

Uganda Labour Enquiry

The report of a Committee appointed by the Government of Uganda in November 1937 to enquire into the labour situation has recently been published.¹

LABOUR DEMAND AND SUPPLY

The Committee examined the labour requirements of Uganda in the sense of the number of workers which employers considered would be required when circumstances favoured working to full capacity.

In 1937, it was estimated that a monthly average of 91,000 workers had been required by Government departments, Native administrations, and non-Native employers. Future monthly average requirements are expected to range between 110,000 and 120,000.

In 1937, the actual labour supply was short of requirements, the monthly average in employment being 83,200.

The above calculations leave out of account the employment of Africans by African farmers. This practice is confined to the Buganda Province, where it is extensive. At the end of June 1937, there were approximately 86,000 immigrant labourers in Buganda. In addition, there were 28,000 settled immigrants, of whom probably 10,000 were working regularly as unskilled labourers, the balance having become cultivators on their own account. Of the immigrant labourers, 27,000 were employed by the European or Native Government and by private undertakings, and 22,000 by African landowners or in growing cotton on hired land. The balance of 37,000 was assumed to be obtaining casual employment in cultivation.

THE OBTAINING OF LABOUR

Uganda relies largely on immigrant labour from other territories for purposes of employment. It is estimated that from the Mandated Territory of Ruanda-Urundi, under Belgian administration, not less than 100,000 workers enter Uganda in the course of the year. Of the workers enumerated in 1937 in the Buganda Province, 48,732 were from Ruanda-Urundi and the Belgian Congo, 15,852 from the Mandated Territory of Tanganyika, and 1,549 from Kenya. From the West Nile district of Uganda, during the five years 1933-1937, 58,750 workers left for work elsewhere in Uganda. Many of these workers were immigrants from outside Uganda.

¹ UGANDA PROTECTORATE : *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Labour Situation in the Uganda Protectorate, 1938.* Cf. *Industrial and Labour Information*, Vol. LXV, No. 1, 3 Jan. 1938, p. 23.

By far the most general method of obtaining labour is that of engaging workers offering at the place of employment. Recruiting for employment under written contract takes place, however, on a small scale. In 1937, the total number of workers so recruited was 18,500.

The report states that, while the recruiting of contract labour is subject to reasonable safeguards against abuse, these safeguards are largely absent for the labour which seeks work on its own account. The conditions of the journey are described, and it is stated that many of the workers from Ruanda-Urundi reach the employment centres in an exhausted condition.

CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

At the time of drafting of the report, the rate of wages for casual labour in Kampala was 12s. for 30 days of work without food, rising to 13s. after six months and 14s. after 12 months' regular work. The wages offered by African landowners for regular workers compared not unfavourably with those paid by non-Native employers. In one district mentioned, the average wage was about 11s. Casual labour receives either an agreed daily wage or payment for a specified piece of work. The average of earnings for this kind of labour was stated to be probably from 16s. to 20s. a month.

In a number of cases, non-Native employers are beginning to offer inducements, in addition to graded pay, in order to encourage the labourer to stay for longer periods (for example, blankets, clothes, and cash bonuses after completion of a certain period of employment).

In the great majority of industries, hours of work ranged from eight to nine in the day, and where task work is the rule they were usually much less. Exceptions are cited: in one sugar factory, two 12-hour shifts were being worked, and at a sisal factory two 10-hour shifts. The majority of the mines worked on the basis of an 8-hour working day, but a few worked a 9-hour or even a 10-hour day. Long hours are also noted in the case of small ginneries. Among 95 ginneries in regard to which information could be collected, there were 19 with 9-hour, 31 with 10-hour, 39 with 11-hour, and 6 with 12-hour shifts.

The report notes a marked increase in the number of employers providing some form of rations for their labourers. There has also been a steady improvement in the accommodation provided by employers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee grouped its recommendations under the following headings:

- (1) The more orderly organisation of the seasonal workers who will continue to form a preponderant share of the labour force and, as a complementary measure, the creation and maintenance of a regular wage-earning class;
- (2) The encouragement of an adequate flow of immigrant labour until such time as the indigenous supply can meet current requirements;
- (3) The progressive improvement of general conditions of employment.

Under the first heading, the following are among the recommendations made. The administration should point out to Natives their duty to do a reasonable amount of work and, in the light of local conditions, should help them to weigh the relative advantages of economic production and wage earning. Each district should aim at providing the unskilled labour necessary for the upkeep of its local public services and for the processing of its Native-grown economic crops. Large-scale non-Native industries must expect to have to fill their labour requirements from non-local sources and should, therefore, aim at securing a resident labour force by offering facilities for the worker to make a comfortable home. The establishment of rural social centres by large employers should receive Government encouragement, and the future establishment of village communities near centres of employment should be considered. The report states that administrative officers, doctors, and missionaries, were agreed that for the unaccompanied worker a longer period than six months' employment would be definitely harmful. The Committee held, however, that labour contracts for three years should be permitted in cases where the worker is accompanied by his wife and family. Such contracts should contain adequate provision for transporting the worker and his family, for their housing, and for repatriation.

With regard to the care of immigrant labour, the Committee recommended that labour camps should be developed and transport services improved.

Among the recommendations concerning conditions of employment were the following. Each industry should be encouraged to establish wages on a sound basis, together with the replacement of the 30-day ticket system by monthly wage payments. Healthy quarters should be provided for resident workers, of a permanent nature in the case of established industries. A comprehensive investigation of problems attending cheap house construction should be undertaken by the Government without delay. The principle should be accepted that rations must be issued to all labourers who do not return to their own homes daily. Hours of work should be settled by each industry, in consultation with the Government, and task work adopted where practicable. Conditions of employment in factories should be settled for each type of factory by consultation between the owners and the Government. The hours of work in all factories should be limited. In cotton ginneries, a 10-hour shift, with a one-hour break and 24 hours' rest at week-ends, is recommended. The Government should enter into consultation with the cotton ginning industry regarding working conditions at an early date, and similar consultations should be instituted with other industries. A comprehensive scheme of workmen's compensation is desirable. Concerns employing more than 500 labourers should employ a whole-time labour superintendent.

LABOUR ORGANISATION

The Committee also makes recommendations regarding labour inspection and control. It is stated that the control of labour policy is a function of the central Colonial Government and is of sufficient

importance to warrant the appointment of a special Labour Secretary. In addition, a standing Economic and Labour Advisory Committee should be established, with a membership of officials and non-officials.

On the question of the abolition of penal sanctions for labour offences, the Committee resolved that "at the present stage of development penal sanctions are both necessary and mutually beneficial to both employers and workers, and that this will continue to be so for a considerable time to come". At the same time, the Committee considered that the judicial processes for dealing with disputes between employers and employed need simplification, and that it will become increasingly appropriate that certain offences by workers should be dealt with as civil offences or by dismissal, but that employers might concurrently be permitted to impose small disciplinary fines. The Committee held that the most satisfactory way by which the elimination of penal sanctions can gradually be effected is by increasing use of the existing powers whereby a magistrate may order in any case that remedy shall be by civil action and not by penal complaint. "As a result of a more general adoption of this procedure, penal sanctions are likely to fall into desuetude until a stage has been reached at which it should be possible to abolish the majority without endangering the legitimate interests of either workers or employers."

The Committee notes that, to employers, the Government's intentions were the object of some suspicion, evidencing a lack of mutual understanding. "Typical of such suspicion was the attitude towards the Conventions sponsored by the International Labour Office which threatened, in the view of more than one witness, to render the position of the employer intolerable. So far as could be ascertained, however, no witness had ever read or had access to a copy of any of these Conventions; and, by way of instance of the desirability of close liaison between Government and the public, it would clearly be advantageous if Government could arrange to bring such Conventions in draft to the notice of employers—possibly through the agency of the Chambers of Commerce—and to invite their comments upon proposals which prove on examination to be eminently practical and reasonable."
