

Labour in Tanganyika in 1927

Information on labour conditions in Tanganyika Territory during 1927 is contained in the Annual Report of the Labour Department, and in the Report by his Britannic Majesty's Government to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Tanganyika Territory.¹

ORGANISATION OF THE LABOUR DEPARTMENT

The Department was created in 1926, following a report by Major G. St. J. Orde Browne.² Its first year of work was very largely occupied in preliminary organisation and investigation. In 1927, however, it was possible to undertake more definite duties.

The Department was at first regarded with a certain element of suspicion by employers. The visits of labour officers are, however, now welcomed on plantations. From the point of view of the native employees the Department had a somewhat similar experience. Labour officers visiting establishments were frequently regarded by the employees as having come to punish or arrest, and it was some time before it was generally realised that the principal object of such visits was to discover and eliminate sources of friction. Nevertheless, the natives' confidence has now been obtained, and the labour officers have secured information of great value regarding the difficulties which the men experience on their journey to work and the causes of discontent while at work.

The results have been eminently satisfactory. A general improvement has taken place in the whole management of labour. The labour supply is appreciably better than it was two years ago. The importance of giving proper attention to the needs of the labourers is generally recognised. Feeding has improved, with a corresponding fall in the sick rate. Lastly, in certain areas at any rate, the efficiency percentage of the labour force has been definitely raised, thus slightly reducing the cost of labour in spite of a tendency for wages to rise.

The labour camp established at Kilosa in 1926 was maintained throughout 1927 in full working order, 38,421 travelling natives passing through the camp. Its success was held to justify an extension of the system, and another camp of the same type was built at Mziha on the principal labour route of the country. Arrangements have also been made for the construction of a third camp. The Labour Commissioner states that several more camps are still needed, but considers that it would be disastrous for his Department to be responsible for any camp which could not be adequately supervised and maintained at a proper standard.

¹ TANGANYIKA TERRITORY. LABOUR DEPARTMENT: *Annual Report, 1927*. London, Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1928.

Report by His Britannic Majesty's Government to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Tanganyika Territory for the year 1927. London, 1928.

² Cf. *International Labour Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, Sept. 1926, pp. 371-376.

LABOUR STATISTICS

It is not possible to furnish an accurate figure of the number of labourers employed by private employers during 1927. The total number of contract labourers employed during the year was 18,031; approximately four times this number emigrated from their home districts to distant employment areas. There was in addition an elusive contribution to the labour force of a very large number of natives working for a few days in each month, say, 60,000 occasional workers equal to 10,000 regular workers. Between 4,000 and 5,000 natives emigrated to Zanzibar for short periods; 21,000 were employed in domestic service; 13,000 natives were employed in various occupations such as mines, wharf labour, and minor works. An estimate of the number of labourers employed on private portorage has appeared impossible.

The Government departments employed a monthly average labour force of 14,556. In addition, about 78,000 porters were engaged, their average period of employment being just over six days.

CONTRACT LABOUR

The Labour Commissioner considers that the position of the contract labourer and the observation of his obligations continues to be most unsatisfactory; though legal penalties exist, the contract can be broken with practical impunity, which is a legitimate cause of complaint to the employer and is demoralising to the native.

Contract breakers may be divided into two classes: first, the ignorant native who deserts because he is dissatisfied or because he is for some reason anxious to return home, and, secondly, the professional deserter.

The Labour Commissioner remarks that the first class can hardly be considered as particularly blameworthy. As such people grow more accustomed to conditions of work, they may be expected to refer readily to their employer or to a visiting labour officer, instead of wandering off without any attempt to explain their reason. One motive for contract breaking is the native's inability to foresee how long the engagement will last. Often he engages in good faith only to find, after completing the greater part of the period, that the planting season in his village has begun. He becomes very restless, and if he meets a party of friends going home, he most probably joins them. The Labour Commissioner holds that it is therefore important that administrative officers when making contracts should explain the position to recruits whenever there is a likelihood that the contract will extend into the planting season.

With regard to the professional deserter, the Labour Department has been attempting to deal with the problem through co-operation with the native authorities. On several occasions head men have spontaneously expressed strong disapproval of desertion and have promised to do all they can to put a stop to it, provided always that they feel that their men will have a fair hearing.

LABOUR AGENTS

The Labour Commissioner reports that while some agents are a real asset to the community, others are capable of causing great harm. The difficulty of detecting and punishing malpractice is great. Measures have therefore been prepared for the consideration of the Legislative Council which are intended to transfer the control and issue of all recruiting licences to the Labour Commissioner, who will be able to refuse a permit in the case of an undesirable applicant. It is also proposed to enforce medical inspection for all recruits, while steps have already been taken to control the granting of advances to recruits, a practice which threatened to become a great evil.¹

PORTERAGE

Of the 78,000 porters employed by Government departments, 33,097 were requisitioned. Of those included under this term, a number were tax defaulters and many others were not in fact conscripts. It frequently happened that time did not permit of recruiting porters by ordinary means and that it was necessary to instruct a chief to produce the number of men required. These men were therefore placed in the category of conscripts, though in practice most of them were perfectly willing to perform the work.

The question of the reduction of portage was closely considered by the Labour Department. Instances were discovered where stores had been forwarded at a time of year that necessitated portage, whereas at an earlier or later date motor transport would have been available. In order to obviate such mistakes a directory was compiled showing every station and the means of reaching it in each month of the year. Tables showing the porter rates and cost of daily rations were also circulated.

Portage for private purposes continues to be used to a considerable extent, in most cases unavoidably. Nevertheless, road and railway development is constantly tending to lessen the amount. In order to ensure that the waste of labour on portage should be reduced as much as possible by the use of motor transport, it was proposed that the Government should introduce legislation prohibiting the use of portage by employers for the export of produce from areas served by motor roads.²

GOVERNMENT LABOUR

Although lack of organisation and foresight in preparing for large undertakings was responsible for considerable waste of labour and needless expense, the position improved considerably during 1927, and conscript labour was almost entirely avoided, except in the case of portage, which has been already mentioned.

¹ A 1928 Ordinance amending the Masters and Native Servants Ordinance, 1923, gives effect to these proposals.

² This proposal was given effect to by the Ordinance to make provision for the restriction of the employment of porters, 1928.

The total number of labourers requisitioned for purposes other than portage amounted to 8,046. Of these, however, almost all were employed prior to the issue early in 1927 of the instruction that labour was not to be requisitioned without the express sanction of the Governor in each instance, except for portage or in cases of emergency. The wage paid was the current rate prevailing in the district in which the labour was employed.

CHILD LABOUR

Particular attention was paid during the year to the question of the employment of children. It is to be found in Tanganyika Territory in two forms: (a) the utilising of young people for such work as coffee picking during the busy season, and (b) the employing of lads who have accompanied their fathers or brothers to work.

The Labour Commissioner holds that the first form of employment is not objectionable as regards conditions of employment. The argument that the children should be at school might apply were there school accommodation for even a tithe of the child population. If the employment of children in this way leads to immorality, it should be, in the Commissioner's opinion, for the parents, with educational and missionary support, to apply the necessary restraint.

The Commissioner also considers that the second form of child labour is open to little objection. The lads are usually fairly well grown; they come with relations; they are not registered on the contract, but are put on the list of relatives accompanying the contract labourers. Compulsory medical inspection, when introduced, will secure that there is no danger of an immature boy being included as a contract labourer. Their employment in connection with dangerous machinery is prohibited. No case has arisen during the year of any accident to a child caused through the nature of his work.

The Commissioner's conclusion on this question of child labour is that it at present exists only in a very rudimentary form, and that there is very little reason for objection at present, though developments should certainly be watched.

NATIVE ORGANISATIONS

During the year a motor drivers' union was formed of African mechanics at Moshi and a strike for higher wages was attempted. The effort, however, was short-lived, the motor drivers in fact being already by far the best-paid workers in the country.

The Labour Commissioner describes as a more interesting and far more desirable movement the foundation on one plantation of tribal welfare societies. The funds are collected by a monthly subscription from every member and are banked with the manager. Beyond acting as banker the manager attempts no control of these funds. At the time of the labour officer's visit the principal society had a credit balance of 786 shillings; the total number of members of all the societies was 644 men and 147 women, with a total cash balance of 3,222 shillings.

HEALTH

Considerable attention was paid during 1927 to the question of disease as affecting the labour supply. In the past scurvy had caused great loss of efficiency, the worst months being from November to March when there is a shortage of fresh vegetables and fruits. The position has now however become satisfactory. In 1926 attention was drawn to the importance of proper diet on estates, and the practice of issuing fresh fruit to all travellers passing through the Kilosa camp was introduced.

Improvements have also been effected in regard to the prevention of beriberi and yaws.

Efforts have been made to increase the medical facilities at the important employing centres. Most of the larger estates have hospitals where all except the most serious cases can be treated. In the case of the smaller estates, steps have been taken to secure that each estate has simple remedies on hand for immediate use and that all cases of any seriousness are sent to the nearest Government hospital for treatment on payment by the estate.

The number of serious accident cases treated in Government hospitals during 1927 was 101, and there were 5 deaths. The outstanding cause of accidents was the misuse of trollies on light lines, due mainly to the recklessness of the natives in charge. Compensation is awarded by the courts. An attempt was made in the course of the year to lay down a definite scale for each type of injury for the guidance of officers. It was found on investigation, however, that this was not at all suitable, since the amount of compensation should vary according to the circumstances of the man concerned. A sum, for example, which would make an up-country native from a cattle-keeping area independent for life would be almost useless to a coastal man unable to invest in cheap stock.

WAGES

The wages paid to unskilled labourers in September 1927 varied in the different districts from a minimum of 6s. to a maximum of 30s., rations being provided. Semi-skilled workers received up to 50s. per month. The Labour Commissioner reports that seasonal fluctuations affect wages to a considerable extent. Pay may appear low, but it must not be overlooked that practically the whole of the workers' expenses are covered. If a comparison is made with the cost of living and of taxation, the Tanganyika native can be said to be well paid.

SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS

The change from the home conditions, the new experience, the purchase of previously unknown luxuries, the introduction of methodical work, and many other novelties have a profound effect upon the native worker and on the life of the tribe as a whole.

The most conspicuous influence on the labourer is the type of accommodation and surroundings in which he lives while at work. There are two different directions which the development of labour accommodation

may take : one, the provision of more and more elaborate buildings, with food comforts and attractions, and the other, the maintenance of the atmosphere and spirit of the African village. The first, in the opinion of the Labour Commissioner, means industrialisation and detribalisation, while the second will, to a great extent, maintain the old traditions and methods of life which have served the African in the past.

After pointing out that the outstanding examples of the material care of native labour are to be found in the big undertakings in South Africa and the Congo, the Commissioner remarks that it is very doubtful if the conditions produced by sheer commercialism are desirable ; although from a purely physical point of view the workman will be vastly benefited, he may well lose elements of greater, even if of less tangible, value. The production of conditions utterly unlike those of the home village can only tend to create a distaste for that village, and the long-continued experience of living on a daily ration and spending a weekly wage must undermine the habit of relying on home-grown food. Thus would be created an industrialised class divorced from their old tribal customs and without any rules of conduct other than those dependent on the fear of punishment.

The line of advance favoured by the Tanganyika Labour Department has, on the other hand, been the creation of a superior type of native village, where conditions are much the same as those of the employees' distant homes. A proportion of married men with children increases the domestic atmosphere, while the grouping of members of one tribe together serves to maintain tradition.

As regards the question of the effect upon the tribe of the exodus of a large proportion of their young men, the Labour Commissioner regards this too as largely dependent on conditions of work. If the man is accompanied by his wife any evil effect will be greatly reduced. If, in addition, it is possible to allocate to each man a small plot which can be cultivated, a far larger proportion of the native population can with safety leave their homes than would be the case under less favourable circumstances.

The Commissioner regards these considerations as supplying the answer to the question how far it is morally justifiable to encourage the native to travel great distances to work for wages rather than to remain at home raising his own crops for export. It is mainly a question of conditions of work. If the circumstances are bad the cumulative effect on the population will be bad, but if conditions on the journey are eased and the management of labour on estates continues to improve, there would be a real justification for the claim that the worker in particular and the tribe in general benefit by the wage-earning habit.

"In any case, it is not now practical politics to contemplate the abolition of labour for wages, while the necessity for large public works, in the interests of the natives themselves, will always involve the employment of large numbers. There is great room for improvement in the administration of Government labour quite as much as that in private employment ; but definite progress has been made and there is every reason to expect this to continue at an increasing rate. "