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THE RESPONSE OF AFRICANS TO WAGE EMPLOYMENT IN EAST AFRICA: CHANGING ATTITUDES AND FUTURE PROBLEMS.

Introduction:

Before the penetration of Africa by foreigners, the Africans lived in their traditional villages, (or wandered about from place to place in the case of the nomads), quite undisturbed and only occasionally interrupted by tribal wars or famines caused by the vagaries of nature far beyond human control. Their economic, social, political and religious activities were all governed by established customs and traditions that varied from one community to another. Except in the coastal areas there was no contact with the outside world and thus no external trade though certain amount of internal exchange took place, based on a barter system. Thus in times of peace and without famines the African economic system though vulnerable was self-sufficient. In almost all the African communities, paid employment in whatever form was unknown and a man earned his livelihood through subsistence production either of livestock in the case of nomadic pastoralists or of food crops in the case of settled agrarian communities. The latter often combined crop production with livestock raising. Intricate kinship relationships and family ties acted as a form of social security whereby a person who failed to produce his own food was fed by relatives who also expected reciprocal action from him. This extended family system still exists to this day and has been well discussed by sociologists<sup>1</sup> and anthropologists<sup>2</sup>. The possible negative effects of extended family system on savings and investment has been a matter of concern both to sociologists<sup>3</sup> and economists. Another immediate and obvious social effect often forgotten<sup>is</sup> that the system perpetuates urban unemployment by enabling the unemployed to stay in towns with relatives for considerably long times even when prospects of finding a job are dim.<sup>4</sup>

With the penetration of the African continent by alien powers, the African traditional life was interrupted in a series of foreign influences, first by slave traders, then by explorers and missionaries followed by private enterprises and lastly by colonial powers.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of this foreign influence on the supply of and demand for labour in East Africa and the problems created by the changing attitudes of the Africans and employers to wage employment.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of labour problems in East Africa may be divided into three possible phases. First the period of slave labour starting from the Arabs occupation of the East coast during 8th century and ending with the abolition of slavery at the close of the 19th century. The second phase is that of forced labour period which begins with the colonization of East Africa in the 1890's and stretches to the end of World War II. The last period is that of Voluntary labour supply stretching from late 1940's to the present time.

#### Slave Labour Period.

The Arab invasion of the East Coast of Africa was partly motivated by the desire to spread Islamism and partly by the desire to build up trade. In this endeavour it was necessary not only to establish trading posts at the coast but also to make long journeys into the interior and the latter required the use of porters who could only be obtained by force. As Orde-Borwne has pointed out,

"the much-valued ivory of Africa formed a strong incentive for expeditions; thus there grew up at Zanzibar and other points along the seaboard an active and enterprising community which was constantly thriving to push farther into the heart of the continent the carriage of the necessary for heavy tasks (and the supplies) the lengthy journeys entailed the use of numerous porters, and these could obviously be most easily obtained by the capture or purchase of men from the interior; these could then be sold as slaves when they had served their purpose for the journey to the coast."

At first the Arabs were content to capture members of the tribes near the coast. But during the 19th century their raids extended far inland as far as the Western parts of Kenya and Eastern Uganda.

One of their posts at Mumias in Western Kenya still has a large Arab community.

The Arab invasion greatly disturbed the tranquility of traditional African life and tremendously affected his attitude towards working for another man. Not only was the idea alien to him but also nasty since it was based on brute force. Orde-Browne rightly points out that the Africans had in fact met the employer though not the wage-payer.

"Thus the first experience that the African received of working regularly for another man was in the form of slavery; previously accustomed to supplying only his own needs, with a share of those of the community, he now encountered a system wherein he was required to toil for the enrichment of one individual who assumed proprietary rights in him; he had in fact met the employer though not the wage-payer."

Under these conditions the slave labourer naturally developed a strong dislike for work and had to be constantly supervised. Again to quote Orde-Browne,

"Sly evasion was his attitude towards a task in which he had no interest, and he received a prolonged education in reluctance to work;..."<sup>7</sup>

It is no wonder then that when slavery was abolished at the end of the 19th Century, the supply of African labour immediately dried up and some form of forced labour had to be instituted to make the African offer his labour services.

#### Forced Labour Period:

The abolition of slavery changed the labour picture in East Africa as employers found it impossible to secure labour. A method had to be found whereby labour supply could be obtained without resort to raiding. The offer of wages proved inadequate,

"since the needs of the natives were not sufficiently great to furnish the necessary inducement"<sup>8</sup>

Inducement through the introduction of imported goods met with no success except among few tribes like the Baganda and the Chagga. The situation became even harder for the employers when they moved away from the coast inland as they

".....came into contact with tribes who had not previously had any experience of organised work, either as slaves or as wage-earners; producing themselves almost all that their simple needs required, they lived a self-sufficing existence that rendered them slow to see any sort of advantage in going to work for strangers in order to obtain goods for which they had no particular use when gained"<sup>9</sup>

The attitude of the African towards regular wage-employment did not change even after the country had been colonized and the administration found itself faced with the same serious labour shortage as the private employer. An adequate labour supply was needed if the administration had to be carried out successfully. Roads had to be constructed, government officials required large numbers of porters in order to move from one place to another, without a postal system the administration needed messengers, and office boys, cooks etc. were needed.

"Various attempts were therefore made to introduce governmental pressure in some form so that to the self-sufficing life of the village should be added some requirement which could only be met by work for an employer"<sup>10</sup>

The introduction of a form of tax payable in cash was the most appropriate form of pressure since it would force the African to offer himself for work and at the same time contribute to government revenue. The tax had some impact on the African in that supply of labour forthcoming increased. In Uganda, a Hut Tax of three rupees was introduced in 1900 and Bishop Tucker reported that it stirred the whole nation into action.

"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"<sup>11</sup>

But the introduction of a tax did not solve the labour shortage especially among the tribes who needed money for no other purpose than to pay the tax. Work was only sought when payment of tax was due. The African labourer thus became a "target-worker" in its true sense. To secure an adequate and continuous supply of labour the administration had to introduce some form of compulsory paid labour. Every able-bodied adult male was required to work for certain number of day in a year at a given wage. For example in Uganda,

"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 would be responsible for inducing their people to work for the usual wages, for at least one month each year, the names of those liable to the call being read off from the tax registers"<sup>12</sup>

A similar system was introduced in Kenya where it was meant to cater for both government and private employers especially the European plantation farmers.\* This system of forced labour became so unpopular in Uganda that it was abolished in 1922 but in Kenya it continued until the 1940's and was even more reinforced during the Second World War although the Colonial Secretary had revoked it <sup>in</sup> 1921.

Another form of forced labour was the requirement that each able-bodied male adult works for the local authority in the building and upkeep of roads, bridges and other public projects for a given period in a year without wages. In Kenya, this method of securing labour was not abolished until the 1950's!

During the forced labour period, one cannot talk of a labour market in any economic sense. The interaction of supply and Demand had no effect on wage rates, which were arbitrarily determined by the employer. The offer of high wages would not stimulate more labour supply as the African had only limited need for money. Consequently wages were extremely low and conditions of work very poor.

For example the wages of a labourer in Buganda were as follows:-

| Year | Shillings per month |
|------|---------------------|
| 1900 | 6/-                 |
| 1913 | 9/- to 12/-         |
| 1921 | 11/- to 14/-        |
| 1925 | 18/- to 22/-        |
| 1932 | 8/-                 |
| 1943 | 12/-                |

Source : P.G. Powesland "Economic Policy and Labour"  
pp. 3, 21, 35, 43, 53, 70.

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For example the Governor of Kenya issued Circulars empowering District Officers to use compulsion if necessary to ensure that farmers had sufficient labour. However the Colonial Secretary quickly revoked the use of compulsion in all Colonies and Protectorates.

The actual wage rate fluctuated with the flow of immigrants from Ruanda and Burundi. After the Second World War "forced labour" became unnecessary as large number of Africans were voluntarily coming into the towns in search of wage-employment.

Period of Voluntary Labour Supply

The period after World War II may be termed a period of urban influx in East Africa. Several factors must have been responsible for the changing attitude of the African towards wage-employment. First there was the return of the ex-service men who had acquired a taste for manufactured goods which could only be obtained by money. Moreover, these soldiers had gained long experience in regular and hard work and were more adventurous in looking for wage-employment. Secondly, the need for money was no longer confined to the requirements of tax alone. In addition, money was needed to pay fees, to meet certain customary obligation (e.g. payment of brideprize) and to buy various imported products. In some communities money could be obtained by growing cash crops (cotton and coffee in Uganda). But the majority could only obtain money through offering labour services. Hence the influx to towns of young men and adults in search of wage-employment. However, the supply of labour forthcoming was not sufficient to meet the demand and a period of labour shortage was experienced right up to the mid - 1950s. Thus the Uganda Labour Department reported in 1947 that,

"Literal unemployment does not exist in that any able-bodied African can almost certainly obtain some form of manual labour at an average wage if he looks for it" (13)

A similar situation existed in Kenya in the late 1940s and early 1950's as the Labour Department Report of 1948 noted that,

"There is little or no unemployment in Kenya in the accepted sense i.e. involuntary. There is work for all who seek it".<sup>(14)</sup>

And again in 1951,

"The continued expansion of industry and large-scale agricultural concerns has made unprecedented demands upon the labour force of the Colony during 1951. It was particularly in the unskilled category of employee that the demand oustripped the supply and many employers reported shortages particularly those with considerable development programmes"<sup>15</sup>

In Tanzania the labour shortage did not develop immediately after the war as in Kenya and Uganda. Thus the labour department was able to report in 1948 that

"There has been no lessening in demand for unskilled labour but workers have come forward in greater numbers than was expected."<sup>16</sup>

One aspect of the labour situation in East Africa during 1940's and early 1950's was that the labour supply tended to fluctuate inversely with subsistence food production. During years of crop failures more people came forward to work for wages in order to buy food and in the years of plenty fewer people offered themselves for work. This state of affairs was reported mainly in Uganda and Tanzania.

Thus in Uganda during 1953,

"The drought in the early months of the year, which was followed by a shortage of food had a pronounced effect on the labour supply and in the areas which were affected the local population turned out to work for any employer who issued rations"<sup>17</sup>

In the same year the Tanganyika Labour Department reported ~~labour~~ surplus due to crop failures,

"A distinguishing feature of the labour situation in this Territory is the relationship which exists between it and the vagaries of the East African climate. In the years when the rains fall when they are expected and harvests are generally consequently good, there is usually a shortage of labour coming forward for wage-earning employment. Conversely, when as in 1953 the rains failed in many parts of the Territory....., the supply of labour was generally satisfactory and

"in some areas there was more labour offering for employment than could be absorbed."18

This contrasts with the situation in 1950 when the Labour Department reported that

"the exceedingly good harvests this year have been responsible for a shortage of labour to meet increasing demands"19

In Kenya, however, the demand for labour far exceeded the supply during this period that even when there was crop failure the supply of labour forthcoming was inadequate to meet the demand,

".....even in a year of adverse climatic conditions such as 1949, all who wanted work could find it....

There is still little or no unemployment in Kenya for the able-bodied man of any race."19

The fact that labour supply fluctuated with subsistence production indicates that the African still preferred the traditional way of life and resorted to wage-employment only as the last alternative. Though his needs for money had developed beyond tax requirement he was still basically a "target-worker". He migrated between town and country-side as the needs arose but regarded his <sup>rural</sup> home as the permanent place where his life was centred.

Although the African still regards town life as only temporary he no longer regards paid employment as a mere alternative to subsistence farming. His attitude has changed and he is willing to offer himself for paid work whether subsistence harvests are inadequate or not. The inverse relationship between labour supply and subsistence output seemed to have disappeared during the mid-1950's. The three East African governments began reporting that unemployment was developing in the main urban areas. The Kenya Labour Department pointed out that,

"During 1956, a radical change took place in the labour supply position and by the end of the year surpluses of labour were being reported from almost all urban and many rural areas"21

Tanzania also reported a "substantial flow of workers to and from tribal areas to centres of employment"22 and in 1957,



"In contrast to previous years a notable development in the Territorial Labour situation has been the increasing unemployment problem experienced in the larger urban areas and in particular in the Dar-es-Salaam municipality"<sup>23</sup>

A similar situation was reported in Uganda in 1956 where unemployment was said to be growing in Masaka, Jinja and Kampala and in 1958 the problem seemed to be growing as

"There was a surplus unskilled labour, semi-skilled workers, domestic, clerical and other non-manual workers in the main towns"<sup>24</sup>

No information is yet available as to the magnitude of the unemployment problem in East Africa. But its seriousness is being felt by the respective governments as young men (mainly school leavers) and adults flux in urban areas looking for jobs. As early as 1959, the Kenya Government was already alarmed by the growing unemployment in towns and this prompted it to appoint a Mr. A.G. Dagleish to carry out a survey of unemployment:-

"to investigate and report on:- the extent of unemployment in Kenya; where they occur; why they occur; and factors likely to influence their incidence in future"<sup>25</sup>

Dalgheish's findings revealed that there was chronic and widespread underemployment in African land units and recommended as one solution, the full development of African rural areas, a suggestion which if governments had the needed resources would have eliminated the unemployment problem. But none of the East African governments have the resources to carry out full scale rural development programmes. Consequently the unemployment problem is still growing and the labour departments in each of the three countries continue to report acute unemployment situations in the main towns. Various attempts are being made to cope up with the problem but so far one obvious thing is that the labour supply is growing faster than the East African economies can absorb. Drastic measures like the "back to the land policies" adopted in Kenya and Tanzania do not seem to solve the problem even in the short-run as they merely transfer unemployment from one area of the country to another, often at public expense! Land settlement schemes and rural development programmes are hampered by limited resources available at the disposal of the governments.

THE AFRICANS' CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
WAGE - EMPLOYMENT.

The above historical outline suggests that the African attitude towards wage-employment must have changed tremendous since the opening of the century. First there was the slave labour which he hated. Then came the tax requirement and various forms of forced labour which he resented. At certain times the vagaries of nature forced him to accept wage-employment because that was the only alternative way open to him<sup>to</sup> obtain his food. But during the mid-1950's he began to regard wage-employment as desirable and necessary. His wants had multiplied several folds and money was needed not only to pay taxes but also to pay school-fees and to buy various manufactured products. It is this change in attitude which was largely responsible for turning the labour shortage of the early 1950's into a labour surplus which began in the mid-1950's. An increase in wage rates might also have acted as incentive to make more people seek employment but this was not a dominant factor since even after 1956 labour was prepared to accept very low wages of less than 50/- per month.

The attitude of regarding wage employment as a necessary means of obtaining money is quite widespread among the unemployed in urban areas. In itself it is not a bad attitude provided the unemployed are willing to look for alternative means of acquiring money when job opportunities are lacking (e.g. returning to the land to grow cash crops or raise livestock). Unfortunately this attitude goes even much further in that wage-employment is being regarded as the only means of obtaining the needed money. This view is particularly strong among young people, especially school leavers, who even if they had access to the use of a piece of land, would rather not work on it but look for employment in towns. Even older subsistence farmers tend to hold the view that work on the land is purely for subsistence and should money be needed resort must be made to wage employment. The result is the urban influx and all its social consequences.

It is sometimes argued that one should not blame the African too much for holding the view that wage-employment is the only legitimate means of getting cash income. If his productivity in agriculture is too low relative to wage-employment then the opportunity cost of working on his land can be very high. In such a case his decision to look for a job is the most rational

economic choice he can make at the moment. But this does not justify the refusal to accept alternative means of getting money when jobs are not available. In addition to low productivity in agriculture, there is chronic visible underemployment of Africans in the rural areas caused mainly by the seasonal nature of production. As the unemployment survey in Kenya rightly points out.

"The unemployment of Africans in towns is essentially a projection of larger problem of underemployment in the rural areas and arose in the main from the desire of Africans to take up employment in the wage-earning sector of the economy" 26

This then suggests that part of the solution to the problem must be found in rural development to improve productivity on land. If this cannot be done and if job opportunities remain scarce at a time when the African holds the view that cash income can only be obtained by getting a job then the urban unemployment problem is bound to grow out of proportion.

The underemployment and low productivity in agriculture act as "push factors" urging the African to move (though temporarily) out of the land. But there are also strong "pull factors" urging him to go to towns.

First there is a strong "demonstration effect" displayed by those who return to the rural areas after working in towns for some time. These people are usually well-off financially relative to those who stayed home. Materially they often possess modern manufactured products such as good clothes, bicycles, shoes, watches, radios etc. which are coveted by their friends who remained on land and this stimulates the desire to migrate to towns in search of jobs.

Secondly, town dwellers do pass information to their rural friends and relatives as to the possibilities of job opportunities existing in towns - when a new factory is going to be started, a road building programme launched, new government offices to be opened and the general employment situation and wages in a particular town. A preliminary survey<sup>27</sup> of active job seekers at building sites in Kampala indicated that nearly all of them learnt about the constructive project either through their relatives or friends already in town. A few came across the construction project by chance while visiting areas of the town where a job might be found. None reported having read about the project in a newspaper. In addition to passing information about job opportunities.

the urban worker is often full of attractive and exciting stories to relate to his rural friends - Stories about motor-cars, locomotives, street lighting, cinema houses, recreational grounds, beer halls, night clubs and dance halls and the vast contrast between urban life and the dull rural life. Often little is mentioned about urban slums and its social evils. In any case, the possibility of getting a job and the attraction of urban life often outweigh the negative effects of slum conditions as judged by the potential migrant. As Gutkind has rightly pointed out

"We are thus faced with a situation in which urban life and entrance to a wage economy are becoming the objections of an ever-increasing number of Africans, this urbanisation however promises to lead to misery and hunger for many of them"<sup>28</sup>

The third "pull factor" making the African migrate to towns is the availability of cheap means of transport. It used to take several weeks for the migrant labourer to travel to a place of work 200 miles away. With the opening of roads and the building of railways it now takes just a matter of few hours at a cost of less than ten cents per mile to travel 200 miles. In many parts of East Africa there are regular bus services on the trunk roads and the potential migrant may have to walk only a few miles to the main road to catch a bus to his destination.

The fourth "pull factor" is the presence of relatives in the town of destination. A new arrival is in almost all cases accommodated by his relatives. The African system of extended family unit makes it possible for the job-seeker to remain in town for a long time being taken care of by his relatives (or even by members of his own tribe). Often the job seeker moves from one town to another and only returns to the land when all possibilities of getting a job have been exhausted. The extension of kinship relationship to the urban areas is not confined to East Africa but has been observed in other parts of Africa<sup>29</sup>

Thus the changing attitude of the African to wage employment, the "push factors" in the rural areas and the "pull factors" in the urban areas have led to a large increase in the supply of labour at a time when the demand for labour is not growing fast enough to absorb the additional supply. The seriousness of the problem lies in the fact that while the African attitude has

changed towards offering more labour services, several factors have acted on the employer to make him economise on the use of labour. The following section of the paper deals with the changing attitude of the employer.

THE CHANGING ATTITUDES OF THE EMPLOYER TOWARDS  
AFRICAN LABOURER.

Labour Costs:

The prevailing view of the employers used to be that in Africa labour is "cheap". This view was obviously misleading as later studies showed. Champion (1957) rightly pointed out that

"the "cheap" East African labour is not "cheap".....labour which is bought cheaply in terms of wages is not necessarily good value in terms of production costs" 30

Apart from the wage-bill labour has certain hidden costs which used to be neglected by the employers. Given the traditional background from which labour was drawn some training was necessary to make him an efficient industrial worker and the cost of training might be very high in case of raw labour. Secondly supervision costs could be very high if a labourer cannot be trusted to work his own. Thirdly, high breakage rate and poor quality of production are part of the hidden costs of labour which employers tended to neglect. As a result, the cheap labour concept led to most extravagant use of labour. Rogers (1957) points out that

"In many parts of Africa, even to-day labour is so abundant and on the face of it, so cheap that little or no attention is paid to supervision; employees are left to find their own way of doing things"31

"If the job is getting behind schedule the labour force is increased instead; if the men are particularly slow the worst offenders are singled out and dismissed"32

The cheap labour concept has almost disappeared in East Africa to-day but not because employers have realized the hidden costs but because statutory minimum wages have been set at levels they consider too high. They thus now tend to economise on the use of labour. As we have seen above, this is happening at a time when labour supply is forthcoming in greater number than before. Thus the divergence between the supply of and the demand for labour in East Africa tends ever to increase.

Labour Productivity:

There is no doubt that the raw African labourer used to have very low productivity in terms of output per man-hour. In the first place he was new to the type of job he was required to perform, unaccustomed to the industrial discipline involved, and ignorant of the use of tools and equipments he now found at his disposal. One amusing incident often quoted is that of African labourers carrying wheelbarrows full of soil on their heads.<sup>33</sup> Secondly the labourers were often not in healthy conditions<sup>34</sup> and were physically weak to perform the arduous work assigned to them. Thirdly in almost all cases the African labourer was target migrant worker not at all fully committed to wage-employment and therefore did not cultivate a personal interest in his work. Because of all these factors it is not surprising that the productivity of the African worker was very low indeed. But the first impression the African labourer made on the employer created so much deep-rooted prejudices that hung on for a very long time even after conditions had changed and the quality of African labour much improved. Even as late as 1961 Kilby points out that

"The conventional portrayal depicts the African labourer as indolent by nature, unadaptive to continuous labour, insensitive to monetary reward and unsuited to Western technology"<sup>39</sup>

Admittedly African labour productivity must have been quite low during his early experience as a regular worker in the monetary sector of the economy. However, as time went on the worker must have been improving so that a labourer of 1960's is of a better quality than the one of 1930's. Unfortunately the early prejudices were so strongly held that employers tended to regard quality of labour as a given constant. But as Kilby noted little field work had been done to support the views held; most of the work related

to periods - during the 1940's or before and most of the materials used were drawn from the mines and plantations in South Africa and Central Africa<sup>36</sup>. De Briey (1955) gives several instances drawn from various parts of Africa to prove that productivity of an African labourer is low and concludes that since labour productivity is low wages must be low.<sup>37</sup> What employers failed to take into account is the fact that low wages lead to poor living conditions poor diet, encourage migratory nature of labour etc. all of which may negatively affect productivity itself.

Another weakness of the earlier views on African labour productivity was the belief that the worker himself was solely responsible for the low productivity and that management and organizational skills could not be used to improve the quality of labour. As mentioned above, African labour was and still is in certain cases raw and inexperienced and like any other factor of production could be improved upon by managerial skills and provision of better and efficient tools to work with. One tends to agree with Rogers when he states,

".....lack of productivity among Africans is partly the responsibility of the employer and can be largely remedied by him"<sup>38</sup>

This view is also voiced by Kilby who argues that the determinants of labour productivity are various managerial functions,

"These functions include organization of work process, supervision and production control planning and co-ordination, provision of incentives to labour and maintenance of plant and equipment. Thus it is not the African labourer who must bear the stigma of imperfect performance"<sup>39</sup>

In addition to lack of managerial efforts, few firms had organized schemes to train labour, it being argued that the African worker was basically a target worker and that money would be wasted in training a person who after the training quits the job to return to his rural home. Though this argument was valid in the 1940's it is no longer true in East Africa where due to acute shortage of job openings a certain amount of stability of labour has been induced.

Even those with short-term objections soon learned that only steady work paid off: employers were becoming more selective and there was a fear of unemployment"<sup>40</sup>

The Kenya's Carpenter Committee (1954) quotes how a "Sticking example of what can be done with African labour, given a progressive and realistic management policy, is provided by the experience of one of the colony's larger factory undertakings"<sup>41</sup> where supervision was carried out by European and African foremen trained in the factory; annual bonuses paid in relation to length of service; 80% of the workers were housed by the company; productivity had doubled in six years to reach approximately 50% of that of a factory of similar size in the United Kingdom and where with the increase in productivity wages continued to rise and were "markedly higher than the general level of wages in the colony"<sup>42</sup> If all firms adopted similar lines of policy, there is no reason why African labour productivity could not have been raised even as early as the 1940's.

Target-worker Hypothesis:

As mentioned above, the African labourer used to be a target worker in the sense that he needed money for a very limited number of purposes (mainly to pay taxes) and preferred to be out of the labour market as soon as he acquired the desired amount of cash. This state of affairs can have serious depressing effects on wages and productivity. In theoretical jargon we are faced with "backward-sloping" supply curve of labour whereby an increase in the wage rates leads to a fall in the number of man-hour services offered. Employers would thus tend to keep wages low in order to secure adequate supply of labour.

Two points ought to be made with respect to target worker hypothesis. First it is based on the assumption of discontinuous and limited wants, an assumption which no longer holds true in East Africa. In addition to tax requirement, the African now needs money for a whole range of purpose all spread out throughout the year so that his cash expenditure is now longer discontinuous with time. He has to pay school fees, buy clothes, buy certain manufactured products, food etc.

Moreover, his rising aspirations mean that his wants are no longer limited and the acquisition of a given stock of goods leads to a desire for more variety and better quality stock. This sort of unlimited and continuous wants is incompatible with "target-worker hypothesis". In the absence of accumulated past savings, continuous wants can only be satisfied by continuous cash flow obtained either through wage employment, sale of cash crops or self-employment.



The second point to make about the hypothesis is that, though it may be true for a few individuals it cannot be true for the community as a whole so that community supply curve need not be backward sloping. Eliot Berg reaches this same conclusion in his study of West Africa<sup>43</sup> This means that policies based on it can be grossly misleading. Policies derived from micro-analysis cannot be expected to be of much help in solving macro-economic problems.

#### The Migrant Worker and Productivity.

Closely connected with the target-worker hypothesis is the problem of migrant worker. Though in many parts of Africa the migratory labour developed because the African was a target worker, the two phenomena ought to be separated. First a permanently settled urban worker can be the same sense as the rural dweller. Secondly, contrary to the conventional view migratory labour is not at all incompatible with high productivity while improving the productivity of a target-worker may be extremely difficult.

Both governments and employers in Africa did and still believe that the sole cause of low productivity of African labour is its migratory nature. In Southern Rhodesia,

"This tendency to live and work in town while maintaining unproductive land in reserves is referred to as the "foot in both camps attitude" and is largely condemned on the grounds that a man who attempts to retain a foothold in both places cannot be efficient in either"<sup>44</sup>

In Kenya, the Committee on African Wages (Carpenter Committee, 1954) saw no alternative to raising African productivity other than severing his ties with the reserves,

"the essential prerequisite for the creation of an effective labour and the severance of its ties with the reserves"<sup>45</sup>

The East African Royal Commission Report 1953-1955 did endorse this policy and recommended that the three East African territories should adopt it not only to raise productivity and standard of living but also to solve the social evils of overcrowding in towns.

"Apart from the fact that migrant labour is less efficient to the employer and less capable of earning a "good" wage, the depressing effect which it exercises on wage level makes it difficult to raise the standard of living of life of African wage earners. And the social evils of overcrowding, malnutrition, prostitution, venereal disease and juvenile delinquency, which were recognised by the Committee of Inquiry into Labour unrests in Mombasa (1945) as a by-product of the employment of migrant labour in towns, tend to be intensified....."<sup>46</sup>

A stabilized urban labour force was seen as the solution. This is one of the most misleading and the most impracticable labour policy measures ever suggested in East Africa. It is misleading because it does confuse stability of labour with urban residence. It is impracticable because neither the government nor the private employer can afford the costs associated with its successful implementation.

Migrant labour used to be inefficient because he was at the same time a target-worker. A migrant worker who is not a target worker can be just as efficient as a permanently settled urban worker. It is not the place of residence which constitutes the stability of labour but the willingness of the worker to remain in his particular job for a long time. In this respect, a migrant worker, if he is not a target worker can be just as stable as an urban dweller. The association of stabilized labour with urban residence is an unwarranted transplantation of Western European and American ideas into an East African environment. Current developments in East Africa tend to show that labour is becoming more and more stable without severing ties with the reserves. The East African migrant worker only goes back to his rural home on holidays or on retirement or when he loses his job in which case he is likely to make another trip to urban areas in search of another job. There is nothing inconsistent with increasing the productivity of such a worker.

The creation of permanent urban labour force at the current wage levels and urban conditions in East Africa is a great myth. First to induce a man, his wife and children to abandon his land and come to live in the town permanently, wages must be raised substantially above the present levels. By keeping "a foot in both camps" the African is able to support his family even at a minimum wage of 150/- per month. As the East African Royal Commission noted,

"For many Africans it is not now possible to attain to a higher income level for the support of their families without working both on the land and in urban employment"<sup>47</sup>

Secondly, to create a permanently settled urban labour force, the urban housing structure must change from single flats to family types of dwellings which are not only costly to build but tenants will have to be subsidized by the employers either to pay the rent or to purchase them. Thirdly, the cost of

urban services must increase particularly school facilities. Most migrant workers in East Africa have their children in rural schools where cost of education is much lower than in urban areas. If they become permanent urban dwellers, their children will have to go to urban schools and this means more urban schools will be needed.

Lastly, urban life in East Africa does not offer the African any form of security he can rely on. To him, return to the land is a form of security which neither the government nor the employer can provide at the moment. Provident fund schemes and old-age pensions are just in their experimental stages in E. Africa and are not yet understood by the labourer.

What E. African policy makers ought to be concerned about is not how to create a stable urban labour force but how to make migrant labour more efficient. Given the present resources, migrant labour is the cheapest form of labour East Africa can afford.

#### CONCLUSION.

It is argued in this paper that the attitude of the African labourer towards wage-employment has radically changed from regarding wage-employment as an unnecessary burden to that of regarding it as the only means of obtaining cash income. In the process of this change, three phases are distinguished. First the slave-labour period based on force which the African hated; Secondly the period of compulsory paid labour which was imposed on him by the administration and which he disliked and lastly the period of voluntary labour supply when the African willingly goes to urban areas in search of jobs.

This last stage is creating serious unemployment problems first because the East African economies are not growing fast enough to absorb the rising labour force and secondly because the employers attitude towards African labour has changed from that of regarding it as "cheap" to that of realising that it is not cheap. There is thus a tendency to economize on the use of labour at a time when labour supply is increasing rapidly. Hence the unemployment problem tends to grow.

With respect to the productivity aspect of African labour the paper notes that low productivity is inevitable in the case of raw inexperienced and unhealthy of production, labour could be improved upon and management should bear some of the blame for low productivity. The belief that the African is a target-worker is found to be no longer true and the blame put on migratory nature of labour as causing low productivity is misplaced if not out of date. Thus Policies aimed at creating a stable urban labour force not only miss the issue by confusing stability of labour with urban residence but are also impracticable under present wage levels and urban conditions in East Africa. The issue should not be how to create a stable urban labour force but how to make migratory labour more efficient, for it is the cheapest form of labour East Africa can afford at the moment.

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