

## Native Labour in Northern Rhodesia in 1931

Northern Rhodesia has long been a source of labour for other tropical African territories, and more recently, owing to mineral developments, the home demand for labour has greatly increased. At the same time, the Government is pursuing a policy of tribal development, reinforced by indirect rule through Native authorities. The 1931 report of the Native Affairs Department<sup>1</sup> throws light on the problem thus arising of the effect on African social development of the opportunities for wage-earning employment offered by the establishment of European-controlled industries.

### EMPLOYMENT AND RECRUITING

The following table shows the average number of workers in employment in each of the years 1928-1931 :

|   | 1928   | 1929    | 1930    | 1931    |
|---|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Natives recruited in Northern Rhodesia for work outside the Territory | 9,198  | 8,709   | 4,492   | 1,762   |
| Natives working independently outside the Territory (estimate)        | 27,650 | 33,741  | 33,564  | 29,181  |
| Average number of Natives employed within the Territory (estimate)    | 46,680 | 61,730  | 76,643  | 79,165  |
|   | 83,528 | 104,180 | 114,699 | 110,108 |

These figures show a constant increase in the numbers employed until the last part of 1931, when the general economic depression made itself felt and greatly reduced the labour demand, and consequently the number of Africans absent from their villages.

Early in the year the Native Labour Association decided to discontinue recruiting Africans who entered the Territory from Portuguese West Africa, as they were discovered to be unsuitable for labour conditions on mines and the incidence of sickness amongst them was unduly high. In August recruiting in Barotseland and in the Western Districts was stopped, as sufficient labour could be obtained elsewhere and the physique of the men from that area was not particularly good.

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<sup>1</sup>. NORTHERN RHODESIA : *Annual Report upon Native Affairs, 1931*. Livingstone, Government Printer, 1932. For a note on the report for 1930, cf. *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXIV, No. 5, Nov. 1931, pp. 577-580.

Finally, towards the end of the year, unemployment amongst Africans in the industrial centres enabled the mines to obtain all the labour required and recruiting was entirely suspended.

In any case the majority of workers prefer to proceed independently in search of employment, so as to have a free choice in the selection of an employer. The report states that such independent labourers who travel long distances suffer from the strain of the journey, and that their condition on arrival is not so favourable as that of recruits, who are brought by motor transport and well fed on the way. On the other hand, it is admitted that Africans travelling slowly on foot may in the course of the journey become more acclimatised and inured to the conditions under which they will work, while some degree of resistance to pneumonia appears to be acquired.

#### EMPLOYMENT AND THE POPULATION PROBLEM

Fears have been felt in recent years of a possibility of a decrease in population in the Tanganyika Province owing to the absence of men in distant employment. In the year under review a decrease is recorded of 2,020 in the total population. There is an increase among the men of 391, but a decrease among the women of 1,773, among the boys of 299 and among the girls of 339. The Provincial Commissioner, however, considers that the figures are inaccurate and that there are no grounds for anxiety. It is to be noted that a decrease was also recorded in the population figures of the Luangwa Province, although there very few of the people go out to work for Europeans.

The report compares the birth rates in areas of labour supply and in pastoral and peasant-farming areas. In 1931 in the first group the estimated average birth rate was 60 per thousand and in the second 65 per thousand. In 1930, on the other hand, the birth rates were estimated to be higher in the labour supply areas (73 per thousand) than in the other areas (59 per thousand). Although some Provincial Commissioners are inclined to think that the labour exodus has affected the birth rate, the general conclusions of the report are that so long as no unreasonable restrictions are placed on the movement of women, there is no great risk of a decline.

#### THE SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE LABOUR EXODUS

The general effect of the absence at work of large numbers of men is also examined in the report, although during the year under review the problem was less evident owing to the return of many men who had lost their employment.

There is stated to be considerable dissatisfaction with village life among the younger generation who have worked on the mines and at industrial centres. They realise that there are few opportunities for economic advancement in remote villages, and that life for many of them is exceedingly dull and uneventful. The young men become

restless and wander off to the towns and mines, where they find what they regard as a fuller life. Many of them, however, suffer from nostalgia after a few months and soon return to their villages, so that although there is a constant exodus there is also a constant flow of men returning.

On the other hand, elsewhere in the report it is suggested that the urge to seek distant employment comes rather from the young women, who demand more clothes and more enamel utensils, for which the young husband must earn money, and that thereby an effective pressure is exercised upon them to seek employment under Europeans.

The present report, however, considers it doubtful whether some of the evils are as grave as they are reported to be. Many men who proceed to work take their wives with them and many do not stay away very long. Large numbers only leave home when their wives become pregnant, and in other cases relatives look after the wives and children of the absentees. It may be, as some observers assert, that the absence of the males has brought about deterioration in the morals of the women, although it has been pointed out by others that even in districts where Natives do not go to work there is a tendency for women to become dissatisfied and for huts and sanitary services to be neglected.

There is no evidence that any food shortage has been caused by the absence of the men at work, although some administrative officers believe that there is less cultivation than formerly. On the other hand there is ample evidence of a greater demand for foodstuffs throughout the country, owing to the increased economic activity.

While, therefore, it is admitted that it will have to be considered whether tribal life will not eventually be affected if this labour movement continues, the problem is not regarded as urgent. It is suggested that the Chiefs should be encouraged to discuss the situation with their people, bearing in mind that economic advancement can only be obtained by the growing and selling of produce or by working for wages, and it is held that there is little doubt that the Native authorities and Chiefs will be able to arrive at some solution of the difficulty.