
THE RHODESIAN JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS

The Quarterly Journal of the Rhodesian Economic Society

Editorial Board:

A. M. Hawkins (Editor), D. G. Clarke, J. A. C. Girdlestone, A. F. Hunt
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The Rhodesian Journal of Economics was established in August 1967 to Publish papers, articles and addresses relating to the Rhodesian economy or to problems of economic development typical of a country like Rhodesia. The initial objective of the Journal was to publish the majority of the papers read at Society meetings (thereby replacing the Society Proceedings). More recently, the Journal's role has broadened in an attempt to make available to a wider public—both in Rhodesia and abroad—articles which might otherwise not be published, and which contain information or views of interest to those concerned with any aspect of economic development.

Needless to say, in the five years that the Journal has been published as a Quarterly, a very broad spectrum of views has been expressed. Obviously, the opinions expressed by contributors are not those either of the Council of the Society or of the members of the Editorial Board of the Journal.

The Board welcomes comments on or replies to published articles which will be considered for publication.

THE RHODESIAN JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS

Articles

**African Education and the
Rhodesian Employer—A
Sociological Perspective.**

Contributors

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AFRICAN EDUCATION AND THE RHODESIAN EMPLOYER

A Sociological Perspective*

D. H. READER

Introduction

This paper is propounded in the context that the seemingly bottomless well of African teaching posts in Rhodesia is drying up, and that the employment of Africans generally is becoming a problem of greater concern. It is commonly supposed that the responsibility for the inadequate employment of Africans lies with the European employers and that it is mainly due to racial prejudice. On this basis a gradual improvement in the situation might be expected in the long term as those graduates and others who do find employment slowly prove the worth of Africans, and prejudice perhaps erodes away.

Such is the position which a number of us would like to see. Unfortunately for this view, a very different situation has been revealed in a recent investigation into the legal profession, done as part of a larger Rhodesian manpower study by Mr. J. Danckwerts, research fellow of the University's Department of Economics. His evidence shows that the improvement anticipated above is not an early likelihood in legal work, and that it is not primarily racial prejudice which is responsible for the inability of African law graduates to find suitable employment.

The nature of these findings, if they are true, makes it probable that they would extend to other areas of employment besides the Law. Furthermore, on careful reflection, the profound cultural and educational disabilities from which especially rural Africans still suffer in a modernizing context, seem to render the Danckwerts conclusions and the attitudes of employers not entirely unexpected.

The purpose of this paper is therefore an attempt to clarify some of the issues involved, to make manifest the educational and cultural factors concerned, and to offer suggestions in the social and educational fields where some of the remedies may lie. It is all too easy to approach this problem from the standpoint of the Rhodesian economy and with an "establishment" position in mind. Instead, I shall try to conduct the analysis from two viewpoints, African needs and the Employer's needs, and determine to what extent, if any, the two are commensurate and could be worked in harmony with one another.

African Needs

The actual contribution of formal education to job skills for both Europeans and Africans is debatable. The primary school system which we have inherited from Britain is in fact mainly a 19th century product. It was designed primarily to teach the poor to read the Bible and thus keep them in their barely literate place. The secondary school system, which has since been arbitrarily attached to it, was framed with a view to elevating the British middle classes to those white-collar and even minor professional jobs considered appropriate to their station. The Establishment was recruited from the private and preparatory school system, directly conjoined with the universities.

Soon the grammar school system arose to service increasing middle class needs in an industrial society. In doing so it followed the private school maxim that what a gentleman needed as a basis for administration was a sound education in the classics and humanities. And in spite of numerous successful and

* Expanded version of a paper delivered at a Rotary (inter-city) Conference on Employment Opportunities for Africans, Marandellas, 27 February, 1972.

unsuccessful attempts at reform, this is essentially the secondary school education which is with us today.

This too is the educational system which Africans insist that we give them. In the early days of European colonization in Africa, the missionaries were first on the scene. At that time, as Vilakazi tells us of the Zulu, the people admired the material culture of the evangelists — their clothes and even eventually their motor cars. And so, reasoning that to obtain these good things you had to become a Christian, the people became Christians. In a gradual way, as the Africans met more and more important secular administrators, this belief declined and was replaced by the conviction that it was Education which had the power. And thus to this day many Africans believe that Education, exactly as Europeans receive it and preferably by the same teachers, is the only key to success such as the white man enjoys; and they are prepared to make tremendous financial sacrifices to obtain it.

In practice, however, it appears that Europeans do not acquire their occupational expertise so much from their formal education as from the general cultural milieu in which they are reared. Not only are they exposed to western technology from the earliest possible moment, but they grow up in the atmosphere of a profit-maximizing, production-oriented, monetary culture. The very folklore of this culture includes business precepts as an integral part, as is shown in numerous aphorisms such as “the early bird catches the worm” and “look after the pennies . . .”. As the great German sociologist Max Weber has shown, our culture has also been heavily overlain by the Protestant Ethic, which demands industry and thrift in return for material success, which in turn is a sign of favour by the Almighty.

In general, then, we may contend that it is this knowledge and understanding of the Western capitalistic system, acquired from birth with discipline and training, which mainly equips young Europeans for jobs in business. These skills are surely acquired almost unconsciously from growing up in a European environment as much as from formal education at school.

The rural African of course does not know this. His own home environment, which (just as we do) he believes to be the only significant one, inculcates quite different values, some of which may well be common to peasant societies the world over. Indeed African rural society still seems to be largely permeated by at least the following major cultural values:

- | <i>African in contradistinction to</i> | <i>European cultural values</i> |
|--|---|
| (1) an agricultural time-sense oriented to the slow rhythm of the seasons; | industrial time-sense, target-oriented and with time as an accountable commodity; |
| (2) simple hand-technology, implying rough finish and lack of quality sense; | machine-technology, implying a “feel” for machinery, high-quality finish expectations, and care of the final product; |
| (3) communal attitudes to property, in which property is given or taken when available, and services are rendered without expectation of immediate return; | individualistic and exclusive rights over property and services, guarded by severe and enforceable legal sanctions; |
| (4) personalized relationships, primarily in the kinship rather than the economic field; | impersonal relations, largely in a sophisticated economic market system; |

- | | |
|---|---|
| (5) communal action, in which personal initiative is discouraged and abnormal; | mental flexibility and personal problem-solving are accentuated; |
| (6) loyalty and morality only within the social group: all outsiders may be exploited or disregarded; | impartial morality and honesty in all dealings, especially in professional matters; |
| (7) appeal to supernatural causation in all situations which are not under cultural control; | demand for scientific and/or empirical approach in all matters. |

It may be that the very real differences between these two cultures can largely be subsumed under two major premises:

- (a) the long-standing contrast in European and African cultures between the use of inanimate sources of power (e.g. steam and electricity) on the one hand and human and animal power on the other;
- (b) a proposition formulated long ago by the famous anthropologist, Malinowski, that in every culture there are areas of the known and unknown, the controllable and uncontrollable; and that the smaller the area of the known in a given culture, the greater the appeal to supernatural forces.

However that may be, the conclusion to be drawn from this cultural comparison is apparently that the rural African at any rate, far from learning items in his home culture which will be useful to him in the western industrial milieu, still absorbs values which *actively disqualify him from competition in it against Europeans of comparable formal education.*

And this leads to another curious paradox. The African requires first from formal education a commercial and industrial component to *counteract* the nature of his home culture. But the European most needs (and we hope that he gets) from formal education a humanistic, aesthetic and spiritual component to *balance* the technological training given at home and at school. As the African becomes more westernized and hence more technologically sophisticated, this paradox should gradually disappear. But the two primary needs are still to varying degrees different.

The final conclusion on African Educational Needs is therefore surely that *although the African insists on European formal education to the letter, and we give it to him, it is not what he primarily needs at this stage; except in a number of urbanised cases.* It should now be interesting to see how far this conclusion is borne out or rejected by a consideration of African education from the viewpoint of —

The Employer's Needs

Here it must be supposed that the most reliable and tangible indicator of the employer's needs is the African employment situation in practice. It could be a fair guess that if 2,500 African school-leavers came into the employment market now with 'O' levels and 4 years of secondary education, not 500 of them would find jobs needing the formal qualifications they have achieved. At higher levels, as we know at the University, the demand for A levels and degrees is very low indeed.

Why is this? Why are African opportunities in the money economy so restricted? Some part of the answer was put forward on the *European* culture side in the comparison which has just been made: the need for a time-sense in

the employee, for quality-awareness, a notion of the sanctity of property, mental flexibility, impersonal morality and the empirical approach. These are individual and cultural difficulties for the African, but there are other *social* factors deriving from the African's situation as seen by Rhodesian employers.

In the first place we have to remember that only recently in this country's development has the Rhodesian African been accepted for anything but menial and unskilled work. The growth of industry and commerce since the second world war, and particularly since U.D.I., has been a feature in this case. Perhaps the absence of a Kaffir War background and of a formal policy of *apartheid* has made the transition somewhat easier here than in South Africa.

And yet this transition to skilled work coexists with an awareness that the African may be capable of very much more skilled work than he is already doing: a suspicion which is borne out by the number of African builders, painters, carpenters and so forth working on their own account and contracting with European clients at less than the rate for the job. For these reasons the European artisan can easily fear that if Africans are admitted to all spheres of technical employment, then his own position will be undermined. In this connection, European workers have been able to negotiate from a strong position because of a scarcity of reliable skilled labour. They have succeeded in exerting pressure on employers not to employ Africans in many desirable positions where they would constitute a threat. In this way the artisan has maintained his occupational security, but perhaps at the expense of rising political tension in the country as a whole.

The employer who decides to take the cultural risk and employ educated or trained Africans at senior and responsible levels has further problems. One is the official regulation regarding separate lavatories, which have to be put up often at considerable expense for only a few individuals. Again there is a widespread prejudice among the Rhodesian white public against dealing with Africans in anything but a menial situation. Furthermore, employers are reluctant to promote an African to any position in which he might give orders to a European, however indirectly. And finally, owing to present limits of advancement in skill and responsibility open to Africans, the employer hesitates to engage an African with any higher qualification than the Rhodesian Junior Certificate, knowing that he will only be frustrated. In spite of all this, it is not true to say that no skilled work is available for Africans in Rhodesia. The Railways, the Post Office, the Banks, Rhodesian Airways and other agencies all employ limited numbers of skilled Africans, whom they find more or less satisfactory.

There is, however, a further difficulty in connection particularly with the employment of African graduates, which can be pinpointed by specific reference to the profession of Law. Mr. Danckwerts in his manpower investigation at the University has found that there are sufficient firms of attorneys who are prepared to find openings for African articled clerks at least to the limited extent that African law graduates are being produced at present. It must therefore be recognized that although some racial prejudice may exist, it is not so widespread as to account for the lack of success of past African law graduates from the University of Rhodesia.

The position is that except for one African currently still in articles, the past record shows that eight Africans who have been articled in Rhodesia since 1963 have failed to meet the requirements of the profession; and one of these *after* qualifying as an attorney. The latter set up his own practice, but abandoned it after two years in circumstances which need not be gone into here. This record

of drop-outs is hardly one which is likely to inspire confidence or to encourage attorneys to spend time trying to instruct African articulated clerks. The articulated clerk is in any case not productive for a year or two during his training, and the attorney's only hope of recompense from the clerk is in later years. A clerk who drops out after two years is a bad investment, whether he be African or European. These conclusions emerge not only from Mr. Danckwerts' work but from a letter to the *Rhodesia Herald* of Friday June 2, 1972 from the Secretary of the Law Society of Rhodesia, couched in almost the same language.

It is only reasonable to point out in the opposite direction that advocates and attorneys in their work together from a notably "closed shop" in which personal friendships and compatibilities between members of the two bars cannot be excluded in the access to and allocation of work. At least one African advocate in a counter-article in the *Rhodesia Herald* has stated that it is very difficult to break into this situation. The fact remains that if firms of attorneys are willing to brave the risks of taking African law graduates into articles, it seems *prima facie* unlikely that having allowed them to qualify, they would refuse them access to legal work or to their connections with advocates, at least for African clients.

The evidence thus seems to indicate that racial prejudice is only one factor in the situation, and that the deep problem must lie with some as yet undefined characteristic of the African graduates themselves. In other words, although the degree plainly equips European graduates for work in the profession, the Africans must lack some quality which prevents them from obtaining a similar benefit from a law degree. This quality-lack together with racial prejudice might then form two of the necessary and sufficient conditions to African rejection.

Such a conclusion prompts Mr. Danckwerts to go further and wonder uneasily whether the allegations by some employers that many University of Rhodesia degrees do not raise the capacity of African graduates sufficiently, may not now be found to have some substance. He excludes specifically vocational training, such as is found in medicine and teaching (although these cases are all too easily overlooked) and is concerned with a wide variety of non-specific graduate employment, mainly in the business sector. Although the work requirements here are often as demanding as those in the legal profession, they are not explicit and therefore it is more difficult to assess African capabilities in business situations. In practice it is usually left to a responsible individual in the company to assess whether the employee's work is satisfactory or not. It is therefore easier to blame prejudice rather than a genuine assessment of inadequate ability when African graduates are passed over for senior jobs. Perhaps in this case too, however, we may have to accept the good faith of those employers who have accepted African graduates in the past and have subsequently rejected them.

The final conclusion of Mr. Danckwerts is that no satisfactory explanation of these alleged disabilities of African graduates is at present available, and that we should do research on the problem at the University as a matter of urgency. Here I am going to be somewhat less modest and hypothesize that the problem which he has uncovered is a problem of social change which perhaps occurs in emerging peasantries the world over. To explain it, we may have to add two further contrasts of social values to the *seven* which have already been noted as distinguishing African from European culture:

- (8) *collective accountability*, or the referring back of all reports or *individual accountability*, or the acceptance in Law of personal res-

- accountability on any social issue to a group of kinsmen and their senior spokesman;
- (9) *anticipatory exploitation* or over-individualization; or the expectation that in a new individual social context, one may legitimately take for oneself all that previously had to be shared in a communal context.
- possibility for one's actions;
- responsible compromise*, or the realization with experience that a social contract prevails in which all may have some if none takes all.

Personal experience in a limited situation at the University, through working with students managing the quite substantial budget of our Students Union, has shown me that accountability and responsible compromise can both be taught on the job while the students learn management at board meetings. There seems no obvious reason why these skills should not be taken into similar or even dummy situations during higher education at large.

When all this is said, however, the major difficulty is the economic one which overshadows the individual, cultural and social factors taken together. This is that even if all limitations to the employment of educated or trained Africans were removed tomorrow, only a small proportion of African labour could be absorbed into the limited Rhodesian economy as it is or foreseeably can be. Figures available suggest that as matters stand at present employment opportunities for Africans will increase by about 270,000 between July 1969 and 1979, while an estimated 400,000 African males will enter the market during that time.

If this is a fair approximation, even roughly, then there is little point in pouring large sums of money into African formal education and training for the white economy as such. The analysis from the viewpoint of the Employer's Needs finds us in a similar position, for different reasons, to that reached from the standpoint of African Needs. There seems only a limited future for the African, beyond what he is already gaining, in the *white* sector.

In such a case there may be only one alternative. If the aim is to further the employment of Africans at post-primary level — and the long-term peace of the country at least demands this — then it is to the African and not the white sector that we must turn. Without necessarily committing us to separate development, the primary opportunities for large-scale African employment must lie in the underdeveloped parts of Rhodesia: in the tribal trust lands.

Now here we must admit that the Government has been working at this problem for some time, both in the formal educational and vocational spheres. In formal education the new junior secondary schools come to mind. These have been in existence for about four years now and the Government's intention is that 37½ per cent of primary school leavers shall go to them. They attempt to meet African needs, as seen in the present analysis, by providing a syllabus intended for "boys and girls who . . . will be employed by industry, commerce and agriculture . . . One third of the curriculum is devoted to practical subjects."

In spite of these good intentions, presumably to provide the African with a practical content which he does not get at home, school leavers from junior secondary schools do not appear to be markedly more successful in finding employment than African school leavers at large. There seem to be several reasons for this. One is that levels of instruction possible in these schools are

so elementary that they only plug a skill deficiency and cannot be recognised as a vocational training. A second reason is a frequent administrative one, that a facility is provided without any planning for its eventual use. Industry and Commerce have not, so far as I know, agreed to co-operate in using these junior school leavers; nor, on my analysis, would they at present be able to do so to any great extent. Again, it may be that an aura of "second-class citizenship" is making these schools unpopular.

Vocational training is seen at its best in the five agricultural training institutions which are to be found in Rhodesia (Chibero, Mlezu, Esigodini, Gloag which is Presbyterian, and Kukwanisa operated by the Cortauld Trust). As far as we can tell, all of their graduates are finding employment, largely with farmers, and there is considerable optimism about their future expansion.

A promising area for the employment of agricultural graduates is in the government rural council and community development scheme in the tribal trust lands. There are already 150 African councils throughout the country, with many more to come, and it seems probable that over the next five years they will require hundreds of agricultural assistants and demonstrators, not to mention council secretaries.

The controversial matter of reintroducing African trade schools must perhaps be left until a clear market for their trainees has been created. We have seen in the course of this analysis that formal education does not entirely meet African needs to participate in the money economy; that even if it did, powerful social and economic forces operate in the European sector to prevent Africans from finding full employment; and hence that even well-meaning attempts to solve the problem by giving Africans technical training are largely doomed to failure at this stage. Some limited success using "fragmentation" of skills may be possible in the context of an artisan shortage, but this is a controversial area for negotiation.

I have suggested that what is wanted in all areas is a market and a milieu in which the trained African can operate, and that this can only be found by developing the tribal trust lands themselves. This means that for every dollar put into African technical education at junior secondary or university level, many more dollars must go into developing the rural community where the African is going to work. And this implies setting up not only industrial and commercial enterprises in the rural areas, but urban amenities good enough to dissuade the rural worker from going into city life.

Education

Finally, we have to consider what to do about African education in a multi-racial context, and here the views of educationists must be sought. The suggestion here has been that education for Africans at present is not adequate either for the humanistic or the technological needs of the African people. It would be good if we might find a solution which did not pre-empt any particular political eventuality in the future — a fully multiracial community on the one hand or separate development in the tribal trust lands on the other.

My personal view is that nothing less than the equivalent of a university-type course-unit system in schools, whether integrated or mixed, will meet the situation. There is now a general familiarity with the American-type course-unit system in which subjects are divided up into courses of terminal or yearly duration, and each is given a numerical weight in terms of difficulty and length. Such courses are then accumulated by a student into a convenient profile of subjects, and he qualifies when he has reached a certain minimal aggregate in total points.

If this system were translated into our schools, one would visualise a set of course units ranging from humanistic studies such as Southern African literature and principles of community development on the one hand to "hard" courses in soil physics and organic chemistry on the other. The courses would be graded in difficulty from, say, I to about XX throughout the school sequence. Certain courses in English and Mathematics, perhaps up to medium difficulty X, would be compulsory for all pupils, but others would be suited to the needs and capabilities of the individual student. This would have a number of important implications. It would mean that Africans could be introduced to a graded combination of courses designed to overcome their technological and cultural deficiencies with respect to western civilization. It would mean that formal set classes as such would disappear — a teacher with a given group would have boys and girls of all ages studying, say, Maths VII, some having done more than one of these units in one year, others spending two years over one unit. All would be more or less at the same level in this Maths VII group, although any stragglers could always be returned to Maths VI for reinforcement. Such an action would not be discouraging to these children if in other groups they were doing, say, English XIII. This would mean in turn that streaming would not be necessary, and that different schools for the different races would not be so mandatory as at present.

The disappearance of the formal class would be overcome by having a peer group class session of those of equal ages at least once a day, in which human relations skills and group management-type projects would be practised. This would give pupils a sense of home-group identity and at the same time develop skills of integrity of management, the lack of which we noted earlier.

All this is only the shortest and most incomplete diagnosis of the African employment issue and the briefest of blueprints for its remedy. In the end, I suggest, nothing less than a national conference of experts in all the fields concerned, not least the employers, will be sufficient to meet this problem.



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