

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, P. S. Harris,
A. F. Hunt and M. L. Rule.

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REVIEW

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COLONIAL LABOUR POLICY AND RHODESIA

JOHN M. MACKENZIE

The labour policies which were applied in Rhodesia in the early years of colonial rule had their origins in nineteenth century colonial labour policy as formulated after the abolition of slavery. This article sets out to examine the origins of policies which were framed both in the wider colonial context and in South Africa, particularly Natal, and the application of them to Rhodesia. To understand early Rhodesian ideas upon labour, it is necessary to understand the origins of the concept of labour itself, its applications in the colonial environment, theories of tropical abundance and tropical indolence, notions of inefficient indigenous labour and of target working, the relationship among land, tax, and labour, and the development of the indentured labour policy. It will be argued that after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, the principal problem in the colonial setting was that the position of labour vis-à-vis capital was a powerful one. The prime object of colonial labour policies was therefore to shift the balance of power in colonial economies in the direction of capital.

I

The emergence of the concept of labour as a moral imperative was closely bound up with the notion of tropical abundance. When labour was viewed as an unpleasant necessity, tropical abundance, whether myth or reality, was seen as a great good. The works on exploration of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the tropical Eldorado as much in terms of agricultural luxuriance as in terms of mineral wealth. In the eighteenth century, however, labour emerged as a moral necessity, the sine qua non of civilisation, even at times equated with civilisation itself. Whether this was a result of enclosure and embryonic industrialism in Britain, a result of the thinking of the Scottish philosophers and the Evangelicals, the extension of the Calvinist ethic, or the shift from commercial to industrial capitalism need not concern us here. The great significance of labour in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century thought receives ample testimony in the attempts to use labour as a currency in the West Africa utopias of Granville Sharp and others,¹ and in the labour theory of value of the classical economists. In the face of this apotheosis of labour tropical abundance came to be seen as a great evil, a barrier to civilisation, a temptation to indolence and "animal existence".

The notion of tropical indolence was a highly resistant one: it persisted in writings from the late eighteenth century to well into the twentieth century. Philip Curtin in his *Image of Africa* has charted the spread of the idea in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At a later date, it can be found in the works of men as different as Herman Merivale and Henry Taylor, Samuel Baker and J. A. Hobson, the 3rd Earl Grey and Cecil Rhodes, Alfred Milner and Harry Johnston, Sidney Olivier and Frederick Lugard.² In the writings of this merely representative sample, tropical indolence came to be linked with stimulation to labour, and therefore to civilisation, racial displacement, the loss of land rights, and the "child view". All of these implied that little value could be found in indigenous tropical economies, despite all appearances to the contrary in West Africa.

Earl Grey, in a celebrated despatch to Governor Torrington of Ceylon,

wrote that in European countries the labouring classes had sufficient "motive to exertion" through the discomforts of their situation, and that therefore governments ought to avoid enhancing the cost of subsistence by taxing them, but that in tropical countries a comfortable existence could easily be achieved, and in consequence races inhabiting the tropics tended to "sink into an easy and listless mode of life, quite incompatible with any high degree of civilisation".³ Herman Merivale, Grey's permanent under-secretary at the Colonial Office, wrote in his Oxford Lectures *On Colonisation and Colonies* of "amalgamation", which he described as the "only possible euthanasia of savage communities".⁴ By amalgamation he meant social, economic, cultural, and even genetic union, for he asserted the superior energy of half-castes.⁵ The implication was of course that the societies and economies of such "savage communities" were valueless. In a similar but even more extraordinary thesis, which may be called the theory of miraculous eugenics, Sir Harry Johnston asserted that "rills of Caucasian blood" would circulate through black Africa, producing a compromise, "a dark-skinned race with a white man's features and a white man's brain".⁶ Eccentric as these ideas were—and Merivale himself thought they would be regarded as "wild and chimerical"⁷—they reflect an idea prevalent throughout the nineteenth century, that the cultures of "savage races" must inevitably collapse in the face of white civilisation and the craving for labour which sustained it. The alleged experience of North America and Australasia was extrapolated to Africa.

But even if black cultures were not to collapse, tropical indolence entailed loss of rights. Rhodes spoke of an "inexorable law" by which Africans would "lose their country" if they were not made worthy of it by being dissuaded from sitting in idleness and by being trained in the "arts of civilisation".⁸ Even J. A. Hobson, liberal journalist and the true originator of the theory of capitalist imperialism wrote "The resources of the tropics will not be developed voluntarily by the natives themselves".⁹ For him white men would by organising and superintending the labour of Africans educate them "in the arts of industry and stimulate in them a desire for material and moral progress, implanting new 'wants' which form in every society the roots of civilisation". The view of the "official mind" closely linked tropical indolence with the "child view". Milner wrote of the necessity for native commissioners to place positive moral pressure on Africans to work and stated as his justification that "the black man is naturally inclined, much more than the white, to do nothing at all".¹⁰ To Sidney Olivier, a Fabian colonial governor and Secretary of State for India in the first Labour government of 1924, the African had "no mechanical habit of industry . . . no idea of any obligation to be industrious for industry's sake, no conception of any essential dignity of labour itself, no delight in gratuitous toil",¹¹ while for Lord Lugard the African held "the position of a late born child in the family of nations, and must as yet be schooled in the discipline of the nursery".¹² The Church gave its sanction to this view. For the Bishop of Mashonaland in 1900 polygamy was the great evil, holding men from work since they could exist on the labours of their wives. Doing "our duty to the native races of the countries Providence has given us" involved teaching them the necessity of working "with body or brains".¹³ It is in this context that the survival of forced labour in British colonies up to the Second World War must be understood.¹⁴

II

Two events were crucial in the development of colonial labour theory and policies in the nineteenth century. One was the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833, or perhaps more significantly, the premature ending of the "apprenticeship system" in 1838. The other was the rapid dismantling of tariffs and the advent of Free Trade after 1846. The classic plantation 'hinterland of exploitation' had been a closed system, dependent on imports of slave labour, producing entirely for export, and creating a rigid social hierarchy. The abolition of slavery and the demolition of the mercantile structure destroyed that closed system.¹⁵ The fortunes of the West Indian islands and to a lesser extent of Mauritius were the principal headache of the metropole in the post mercantile age. The metropole, influenced now by industrial rather than mercantile capital, had shifted the terms of trade in the direction of itself, and it had to offer a quid pro quo to the plantocracies. This quid pro quo was the provision of labour, and the facilitating of the movement of labour from areas of labour abundance to areas of labour shortage became the standard response of the metropole to the cries for help from the periphery. With the ending of protection, West Indian and Indian Ocean sugar was in direct competition with the slave-grown sugar of Brazil and Cuba. It was essential for survival to make free labour as cheap as, if not cheaper than, slave labour. Arguments about the continuation or destruction of protection were invariably reduced to arguments about the labour supply, and the necessity for colonial regulation of that supply in the post-slavery period. Lord John Russell specifically said that the West Indies should be bolstered with labour rather than with protection.¹⁶

The removal of coercion from the labour supply introduced a need for an entirely new relationship with labour on the part of the plantocracies. Moreover, the connection between labour supply and the land was soon apparent. In those colonies where there was an abundance of spare land, the ex-slaves departed in search of plots for themselves. In Jamaica, in British Guiana, and in Trinidad, capitalist plantations constituted a very small part of the total area. In these colonies, almost all labour disappeared. Despite the cries of black sloth and relapse into barbarism of the planters and colonial officials alike, visitors to the old slave colonies found a considerable improvement in conditions outside the plantation sector. One Sewell, who visited Trinidad in 1846, wrote of the improvement of the condition of those who had left the estates, many of whom now owned the plots of from one to ten acres, and had become traders, whether owning a store or selling a few mangoes in the street.¹⁷ In Mauritius, labourers could now earn more in a few days' loading than they could earn in a month on a plantation. Given the insufficiency of labour, wages began to rise. Emancipation, to a far greater degree than expected, had suddenly reversed the balance of power between capital and labour. But observers were not slow to note that in St. Kitts in the Leeward Islands or in Barbados, where there was no spare land, the planters had an abundance of labour. Adam Smith's warning in *The Wealth of Nations* that where land is cheap, labour is dear was being amply borne out.

If this situation were to be reversed, the labour supply would have to be enormously increased. And such increase required social engineering on a grand scale. Hence in order to compete with other sugar producers, laissez

faire in trade had to be matched by strict social regulation. To an emancipator and free trader like Earl Grey, stimulants, "motives to exertion" had to be created to force out labour. The colonial reformers, systematic colonisers, had advocated emigration financed by land sales. If more Crown land could be alienated and more unused plantation land taken up (for plantation systems tend to be wasteful of land), there would be less for squatting and subsistence. There was indeed a land rush in British Guiana after the end of apprenticeship, but by and large the policy of land alienation was not successful, and was in any case bedevilled by absenteeism. The policy of making squatting illegal on Crown land was equally unsuccessful because it was so seldom enforced. It was only later, in the southern African colonies, that land hunger was used as an effective producer of labour.

Grey's principal solution involved the positive stimulant of direct taxation.¹⁸ Before emancipation, when he had been parliamentary under-secretary at the Colonial Office to Lord Goderich, he had suggested a direct tax as the solution to the emancipation problem. His suggestion had been rejected, but once he became Colonial Secretary in 1846 he set about the rapid dissemination of his tax idea, closely allied with forced labour as a labour tax for public works throughout the Empire. By the Ceylon Road Ordinance of 1847 a labour tax was to be exacted to build roads to connect the planters of the high lands of the island with the coast to facilitate and therefore reduce the cost of export. This forced labour could be commuted for a cash payment. The tax in Mauritius took the form of a levy on Indian immigrants not under contract in order to keep them in plantation employment. In Natal the tax on Africans was to be specifically allied with a locations policy (the Natal case will be examined in greater detail below). In the Gold Coast, the tax of 1852 was designed to be an alternative to Governor Winniett's call for forced labour for cotton planting. Both this tax and one levied in Sierra Leone in the same year were to prove failures. In the West Indies direct tax took a very different form; there the planters were taxed to pay for the immigration of vast numbers of indentured labourers.

This migration constituted the third, and without question the most effective, means of redressing the balance between capital and labour. The indentured labour principle developed from the practice of indenturing European servants for work in the American and West Indian colonies in the seventeenth century. After the intervening slave period, the system was resurrected in the nineteenth century for Scots, Irish and Madeira peasantry, but the high mortality of these indentured migrants forced the plantocracies to look elsewhere, to Africans, to Chinese, and above all to Indians, amongst whom the mortality was to be no less, but more acceptable. The West African trade, which together with the European was instituted in 1840, seemed to resemble too closely the slave trade which it was designed to replace, particularly as agents upon the coast asked no questions about where their indentured labourers were coming from. Moreover, it ran counter to the ideas of those who wished to destroy human trade, slave or indentured, through making labour profitable within Africa itself. Nonetheless, McGregor Laird, one of many shipping magnates to develop an important maritime interest in the indentured labour traffic, suggested a free, imperial government financed, shipping service across the Atlantic to transport black labourers back and forth.¹⁹ But African trans-Atlantic indentured labour was a failure.

The Chinese system on the other hand was a modified success, and it

reflected very well the manner in which indentured labour appeared as a substitute for slavery. It began — like slavery — surreptitiously, from several ports, of which Amoy was the most important. The first full-scale operations were undertaken by the French for Bourbon in 1845 and by the Spanish for Cuba in 1847. Like slavery, it swiftly set up a large network of vested interests: British, American, French, Spanish, and Dutch shipping interests, agents in the foreign communities of Canton, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Macao, and Chinese businessmen in Singapore, Penang, and San Francisco. It created abuses — like kidnapping — which forced the Chinese authorities to recognise its existence and attempt to regulate it from the 1850s (it had hitherto been illegal). The credit-ticket system had already produced the widespread serfdom of debt-peonage, even more intolerable than the system that had prevailed in South America. Indentured labour, moreover, helped to create the Chinese xenophobia, fanned by the communities of foreigners in Shanghai, Canton, and other treaty ports, that became such an important feature of twentieth century Chinese history. It created a reciprocal xenophobia firstly in Australia and later in British Columbia and California, that produced first of all control of immigration and then exclusion. Chinese were scattered by it throughout the Pacific area, and into such far-flung places as the silver mines of Peru and the plantations of Cuba and British Guiana.²⁰ The most celebrated case of Chinese indentured labour, that upon the Rand, will be examined below.

It was in the securing of Indian indentured labour that capital achieved its greatest success. The Indian migration began before the abolition of slavery with the provision of indentured labourers to Bourbon in 1829, New South Wales in 1837, and subsequently British Guiana before the trade was stopped in 1839. It was stopped because of the combined activities of the Anti-Slavery Society, primarily concerned about the conditions of the traffic and about the rights of blacks in the colonies, of Lord Brougham and other peers in the Lords, and of the cries of a new slavery in *The Times*. At the moment when the “apprentices” were being freed, it seemed much too close to the slavery it was designed to replace. But the cries of distress of the colonists ensured its resumption under tighter Indian regulations in 1842. The equalisation of the sugar duties, and the subsequent recession in the sugar colonies, made its extension the more necessary. After a faltering start, migration increased in the late 1840s until by the early 50s it had become an accepted and permanent traffic, which continued until 1917. Mauritius, Jamaica, British Guiana, Trinidad, St. Lucia, Grenada, Reunion, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, Danish St. Croix, Dutch Surinam, Natal, and later Kenya and Uganda all received Indian indentured labourers. Between 1842 and 1870, 533 595 Indian indentured emigrants left India, of whom Mauritius took two-thirds, and 21% returned.²¹

There can be no doubt that the scope of indentured labour migration saved the plantocracies of the sugar islands. Above all contracted immigrants at fixed pay kept wages down. In both British Guiana and Trinidad, the stoppage pushed wages up in the early 1840s. In Trinidad, employers had to provide houses and plots to cultivate rent-free in order to attract labour.²² In 1843, the new arrivals from India after the renewal of migration served to reduce wages by two-thirds in Mauritius.²³ In 1848, the British Guianan planters’ desire to reduce wages was promptly effected by the arrival of 5 000 immigrants.²⁴ In 1849, when there were very few arrivals, wages again went up.

There can, therefore, be little doubt about the effect of indentured migration upon wages. Moreover, indentured labour was attractive because it could be so much more easily controlled than labour which had its roots, and probably some land, within the colonial economies. Another characteristic of the plantocracy was that it used labour as a scapegoat for all its ills. But in fact their scale of operations, outdated methods, absenteeism, extensive trading on credit coupled with over-speculation, and changes in continental tariffs all had an effect upon their competitive position. Labour as an external threat to survival was to remain a constant cry of colonial capitalists.

III

Southern African history has invariably revealed colonial characteristics in their extreme form, and this is certainly true of the labour issue. The first great labour supply crisis occurred in Natal, and it comes as no surprise to discover that it again involved sugar, a notoriously labour intensive staple. It is ironical that sugar was developed from 1851, while it was in the immediately preceding years that the African settlement was taking place. Earl Grey had seen the newly acquired Natal as the perfect forcing house for his land and tax ideas. He had hoped that in Natal his aims of social and economic amalgamation would be achieved by establishing a large number of small locations interspersed with white settlement in order to introduce Africans at once to European employment. Theophilus Shepstone, diplomatic agent and later secretary for native affairs, however, thought differently. The 1846 Natal land commission was dominated by Shepstone and the missionaries Adams and Lindley. Unlike the Coryndon Commission in Rhodesia, the chief government surveyor, whose prime interest was obtaining the best land for settlers, was kept firmly in check.²⁵ The commission set out to establish ten large locations, each of which would have a model mechanical school to foster improvements in agriculture, cattle-breeding, and "native industries". There can be no doubt that Shepstone was thinking in terms of self-sufficient economic units, for he was later experimenting with cash crops, including cotton. Moreover, this fitted with his desire to maintain traditional political institutions and all traditional law which did not conflict with natural law. Daniel Lindley, one of Shepstone's principal collaborators, attacked the settlers' desire to give the African population as little land as possible so that they would be forced to work. The natives are to be made servants and beggars, he said, because the government wishes to attract capitalists and make Natal a flourishing colony.²⁶

The commission's grand design was only imperfectly achieved, however. They aroused the ire of the settlers, and in particular of the Boers still in the colony. In 1847, Sir Harry Smith, eager as always to conciliate the Boers and persuade those who had departed across the Drakensberg to return, dismissed the commissioners. A new land commission cut down the newly created locations on the grounds that they encouraged indolence. They declined to establish any more, and as a result none were created south of the Umkomazi River. In 1849 there were seven locations, and Shepstone set about collecting the first tax of seven shillings per hut, a tax which was expected to raise no less than £10 000 for the as yet impecunious colony. But very little of this tax was devoted to the improvements Shepstone had envisaged. His ideas for agricultural and industrial improvement entirely came to nought. White settlement was increasing at precisely this period, and the

colonial government wished to encourage it. Lt. Governor Pine—appointed in 1849—was particularly hostile to both the locations and the mission stations.

If the settlers succeeded in cutting down the reserves and thwarting their development, they did not succeed in forcing out a sufficient labour supply. In addition to the reserves, Natal was a prey to the speculative landowner who, as elsewhere in Southern Africa, found “kaffir-farming” both more convenient and more lucrative than beneficial occupation of the land. As early as 1853 the Natal Native Affairs Commission asserted that the Africans of Natal were “rapidly becoming rich and independent”.²⁷ The cries of the sugar planters of the coast were directed both against the reserves and the kaffir farmers of the interior. At a time when colonial economies searched for a lucrative staple, they were a powerful group. Hence, when endogenous mechanisms for turning out labour failed, they turned to the exogenous mechanism which had proved so helpful elsewhere, immigrant Indian indentured labour.²⁸ From the end of 1860, Indians began to be transported to Natal in considerable numbers, and between 1860 and 1866, 6 487 Indians arrived. Although the planters insisted that Indians were more expensive than African labour, still it is clear that without the Indians conditions and wages could have favoured scarce African labour. Moreover, the Indian migration was financed partly from a tax on beads and blankets, largely of African consumption, a tax expected to yield more than £4 000 per year.²⁹ The importation of the Indian labourers for the plantations was heavily subsidised by the colonial government to the tune of at least two-fifths of the total expenses. And it should be remembered that this was a colonial government itself already heavily dependent upon the direct African tax. In these ways Africans subsidised the importation of their own competitors.

IV

By the end of the century, labour policies formulated for plantation economies were transferred to mining economies, where conditions were in many respects the same. In the colonial mining economy, enterprise, capital, and labour have again to be brought together into a hinterland of exploitation, again production is for export in a Free Trade situation, again a rigid social hierarchy is produced which dictates conditions and wages, and marginal profitability is used to enhance rather than mitigate the inequalities in that hierarchy. Again a constant supply of abundant cheap labour is required and cheapness rather than efficiency could ensure the perpetuation of the system. Mine owners, like their plantocracy predecessors, discovered that because their system could no longer be a closed one, local labour valued independence, had alternative routes to the satisfaction of cash wants, and could not be controlled as rigidly as imported labour could be. However, at Kimberley and upon the Rand, the closed compound system, impossible in the plantation setting, was created, partly for security, partly in order to exercise fuller control over labour, partly to enable the mining companies to win back labourers' earnings through the truck system of compound stores. The closed compound system was, however, inappropriate to Rhodesian conditions, both because of the smaller scale of activity, and also because of the violent opposition of the commercial sector, anxious to avoid losing custom to the mines. This fact helps to explain why Rhodesia never received non-African indentured labour while the Rand did. It means that

Rhodesian conditions were more akin to plantation.

The main reason for the closed compound system was that external labourers could be repatriated at the end of their contracts. Under the plantation schemes this had been difficult if not impossible. Now, where labour came from adjacent African territories, the administrations of those territories regarded their migrant labourers as an asset which might not be diminished, an asset of considerable financial significance to their economies whose repeated re-export produced contracting fees, deferred pay and tax. Moreover, any fresh tide of Asiatic immigration had to ebb as well as flow both for social reasons and above all to avoid competition with other sectors like trade and white labour. The Chinese immigration scheme on the Rand was the classic case of the latter type of migration.³⁰ At a crucial period after the end of the Boer War when African peasants in South Africa renewed their efforts to enter the cash sector via cash cropping³¹ and consequently had the terms of labour on their side, the contracted Chinese labourers undercut African wages, providing a breathing space during which the frustration of the peasantry could be begun, and additionally ensured that the line in white job reservation was drawn unnaturally low.

The greatest similarity between the plantations of the West Indies, the Indian Ocean, Natal and the mining concerns of Rhodesia was that in order to remain competitive and in the absence of added efficiencies elsewhere, labour costs had to be reduced to a minimum. In addition, both sought labour after an initial period of coercion. In Rhodesia, this period was short, politically disastrous, but briefly effective. With the removal of coercion mine owners were forced to attempt to create an abundant supply of labour through external immigration. Although considerable dispossession of African land rights had already taken place, and the Ndebele cattle economy had been totally disrupted, although cash demands were repeatedly increased, such endogenous mechanisms proved to be slow to work, and the mines turned in consequence to the exogenous mechanisms.

There were three different forms that labour from the outside could take. The Rhodesian administration encouraged peoples from Mozambique, the Cape, the Transvaal, and Bechuanaland to immigrate permanently to form a quarry for a potential labour supply. They attempted to bring in labour from further afield, from Ethiopia, Somaliland, and South Arabia, from India and from China. And they encouraged a large body of migrant labour from the surrounding territories, mostly from the Company's own domain in the North, but also from Nyasaland and Mozambique.³²

The Mfengo immigration of 1898 was the most celebrated of the first type. The intentions of the scheme were specifically the provision of labour and aid in defence against the Ndebele. In the verbal agreement between Rhodes and the Mfengo, Rhodes is reported to have said:

We do not love one another so much as to give land without any return . . . having come to your reserves and your titles I ask you to give at least three months' work a year.³³

No tax would be levied on those able to produce work receipts. Again in 1898, Mpefu and 3 000 followers were encouraged to cross the border from the Transvaal to settle in the Belingwe District, and precautions were taken to ensure that the Boer police did not follow them.³⁴ There was a secretive scheme to entice Shangaans of the Gaza state to enter the Melsetter district.³⁵

A location was allocated in the south to Raditcladi, the brother of Khama.³⁶ And in February 1901 Temba chiefs from the Cape Colony visited Rhodesia with a view to settling, looked over available land and returned to bring up their followers "as soon as military exigencies permit".³⁷ Although most of these schemes proved either abortive or short-lived, the "beggar-my-neighbour" policy continued. In 1917, several thousand refugees from the "pacification" of Makombe's rising were encouraged to settle and were provided with famine relief specifically on the understanding that their menfolk would go out to work.³⁸ These movements perfectly reveal the land-labour syndrome. The Resident Commissioner, Sir Marshall Clarke, disapproved of the earlier immigration schemes on the grounds of infringement of the rights of the indigenous inhabitants of Rhodesia. The Colonial Office was sceptical of the Company's ability or desire to provide these peoples with sufficient land, and so Chamberlain informed Milner that all such immigrants should be made aware of the land and labour situation.³⁹ Colonial Office suspicions were again aroused by the veiled threats of the chief native commissioners of Matabeleland and Mashonaland in the indabas which they held in 1899, in which they announced that if local peoples would not go out to work, then other peoples would be brought in and would take over their land.⁴⁰ This presumably was the operation of Rhodes's "inexorable law".

The second type of immigrant labour was of course indentured labour, and here the Company was prepared to go to bizarre lengths in its attempt to ape the efforts of the sugar planters. The projects to extract labour from the Gulf of Aden area exhibited all the worst aspects of the indentured labour system. In Ethiopia arrangements were set in train for recruiting labour without King Menelik's approval; in Somaliland, labourers were kidnapped, whipped from under the French imperial noses at Djibouti; in South Arabia, Sultans were tipped, labour agents circulated and exaggerated stories told; an island in Aden harbour with the unfortunate name of Slave Island was taken over as a depot; the element of compulsion in recruiting is amply revealed in the case of one party of 338 secured at Lahej: 150 "deserted" on the way to the medical centre at Sheikh Othman, 60 refused to submit to the medical examination, 32 were rejected as unfit, leaving 96, of whom one was reclaimed by his mother!⁴¹

Yet despite the fiasco of Arab labour — those who survived the obstacle course and actually arrived in Rhodesia refused to go underground and were sent home — other schemes for indentured labour were got up. From late 1899 onwards a great controversy developed about the use of Indian or Chinese labour.⁴² Examples of the successful migration and employment of both were adduced; the great Indian famine of 1897 was raising emigration from the sub-continent, particularly from Bihar, to a new peak; shipping interests, in the shape of Sir G. S. Mackenzie and the British India Steam Navigation Company, were as always closely involved; draft legislation was even prepared to regulate the influx. But these ideas were scotched for a variety of reasons. In the first place, Curzon expressed nothing but viceregal contempt for the Company administration. Secondly, these policies were entirely the policies of the mining sector, already arousing the considerable opposition of the farming and commercial sectors who saw in Asiatic immigrants only the Yellow Peril and, more importantly, a possible loss of trade. Moreover, few outside the mining community were convinced that the restrictive regulations holding Asians to mining activity only and ensuring

their repatriation at the termination of their contracts could be enforced.⁴³ A spectre of hordes of Asian traders and market gardeners arose before their eyes. So far as these restrictions were concerned, the Chinese were preferred, since it was easier to restrict them than British subjects from India. Moreover, the Colonial Office refused to countenance separate immigration for Southern Rhodesia, but insisted that the decision could only be taken for the whole of southern Africa, despite Rhodesia protestations that she was geographically isolated and had her own port of entry in Beira.

The Colonial Office was, however, prepared to be far less obstructive with regard to the third type of immigrant labour, labour from Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, and Mozambique. Two of Chamberlain's doctrines had become dogmas enshrined in the Colonial Office. One was that Rhodesia was economically indivisible from the rest of South Africa; the other was that the Company must be given a free hand in developing its estates to the north, even if that development involved only the use of the territories as labour quarries. It was through this supply that Rhodesian capital was able to secure the control it required over wages and conditions. Moreover, it was an effect which operated sector by sector. At first it was the mines, through their treatment, high death rates, and defaulting on wages, that were unpopular. Later, with the rapid development of capitalist agriculture from 1908, the mines were to become the lesser evil, with better conditions, higher wages, and a more attractive social life, than the agricultural sector. Once the mines were able to satisfy their requirements from "voluntary" migration, it was the agricultural sector, in effect a new plantocracy, which required and received an infusion of cheap immigrant labour.

Although, as we have seen, the mines had toyed with the idea of overseas indentured migration, they recognised from the beginning that their principal source of supply would be from adjacent African territories. At first they attempted to use a combination of individual recruiters and Company officials — like Robert Coryndon the administrator of North Western Rhodesia⁴⁴—as their labour agents, but from 1899 a series of labour bureaux, reconstructed in 1900, 1903, 1906, and 1912, abandoned in 1933 because of the Depression, and each subsidised in one way or another by the administration, set about the mobilisation of labour. The purposes of the bureaux, to hold down wages by boosting supply, and to provide employers with greater control over their labourers, were never in doubt. In 1900, one official, Alfred Drew, arguing for native commissioner involvement in recruitment, wrote "The Labour Bureau might still preserve its combination for keeping wages down and so forth".⁴⁵ Again in 1900 the Chief Native Commissioner, Mashonaland, H. M. Taberer, referring to the desertions of some 100 Ngonis from the Bonsor Mine, wrote:

The great object in importing these boys is to keep the rate of wages down, and while I consider that this object should always be kept in view, it appears that the authorities at the Bonsor Mine went a little too far in their endeavours to secure a cheap labour . . .⁴⁶

That the bureaux were designed to keep Africans in employment for longer periods at lower wages—and supply unpopular employers who could not secure their labour supply by any other means—became so well known that it very soon had to suspend its operations within Southern Rhodesia and concentrate solely on the northern territories. There, Africans pressed by the

pecuniary demands of their administrations, with little opportunity for cash cropping, and facing a long dangerous journey to the south, had less freedom of choice. As late as 1914 it was reported to the Colonial Office that officials were handing over tax defaulters to the Bureau and that Bureau messengers were acting as a "press gang".⁴⁷

Within Southern Rhodesia, the mines faced a more independent population, capable of meeting most of their cash demands by cash-cropping and sale of stock, and able to migrate to better wages, better conditions, and laxer liquor laws, on the Rand. The contemporary chambers of mines were themselves in no doubt of this. In 1902 the president of the Bulawayo Chamber of Mines asserted that over 90% of grain produced in the country was African produced, and suggested that the mines should themselves go into co-operative farming to cut out the "native producer".⁴⁸ Each year the chamber of mines re-produced with growing alarm figures of increasing prosperity in the peasant sector. In 1904 the Bulawayo Chamber attempted to show that the balance between peasant income and contribution to revenue was £762 562.⁴⁹ Moreover, the spirit of independence in the local population was revealed in considerable migration to the Rand, particularly from all areas south of Fort Victoria, a migration which was ironically stimulated by the Rhodesian Bureau itself. In 1904, the slump year in Rhodesia, 4 613 recruits were sent to the Rand. Not even WNLA's insistence on twelve months' contracts from that year could in any way inhibit the stream of migrants, much to the surprise of Rhodesian employers who were lucky if they got three months' work out of local recruits.⁵⁰

Indigenous labour in the early years of the century could indeed have had the terms of employment on its side. Before the operation of the endogenous mechanisms — increasing cash demands, movements to the reserves, and the reduction of those reserves — immigrant labour constituted considerable competition for indigenous labour and the means by which wages could be held down. Hence these immigrants from adjacent territories played the same role vis-à-vis indigenous labour as the Chinese scheme, 1905-1910, played upon the Rand. The increase in migrant labour to Rhodesia as a result of the Boer War produced reductions in wages in late 1901. In 1903, when immigrant labour combined with increased internal supply because of poor conditions in the peasant sector, wages were again reduced.⁵¹ In 1904, the slump year, F. G. Elliott, inspector of native compounds for division no. 1, asserted in his report that the local man was unable to compete with the immigrant and was being refused work at the mines.⁵² Again in 1905 increased supply resulted in a wage reduction.⁵³ In March 1906, the Chief Native Commissioner, Matabeleland, gave average wages as 20s to 25s per month for surface work, and 35s to 40s for underground work.⁵⁴ In his December 1907 report, he gave wages of Bureau recruits from North Eastern Rhodesia: 22s 6d for 30 working days in underground work, and 15s for surface.⁵⁵ As can be seen from table I, it is from 1907 that the proportion of internal labour begins to go down. There could be no better demonstrations of the effects of immigrant labour.

The development of capitalist agriculture in Rhodesia produced not only competition for the African producer, but also an onslaught upon the mining industry. The cornerstone of this policy was the Private Locations Ordinance of 1908 which limited the number of heads of families who could be kept on

alienated land to 40 per 1 500 acres. The result was the first of the great movements upon the land which have characterised twentieth century Rhodesian history, and the short-term result was a marked decline in the indigenous labour supply. Table I reveals that during times of disaster in the peasant sector, the proportion of indigenous labour in mining actually declines, as in the years 1911-1916, in the early twenties when the peasant market collapsed, and during the Depression. In these periods external migrants are no longer a substitute for reluctant indigenous labour; they constitute, as in 1904, competition in times of labour glut because of the greater controls that can be placed upon them. During these periods, as the Chief Native Commissioner's reports and recent oral evidence confirm, indigenous labour in abundant supply is rejected in favour of external labour.

The development of the European farming sector created another even more unpopular source of employment, and again it was the labour bureau which set about tiding it over initial difficulties. Table II shows the percentages of indigenous and alien labour in employment other than mining, while Table III shows the dramatic shift from mining and general employment to agriculture in the labour bureau's supply pattern, although the bureau was so heavily capitalised by the mines that effectively the mining sector was subsidising the farming. Again the role of the bureau was clear. As Coghlan's secretary frankly put it, the Bureau's functions were:

1. To supply unpopular and isolated employers.
2. To maintain an organisation ready to meet a possible sudden falling off of 'voluntary' labour or increase of demand.
3. To keep down the wages of 'voluntary' labour. (In this capacity it is made more use of than is generally supposed.)⁵⁶

In the farming industry, as to a lesser extent in the mining, indigenous labour bore the brunt of the cycle of booms and slumps. Immigrant labour which facilitated the boom was invariably used to tide over the slump. As successive managers of the labour bureaux repeatedly pointed out, Rhodesian employers were totally unwilling to create either standard conditions or minimum wages. In consequence large numbers of "work-seekers", even in the farming sector, headed for the Transvaal, while some Nyasaland farm labourers were found to be passing through Rhodesia since Rhodesian wages were not much better than those obtaining in Nyasaland.⁵⁷

In these ways the terms of employment were turned against indigenous Africans and a breathing space secured in which the frustration and compression of the peasantry could be effected. This use of the external mechanism to swing the balance back in favour of capital was of long standing. The Colonial Office, while solicitous about death rates, did everything to facilitate the provision of labour from adjacent territories. In West Africa, the peasant producer was encouraged, but in southern Africa there can be no doubt that successive secretaries of state, from Chamberlain to Milner at least—with the sole exception of Harcourt⁵⁸—were closely tied by personal relationship and financial interest with southern African capital. Of even greater significance is the fact that when Harcourt gave qualified support to Sir William Manning in his attempt to shut off Nyasaland labour from Rhodesia in 1911, the officials of the Colonial Office regarded it as intolerable that the labour of Nyasaland should be locked up in this way.⁵⁹

V

Colonial labour policy in the nineteenth century was conditioned by the apotheosis of labour in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, by the notions of tropical abundance and tropical indolence, and the related assumption that little or no value lay in indigenous economies. With the abolition of slavery and the removal of the concept of labour as property, labour enjoyed a powerful position vis-à-vis capital, particularly where extra land was available for subsistence. This imbalance in favour of labour had to be redressed, such that laissez faire in trade had to be matched with careful social regulation. Several colonial mechanisms were introduced to achieve this regulation. Internal mechanisms included the restriction of land available for subsistence and the levying of direct taxation. The external mechanism, which proved to be the more successful, was the introduction of large numbers of indentured labourers who served to hold wages and conditions down. In southern Africa this external mechanism was used as a stop-gap until the internal mechanisms could be made to work. By the operation of these mechanisms the competitive position on the world market of both the sugar plantations and the low-grade mines of southern Africa was secured.

TABLES

Year	I Mining Labour			II Non-Mining Labour			III R.N.L.B.	
	% Local	% Alien	Total in Employment	% Local	% Alien	Total in Employment & other	% Mines	% Farms
1903	20	80	5 614*	—	—	—	—	—
1904	22	78	7 533*	—	—	—	—	—
1905	31	69	15 382	—	—	—	—	—
1906	40	60	19 852	—	—	—	100	0
1907	38	62	27 796	—	—	—	100	0
1908	34	66	30 847	—	—	—	96	4
1909	33	67	32 720	—	—	—	75	25
1910	34	66	37 824	—	—	—	75	25
1911	37	63	38 656	—	—	—	82	18
1912	37	63	34 654	—	—	—	56	44
1913	35	65	33 423	71	29	39 773	49	51
1914	32	68	36 363	65	35	45 064	49	52
1915	31	69	37 916	65	35	43 247	60	40
1916	31	69	40 214	60	40	39 633	46	54
1917	37	63	38 664	57	43	44 948	47	53
1918	34	66	32 199	58	42	46 477	56	44
1919	33	67	30 678	54	46	50 120	55	45
1920	25	75	36 875	53	47	52 272	41	59
1921	21	79	37 605	44	56	76 573	37	63
1922	26	74	35 674	34	66	96 000	34	66
1923	28	72	36 681	39	61	101 000	50	50
1924	27	73	41 372	38	62	100 800	35	65
1925	27	73	39 644	41	59	107 561	35	65
1926	27	73	40 874	52	48	133 133	40	60
1927	29	71	40 636	51	49	137 888	24	76
1928	29	71	43 703	53	47	134 151	33	67
1929	27	73	46 811	51	49	116 188	35	65

1930	26	74	45 337	51	49	111 490	20	80
1931	24	76	35 202	47	53	129 060	12	88
1932	26	74	36 050	52	48	121 348	—	—
1933	30	70	48 269	49	51	123 027	—	—
1934	31	69	62 339	48	52	121 968	—	—
1935	29	71	76 226	—	—	—	—	—
1936	28	72	84 092	—	—	—	—	—
1937	26	74	90 600	—	—	—	—	—

SOURCES: Rhodesia Chamber of Mines, Bulawayo, and Chamber of Mines, Salisbury, Annual Reports, and Annual Reports of the Chief Native Commissioner.

* The figures for 1903 and 1904 are for Matabeleland only.

III represents the percentage of total recruits supplied to mines and general employment and to farms. The R.N.L.B. was wound up during the Depression because of the glut of labour.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa*, Madison 1964, 100.

² For a fuller discussion of the views of these figures see J. M. MacKenzie, *African Labour in South-Central Africa*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of British Columbia, 1969.

³ Earl Grey, *The Colonial Policy of Lord John Russell's Administration*, London 1853, Vol. I, 81.

⁴ Herman Merivale, *Lectures on Colonisation and Colonies*, London 1841, Vol. II, 181.

⁵ Merivale, *Lectures*, Vol. II, 201.

⁶ H. H. Johnston, *A History of the Colonisation of Africa by Alien Races*, Cambridge 1899, 450-451.

⁷ Merivale, *Lectures*, Vol. II, 181.

⁸ J. G. Lockhart and C. M. Woodhouse, *Rhodes*, London 1963, 197.

⁹ J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, London 1902, 239.

¹⁰ Milner to Chamberlain, 4.x.1901. C.O. 417/321.

¹¹ Sydney Olivier, *White Capital and Coloured Labour*, London 1906, 82.

¹² F. D. Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire*, London 1883, Vol. I. I, 74.

¹³ *Bulawayo Chronicle*, "The Labour problem in Rhodesia and proposed importation of Chinese, Bulawayo 1900," 53.

¹⁴ G. St. J. Orde Browne, *The African Labourer*, London 1933, provides a survey of forced labour provisions for the British and French Empires.

¹⁵ For the economies of plantations and a historical survey of their development see L. A. Best, "A Model of Pure Plantation Economy", *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3, September 1968; G. L. Beckford, "The Economics of Agricultural Resource Use and Development in Plantation Economies" in Henry Bernstein (ed.), *Underdevelopment and Development*, London 1973; and G. L. Beckford, *Persistent Poverty*, New York 1972.

¹⁶ I. M. Cumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854*, London 1953, 80.

¹⁷ W. G. Sewell, *The Ordeal of Free Labour in the British West Indies*, New York 1861, quoted Cumpston, *Indians Overseas*, 99.

¹⁸ Grey, *Colonial Policy*, passim.

¹⁹ Curtin, *Image of Africa*, 445.

²⁰ Persia C. Campbell, *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire*, London 1923.

In L. A. A. G. De Verteuil, *Trinidad*, London 1884, 160, Asians are said to be the sole labourers on sugar and cacao estates, and the number of Chinese is given at 500.

²¹ CD 5192, 3. L. M. Thompson, *Indian Immigration into Natal, 1860-1872*, Archives Year Book for South African History, 1952, Vol. II.

²² Cumpston, *Indians Overseas*, 99.

²³ Cumpston, 69.

²⁴ Cumpston, 149.

²⁵ R. E. Gordon, *Shepstone*, Cape Town 1968, 124.

²⁶ Gordon, *Shepstone*, 123.

²⁷ Quoted Colin Bundy, "The emergence and decline of a South African peasantry", *African Affairs*, Vol. 11, October 1972, 376.

²⁸ Thompson, *Indian Immigration*.

²⁹ Thompson, 14.

³⁰ D. J. N. Denoon, "The Transvaal Labour Crisis", *Journal of African History*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1967.

³¹ Bundy, "Emergence and decline", 383-384.

³² MacKenzie, *African Labour*, chapters 6 and 7.

³³ Quoted by Sir Marshall Clarke in Clarke to Milner 11.ix.1904, enclosure in Milner to Lyttelton, 11.x.1904. C.O. 417/393.

³⁴ B.S.A.Co. Annual Report, 1897-98, and Milner to Chamberlain 10.i.1900, C.O. 417/283. A detachment of police was sent to Tuli to stop the Boers pursuing Mpefu.

³⁵ Annual Reports, N.C.'s Ndanga, Melsetter and Umtali, 1899-1900. N9/1/2-3.

³⁶B.S.A.Co. Report, 1900-1902, 163.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Reports of N.C. Inyanga, 1917-18. N9/1/20-21.

³⁹Chamberlain to Milner, 26.ix.1900. C.O. 417/283.

⁴⁰Reports of indabas held throughout Rhodesia in 1899, annexures to minutes of the Board of the B.S.A.Co., 18.x.1899. C.O. 417/276.

⁴¹Hole to Milton, 26.vii.1901. A11/2/8/3. Also Hole to B.S.A.Co., 10.x.1901. C.O. 417/338.

⁴²MacKenzie, *African Labour*. 252-260.

⁴³*The African Review*, 22.ix.1900 and 19.ix.1900. Also *Bulawayo Chronicle*, "The labour problem in Rhodesia" 1900.

⁴⁴Rhodesia Chamber of Mines, Bulawayo, Annual Reports, 1897 and 1898.

⁴⁵Drew to Secretary, Administration, Bulawayo, 9.xii.1899. NB 1/1/8'

⁴⁶Taberner to Chief Secretary, Salisbury, 23.v.1900. NB 1/1/10.

⁴⁷Salborne to Harcourt, 6.vi.1914. C.O. 417/540. The D.C. Balorale had been sending out a body of police and bureau messengers to arrest tax defaulters in his area.

⁴⁸Rhodesia Chamber of Mines, Bulawayo, Annual Report, 1902.

⁴⁹Rhodesia Chamber of Mines, Bulawayo, Annual Report, 1904.

⁵⁰Rhodesia Chamber of Mines, Bulawayo, Annual Report, 1905.

⁵¹Charles van Onselen, "Worker Consciousness in Black Miners, Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1920", *Journal of African History*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1973, 244.

⁵²Reports of the Inspectors of Native Compounds for the Year Ending 31st March 1904, 27.

⁵³Report of the Chief Native Commissioner Matabeleland, for the Year Ending 31st March, 1905, 11.

⁵⁴Report CNC Matabeleland, 31 March, 1906, 7.

⁵⁵Report CNC Matabeleland, 31 December, 1907, 8.

⁵⁶Quoted in M. C. Steele, "The African Agricultural Labour Supply Crisis, 1924-1928", University of Rhodesia Labour Research Seminar Paper no. 6, August 1973, 5. I am grateful to Dr. Steele for permission to use this quotation.

⁵⁷Steele, "African Agricultural Labour Supply Crisis", 9.

⁵⁸The two other Liberal secretaries of state cannot really be excluded as both Elgin and Crewe had connections with the world of big business. Elgin actually disassociated himself from the attacks on the Unionist Government on the Chinese labour issue in 1905.

⁵⁹For the High Commissioner Gladstone's support of the Rhodesian position on Nyasaland labour, see the "Record of a Deputation to H. E. Lord Gladstone, September 2nd, 1911". A3/18/30/15. For a Colonial Office attack on Manning, see minute of Lambert on Gladstone to Harcourt, 18.ix.1911. C.O. 417/498.



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