole, and neither cotton nor coffee had proved a success. In order to find the necessary money for the poll tax, the majority were compelled to make the journey of about 250 miles each way to Buganda, and even there, the depression was severely restricting the field of employment open to casual immigrants from other, still more impoverished, districts. Many, therefore, returned, having failed to earn the full amount for the tax required, while others remained in Buganda—often with a disastrous effect on domestic life. The severity of the tax also caused people to migrate in the opposite direction, to Kigezi in the far south-west corner of Uganda, where the tax was lower, and even over the border into Ruanda. In many parts of Ankole people had reverted to skins for clothing.

As a result of this and other reports in the same vein, the Provincial Commissioner was instructed in October, 1921, to exercise wide discretion in collecting outstanding taxes for the current year, and the rate was cut to Florins 5/- for 1922.<sup>52</sup> The reduction did not, however, make it any less necessary for large numbers of Banyankole to seek work in Buganda.

As Ruanda-Urundi came under closer administration by the Belgians, the effect of taxation there was likewise to stimulate movement into Buganda to earn the cash required, and in subsequent years immigrants from this region have constituted numerically the most important single element in the alien population which the Baganda have drawn into their country. The fact that an international boundary crosses the path of the immigrants from Ruanda-Urundi interposes the additional variable of the Congolese franc-sterling exchange rate into the nexus between tax obligations and their fulfilment. So far as can be judged from statistics whose reliability, especially for the early years of the movement, leaves much to be desired, the Banyaruanda and Barundi have generally reacted sensitively to changes occasioned by variations in the exchange rate, as to the relative advantages of money-earning in Uganda or in Ruanda-Urundi.

Migration is in a sense dependent upon the existence of money as a unit of account or a measure of value. A measure of value is necessary to enable people to assess the relative advantage of migrating or of staying put. Yet it is precisely in this role of a measure of value that money also introduces a number of concealed tendencies, which distort the judgement of all concerned in a labour market: the judgement of would-be workers, of employers, and of the Government in its capacity as the final arbiter of what is in the public interest.

The individual tribesman is prone to suffer from a peculiar form of "money illusion". He tends to regard money as belonging to a fund to be exclusively reserved for a clearly demarcated category of uses—for paying tax and buying imported goods, or for bride-price (either through the purchase of cattle or directly), or for similar special purposes. He is often reluctant to reconcile himself to the necessity of paying money for native-grown food, which he has always taken for granted as, if not a free food in the sense of being available at no real cost, at least something supplied independently

51. E.S.A. SMP 3841 (O.S.)/20c and 5355 (O.S.)/20b.

52. E.S.A. SMP 5355 (O.S.)/37. The rupee had been converted into the florin in July, 1920, but the change was short-lived and the florin was superseded by the shilling currency as from 1st January, 1922. (Thomas and Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 232).

of the restricted monetary sector of his personal or domestic economy. His attitude may, perhaps, be likened to the irrational irritation of an English motorist who comes to a toll road in a remote part of the country. A wage differential between town and country, or between one district and another, has therefore a tendency to stimulate movement into the high money wage area to a greater extent than would be the case if the money cost of food and, in some cases, of shelter were given due weight in the migrant's calculations.

The "money illusion" may show itself in another form. The migrant may discover that he now has to pay for everyday necessities—food, beer, fuel—which he had always assumed belonged outside the monetary sphere, and that, in addition, urban working conditions impose heavier demands for clothing (notwithstanding the extreme leniency of African public opinion in the matter). He may try to maintain his accustomed consumption standards and in consequence find himself as far away from the mirage of his original intentions as he was when he first arrived. His exposure to unexpected temptations to buy merely aggravates his predicament. Thus the District Commissioner, Ankole, complained in 1914 of the "extreme difficulty" of getting poll tax from the Banyankole who went to Buganda plantations with the object of earning the sum required. "As a general rule these men return here with only one or two rupees, having spent the rest of the money on clothes or meat in Buganda or Buddu, and are as far off paying their tax as when they left Ankole".<sup>53</sup> Pagès, similarly, writing in 1930 of the inhabitants of Bugoyi in Ruanda, says: "Les jeunes gens et même les hommes faits avaient durant ces dernières années une tendance à aller chercher fortune en territoire anglaise, où les salaires sont plus élevés à cause de la valeur du shilling. Ils reviennent généralement avec des économies très modestes car ils dépensent sur place presque tous leurs gains en nourriture et en habillement. On cite des pauvres diables qui sont rentrés au logis familial plus pauvres qu'ils ne l'étaient au départ".<sup>54</sup>

The money wage also helps to create something of an illusion in the employer's eyes. In depersonalising the link between himself and his employees, it tends to reduce labour in his mind to an aggregate of equivalent units—in fact, to the African analogue of the English labouring class which Ricardo saw as a race apart, and to the "labour" of the elementary economic theory.<sup>55</sup> The outcome of such an attitude tends to produce its justification. The partial nature of the commitment between employer and employee is not readily understood by the African migrant fresh from his tribal environment; and the employer who does not take a personal interest in the labourers he employs, and thus fails to supplement the contractual link from which the unsophisticated labourer derives so little effective satisfaction, is apt to be faced with a rapid rate of labour turnover.

A rapid labour turnover, whether for this or other reasons, such as the unfamiliar nature of the tasks to be performed, the pursuit of a higher wage elsewhere, or difficulties over the food supply, in turn tends to confirm the reputation of migrant labour as inexperienced and unreliable, with an average worth per man so small that a serious attempt at differentiation often does not seem worth while.

The effects of modern money and exchange, upon the habits of thought and behaviour proper to a pre-monetary economy are not, of course, the sole cause of the characteristic mobility of the newly emergent labour force in a country in the early phase of the disruption of its tribal organisation. In Uganda the mere establishment of law and order over areas that had been

53. E.S.A. SMP 1493 (O.S.)/1(2).

54. P. Pagès, *Un Royaume Hamite au Centre de l'Afrique*, Brussels, 1933, p. 637.

55. See, for instance, P. Saffra (Ed.), *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo*, Vol. I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1951, p. 93.

It is true that employers may readily distinguish between labour originating from different tribes and may recognise the differences in the quality associated with these distinctive elements in the general labour supply. For example, in Uganda the West Nile tribes have long been regarded as the best source of labour for such heavy work as sugar-cane cutting, and are usually paid at substantially higher rates than, e.g., Banyaruaanda, who tend to be allocated to lighter tasks. But within any one tribal group of this sort, a similar absence of differentiation is likely to be found.



perpetually in dispute, coupled with the opening-up of communications, made unhindered movement possible to an extent previously unknown. The Foreign Office Commissioner Sadler, for example, observed that the fact that natives of, say, Ankole and Bunyoro in the West could move as freely through Buganda as in their own country struck them as "perhaps the most direct evidence of our rule". Carrying arms became unnecessary, and caravans of porters could now traverse the Protectorate without escort and without fear of molestation.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, the message of Christianity and the "liberating and energising philosophy of life implied in its teaching",<sup>57</sup> where it penetrates below the level of mere imitation and outward form, stresses the supreme value of the person and at the same time the personal accountability of the individual for the life he leads. An individualistic conception of society is made the more comprehensible, and less daring is required of those who decide to "use their initiative" and embark on a course not previously traced out by custom. Thus Christianity in its own right, quite apart from concomitant influences working in the same direction, helps to detach the individual temporarily from his native society and thereby facilitates the mobility of tribesmen seeking paid employment.

Yet, however effectually the penetration of money, the lure of trade, and the influence of Christian teaching may continue to facilitate and stimulate the growth of a labour force, the size and structure of that labour force and the nature of the economy which it sustains, and by which it is itself sustained, can only be understood in relation to the demand for labour and to the policy of the Government both as an employer and as a law-giver.

## CHAPTER II

### ECONOMIC POLICY AND THE ATTRACTION OF LABOUR, 1900-1921

Although the British protectorate in Uganda was provisionally proclaimed in April, 1893, and finally ratified in August, 1894,<sup>1</sup> the settled administration of the country really dates from Sir Harry Johnston's period of office as H.M. Special Commissioner at the turn of the century. Johnston reached Kampala in December, 1899, and lost no time in negotiating the Uganda Agreement with the Buganda Regents on behalf of the infant Kabaka and the Baganda chiefs and people. The signing of the Agreement on 10th March, 1900, did much to disperse the fog of uncertainty which had hitherto made it difficult to establish a workable system of administration.

The small Protectorate staff had until then been pre-occupied with military operations necessitated by the intrigues of Kabarega, the ruler of neighbouring Bunyoro, and latterly by the mutiny of the Sudanese troops garrisoning the country. As Johnston explained, until the British power had completely shown its strength by the capture of the rebellious Kabaka Mwanga and Kabarega in April, 1899, no native assemblage of chiefs would ever have agreed to contributing taxes in support of the British administration.<sup>2</sup> There was in any case little possibility of raising revenue so long as external trade remained dependent on portage between the coast and the Lake, and there was the further obstacle that lack of any assurance of security in the tenure of land inhibited the cultivation of new crops.<sup>3</sup>

The 1900 Agreement defined the political and administrative relationship between the Protectorate Government and the Kabaka and his Council, and incorporated the unique form of land settlement out of which developed the "mailo" system of tenure in quasi-freehold, peculiar to Buganda.<sup>4</sup> From the economic point of view the most significant clauses of the Agreement were those defining this land settlement and providing for taxation. The tax agreement was of immediate importance, whereas the land settlement, apart from its immediate psychological effect in removing uncertainty, only gradually revealed its full implications for Buganda's economic development.

The remarkable impetus given to the formation of a voluntary labour supply by the imposition of the hut tax in Buganda under the terms of the Agreement has already been referred to.<sup>5</sup> The fact prompts the question as to whether the tax rate was generally used as a deliberate means of creating a labour force. Reading some of the comments of contemporary observers on the "shock" effect of the first hut tax of three rupees, one might conclude that here was a method open to the authorities for producing a voluntary labour supply by administrative fiat. The potentialities of the tax as a stimulus to effort were certainly appreciated by the Government in the early days of administration in Buganda. Johnston's successor, Lt.-Col. J. H. Sadler, told a meeting of the Royal Colonial Institute in December, 1904, "I have no hesitation in saying that this tax will prove to be the making of

1. The Protectorate at first related only to Buganda, but was formally extended in June, 1896, to Bunyoro and other outlying portions of the British sphere of influence. (Thomas and Scott, *Uganda*, p. 36.)

2. *Report by H.M. Special Commissioner on the Protectorate of Uganda*, Africa No. 7, 1901, Cd. 671, p. 6.

3. The anxiety over land is illustrated in a letter of June, 1896, from Bishop Hanlon in which he refers to rice seed and wheat seed being distributed among the chiefs as an inducement to "the peaceful and profitable labour of agriculture". Some had taken to it kindly, but "others refused to take it up on the grounds of insecurity of tenure in their holdings". (*Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. XII, 1896, p. 81.)

4. Limited areas of freehold land were also granted, under the Toro and Ankole Agreements of 1900 and 1901 respectively, to the native rulers of each of these kingdoms and a few dozen leading chiefs. (Thomas and Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 101.) For a description of the "mailo" system in Buganda see Mukwaya, *Land Tenure in Buganda*, *passim*.

5. See pp. 4-5.

the country, not only because of the revenue it brings in but because of the habits of work it inculcates. . . .”<sup>6</sup> Whether applied to the cultivation of saleable produce or to wage-earning, the growth of “habits of work” benefited the revenue by providing the means for paying the tax in cash.<sup>7</sup>

In 1905 a poll tax of two rupees was added to the hut tax, apparently at the suggestion of the Buganda Regents themselves. The new tax was levied on those adult males in Buganda who had so far been able to avoid the hut tax; and on this occasion the Government justified the extra levy, on grounds not only of equity, sanitation (by reducing overcrowding in taxed huts), and morality, but also of industry. The effect of the poll tax, it was explained, would be to increase the number of those in search of work.<sup>8</sup> But it had also been made quite clear that although it was “a matter of the first importance . . . to raise revenue”, this was to be done without pressing severely on the natives or hampering European commerce. The utmost patience and forbearance were to be shown in the collection of the tax until its bearing had been thoroughly ascertained in practice.<sup>9</sup>

Johnston, who was present at the meeting Sadler addressed in 1904, explained the administrator’s difficulties in trying to strike a balance between the conflicting opinions currently held on the taxation of natives. He had always felt that “. . . whilst it was our privilege to bring bloodshed to an end and introduce safety and a civilised government, it was equally the duty of the negro to play up to that policy by providing what share he was able to afford of the expense of governing his own country”. Such a view hardly suggests that Johnston regarded taxation as the prime mover in the generation of economic power in a new country like Uganda.

There are in any case various practical limitations to the extent to which it is possible to rely on taxation as an effective spur to economic activity, to say nothing of the moral aspects of such a course. Unless the tax is kept low enough to be payable without much difficulty by the less prosperous, the result will be, either to inflict serious hardship on those least able to pay, or to cause them to move to another part of the country or across the frontier. If arrangements have to be made for many exemptions or partial exemptions, a heavy additional administrative burden will be created. The various possible effects of an excessively high rate of tax were illustrated in the case of Ankole in 1921, discussed in the previous chapter. Moreover, a rise in the poll tax will generally be used as a lever for securing a higher normal wage rate. This tendency seems to have been particularly marked in Uganda, where the consensus of public opinion very soon became wedded to the view that there was an almost automatic connection between a rise in the poll-tax rate and an equivalent rise in the monthly wage rate. During the period when cash was still only beginning to circulate, the Government’s willingness to accept one month’s labour from those unable to produce rupees probably did much to establish in the minds of natives the idea of a fair price for labour, and that the period of work necessary for meeting the tax ought not to exceed a month.

As more positive incentives to wage-earning grow, and increasing numbers seek work for more than a month or two during the year, in order to provide themselves not only with a poll-tax receipt but also with imported goods, the proportion of total labour supply attributable to the tax demands of chief or collector must steadily diminish. In Major Orde Browne’s view: “Probably the first introduction of taxation in a raw tribe may serve as the preliminary inducement to many of them to seek work, but after they have formed the habit it seems very doubtful if a few shillings added to the tax will

6. *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute*, Vol. XXXVI, 1904-1905, p. 72.

7. As an alternative in the early days, the Government accepted a month’s labour in lieu of the cash payment, and while the rupee currency was still very scarce a large proportion of the taxes had to be accepted in this way. By 1904, however, partly as a result of Government initiative in facilitating the disposal of native-grown produce to the traders, taxes were being largely paid in cash.

8. A. R. Cook, *Uganda Memories* (1897-1940), Kampala, The Uganda Society, 1945, p. 201.

9. *Instructions to Lt.-Col. J. H. Sadler on appointment as H.M. Commissioner and Consul-General in the Uganda Protectorate*, Africa No. 2, 1902, Cd. 910, p. 2.

really influence the decision of many men as to whether they should remain at home or not".<sup>10</sup> In Uganda, nevertheless, poll-tax obligations remained a major spur to temporary wage-earning for many years, especially among the more remote tribes. There can be little doubt that the "demonstration effect" of the consumption of imported goods by members of other races or by wealthy and educated Africans very much affects the rate at which the poll tax is superseded as the chief incentive to wage-earning. The effect will vary between tribes, according to the degree of contact with peoples accustomed to a higher level of consumption of such goods.

It seems probable that while the early administrators levied poll tax in full awareness of its advantages from the point of view of stimulating personal exertion, there was no single-minded policy of making frequent adjustments to the rate so as to call forth the maximum possible amount of labour. For the first few years of the century, the exceptionally keen interest of the Baganda in cloth and other imports, and the new taxes, were enough to produce a local labour supply that sufficed to meet the needs of the Government and of commercial employers, especially as even at this early stage the supply was supplemented by migrants coming in from up-country districts, notably from Toro, Bunyoro, and Ankole.<sup>11</sup> The authority of the chiefs was still virtually unimpaired, and this, too, reacted favourably on the labour supply. The Colonial Office was informed in 1906 that in Buganda "practically the whole of the land is in the hands of its chiefs and their influence over the peasantry is at present sufficiently strong to ensure a steady and abundant supply of unskilled labour".<sup>12</sup>

Real difficulties over labour supply only started to trouble the Government as the cumulative processes it had set in motion began to run into conflict with one another. The lines on which development was proceeding were directed by certain basic assumptions about the aims to be pursued by the protecting power. These assumptions were rarely set forth in explicit terms, and they seem to have been still less frequently consciously related to one another in detail.

There was first the predominant idea informing "Imperial policy", and colonial policy in particular at the time, which was that the newly acquired tropical territories were "undeveloped estates", which had to be taken in hand and developed so that their resources might be made available to the world at large and that the moral and material well-being of their native inhabitants might be advanced through contact with civilisation. "We, in our colonial policy, as fast as we acquire new territory and develop it, develop it as trustees of civilisation for the commerce of the world", said Chamberlain.<sup>13</sup> The British Government had only reluctantly agreed to the assumption of a protectorate over Uganda in 1893-94, and at that time philanthropy probably weighed more heavily in the balance of decision than the claims of overseas commerce and investment.<sup>14</sup> But during the following decade views on the policy to be adopted in Uganda were swept along in the train of the Chamberlain philosophy of development. As Lord Olivier has recalled: "That word [development] recurs incessantly in State papers and governors' speeches as describing the principal aim to which regard must be had . . . not only in the interests of European adventurers in these new colonial enterprises, but in framing conceptions of the interest of natives, which are presumed to be bound up with 'development,' in determining 'native policy' and deciding what manner of obligations shall be primarily imposed on natives . . . and what attitude shall be adopted . . . towards the question of their own indigenous economies".<sup>15</sup>

10. G. St. J. Orde Browne, *The African Labourer*, p. 32.

11. Despatch No. U.P. 233 of December, 1906.

12. Despatch No. U.P. 236 of December, 1906.

13. Joseph Chamberlain quoted in Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa*, Edinburgh & London, Blackwood, 1929, p. 60.

14. See D. A. Low, "British Public Opinion and the Acquisition of Uganda," *Uganda Journal*, Vol. 18, 1954, pp. 81-100, *passim*.

15. Lord Olivier, *White Capital and Coloured Labour*, London, Hogarth Press, 1929, p. 56.

Johnston's view in 1901 was that although the British were in Uganda for political and philanthropic reasons, the Administration and the people of Uganda were under an obligation to relieve the British taxpayer as soon as possible of the necessity for providing subventions to balance the country's budget. In his view the British taxpayer should be helped to profit from the interest he had taken in providing funds for the administration of the Protectorate. This profit would be in the marked development of British commerce in the countries of the Protectorate—although he made it clear that he was not in favour of restricting trade between Uganda and other countries.<sup>16</sup>

But the word "development" could cover important differences of meaning when used by different persons. Thus Johnston was not in favour of handing over large districts as exclusive concessions to companies for plantation development—not, at least, until other expedients had been tried. He evidently hoped that with security of life and property guaranteed there would be good prospects of a substantial trade in low-priced native products, which would at once benefit the native himself, the European trader, and the finances of the Administration.<sup>17</sup>

Sadler, on appointment as Johnston's successor, was told to continue to encourage all measures tending to the improved welfare of the natives and the increase of commerce. The two objectives were closely and rather curiously associated in the instructions of the Foreign Office. He was asked to bear in mind that, although administration was to be firmly established in the south and west of the Protectorate, "in the opinion of His Majesty's Government, it is not desirable to push too quickly amongst tribes in the outlying districts who have little to offer at present in the way of commerce, and who have not yet become accustomed to the sojourn of white men in their midst. Such tribes should be attracted to larger centres where they will see the work of civilisation in progress and begin to appreciate its advantages". His mandate, in brief, was "to carry on the administration of the Protectorate with the utmost economy consistent with its efficiency and the welfare of those entrusted to [his] care".<sup>18</sup>

The general "duty" upheld at the time to develop uncivilised tropical resources for the benefit of the outside world was thus strongly reinforced in the case of Uganda by the immediate necessity of increasing revenue in order to lighten the burden of the subsidy contributed by the Imperial Treasury, although it was accepted that there was no immediate prospect of dispensing with this assistance.<sup>19</sup> Within the wide limits set by such a mandate, there was ample scope for different individual interpretations. Sadler, when writing his report for the year 1903-04, had reached the conclusion that "the development of the Protectorate will be by native agency under European supervision, and with the help of European capital. Land was available on favourable terms, and money could be profitably invested in the cultivation of rubber; the work would be done by paid native labour under the supervision of the European".<sup>20</sup> Concurrently, however, experiments with cotton seed imported by the Government and by the Church Missionary Society's industrial arm were already showing very promising results, and cotton was about to reveal its enormous potentialities as a purely native-grown crop. There is an indication in Sadler's 1903-04 report of early signs of labour difficulties.

As has frequently been the case since then, there was at this time a close connection between labour and medical problems in Uganda. The somewhat incautious reference in Sadler's original instructions from the Foreign Office, recommending that the remoter tribes should be attracted into the larger centres, showed no awareness of the medical hazards entailed by large

16. G.B. Report . . . on the Protectorate of Uganda, Cd. 671, pp. 7-8.

17. H. H. Johnston, *The Uganda Protectorate*, London, Hutchinson, 1902, Vol. I, p. 296.

18. G.B. Instructions to Lt.-Col. J. H. Sadler . . . Cd. 910, pp. 2-3.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

20. G.B. *General Report on the Uganda Protectorate*, Africa No. 12, 1904, Cd. 2250, p. 28.

movements of population. Sadler soon encountered them in full force in a sleeping-sickness epidemic, which wrought havoc in the Lake areas of Uganda for more than ten years. One of the consequences of the epidemic and of the attempts to localise it was that "hut-tax labour" was rendered much less useful to the Government, since men could no longer be brought in from the remoter districts to work at headquarters at Entebbe. Deprived of these supplements to the local labour supply at Entebbe and Kampala, the Government was experiencing increasing difficulty in procuring sufficient labour for transport.<sup>21</sup> The Regents' suggestion that a poll tax should be introduced as a complement to the hut tax was, therefore, opportune, and its imposition after 1904 seems to have given a further boost to the labour supply sufficient to keep the problem in abeyance for another two years.

In the meantime, the control of Uganda had passed from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office. Sir Hesketh Bell, who reached Uganda in May, 1906, and became the Protectorate's first Governor the following year, regarded the Protectorate as "one of the greatest of our 'undeveloped estates'",<sup>22</sup> but his policy for developing it showed a distinct shift in emphasis. He had been given to understand, at the Colonial Office, that he would be allowed "a fairly free hand",<sup>23</sup> and his personal conception of the nature of his task left a distinctive mark on the course of development during the period of his governorship. "I am concerned", he recorded in his diary (28th June, 1906), "that every effort should be made to avoid the intrusion of alien interests in land, and that our policy should be the creation of an essentially African state. . . ."<sup>24</sup> It was to be expected, therefore, that he would encourage the nascent cotton industry. "I think there can be no doubt of the suitability of this country for a really large production of cotton. The soil, rainfall and labour conditions all seem to be ideal, and I am going to concentrate on this matter".<sup>25</sup> He did so, and cotton-growing during his tenure of office became quickly and permanently established as the leading cash crop for the peasant farmer, notably in Buganda, and increasingly in the Eastern Province.

The enthusiasm with which the Baganda took to cotton-growing soon had its repercussions on the labour supply. Early in 1907, Sir Hesketh Bell was lamenting his inability to carry out the various schemes in his mind for developing the territory, owing to "miserably inadequate" financial resources. The total revenue that could be raised locally was barely £100,000 a year: this allowed for little beyond official salaries and the maintenance of the armed forces. "I am tired of impressing on the people at home that *now* is the time for spending money on essential public works. With natives willing and anxious to work for only threepence a day, we can do, for £1,000 now, what will cost ten times that sum in twenty years' time".<sup>26</sup> Later in the same year, however, there were unmistakable signs of a falling-off in this willingness to work for the wages offered.

Contributions to the mission journal, *Uganda Notes*, now tended to stress the inadequacy of the "wants" of the Baganda, in marked contrast to earlier approving comments on their advanced tastes. Observers in the past had probably been prone to generalise rather too readily from the spectacular eagerness of some of the leading chiefs to buy English suits, typewriters, furniture, etc. Now there was a reaction. "Before we can get what is required in regard to the labour market, we must first develop the wants of the working population. How to develop such wants is a most difficult problem. . . ."<sup>27</sup> In September, 1908, *Uganda Notes* commented: "The portage difficulties increase from month to month. . . . The population of Buganda is not what it was, yet the local demand for labour in Kam-

21. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

22. Sir Hesketh Bell, *Glimpses of a Governor's Life*, p. 155.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

27. T. B. Fletcher, "Notes from Masaka," *Uganda Notes*, 1908, p. 61.

pala district has increased enormously in the last few months. Natives evidently find it far more profitable nowadays to carry their own cotton to the factories in Kampala, than hiring themselves out at the current portorage rates. . . .”<sup>28</sup> The numbers of men needed for portorage at the main centres had by this time grown to an alarming extent. In November, 1907, it was estimated that over 10,000 porters were in daily demand in Kampala alone,<sup>29</sup> and the implications for the Government’s constructional programme were obvious : road-building claimed priority. It was also clear that the further expansion of cotton acreage depended on transport facilities being provided to link the inland agricultural centres with the Lake ports. Although the cotton-grower was quite willing to bring his crop in over reasonable distances, it was reported in 1908 : “ Every peasant in the country appears to be willing to grow cotton on condition that he be not obliged to carry his crop on his head for more than a two days’ journey ”. For lack of transport there was already a tendency to leave cotton to rot in the fields.<sup>30</sup> But the Government itself, as employer, had suffered from an “ unexpected dwindling ” of the labour supply during 1907,<sup>31</sup> which did not augur well for rapid progress with new projects for road construction.

By December, 1908, the mounting complaints from the various Government departments of the difficulty of obtaining an adequate supply of labour moved the Governor to introduce a new administrative procedure, which was immediately and remarkably successful in solving the Government’s labour problem—at least for the next few years. The chiefs had already been using their influence in support of the Government’s labour needs, but latterly without much effect.<sup>32</sup> Sir Hesketh Bell’s innovation was to place this assistance on an organised basis for the first time. He pointed out that if Buganda’s estimated population of 150,000 able-bodied men was drawn upon to the extent of one month’s work per man each year, this would put at the Government’s disposal a supply of some 12,000 labourers—a number that could certainly be expected to meet requirements. There were, in addition, a considerable number of people from Toro, Bunyoro, and Ankole who found their own way down to Entebbe and Kampala in search of work, and they would relieve the strain on the Baganda. The chiefs would be responsible for inducing their people to work “ for the usual wages, for at least one month in each year ”, the names of those liable to the call being read off from the tax registers. The exemption provisions allowed those who could show that they were in permanent employment to claim to be excused the call. The Governor concluded, “ I think we can reasonably expect the native chiefs, who are supposed to have such authority in the country, to show that they possess sufficient moral influence over their people to induce each man to work for one month at a reasonable wage ”.<sup>33</sup>

The scheme ran very smoothly at first. It was even reported that some of the Buganda county chiefs had sent in applications on behalf of their people, asking to be allocated a greater percentage of the labour required so that they could earn their poll tax.<sup>34</sup> (The counties referred to were probably some of those less favourably situated from the point of view of cotton marketing.) Though at first designed to meet the labour difficulties in Buganda, the scheme was also extended, in varying degrees of application, to other districts as the voluntary labour supply became insufficient for official requirements. The introduction of the new system, which became known in official as well as native parlance as *kasanyu*,<sup>35</sup> meant that for some fourteen years (1909-1922) the labour market in Uganda was no longer open to the free play of demand and supply.

28. *Uganda Notes*, September, 1908, pp. 129-130.

29. E.S.A. SMP 1437/07/1a.

30. G.B. Colonial Annual Reports : Uganda 1907-8, Cd. 4448, p. 4.

31. Despatch No. U.P. 100 of July, 1907.

32. *Uganda Notes*, September, 1908, pp. 129-130.

33. E.S.A. SMP 2002/08/II/1.

34. E.S.A. SMP 2002/08/II/55.

35. The origin of the word, which in Luganda means “ 7000 ”, is not known. Probably it related to the number of men required at one of the earlier levies.

Uganda was not, of course, exceptional among the African colonial territories in finding it necessary to resort to a system involving compulsion in order to meet its labour needs in the early stages of development. Undoubtedly, if the Treasury had given Sir Hesketh Bell further rein, the implementation of his numerous plans and projects for the development of the country would have precipitated a labour crisis even earlier than in 1908. There is no need to recount the circumstances that in many of the African territories in the past have given rise to compulsory systems of one kind or another.

In Buganda, where the burden of *kasanvu* fell most heavily, the Protectorate Government was unusually fortunate in having a strongly organised native administration at hand, able to give effect to the compulsory system, at first without great difficulty. But other elements in the many-sided development policy of the protecting power were at the same time gradually reducing the personal authority of the chiefs. Formerly, they had exercised direct and unquestioned authority over the peasants' daily comings and goings. Now their power to do so was being impaired; it was threatened by new criteria of personal eminence, related to a man's style of living rather than to his position. It was also undermined by the peasant's power to commute at will the tribute he formerly owed in personal services. Chief and landlord were in any case gradually separating into different persons, the private landowner carrying with him, and devaluing in the process, some of the prestige formerly attached uniquely to the chief. These changes were obvious to the Baganda themselves. A contribution to the Buganda missionary journal, *Ebifa*, in 1913, for example, expressed alarm at the manner in which some landowners were disregarding the advice of the leading chiefs and were selling land to Europeans instead of leasing it. Freedom had ruined the people, the writer said, because they no longer listened to the chiefs, nor children to their fathers. Peasants before the court would sometimes abuse the chiefs, as though they were not aware of their greatness, and this was due to freedom.<sup>36</sup>

The date of this contribution is significant: by 1913 a miniature boom in plantation development was in full swing in Uganda. After Sir Hesketh Bell's departure in 1909, there had been another perceptible shift in development policy. During his period of office there had been no great activity in planting by non-natives, although information supplied to the Colonial Office for the Emigrants' Information Handbook still carried (as it had since 1902) the statement that "native unskilled labour is plentiful and cheap".<sup>37</sup> But now that *kasanvu* was acting on the local population as a new incentive to seek voluntary paid employment for long enough to provide exemption from the call, conditions were especially favourable to an expansion of the plantation industry. The District Commissioner, Kampala, reported in April, 1910, that "the few European plantations so far commenced upon find little difficulty, and for some time to come are scarcely likely to experience difficulty, in obtaining a sufficient and steady supply of Baganda male workers for their development. Such work has so far proved popular enough".<sup>38</sup>

By 1911 optimism was running high. *Uganda Notes* published a series of reports on plantation development then in progress. The success of two of the earliest estates proved, according to one of the reports, "that Uganda, at any rate so far as the county of Kyagwe is concerned, is a planter's country, and for rubber is second only to Ceylon". Labour all over Kyagwe county was stated to be "plentiful".<sup>39</sup> But the labour position described by the Provincial Commissioner, Buganda, in his report for 1910-11, was much less promising. He pointed out that during the 1911 cotton harvest large numbers were engaged in carrying the crop, and the fact that peasants from the

36. *Uganda Herald*, 28th March, 1913 (which published a translation of the extract from *Ebifa*).

37. Despatch No. U.P. 217 of September, 1908.

38. E.S.A. SMP 103 (O.S.).

39. *Uganda Notes*, 1913, p. 53.



remoter districts had already paid their poll tax, and therefore had not needed to seek work, had produced an acute labour problem.<sup>40</sup>

The following year (ending 31st March, 1912) there was a large increase in enquiries for land for plantation development. The effects on the availability of labour were immediately felt, and the demand for labour was now rapidly reaching the limits of the available supply.<sup>41</sup> Work on the plantations was popular with the peasants, and many were flocking in as "permanent employees" and thus avoiding their chiefs' call for the Public Works Department. The Department's own Annual Report (1911-12) confirms its difficulties over labour—notwithstanding the fact that the supply in Buganda was then being augmented by drafts from other Provinces.<sup>42</sup>

This was the opening phase in a prolonged three-cornered contest over labour supply and labour policy between Government, planters and chiefs, and native suppliers who said less but had the last word. The conflict was intense during the whole period when, to an extent that now appears surprising, the idea of Uganda as "a planter's country" rivalled Sir Hesketh Bell's view of a "Uganda for the Baganda". Conflicting arguments were rehearsed with monotonous frequency, the monotony being broken from time to time by the sudden shifts of fortune which changing world prices were liable to bring upon all cultivators of exportable crops, native or non-native, and by whether the Government as employer was hard-faced and Treasury-minded, or solicitous and exemplary.

By 1913 the labour supply in Buganda had become "the most serious question" facing the Provincial Commissioner. The influx of planters he considered to be the main cause; competition among them was pushing up the wage rate, although there was no corresponding increase in the amount of labour performed. Moreover, so many exemptions were now claimed on grounds of "permanent" employment on plantations—some of them of doubtful validity—that the *kasavu* system was no longer producing supplies adequate for the Government's own needs.<sup>43</sup> Not only planters, but many leading chiefs were drawing labour away from the Government; in 1913 over eighty chiefs were following the European planters' example and planting coffee on their own account.<sup>44</sup> They were apparently helping themselves to such labour as they wanted from the drafts sent in for Government employment, with the result that the Public Works Department was getting only about two-thirds of the labourers asked for. The Government began to show an interest in attracting a large voluntary supply. The standard wages and conditions were found to be less agreeable than those elsewhere, and an attempt was therefore made to bring them more into line with what the planters were offering. A Public Works Department Circular announcing the changes included an instruction that "the wages paid by other employers in every neighbourhood where Public Works Department work is going on should be carefully . . . watched, and the Public Works Department rates adjusted accordingly". The new arrangements applied only to Buganda, Bunyoro and the Western Province. In the Eastern Province there was still no difficulty in obtaining labour, but since the number of plantations was rapidly increasing and food prices were rising—there too it would later become necessary to offer a higher wage and Saturday afternoons off.<sup>45</sup>

In more recent years, the situation has generally been very different: the Government, as the largest employer, has consciously and effectively established a minimum wage rate at a higher level than would be attained without its "wage leadership". But in 1913 (and until 1915) Uganda was still partially dependent on a Treasury grant, a fact sufficient in itself largely to explain the Government's cautiousness over wage advances. Moreover,

40. E.S.A. SMP 1138 A(O.S.)/23.

41. E.S.A. SMP 1138 C(O.S.)/5, 10.

42. Annual Report of the Public Works Department for the year ending 31st March, 1912, p. 6.

43. E.S.A. SMP 1138C (O.S.)/5, 11; 3424 (O.S.)/4.

44. E.S.A. SMP 1138C (O.S.)/5, 8.

45. E.S.A. SMP 3408 (O.S.)/9a.

in 1913 the proportion of "target workers", of those aiming at a fixed quantum of money earnings for the payment of tax and similar limited objectives, was undoubtedly large, and a forward policy of wage leadership might even, on balance, have accentuated the labour shortage. Indeed, the wage increases occasioned by the growing demand for labour on the plantations may in themselves have had such an effect. It is impossible to decide in view of the other factors involved. For example, with a lower wage rate in Buganda, the number of tribesmen finding it worth-while to make the journey into the centre from the districts around Buganda would have been smaller, and these men were evidently an important subsidiary source of supply. In 1913 it was estimated that from Bunyoro alone some 3,000 migrants were working in Buganda "for settlers and for well-do-to Baganda"; they earned between Rs. 4/50 and Rs. 6/- per month, which was well above the rate they could get locally in Bunyoro.<sup>46</sup>

In spite of the fact that competition amongst planters was forcing up the wage rate, there was at the same time an opposite tendency for the rate to be artificially depressed by the exemption provisions of the *kasanyu* rules. Thus the increased wage rate plus food allowance (Rs. 5/- in all) introduced by the Public Works Department to keep pace with the planters (who were paying Rs. 4/- but who could offer better opportunities for getting food and more congenial work)<sup>47</sup> was still only just equivalent to the poll-tax rate, which in Buganda had been raised to Rs. 5/- in 1910. Before the introduction of the compulsory system of paid labour for the Government, the wage rate had been above the level of the hut tax (the forerunner of poll tax): in September, 1908, for example, it had been quoted as Rs. 4/50,<sup>48</sup> while the hut tax was Rs. 3/-.

The Public Works Department watched its labour statistics month by month, hoping to see a marked rise in the number of voluntary labourers as a result of improved conditions. No such effect was observed, and in its review of the year the Department reported that it had had a good deal of trouble, owing to lack of labour in the more settled areas of the Protectorate. Victory was implicitly conceded to the planters, who could offer more attractive types of work than the Department. But cotton, too, was held responsible: "the natives in the cotton-growing areas appear to be obtaining sufficient money for immediate needs from the sale of their cotton and are becoming more disinclined to work for fixed periods at fixed rates of wages". Doubts were expressed as to the efficacy of raising wages at such a time.<sup>49</sup> The Buganda Annual Report for 1913-14 said much the same. Labour was still insufficient for Government needs, because of the planters' demands. "Owing to the planters having increased the wages of their labourers, the Government have also been obliged to raise the rates of wages from 4 rupees to 5, but the increase has not augmented the supply as it was expected to".<sup>50</sup>

The rise in wages in Buganda, though hardly spectacular, was regarded with misgivings not only by the Government, for Buganda chiefs found themselves in difficulties, as they had earlier, in similar circumstances. In June, 1914, the three Regents addressed the Provincial Commissioner, Buganda, on the matter. "We have noticed that all the *Bakopi* (tenants) living on the chiefs' land now do not want to work for their chiefs when called upon to do so, they always take Rs. 3/50 to their chiefs instead of preferring to work for them." But it was now impossible, they said, for the landlords to obtain "other porters" at the rate of Rs. 3/50. Their proposal for dealing with the situation was not simply the straightforward increase in authorised "rent" that might perhaps have been expected. "Sir, we trust that you will approve of our suggestion . . . which is to make a law to the effect that any *mukopi* who shall refuse to go and work for his chief when

46. E.S.A. SMP 3430 (O.S.)/11.

47. E.S.A. SMP 3408 (O.S.)/9.

48. Despatch No. U.P. 217 of September, 1908.

49. Annual Report of the Public Works Department for 1912-13.

50. Annual Report of the Kingdom of Buganda for 1913-14.

called upon to do so shall have to pay a rent of Rs. 5/50 to enable his chief to find and pay a substitute, and that any *mukopi* who has not been asked to go and work for his chief should pay Rs. 3/50. . . .”<sup>51</sup>

Despite their early acceptance of the commutation of feudal services at the peasant's option, the Buganda chiefs and landowners were evidently still reluctant to regard money rents as payments purely and simply for the use of land. But although there was this tendency to want to have it both ways, it is also possible to detect, in the Regents' suggestion of a differential rate, the notion of a “just price”, which would relate the payments receivable by the landlord to the extent to which he was being deprived of the enjoyment of his rights. It was decided to agree to a general increase in rents to Rs. 5/- from 1st January, 1915 : “the Regents can be informed that they are at liberty to arrange accordingly, but that this should not be dealt with by law as they suggest, but by Instructions from the Lukiko [Council]”. As on the previous, similar occasion, Crown Land rents were raised by a similar amount.<sup>52</sup>

This decision probably had more far-reaching consequences than could be foreseen at the time it was made. The immediate effect to be expected was a rise in the money incomes of landowners, putting them in a better position to exploit their property with the aid of paid labour. There was a noticeable increase at this period in the area of native-planted coffee and rubber.<sup>53</sup> Substantial numbers of migrants from Ankole were now coming into Buganda to earn their tax, and not a few of them worked for the native chiefs.

Other implications of the Government's consent to an increase in rents, though indirect and less immediately observable, were probably quite as important in their eventual effects on Buganda's agricultural economy and labour force. The open-handed authorisation of higher rents by the Protectorate Government and the intimation that the changes were to be introduced, not by legislation as the Regents themselves had suggested, but by instructions from the Lukiko, was a sign to the Lukiko members and to landowners generally that the Europeans did not intend seriously to interfere in their private affairs, and that the way was clear steadily to increase their demands on tenants. This they certainly did over the next twelve years until the reins were once again firmly tightened by the passing of the Buganda “Rent Restriction Act”—the Busulu and Envujo Law of 1928.

During this period there was thus a continuous inducement to non-landowners to become landowners, with perceptible repercussions on the composition and distribution of the labour supply. As early as 1917 the Provincial Commissioner, Buganda, observed that one of the reasons why the *kasavvu* system was not procuring enough labourers was that, owing to the large amount of land sold and bought in recent years, many people who were originally liable to *kasavvu* had now become landlords and therefore exempt, and considered themselves chiefs. The attention of the Lukiko had already been drawn to the numbers escaping the call in this way, but nothing had been done.<sup>54</sup> By the middle 'twenties the relative advantages of landownership over tenantry were so highly rated, that the tenants' desire to own land had become “a primary incentive to work and saving”.<sup>55</sup>

After the First World War, the Baganda tended more and more to become habitual employers of migrant labour. Tenants who were anxious to increase their cash earnings from cotton, yet not eager to undertake the actual labour of cultivation themselves, would have good reason to employ foreigners, so long as the price of cotton afforded them a sufficient margin over the wages they had to pay. Once having purchased, not merely an estate, but—however illogically—a share of the prestige attached to chiefly

51. E.S.A. SMP 451 (O.S.)/42, 85.

52. E.S.A. SMP 451 (O.S.)/42a, 86.

53. Annual Report of the Department for Agriculture for 1914, p. 3.

54. E.S.A. SMP 2002 (O.S.)/111/257a.

55. Annual Report for the Land & Survey Department for 1926, para. 72.

status, such men would be the more likely to continue to attract migrants into their service, if only to provide confirmation of their new status.

In 1914-15, however, Buganda was not yet firmly established as the central focus of spontaneous migrant streams converging from all sides. Countering the effect of the large numbers of Ankole people coming in to earn their tax, there was almost complete cessation of the former influx from Bunyoro.<sup>56</sup> Banyoro now had opportunities of employment in their own district, on the new plantations opened up by Europeans.

In 1914 the inadequacy of the combined local and migrant labour supply in Buganda to meet the needs of the competing employers was accentuated by an ominous tendency on the part of some Baganda to migrate, not in search of work, but to escape from it. "The natives find that so much is required of them, what with labour obligations to the chiefs and the Government and increased taxation that life is scarcely worth living in their own country. Many therefore go to East Africa [Kenya] and neighbouring Provinces where less is required of them. . . ."<sup>57</sup> The effect of these population movements was to aggravate a labour shortage which, by slowing up the improvement of communications, could without difficulty be shown to be contrary to the interests of the people themselves.

The planters were concerned about their growing and vulnerable dependence on Bagisu labourers recruited or coming down on their own initiative from the Eastern Province, and on other workers drawn from outside Buganda. The supply of unskilled labour to be obtained locally from the Baganda had shrunk to such an extent that without the migrant supply many plantations would have been ruined. The Baganda were still willing to accept skilled work on plantations; rubber-tapping, coffee-pruning, and work involving the use of machinery they would readily take on. But the Provincial Commissioner, Buganda, pointed out in October, 1917, that the Baganda had now so many and various means available for obtaining money that it was improbable they would ever supply unskilled labour in sufficient quantity.<sup>58</sup> Some of the Baganda were not slow to see that there was no reason why they should not apply their efforts to growing plantation crops themselves and were now experimenting with coffee and rubber as well as growing the simpler cash crops like cotton and chillies.<sup>59</sup>

The planters' associations kept the Government fully informed of their views on the labour problem. They conceded implicitly that native-grown cotton was important to the country, but argued that its future depended on the planting industry as much as on cotton. Although they knew that the shortage of labour stemmed largely from the appeal of cotton-growing, they could still complain of the idleness of the local population: one planter alleged that "only a small part of the Kyagwe population was doing anything at all".<sup>60</sup>

It was not the normal policy of the Government to assist planters directly under the *kasanvu* system, although there were occasions, especially in Busoga, when help was given to tide them over periods of exceptional difficulty.<sup>61</sup> During 1917, however, when the Baganda Regents and administrative officers were urged to tighten up the compulsory system, part of the object was to assist the planting industry, if only indirectly. The Baganda chiefs, the Provincial Commissioner said, were losing their power, and the first task was to get them to eliminate the laxity and excessive granting of exemptions that characterised the administration of *kasanvu*. The ministers drew attention to the fact that, so far as the younger men were concerned, the chiefs could use their influence only to a limited extent, lest bachelors quit the Province. The intervention seems, nevertheless, to have resulted in a tem-

56. E.S.A. SMP 1138E (O.S.)/2.

57. E.S.A. SMP 1138D (O.S.)/24.

58. E.S.A. SMP 2002 (O.S.)/111/305.

59. E.S.A. SMP 2622 (O.S.)/12a.

60. *Uganda Herald*, 20th April, 1917.

61. E.S.A. SMP 1371/71 and 73.

porary improvement, at least in the actual numbers supplied for Government employment (97 per cent. of the 10,000 "indented" for in Mengo District during the year ended 31st March, 1919).<sup>62</sup> In spite of this achievement, and indeed in part because of it, the system continued to incur heavy, though concealed, social costs, and its unpopularity continued undiminished. Towards the end of 1917 there were signs of increasing opposition by leading Baganda to the continuance of *kasanvu*. They agreed, however, to postpone the question until the war was over and more normal conditions prevailed.

In the immediate post-war years, 1919 and 1920, the release of wartime restraints and rising world commodity prices brought into the open all the repressed conflicts over the labour supply. The planters, for whom the high prices of coffee made the labour shortage a matter of greater concern than ever, revived the idea of a Labour Conference, which had been mooted in 1914, and which met in November, 1918.<sup>63</sup> The Government, no longer dependent on an annual Treasury subvention and receiving a larger revenue than ever before, was eager to push ahead with development projects long held in check, and in October, 1919, set up a Development Commission "to enquire into and consider generally the steps which should be taken to forward the commercial and industrial development of the Protectorate, having regard to the interests of the different communities resident therein; and in particular to enquire . . . into the question of transport. . ."<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile the African population, who alone furnished the labour on which coffee profits and constructional programmes alike depended, were quietly occupying themselves growing their own cotton, the price of which made self-employment, for a large proportion of those in need of cash, a much more attractive proposition than working either for the Government or for the planters.

The exceptionally heavy demand for labour in Uganda between 1918 and 1920 was mainly concentrated in the Mengo and Entebbe Districts of Buganda and in the Busoga District of the Eastern Province, although in 1919 a labour shortage was felt even in those parts of the Eastern Province where there were no plantations and where the proportionate demand for labour was much less. Wherever cotton was grown, employers complained of labour difficulties.<sup>65</sup>

The proposals brought forth at the long-awaited Labour Conference, which was attended principally by the leading officials and members of the European employing community, were not remarkable for originality. The planters proposed the appointment of an official "to deal with all labour matters", the appointment of a Commissioner to recommend legislation, a labour census, some system of registration which would enable the amount of labour any person had performed to be recorded, and the enactment of measures "enabling the Government to deal with non-workers". They also criticised—no doubt justifiably—the manner in which compulsory labour was used, both the paid *kasanvu* used by the employing departments of the Protectorate Government and the traditional unpaid *luwalo* labour called out by the chiefs for employment on native public works. They alleged a great deal of waste and urged as one method of reducing it that all compulsory labour and not merely *kasanvu* should be paid.<sup>66</sup> The Governor accepted the proposal to appoint an officer to deal with labour matters, and in February, 1919, the chief executive heads were informed that "as the first step towards the organisation of the labour supply in this Protectorate, His Excellency has approved the secondment of Mr. L. H. C. Rayne, Assistant District Commissioner, for work exclusively in this direction".<sup>67</sup>

The task of this officer was "to create and maintain a regular and

62. E.S.A. SMP 2002 (O.S.)/IV/345, 370, 375, 396a.

63. E.S.A. SMP 3957 (O.S.)/27, 44a.

64. U.P. Report of the Uganda Development Commission, Entebbe, Government Printer, 1920, p. 5.

65. E.S.A. SMP 5568 (O.S.)/1.

66. E.S.A. SMP 3957 (O.S.)/44a.

67. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/1/1.

adequate flow of voluntary labour from populated areas to all employers, both Government and private". The Governor (Sir Robert Coryndon) impressed upon him that "it must be assumed from the start that neither this Government nor the Colonial Office will permit any legislation authorising compulsion. The object, therefore, must be attained by educating the chiefs and the people to the necessity and the wisdom of labour; and all employers, to the absolute necessity of feeding, paying, housing and caring for their labourers properly". In the Governor's opinion, every line of development and all future progress was dependent upon an adequate supply of cheap labour, and he believed there was every prospect of attaining this object, because of the large potential supply available. But Rayne was to make clear that his job was "to encourage and organise labour, and not to provide it". The Governor was hopeful that regular labour routes, adequately provided with good shelters, food, and resident caretakers, might grow up from the Uganda slopes of Mount Elgon and from Budama and southern Teso towards Jinja, the Busoga Railway and the Busoga planters; from the West Nile and the Acholi country towards Bunyoro; and from the whole of the Western Province towards Kampala.<sup>68</sup>

On a map the scheme appeared admirable, because it minimised the distances over which migrants would travel between their homes and the centres of employment. But Rayne did not take long to discover some of the difficulties. The remarkable diversity of customs, prejudices, and preferences between one tribe and its neighbours, was a sufficient reason why there could be no certainty that migrants from any particular locality would seek employment in the labour market nearest them. Rayne found that migrants from Budama and Bugisu, for example, ignored the ample employment available in Busoga, which lay directly across their path, and preferred to make the longer journey into Buganda. The attraction lay not merely in the slightly higher average rate of wages paid in Buganda, but also in the opportunities for making money or earning food by doing casual work for Baganda natives. The Basoga could not compete with the Baganda in this respect, and in any case the Badama thought it "beneath their dignity to work for Basoga in their spare time as they do for Baganda".

The Baganda by this time were evidently emerging as formidable competitors for the supplies of migrant labour coming into their kingdom from adjoining districts. The idea of being employers came easily to a people with a long tradition of martial dominance over their neighbours. They had long been used to adopting captive boys and women as slaves and incorporating them into their households. Wilson and Felkin observed that "the servants in Uganda are all slaves, the majority being born in slavery, and a tolerable percentage are prisoners. They are, as a rule, fairly well off, and are not often badly treated, but of course they are liable to be sold to the Arab and half-breed traders for guns, ammunition, cloth, etc. They often live on terms of familiar intercourse with their masters, and are treated as part of the family . . ."<sup>69</sup> One resulting evil was that all manual labour came to be looked upon as derogatory to the dignity of a free man. Another early visitor to Buganda noted "the invariable custom for persons of quality when they walk abroad to be followed by a number of retainers or slaves; even the poorest peasant will at least have one little slave-boy to grace his presence".<sup>70</sup> The ease with which the migrant labourer fits into the Baganda household derives much from these historical circumstances. Certainly it is an attraction with which non-African employers cannot compete. While the days were past when the Baganda had occasion to demonstrate in war "that instinctive feeling of their superiority over others" which to Dr. Carl Peters was "the natural and indispensable condition of sovereignty",<sup>71</sup> they were now beginning to show a similar natural aptitude for the rôle of employer of wage labour.

68. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/1/a.

69. C. T. Wilson and R. W. Felkin, *Uganda and the Egyptian Sudan*, London, 1882, Vol. I, p. 186.

70. R. P. Ashe, *Two Kings of Uganda*, London, Sampson Low, 1889, p. 291.

71. C. Peters, *New Light on Dark Africa*, London, 1891, p. 406.

At the time of Rayne's investigations, most of the unskilled work on estates in the Kyagwe county of Buganda was being done by Badama and people from tribes living near them, close to the Kenya border to the south-west of Mount Elgon. Food habits placed certain limitations on the mobility of different tribes. Thus, as Rayne pointed out, the Teso people were grain-eaters (unlike the plantain-eating Baganda and Basoga) and were sensitive to changes in diet, as had been found to their cost during the recent war. Language difficulties also presented an obstacle to the free movement of tribesmen from Nilotic regions to the Bantu-speaking areas. Most important, however, was that, owing to different climatic and soil conditions and to the unevenness of communications, different tribes had unequal opportunities to earn cash by growing cotton. While the Teso and their neighbours could grow cotton without difficulty, the Bagisu, inhabiting the upland valleys between the westward buttresses of Mount Elgon, had fewer means of earning money, and in order to pay their tax they had either to sell stock, work on the distant coffee and rubber estates, or find employment over the border in Kenya.<sup>72</sup>

An instruction to "encourage and organise a voluntary flow of labour" must, in African tribal conditions, come near to being a contradiction in terms, unless there are sufficiently strong economic or other underlying forces operating independently in favour of the voluntary flow. Nor can official "organisation" go far without itself either destroying the voluntariness of the flow or causing it to leave its natural course or to dry up altogether. It is true that the underlying economic forces are themselves in part determined by Government policy, but the types of policy decisions likely to be relevant to labour migration would almost inevitably have repercussions taking them outside the immediate range of labour. Moreover, once made, decisions may not be susceptible to short-run adjustment in relation to their anticipated effects on the labour supply. A poll-tax rate, for example, cannot be varied fairly at short notice. Decisions may also by nature be practically irreversible, as in the case of one to introduce a new and successful economic crop. The scope for organisation, therefore, may be more restricted than might at first sight appear.

Rayne submitted recommendations which reflect these difficulties. In them, "encouragement" was indistinguishable from "pressure", and the main remedies proposed required action at the centre. His reports concerning the particular characteristics of the various tribes, considered as potential suppliers of paid labour, were factual and illuminating. His proposals for the positive encouragement of a labour supply, on the other hand, leaned too heavily towards compulsion. Coupled with these proposals, however, and as a counterpart of them, he put forward recommendations designed to remove the existing hindrances to free movement of peasants, and these were of significance. His enquiries had convinced him that in the cotton-growing regions outside Buganda, the adverse effect of cotton on the supply of labour was aggravated by the direct interest the chiefs still possessed in the size of their personal entourage of taxpayers. Chiefs in the Eastern Province, unlike those in Baganda, were still entitled to call on their people, not only for native public works, but also, to some extent, for their own purposes—a valuable privilege in times of high cotton prices. Moreover, by virtue of a rebate system, chiefs were directly dependent for their salaries on the amount of poll tax they collected and they were therefore reluctant to see anyone leave home.<sup>73</sup> The Governor, on the strength of Rayne's report, sought to remove this impediment to labour mobility by introducing a system of fixed salaries for chiefs and by the commutation of all customary labour obligations for a cash payment.<sup>74</sup> These intentions met with considerable opposition from some administrators, who were afraid that the

72. E.S.A. SMP (O.S.)/IV/441a; 5618 (O.S.)/1, 5; 3841 (O.S.)/20c.

73. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/1/33.

74. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/1/55.

result of permitting a general commutation of personal services might mean a dangerously premature loosening of the control exercised by the chiefs over their people.<sup>75</sup> There was a further danger that the native authorities might find that, although they had cash, they could not obtain with it the labour required for public works.<sup>76</sup> Even in Buganda, where commutation of personal services to the landlord had been customary since the turn of the century, free labour for the native authority for local public works was not made universally commutable until 1930. Outside Buganda, the extension of commutation proved to be considerably more complex and was only gradually effected over a period of years.

In Buganda it had become clear that the increasing emancipation of the peasants from the control of their chiefs could be embarrassing at times. It weakened the authority of the chiefs and made it difficult for them to induce their people to come forward and make up deficiencies in the voluntary labour supply. The chiefs were even finding it difficult to administer the *kasanvu* régime. and in August, 1919, the Provincial Commissioner, Buganda, transmitted to headquarters a letter from one of the ministers and eleven of the leading chiefs in which they drew attention to their embarrassment. "We humbly write this letter to lay before you the continual discontent we have heard of, existing among [the] people", the letter began. *Kasanvu*, they explained, was causing a large number of people to leave the Buganda Province and go elsewhere, even to Kenya and German East Africa, for the reason that "those who are called on for *kasanvu* . . . are much despised", and looked upon as of the lowest peasant class. The writers of the petition confirmed what had long been known : whereas the great advantage of the system as originally conceived was that it enabled the work to be spread fairly and evenly over the able-bodied population, the large number of exemptions being granted on grounds of "permanent employment" meant that the brunt of the call now fell on "weak people and those . . . nearing old age". A constant movement of population was being provoked and was disrupting home life ; and it was even alleged that the marriage rate was adversely affected because the eligible men liable to be called on for *kasanvu* were looked down upon by young women. The writers added : "The system of *kasanvu* makes a *mukopi* [peasant] say that the freedom which is said to have been brought by the Government only applies to leading chiefs . . . and does not extend to him" ; and they urged that the system be abolished.<sup>77</sup>

Although it was becoming more and more obvious that the system could not be kept much longer, the upsurge of economic activity on all sides in 1919-20 made it seem less likely than ever that the necessary labour could be obtained entirely without resort to pressure. In October, 1919, it was considered that without *kasanvu* practically no labour would be forthcoming for public works. The plantations would also be badly hit if the compulsory scheme were abolished, on account of the stimulus given to natives to volunteer for private employment so as to avoid being drafted into *kasanvu* levies. The exemption provisions were themselves one of the main causes of the breakdown of the compulsory system. "Every landowner, however small his holding, is looked upon as a chief and is considered to be exempt ; every possessor of a saw or a few yards of Americani [cloth] and a needle claims to be a craftsman". A recent examination of the *kasanvu* registers was reported in 1919 to show that 67 per cent. of the population were exempt, and that of the remaining 33 per cent., only 15 per cent. worked, whilst 18 per cent. succeeded in evading their obligations.<sup>78</sup> The determination of so many to escape their turn by any means they could reflects what was probably the crucial reason for the breakdown of *kasanvu* : its intense unpopularity because by its very nature it relieved the officials of a large part of their responsibilities as employers. There was little pressure on the officials

75. E.S.A. SMP 6025 (O.S.)/passim.

76. E.S.A. SMP 1371 (O.S.)/132.

77. E.S.A. SMP 1371 (O.S.)/114.

78. E.S.A. SMP C 346/14.



to try to make conditions of work attractive so long as labour was thought to be available on demand from the chiefs.<sup>79</sup>

It is true that the labour was paid, but there was little stimulus under a coercive system to advance the wage rate. In the latter years of *kasavu* the official wage was below the market rate,<sup>80</sup> even though the market rate itself tended to be artificially depressed by the augmented supplies provided in the "voluntary" market through the exemption provisions. The depressing effect of *kasavu* on the normal wage rate and the ill-repute it lent to official employment did nothing to favour the attraction of voluntary labour to replace it, in spite of the hopes which various officials had from time to time expressed. In Buganda the numbers required under the compulsory system continued to increase. During 1920, the total numbers called for in the four Buganda Districts amounted to 20,500, the number supplied falling short of this by about 3,000.<sup>81</sup>

It is noteworthy that *luwalo*, the obligation to perform one month's labour for the local authority, though unpaid, was said to be regarded by the people as less burdensome than the paid *kasavu*.<sup>82</sup> It is easy to understand why this was so. *Luwalo* was usually performed near a man's home; he was working at something he understood; and it was a practice sanctified by long tradition. *Kasavu*, on the other hand, which often meant enforced migration far from home, required him to work on tasks that had little meaning for him, for example, on Government buildings or distant roads, which he was unlikely to use himself. That compulsory labour need not inevitably incur the odium that came to be attached to *kasavu* was strikingly shown in the Eastern Province in 1923. The *kasavu* system had already been abolished, but in order to construct a road urgently needed by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, special authority was obtained from the Secretary of State for the use of compulsory labour obtained locally. The outstanding success of the scheme made a deep impression on the Director of Public Works. "The measures taken by the District Commissioner were radically different from those adopted under the old system of *kasavu* labour. . . . Under Mr. Weatherhead's system all members of the communities, rich or poor, important or unimportant, turned out to work side by side. It was . . . in fact communal effort for a public service . . . It was difficult to conceive that the labour was working under compulsion at all. So far from people being hounded from their homes and taken under guard to the scene of their labours, they realised the need for public effort as had been explained to them by their chiefs and by the District Officers, and took up their tasks willingly and gladly. Many of them were at work before the appointed time and it was a common occurrence for the people to go to their work, in the early morning, singing and blowing horns. The manner in which the people were working was to me an entirely new experience; indeed without having seen it, I would not have believed it possible that local labour, voluntary or compulsory, could have been so effective".<sup>83</sup>

In recent years the achievements of community development schemes in Africa have shown what powerful springs of energy can be tapped, once people have been converted to the idea of themselves creating some addition to their basic social equipment—a road, a school, or a dispensary, for example—which they ardently desire. In the *kasavu* days in Uganda, on the other hand, the Government would have found it difficult to inspire the compulsory levies with enthusiasm for the work they were about to perform.

During the period when *kasavu* was in operation, and especially in the period of acute labour difficulties between 1918 and 1921, the Government would not have found it easy to explain to any enquirer how the various constituent parts of its economic policy fitted together, or how, taken together,

79. E.S.A. SMP 6913/1.  
80. E.S.A. SMP 3711 II/78.  
81. E.S.A. SMP 6025/9; 5711 (O.S.)/I/59.  
82. *Uganda Notes*, July, 1919, pp. 72-80.  
83. E.S.A. SMP 3711 II/185.

they justified the large-scale reliance on compulsory labour that was required. Nor is this altogether surprising. Clearly in any country in process of stimulated economic development directed from the centre, the relative importance of various objectives is likely to be differently assessed by the policy-makers on the one hand and the beneficiaries on the other. Where the educational level of the majority of the people is low and the hold of traditional beliefs is strong, there may be no means of getting the population to understand how certain types of economic development are likely to benefit them, e.g., how a scheme for the reforestation of hill crests may lead in time to increasing rainfall. Government and people may differ markedly in their estimation of the importance of tomorrow as compared with a remoter future. There may be a conflict of interest of the sort already mentioned, in which it may be generally agreed that the completion of a development scheme would be in the common interest, but an equally general disinclination on the part of individuals to contribute to its achievement. To aggravate these difficulties, the country's political organisation may provide no means by which the aspirations of the people and those of the policy-makers may be juxtaposed and assimilated in so far as possible. Where the planners and the majority of those affected by decisions are of different race, the likelihood of such discrepancies in evaluation is much greater. It is further increased when the policy-makers have to consider the conflicting interests of the constituent groups in a plural society, as Uganda may be considered to have been politically and economically in the heyday of the European planters. The likelihood of discrepancies is even further magnified where thought and policy are still coloured by the theory of the "Imperial estates".

Locally, the idea that it was a primary duty to develop resources for the benefit of the world at large found expression in statements like the following, which appeared in the newspaper, *The Uganda Herald*, on August 23rd, 1918 : "Here we have a young country in the tropics, the fringe of the resources of which has only just been touched upon ; a country which in this respect has probably no compeer in the many Colonies which grace the possession of the British Empire ; a country awaiting the opportunity of unfolding its many possibilities to the outside world and yet being cribbed, cabined and confined because of the want of proper organisation of the labour which is so abundant within its doors".

Development for the benefit of the outer world was not an objective that necessarily tallied with a native desire voluntarily to supply the labour required at a wage that would-be employers could afford. Cotton was an exception : by growing it Uganda was able both to contribute to the raw material resources of the world and also to benefit directly the native cultivators. But in the case of crops grown on non-native estates, the benefits that accrued to the native wage-earners were less obvious. There was a tendency to regard the labour required for such production as a subsidiary factor, the supply of which must be adjusted as necessary. This tendency was most in evidence amongst planters and their spokesmen. Thus, in the view of *The Uganda Herald*, "once the principle is acknowledged that the demand for labour is such that the supplying of it becomes an inevitable consequence," the whole question of solving the problem was a matter of "systematic organisation".<sup>84</sup>

An alternative and closely related dogma, with a similar implication that the labour supply must be adjusted to an autonomous need, was that of the primacy of the requirements of "the country". The Uganda Development Commission of 1920, dealing with the labour problem, reached the familiar conclusion that the main reason for the shortage was the ease with which the native could satisfy his wants with the minimum of effort, and that "the supply will never be equal to the demand unless properly organised and controlled".<sup>85</sup> Discussing the means by which the labour supply for "the

84. *Uganda Herald*, 23rd August, 1918.

85. U.P. *Report of the Uganda Development Commission*, 1920, *loc. cit.*, p. 13, para. 47.

public" might be increased, the Commission considered that the "training of the native" in habits of work was a slow process and would never "keep pace with the development of the country", and that therefore other, more immediately fruitful measures would have to be taken.<sup>86</sup> Although at one point the Commission expressed strong opposition to any steps tending to force the exploitation of the country and to create a "boom",<sup>87</sup> it also—after making various other recommendations involving the application of indirect means to improving labour supplies<sup>88</sup>—expressed the view that "in Uganda where the least possible amount of work is sufficient to keep a native in comparative comfort, some form of direct pressure may become a practical necessity if the potential wealth of the country is to be developed, and stagnation avoided".<sup>89</sup> In such contexts "the development of the country" or "the duty of meeting national requirements"<sup>90</sup> are implicitly taken as the ultimate justification for the labour required.

Such criteria seem to set no limit to the amount of labour that could be shown to be required. In 1919, however, the year in which the Commission began its deliberations, the Government, though fully alive to the planters' claims, was by no means disposed to underrate the importance of the native as his own employer or to overlook the fact that cotton exports had in the years 1918-1919 reached a value of £965,951 and accounted for 77.4 per cent. of the total value of the country's exports. In spite of the prevailing labour shortage, a general circular was issued from Government headquarters in September, 1919, stressing "the necessity for extending the existing areas of cotton cultivation as well as for introducing and encouraging the production of the crop in suitable localities throughout the Protectorate during this and subsequent years. . . . His Excellency attached the greatest importance to this question. . . ." <sup>91</sup>

The Uganda Development Commission was well aware that the Government did not intend to solve the labour problem by holding back the development of the cotton industry. The Commission (whose eight members included three officials, one being chairman) recorded that the Director of Agriculture had for several years past appeared to follow a policy of aloofness, "and to have failed to identify himself with the planters' interests as he should have done". The Commissioners added, "we feel constrained to say, also, that the Government appears to have tacitly accepted the position". They urged the Government to instruct the Department of Agriculture to give plantation crops the same attention and encouragement hitherto given only to native products.<sup>92</sup>

At this time of high commodity prices and post-war optimism, economic activity was being stimulated not only by the high prices themselves but also by the Government's construction programmes, and there was once again a heavy demand for *kasavvu* labour. In October, 1920, new regulations were issued, designed to improve the conditions under which *kasavvu* labour was employed, but they were apparently less thorough-going than the circumstances warranted.<sup>93</sup>

As early as 1917 it had been said that *kasavvu* must be expected "gradually to smoulder out and die from inaction",<sup>94</sup> but it was discussed by the 1920 Commission on apparently the tacit assumption that there was no immediate prospect of its being superseded as a means of securing the labour required by Government departments. The Commission recommended, however, that the continuation of *kasavvu* should not deflect the Government's attention from the need to make substantial improvements in housing, feeding, and other working conditions, and it urged that *kasavvu* labourers

86. *Report of the Uganda Development Commission, 1920, loc. cit.*, p. 16, para. 71.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 13, para. 45.

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-19, paras. 69-95.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 19, para. 99.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 20, para. 101.

91. E.S.A. SMP 3457 (O.S.)/Circular Memorandum of 16th September, 1919.

92. *Report of the Uganda Development Commission, 1920, loc. cit.*, pp. 35-36, paras. 231-32.

93. E.S.A. SMP 5116 (O.S.)/26.

94. E.S.A. SMP C 346 (O.S.)/2.

should be paid "the current rates of wages". Finally, there was put forward a somewhat inadequately thought-out scheme for "the grading of regular unskilled workers and for their definite recognition in the State Civil Service".<sup>95</sup> The Commission's proposals for increasing the supply of labour to non-Government employers by indirect methods included the suggestion of a differential rate of poll-tax—Rs. 5 for those who could show they had worked for a prescribed period in each year and Rs. 17/50 for those who could not.<sup>96</sup> It was satisfied that a general increase of wages would not ensure a greater supply of labour: the daily needs of the native were so small that any increase in his wage would simply mean that a shorter period of work would suffice to satisfy them.<sup>97</sup> The Commission's recommendation was that "a real and genuine effort should first be made to rectify the position by means of the indirect methods . . . advocated", but felt bound to point out that "if these methods fail or even if they are only partially successful, there is no remedy but to accept the principle of direct pressure".<sup>98</sup>

It is remarkable that the recourse to compulsion, which in the form of the *kasavu* system had originally been a temporary expedient, and had generally been regarded as justifiable only in respect of labour required by the Government for public purposes, should now in 1920 be suggested by an official Commission as permissible, if necessary, in order to provide labour for private employers.<sup>99</sup> Compulsion was breeding compulsion. The greater the call for *kasavu* labour, the greater the tendency for the wage rate in the "voluntary" market to be depressed relatively to what would have been the normal rate, freely determined. This would reduce the attraction of both Government and non-Government voluntary paid labour. Furthermore, in Buganda the low wage rates did little to stimulate the inflow of migrant labour from up-country districts.

But the tide of public opinion, which frequently seemed to hold that a native could only be regarded as working if he was working for a European employer, and which urged that "special efforts should be made to encourage the natives in the more remote districts, such as Gulu, Lango, Teso and the West Nile, to go out to work" (when the natives of Lango and Teso were cultivating more than a third of the acreage of the chief export crop, cotton),<sup>100</sup> reached high-water mark in the recommendations of the report of the 1920 Commission. Thereafter change came very rapidly.

Different views were beginning to be expressed. One administrative officer was particularly outspoken in putting his views before the Development Commission. "The *kasavu* system, or compulsory paid labour, should also be abolished . . . Such labour, compulsorily recruited, has no say in the rate of wages paid to it and the wages paid are always, to the best of my knowledge, below the current market rate. There is actually no labour question, as granted adequate housing, food and pay a sufficient supply would be forthcoming for all requirements". Planters, he said, had stated that it was impossible to pay a higher rate than was being paid at the time. If that was so, planting was of no economic value to the country.<sup>101</sup>

In 1921, *kasavu* was undermined simultaneously and rapidly from several directions at once. The earlier secondment of L. H. C. Rayne (who had died only a few months after commencing his enquiries) to deal with labour matters was followed early in 1921 by the appointment of a Labour Commissioner. He was to consult with the provincial administration and employers on all labour matters and make recommendations to headquarters. He was also instructed to examine the conditions of employment of both Government and private labour and to advise as to their improve-

95. *Report of the Uganda Development Commission, 1920, loc. cit.*, pp. 13-16, paras. 48-68.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 16, para. 72. The suggestion came from a native official.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 19, para. 91.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 20, para. 105.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 16, para. 70.

100. Annual Report of the Agricultural Department for the year ending 31st March, 1920, p. 6.

101. E.S.A. SMP 5860 (O.S.)/1/1.

ment.<sup>102</sup> His enquiries showed that the intense unpopularity of *kasavvu*, which had long been recognised, was largely explicable by the absence of any satisfactory provision for the men's welfare either on the journey or at the place of work. The usual conditions under which *kasavvu* labour worked had involved discomfort and very frequently great hardship and distress.<sup>103</sup> At the instance of the Labour Commissioner, a real attempt was at last made by the Government to make the accommodation and working conditions of departmentally employed labourers less bleak and discouraging and "by these improvements gradually to attract voluntary labour to replace *kasavvu*".<sup>104</sup> But these efforts came too late.

On October 11th, 1921, the Buganda Lukiko, under a misapprehension that they had power in this matter, wrote to inform the Provincial Commissioner, Buganda, that "after the most careful consideration, the Lukiko have decided unanimously that they do not desire *kasavvu* of any kind . . . to exist in Buganda . . . we pray you inform His Excellency the Governor in order that he may inform the Secretary of State for the Colonies that the Full Lukiko has finally decided to do away with *kasavvu* as from 31st December, 1921, as it is no longer fitting that it should be enforced. . . ."<sup>105</sup>

At this juncture a series of events in Kenya played into the Buganda Lukiko's hands. The Kenya Governor's Circulars, enjoining district officers to use compulsion if necessary to ensure that farmers had sufficient labour, led to a public outcry. This caused the Colonial Secretary, Mr. Churchill, to issue a despatch to all Colonies and Protectorates, in which he made it clear that in future compulsion would no longer be tolerated except with the prior authority of the Secretary of State, which would only be given for specified public works and for a specified period.<sup>106</sup> Uganda, like Kenya, had no choice but to conform, and it was clear that *kasavvu* had to go.

In these circumstances the Government was able to accede to the wishes of the Buganda Lukiko with good grace. The *kasavvu* system ceased to be operative from 1st January, 1922, in Buganda, Bunyoro, and Toro,<sup>107</sup> and towards the end of that year it disappeared throughout the remainder of the Protectorate.

There can be no doubt that the abolition of *kasavvu* greatly improved the welfare of the people of Uganda and the health of the country's economy. The transition to entire reliance on voluntary labour for all normal labour requirements except certain customary services, which continued to be performed under the control of the native authorities, was at first remarkably smooth. It was facilitated by the slump in world prices at the end of 1921, which caused a disastrous reversal of fortune among the planters and native cotton-growers, but which, incidentally, eased both the demand for and the supply of labour.<sup>108</sup> Difficulties only began to appear in 1923 as the prices of cotton and coffee recovered from the low level reached in 1921. On this and future occasions the remedy for the shortage lay, not in the coercion of the local population, but more and more in the attraction, into Buganda especially, of migrant labour from outside. The non-native plantations, however, never regained the proportionate importance in the economy which they had enjoyed before 1921—and still less the importance their spokesmen had claimed for them. It seems unlikely to have been mere coincidence that the greatest relative importance of non-native plantation industry occurred during the time when the *kasavvu* system was in force and was exerting a favourable influence both on the wage rate and on the actual numbers available for employment.

It is true that the sharp rise in the wage rate in Buganda, which went with

102. E.S.A. SMP 5590 (O.S.)/I/53.

103. E.S.A. SMP 6913 (O.S.)/1.

104. E.S.A. SMP 5116 (O.S.)/57.

105. E.S.A. SMP 5116 (O.S.)/100a.

106. Cmd. 1509 of 1921. For an amusing account of the "Northey Circulars" episode in Kenya, see Sir

Phillip Mitchell, *African Afterthoughts*, London, Hutchinson, 1954, pp. 98-99.—Ed.

107. E.S.A. SMP 5116 (O.S.)/112.

108. E.S.A. SMP 1138 L (O.S.)/2(4).

the change from the use of *kasanyu* labour by the Government to exclusive reliance on voluntary supplies, was partly due to an adventitious factor contributing to the plight of the planters. This was the fortuitous link which in the immediate post-war period connected the economic interests of the inhabitants of East Africa with the silver-hoarding propensities of the Chinese, since this link was largely responsible for the change-over from the rupee currency first to the florin and then to the shilling, at the parity of one florin to the rupee. By these extraneous changes alone, the former wage-rates, which on plantations in 1920 were between Rs. 3/50 and Rs. 6/- (according to locality), unless overtly counteradjusted, became automatically raised by 50 per cent. in terms of sterling, compared with the same rupee rates calculated at the previous normal parity of 1/4d. This, from the planters' point of view, aggravated the effects on wages of the removal of compulsion and of the Government's "good employer" policy which accompanied the change. It is doubtful, however, whether the currency change did more than accelerate an upward adjustment that would in any case have followed the supersession of the compulsory system.

It seems fair to conclude that the indirect effects of *kasanyu* on the wage rate, and the availability of labour itself, had served as unobtrusive props to the plantation industry, and that their removal was a main cause of the subsequent stagnation of the non-native plantations, during a period when coffee-growing by natives made rapid progress. The process of adjustment after the 1920-1921 collapse of prices and the change in labour supply conditions was painful and prolonged. The acreage under coffee cultivation by European planters fell away from the peak reached in 1920, and numbers of estate-owners found themselves on the verge of bankruptcy.<sup>109</sup>

The eclipse of non-native planting in Uganda in the 1920's after a bright and confident beginning in the preceding decade is perhaps of not solely historical interest. It may be seen as a particular example of the structural distortion that is liable to be produced in a developing economy whenever private economic calculations are made on the basis of prices which are themselves temporarily biased in one direction or another. So long as the bias continues, all may be well, at least for those in whose favour it works; and the longer it persists the greater the tendency may be to treat the abnormal situation as normal. In this respect uneconomic freight rates, protective import duties, racial discrimination in employment policies, and similar constraints, are analogous in their effects to the compression of private wage costs brought about during the *kasanyu* period in Uganda. If in such cases the abnormal influence is eventually removed, the cost of adjustment to be borne by those who have committed capital on the assumption that the bias would continue, may well be heavy, as it was in Uganda, especially if they have been unconscious of it and are unprepared. While if the consequences of change are in fact clearly foreseen by those who stand to lose, the reaction may be, not to make provision in good time, but to use political influence to resist the change itself.

It may be feasible to eliminate bias gradually, so that the adjustment can also be gradual and its costs more easily borne. Thus if plantation-owners are to be required to provide housing for a proportion of their casual employees, it may be quite practicable for the authorities to increase gradually the percentage of workers on strength which the employer is to be required to accommodate. But in other circumstances a policy of gradualness may impose even heavier costs than one of complete and outright change, or at least, heavier costs than the benefits arising from merely partial adjustment would warrant. For example, it would obviously be of no assistance to plantation-owners, first to require them to build permanent houses with walls six feet high, and then a few years' later to insist on nine feet. The degree of adaptation or commitment of organisation or capital to a

109. R. L. Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa*, New York, Macmillan, 1928, Vol. I, p. 627.

temporary expedient may exclude the practicability or likelihood of a gradual adjustment to the intended extent. As has already been observed, in spite of hopes that *kasavu* in Uganda would gradually disappear, and even though its operation gave rise to increasingly heavy social costs and administrative strain, the calls upon it latterly actually rose rather than diminished. The type of organisation required to attract and retain a wholly voluntary labour supply differed substantially from what was required to deal with *kasavu*, and the very existence of the compulsory regime militated against the success of any attempt to bring in voluntary labour alongside it, except at an extra organisational cost that would have seemed disproportionately heavy.

It may be equally misleading to assume, in the context of present-day development, that migrant labourers will succeed in gradually becoming wholly adapted to an urban life ; or that employers will gradually adjust their whole organisation from what is appropriate to the employment of large numbers, low in efficiency and earning low wages, to what is appropriate for smaller numbers, more efficient and earning higher wages ; or that it is good economic policy for the Government, in giving the lead to both sides, to encourage merely gradual adaptation on the part of employer and employed.

The *kasavu* period in the economic history of Uganda is relevant to present-day problems in another important respect. It illustrates the serious dangers that may arise when native institutions are used for purposes for which they were never intended. It was demonstrated in Uganda that whereas the properly traditional Buganda *luwalo* obligation (providing the labour required for the upkeep of native roads and buildings), even though unpaid, was accepted without serious objection, *kasavu*, which at first worked well enough, but which could claim no more than borrowed authority, eventually degenerated into a practice that was ultimately thoroughly evil and harmful in its effects.<sup>110</sup> Such dangers are the less likely to be taken fully into account in that they are often only incidentally reflected in the indices to which Governments have commonly referred, to assure themselves that " the country " is advancing—whether the export list (" that barometer of progress ", as one administrative officer in Uganda described it in 1911) or the yield from taxation or even the peoples' material standards of living. The dangers are still less likely to be fully weighed, if, for whatever reason, the central government is remote from the people on whose behalf it is planning and administering.

In the *kasavu* system there was, originally, the conscious intention to harness a powerful traditional social force, the customary powers of chiefs<sup>111</sup> to command the obedience of their people, to subserve new purposes. Most commonly, however, it is without any explicit prior intention that indigenous institutions come to be used for purposes other than those which give them meaning. But in either case the same unlooked-for result may in due course appear, a grave disruption of some previous social, economic, or ecological balance.

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110. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/II/135.

111. Such powers were much less in evidence in the Nilotic areas of northern and eastern Uganda than among the Bantu-speaking tribes.

## CHAPTER III

### ECONOMIC POLICY AND THE ATTRACTION OF LABOUR, 1922-1939

The abolition of the *kasavu* system at the end of 1921 in Buganda, Bunyoro, and Toro at first gave rise to no difficulty. The low price paid for cotton in 1921 increased the potential labour supply, because farmers grew less cotton and their 1922 incomes were lower. At the same time, the demand for labour fell off; plantations were closed and public works programmes were limited by decreased revenue. These circumstances were unexpectedly favourable for the transition, and there seems to have been a certain faltering in the Government's execution of its expressed intention to adopt "a wise and far-sighted policy as an employer of labour".<sup>1</sup>

In the newly established Legislative Council attention was drawn to "the great amount of feeling existing among employers . . . at the rate of wages paid to native labour in Government employ, which is understood to be much in excess of the market rate. . . ." The Government did not agree that this was the case, "with the sole exception of the rate paid on coffee plantations". Nevertheless, an assurance was given that the Government was taking "all possible precautions to see that interdepartmental competition consequent on the abolition of the *kasavu* system . . . does not lead to an undue inflation of the wage", and that in order to cut down the drawing of labour away from estates "the Government will further endeavour to reduce the rate of wages paid to permanent Public Works Department maintenance gangs working in the immediate neighbourhood of plantations". (The actual rates then being paid by the Government varied from between Shs. 11/- and Shs. 14/- per month in the central districts of Mengo and Busoga, to between Shs. 6/- and Shs. 8/- in Toro, Ankole, and Kigezi, in the Western Province, and in the remote northern districts of Arua, Chua and Gulu.)<sup>2</sup> There was also strong criticism of the Government's expenditure on a labour camp at Kampala, which was alleged to be unduly inflating labour costs. It was explained, however, that by housing and feeding employees the Government was hoping both to increase working efficiency and at the same time to keep down the direct wage rate.<sup>3</sup>

The new policy was more explicitly defined in a despatch to the Secretary of State.<sup>4</sup> The Governor said that he did not propose to take advantage of the situation to enforce a general reduction in the wages of unskilled labour. He wished, on the contrary, by continuing to pay a rate that would give the native a reasonable return for his labour, and by improving conditions of employment in other respects, "to seize this opportunity to bring the Government into credit as an employer", and to impress upon the natives generally that unskilled labour might be adopted regularly as a reasonable means of livelihood, instead of being merely regarded as the last resort of the destitute. By keeping up wages during the depression it was hoped that even when more prosperous conditions returned many natives would remain as members of a "permanent labouring class" and thus prevent an undue inflation of wages in the future. A Labour Commissioner for the Protectorate would continue to be needed, and one of his main duties would be "the education of the employer, both Government and private".<sup>5</sup>

It is not altogether clear what precisely was meant by "a permanent

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1. E.S.A. SMP 5590 (O.S.)/1/68.  
2. Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 25th-26th May, 1922, pp. 6-8.  
3. Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 26th August, 1922, p. 7.  
4. Despatch No. U.P. 316 of May, 1922.  
5. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/11/109.



labouring class", but it was an ideal commonly spoken of at this period. The Director of Public Works, for example, said in his 1922 Annual Report : "In view of the difficulties anticipated as a result of the abolition of *kasanvu* much was done to improve the conditions of voluntary labour, it being hoped that these improved conditions would lead to the creation of a permanent voluntary working class". He added, however, that although up to the end of the year there was no sensible shortage of labour, "a marked tendency to decreasing output was noticed", and he expressed grave anxiety for the future.<sup>6</sup> Such statements, imprecise as they often are, serve as a caution against the assumption of any automatic connection between "improved conditions" and increased output.

The higher wages being paid in Buganda, and especially in Mengo District, seem to have powerfully stimulated the inward flow of migrant labour from the less favoured districts. The Labour Commissioner observed and reported their movements with assiduous care,<sup>7</sup> now that Government and other employers alike depended on voluntary supplies. At this stage the Banyaruanda and Barundi, who were later to make up the most important contingent in the army of migrants, seem to have been insignificant in numbers, but there were already a few Bakiga from the far south-west of the Protectorate near the Belgian border. The most important suppliers of migrant labour at this time appear to have been Banyankole and Banyoro coming in from the south-west and north-west, and Bagisu and Badama from the Eastern Province. There were less important contributions from the Batoro of the Western Province, from various other Eastern Province tribes while from the Northern Province there were a few Acholi, and—not yet numerically important but increasing—the first explorers from the tribes living beyond the Nile and Lake Albert in the far north-west of the Protectorate.<sup>8</sup>

The beginnings of movement from the Northern Province had been encouraged through active recruitment by planters from Bunyoro. They had obtained permission in 1918 to seek volunteers in the West Nile District who might replace the local Banyoro who were being attracted into Buganda by higher wages. Some of the West Nile tribesmen, particularly the muscular Alur, were coming into Buganda on their own initiative. West Nile natives had become liable to pay poll-tax in 1917,<sup>9</sup> and as a result the need for money for this purpose made a period of work outside their district indispensable for many.<sup>10</sup>

The filtering-through into Buganda of some of the Alur raised a recurring question which the Government in these early years seems to have found exceptionally difficult to settle. Should the interests of the people of one district or province be protected to the detriment of the inhabitants of others? A planter in Buganda, impressed by some of the Alur who had found work with him, asked in 1921 for permission to recruit more in their home area. He was told that in view of the very large migration of Banyoro into Buganda, it was not intended to encourage employers outside Bunyoro to obtain labour supplies from the West Nile, as the Bunyoro planters were becoming more and more dependent on that District as their sole source. The Governor in 1922 agreed with the opinion of the Provincial Commissioners that policy in the matter must ultimately be that of "equal opportunity for all"—certain employers ought not to be privileged to recruit in particular areas to the exclusion of others. But it was nevertheless decided that for the time being the policy of "protecting" the Bunyoro planters should be continued. The year 1922 was difficult for most Uganda planters, and on balance it was evidently considered preferable to protect these employers from a high wage rather than their migrant employees from a low

6. Annual Report of the Director of Public Works, 1922, p. 9.

7. E.S.A. SMP 7691 (O.S.)/1.

8. E.S.A. SMP 7491 (O.S.)/12.

9. *Uganda Gazette*, 31st January, 1917, Notice No. 22 of 1917.

10. E.S.A. SMP 2002/08/V/569.

wage. "If the door is thrown open to all employers the result will be a rapid rise in the price of Alur labour. This rise, coming at this critical moment, might have a disastrous effect on the Bunyoro plantations. . . ." By continuing to protect the Bunyoro planters, the administration allowed other employers still to obtain a proportion of the coveted Alur labour, "who will filter through to them in gradually increasing numbers, at a lower rate than if the price were forced up by competition in recruiting at the base of supply, and at the same time the Bunyoro planters will thus be helped to carry over this very difficult period".<sup>11</sup> The Bunyoro planters did survive, and it would be difficult to demonstrate that the exceptional measures taken in their favour were not justifiable in the circumstances. Their privilege, however, was revoked in October, 1923, when the Governor ruled that, subject to safeguards laid down by Ordinance, recruiting by private individuals should be unrestricted throughout the Protectorate.<sup>12</sup>

The Government, at this period, saw no virtue in a policy of aiming at deliberate local self-sufficiency in labour supplies, though at least one of its Provincial Commissioners found it difficult to share the Government's view. The Provincial Commissioner of the Eastern Province, who, during the shortage of 1918, had objected strongly to an instruction to supply labour to Buganda,<sup>13</sup> was equally insistent in 1923 that the Teso of his Province, who were wealthier from cotton than they had ever been, should themselves provide labour for public works in their own district, including road and bridge construction that would closely affect their future prosperity as cotton-growers. He considered that "to import labour from other parts of the Protectorate is wrong and can only add to the unwillingness of the Teso to volunteer".<sup>14</sup> For the Provincial Commissioner, evidently, the question was one of morality as much as of economic or administrative practice. The Government's view, however, was unambiguous. "His Excellency . . . has decided that it is wise to encourage the importation of labour from other sources into the big producing areas of this Protectorate. While the natives in any area are actively engaged in producing and partly transporting a valuable crop and are at the same time acquiring by this form of activity ample cash to enable them to meet their cash obligations and to satisfy their normal requirements, it is not reasonable to expect them also to work on departmental services and extraordinary works, such as road construction. His Excellency feels that any attempt to induce them to hire out their labour in these circumstances will fail, and is further calculated to have a discouraging effect on production. . . ." The Governor would not consider having resort to compulsory labour until the Labour Commissioner was satisfied that the Public Works Department had unsuccessfully tried every possible means of attracting voluntary labour from all parts of the Protectorate.<sup>15</sup>

Labour difficulties of this kind began to reassert themselves in 1923, with the recovery of prices, and the chief hope of meeting them, as these instructions illustrate, lay in stimulating migrant labour wherever it could be found and attracting it from less developed districts to the centres where it was most needed. Migrant labour streams would follow directions that had the logic of a plan for trunk railways,<sup>16</sup> it was hoped, but in fact the labour flow by no means always followed the courses that seemed the most convenient or predictable from the map. Nor did migrants confine themselves neatly to the nearest employment areas to which they might be theoretically allocated: Bagisu, for example, were still spurning Busoga and coming further into Mengo in the thousands<sup>17</sup> or going to Kenya.

11. E.S.A. SMP 2002/08/V/558-563.

12. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/II/162.

13. E.S.A. SMP 2002/08/IV/343.

14. E.S.A. SMP 5551 (O.S.)/I/35.

15. E.S.A. SMP 5551 (O.S.)/I/32.

16. E.S.A. SMP 2002/08/V/559b.

17. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/II/137, 139(2).

Buganda was now receiving contingents from each of the three remaining Provinces. A Labour Deputation to the Governor in September was given figures based on the experience of the previous eight and one-half months, showing that a monthly average of 2,000 labourers were coming into Buganda from the Western Province, 1,000 from the Northern Province and 1,500 from the Eastern Province.

Some European employers in Buganda were apprehensive of competition from the Baganda, who were said to pay higher wages and give more food during the cotton-planting season. One of them asked that "pressure should be brought to bear to prevent the Baganda from employing outside tribes as labourers, as this system was having a deleterious effect on the better tribes of the Protectorate".<sup>18</sup> Migrants from Toro and Ankole at this time were said to be responsible for producing at least a quarter of the Buganda cotton crop, and the problem of transporting the pickings to metalled roads would have been "almost insoluble" without their assistance.<sup>19</sup> This influx sufficed to defer a labour famine in Buganda until 1924, although by the end of 1923 the Public Works Department was again beginning to complain of difficulties in all parts of the country excepting Kampala, where it seemed that "a floating labour population" was coming into being.<sup>20</sup> The position was far more difficult in the Eastern Province, where in the two most important cotton-growing districts, Teso and Busoga, an average of over Shs. 60/- per head had been paid out to the adult male population. This was a large sum in relation to the monthly wage rate for unskilled labour, which in the previous year had been only Shs. 9/- to Shs. 10/- in the one district and Shs. 11/- to Shs. 14/- in the other.<sup>21</sup> The successful cotton harvest sent up the market rate for unskilled labour in Jinja by nearly 100 per cent.<sup>22</sup>

In 1924 the position seriously deteriorated, with both Buganda and the Eastern Province affected. Two successful cotton seasons had practically eliminated the supply of local labour. Most private employers were in difficulties, the arterial road construction programme then under way was lagging behind schedule, and even essential public services, such as the handling of cargo at ports, were endangered. In addition, there was a major railway construction project pending, which would give rise to a heavy additional demand for labour,<sup>23</sup> and the Inter-Colonial Railway Council perturbed by the difficulty of finding men to move the Uganda cotton crop, decided to urge both Kenya and Uganda to establish native recruiting organisations so as to ensure the availability of labour for Government work.<sup>24</sup> Large numbers of migrants were continuing to come in from Ankole, Toro, Bunyoro, and the West Nile District, but it was estimated that at least 75 per cent of them were being absorbed by the Baganda for cotton cultivation.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, there were all the ancillary activities connected with cotton. Cotton-buyers and ginners, working on a substantial margin of profit and having contracts to fulfil, were not disposed to quibble about the wage they had to pay, and much labour could be used up in this way in a short time.<sup>26</sup>

These were the circumstances in which it was decided that a complete Labour Department for the Protectorate was indispensable. During 1923-4 there were signs of a gradual shift in emphasis taking place in Uganda, as

18. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/II/159.

19. E.S.A. SMP 6847 (O.S.)/69.

20. Annual Report of the Director of Public Works, 1923, p. 10, para. 41.

21. Proceedings of Legislative Council, 25th-26th May, 1922, p. 8.

22. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/139.

23. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/III/221.

24. E.S.A. SMP 5551 (O.S.)/145a.

25. Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, 1923, p. 4 ; 1924, p. 5.

The Government, moreover, was still exerting strong influence to persuade the Baganda to keep up their efforts in cotton-growing. In 1923 the Kabaka himself had undertaken a propaganda tour at the Governor's request, and in 1924 two administrative officers were specially detailed to travel about the Province explaining the need for increased production. They were aided in their efforts by the stimulus of good prices and also by the direct pecuniary interest of the chiefs in increased production under the existing custom of the *nyujo* or tithes. (E.S.A. SMP 1138 (O.S.)/P/13.)

These activities brought forth protests from the Uganda Chamber of Commerce and from the Uganda Planters' Association. It was urged that "due regard should be given in any development programme both to the general labour situation and to the other economic crops of the Protectorate". (E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/III/218 ; 7939/I/149.)

26. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/III/221.

elsewhere, away from an almost exclusive preoccupation with development for trade and towards a more socially interested policy of trusteeship directly on behalf of the native inhabitants. In November, 1923, for example, the Governor (Sir Geoffrey Archer), addressing the Legislative Council, referred to the budgetary implications of "the growing demands of all sections of the community and, particularly, the needs of the large indigenous population".<sup>27</sup> Public instruction ceased to be the exclusive responsibility of the missions and the first annual report of a newly created Department of Education appeared in 1925. The views of the European agricultural and commercial community began to exert a less overbearing weight in Government counsels.

Nevertheless, when labour policy was under consideration by the Government, the planting interests, in spite of the hard times they had recently experienced and of the smallness of their numbers (not more than 100 in 1924),<sup>28</sup> still claimed a considerable say, and in September, 1924, the Governor took care to explain the proposals for the establishment of a Labour Department to representatives of the Planters' Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Indian Association. There were objections that the wages proposed by the Government for its recruited labour (Shs. 12/- for Northern Province labourers and a gunny bag and blanket) were unnecessarily high when "it was only possible to get two hours' really good work out of the labour". Here, indeed, was an important part of the explanation of the "labour shortage". One reason put forward for this remarkably low output was inadequate diet; but another reason was that competition for labour between employers had tended to take the form of a progressive reduction in the size of the tasks set—this indirect competition no doubt being less likely to court adverse comment from fellow-employers than the granting of direct wage advances. According to the Labour Commissioner, "any planter or Government Department endeavouring to secure a fair task from the porter becomes unpopular, and labour drifts away elsewhere".<sup>29</sup> The derisory size of the task performed must obviously have resulted in a much larger demand for labour in terms of numbers than would otherwise have been necessary, and "target workers who might have been willing to perform a larger task for a higher wage would find it necessary to prolong their absence from home". (As one employer put it, "Labour brought down-country from the more industrious tribes deteriorates owing to contamination by down-country labour".) The small tasks did mean, however, that the migrants could also take on the more popular work offered by Baganda cotton-growers, generally in return for food and drink. Indeed, for the majority of migrant labourers working for planters or for the Government at this period, it was only by this means that they could feed themselves. The Provincial Commissioners viewed with considerable anxiety "the demoralising effect on the native caused by the task system, whereby men at times finish their day's work at 9 a.m.". They recommended united action by the principal employers to ensure that unskilled labour performed a full day's work in return for a good wage, but this recommendation elicited a succinct comment: "Employers cannot continue to dictate terms to labour until the supply exceeds the demand".

One suggestion for continued action put forward by a planter at a meeting called by the Governor was that a single private organisation might recruit for both Government and private employers alike, and that "a standard wage could then be agreed upon".<sup>30</sup> The Government, however, did not entertain this proposal, and in fact the Planters' Association had already decided to set up a recruiting organisation of its own to bring labour down from the less productive areas. This was arranged with the approval

27. Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 16th November, 1923.

28. E.S.A. SMP 7725/9.

29. E.S.A. SMP 7835 (O.S.)/36a.

30. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/III/230; 226a; 204a.

of the Government, in spite of the fact that it would mean direct competition with the Labour Department.<sup>31</sup>

The duties of the Government's Labour Department, however, were more extensive than those of a mere recruiting organisation. It was to be responsible "for studying and improving the conditions of migration and employment," as well as "for propaganda and recruitment in the outlying districts".<sup>32</sup> In practice it proved much easier to show results in recruiting than in improving the conditions of employment.

It was estimated in September, 1924, that there were then in voluntary employment some 15,000-20,000 unskilled labourers drawn from nearly all the tribes of the Protectorate. This estimate did not include those working for native authorities nor, evidently, those at work on Baganda cotton-plots. The Public Works Department was employing about 8,000 of the total, which left them with a shortage of about 3,000. In addition, the extension of the Uganda Railway from Turbo to Mbulamuti, shortly to be undertaken, would call for another 8,000-10,000 men every month.

The Government's scheme envisaged the recruitment of men for railway construction and Government services in the Eastern Province from the West Nile and the Acholi country, and for services in the rest of the Protectorate from Ankole and Kigezi.<sup>33</sup> The planters' recruiting organisation also proposed to operate in the same areas,<sup>34</sup> and it was permitted to use the special labour camps established along main routes by the Labour Department and to receive other assistance. Nevertheless, it was emphasised that "the very definite instructions issued by the Secretary of State" prohibiting the recruitment of labour by District Officers for private employers were to be rigidly adhered to.<sup>35</sup>

The planters had received an assurance, however (15th July, 1924), that it was "not the policy of the Government to push cotton production" in the various outlying areas where recruiting was about to take place.<sup>36</sup> This was a decision with far-reaching implications. It seems to represent a *volte face* from the view held less than a year before. At that time—August, 1923—it was found that the poll-tax yield in the Western Province districts of Toro and Ankole was so low that the rebate was insufficient to provide the chiefs with adequate guaranteed salaries. This was due to the prohibitive transport costs of marketing local produce and to the "very large numbers" of natives of Toro and Ankole migrating to the central areas in search of employment. Some of these migrants sent the tax home, but the majority paid in the districts in which they had found employment. The Colonial Office view was that "the true remedy for the difficulty . . . appears to be to find some means of local development in these districts". The Governor had stated in reply that he hoped to see at no distant date "definite progress in all forms of development in the Western Province. . . . I can assure your Grace that every possible effort is being made to promote progress especially in the matter of agriculture. . . ."<sup>37</sup>

The new, and different, policy was reaffirmed in 1925. The Department of Agriculture, apparently ignorant of the new arrangements, had sent an officer to the West Nile District to stimulate cotton production, with adverse effect upon labour recruitment there. The Director of Agriculture was then informed that "the policy of this Government is at present to refrain from actively stimulating the production of cotton or other economic crops in outlying districts on which it is dependent for a supply of labour for the carrying out of essential services in the central or producing districts. . . ." This policy was to be maintained "until such time as labour difficulties in the more central districts . . . became less acute". At the same time, it was

31. E.S.A. SMP 8297/21.

32. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/III/221.

33. E.S.A. SMP 7725 (O.S.)/8.

34. E.S.A. SMP 5590 (O.S.)/I/140a.

35. E.S.A. SMP 8297 (O.S.)/1.

36. E.S.A. SMP 8297 (O.S.)/1d.

37. E.S.A. SMP 6847/69; 70: 73.

also made clear that the intention was not, and never had been, to prevent cotton-planting in any district by natives wishing to do so.<sup>38</sup>

This policy was from one point of view only an extension of the principle already affirmed in the case of Teso<sup>39</sup> in 1923, that "productive" districts need not be required themselves to provide the labour necessary for their own capital construction programmes. In other words, productive districts, to avoid a temporary sacrifice of their present production, should call on less productive districts for the hire of the additional labour currently required. Now the principle was taken further, and the other districts were expected, not merely to supply the labour needed to augment the productive equipment of the already more productive districts, but—temporarily at least—to remain less productive themselves in order to be able to continue to do so. The Ormsby-Gore Commission commented: "At the present time it may be said that the cotton-growers are becoming a special class for whom all the other community services have to be provided by wage labour imported from outside".<sup>40</sup>

As the cultivation of cotton in Uganda was subject to detailed legislative control designed to maintain the quality of the crop and to check the spread of disease and the proliferation of inferior varieties, and as all seed had to be obtained from the Department of Agriculture, a policy of "not actively stimulating" cotton-growing, by not providing instructions and not distributing seed unless specifically requested, was little different from a policy of actual discouragement. The great success of cotton in Buganda and the Eastern Province certainly owed much to official stimulation in the early stages of its introduction, and now its very success there had the result of withholding similar aid from remoter districts. It is interesting, if unprofitable, to speculate whether, if the country that is now the Uganda Protectorate had been opened up from the direction of Khartoum instead of from the Coast, there would have been a stage when the development of Buganda had to be postponed until after the solution of labour difficulties in the Northern Province.

The wisdom of a policy of holding back the agricultural development of the outlying districts so as to stimulate an increased flow of migrant labour was questioned even in 1924. In the opinion of an officer who was Labour Commissioner for a short period of that year: "The present policy of discouraging cotton cultivation in the remote parts of the Protectorate and bringing down the population of these districts to work in Buganda and Busoga will undoubtedly do much to alleviate the present shortage but it can in no sense be a permanent solution of the problem. The labour thus secured is poor in quality and most expensive and after a sojourn of three or four months in the more civilised parts of the country the raw and unsophisticated native will return home a different being, impatient of control and unlikely to do any work he can reasonably avoid".<sup>41</sup>

The medical authorities, too, whose focus of vision rarely coincided with that of administrators or labour officers, began to point out considerations that had been overlooked. The possible resurgence of the scourge of sleeping sickness was an ever-present danger which large movements of population could not but increase. Restrictions had therefore to be imposed affecting both recruitment and reception areas.<sup>42</sup>

Nor did the proposals meet with unanimous approval in non-official circles. At the special meetings held between Government representatives and those of the planters and the commercial world, there were indications of a minority of dissenting opinion. Attention was drawn to the danger that the wholesale importation of labour from the non-productive into the productive areas might mean the depopulation of a country itself potentially

38. E.S.A. SMP 8297 (O.S.)/68-84.

39. *Vide supra*, p. 37.

40. *Report of the East African Commission*, London, H.M.S.O., 1925, Cmd. 2387, p. 142.

41. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/III/230.

42. E.S.A. SMP 8297 (O.S.)/51; 8381/3.

productive, and one speaker questioned outright whether it was justifiable to divide the Protectorate into "productive" and "unproductive" areas.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless in 1924 official and non-official opinion was generally in favour of closing the labour gap by means of organised recruitment from the peripheral areas.<sup>44</sup>

The Governor summarised the Government's intentions as, first, to organise and direct the flow of labour from "our outlying labour reservoirs"; second, to offer inducements to such labour "sufficient to overcome the human disinclination for the continuous performance of monotonous and uncongential tasks", and by feeding and good living conditions to raise the physical capacity for work; and, finally, to extract a full day's work from the labourer.<sup>45</sup>

The new Labour Department went into full operation in January, 1925, and the results of its recruiting activities clearly showed how little control the Government possessed. For at the very time when the Labour Department was setting up its recruiting organisation in Ankole and Kigezi, voluntary labourers from the Belgian mandated territory of Ruanda-Urundi were coming to be an important element in the migrant labour supply in Buganda.<sup>46</sup> It seems probable that they were entering the Protectorate in appreciable numbers as early as 1923. Various influences were creating a powerful incentive for Belgian Africans to cross the frontier and seek a spell of paid labour in Buganda. The fact of a common frontier, for instance, made migration easy. The route into Uganda from the Kingdom of Ruanda had traditionally been a means of escape from feud, famine, or oppression. In Buganda, the rising price and increased production of cotton in these years, and the construction of the Kampala-Masaka road, made the demand for labour grow when the supply within the Protectorate was decreasing, as more and more potential wage-earners took to cotton-growing instead. In Ruanda this was a period of acute food shortage, and migration to Buganda provided one way of relief. Wages in Uganda were higher, and the unfavourable franc-sterling exchange rate made them seem more attractive still. Finally, the Belgian administration was intensifying its efforts to raise taxes and thus making it more necessary for men to earn cash.

The numerical importance of this foreign labour supply was not foreseen when the recruiting schemes were under discussion in Uganda in 1924. The supposition was that the labour to be recruited would be drawn from within the Protectorate.<sup>47</sup> In the event, Belgian natives provided by far the greater proportion of the numbers recruited by the Labour Department. "The great majority" of the 11,700 labourers recruited in the south-west of the Protectorate by the Labour Department up to the end of September, 1925, were from Belgian territory; and part of the 5,200 obtained from the West Nile District were also of Belgian origin, coming from the Congo proper. Less than 2,000 were recruited from Lango and the Acholi country. And when at the end of September—apparently through drastic action on the part of the Belgian authorities—there was an abrupt cessation of the foreign movement, the Labour Department reported that in consequence it was "seriously short" of the amount of labour required.<sup>48</sup> The reaction of the Uganda authorities was to redouble their efforts to attract labour from within the Protectorate, and 100,000 propaganda handbills were ordered for distribution amongst the principal tribes of south-western and western Uganda.<sup>49</sup>

The flow of immigrants from the Belgian side was apparently soon

43. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/III/226a; 5590 (O.S.)/I/140b.

44. E.S.A. SMP 5590 (O.S.)/140; 140b.

45. E.S.A. SMP 5590 (O.S.)/140a.

46. It was estimated by the Labour Commissioner as early as May, 1924, that "probably at least 50%" of the Buganda cotton crop was then being produced by Banyankole, Batoro, Bakiga or Banyaruanda labour. (E.S.A. SMP 8238 (O.S.)/19 May, 1924.) Road counts taken around Kampala in September, 1924, indicated a sharp increase in the proportion of Banyaruanda migrants seeking employment.

47. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/III/244(n).

48. E.S.A. SMP 8297 (O.S.)/87; 8882 (O.S.)/4.

49. E.S.A. SMP 8882 (O.S.)/5.

resumed, and at the end of the year, although the numbers recruited fell far short of the estimated figure, all demands had been met.<sup>50</sup> The numbers of labourers coming into the centre on their own initiative had evidently completely upset calculations.

In spite of the relatively small numbers with which the Labour Department had had to deal, and of the efforts to popularise employment in the public service by higher wages and improved conditions,<sup>51</sup> there was, at the end of 1925, little sign of progress in the creation of a "permanent labouring class", which had been referred to at various times as the ultimate objective of labour policy.<sup>52</sup> The new Department had applied most of its resources to recruiting and conducting labour. The Government no longer attempted to maintain a position of wage leadership. In the new schedule of Government wage rates, announced in 1925, the recommended rate was never higher than that paid by private employers for similar work under similar conditions. At one period in 1925, when private employers in the Kampala area were paying a cash wage of Shs. 18/- to Shs. 22/- per month for locally engaged labour, the Government rate still lagged behind at Shs. 14/-. To make up the resulting deficiency, recruited labour had to be used, at an average cost, including recruiting expenses and food, of about Shs. 23/- ! When this was realised, the Government wage rate in the area was increased to Shs. 18/-,<sup>53</sup> which meant that the wage rate in the vicinity of the commercial and administrative capitals was once again above the local poll-tax rate.<sup>54</sup>

The spate of recruiting, especially in the West Nile District—which in January, 1925, was said to be "overrun with recruiters from all over Uganda"<sup>55</sup>—was evidently less than satisfactory to some private employers. Suggestions were put forward, during the year, for eliminating some of the competition, but the official policy was reaffirmed, that in all districts where labour recruiting was permitted, there must be equality of opportunity for all employers, whether Government or private.<sup>56</sup>

In the following year, however, the whole policy of meeting the labour shortage by attracting up-country tribesmen into the centre of the Protectorate was regarded much more critically. Sir William Gowers, who became Governor of Uganda in February, 1925, was far more apprehensive of the ultimate effects of these labour movements than his predecessor had been. During 1924 there had been warnings of unexpected difficulties and costs, especially medical ones; for example, the death rate, incidence of sickness, and call upon medical services was far greater with imported labour than with labour drawn from local populations.<sup>57</sup>

Now the Governor, in commenting on certain observations made by the Ormsby-Gore Commission,<sup>58</sup> drew attention to the grave social consequences which in the long run might flow from current policy. When, among such people as the Baganda and the Basoga, labourers were introduced who came from tribes considered inferior and who worked under conditions which the Baganda and Basoga would not themselves accept, the latter inevitably tended to feel that unskilled manual labour was a form of employment suitable only for inferior tribes. There was even danger that the question might in time become one of "caste", and in that event the Government, if the system of imported labour ultimately broke down, would be confronted with difficulties far more formidable than any that existed. There could be no question, Gowers said, "that the present system of imported labour should be regarded only as a temporary and even emergency expedient, and should

50. G.B. Annual Colonial Report—Uganda, 1925, p. 6, para. 11.

51. These regulations constituted an elementary code dealing with water and fuel supplies, cooking arrangements, dwellings, a minimum ration, a maximum load, medical attendance, and sanitary supervision.

52. E.S.A. SMP 7128/69b.

53. E.S.A. SMP 3408 (O.S.)/82; 90; 93.

54. Cf. p. 14.

55. E.S.A. SMP 1049/06/III (insertion).

56. E.S.A. SMP 8840 (O.S.)/2.

57. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/III/244; 233b.

58. G.B. Report of the East African Royal Commission, Cmd., 2387, 1925, pp. 73, 60, 141-3.



be abandoned in favour of the development within each district of a labour supply adequate for local needs from the tribes inhabiting the district, if this alternative is in any way practicable”.

The question was whether the development of an adequate local labour supply within the producing districts was a practicable possibility. The Governor expressed cautious optimism. He was able to point to recent experience in the Eastern Province where, against all previous expectation, large numbers of natives from several cotton-producing tribes<sup>59</sup> had been induced to volunteer for work on railway construction as the result of careful, continuous attention to housing, feeding and other employment conditions, by a small staff of specially detailed European officers. The task now was to adopt similar methods so as to achieve a substantial increase in the local voluntary labour supply in all the producing districts. “The problem will present varying difficulties according to local conditions. In Buganda, for instance, it may be necessary to continue a far higher standard of housing, feeding and sanitation with the organisation of labour battalions or pioneer corps offering special conditions of leave, clothing and equipment and fair prospects of promotion by length of service. In districts such as Teso, the natives of which have always evinced a marked reluctance to leave their homes and are engaged, both men and women, in the planting and harvesting of annual food crops, twice in the year, in addition to cotton, special conditions will also have to be considered”. Allowing for these difficulties, there remained ample grounds for hoping that “a general improvement of conditions and a close study of the problem by tribes and districts, combined with . . . a far greater economy in the use of labour than is at present observed either by the Government or by private employers, will ultimately produce a local labour supply sufficient to meet local requirements.” The Labour Department would therefore be instructed to aim at “the gradual . . . replacement of imported labour by local labour”, a policy that would necessitate far higher expenditure than had yet been contemplated. In the Governor’s opinion, the existing system of dependence on imported labour was “fraught with economic danger to this Protectorate of so serious a nature that no expenditure up to the limit of the Protectorate’s financial resources can . . . be considered excessive if its abolition can thus be secured”.<sup>60</sup>

This was in accordance with the view expressed by the Ormsby-Gore Commission that “the same propaganda issued by the Government which has resulted in the rapid extension of cultivation must be directed to securing a greater participation by local natives in the public works, transport and other services necessary for the preparation and handling of the cotton crop for export”.<sup>61</sup>

There was a simultaneous move away from the theory of a Protectorate divided into “productive” and “unproductive” areas. By February, 1926, the Government’s development policy had undergone a significant change. The intention now was that “all districts should, as soon as the extension of transport facilities renders it practicable, become producing districts”. It was recognised, however, that the development of the “local labour policy”, whereby “each District should meet its own normal labour requirements from the native population resident in the District”, would take time, and that in the meanwhile the producing districts’ dependence on the non-producing districts for labour would have to continue. “Young men in non-producing districts should therefore be encouraged to seek temporary employment outside their tribal areas rather than stay idly at home. This migration of labour should as far as possible be controlled so that able-bodied and physically fit men only migrate”.<sup>62</sup>

It was not to be expected that the new policy would make an immediate impression upon the country’s economy. Other conditions had to be ful-

59. The Basoga, Bagwere, and Banyuli.

60. E.S.A. SMP 5711 (O.S.)/111/254.

61. G.B. Report of the East African Royal Commission, Cmd., 2387, 1925, p. 142.

62. E.S.A. SMP C 913/9a; 11.

filled, notably, the discovery of cash crops suited to local conditions in the remoter districts ; knowledge to be acquired by the inhabitants of the most suitable methods of production ; the availability of means of transport whose cost would leave production worth-while. In Uganda, where the exportable produce of even the most favoured localities has to undergo a lengthy journey to the ocean port (750 miles, for example, from Kampala to Mombasa via Kisumu), transport costs have profoundly influenced the structure of the economy. In those parts of the country where there are few reliable roads and no railway, the costs may operate with penal effect. Nearly thirty years were to pass after 1926 before the Uganda Railway was to penetrate into Western Uganda, and migration into Buganda from the Western Province and elsewhere was destined long to continue. Moreover, so far as the predominant migratory movement was concerned—that from Ruanda-Urundi—the Uganda Government obviously had no direct power of control over the economic conditions prevailing at the source, even if it had wished to exert such influence.

The movement of migrant labour into Buganda continued, especially from the south-west, and in 1926 there was little sign of approaching repletion. The year was marked, however, by an increasing conflict of opinion between different branches of the Government about the desirability of having migrants in Buganda. The Public Works Department still had recourse to the Labour Department's recruiting services for about a third of its average monthly labour force of nearly 11,000, and many of the remaining two-thirds, although "locally engaged", were in fact of migrant origin. Frequently they would arrive as recruits and then desert<sup>63</sup> in order to reappear as local men and claim the higher rate of pay. It was, in part, the familiar case of the refusal of the labourer to take the value of food fully into account in estimating the value of his earnings. It had been the policy to pay recruited men Shs. 12/- plus rations, etc., as well as to provide accommodation, and to pay local men, who fended for themselves, Shs. 18/-. To the Government the value of the ration was Shs. 4/-, to the migrant worker it was obviously far less—especially if he happened not to be partial to maize flour as a staple item of diet.<sup>64</sup> A wage rate attractive enough to the migrant when offered to him in the country could not easily hold him in town, if it was less in money terms than the town rate paid to local people. The larger the gap between the two cash rates, the more likely it was that the recruit in town would forsake his labour camp and his ration and try for the bigger full cash wage. The labourer would make himself a temporary hut on a vacant piece of ground, and, since others did likewise, such plots became dangerously insanitary. The more often this happened, the more persistently these hungry wanderers tended to spread disease, and the more clamorous became the medical authorities' concern for the health of the resident population.<sup>65</sup>

The Acting Governor minuted in June : "The Banyaruanda are a miserably poor lot . . . and I have lately had under consideration the question of shutting down completely recruiting from [the south-west] until the health conditions in Kampala improve". The intention was to recruit West Nile men for employment in Kampala so that the Public Works Department could dispense with its Banyaruanda. Fewer West Nile recruits were now needed for work on the railway extension, because members of the cotton-producing tribes in the vicinity were coming forward in 1926 as labourers in greater numbers than expected. No doubt the drop in the price of cotton paid to growers—from an average of Shs. 24/- per 100 lbs. in 1925 for the Eastern Province to an average of Shs. 17/- in 1926<sup>66</sup>—was partly responsible for this unexpected success of the new policy of local self-sufficiency in labour

63. It was stated on 20th May, 1926, that 41.6% of the labour recruited by the Labour Department between 1st January and 6th May had deserted. Later, to reduce the desertion rate recruits were taken on, on the understanding that part of their pay would be deferred. (E.S.A. SMP 8840 (O.S.)/25 ; 37.)

64. E.S.A. SMP 8840 (O.S.)/25 ; 8540 (O.S.)/3.

65. E.S.A. SMP 8297/100.

66. E.S.A. SMP 7939A/6a.

supply. As a result, West Nile voluntary labour was in June "offering freely and in numbers largely in excess of the Railway Extension requirements".<sup>67</sup>

At this stage, however, other considerations came to the fore: private employers were still recruiting heavily and both the Labour Department and the Provincial Commissioner of the Northern Province became apprehensive about the number of males who were away from their West Nile homes at work in other parts of the Protectorate. One estimate put the absent during the first six months of 1926 at about 6,400, or approximately 16 per cent of the adult male population.<sup>68</sup> Uganda Government officials were at this time influenced to a considerable extent by the report of the Belgian Commission into Labour Problems in the Congo, in which it was recommended *inter alia* that up to 5 per cent of able-bodied adult males might be withdrawn from their tribal areas for work elsewhere without harm, provided they were well cared for at their place of employment, and that a further 10 per cent might be employed by enterprises situated within 2 days' march of the labourer's home.<sup>69</sup> It was concluded in Uganda that for the time being no further recruitment in the West Nile District by the Labour Department could be justified, and that in future the proportion of adult males away from home should not exceed 10 per cent. Recruiting in the south-west was therefore reluctantly continued, although a strict medical examination was now imposed, which resulted in a rejection at Mbarara of 70-75 per cent.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, no attempt to accept recruits on a selective basis was likely to be satisfactory if those rejected were already well inside the country, as was in fact the case. Those rejected would simply resume their long journey independently; indeed, those in need of assistance might actually be less likely to receive it, although they were at liberty to make use of local hospitals if they had sufficient confidence and initiative to do so.

Here was one example of the tendency of a migrant labour system, at least in the long run, to impose its full cost on the section of society making use of it, and of the disinclination of that society to accept the imposition. Sooner or later the employer-beneficiary of such a system must come to terms with the fact that the migrant whose services are in demand is not mere "labour", but a being who retains an obstinate attachment to his own community of dependents and friends, and who is apt to draw that community in with him if possible—with all its claims for recognition as an addition less to man-power than to population and to responsible society. It must be admitted, however, that the full development of a sense of social responsibility extending beyond the boundaries of sovereignty is a late growth in societies of far greater maturity and cohesion than the colonial Protectorate of Uganda in the early 1920's, where in Government circles there were lingering traces of the earlier habit of referring to the employing community as "the General Public" and still occasional references to the native tribes of the country as "material".

Nevertheless, in Uganda during this period the trusteeship theory was beginning to impinge more directly on practical economic and labour policy than ever before. The speech of the Acting Governor to the Legislative Council in December, 1926, bore the imprint of changing ideas: "I desire to take this opportunity to impress upon the people of this Protectorate . . . that labour is neither a chattel nor a commodity, but human, and must be dealt with from the standpoint of human interests. . . ." There were limits to the effectiveness of legislation. Employers, if they wanted to have loyal and cheerful service, must demonstrate a keen human interest in the welfare of their employees; good houses, good food, medical attendance, a knowledge of their language, and wages commensurate with the work they were doing, were essential elements in labour practice. "It is only by raising the

67. E.S.A. SMP 8297/92.

68. E.S.A. SMP 8297, 142.

69. Rapport de la Commission pour l'Etude du Probleme de la Main-d'Oeuvre au Congo Belge, Brussels, 1925.

70. Labour Department, Annual Report for 1926.

standard of living that we can induce the native to work harder in order to satisfy his ambitions".<sup>71</sup>

Most of these exhortations contained nothing new ; the change lay in the fact that during 1926 the Labour Department was for the first time making a serious attempt to bring about improvements and in the process was discovering how necessary they were. The Department brought to light housing and feeding conditions in private employment that " could hardly be worse ".

Here was one of several paradoxes concealed in the labour problem : the Government, in conformity with the ideal of creating a permanent labouring class, pleaded that employers should co-operate in the policy of improving employment and living conditions, but the employers might argue with some justification that so long as there was little sign of the growth of a permanent labouring class it was uneconomic to invest more than a minimum in the health and physical welfare of drifting groups of unskilled workers. This would be particularly true of those employers—notably the ginner—whose demand for labour was concentrated at one season of the year. Yet private employers undoubtedly underestimated the degree of transformation that is possible within only a period of months when raw unskilled labour is properly fed and looked after. For example, it was claimed at that time (1926) that recruits who re-engaged for a second contract of four or six months' work on the railway extension were from 40 to 90 per cent more efficient as a result of adequate feeding and supervision.<sup>72</sup>

In the course of the prolonged discussion and argument which took place in the middle 'twenties on the " imported labour " question, it is surprising how little was said of those who collectively comprised the most important group of employers, the Baganda. It is true that although undoubtedly these native employers absorbed the majority of the migrants entering Buganda, the scattered distribution of transient workers among them did not give rise to such dangers as those produced by numbers of drifting migrants in and around the chief towns. Much concern was expressed about the propagation of disease by migrants in the course of their movements about the country, but the main fears of the medical authorities were largely on account of the comparatively high social costs of human aggregation, which were especially liable to arise in Kampala through the huddling-together of aliens as ill-adapted to the sanitary discipline of urban life as the urban amenities were to the presence of the outsiders. So long as the migrant was working for a Muganda farmer, not only were risks of concentration reduced, but the worker's diet also tended to be more varied and to his taste, and the debility and disease due to an inadequate and unsuitable town diet were greatly reduced. The fact that the Baganda employed large numbers of migrants was therefore not in itself cause for great concern.

But what if many Baganda suddenly found it necessary to dispense with paid labour ? This is apparently what happened in 1926, partly, no doubt, because the drop in the price paid for cotton during the 1926 buying season meant that the Baganda had less cash available for paying wages, but also because of the effects of unfavourable weather in the following months.<sup>73</sup> It is significant that the easing of the Public Works Department's labour problem during 1926 was said to be " partly due to the increasing flow of men seeking work from Ruanda to Kampala which had been set in motion by the previous recruiting activities of the Labour Department, and partly to the fact that owing to the partial failure of the cotton crop many men were thrown out of employment ".<sup>74</sup> So far as the very rough and incomplete migrant labour statistics available for later years enable one to judge, the more direct social costs which the system is liable to impose, such as heavy pressure on local and central medical services and an increased incidence of crime, tend to be heaviest, not necessarily when the total number of migrants

71. Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 15th December, 1926.

72. *Ibid.*

73. E.S.A. SMP 7939A (O.S.)/6a.

74. Annual Report of the Public Works Department, 1926, pp. 8-9.

is highest, but rather when adverse fortune hits Baganda employers and reduces their capacity to afford the luxury of paid labour.

In retrospect, therefore, much of the "imported labour" argument was beside the point in its assumption that the major cause of embarrassment was the recruitment and importation of labour, especially as the proportion of Government labour in Buganda actually recruited was steadily falling away and in February, 1927, dropped to nil. The Public Works Department continued to employ large numbers of migrants, Banyaruanda in particular. Disguised as they were as "local labour", most of these men enjoyed neither the rudimentary care afforded by legislative protection to recruited labour nor recourse to the fortifying supplements to wages available to genuinely "local" labourers possessing their own permanent homes and smallholdings near their place of work. The situation in Kampala from the point of view of public health actually deteriorated when the non-recruited labour set free by the temporarily impoverished Baganda cotton-growers made it possible to dispense with the imported labour system, as had been so strongly advocated.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that Government labour policy became somewhat imprecise and hesitant, of which there were signs in discussions of the wage level. In December, 1926, for example, an equivocal answer was given in the Legislative Council to a member who wanted to know "whether the experiment of labour camps and the introduction of a Labour Department are justifying the large expenditure involved and are increasing the efficiency of labour and averting an increase in the wages of unskilled labour?" The Chief Secretary, in the course of his reply, said that "the primary object of the Department is to create an efficient and adequate labour supply and not to depress wages, but the Department is now recruiting at the same rate of wages . . . as in 1924".<sup>75</sup> Instructions issued to the Labour Department in June of the same year were also vague: rates of pay were to be reviewed at frequent intervals "to see that they are in close correspondence with the realities of the labour situation".<sup>76</sup>

This reluctance to define a clear wage policy can well be understood. The Uganda Government of the time seems to have been suspended impatiently between the opposite poles of its previously expressed labour policy. If a permanent labouring class was to be created from among the Baganda and other cotton-growers, the wage rate held out would have to be high enough to compare favourably with what could be earned by growing the cotton crop, one year being taken with another. Yet the more closely the wage rate approached this relatively high level, the more powerfully it operated as a magnet on the very tribes whose migration inwards it was hoped to check. An analogous dilemma confronts the present-day administrator when pressed to raise the minimum urban wage rate to the "family" level.

Early in 1927 the medical authorities again protested strongly about the continuing menace to the health of the native population—and of Kampala in particular—incurred through drawing into Buganda migrants from the unhealthy areas of Ruanda and Ankole; "much sickness and death and expenditure" had already been caused by this source of infection. The Labour Department, in accordance with standing instructions, reviewed wage rates and recommended a cut in the maximum monthly rate for Government unskilled labour in Kampala from Shs. 18/- to Shs. 16/-, to correspond "more closely to the realities of the labour situation". But in the following months there was no sign of any slackening in the stream of immigrant labour coming into Buganda from Ruanda.

A minute from the Governor of 30th May, 1927, suggests that he was veering towards a policy of making the best of the inevitable. He recognised that immigrant labour presented a very serious menace to health. "In some

75. Proceedings of the Legislative Council, December, 1926.

76. E.S.A. SMP 3408 (O.S.)/98.

ways it would be most satisfactory if the whole of this immigrant labour from Ruanda could be stopped. This, however, is practically impossible ; and inefficient though it may be, it forms a very considerable and important contribution to the total labour supply of the Protectorate. If it were entirely shut off there would be nothing to take its place. . . .” Medical responsibility, so far as the immigrants were concerned, had to be accepted, “ not only for their sakes, but for our own ”. A Committee would be appointed “ to ascertain all the facts regarding immigrant labour and to make recommendations as to what remedial measures within the financial resources of the Protectorate, can be taken ”.

This Committee, set up in August, 1927, with the Provincial Commissioner, Buganda, as chairman, reported in January, 1928. Its findings were less useful than had been hoped. Some fragmentary statistics of immigration from Belgian territory were collected by means of road counts, but they did not give an estimate of the total number of natives from foreign territory entering Uganda or Buganda per year. A later estimate, based on these statistics, put the immigration from Belgian territory in the south-west at about 46,000 per annum, but it is not clear precisely how the figure was derived. Nor did the report estimate the average length of stay of the immigrants, nor the extent of settlement, nor suggest the proportions in which they were distributed among different employments. It was thought that only a comparatively small number found employment with non-native employers and the great majority with Baganda cotton farmers, but no further details were obtained on this important point.

One fact clearly emerged, however : that migration from Belgian territory was now accepted as a net advantage to Uganda, even if it entailed extra costs in defence of public health. The Committee referred to “ the beneficial effect on the labour market ” of the migration and considered that it was undesirable to restrict in any way the flow of labour to Kampala and other centres of employment. “ Any measures, therefore, which may be adopted for its control should be . . . such . . . as to attract rather than to deter potential labour ”.

It was not migration as such, but the uncontrolled movement of immigrants into Kampala and their existence there, often *in extremis*, which had given rise to fears on the score of public health. To meet these dangers it was now proposed to house all recruited and also all homeless casual labour in permanently constructed and medically equipped accommodation near the town. The financing of this scheme was not studied in detail, but it was intended that payment for all housing and food should eventually be recovered.<sup>77</sup>

The task of controlling migration was made more difficult by the lack of contact between the British and Belgian authorities. Apart from some measure of practical co-operation on border administration between the respective local officials, the two administering Governments had not established any simple, direct means of communicating with each other on matters of common interest. In December, 1927, an informal exchange of information took place between the two authorities, which revealed a serious lack of knowledge by Belgian officials of conditions in Uganda. The Ruanda-Urundi authorities were then apparently under the quite mistaken impression that many thousands of their people were being recruited annually by Government, Railway and private employers in Uganda, and that of this number the Government and the Railway took the vast majority. In fact, the Railway Administration employed no Ruanda-Urundi labour, and the Uganda Government now employed considerably less than 2,000, none of whom were recruited, whilst the “ vast majority ” found work in native plantations.<sup>78</sup>

77. E.S.A. SMP R30/I/1 ; R30/II/1.

78. E.S.A. SMP 9349 (O.S.)*passim*.

Fortunately for Uganda, the Belgian authorities seem at that time to have favoured migration from Ruanda-Urundi no less than did the British. They adopted the view that emigration was a necessity, for the country was over-populated : “ le Ruanda-Urundi ne peut réserver a sa population qui étouffe dans ses frontières des possibilités d’expansion suffisantes ”. The least failure of a harvest had grave repercussions : food shortage amounting to famine occurred at intervals, in spite of the authorities’ efforts. The population was increasing rapidly, and many natives welcomed the opportunity of working abroad so as to improve their lot. In these circumstances it was probable that even if there had been no Belgian occupation of the territory, migration in search of available land would have occurred.

Taking these considerations into account, the Government concluded that it could not, without detriment to the interests of the native inhabitants under its administration, eliminate migratory population movements. It had an obligation, however, to see that these movements did not become a source of abuse. In particular, it intended to prevent an excessive outward movement that might endanger the health of the community and to guarantee as far as possible security and justice for migrants leaving the country. Hitherto, the movement into British territory had been clandestine and was opposed by local authorities and native chiefs, but in future the movement was to have official blessing.<sup>79</sup> The Belgian authorities at this juncture (1926-27) were therefore in favour of emigration, provided they could be satisfied that the natives concerned would receive satisfactory treatment while abroad.

As if to emphasise the gravity of the problem of over-population in Ruanda-Urundi, 1928 was marked by crop failures and famine without parallel during Belgian administration of the country. Ruanda was particularly affected. A drought which set in in May, 1927, persisted throughout 1928 and continued to afflict the country during the early part of 1929. The dearth extended to Urundi, which had already been heavily drawn upon for supplies to relieve Ruanda.<sup>80</sup> The effects on the migratory movements into British territory were most marked. Exceptionally large numbers crossed the border into Uganda, although not all came as far as Buganda. Records suggest that about 50,000 immigrants came from the south-west and about 8,000 from Tanganyika, which was also affected by the drought.<sup>81</sup> So severe was the disaster that some escaped into Uganda without thought of returning. Hitherto, family migration into British territory seems to have been negligible in extent. The Belgian Annual Report for 1928 refers to the deep attachment of the people of Ruanda-Urundi to their country, but it also records that some families in the ravaged areas, after the experience of successive crop failures and with no likelihood of an early improvement in the conditions against which they had been vainly struggling, had determined to abandon the region and establish themselves in a more favourable land.<sup>82</sup> In 1933 many of these families were still abroad. The Belgian authorities reported that there were then about 9,000 natives from the parishes of Gabiro and Kibunga—areas that had suffered particularly severely during the 1928-29 famine—whose return could no longer be expected, “ parce-que, depuis plusieurs années, ils ont pris racine dans le pays où ils résident ”.<sup>83</sup>

The great famine years of 1928-29, therefore, were of considerable importance for Uganda, and especially Buganda, not merely for the boost given to the numbers of temporary migrants coming in from Belgian territory, but for establishing a new habit, that of coming to Uganda, not simply to work and then to return, but with the object of settling permanently. This indeed was the kind of emigration which the Belgian authorities could regard

79. Rapport présenté par le Gouvernement Belge au Conseil de la Société des Nations sur l’Administration du Ruanda-Urundi pendant l’année 1926, pp. 85-6.

80. Rapport . . . au sujet de l’Administration du Ruanda-Urundi pendant l’année 1928, pp. 66-72.

81. E.S.A. SMP R/30/21/14.

82. Rapport . . . au sujet de l’Administration du Ruanda-Urundi pendant l’année 1928, p. 67.

83. Rapport . . . au sujet de l’Administration du Ruanda-Urundi pendant l’année 1933, p. 124.

with approval. The famine, though in fact its worst effects had not fallen in the most densely populated regions, had given ample cause for concern. Despite the unceasing efforts of the administrators to bring relief, the prolonged failure of the rains had produced a major catastrophe, and in the Ruanda-Urundi Annual Report for 1928 the conclusion was drawn that a policy of internal transfer of population could not meet the problem of overcrowding, and that emigration would be necessary as a supplementary remedy.<sup>84</sup> Undoubtedly the emigration desired was emigration of the settlement type.

Migration of this sort, however, was far from being the most useful from the point of view of the Uganda Government. Uganda authorities were interested in the Banyaruanda and Barundi movements as potential labour supplies, and though they acknowledged a moral obligation to protect the health of the migrants once within the country, they were not eager to incur the cost of providing social services which they could justifiably avoid.

As was to be expected, the immigrations of 1928 and 1929 had included a considerable number who entered the country to save their lives rather than to hire themselves out as labourers, and their presence was a charge upon the community that led, in 1930, to another examination of the immigrant labour situation. The Labour Commissioner was instructed to consult with the Provincial Administration and medical authorities and to suggest measures for control. The two aspects of the problem were set clearly before him: "This immigration of labour is of considerable economic importance to us, poor though the labour is, and should not be unduly discouraged. We cannot, however, accept the benefit and ignore the contingent liabilities".<sup>85</sup> The Labour Commissioner in due course produced a scheme which provided for the selective admission of immigrants through the establishment of special camps near the border. The famine and near-famine conditions in Ruanda-Urundi during the past three years had brought on a wholesale immigration, which included many who were physically unfit and who could never hope to obtain more than casual employment but who were apt to introduce and spread disease. The scheme was drafted "with a view to checking the influx of such undesirables, while at the same time securing a steady flow of employable labour. . . ." A control camp was to be set up at a suitable point on each of the two main immigration routes—one leading to Mbarara from the south-west, the other running from the Kyaka Ferry (over the Kagera River) into Masaka—where all immigrants would be medically examined. Those who were fit or could be rendered fit within a few days would be given a pass and allowed to proceed, while "those suffering from dangerous diseases or so debilitated as to be unemployable" would be returned over the border. Recruiting would be concentrated at these camps, and transport provided to convey recruits to places of employment. The scheme was supposed to produce a beneficial effect on the whole labour situation: "As the knowledge spread that food, shelter and medical attention were available the moment the Uganda border was passed, and further that employment could be obtained almost immediately, a steady stream of immigrant labour would be forthcoming in sufficient numbers to meet all requirements. Moreover, this labour could be relied upon to be up to a fair standard of physical fitness. . . ." There would also be a great saving, since recruitment near the point of entry would largely do away with the wandering gangs of semi-starved Banyaruanda then so prevalent along the Mbarara and Masaka roads.

For various reasons, the Labour Commissioner's scheme was not adopted. One experienced administrator pointed out that "the African native invariably dislikes European schemes for his protection and betterment and I therefore believe that your camps will be unpopular with Banyaruanda, who will then develop new routes of entry into the promised

84. Rapport . . . au sujet de l'Administration du Ruanda-Urundi pendant l'année 1928, p. 62.  
85. E.S.A. SMP R30/21/19.



land". Moreover, towards the end of 1930, no doubt partly because of more normal conditions in Ruanda-Urundi, the proportion of incapacitated immigrants in the country was found to be considerably less than had previously been feared. The capital costs of the scheme would be heavy, and revenue at the time (November, 1930) was diminishing. Finally, the proposals, if carried into effect, would be open to misconstruction by the Belgian authorities. In spite of the fact that the scheme was originally designed for the betterment of Belgian natives visiting Uganda, it was felt that some of the measures proposed—for example, the establishment of camps near the border, the provision of free food and shelter and motor transport to the scene of employment—"might very well be construed by the Belgian Government . . . as the foundation of a scheme deliberately designed to attract Belgian labour into Uganda for the benefit of Uganda and not as a scheme designed to limit immigration to those only who are physically fit".<sup>86</sup>

With the shelving of the scheme on these grounds, immigrant labour from the mandated territories was left to its own devices for many years. It was not until the Second World War that steps were finally taken towards improving the conditions under which immigrants made the journey of some 150 to 300 miles between the southern borders of Uganda and the employment centres of Buganda. In the 'thirties and early 'forties the majority of the travellers made the journey on foot, and there is no doubt that the hardships of the march through long stretches of uninhabited country meant that the labour they were able to offer at the end was generally of very poor quality, poorly remunerated, and therefore likely to remain of that quality.

One hesitates, however, to condemn the decision taken in 1930 against the measures proposed. Certainly the costs of the unassisted journey in terms of human suffering continued to be high. Yet these hardships were risked by the immigrants of their own free will. And from the employers' point of view, if the quality of the labour on reaching Buganda continued to be low, the wage also remained low for most of the 'thirties; in 1938 it was still only regaining the level reached before the slump.<sup>87</sup>

There was also the danger that the scheme might have been either a costly failure or too great a success. The intention was to attract "a steady stream of immigrant labour . . . in sufficient numbers to meet all requirements",<sup>88</sup> but what if "requirements" themselves sharply diminished, as in fact they did over the next few years? The slump in cotton and coffee prices begun in 1929-30 had a marked effect on the employing capacity of the Baganda. Cotton-growers began to find that if they continued to employ immigrant labour on the scale which former cotton prices had made possible, the cost would in general be as much as the resultant crops were worth.<sup>89</sup>

Immigration from the south-west was considered to have returned to normal in 1930. It ceased to be artificially swollen by emergency movements of population in flight from famine, and the number recorded as entering from Belgian mandated territory is only about 20,000, or half that of the previous year. Tanganyika supplied about 16,000.<sup>90</sup> No Uganda figures are available for 1931, but the movement was probably roughly on the same scale as 1930.

These numbers, though substantially less than in the years immediately before the depression, exceeded the demand, and wages were subjected to severe pressure. The Government was therefore faced with a difficult decision: how far could it maintain a policy of "not depressing the wage rate" when its own general revenue was in precipitate decline? In April, 1921, the employing Departments of the Government had received instructions which represented an uneasy compromise between the demands of a

86. E.S.A. SMP R30/21/*passim*.

87. U.P. *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Labour Situation in the Uganda Protectorate*, 1938, Entebbe, Government Printer, p. 25, para. 92.

88. E.S.A. SMP R30/21/19.

89. Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, 1932, p. 21.

90. Labour Department Annual Report for 1930.

“generous employer” policy and those of economy. “The policy of this Government is to endeavour to set up reasonable conditions for [unskilled labour] which might be expected to attract good men to remain in it with some permanency. To this end it is not the intention of the Government to take advantage of every period of depression . . . to reduce the wages of those who have remained for several years in their present employment. This policy, however, does not . . . prevent the engagement of temporary casual labour at the wages for which such labour is willing to work”. An important proviso was added. Since labourers who were paid an inclusive rate of wages and had to purchase their own food were always inclined to feed themselves inadequately and unsuitably in order to save as much pay as possible, a drop in the rate of wages would, unless there had been a corresponding fall in the local cost of food, tend to stimulate this tendency, which it was obviously desirable to discourage. It was therefore proposed that the wages of this class of labour should not be reduced except to correspond with a drop in the price of local food supplies. In addition, “this consideration . . . clearly does not apply to labour who are retained in full or are working in proximity to their own gardens”.<sup>91</sup> But the general effect of the circular seems to have been to keep Government wage rates for a time above the level paid by private employers.

The question came up again in 1932, when there was again a very substantial inflow of labour from the mandated territories. A Tanganyika source suggests that an influx of at least 25,000 Tanganyika natives and 20,000 Belgian natives must have entered Uganda via the Tanganyika routes alone.<sup>92</sup> In August of that year, labour was available in Kampala for Shs. 8/- per month and in some cases even for Shs. 6/-, while Government and the Township Authority were paying Shs. 12/-. Taxpayers complained. The Government was perturbed to find that apparently “an unskilled labourer in Kampala is prepared to work for a wage which does not amount to more than the actual cost of food he consumes . . . or at least which does not exceed that amount by more than one or two shillings”. Was this due to the existence in Kampala of “large numbers of out-of-work ‘foreigners’”—residents either of Provinces other than Buganda or of territories other than Uganda? The Provincial Commissioner, Buganda, was asked whether, in view of the general effect on the labour market, any steps towards repatriating such foreigners should be taken. He was also asked to advise “on the propriety or otherwise of a reduction of present wage rates by Government”. An enquiry showed that a monthly budget for an alien labourer would then be: food, Shs. 6/-, rent, Shs. 1/-, so that even with a wage of Shs. 10/-, assuming taxation met, there would not have been enough for a man to repatriate himself. The medical authorities considered that at Shs. 7/- per month the wage was “not only insufficient, but . . . the conditions of living of natives drawing such a wage are detrimental to the health of the community at large”. There were other disquieting signs: a marked increase in theft and larceny, and the hospitals again overburdened. The Provincial Commissioner’s advice was uncompromisingly in favour of maintaining the wage at Shs. 12/-. “Without this wage the labourer is unable to maintain himself in a fit condition and is thus unable to perform a full day’s work”. And any further reduction in wages paid by Government would also mean a further reduction in wages paid by private employers.

Far from reducing the wage paid by public employers, the Government now considered the possibility of fixing a statutory minimum wage, at least for Kampala. The idea was soon abandoned, however, for the Government realised that, once a minimum wage of Shs. 12/- was prescribed, there would probably be an increase in unemployment. “In fact news that the minimum wage rate was fixed in Kampala by law might well tend to stimulate the immigration and might well intensify the difficulties”. Accordingly, no

91. E.S.A. SMP R10/6/20a. Cf. *supra*, p. 35.

92. E.S.A. SMP J22/4/81(i).

minimum wage was imposed.<sup>93</sup> Miserable conditions prevailing in Kampala caused many to leave, and in 1932 the migrant flow was said to be outward rather than inward.<sup>94</sup> Then, as the price of cotton began to recover from the lowest level of the slump of 1933, more and more Baganda gradually resumed their practice of employing immigrant labour.

The struggle to maintain the wage in Kampala in 1932 was a foretaste of minimum-wage problems to come. Uganda was still far from the stage where minimum-wage legislation is usually regarded as an essential part of a country's economic foundation, but the 1932 circumstances were in some degree analogous to the more familiar problem posed by the existence of a community of landless, unskilled labourers in an industrial or urban centre. The immigrant labourers unable to obtain work with the Baganda, who were forcing the wage rate in Kampala down to the "sweated" level, were not for the most part landless, but many of them evidently found themselves in a similar position through having been stranded away from home districts by the receding tide of wage rates. The only reserve price on the individual's labour was the level at which the sole alternatives were recourse to crime or relapse through inanition into the care of the public health authorities.

The failure to maintain the wage rate in the commercial capital also implied failure in the policy of creating a permanent class of wage-earners from amongst the Baganda cotton-growers—an admission signified by the virtual disbandment in 1931 of the Labour Department, which was to have executed that policy. The Labour Department, especially after 1927, had at last been able to devote most of its attention to the inspection and improvement of conditions under which men were employed. These functions had in 1926 been regarded as fundamental to the policy of "the development within each district of a labour supply adequate for local needs from the tribes inhabiting the district", and some success was achieved, particularly in persuading estate employers to improve standards of accommodation.<sup>95</sup> In 1931, however, when, under pressure of external economic forces, the Government was moved to drastic economies, the status of the Labour Department was no longer sufficient to protect it from dismemberment and it was reduced to a single Inspector of Labour.

Even allowing for the degree of *force majeure* imposed by the depression, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the Government was now disillusioned over the prospects of promoting local self-sufficiency in labour supplies through the efforts of a Labour Department charged with the responsibility of raising employment conditions to a sufficiently attractive standard. It must by now have been clear that migrant labour would continue to converge upon Buganda, irrespective of whether active recruitment was being pursued in outlying districts, and that the effect of creating attractive conditions was not to tempt the local people away from cotton- or coffee-growing but merely to enhance the magnetic pull on the remoter tribes. At the same time, it would become more difficult to preserve such conditions against erosion through increased competition from incoming 'foreigners'.

The collapse of wages and prices in 1931 and 1932 threw into relief another aspect of Buganda's position as the centre of concentration for immigrant labour, namely, the cost to the Baganda themselves when adverse market conditions forced them to suspend the hiring of migrant porters. When these unemployed retainers stayed on in Buganda, unable to return to their homes or unwilling to do so without the earnings they came for, they made it difficult for the Baganda themselves to find jobs. Thus the Acting Provincial Commissioner commented in 1932: "At present the supply of labour exceeds the demand, and labour is consequently cheap. This state of affairs is partly due to the Labour Department, who brought in a large number of races alien to Buganda and did not see that they were repatriated

93. E.S.A. SMP R10/6/*passim*.

94. E.S.A. SMP R10/6/31; Annual Report of the Inspector of Labour for 1932, p. 2.

95. Labour Department Annual Report for 1928.

... at the end of their contracts, and it is also partly due to the Baganda themselves who encourage these immigrant natives to plant their [small-holdings] and do their work and when they can no longer afford this they wonder why they cannot compete economically with experienced workers in a labour market".<sup>96</sup> Baganda who wished to maintain their income for the payment of tax, *luvalo* commutation, rent, school fees, and for the purchase of various imported necessities (cloth in particular), were faced with disagreeable alternatives. Either they could extend their cotton acreage in spite of the prevailing low prices (and the large increase in the area under cotton in Buganda between 1929 and 1933<sup>97</sup> suggests that this is what many did), or they could seek paid, unskilled employment, at exceptionally low wage rates resulting from the competition of stranded immigrants.

The effects of this competition on the wage rate in Buganda were illustrated in 1934, when it was found that locally engaged labour in the Eastern and Northern Provinces (where relatively little migrant labour is employed) was receiving from Shs. 7/- to Shs. 15/- per month plus rations, whereas in Buganda the range was between Shs. 6/- and Shs. 12/-, without rations.<sup>98</sup>

These low wage rates were associated with employment conditions that justified the view expressed by a Provincial Commissioner in 1937 (when it was less of a commonplace than it would be if voiced today) that "many of our difficulties are due to the abundant supply of cheap, poor labour. If labour were scarce and wages higher, more care would be taken not to waste it, but to increase efficiency by training the men and providing better and more attractive conditions".<sup>99</sup> Yet what could be done—quite apart from the fact that the country's resources were deemed only sufficient to support a single permanent Inspector of Labour—if the immigrants themselves, as temporary workers, were willing to accept these unsatisfactory terms of service?

A general description of the employment conditions prevailing in cotton ginneries, undertaken in 1934, revealed a sorry picture of owners' neglect and indifference. More than half the total labour then employed by ginneries throughout the Protectorate was of the migrant class (8,460 out of 14,418), especially in the ginneries of Buganda and Busoga. With a few exceptions labour accommodation was unhygienic by any standards; in Buganda rations were rarely provided and workers had to furnish their own food as best they could. A Congo migrant at one ginnyery said: "I came to look for work; I have been working here for eight days. I do not know what my wages are... I am on night work and work for my food during the day. Of course I am tired, but what can I do? During the night I work for money, during the day for food... When the engines stop at night we only rest, we do not eat. When I arrived I was told to go and sleep in one of three small beehive huts close to the ginnyery. There are eight Bakongo and two Baganda in these three huts".<sup>100</sup>

There was a similar situation in the same year in some of the mines in the Western Province. Two of these, situated near routes into Buganda from Ruanda, offered employment to migrants at from Shs. 2/- to Shs. 9/- per month and no food, or Shs. 2/- to Shs. 7/- per month and food that was described as "inadequate". The plentiful flow of immigrants over recent years had not encouraged efforts to develop and retain a permanent or even semi-permanent staff of labourers.<sup>101</sup>

The Government was properly concerned at the situation revealed, especially in the cotton-ginning industry, but a solution was not simple to find. "The main difficulty we have to face in connection with housing and

96. E.S.A. SMP R10/6/24.

97. From 199,035 acres in 1929 to 318,311 acres in 1932 and 350,878 acres in 1933. (These figures may not be strictly comparable as the method of assessment was changed at this time.—Ed.)

98. E.S.A. SMP U2/14 (1934).

99. E.S.A. SMP R111/1 (attachment), 93.

100. E.S.A. SMP R62/4.

101. E.S.A. SMP R62/4.

feeding is that the great majority of the natives will prefer living in filthy *nbisina*<sup>102</sup> rather than in a sanitary and well-organised compound, and will take a higher wage and feed themselves miserably rather than accept a low wage and be well-fed. One of the main questions, therefore, is how far we can legitimately and fairly place on the employer by Rule the onus of assisting the Government to save the native from himself. . . .”<sup>103</sup>

It was decided, nevertheless, to bring pressure to bear on employers under the Masters and Servants Ordinance, but when new Employment Rules were circulated in draft form for the advance information of employers in 1935, there was great opposition, especially to the clauses relating to housing, diet, and hours of work. The usual difficulties barring the way to improving the health and efficiency of native unskilled labourers were further confirmed. The minimum diet judged satisfactory by the medical authorities for a man doing moderately hard work would cost, the employers claimed, Shs. 6/- to Shs. 7/- per month. But if employers were required either to provide rations on this scale or to pay the full cash equivalent, migrants would be even more likely than hitherto to demand the inclusive wage and to fend inadequately for themselves. A cash difference of as little as Shs. 2/- could produce this result. “As a large proportion of the labour employed in the country is from Ruanda, and as these men only come to earn enough to pay their taxes and to do this in the shortest possible time, it is natural that they should prefer to take Shs. 12/- a month without rations, hoping to live, or rather to half-starve, on Shs. 1/- a month”.<sup>104</sup> The new Rules were finally withdrawn, although their appearance in draft form administered a salutary jolt to laggard employers and to ginnery owners in particular. The reason for the withdrawal was that the whole question of the Protectorate labour supply and its control was again thrown into discussion by several concurrent developments towards the end of 1935 and in 1936, as world prices were recovering from the depression.

The Uganda Government was now well aware of the unsatisfactory conditions of employment widely prevalent. Simultaneously, the Colonial Office was laying considerable emphasis on the importance of adequate inspection of labour in the Colonies, especially in mines, factories, or other industrial undertakings.<sup>105</sup> The planters, on the other hand, complained at a conference in December, 1935, of a falling-off in the labour supply. This was considered to be due in part to restrictions on immigration from Tanganyika, and in part to a falling-off in the numbers of migrants from other districts within Uganda. The planters blamed the policy of “pushing the production of economic crops in the remoter areas”. In fact, the restrictions on immigration from Tanganyika had been in operation since 1933 and their aim was to prevent the spread of a sleeping-sickness epidemic. The Government had no intention of raising these restrictions, nor was it prepared to keep the Protectorate’s outlying districts as labour reserves. The Governor, Sir Philip Mitchell, reaffirmed the principle that “the natives of this Protectorate are entirely free to go to work for others or to cultivate land for themselves”.<sup>106</sup> The Secretary of State was assured in March, 1935, that “in no circumstances is pressure brought to bear by the Protectorate Government to induce natives to hire out their labour”. The policy was “to extend guidance and assistance in the cultivation of economic crops to the native populations in all districts”. The exodus from the West Nile country, it was pointed out, had decreased rapidly since 1931, largely owing to the spread of native production.<sup>107</sup>

The implications of this policy for non-native employers in the central areas must have been apparent: a diminution in supplies of labour from within the Protectorate would have to be made up, either by a further attempt

102. Small beehive-shaped huts made of grass.

103. E.S.A. SMP R62/4.

104. Annual Report of the Medical Department, 1936, p. 11.

105. G.B. Colonial Office, Circular Despatch of 9th November, 1935.

106. E.S.A. SMP R49/20.

107. E.S.A. SMP R49/20.

to attract local labour through offers of higher wages, or by increased reliance on foreign immigrant labour. The Government had suggested the first of these alternatives as the one planters should pursue. It was rejected, however, not merely on grounds of cost, but also for reasons which recall the fears expressed ten years earlier. The planters said that the tribes in question were well known to be averse to labour on plantations, for social rather than financial reasons ; there was a definite stigma attached to the work because it had been done for years by less advanced tribes.<sup>108</sup>

As production and employment revived in the middle 'thirties, Uganda, and above all Buganda, was becoming dependent on foreign labour to a greater extent than ever before. At the same time, it must be remembered that the possibilities of economic development in the outlying districts were still restricted by high transport costs, so that Buganda continued to benefit from substantial supplies of migrant labour from within the Protectorate. Of the Western Province, for example, in 1936, it was said : " In spite of agricultural development and local opportunities for earning money, many natives still rely upon finding work in Buganda to enable them to meet their taxes and other needs. . . ." In the Kigezi District of the Western Province it had been noticed that " Crowds of well-dressed peasants had returned from their annual visit with enough money to meet their obligations, and it was impossible to avoid the impression that a spirit of adventure prompted these excursions, quite as much as economic pressure ".<sup>109</sup>

It was against a background of incipient rather than actual labour shortage, and of doubt as to the adequacy of the existing provision for labour inspection, that a senior administrative officer, J. F. McD. Elliot, was asked in 1936 to conduct an investigation into the labour conditions then prevailing in the Protectorate. His report<sup>110</sup> is in some respects an ambiguous document, from which it is difficult to extract conclusions. It seems, however, that despite the cries of " shortage ", employers in the industries heavily dependent on casual migrant labour, and notably ginneries and coffee and tea estates, were in many cases managing to attract most of the labour required.<sup>111</sup> Elliot felt unable, however, to predict how long this state of affairs would continue. He pointed out, for instance, that the economic development of the West Nile District, which supplied 32.4 per cent of the labour employed by the private concerns he visited, and the increasing tendency for West Nile natives to come to Buganda, not to seek work, but in order to grow cotton on their own account on land leased from Baganda, meant that the supplies of labour from the West Nile District were bound to decrease. On the other hand, it was impossible to predict the future of the labour entering the Protectorate via the West Nile from the Congo and the Sudan.<sup>112</sup> Nor was it possible to predict how many would enter Uganda from Ruanda-Urundi along the south-western route.

Immigration from the south-west in 1936, the year of Elliot's investigation, was considered to have been far higher than in previous years. It was probably over 100,000, a record figure, and Elliot found at the end of 1936 that there was " on the whole . . . a sufficient supply of labour ", although he thought demand was " gradually overtaking supply ".<sup>113</sup>

The reasons for the heavy immigration from Ruanda-Urundi in 1936 are not immediately apparent. It is true that there was a marked revival of economic activity in Uganda and that one might expect this to have led to a corresponding increase in the demand for labour. Exports, which are a good indicator of prosperity, rose in 1936 to about £4½ million from an average of some £3½ million during the three preceding years, largely because more cotton was exported. If most of the increased cotton income went to the

108. E.S.A. SMP R49/20.

109. Annual Report of the Provincial Commissioner, Western Province, 1936, p. 45.

110. J. R. McD. Elliot, *Report of an Investigation into Conditions Affecting Unskilled Labour*, Entebbe Government Printer, 1937 (referred to hereafter as the Elliot Report).

111. *Ibid.*, paras. 3, 8, 19, 53, 54, 59.

112. *Ibid.*, para. 77 ; Annexure VI.

113. *Ibid.*, para. 3.

Eastern Province and not to Buganda, it is nevertheless true that there had been a substantial increase in the amount of cotton *planted* in Buganda ; this again suggests an increase in the demand for immigrant labour. But the real explanation for the rise in immigration is probably to be sought, not in the forces governing the demand for labour, but in those affecting its supply.

The supply of labour from Ruanda-Urundi was much augmented by Belgium's abandonment of the gold standard in March of 1935. The depreciation of the franc in terms of sterling brought into play a new stimulus to emigration from the Belgian territories.<sup>114</sup> Elliot visited Ruanda-Urundi in the course of his enquiries and found that at the ruling rate of exchange—a bank parity of 7 francs 34 centimes to the shilling—the wage rate paid in Uganda appeared very attractive when converted into Belgian currency. He obtained the impression that it was “just as hard for a native to earn a franc in the Congo as it is for him to earn a shilling in Uganda”. This was perhaps an exaggeration, but Uganda had clearly become more attractive financially. To this incentive was added the desire to escape the unpaid communal labour required in Ruanda-Urundi for the construction and maintenance of roads and other public works. Elliot found that the chiefs were quite willing to allow their people to go to Uganda, recognising that they could quickly earn their taxes there.<sup>115</sup>

There is no doubt that a large part of this increased immigration was absorbed by the Baganda. Elliot remarked, “Every Administrative Officer in Buganda met during my investigation impressed upon me the really very extensive numbers of labour employed by the Baganda, especially in the cultivation of cotton. No exact details can be given, but it appears that if the source from which the supply emanates was to dry up or be greatly restricted, it might have a serious effect on the output of cotton in the Buganda Province.”<sup>116</sup> But the non-native employers benefited no less. The record influx of 1936, shared between non-native and native employers, again provided Uganda with an apparently easy solution to her labour problems ; to attract labour, employers had neither to raise wages nor improve conditions of work. In spite of Elliot's view that “many employers now realise that it is in their own interests to look after their labour properly”, it is clear from his report that some of the plantation-owners had not allowed themselves to be influenced in practice by the Governor's remark at their Conference in 1935 that “badly fed, badly housed, primitive native labour drawing five or six shillings a month is probably the most expensive means in the world with which to do anything”.<sup>117</sup> Why was it that what seemed common sense to the outside observer was evidently not so from the point of view of many employers ?

Undoubtedly one reason, in 1936, was the persistent financial insecurity engendered by two ruinous depressions since the end of the First World War. Employers were understandably hesitant to embark on costly schemes for the provision of permanent accommodation and amenities for labour, when they still had no assurance that world commodity prices would remain high enough to enable them to recoup the outlay. Within the Government itself confidence was scarcely greater. At the end of 1935, it had been decided that the financial position had recovered sufficiently to justify new capital expenditure, and a Development Committee met in 1936 in order to draw up a programme of works, but its chairman, the Treasurer, was unwilling to suppose any certainty of rising Government revenue in the five years ahead, and no scheme was admitted that would have committed the Government to an increase of recurrent expenditure.<sup>118</sup>

114. The abandonment of the gold standard by Britain in September, 1931, would have influenced immigration in the opposite direction, and helps to explain the comparatively small annual rate of inflow for the depression years.

115. E.S.A. SMPC 835/1.

116. Elliot Report, para. 68.

117. Planters in 1936 were paying Shs. 7/- to Shs. 10/- on a 30-day “ticket”, which a labourer might take from two to three months to complete (see Elliot Report).

118. U.P. Interim Report of the Development Committee, 1936, Entebbe, Government Printer, 1936.

Another long-standing reason was that employers could not feel certain that workers whom they might feed, train, and accommodate on a liberal scale would remain in their service long enough to repay in higher output what had been invested. It was, and is, a case where those who take refuge in a half-way house are unlikely to manage the whole journey. For unless the conditions offered are sufficiently pleasing to hold an employee semi-permanently, the employer may well find justified his fears that the expense is not worth-while. In Buganda, as had been amply demonstrated, there was scant likelihood of persuading the local cotton-growers to take up regular unskilled employment. The peculiarly unfettered "landlord and tenant" system of tenure provided competing attractions to migrant employees in the shape of temporary or permanent tenancies on *mailo* land. This fact increased the chances that employees on non-native plantations would leave, if employers, by increasing tasks or other devices, tried to get more work than was customary so as to offset the greater costs incurred. The employer of labour recruited on contract could also argue that his risks of unrequited expenditure on the efficiency and welfare of his labour were made greater by the difficulty of bringing deserters to book, and by the fact that the Government would not countenance contracts for periods of longer than six months.

The two views were therefore not so wholly incompatible as might at first appear. The output that could be obtained from underfed, badly housed, untrained labour might indeed be so small that the wage paid, low as it was, did not prevent labour costs from being high. On the other hand, while a far higher output might ultimately be obtained from labour on which more had been spent, uncertainty as to future prices and as to the labourer's willingness to remain long in employment could well mean that the risks of being a "model employer" appeared prohibitive. Some of the causes of this uncertainty might have been removed by the Government, but the costs, financial or otherwise, which would be inflicted on the community in the process were usually too great. This applied, for example, to the recurrent demand from certain employers for a system of registration, and to the possibility of allowing contracts of employment of more than six months' duration to be made with tribesmen who were considered incapable of realising their meaning.

The labour situation in the following year, 1937, presented a complex picture of much that was unsatisfactory, but the remedies were not self-evident. Elliot's enquiry had shown how dependent the various non-native industries of Uganda were on immigrant labour. There was believed to be little tendency for the proportion of migrant labour originating within the Protectorate to increase, and the Government continued to recognise a duty "to afford facilities for production where they occur and to give the peasants the option of home farming or temporary migration".<sup>119</sup> This excluded the possibility of any policy designed to restrict new development for the benefit of older economic centres. There was a conviction among the planters themselves that it was illusory, at least in Buganda, to suppose that local cotton farmers could be induced to contribute substantially to the labour supply; their dependence on migrant labour was likely to continue indefinitely.<sup>120</sup> The mines in southern Ankole, employing about 8,000 men in 1937, were also largely dependent on labour from Ruanda-Urundi and Kigezi.<sup>121</sup> Finally, there was the certainty that without the contribution of other labour the Buganda cotton crop would seriously diminish.

From all these points of view the Protectorate had a direct interest in the size and quality of the immigrant labour flow from Ruanda-Urundi. But if the immigrants were to be allowed to make their own way uncontrolled and unaided into the country, as had for so long been permitted, there would continue to be grounds for reproach, and the burden on public health

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119. E.S.A. SMP R111/1/149, *et passim*.

120. E.S.A. SMP R49/20.

121. Annual Report of the Provincial Commissioner, Western Province, 1937, p. 43.



services would continue. Yet there were cogent reasons for reluctance to embark upon elaborate measures of control, financial, political, and administrative. And the question had again been raised—though in a minor key—of how far all this intermixing of population would prove to be wise. A survey of the extent of settlement by non-Baganda in the Entebbe District in 1936 raised as a point for consideration “whether the increase of these aliens . . . will be beneficial in the long run, to the country, by reason of their industrious habits and their example of working with their own hands rather than employing others, or whether miscegenation in future years will tend to lower the standard and culture of the Baganda. Certain it is that if the influx continues as at present, within fifty years the Baganda . . . will lose their identity as a race”.<sup>122</sup>

In November, 1937, it was decided to appoint a full Committee of Enquiry before coming to conclusions. The Committee's terms of reference required it to review further the supply of voluntary unskilled labour in the Protectorate and to provide information on the size of the required labour supply, on recruitment, on the composition and utilisation of the labour force then employed, and on the tendency of labourers to settle away from their homes. It was also instructed “to recommend any measures not inconsistent with Government's policy . . . which might be taken by employers and by administrative and legislative action to improve the present position”.<sup>123</sup>

The main lines of Government labour policy were placed before the Committee. The principle was reaffirmed that “while no native will be prevented or discouraged from hiring out his labour . . . there can be no question of compelling him to do so or of withholding from the natives of any district the opportunity of being able to grow an economic crop when it is economically practicable to afford them this opportunity”. However, labour movement from a particular area might have to be restricted on medical grounds, or to prevent an excessive exodus of males that would threaten the general well-being of the tribes concerned. No action would be taken to prevent labourers from settling permanently outside their districts of origin, but they would be required to meet the same tax and tribal obligations as the natives of the district to which they had migrated, “thus ensuring that the authority of the local Native Administration is preserved”. Finally, Government responsibility for the regulation and improvement of employment conditions was affirmed.<sup>124</sup>

The Committee took care to set the problem of labour supply in its proper perspective: “Uganda is pre-eminently a land of peasant producers; and it is but right to remark that non-native endeavour has never been and can never be of more than subsidiary importance in the economic structure of the Protectorate”. Export figures left no doubt on this score. In 1937 the total value of Uganda's domestic exports was £5,702,736, of which cotton and cotton-seed, entirely native-grown, accounted for £4,661,366, and a substantial share of the remainder consisted of other produce of native origin. At the same time, non-native enterprise had an essential place in the fields of processing and marketing, and the problem of creating a regular supply of labour to meet the requirements of these other non-native industries had received little deliberate consideration.<sup>125</sup> As Elliot had predicted, the demand for labour had now once again overtaken the supply, but the deficiency was not great and was mainly seasonal, corresponding to the busy periods of the agricultural year.<sup>126</sup> As was now common knowledge, the supply came increasingly from outside Uganda, especially from Belgian territory. “So long as the flow of immigrant labour continues unabated it is not to be expected that employers will refrain from making use of it; for although

122. E.S.A. SMP R49/24.

123. U.P. *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Labour Situation in the Uganda Protectorate, 1938, Entebbe*, Government Printer, 1938, para. 2. (The Report is hereafter referred to as the 1938 Labour Committee Report.)

124. *Ibid.*, *passim*.

125. *Ibid.*, paras. 146-147.

126. *Ibid.*, para. 40.

such labour is largely of inferior physical quality, it seems, at first glance, cheap, and is reasonably easy to obtain".<sup>127</sup>

The influx of immigrant labour was continuing at a very high level. Data collected by the Committee confirmed earlier estimates that Banyaruanda were entering Uganda looking for work at the rate of about 100,000 a year, and Buganda continued to be the main pole of attraction. This was the case not only for immigrants from Ruanda-Urundi but for others. Men converged on Buganda from Tanganyika, from the neighbouring districts of Kigezi, Ankole, Toro, and Bunyoro, and from the distant district of West Nile. The West Nile migrants alone were said, in 1937, to number some 14,300, but this number included people from the Belgian Congo and the Sudan who had entered Uganda through that district.<sup>128</sup>

The 1938 Committee was uneasy at the extent of this dependence on foreign man-power, regarding it as the most intractable feature of the labour problem. The Committee was convinced that "sufficient potential man-power does exist within the Protectorate to meet its own needs for wage-earning labour". The average monthly numbers in unskilled employment in the Protectorate in 1937 amounted to 83,200, of whom immigrants formed a very substantial proportion, whereas it was estimated that the potential working population of the country was 837,000, out of a total population estimated as 3,692,000. Allowing for the man-power expended annually on the production of the main native-grown economic crops, the somewhat doubtful conclusion was reached that "there is in the whole Protectorate the equivalent of over a quarter of a million men who could have been occupied in wage-earning employment if the remuneration had been sufficiently great to divorce them entirely from subsistence agriculture. The unskilled labour problem of the future will be to open up outlets from this reservoir of such a gradient as to furnish a steady flow of man-power to industry".<sup>129</sup>

It is hardly surprising that the 1938 Committee was unable to go far in suggesting how this problem could be solved. Compulsion in any form was excluded; so was any policy of withholding opportunities for local economic development; while any attempt to interfere with the wage rate would have risked opposition from employers who would see no good reason for not being allowed to buy labour in the cheapest market. There remained exhortation, and this, though it seems a slender basis for what was to be achieved, was in fact recommended. It was suggested that "administrative officers" should take every opportunity of pointing out to the native peoples under their care the existence of a duty to the community to do a reasonable amount of work; and, while exercising complete impartiality, "they should help the individual to weigh the relative merits of economic production and of wage-earning in his own case and should be able to advise him where wage-employment can probably be found". It was hoped in this way to open up local sources of labour which might "contribute substantially to the attainment of rendering the Protectorate labour market independent of outside supplies".<sup>130</sup>

The Committee also recommended "the encouragement of an adequate flow of immigrant labour until such time as an indigenous supply has so far developed as to meet current requirements", without facing the inconsistency such an objective involved.<sup>131</sup> Twenty years earlier the Government had hoped that the *kasavu* system would *gradually* give way to voluntary labour, whereas it was only when the compulsory supply was abruptly cut off that a voluntary force took its place. Now it was supposed that cheap Banyaruanda labour might gradually be replaced by labour from within the Protectorate. Yet so long as the foreign supply continued, the wage rate and

127. *Ibid.*, para. 155.

128. *Ibid.*, paras. 47-51.

129. *Ibid.*, paras. 206, 139-141.

130. *Ibid.*, para. 169.

131. *Ibid.*, para. 165.

conditions of employment offered in areas of abundant supply would tend to be held too low to be sufficiently attractive to call forth additional Protectorate labour. There were many indications of the depression of wage rates and of the persistence of sub-standard employment conditions in the main area where Banyarua labour was concentrated, namely Buganda. However, the 1938 Committee's report indicates that there had been a definite improvement in accommodation and rationing, and the Committee was able to record that "in every quarter there was a realisation that the employer alone is able to break through the vicious circle created by inefficiency and low standards of wages and of conditions of employment"; but it is significant that it was again outside Buganda that the greatest improvement was observed in the accommodation provided at ginneries—"in Buganda some progress in housing has been made but not to the extent achieved elsewhere". Similarly, no rations were issued in Buganda, contrary to the practice of ginneries in other districts.<sup>132</sup>

The fact that employment conditions in Buganda lagged behind those offered in other parts of the Protectorate was a reflection, not merely of the predominance of migrant labour in that Province, but of the readiness of the resident Baganda having these migrants in their midst to make good the non-native employers' neglect to their own advantage. Native landowners augmented their incomes by allowing immigrants to build grass huts on *mailo* land conveniently near the place of employment, in return for a small rental, and both landowners and tenants were quite willing to supply them with food in return for odd jobs performed after the day's work or at week-ends.

This was not the only convenience afforded to non-native employers by the Baganda attitude towards the immigrants. The Baganda landlords' willingness to grant tenancies to aliens had the effect, in a sense, of lowering the supply price of labour. It did so in two ways: first, the migrant who had entered Buganda with a view to ultimate settlement would be the more willing to accept a low wage and indifferent working conditions because wage-earning was not his sole object; secondly, the numbers entering would increase, and therefore competition for work would be greater than if the bait of possible eventual settlement were absent. But it is a measure of the importance of this bait that by June, 1937, there were already 28,000 non-Baganda settled on homesteads in Buganda, 27 per cent of them from Ruanda-Urundi.<sup>133</sup>

Whatever the internal conflicts of interest produced by this process, so long as the Baganda, collectively, welcomed immigrants, whether as employees<sup>134</sup> or as tenants, there would be little prospect of success for any proposals to discourage the movement. The 1938 Committee not only took the view that on the contrary the movement should be encouraged, at least for the time being, but again put forward specific recommendations for the construction of camps along the main south-west route to assist the travellers.<sup>135</sup> No suggestion was made, either in the Government's statement of its labour policy or in the Committee's report, that the extent of settlement might call for intervention; so long as the immigrant-settler obeyed the local native authority, the Government evidently did not intend to interfere.<sup>136</sup>

In the Bukoba District of Tanganyika a similar state of affairs had come about, owing to events in Buganda, and there the authorities had taken a different attitude. The Bahaya, like the Baganda, had been in the habit of using Ruanda-Urundi labour "to perform such heavy agricultural and other work as is not reserved by custom for the woman"; but in 1937 they found that the bulk of their former labour now preferred work in Uganda. In an attempt to counteract the attractions of the neighbouring territory, the

132. 1938 Labour Committee Report, paras. 19, 122, 110.

133. *Ibid.*, para. 127. The subsequent increase of settlement is discussed in Ch. IV, (A. I. Richards, Ed.), *Economic Development and Tribal Change*, *loc. cit.*

134. 1938 Labour Committee put at roughly 50,000 the amount of paid labour used by Baganda farmers. (Report, para. 60.)

135. 1938 Labour Committee Report, paras. 207-212.

136. *Ibid.*, para. 7.

native authorities were offering inducements to Belgian migrants to settle in the country. The Bahaya knew that the immigrants would have to work as labourers for several years while their smallholdings were in process of preparation, and it was evidently considered worth-while to sacrifice land not then in use in exchange for a temporary advantage in labour supplies. In this case it was considered necessary to remind the native authorities that they must ensure that no land be allocated in this way which would later be needed by the tribe itself.<sup>137</sup>

There was a further implication in the acceptance of immigrant African settlement by the Government and by the Baganda. As it increased and especially if, as was likely, settlement tended to "snowball", because people at home got to know of their kinsmen's being safely installed abroad, the time would soon come when agricultural land in central Buganda would be fully tenanted and thus give rise to a population surplus faced with the alternatives either of moving into the less densely settled inland districts or of becoming permanent wage-earners, dependent on industrial or urban employment.

The 1938 Committee had considered the problem of "the creation of a regular wage-earning class", which had been frequently referred to in earlier days but never closely examined. It visualised such a class as complementary to the supply of seasonal workers who, better organised, would continue to form a large proportion of the Protectorate's labour force. The creation of such a class was thought to be practicable, even from amongst some of the Baganda, provided the conditions offered were pleasing enough to compete effectively with the income the peasant could derive from agriculture. As a community emerged from self-sufficient subsistence agriculture, there would be some members who preferred "the regularity of wage employment to the hazards inseparable from the production of cash crops".<sup>138</sup> But the Committee recognised that most large-scale, non-native industries would need to have recourse to non-local sources of labour, and to attract a resident labour force therefore meant offering the labourer facilities to make a home for himself and his family on or near the employer's land. The goal was to be the establishment of rural social centres on a "village" model. The Committee favoured the granting of a Government subsidy to employers providing social services. Surprisingly, the net advantages to the employer of a permanent local labour force were not discussed; they were presumably taken to be self-evident. The implications, however, were clearly recognised: the class of permanent wage-earners would tend to become entirely divorced from the land, wholly dependent for their own and their families' wants upon their wages, which would have to be adjusted to the full sum of their needs. "They will live in circumstances increasingly urban in character, buying all food with money and obtaining accommodation not from their employers, but on payment of an economic rent. Unemployment and maintenance in old age, conditions which are at present absorbed by the resilience of the tribal system, will claim State cognizance".<sup>139</sup>

The Government's Statement of Conclusions on the 1938 Report was published in 1940,<sup>140</sup> after taking public comment into account. Uganda's dependence on immigrant labour was now implicitly recognised and accepted, and an experimental labour camp was built at Mbarara on the main south-west route in the course of the year. Nevertheless, the recommendation that "the formation of a class of workers exclusively dependent on wages should be encouraged" did not evoke approval, in spite of the idea's long history. The Government statement pointed out that if a class of unskilled workers exclusively dependent on wages came into existence, wages would need to be raised three or four times above their current level, and industry

137. Tanganyika Territory Annual Report of Bukoba District, 1937 (unpublished).

138. 1938 Labour Committee Report, paras. 185, 158.

139. *Ibid.*, paras. 186-189.

140. *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Labour Situation in the Uganda Protectorate, 1938. Statement of Conclusions by Government, Entebbe, Government Printer, 1940.*

would have to meet the cost of sickness and unemployment benefits and of welfare. Industrial housing estates would also have to be developed. "All this is probably inevitable to a certain extent, but it seems to Government that the forces making in this direction are already powerful enough and need no stimulation . . . The Government is not therefore prepared to encourage—even 'cautiously'—such a development, but recognises its obligation to be prepared for it as it occurs, to guide it, and to control it as far as possible in order that bad working or living conditions may not be avoidably created". The Government adopted a similarly cautious attitude to the suggestion that the establishment of rural social centres by large employers should be officially encouraged. It did not dissent from the suggestion that employers providing social services in these centres might qualify for a subsidy, but it would await more definite proposals.<sup>141</sup>

The Uganda Government's labour policy during the inter-war period was characterised by two interconnected and recurring themes, although neither was consistently followed. One was that of creating a permanent labouring class; the other visualised greater self-sufficiency in labour supplies and less dependence on a foreign element. At the close of the period, the full implications of stimulating the growth of a class of permanent wage-earners had been revealed, and the intention to do so was renounced; it was not until after the Second World War that the question of labour stabilisation received serious attention. The view was also implicitly accepted that the prospect of the country as a whole, or of the districts within it, becoming eventually self-sufficient in meeting unskilled labour requirements, was extremely remote. Any apprehension that may have been felt as to the future social costs of tribal admixture in Buganda did not weigh heavily against the fact that the Baganda and employers generally considered the foreign migration beneficial, and against the obvious difficulty of putting into practice any control scheme that might be devised. It could have been said that the same social dangers were attached to internal migration, and the case against internal movement had also been argued on moral and on medical grounds, but here too there was no disposition on the part of the Government, then, to prevent these movements from following their natural course, except in special circumstances. Their natural course was defined in part by the manner in which the country was being developed, but the principle had long been accepted that there could be no justification for deliberately discriminatory development with the object of maintaining some districts as "labour reservoirs" for the benefit of others. For example, although during the 'thirties the extension of the Uganda Railway with the object of opening up the Western Province was deferred, this was done on account of the general depression rather than from a desire to maintain internal labour supplies.

The inhibiting effects of depressed world prices for raw material on economic development in Uganda and, not least, on the efficiency and energy with which labour policy was administered, persisted until the outbreak of the Second World War. In October, 1938, the Government's capital construction programme was still proceeding on the recommendations of the cautious Development Committee of 1936. This could not be described as part of a co-ordinated development plan.

Even at the end of the decade, the country's main products were still subject to low and unstable prices. In the latter part of 1939, the Governor drew the attention of the Secretary of State to the consequence of Uganda's dependence on world prices: stability and security in the world produce markets were the first condition of "wholesome and enduring development" and the raising of living standards. In the first six months of 1939, prices of tropical raw materials had been "at a level perilously near the cost of production".<sup>142</sup> In January, 1940, the Governor was still not in favour of re-

141. *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Labour Situation in the Uganda Protectorate*, 1938. Statement of Conclusions by Government, Entebbe. Government Printer, 1940, pp. 1-2, 4.

142. U.P. Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1939, p. 4.

establishing a full Labour Department (after its reduction to an Inspectorate in 1931). He recognised the low wage levels, bad housing, low standards of nutrition, and the general lack of provision for welfare, but he thought little could usefully be done beyond what was already being done while produce prices remained as they were.<sup>143</sup> This was perhaps to underestimate the potential value of a Labour Department in persuading non-African employers of African labour to act in their own long-run interests. During 1938 and 1939, when wage rates were slowly rising,<sup>144</sup> and when some employers were again experiencing a labour shortage, there were several illustrations of the possible gains from greater expenditure on labour. The most noteworthy of these was the experiment over a period of five months arranged by Dr. L. J. A. Loewenthal, during the building of Kampala Railway Station in 1938. Two hundred Banyaruanda, members of a tribe notorious for poor physique and inefficient work, were given a full diet, which included meat and certain medical supplements, and it was shown that it was possible in as little as two months to build up these supposed weaklings to the level of efficiency of the normally much superior West Nile tribesmen. The nutrition expert recorded that "these [Banyaruanda] could be given the hardest manual labour and become as good as any other type of local labour in physical condition and output of work. In fact, the results showed that the extra output paid for the extra diet several times over". The Medical Department commented that the result was of great interest because "the constant attempts . . . to improve the diet of Africans employed in industrial undertakings have always been opposed on the grounds of cost".<sup>145</sup> To judge from the 1939 Annual Medical Report, the significance of this experiment was not altogether lost on private employers.<sup>146</sup> The mines had also discovered, in 1939, that to improve the terms on which men were employed was not necessarily mere philanthropy. They found that rising wage rates did not necessarily mean rising costs. "Wage rates tended to rise but were not reflected in working costs, as the effect of higher wages and better feeding of resident labourers combined with improvements in methods of operation was to increase the individual's output".<sup>147</sup> A gold mine in Ankole, for example, found that output trebled when an issue of half a pound of meat per day was made to its employees.<sup>148</sup>

These and other similar experiences recorded during the later 'thirties might have suggested that the capacity of industry to improve employees' real wages was not entirely dependent on world prices of raw materials, and that a reconstituted Labour Department might soon have paid for itself. The Governor, however, continued to hold that the existing arrangements for the supervision of labour conditions in the Protectorate were less inadequate than they may have appeared. At the close of the inter-war period, full-time responsibility for the oversight of labour matters remained concentrated on a single European Inspector with an African assistant. The task was shared with the Provincial Administrations and with various specialist officers, Medical Officers and Inspectors of Mines and of Factories. The Governor claimed that, in view of the restricted revenue available, the relatively small field of employment would not justify the establishment of a full-fledged Labour Department. In March, 1940, he pointed to the fact that

143. E.S.A. SMP R1/161.

144. The practice in reports of quoting most wage rates in the form of comparative ranges, without indicating the relative importance of the extremes, often makes it impossible to calculate a satisfactory series of averages, especially for only a few years, but a series available for the mining industry suggests a rise in wages of about 14% between the first half of 1937 and the latter half of 1939. (Annual Report of the Department of Land and Survey, 1939, p. 19.)

The rise in wages was liable to a considerable variation from one industry to another, however, and Baganda cotton growers, in 1939, under the influence of lower cotton prices, seem actually to have been moving in the opposite direction with their wage offers, and this may have contributed to the low immigration figures recorded for 1939—24,819 compared with 71,516 in 1938. (L.O. L/11/311; Labour Department Annual Report 1939, p. 2.)

145. U.P. Agricultural Survey Committee. Nutrition Report No. 3, *Unskilled Labour, The Effect of Dietary and other Supplements on the Health and Working Capacity of Banyaruanda Labourers*, Entebbe, Government Printer, 1939; Annual Report of the Medical Department, 1938, pp. 11-12.

146. Annual Report of the Medical Department, 1939, p. 12.

147. Annual Report of the Land and Survey Department, 1939, p. 19.

148. Annual Report of the Inspectorate of Labour, 1939, p. 4, para. 7.

the total number of workers in private non-native employment amounted to only about 40,000, or roughly 1 per cent of the population, and that a substantial proportion of these—about 40 per cent—had in 1938 been concentrated on three large plantations, a sisal estate and two sugar plantations. The two sugar companies, founded in 1924 and 1929 respectively, by 1938 accounted for about two-fifths (approximately 20,000 acres) of the total area under cultivation by non-native agricultural enterprise. Subordinate to agriculture, there were 141 active ginneries, three tobacco factories and five coffee-curing works, and in addition seven saw-mills. There remained the mines, employing in 1938 a daily average of 10,600 men. The low wage level, moreover, was not readily susceptible to increase by any legislation that a Labour Department might enforce. The depressing influence on wages of the former *luwalo* obligation (a month's unpaid labour for the benefit of the native authority) had already been removed. The levy was now explicitly in monetary form, though commutable in labour, and local authorities now had to compete in the market for their labour supplies like any other employer ; the effect of this was obviously favourable to the wage level. On the other hand the presence of thousands of immigrant labourers willing to accept low wages and to live poorly worked in the opposite direction. " It might be suggested that the remedy is to impose minimum wages by law, and I should be willing to consider that, provided every country producing for the same markets did the same. . . . In any case, it seems to be very doubtful if that method is in fact applicable to unskilled, largely casual labour which is employed to a great extent according to the seasons, in conditions which are at any rate very easy going, even if they are in some respects objectionable ". He was satisfied that under the arrangements already in force improvement had been striking and was continuing.<sup>149</sup> However, as the war proceeded, conditions were to be revealed before which these somewhat complacent views became no longer tenable.

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149. E.S.A. SMP R1/165.

## CHAPTER IV

### ECONOMIC POLICY AND THE ATTRACTION OF LABOUR, 1939—1952

At the outbreak of war in September, 1939, the Government announced that its policy was to maintain the supply of immigrant labour at the level necessary for local agriculture and industry during the war, and that steps had been taken to ensure that this essential need should not be prejudiced by military recruitment,<sup>1</sup> so far as avoidable. Simultaneously, however, the immigrant labour from Ruanda-Urundi showed a perverse independence, and during the first few weeks of the war the supply virtually dried up. Various explanations were put forward: a coincidental tightening-up of sleeping-sickness regulations at the Kyaka Ferry crossing near the Tanganyika border; the depreciation of sterling; more attractive employment opportunities on the Belgian side; and—probably the most important—the immigrants' unfounded fears of being conscripted by the British authorities. Immigration from Ruanda-Urundi had been unusually low in 1939, even before the outbreak of war, and when it appeared to be stopping altogether, considerable concern was felt by the Uganda Government, and the country's vulnerable dependence on foreign man-power outside its full control was again underlined. The total employed population of 80,000-90,000 (apart from employees of African farmers) was only about 2 per cent of the Uganda population of close on four millions. However, as the 1938 Committee had shown, of this 80,000-90,000 a large proportion were of immigrant origin, and therefore fluctuations in the foreign contribution to the labour supply caused the employers a degree of anxiety quite disproportionate to the numerical importance of the immigrants in the population as a whole. Public announcements were made denying the rumours that Banyarwanda were to be taken for military service, and by the end of the year the flow began to resume more normal dimensions. It continued to be unusually slack, however, until the latter half of 1940, when it was no doubt stimulated by the Belgian devaluation of 7th June. This established the Congo franc sterling exchange rate at 176.625 francs to the pound, and thus effected a depreciation of 32.7 per cent,<sup>2</sup> more than offsetting the British adjustment of the previous September. Records show 57,299 entering via Kakitumba Bridge in the latter half of 1940, as against only 14,383 during the first half of the year.<sup>3</sup>

Fortunately, although there was still no formal understanding between the Belgian and Uganda authorities on the subject, it had become known during 1939 that the Belgian administration was quite willing for labour to go to Uganda and had no intention of interfering. There were particular times when the departure of labour might cause inconvenience, especially if the whole burden of planting fell on the women; but the Ruanda-Urundi authorities recognised that migration to Uganda helped natives to find means of paying their taxes.<sup>4</sup> It was ascertained that Belgian officials were in no way responsible for the temporary cessation of immigration on the outbreak of war.<sup>5</sup>

The need for a regular exchange of information between the two administering authorities nevertheless became increasingly apparent. Uganda was in difficulties whenever labour fell short of requirements, more especially

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1. U.P. Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1939, p. 11.  
2. *Bulletin Hebdomadaire de la Kredietbank*, 5th November, 1950, p. 353.  
3. Annual Report of the Inspectorate of Labour, 1940, p. 4, Appendix I.  
4. E.S.A. SMP C835/A.102/14.  
5. E.S.A. SMP R306 I/letter dated 18/xii/39.



since it had become a war objective to produce greater quantities of cotton, coffee, sugar, and other marketable crops.<sup>6</sup> But difficulties were no less when the labour supply threatened to overflow the market. This happened again towards the end of 1940, when the Labour Inspector warned of unemployment in sight if the influx continued at the current rate.<sup>7</sup> The alarm proved premature ; partly, no doubt, because of the wartime encouragement given to increased cultivation of economic crops, and partly because of the military recruitment of resident natives of Uganda. In 1941, however, adverse reports from the medical authorities once more reminded the Government of responsibilities still unfulfilled. The solitary camp established at Mbarara in 1940 had done little to reduce the hardships of the journey, and the question of substantial investment in accommodation for the travellers was raised yet again. By 1942, the difficulties foreseen became an immediate and urgent reality ; in June of that year the Labour Advisory Committee (which had been established in 1941 under another name) was called upon to concentrate its attention on the immigrant labour question. The need for a full enquiry had been revealed during the investigation of a strike at one of the two large sugar estates, and by the findings of a medical enquiry that had presented the Government with a disturbing picture of the plight of the typical immigrant labourer in Buganda. Immigrants were arriving in Mengo District in an exhausted, devitalised state, most of them extremely undernourished and many suffering from disease. They had no opportunity for recuperation before starting work, and if they were too ill to work they starved. There was evidence that the death-rate at one of the sugar estates was “ staggeringly high ”. The immigrants’ desire to accumulate as much cash as possible during their short stay in Uganda meant that a large proportion of casually employed Banyaruanda maintained life on the cheapest possible diet, with the familiar result that their health was still further undermined. The uncontrolled entry of thousands of these immigrants in search of work constituted “ a very grave social problem ”.<sup>8</sup>

The reason for this aggravation of a long-standing evil is not far to seek. The low prices paid for cotton in 1942 (an average of Shs. 8/25 per 100 lbs. in Buganda) had resulted in a large fall in the acreage which growers wished to plant, both in Buganda and elsewhere in the Protectorate. The decrease in Buganda was from 481,966 acres in 1941 to 307,154 acres in 1942, and the supply of immigrant labour was therefore greater than Buganda could absorb. The number of Banyaruanda suffering from malnutrition treated in hospitals was much larger than usual, and the problem of destitute Belgian immigrants made itself felt as far east as Jinja.<sup>9</sup>

The experience of 1942 illustrated again the costs, in terms of disease, imported and spread, and of destitution and of the relief of these conditions, that were inseparable from Buganda’s dependence on immigrant labour, and the fact that these costs are likely to arise, not necessarily when the rate of immigration is at its highest—the numbers recorded as entering from the south-west in 1942 (68,820) being well below the numbers considered to have entered the country in 1936 and 1937—but when there is a maladjustment between supply and demand.

A tour of investigation undertaken on the Labour Advisory Committee’s behalf by a senior Medical Officer and the Inspector of Labour was particularly interesting in providing long-lacking information on prevailing conditions in Ruanda-Urundi and on the views of the Belgian authorities about possible control measures. The investigators were impressed by the effects of the pressure of human and animal population on the diet and health of the Banyaruanda even in their home country. Despite the efforts of the Belgian administration to promote intensive cultivation of the mountainous country

6. U.P. Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1941, pp. 11-12.

7. E.S.A. SMP R306 1/67.

8. *Second Report of the Labour Advisory Committee, Organisation of the South-Western Labour Migration Routes*, Entebbe, Government Printer, 1943, pp. 23-24 ; Annual Report of the Inspectorate of Labour, 1942, pp. 1-2, para. 5.

9. Annual Report of the Inspectorate of Labour, 1942, p. 2, para. 4.

characteristic of the Ruanda and Urundi kingdoms, the majority of the people lived in a state of sub-nutrition. The efforts of the Belgian authorities to improve these conditions paradoxically acted as a stimulus to the migration to British territory. The Vice-Governor of Ruanda-Urundi stated that one of the reasons why the Banyaruanda sought employment in Uganda was the unpopularity of low-paid, forced work, particularly on swamp-clearing, even though this was entirely for the people's own benefit. Other reasons were the generally easier working conditions in Uganda, where there was less "discipline", and the higher wages obtainable. The Belgians confirmed the fact that they were adopting a neutral attitude towards these movements, seeking neither to prevent nor to increase them.<sup>10</sup>

The 1940 devaluation of the Congolese franc served artificially to exaggerate the Uganda wage rates when converted into Belgian currency. Moreover, knowledge that these attractive wage rates were being paid probably spread faster than accurate information about the likelihood of work actually being available. These exceptional circumstances very probably played a part in aggravating the unemployment problem of 1942. It might be supposed that the relatively high wage rates, from the immigrants' point of view, would have encouraged them to spend an adequate proportion of their earnings on food, but in fact they did not do so. Apparently, the majority did not even ask for the advance of pay to which they were entitled after 15 days' work and which would enable them to buy food, but preferred to work for their sustenance for local Baganda. "The picture, therefore, is of an African of normally poor physique, his resistance still further lowered by a long journey with insufficient nourishment, attempting to maintain himself by working for his food, and, in addition, endeavouring to perform a task which can only be performed by a man in good physical condition. It is not surprising to find that the death-rate among such people is high. . . ."<sup>11</sup>

There are obvious difficulties in attempting to assist or legislate for people who do not understand the need for taking care of themselves. There could be no certainty that the imposition by statute of an increase in wages would improve matters: indeed, its effect would probably have been to stimulate further immigration and unemployment. On the other hand, the need for enforcing other improvements in working conditions was patently clear from the 1942 enquiries. There was obviously little use in providing food and shelter for immigrants on their way to and from work if the conditions under which the work was carried out were conducive to sickness and death. The Labour Department was accordingly reconstituted on January 1st, 1943, and one of its main tasks was the drafting of up-to-date labour legislation which would supersede the Masters and Servants Ordinance dating from 1913. To meet the recurrent problem of unemployment, it was proposed to limit immigration; monthly requirements were to be calculated, and only the required quota of labourers, all of whom must reach a reasonable standard of physical fitness, permitted to cross the frontier. The Labour Advisory Committee, however, foresaw serious difficulties, administrative and political, in connection with any scheme directed to the regulation of supply. There was also the risk, of which administrators had long been aware, that attempts at control might frighten away the timid and suspicious Belgian immigrants and replace the labour surplus by a labour shortage. It was therefore recommended that no attempt be made, at least for the time being, to introduce measures for the selective control of entry. The major practical recommendation put forward was the provision of an organised system of rest camps along the main immigration routes between the mandated territories and Kampala, at which travellers in each direction could be assured of food, shelter, and medical care. A camp-building programme was submitted, calling for capital expenditure of £55,000. The

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 18, paras. 4, 11, 12.

11. Second Report of the Labour Advisory Committee, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

return for this—quite apart from humanitarian considerations—would show itself in a more constant and more healthy labour supply than the country had attracted in the past.<sup>12</sup>

In 1943 and 1944 the alternative hazards of surplus and shortage in Uganda's labour supply were again encountered in quick succession. Following upon two seasons of unsatisfactory cotton prices (1940-41 and 1941-42), the Government, after negotiations with the United Kingdom Government, was able in January, 1943, to announce not only a satisfactory price for the 1942-43 crop, the average price paid in Buganda being Shs. 13/75 per 100 lbs., but the welcome news that the purchase of the crop would continue to be guaranteed until after the war. The guaranteed minimum price subsequently announced in advance for the 1943-44 crop stimulated planting, and the acreage in Buganda rose from 307,154 acres in 1942 to 414,658 acres in 1943. Unemployment among the immigrant Banyaruanda so far disappeared that in July, 1943, it was reported that they were demanding wage increases from Baganda farmers. They were no longer satisfied with a range of Shs. 7/- to Shs. 9/- per month without food, and wanted an increase in the cash element to Shs. 12/- : the sugar estates were now paying Shs. 12/-, food, and a "war bonus" of 50 cents per completed week.<sup>13</sup> The offer of such extra inducements was itself a measure of the labour difficulties acutely affecting some non-native employers. The sugar companies' ability to obtain labour on contract from the West Nile had been adversely affected by the decision to give priority to military needs and to local food production.<sup>14</sup> It was not a decision easily made. The West Nile tribes were highly regarded as the chief source of recruitment for the combatant forces, as well as for the heavy labour in such essential industries as sugar-cane and sisal-cutting and the handling of timber, but their own communities had to be protected against the risk of famine if too many able-bodied males left before adequate planting had been assured. The decision increased the dependence of the deprived industries on labour supplies from elsewhere, in particular on the Banyaruanda, and, as an emergency measure in 1943, on the Basoga.<sup>15</sup>

But at this very time, there was a marked falling-off in the number of Banyaruanda entering Uganda. Entry from the mandated territories in the first five months of 1943 was only about 50% of that recorded for the corresponding period of the previous year. This probably represented mostly a delayed reaction by the Banyaruanda to the hardships unemployment had imposed.<sup>16</sup> A number of years like 1942 would have robbed Uganda of much of its attraction even for the Banyaruanda. It was therefore decided, in 1943, to issue food to migrant travellers at certain points along the route, in the hope that this would once again revive the flow.

A few months later, as famine again descended on Ruanda, the stimulus proved to be only too successful. The District Commissioner, Ankole, asked for instructions : Might he issue extra rations to the semi-starving ineffectives ? Would this encourage an influx of others ? Could the Belgians be approached with a view to checking the entry of people obviously too weak to reach Kampala ? Here again was a problem in which humanitarian relief, economics, politics, and administration were inextricably entangled.<sup>17</sup> By December the influx of starving refugees had reached grave proportions.

12. Second Report of the Labour Advisory Committee, pp. 9-11, paras. 12-15.

The principle of the scheme was accepted, and one of the main camps proposed was built at Merama Hill, opposite the important entry point at Kakitumba Bridge, in 1944. It was later found desirable substantially to modify the building programme originally proposed, because of the marked increase in the use of motor transport in the post-war years. By 1950 it was found that as a result of the change in travelling habits some of the permanent labour camps which had by then been established along the south-west route (at Mutukula, Kyaka and Masaka as well as at the older sites of Mbarara and Merama Hill) were unnecessarily large ; and instead of supplementing these by erecting smaller permanent camps at intervals of one day's march as had been planned, a few temporary camps, consisting mainly of portable aluminium huts, were put up at various strategic points. (Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1950, p. 9, para. 31.)

13. E.S.A. SMP R306/4/12.

14. E.S.A. SMP R305/2/4/1.

15. E.S.A. SMP R305/2/4/47g.

16. E.S.A. SMP R306/1/371-6.

17. E.S.A. SMP R306/5/11, 18, 39.

There were large numbers of women, children, and ineffectives, less than 10 per cent of those entering were fit for employment, and Uganda's own food supplies were being threatened. According to one report, many refugees said they had no intention of returning to Ruanda.<sup>18</sup>

With the concurrence of the Belgian Congo Government, it was reluctantly decided to ban all immigration from Ruanda-Urundi from 1st January, 1944. Co-operation between the two administrations seems to have been fairly effective in enforcing the prohibition.<sup>19</sup> There was an immediate reaction on the part of employers. The Planters' Association expressed grave concern at the stoppage of immigrant labour and feared that there would be serious repercussions on essential production.<sup>20</sup>

By March, 1944, the loss of potential labour entailed by the ban's continuance had become the dominant consideration in Uganda, but it was learned that the Belgian authorities were unwilling to allow the departure of adult males to be resumed until assured of adequate food-planting.<sup>21</sup> There followed an important meeting on 20th April, 1944, between the Acting Uganda Labour Commissioner and the Vice-Governor-General of Ruanda-Urundi, M. Jungers, at which the differing immediate interests of the two administrations were reconciled and some of the longer-term implications of recent events considered. The Belgian authorities were carrying out a concerted agricultural campaign in which the participation of all able-bodied men was needed, but the Vice-Governor-General nevertheless agreed to the resumption of movement after July, 1944, even though this would involve difficulties on the Belgian side. It was his intention, however, to insist that in future the employment of Banyaruanda in Uganda should conform with a Ruanda-Urundi Ordinance governing recruitment for employment beyond the frontier. The Ordinance laid down *inter alia* that all such recruitment should be by contract and it provided comprehensively for the welfare of the recruit and of the members of his immediate family authorised to accompany him. These regulations were already in force in respect of Ruanda workers employed by mines in the Belgian Congo, the cost of recruitment and transport to the scene of employment amounting to about £20 per head.

The Belgian administration was evidently still not aware of the peculiar circumstances under which the majority of immigrants were employed in Uganda. It was explained that recruitment by contract then accounted for only about 16 per cent of the Banyaruanda coming into Uganda. Another 24 per cent, taken on by non-natives at the place of employment, were casual labourers employed by the month, and the balance of about 60 per cent were similarly employed by African employers as casual workers. The Uganda representative did not think it would be possible to enforce the provisions of the Ordinance in respect of these native employers, and it was eventually agreed that in order not to disrupt Uganda's war economy enforcement would be waived until after the end of hostilities. In a subsequent exchange of correspondence, the Belgian authorities explained the disadvantages, from the point of view of Ruanda-Urundi social well-being, of allowing men to leave for Uganda unaccompanied by their families. They stated that they would henceforth welcome the recruitment in Ruanda-Urundi of men with their wives and children, for a minimum period of a year.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile the immigration stoppage continued to have serious repercussions in Uganda, especially on the sugar plantations. There was considerable demand for labour : war production and military recruitment took their toll. The supply of labour was restricted, partly by administrative measure and partly by economic factors. In famine-stricken districts, the administration refused to allow men to leave who were needed for the

18. E.S.A. SMP R306/5/23, 53.

19. E.S.A. SMP R306/5/49.

20. E.S.A. SMP R306/5/74.

21. E.S.A. SMP R306/5/88.

22. E.S.A. SMP R305/5/97-100.

emergency planting of food. At the same time, soldiers' family remittances and the denudation of shops sapped people's willingness to work for wages.<sup>23</sup>

If the ban on entry had again demonstrated Uganda's dependence on foreign labour supplies, the recurrence of famine, which had made the prohibition necessary, had also shown how precariously conditional upon good harvests the welfare of the Ruanda people still remained, despite all the efforts of the Belgian administration to ensure adequate food reserves. The Ruanda-Urundi Government was again acutely conscious of the problems posed by over-population and was now tentatively exploring possible means of relieving the congestion by the settlement of Banyaruanda families in substantial numbers in neighbouring territory. This emerged clearly in the course of the meeting between M. Jungers and the Uganda representative, although the question was not further pursued at the time.

What were Uganda's interests in the matter? Officials in Uganda on various occasions in the past had made contradictory assumptions. Elliot, for example, had suggested in 1936 that Banyaruanda who were settling in Uganda offered "the most fruitful prospects of a permanent labour supply for the Protectorate".<sup>24</sup> A similar view, not unanimously held however, was expressed at a meeting of officials in November, 1943. The opposite, and probably more realistic, view was that the settlement of immigrants would not necessarily contribute to Uganda's labour requirements, since experience showed that settlers preferred to follow the example of the local people and themselves become farmers. If Banyaruanda were to be admitted on long contract with their families, it would probably be necessary to make their ultimate repatriation a condition of their entry.

The question is clearly not one that can be answered on economic grounds alone. The difficulty of answering it on the broader plane of inter-territorial social policy, however, was evidently not matched by any corresponding difficulty in the minds of the immigrants themselves. Independently of any agreement or long-term policy which the two Governments might seek, it was observed that when Banyaruanda immigration resumed its normal course after the middle of 1944, many men made the journey accompanied by their families. The tendency for increasing numbers of immigrants to settle in Uganda, which first became appreciable after the famine of 1928-29, undoubtedly gained further momentum from the famine of 1943-44. In 1945, when the recorded immigration from the south-west again reached pre-war levels, there were signs that definitive family immigration was still on the increase, although there had been a full recovery in Ruanda from the hardships of the previous year.<sup>25</sup>

In spite of more immigrants arriving, non-African employers' labour needs were not fully satisfied. The price of cotton was rising (an average of Shs. 15/- per 100 lbs. being paid in Buganda in 1945); the direct effect on local labour supplies of the absence of large numbers of able-bodied men away in the armed forces<sup>26</sup> continued to be aggravated by the saturating effects of the remittances they sent home, especially since the general shortage of consumer goods continued. As a result, wage rates rose, and the Labour Department noted that "the difficulty of obtaining labour was the chief reason for a more general issue of full rations by employers. . . ."<sup>27</sup>

But the wage rate was now no longer left to find its own level. In Uganda, as in other colonial territories, a profound if gradual and unspectacular change in the Government's social policy occurred during the war years. The inspiration for the revolution in thought of which it was an expression became cumulatively powerful. On September 15th, 1939, the Secretary of State emphasised his desire to see social services and development activities

23. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1944, p. 2, para. 3.

24. Elliot Report, p. 34, para. 87.

25. Rapport sur l'Administration Belge du Ruanda-Urundi, 1945-6, Brussels, 1948, p. 65; Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1945, p. 2, para. 5.

26. Approximately 57,000 men from Uganda enlisted.

27. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1945, pp. 1-3, paras. 4, 9.

in the Colonies disturbed as little as possible.<sup>28</sup> In the following fateful summer, the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act was passed. In June, 1941, when Lord Moyne circularised Colonial Governments to urge that the wealthier colonial residents reduce their living standards in the common war effort, he made clear his recognition that "throughout the Colonial Empire [there are] large populations . . . whose standard of living is now so low that the same policy cannot and should not be applied to them, even in wartime". On the contrary, it was "an imperative duty to do all that is practically possible to raise the standard of living of such people, even during the war period, alike for humanitarian, political, economic and administrative reasons".<sup>29</sup>

Lord Hailey, speaking in 1943, said of the quickened interest in the welfare of people of backward areas, of which Lord Moyne's remarks are an indication, "Historians will doubtless differ as to the cause which has secured so wide a support for these feelings. It may be an instinctive revulsion against the teachings of power politics; it may in part be a legacy of the recent depression period, which has had so revolutionary an influence on modern social and economic thought".<sup>30</sup> The Hot Springs Food and Agriculture Conference of the United Nations of the same year, developing into more concrete form the economic and social clauses of the Atlantic Charter, recommended *inter alia* that the Governments represented "by virtue of their determination to achieve freedom from want for all people in all lands should affirm the principle of mutual responsibility and co-ordinated action". The first objective defined was "to promote the full and most advantageous employment of their own and all other people and a general advance in standards of living. . . ." The adoption in 1944 by the General Conference of the International Labour Organisation, at Philadelphia, of the "Social Policy in Dependent Territories Recommendation" carried these principles directly into the sphere of colonial economic and labour policy.

In Uganda the wage rate came to be looked upon less exclusively from the point of view of the employer's ability to pay and more from the standpoint of the employee and his needs. A Cost of Living Committee, of which the Labour Commissioner was a member, kept "constant watch" on prevailing wage rates in 1943, and war bonuses were paid to help the lower-paid employees of Government "to meet the enhanced cost of living due to war conditions".<sup>31</sup> The Government appears to have been satisfied that other employers could be relied upon to follow advances in official wage rates by making similar adjustments themselves. There was probably good reason for this assumption, so long as a labour shortage persisted, although in 1945 Baganda employers tried to form "rings" to keep down the local wage rates to the pre-war level.<sup>32</sup>

There was, it is true, reluctance to fix minimum wages in urban areas, on the grounds that wage rates in the adjacent rural areas would then be forced up to the detriment of African employers growing essential economic crops, and that an excessive amount of labour would be drawn into the towns. Nevertheless, it was during this war period that it became the practice of Government to concern itself with the adequacy of the unskilled labourer's wage, and to ensure, if not by minimum wage legislation, then by alternative means, that wage rates sufficed to enable him to meet his basic needs. The concept of a "cost of living" applied to the African labourer seems to mask a sudden break with former ideas, implying a certain continuity in the need for cash, which one does not associate with the habits of the "target" worker. The extent to which Africans living in different parts of the Protectorate had developed a regular need for money nevertheless still varied considerably. In 1941, for example, the Provincial Commissioner of the

28. U.P. Sessional Paper, No. 1 of 1940, p. 10, para. 3.

29. G.B. Colonial Office Circular Despatch of 5th June, 1941.

30. Lord Hailey, *The Future of Colonial Peoples*, London, Oxford University Press, 1943, p. 21.

31. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1943, p. 6, para. 26. (For reasons which are not clear, "where practicable, arrears of bonus to labourers were given in the form of khaki shorts".)

32. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1944, p. 7, para. 23.

Western Province said that in many areas the peasant was content to produce and sell crops only to the value of the amount of tax required of him, "witness the ripe cotton left unpicked on the trees";<sup>33</sup> and towards the end of the war it was clear that for many employed Africans, higher wages still meant a falling-off in the desire to work rather than a stimulus to greater effort. Thus while many employers raised wages so as to keep in step with Government cost of living awards and to attract additional labour, the tendency on the part of those already employed was often towards greater absenteeism and the adoption of "go-slow" methods.<sup>34</sup>

The comment of the Labour Adviser to the Secretary of State, who visited East Africa in 1944-45, was typical: "The dominant problem throughout East Africa is the deplorably low standard of efficiency of the worker; that is to say, the exceptionally small output characteristic of the entire country. It has always been a conspicuous weakness in the East African economy, but it has been greatly accentuated by war conditions, and universal opinion, which was confirmed by my own observation, declared that performance had deteriorated steadily during the whole of the war".<sup>35</sup> The main reasons cited by Major Orde Browne were familiar and were related directly to war conditions: the absence of many of the better African workers and of European supervisory staff on war service, and an unusually copious circulation of money among the African population at a time when supplies of imported goods were exceptionally low. Employers, in these circumstances, tended to offer "better conditions" in the negative form of giving easier tasks or of accepting a smaller output, as well as in the positive form of improved feeding, bonuses, etc.<sup>36</sup>

Although these conditions were temporary and exceptional, they illustrate some of the more persistent characteristics of migrant labour: that a prosperous peasantry does not contribute eagerly to its supply; that the migrant labourer's chief incentive to work is the desire to earn money for immediate and tangible purposes rather than as an uncommitted reserve against future needs; and that he has little cause to be bound, whether out of self-interest or of obligation, to identify himself as "a good worker" in the eyes of any particular employer.

The Uganda Government, as the war proceeded, became more and more the directing force in a partially controlled economy, and probably the most complex of its tasks was that of allocating man-power by inducement rather than by direction. The problem of balance arose at every turn. The claims of the military<sup>37</sup> had to be set against the man-power needs of those non-native employers who were themselves engaged on "essential production" of sugar, sisal, timber, rubber, pyrethrum and tin, and against the administrator's fears for the well-being of the families left behind by soldiers. A balance had also to be struck between the need to maximise the output of, e.g., sugar and the need to insist on an improvement in the conditions of employment prevailing in that industry—if necessary, by withholding assistance in attracting fresh labour supplies. The sugar industry posed another problem: while on the one hand there was an urgent demand for greater quantities of sugar, there was also, at times, great danger that famine might make it impossible to feed the large labour forces employed on the two main estates.<sup>38</sup> Then there was the problem of how to stimulate the production of one peasant crop against another and how to balance the call for increased peasant production in general against the man-power claims of the military and of non-native employers.

The institution of guaranteed controlled prices was one of the key

33. E.S.A. SMP R61(N.S. 6537)/92-3.

34. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1945, pp. 1-2, para. 4.

35. G. St. J. Orde Browne, *Labour Conditions in East Africa*, London, H.M.S.O., 1946, Col. No. 193, p. 15, para. 34.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-17, paras. 35-42.

37. The K.A.R., the E.A.P.C. and the East African Military Labour Service. So far as possible the intention was to draw recruits preponderantly from the less productive areas. By January, 1942, it had been decided to resort to conscription to supply the needs of the E.A.P.C. and the E.A.M.L.S.

38. E.S.A. SMP R305/2/4/10-12.

instruments used in the balancing process. In addition to the two main African economic crops, cotton and coffee, various hitherto relatively minor products became "essential" in the war effort, e.g., groundnuts, maize, rice, and sesame. Prices were fixed within the limits set by opposing considerations, of which one was the desire to pay a "fair" price to the grower, taking into account his increased cost of living. The problem was how to raise prices to growers without still further curtailing the number of local people who were willing to take up wage employment, for it was imperative that the country should not become still more dependent on the unpredictable labour supply from Ruanda-Urundi.<sup>39</sup>

The Government was now able to raise the wages of its own employees a little less hesitantly than before the war, because the bulk buying arrangements with the United Kingdom for Uganda's principal crops made Government revenues more predictable. Non-African plantation-owners, too, were at last benefiting from higher prices for their products, which enabled most of them to follow the lead of the Government in advancing wages.

On the other hand, investment in permanent labour accommodation by private employers still required more confidence in future prosperity than many could muster. Among the smaller concerns, in the tile- and brick-making and timber industries, for example, little or no attempt was made to provide housing if it could be avoided.<sup>40</sup> This was natural enough, since the construction of permanent buildings would normally require a larger proportionate expenditure for a small than for a large firm. Plantations in 1945 showed great variation in their assessment of future prospects. The Labour Adviser observed that along with some excellent examples of progressive and modern plans for accommodation and feeding there were many cases of employers resting content with temporary accommodation of the wattle-and-daub type, characterised by low initial, but heavy recurrent, cost.<sup>41</sup> Minimum standards were laid down under the Uganda Employment Ordinance and Employment Rules, 1946, but the uncertainty was recognised which employers felt even then about the future trend of world prices for primary products.<sup>42</sup> The cautious Uganda employer was hesitant for other reasons: in many cases he remained unconvinced that higher standards of employment conditions, improved rations, better housing, medical treatment, and welfare provisions, would repay themselves through the worker's increased efficiency.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, in the early post-war years, the technical problems of devising low-cost, permanent suitable buildings had made little headway towards solution. The difficulties were enhanced in Uganda by the fact that any imported constituents had to bear the cost of the long railway haul from the coast.

The Government or its Labour Department might be convinced that these expensive provisions would in the long run result in greater working efficiency, although in laying down minimum standards of employment the legislator could not be expected to limit the requirements imposed to what every employer could afford. The employer himself, on the other hand, still had no means of ensuring that Africans who might benefit physically from model conditions would remain long enough to repay the investment. In 1947 the Labour Department itself was still saying that the average unskilled labourer was "usually totally unaware that the diet which he provides for himself with money is often inadequate for his health or for his output as a successful worker",<sup>44</sup> and in spite of—or because of—his ignorance, the labourer usually persisted in preferring to make his own arrangements rather than to accept a lower money wage plus rations. If the generous provision of food did not necessarily bring its due reward in terms of greater

39. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1946, pp. 4-5, para. 13; Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1943, pp. 7-8, para. 34.

40. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1945, p. 3, para. 8.

41. Orde Browne, *op. cit.*, p. 91, para. 341.

42. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1946, p. 8, para. 23.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 7, para. 20.

44. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1947, p. 9, paras. 50-51.



contentment and efficiency, the return from the provision of healthy but costly accommodation would be a still more distant prospect and, so long as labour turnover remained high, would have seemed to call for philanthropy rather than for business judgement.

The limitation that even contract labour could be engaged for no more than six months at a time had long been a bone of contention between employers and Government. The administrator's point of view was clearly expressed by one of the Provincial Commissioners in 1941 : " Plantation managers have often said they would pay the passages of the labourers' families and provide suitable quarters, etc., if the law allowed a longer term (12 months) at work. But my impression . . . is that it is neither practicable nor desirable for the employer to force, by process of law, the contract against the labourer. I have suggested to planters that the work should be made so attractive in various ways that the labourer is willing to extend his service or return to the same work after a holiday. No doubt this does happen in a great number of cases, though the planters will never admit it as a practical solution to their difficulty ".<sup>45</sup> There was certainly a persistent tendency among some employers to seek short cuts to the solution of their labour problem. In 1945, for example, two of the largest estate employers, who had been in difficulties over their labour supply throughout the war, sought permission to recruit in the Sudan. Their hope, in the Labour Commissioner's view, was to be able " to break into fresh recruiting areas where the African is still unsophisticated and still prepared to accept work under any conditions in return for a little more money than he can earn at home ".<sup>46</sup> Opposed to this, the Commissioner's consistent recommendation was judicious investment by the employer in the welfare of those already engaged, so as to enable labour strength to be maintained by reducing excessive turnover.

Whatever justification there might have been for the Labour Commissioner's strictures, there is little doubt that the law at times went too far in placing upon employers responsibilities that might more appropriately have been borne by the State. For example, under the 1946 Uganda Employment Ordinance, employers outside the main urban areas were obliged to provide accommodation conforming to minimum specifications which involved very considerable capital expenditure. Under the Employment Rules supporting the Ordinance, employers of one thousand or more were required to provide " adequate and suitable hospital accommodation in accordance with plans and specifications approved by the Director of Medical Services ".<sup>47</sup> Where a number of plantations and mines are adjacent, it would surely have been more economic to have required a local authority to provide accommodation in a centrally situated settlement or large village than to oblige each employer to build houses, a dispensary, or a hospital within his own estate or compound. Much will depend on the social habits of the tribes supplying the labour, but a compact settlement offers many potential advantages over scattered groups of dwellings on individual estates. It gives a stimulus to the establishment of a convenient shopping centre ; it makes it more feasible to provide electricity and running water, which would be too costly to supply to dispersed settlements ; and it would even ease inspection. Furthermore, one large hospital may be much more useful than several smaller units costing the same amount to build and to equip. Such possibilities depend, of course, on the degree of concentration of mines or estates, and the potential advantages of concentration will be more than counterbalanced if the places of employment are widely scattered. Nevertheless, these are possibilities worth exploring, of which the drafters of the Ordinance were not aware.

Undoubtedly, however, many Uganda employers, without the spur of

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45. E.S.A. SMP R305/27.

46. E.S.A. SMP R305/2/4/26.

47. The Uganda Employment Ordinance, 1946, Sect. 30, and The Employment Rules, 1946, paras. 55-56.

the explicit requirements of the Employment Ordinance, would have been content to continue to accept the inevitability of a high labour turnover and low individual efficiency, and would have lacked the courage to try to improve the quality of their man-power by judicious investment in accommodation and amenities. Other employers in East Africa were becoming aware of the economies to be gained from stabilisation. The Labour Adviser referred in 1945 to the fact that even without the administration's encouragement, the great sisal plantations had in almost all cases an appreciable resident labour force established with families, which as a rule remained for a number of years.<sup>48</sup> In 1947, the Joint East African Board informed the Secretary of State that it fully recognised the necessity for stabilised labour, decently housed in convenient villages. "The important objective at the moment is to decrease the number of workers who have one foot in the reserve and the other in employment".<sup>49</sup> But these statements implicitly related to conditions in Tanganyika and Kenya rather than in Uganda, for it was in those two territories that conditions favourable to stabilisation were emerging. In Kenya and Tanganyika there were beginning to be areas where the population could no longer maintain itself on the land solely by farming. Furthermore, it was easier to persuade workers to stay put if they were a very long way distant from their home country and if they did not have the opportunity, open to migrants in Buganda, of transferring their services to neighbouring African employers or of starting to farm locally on their own account.

Here, probably, lies a large part of the explanation for the reluctance of Uganda employers to make efforts to reduce their turnover, for in Uganda in the areas where non-African enterprises were located there was still land available on which those who desired could settle. The attraction of settling on the land was likely to outweigh any incentive employers might offer to induce people to stay with them longer. When in 1947, for example, a leading Uganda company described proposals for a housing scheme on one of its estates, and for the provision of medical, educational, and recreational facilities on a generous scale, a Government official frankly pointed out that the Banyaruanda who remained in Uganda were motivated more by the hope of adopting the Ganda way of living than by the wish to settle in the country as permanent labourers, and that consequently a labour force permanently resident on the estate was unlikely to be achieved despite the modern and liberal conditions of employment proposed.<sup>50</sup> These comments probably exaggerated the difficulties of stabilising labour in Uganda in competition with the "stabilisation" offered by the Muganda landlord, but they illustrate the fact that non-African employers in Uganda, and especially in Buganda, have had less chance of success in attempts at labour stabilisation than employers in other parts of East Africa. They also indicate that even among officials the wholehearted adoption of stabilisation as a primary objective in labour policy has, in Uganda, been a comparatively recent development.

It is true that in the immediate post-war years labour stabilisation begins to be referred to in the Labour Department's Annual Reports, but the references do not suggest that the formation of a class of workers wholly dependent on wage-earning for their own and their families' maintenance had yet become a dominant theme of social policy. The problems involved in converting a casual and migrant labour force into a community of workers specialising in paid employment clearly arise in most acute form in urban conditions, but it is noteworthy that the Development Plan for Uganda of 1946 does not refer to the subject. Two short paragraphs are devoted to "Urban Development" and to "African Housing", recognising the urgent need for housing schemes for which it allocates £500,000, but there is no dis-

48. Orde Browne, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22, para. 57-8.

49. E.S.A. SMP R321 (N.S. 6735)/1a.

50. E.S.A. SMP R304/3.

cussion of the bearing of housing on the supply and efficiency of labour.<sup>51</sup>

The most ambitious housing schemes in the immediate post-war period produced two estates in the Kampala area, at Naguru and Nakawa—the former designed for the higher income group of wage-earners and the latter mainly for unskilled workers—and another at Jinja, the Walakuba Estate. But at the end of 1952 the total accommodation provided, including the smaller estates erected at most District Headquarters, was only sufficient to cater for about 2,400 wage-earners—little more than 1 per cent of the Africans in employment in 1952.<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, stabilisation was now engaging a good deal of the Labour Department's attention. A conference of the Labour Commissioners of the East African territories held in November, 1949, "recognised the great importance of the progressive stabilisation of labour in the planned economic development of the East African territories", and drew attention particularly to the necessity to lower the cost of housing construction, and to the desirability of seeing that any houses that were built should be capable of accommodating families. The Conference also recorded its view that "the essence of the problem is that the African urban or industrial worker must be assured of at least the same degree of social security as he enjoys when living in his home area".<sup>53</sup> But in Uganda, labour stabilisation did not really get under way until 1953 when an African Housing Officer was appointed and the formation of an African Housing Department announced.

The fact that the annual immigration from Ruanda-Urundi continued on a large scale after the Second World War no doubt partly accounts for the prolongation of the Government's reluctance to deal realistically with the many-sided problem of labour stabilisation, even though there had been intermittent affirmations of its desirability, in some form, since the early 'twenties.

The growing strength of the Labour Department did mean, however, that progress was at last possible in bringing about improvements in the country's labour supply in directions which had long been neglected, for example, by the establishment of labour exchanges and by the regular inspection of the larger workshops, factories, and estates, to ensure that their working conditions were satisfactory. But the most striking achievement in post-war labour administration was the successful inter-territorial liaison that has been maintained on all matters of common interest in connection with migrant labour between Uganda, Tanganyika, and Ruanda-Urundi. Periodic meetings between representatives of the three territories since 1948 have been most useful in permitting the exchange of information on immigration problems, to the advantage of all concerned.

Many of the problems discussed at these conferences have been only indirectly related to economic policy. The long-delayed camp-building programme, for example, modified in accordance with the changing needs dictated by the immigrants' much greater use of road and lake transport, was completed with the full knowledge and concurrence of the Belgian and Tanganyika authorities. Medical questions have been frequently on the agenda: the repatriation of incurables, for example, and proposals for minimising the risk of the spread of sleeping-sickness by migrant travellers. Similarly, there has been recognition and discussion of the difficulties of reconciling the desirability of recruitment at or near the immigrants' homes with the fact that so far as the majority of employers in Uganda are concerned—the Baganda—it is not a practicable possibility.

Some of the topics discussed at these meetings have also had a more direct bearing on Uganda's economic problems: for instance, it now proved possible to obtain much more readily than hitherto information on the factors influencing the size of the migrant labour flow from Belgian

51. E. B. Worthington, *A Development Plan for Uganda*. Entebbe, Government Printer, 1947, pp. 78-9, paras. 276-7, 283-6.

52. U.P. Statement of Policy on African Urban Housing, Entebbe, Government Printer, 1954, p. 2, para. 6.

53. E.S.A. SMP. R320/1 (N.S. 6733)/1a.

territory into the Protectorate. These factors have naturally been of particular concern at times when the influx appeared to be diminishing. Such was the case in 1950 when recorded entries fell from 110,897 to 70,725. On that occasion the Belgian representatives suggested various reasons for the falling-off in numbers, such as the increasing pace of development throughout Ruanda-Urundi, and especially in the building industry at Usumbura and the tin mines in the Kibungu area—although these cannot have affected more than a few thousand workers. Another factor was the abolition of unpaid labour for chiefs and its replacement by a small tax. Communal labour on the roads had likewise been replaced by paid labour. Both these obligations had previously given rise to a good deal of emigration. Native-grown coffee at the high post-war prices provided a substantial source of income for those able to benefit from it, while the devaluation of sterling in 1949 automatically made Uganda wages less attractive when converted into francs.

The Uganda Government's anxious concern over the numbers of Ruanda-Urundi immigrants may be seen as the counterpart of its tardiness in actively encouraging the stabilisation of labour. The falling-off in numbers in 1950 seems indeed to have stimulated thought on the matter. The Annual Report of the Labour Department for that year commented on the difficulties experienced by the non-African estate-owners, who were in danger of seeing their labour forces progressively diminishing. They had to compete not only with the higher wages paid by urban industrial employers but also with the easy-going conditions offered by the African farmer. "The remedy available to the agricultural employer, and this is denied to most industrialists, is to establish the nucleus of a stable labour force by encouraging labourers to settle on his land with their families and by providing conditions and amenities which will serve to retain labour in spite of the higher wages paid in the towns and the attraction of African employment".<sup>54</sup> It is significant that this remedy is described as being "denied to most industrialists". The apparent implication that most urban employers must continue to rely on the labour supplied by workers having only one foot in the town indicates that as late as 1950 the problems of urban stabilisation of labour had not been given serious thought. Housing estates at Kampala and Jinja were being built, but it was recognised that "even with the extension of these estates it will be many years before the housing conditions of the lower-paid wage groups in these two towns are likely even to be approaching the satisfactory".<sup>55</sup> Even the policy of stabilisation on plantations was somewhat irresolutely endorsed. When, for example, arrangements were made for the recruitment of Banyarwanda and Barundi by the sugar companies, the Government reserved the right to repatriate all recruits at the end of the period of contract, although recognising that it might be desirable when the time came to allow employers to retain the services of those who were willing to remain longer.<sup>56</sup>

In 1951 and 1952, stabilisation came much closer to being accepted as the central aim of labour policy, despite a recovery in immigration figures. The number of immigrants from Ruanda-Urundi rose to 86,000 in 1951 and to 76,000 in 1952. Internal migrations were also well maintained: recorded movements from the north-west showed 24,896 in 1951 and 27,797 in 1952, and the less reliable figures from the south-west of the Protectorate suggest that about 29,000 adult males in 1951 and 28,000 in 1952 came out to seek work from Kigezi and at least 14,000 in the same years from Western Ankole. But in spite of these substantial contributions to the labour supply at the centre, the total demand for labour rapidly increased, and it was estimated that the total number of 202,000 persons in paid employment on 30th September, 1952, showed a rise of at least 20,000 during the year, as a result of the growing rate of industrial development. The need to stabilise and, by better supervision, to make the most of the existing supply of labour

54. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1950, pp. 6-7, paras. 19-20.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 21, para. 87.

56. Uganda Labour Department H.2. File, A/10/3/1/444/15.

was therefore intensified, as the Labour Department recognised. In 1951 a guide to employers was prepared, suggesting practical ways in which an adequate, efficient, and stable labour force could eventually be ensured, the essence of the remedy being “ good supervision, decent working and living conditions, a balanced diet, an adequate incentive and firm but sympathetic handling ” ; and it was noted that “ a few of the more progressive employers . . . have realised that if they are ever going to have an adequate and stable labour force, families must be catered for and they are now building quarters which can be converted into semi-detached family accommodation. . . . ” At the same time, however, the Government’s own contribution to stabilisation in the urban centres lagged behind. The Walukuba Estate at Jinja could not keep pace with the needs of married men, and in Kampala the bachelor accommodation provided at Nakawa was not attractive at Shs. 5/75 per month for a bed-space, compared with only half that figure paid by the worker for sleeping in a grass hut outside the town.<sup>57</sup>

In 1952 the problem was explicitly stated : “ The question is how to change from a low-wage, low-output economy based on unstable immigrant labour to a high-wage, high-output economy dependent on a stabilised labouring class receiving a wage on which a worker can support his family without recourse to the hidden subsidy of his tribal land which at present so often produces both his food and his housing ”.<sup>58</sup> In the urban areas, however, a large gap remained between the statement of the practical problems stabilisation posed and their solution. How could the vicious circle be broken, by which low productivity and low wages in part were caused by, and in part contributed to, the worker’s inability to house himself adequately with his family near his place of work ? One essential point was beginning to be recognised : the large discrepancy between the standard of building which municipal regulations conventionally demanded and the quality of accommodation which the worker could afford, and there was no simple way in which this discrepancy could be eliminated. Building standards might have to be lowered for the time being, but it was essential that the housing available should be adequate for the worker and his family. This meant not merely good houses but the provision of essential services to go with them—water, for example, lighting, schools, and dispensaries. On the other side, the more the worker’s productivity rose, the higher the rent he could afford to pay. The problem still to be worked out was how the objective could be achieved without requiring a disproportionately large subsidy to bring the cost of the minimum adequate provision of accommodation and services to coincide with what the worker could reasonably be expected to pay. In 1952 the answer to this problem was not yet in sight.

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57. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1951, p. 27, paras. 102-3.

58. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1952, p. 6, para. 7.

## APPENDIX

### IMMIGRANTS ENTERING UGANDA FROM THE SOUTH-WEST 1938-1951

1938	..	71,516	1945	..	101,141
1939	..	24,819	1946	..	138,130
1940	..	75,024	1947	..	109,306
1941	..	73,400	1948	..	88,518
1942	..	68,820	1949	..	110,897
1943	..	59,580	1950	..	70,725
1944	..	42,127	1951	..	86,232

For the sources of these figures the reader is referred to a statistical appendix contributed by Powesland to (A. I. Richards, Ed.) *Economic Development and Tribal Change* (Cambridge, Heffer, pp. 254-5). The figures are given there in much greater detail, the source of each figure is carefully cited, and sources of error are discussed. I regret that I have been unable to find comparable figures for earlier years.

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