

## Native Labour in Northern Rhodesia in 1932

The report for 1932 of the Northern Rhodesian Native Affairs Department <sup>1</sup> chronicles a year of industrial depression, and confirms the information from other tropical territories of the effect of restricted wage-earning opportunities on peoples in the transition stage between a subsistence and a money economy.

### REDUCED EMPLOYMENT

Until the depression there was always more labour available than employers in Northern Rhodesia could absorb, and the surplus proceeded year after year to Southern Rhodesia, South West Africa, Tanganyika Territory and the Congo. The demand for labour in those territories, however, declined considerably during 1932, while the requirements within the territory were also very much less. In consequence the villages were overrun with Natives, accustomed to manual labour and keen to work, for whom there was no employment. In addition, large numbers frequented the mining and industrial centres waiting for any openings that might occur. The position was not made easier by the arrival from Portuguese West Africa of large numbers of Natives who had walked long distances in the hope of obtaining employment and who were willing to accept work of any nature at very low rates.

The following table shows the estimated number of Northern Rhodesian Natives employed during the past five years :

	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932
Natives recruited in Northern Rhodesia for work outside the Territory	9,198	8,709	4,492	1,762	879
Natives working independently outside the Territory (estimated)	27,650	33,741	33,564	29,181	24,260
Average number of Natives employed within the Territory (estimated)	46,680	61,730	76,646	79,165	42,308
Total	83,528	104,180	114,702	110,108	67,447

The annual total, moreover, does not completely reflect the decline in employment, which continued progressively throughout the year. In particular the labour force on the mines fell from 13,261 to 6,677 between 1 January and 31 December.

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<sup>1</sup> NORTHERN RHODESIA : *Annual Report upon Native Affairs, 1932*. Livingstone, Government Printer, 1933. 51 pp. For note on the report for 1931, cf. *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, Feb. 1933, pp. 251-253.

## RECRUITING

The organisation entrusted with the recruiting, distribution and repatriation of Native labour on behalf of the mining companies is the Native Labour Association, which was established in 1930. No recruiting was undertaken in 1932. The Association maintained its relations with the sources of labour supply and repatriated 3,477 Natives to their homes on the completion of their contracts and 645 Natives who had been retrenched.

For employment outside the territory the only organisation which engaged in recruiting during the year was the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau<sup>1</sup>, the operations of which were confined to the engaging of a few special Natives for work in Southern Rhodesia. No Natives were recruited for employment in Katanga. The gradual decrease in the number of Natives recruited for work outside the territory during the past years is shown by the following table :

	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932
Labour recruited for mines in Katanga	5,176	4,110	1,192	551	—
Labour recruited for Southern Rhodesia mines, farms, etc.	4,022	4,599	3,300	1,211	879
Total	9,198	8,709	4,492	1,762	879

The report comments as follows on the changed situation :

" It appears that the recruiting agent has outlived his usefulness, so far as the collection of native labour is concerned. Natives do not now require to be enticed out to work—they come of their own accord—but they do not care for making contracts for long periods with masters whom they do not know and whom they may not find satisfactory. On the other hand, the labour agent as the provider of transport facilities, rations and medical supervision during the journey to and from employment will be sadly missed by many people who have made use of these amenities in the past. "

## WAGES

The average rate of pay for surface workers on the principal mines at the end of the year was 21s. 4d. per month, while for underground work the average rate was 30s. 9d. per month. Food, quarters and medical attendance were supplied free of charge.

In agriculture in the Fort Jameson district (tobacco), wages for unskilled farm labour fell to 6s. per month, with 2s. per month ration allowance in lieu of food. In the Abercorn district (coffee) Native wages declined to 7s. 6d. per month and on the farms in the Lusaka area a wage of 5s. to 6s. per month was stated to be by no means un-

<sup>1</sup> On 30 May 1933 the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau decided to go into liquidation.

usual. The report comments that it is reasonable to believe that these low rates of wages were occasioned by the excess of applicants for work, but that it would be unfortunate if the wage rates for agricultural labour were governed by supply and demand rather than by the economic value of the work performed.

### HEALTH

The report states that the medical care of employees and their dependants on the mines left little to be desired. All the base metal mines were equipped with modern hospitals and staffed with fully qualified doctors, nurses and welfare workers. Health conditions very much improved owing to the greater care in selecting applicants for work and a closer medical examination before engagement. Respiratory diseases still formed the most important problem, although the number of cases decreased. In 1931 the number of patients admitted to the Roan hospital suffering from pneumonia was 234; in 1932 only 23 cases came under treatment.

The mortality figures from sickness per 1,000 Native mine labourers for the past four years were as follows: 1929, 20.00; 1930, 14.70; 1931, 22.70; 1932, 10.80.

Ten fatal accidents occurred to Natives engaged in mine work during the year, giving an accident death rate of 1.33 per 1,000 Native workers, as compared with 1.99 in 1931. On the other hand, the serious accident rate (incapacity for 14 days or over) was much higher than in 1931 and gave cause for anxiety (1931, 7.75 per 1,000; 1932, 11.30 per 1,000).

### CONDITIONS IN THE VILLAGES

Once again the Northern Rhodesian report contains suggestive information on the effect of distant employment on village life.

There was a net increase in the total population of the territory of 0.763 per cent. on the 1931 figures, though the total for adult females showed a slight decrease. The report states that, although the increase in population was probably greater than appears, it may be that the people are not increasing as rapidly as formerly owing to the exodus of large numbers of males during the past few years to industrial employment. It adds, however, that no reliable evidence has yet been produced to prove that the birth rate has materially altered.

The following comparison is nevertheless made between average birth rates (per 1,000 inhabitants) in labour supply areas and pastoral and industrial areas respectively:

	1929	1930	1931	1932
Labour supply areas	59	73	60	57
Pastoral and industrial areas	75	59	65	63

In 485 villages where figures were kept, 2,598 children were born during 1932; 603 children under 1 year of age and 396 between 1 and 2 years of age died, giving an infant mortality rate of 38.4 per cent.

The rates for 1928, 1929, 1930 and 1931 were respectively 47, 38, 34 and 33 per cent.

The restricted opportunities for employment greatly lessened the number of male absentees from the villages. Where it was a common experience to find 40 or 50 per cent. of the adult males absent at any one time, the average in 1932 did not exceed 15 to 20 per cent. and was often as low as 10 per cent. Districts from which 4,000-5,000 Natives used to go out regularly to work each year only supplied a tenth of these figures in 1932.

The report expresses the belief that the increased number of Natives in the districts may have a salutary effect upon the villages and upon tribal life, but that it will involve a lower standard of living for the people and a decrease of the capacity to pay tax. Elsewhere it is stated that in consequence of the lack of employment and of a local demand for Native produce it became impossible for the Native community to maintain the improved standard of living to which it had become accustomed during recent years. The spending power of the Natives was so reduced as to be almost negligible. The Native tax was very much in arrears, and savings were practically exhausted.

On the other hand, the report states that there was no destitution as the people were able to grow their own food supply. Moreover, although economic development was retarded, there had been political and social advance. It was observed that the more enlightened Africans in the reserves and in other Native areas were looking for something better than the houses usually built by their own particular tribe and did not hesitate to adopt types of houses built by other tribes. Native welfare associations continued to increase in numbers and practically every municipality and township had its organisation of educated and detribalised Natives holding meetings regularly to discuss their interests.

#### GENERAL

An interesting development, also perhaps partly encouraged by the decline in employment, is the increase in married labourers residing in the mining districts. In 1931 24 per cent. of the mine labourers were settled with their wives and families, while in 1932 the percentage rose to over 30. On the Roan mine the average was far exceeded. On 31 December 1932, out of a total roll of 2,344 workers, 45 per cent. had their women and children with them in the location. Grants of small land holdings which could be utilised for the growing of food-stuffs were made to permanent workers and it is the intention of the manager to make the Native location as close a semblance of Native village life as possible.

It is declared that the Natives of Northern Rhodesia are now showing a definitely greater capacity for work than heretofore. The improvement in efficiency is attributed to the definite knowledge that slackness would result in dismissal, to contact with experienced Natives from other territories, and to the instructional methods practised on the various mines.