

Back to the Land: the Campaign against Unemployment in Dahomey¹

THE POPULATION of Dahomey totalled 2.5 million in 1964 according to official estimates²; this includes Dahomeyan nationals who during the colonial period worked for the federal authorities of French West Africa and even French Equatorial Africa and have had to return home. With a birth rate of 54 per thousand, the population is growing by 2.7 per cent. annually and can be expected to double within 20 years. The population of working age, which was 49 per cent. in 1959, reached 55.5 per cent. in 1961³ (which means that nearly 45 per cent. of the population are under the age of 15). According to the same official estimates, however, the proportion of persons in Cotonou actually working is only 30 per cent.⁴

This labour force can, in fact, only be found employment in agriculture, for Dahomey would appear to be one of the African countries the least equipped for industrialisation.⁵ Farming (especially food crops), stock raising and fishing are the main occupations. Unfortunately, as things are at present, the Dahomeyan peasant can only scratch a meagre living from the land. He is untrained, his implements are primitive and he cannot afford to make any investment. The result is that the "educated" look upon farming as an occupation fit only for illiterates, and the young peasants themselves, even if they are uneducated, long to leave the land.

¹ Study prepared by E. COSTA, member of the Manpower Planning and Organisation Branch (Human Resources Department) of the I.L.O., following a field mission to Dahomey in the autumn of 1964.

² *Bulletin de statistique* (Service central de la statistique et de la mécanographie), No. 2, Oct. 1964, p. 2.

³ *Economie et plan* (Paris, Ministère de la Coopération, 1962), p. 7.

⁴ *Bulletin de statistique*, op. cit., p. 25.

⁵ Industry, traditional handicrafts and building together provide employment for only 7 per cent. of the population, as against 46 per cent. for the primary sector and 30 per cent. for the tertiary sector (which appears to be swollen because of the number of women traders). These figures, which probably underestimate the number of women employed in agriculture and show only 17 per cent. of the active population as being without any occupation, are not wholly reliable.

This has led to an influx into the towns which, although not on the same scale as in some other African countries, is nevertheless substantial. By 1964 Cotonou had increased its population six times over the previous 18 years to a total of 109,328; even Porto-Novo, which is expanding far less rapidly, doubled its population over the same period and now has 69,500 inhabitants. In the towns, where there is very little industry, unemployment is substantial and steadily increasing. It is estimated that in 1963 there were 30,000 unemployed in Cotonou and Porto-Novo and that this number was growing by 5,000 a year. In Cotonou in 1964 there were 20,000 unemployed, including 1,000 women. In the 15 to 19 age group the proportion of unemployed in the towns rises to 50 per cent.

For the Manpower Service therefore, which is swamped with job applicants, unemployment is an intractable problem. In view of the limited scope for industrialisation (restricted still further by the high cost of electric power) it is unanimously agreed that a policy of "back to the land" is the only way of mopping up unemployment. It is held in some quarters that great strides could be made if private ownership of farm land were more energetically encouraged, but all the schemes launched by private institutions, and by the Ministry of Labour, the Manpower Service, the Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operation, the National Rural Development Company and the Dahomeyan armed forces have in fact taken the form of an organised return to the land, combined with attempts to raise the level of training and technical standards in agriculture. The revolution of 28 October 1963, the spirit of which now permeates the whole political life of Dahomey, has merely strengthened this trend.

Schemes by private bodies and institutions

Although the efforts of private bodies and institutions do not aim at installing systems for the mobilisation of the labour force, they are designed to raise its general standard for development purposes. Some schemes have achieved a marked success and all of them are evidence of the widespread determination in Dahomey to make fuller and more efficient use of manpower in agriculture.

The Young Christian Workers' Movement¹

In 1954 the members of the Young Christian Workers' Movement (J.O.C.) established a farm-school at Adjarra-Dévoukanmé. During its early years, the farm sought to reduce unemployment among young workers in the towns by trying to resettle them in the villages, but since 1960 it has concentrated on training and motivating young peasants of both sexes, teaching them to farm and organise their work efficiently, in

¹ The following information is taken from a booklet entitled *Plan quinquennal de formation rurale*, issued by the Adjarra Rural Training and Promotion Centre.

the hope of inducing them to stay on the land. The farm is now called a Rural Training and Promotion Centre. A second centre was opened at Pobé in February 1963 with the help of a grant from the French Government.

The training caters for young adults with qualities of leadership who have land of their own and are sponsored by their villages; this is to ensure that the latter are committed to the movement from the start. At any given time there are 30 men and 20 women trainees at the Centre; the 350-odd men and 100 women village leaders and the 50 village handicraftsmen who have been trained since 1954 are now working in 150 villages with a total population of 80,000.

The Centre's activities are subordinated to these training needs. Practical work, carried out either on the Centre's own demonstration plots or in the peasants' own fields, accounts for 70 per cent. of the instruction. This is mainly concerned with farming practice, e.g. preservation and restoration of soil fertility, mixed farming and improved methods. The trainees do the work themselves, but under the guidance of the Government Extension Service. Potential village leaders are also taught certain handicraft skills (which depend on the area from which they come), while women leaders learn about child care, hygiene, housekeeping, the breeding of small livestock, etc. Each year the Centre holds two courses for two groups of 15 trainees each, i.e. a total of 60. The trainees spend six weeks at the Centre in all, each week being followed by a spell of two weeks in their native villages. They are fed and housed by the Centre.

The annual budget amounts to some \$20,000, of which two-thirds come from sales of crops and government grants and one-third from private bodies in Europe. The results of the experiment appear to be highly satisfactory, since the crops of vegetables grown by peasants who have taken the course bring in appreciably higher incomes. The Centre has decided, therefore, to launch a five-year plan to speed up this type of training with the help of an international team of six experts who will go from village to village.

The Catholic Scout Movement

In 1956, in view of the short-lived nature of some official experiments, the Catholic Scout Movement in Dahomey launched an initial experiment of its own in Gbodje on the outskirts of Porto-Novo, and gradually built up the facilities which are briefly described below.

A number of basic education centres concentrate on teaching trainees reading and writing, hygiene, child care, civics and some idea of farming and animal husbandry. They cater for children over the age of 6 as well as adults. Two pilot rural centres have been opened for young people aged 15 or 16 leaving the basic education centres, who are given a free one-year

course in farming and stock breeding. The centres also train peasants as village leaders. Each year trainees leaving the pilot centres are divided into two groups. One of these is settled on land bought by the Movement for a "youth village", while members of the other go back to their native villages, where each individual acts as a village leader and enlists volunteers to establish a co-operative.

Initially the youth villages consist of ten volunteers who have qualified at the pilot centres; after five years they are intended to comprise 50 persons. The young people are expected to make their homes in these villages and to lead a community life while farming between 150 and 200 hectares of industrial crops (palm oil, copra and groundnuts), although each family also has between 25 and 60 ares for commercial food crops and domestic consumption. Two villages are being started, one near Ouidah and the other in the north, but both have run into material difficulties.

Other private schemes

A number of other efforts have been made to attract young people back to the land or to keep them on it. For example the Rural Youth Association has been operating farms since 1958 where young volunteers can find work in agriculture. The lay scout movement recently launched a scheme similar to that of its Catholic counterpart. The Dahomeyan Confederation of Believing Workers is also contemplating the establishment of farms for this purpose. Thus a number of spontaneous efforts are being made, all of them with the aim of attracting young workers back to the land.

In 1959 two new movements—the Back to the Land Youth Action Group (GRAJERET) and the Anti-Unemployment League—were formed by prominent citizens seeking a solution to the unemployment problem. The League backed the GRAJERET project, which was an attempt at collective farming in the village of Godomey, 20 kilometres from Cotonou. The experiment failed owing to the small area of land available, the lack of firm leadership and the ill-assorted membership of the group. But, even so, the Government considered it worth while and decided to support it. As a result the decree of 22 November 1960 was issued¹, after which the scheme changed its character when the Ministry of Labour took it over.

In May 1964 the Return Movement (M.R.T.) was formed by a number of public figures, who had earlier been among the organisers of the GRAJERET project. Its aim is to establish nine rural estates for the development of agriculture, market gardening and animal husbandry, as well as four fishery co-operatives. The settlers for each estate are to be trained on the spot and will have to train their own leaders sub-

¹ See below.

sequently. Since the scheme aims to introduce modern farming methods, especially the use of machinery, it must obtain substantial financial resources, and the management committee of the M.R.T. has from the outset kept in close touch with the government agricultural departments and with the prefectures. Towards the end of 1964 it appeared that the Ministry of Labour was likely to back the M.R.T. as it had the GRAJERET in 1960.

Schemes initiated by the Ministry of Labour and the Manpower Service

Since 1962 the Ministry of Labour and the Manpower Service have had statutory powers to direct the unemployed and the jobless. But before this legislation was passed—and subsequently without using these powers—they took steps to find work for the unemployed outside agriculture and also to encourage young job seekers to return to the land.

Power to direct the unemployed and jobless

Act No. 62-21 dated 14 May 1962¹ makes jobless citizens between the ages of 18 and 50 liable to be assigned to work of public importance, "especially the development of cultivable land" (section 1). The authorities can employ this procedure only subject to the following conditions: (a) lack of voluntary workers; (b) failure to produce evidence of a permanent lawful job bringing in a normal income; (c) remuneration of the work performed. Disputes as to whether a job is lawful or permanent are settled by a labour inspector, but appeals against his decision can be lodged with the labour court. Refusal to obey a direction order is punishable by imprisonment and fine, but conviction does not relieve an individual of his obligation to submit to direction, which becomes operative after he has served his sentence.

In practice this legislation has never been applied. This is inevitable in a country where most job applicants on the books of the employment office cannot be found work and where there are always plenty of volunteers for whatever jobs are available. The Act has also been regarded as an infringement of individual freedom. In addition, exercise of the power of direction would have demanded more financial resources than the Government has ever been able to afford and the Act (which has never been repealed) could only be applied if sufficient money became available.

Use of the unemployed for non-agricultural works

This scheme, which is intended to give temporary employment for the jobless on specified short-term public works, does not derive from any legislation and has no connection with the Act of 14 May 1962.

¹ *Journal officiel*, 73rd year, No. 13 (special number), 15 May 1962, p. 552.

Initially, whenever the Government or a local authority wished to carry out road works or other schemes, and invited tenders, the Ministry of Labour competed like any other contractor; if it was successful, it had the work carried out by a number of unemployed volunteers, which was of course cheaper than employing a private firm. This accounts for the lack of any laws or regulations dealing with these unemployment relief schemes (also known as national construction schemes).

Conditions of work were usually as follows. The men did five hours' work per working day, four of them paid for at the rate of the guaranteed minimum wage for agriculture, while the fifth, which was unpaid, was regarded as a voluntary contribution to national development. On the other hand the workers were fed free of charge and were insured against employment injury, although they did not draw family allowances. In Cotonou the unemployed were paid 500 CFA francs for a five-day week.

At first they were mainly employed on urban projects. In Porto-Novo 13,500 half-days were worked in this way and 27,000 meals were served up to 31 October 1961. In Cotonou the unemployed cleared the Place de l'Indépendance (on which the Palace of the Head of State now stands) in five weeks and went on to lay out the gardens of the French Embassy.

Various services were also performed by the unemployment relief schemes outside the towns. Young volunteers in special units carried out in the remoter areas various jobs in which they could use their own occupational skills. These itinerant groups were called Young Workers' Brigades. In five weeks and without any mechanical equipment they built a dyke 400 metres long to prevent a lake village near the frontier with Togo from being cut off during the flood season. In the same area they built a wooden bridge capable of bearing a load of three tons, as well as a covered market.

Naturally any assessment of this scheme must be considerably qualified. While the cost appeared to be low, the men's output was also fairly low so that in the end the work was expensive. In addition the scheme did not create any jobs nor did it lead to any up-grading of the men employed; it even took work away from wage earners who would have been paid at the normal rate and therefore helped to lower national living standards. On top of all this, since the Government cannot afford to start any new works, it is not surprising that the experiment should soon have petered out.

At the present time, there are only two non-agricultural schemes of this type at Cotonou, both of which are on a small scale and quite different from those just described. Both are financed out of funds made available by the United States Government.

One scheme employs 19 skilled building workers who are constructing a model house for the young workers' brigades (using bricks supplied under British bilateral aid). This house consists of two bedrooms and a simple living-room, together with a food store. The workers are paid a

wage equal to the current rate, half of it in cash and half in kind. The cost of the house, which is 75,000 CFA francs, is slightly lower than that of a contractor-built house. The Ministry supplies no supervision, the foreman himself being an unemployed worker. It is planned to put up six of these houses at Hillacondji for young workers who have been resettled in farming.

The other scheme occupies about 30 skilled cabinet-makers, who are paid at the same rate as the building workers just referred to. The sale price of the furniture goes to the Government to cover the cost of installation and equipment. Initially the workshop was regarded as a training establishment and had a permanent staff to give further training to the workers before they were placed in jobs, but owing to the lack of employment vacancies it has now become a production unit, although the workers can always be placed with a private employer if a vacancy occurs.

The return of unemployed young workers to the land

When in 1960 the Government took over the GRAJERET scheme and the Anti-Unemployment League, it laid down the broad lines of its policy in Decree No. 60-328/PCN/MFPT dated 22 November 1960, which established a National Young Workers' Movement. In practice, however, the decree was not enforced. Funds were made available only to the Ministry of Labour, with the help of which unemployed workers were sent to special farms, but the experiments were all short-lived. Even so, it may be helpful to summarise the contents of this decree, since they afford one example of a possible solution to the problem. We can then go on to examine the outcome of past experiments before dealing in more detail with current schemes, which reflect the Government's determination—since the revolution of 28 October 1963—to establish a more soundly based organisation.

The decree of 22 November 1960 recognised the public value of the Anti-Unemployment League, and its by-laws were adopted by the Movement, which was granted incorporated status. The Movement was declared to be open to all youth bodies pursuing similar purposes. Finally it was placed under the supervision of the President and made answerable to the Ministry of Labour. The purpose of the decree was defined in section 2: "The National Young Workers' Movement shall assist young persons who have reached the age of 18 to form groups of voluntary workers, either to develop the land assigned to them or to acquire the rudiments of a skill." In addition the Movement was to abolish distinctions based on geographical or tribal origin. It was to be financed from a number of sources, viz. government grants, overseas aid, members' contributions, legacies and gifts.

In practice the Ministry of Labour has not taken action under this legislation. It selected a number of volunteer unemployed young men and

sent them to farms at Hinvi, Tchaourou, Possotomey, Domey, etc. On these farms, the workers were left unsupervised and reliance was placed on self-discipline, although they were given technical advice by Ministry of Agriculture experts, who inspected them from time to time. At Hinvi, where the experiment followed another conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, some 30 young men were fed, housed and paid a small allowance of 250 CFA francs a month; they harvested a cotton crop worth 800,000 CFA francs, which left them with a net income of more than 450,000 CFA francs. The intention was that they should later form a production co-operative, but owing to the emphasis on self-discipline and the absence of any management the volunteers dropped out one after another, and finally even the keenest of them gave up. In the case of the Tchaourou farm, the distance from Cotonou was undoubtedly a further obstacle.

There were two other reasons for this failure. In the first place the Ministry of Labour, especially at Hinvi, did not succeed in effecting the legal transfer of property rights to the unemployed settled on the holdings, and as a result the neighbouring villagers insisted on the return of their ancestral land. Secondly the combined cost of these four schemes to the Government amounted to more than 10 million CFA francs; it had been planned to recoup this money over ten years, but this proved impossible when the young workers dropped out of the scheme. In short, the high cost of the experiment ruled out any return to the land on the larger scale that had been planned.

THE AGONVY EXPERIMENT

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Labour was not discouraged. It launched another experiment at Agonvy but decided to make a success of this before extending it further. The aim of this scheme is to induce the unemployed to return to the land and to give each of them a personal plot.

Recruitment to the scheme is open to volunteers registered with the Manpower Service. At present over a thousand have applied to return to the land. Selection involves a medical examination, but there is no age limit, although most of the applicants accepted are young. As the number of applications is more than the Ministry of Labour can afford to meet, no publicity among the unemployed is necessary. At the present time there are 23 workers engaged on the scheme, but only two of these were among the 25 who were first taken on 18 months ago. In other words there is a steady turnover and the total number involved is small. Most of the workers have some skill, e.g. as building workers, cooks or typists, but are unable to find work.

The scheme comes under the Director of the Manpower Service. There is no co-ordination with the Planning Ministry or with any other manpower mobilisation scheme. Co-ordination would, in any event, be

difficult because this scheme is an experiment and the Government is not convinced that it will be a success. A co-ordinating committee does exist but deals only with technical matters; it consists of representatives of the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operation and the International Development Agency. An expert from the Ministry of Agriculture inspects the scheme (usually known as "the farm") about once a fortnight, and an official of the Ministry is to be attached permanently to the farm in the near future. There is a project leader, who himself used to be unemployed and is responsible for administration and morale. At first reliance was placed on self-discipline as in the earlier experiments.

As regards organisation and conditions of work, no procedure is laid down for dealing with any grievances on the part of the workers; anyone who is dissatisfied is free to leave. At first the men were merely fed with food supplied as part of United States aid, and received 50 CFA francs a week as pocket-money. Before long they will be entitled to two-fifths of the income from sales of their own output. Of the remainder, one-fifth will be banked in a capital fund for the development of the farm, one-fifth will be paid into reserve and the remaining fifth will go to the Government to cover overheads and the cost of expansion. If the workers can secure an average income of 40,000 CFA francs a year per hectare, they will be earning slightly more than the national guaranteed minimum wage of 6,700 CFA francs a month. The project leader is paid 9,000 francs a month. The workers are living under canvas but in due course will have permanent homes of the type built on the Cotonou scheme. In future they will be able to eat as they please but will pay for the food themselves. Since they are not wage earners they are not normally entitled to social security benefits. The men fix their own working hours and put in about nine hours a day or 50 a week. Advances are made to them out of their anticipated earnings and each man's personal account is credited in accordance with the work he does, which amounts virtually to payment by results.

The workers have cleared 20 hectares in six months, but during the 12 previous months only sporadic efforts were made. The land has by no means been completely cleared, and the tree stumps will not be pulled out until next year when they have decayed. Cotton and maize have been planted with little loss, and it is planned to plant groundnuts, rice, and even potatoes in future. Within the next three years 200 hectares will have been cleared (the Government owns 400 hectares at Agony and several hundred more elsewhere which could also be used for this purpose). Some small livestock is also being raised. Output per man is virtually the same as the normal level in Dahomey and will improve as machinery is introduced after the land has been completely cleared.

The only instruction given to the unemployed joining the scheme consists of training on the job for farm work. Since most of the young men

have already had a primary education or some kind of vocational training, no general education is needed.

As for resettlement, in three years' time the men will be released from the scheme and each will be allocated five hectares (including fallow) to be farmed as a family unit. The houses will be grouped together near the fields. In other words, the unemployed men will become independent smallholders, but will make their large-scale purchases through a co-operative, paying for them out of the capital fund. The results expected are admittedly on a distinctly small scale in relation to the number of unemployed, but it is planned to build four villages around the cleared area at Agony alone.

The cost of the scheme has hitherto been borne by the Ministry of Labour, but later a levy will be imposed on sales. At present the annual cost amounts to 950,000 CFA francs per year. Once the permanent housing has been built and mechanical equipment supplied, the scheme will cost 4 million francs a year for three years in the case of each village. United States aid supplies not only food but also equipment, which for the time being is limited to hoes and machetes.

The experiment is still only in its early stages. Owing to the limited funds available to the Ministry of Labour its economic effect is insignificant, even though it appears to be paying its way. In any event it caters for volunteers and the young men encountered in the fields appear to be very glad to be there, so it is surprising that many of them should have dropped out.

OTHER EXPERIMENTS

Other small-scale experiments have been started by the Manpower Service. For example at Abomey-Calavi five unemployed workers have banded together to raise eating chickens, the profits being shared among the members; the head of the group is now earning 1,200 CFA francs a week, but will soon be earning 1,600. As at Agony, the workers lived alone for two years but afterwards were allowed to bring their families. This experiment has turned out to be a success, therefore, and another has just begun 25 kilometres from Cotonou. In addition the Manpower Service is planning to form a co-operative to collect used tyres and intends to give work to unemployed girls in a scheme to raise laying chickens.

Schemes to promote rural development

Another two experiments have been made in the fuller use of manpower for rural development. The first, an experiment in collective farming, now belongs to the past; it came in for severe criticism and, although the decree instituting it has not been rescinded, the scheme has in fact been a dead letter since the revolution of 28 October 1963. Even

so, looking back, it is not lacking in interest. The second, a scheme for the consolidation of holdings, however, is still going strong and is intended to lead to the creation of compulsory farm co-operatives.

Collective farming

Decree No. 239 PR/MAC dated 1 June 1962¹ was the basic enactment, although a number of practical details were settled by circulars issued in 1962. The decree required each village to farm an area of common land, but each hamlet which administratively formed part of a village could have its own field.

According to section 1 "the common land shall belong to the village community, headed by the village council and under the supervision of the departmental rural development committee; the income from the sale of the crop shall be used to finance the economic and social development of the village". The common land was therefore designed to foster the habit of collective labour in the hope of raising productivity in agriculture and providing the resources needed to improve villagers' living conditions. In addition, it was believed that when young people saw these improvements taking place in agriculture they would be less tempted to leave the countryside.

The scheme did not depend on the recruitment of participants; all the inhabitants of a village had to work on the common land, although the decree of 1 June 1962 did not state exactly how they were to be set to work. This was, of course, the responsibility of the village council in charge of the common land, and it would seem that in some cases at least compulsion was used. Under the Government's programme, 400,000 men between the ages of 15 and 59 were to be mobilised for work in this way.

As for administration, the collective field was the responsibility of the village council, consisting of the head man and his advisers; the head man himself was answerable for the working and management of the land. He proposed which parts were to be cultivated, fixed the hours of work, supervised the crops, reported to the supervising authority, sold the harvest and administered the money. With the assistance of his advisers he also made suggestions for the requisition of land if necessary.

Above the village council was the supervising authority—the departmental rural development committee, composed of the prefect, the subprefects, the senior officials responsible for agriculture, stock-breeding and forestry in the area and representatives of extension and research bodies. To this list Decree No. 63-74 PR/MAC dated 21 February 1963 added a representative of the National Assembly and a general adviser selected by the departmental council. It was this committee which took the important decisions. It informed the subprefects of the areas required, the crops to be planted, the timetables to be followed, and the rotations

¹ *Journal officiel*, No. 16, 15 June 1962, p. 667.

needed. It also planned the allocation of seeds and fertilisers and arranged for the control of crop diseases. Its decisions were subject to approval by the Minister of Agriculture and Co-operation. Each year the committee was to grade the villages in each department in accordance with their performance in farming their common land and recommend appropriate rewards or penalties.

At the summit of this structure was the Minister of Agriculture and Co-operation, to whom the decisions of each committee were to be submitted for approval. He imposed penalties or granted rewards on the recommendation of the committees and generally co-ordinated activities in the villages and the departments.

The farming carried out on this common land was mainly arable. After the scheme had been in operation for a year, the area under cultivation was less than 10,000 hectares, output was insignificant compared with privately owned fields and yields per hectare were not only very low compared with these same fields but were only one-third of yields on the consolidated holdings described below.¹ Success in improving living conditions among the peasants also appears to have been limited. Some villages organised kitchens at their own expense to supply food to workers on their common land. As for training, it is likely that technical advice was given by officials of the Ministry of Agriculture during their visits, but clearly under a scheme of this type there could be no question of any general improvement in skills.

Under the decree of 1962 common lands should not require any financial investment. The work was to be done by the inhabitants of each village, in the same way as on an ordinary plantation. It became clear, however, that in order to improve output meals would have to be supplied. In addition, the question of allocating the income from the crops caused a good deal of difficulty. According to Circular No. 590, dated 2 April 1962, issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operation, the common lands should "contribute to the village budget" and be used for welfare purposes, electrification, and so forth. To this end an account was opened for each village with the Dahomeyan Development Bank. But another circular (No. 35) had to be issued on 27 August 1962 by the President of the Republic allowing part of the income to be shared out among the workers by the village council either in cash or in useful manufactured goods and another part to be earmarked for the purchase of seeds or fertilisers to improve yields. Control by the central Government over the disposal of income from the crops was strengthened by two circulars, issued on 20 October and 5 November 1962 by the Ministry of the Interior and Defence, one of which regulated the sale of the crops, the keeping of accounts, and the payment of money into the Bank, while the

¹ This information is given by J. QUIRINO-LANHOUNMEY: "Le développement communautaire en Afrique noire. Leçons d'une expérience au Dahomey", in *Politique étrangère* (Paris), No. 2, 1964, pp. 161-180.

other required the Bank to submit a summary of progress in each sub-prefecture to the prefects every six months. The Government had initially hoped that gross earnings would be of the order of 1 to 1.2 thousand million CFA francs a year, but the experiment encountered growing difficulties.

The scheme finally came to grief with the revolution of 28 October 1963, since it seems to have been bound up with the fate of President Maga's Government (in northern Dahomey, which was the President's own political stronghold, it seems to have been more successful). It can be concluded, therefore, that the Dahomeyan peasant did not fully grasp the national significance of the scheme, presumably because it conflicted with a number of cherished cultural and social values.¹ The coercion employed by some head men and the inextricable land tenure problems created (above all in the south) by the delimiting of communally owned holdings also help to explain the failure of the experiment.

Agricultural blocks and compulsory farm co-operatives

These two types of farming, which are connected and—at least in the case of agricultural blocks—amount to a form of manpower mobilisation, were introduced by the Rural Development Areas Act (No. 61-26) and the Farm Co-operation Act (No. 61-27), both passed on 10 August 1961.²

The agricultural blocks (the Act calls them “rural development areas”) are designed to merge groups of holdings to form economically sound farms with a view to improving efficiency and the control of crop disease. The holdings are divided into breaks (one per crop) which are then subdivided among the farmers. The heavy work of ploughing is carried out communally, but each subdivision is sown by the peasant family to which it has been allocated; the income from the crop also goes to the family. After the harvest, which is sold communally, members repay the sums advanced to them for the purchase of equipment, seed and fertilisers. This purchasing is also done communally. However—and it is in this respect that the agricultural blocks are a form of manpower mobilisation—peasants who do not own any land themselves can also take part in the development work and are considered to have contributed their labour in lieu of land.

After some years' experience, those contributing land or labour are organised into a “compulsory farm co-operative”. By this stage the individual plots can be expected to have disappeared and to have been merged in the communal holdings. It should be noted that the compulsion does not in fact apply to the co-operators themselves but to the plots incorporated in the agricultural blocks.

¹ On this point see QUIRINO-LANHOUNMEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 176 ff.

² *Journal officiel*, No. 19 (supplement), 15 Aug. 1961, pp. 605-608.

Owners of holdings are selected in accordance with section 17 of Act No. 61-26, which states that "owners of land within a development area who cannot produce evidence of a permanent job or a regularly declared income at least equal to the national guaranteed agricultural minimum wage, shall participate full time as members of the co-operative both on investment projects and on farm work proper, as far as their physical and mental powers permit, up to the age of 55. Any owner of land who evades this obligation shall, if he ignores the warning, be required to lease his land to the co-operative at an annual rent of 1.5 per cent. of its value, as defined in section 18." All who contribute their labour do so voluntarily and there is no selection, although the relatives of owners of land may not apply. The total number of workers employed on an agricultural block depends, of course, on the total area. On the outskirts of Porto-Novo, where holdings are very subdivided, virtually all of the co-operators have contributed land, but in other parts of the country, where farms are bigger, many volunteers have had to be employed and up to a thousand workers have been employed on the biggest blocks.

The National Rural Development Company (SONADER), which was set up on 1 January 1962 to supersede the "Palm Plantations Department" of the Ministry of Agriculture, administers the whole scheme, and endeavours to achieve the objectives of the four-year plan in so far as funds allow. It also takes into account the views of various representatives of the people, especially the members of the departmental councils, and holds meetings for the peasants themselves. It supplies instructors at the rate of two or three for the 400 to 600 hectares cleared every year, but farming operations on each holding are supervised by a Ministry of Agriculture official. During the final stage of this compulsory co-operation the manager, although appointed by the management committee, is, in practice, an agent of the Ministry. Supervisors, some of them co-operators themselves, attend training courses organised by the Company at Porto-Novo.

As regards conditions of work, owners of land are entitled during the initial period to any income earned by their work on their own plots, minus any sums advanced to them. They are likewise entitled to one share in the future co-operative for every 1.5 hectares of land contributed. (One share is estimated to be worth 30,000 CFA francs.) Those who do not contribute any land are paid an "agricultural investment wage", which is lower than the guaranteed minimum for agriculture and amounts to 125 francs a day in the four departments of the South and Centre and 100 francs a day in the other two departments. These lower rates are in accordance with section 20 of Act No. 61-26, whereby payment in respect of investment projects may not be made wholly in cash, and shares in the co-operative must be issued for the unremunerated work. Members are entitled to one share for every 200 days worked. They remain subject to labour legislation, but hours of work depend mainly on the job to be per-

formed. In practice the working day is from 7 a.m. to 1 or 2 p.m. for a six-day week, i.e. about 40 hours a week. In their spare time the workers farm any plots they may own outside the block.

All the blocks have so far been laid out as palm plantations, with one section devoted to crops, mainly maize and manioc. Near Porto-Novo 360 hectares have been planted at Djomon and 528 at Djavi. Up-country 8,000 hectares have been planted at Agonvy and a further 665 are being prepared at Hinvi. Lastly, on a large block of 4,000 hectares at Houin-Agamé, in Mono, 2,400 hectares have now been laid out; the first co-operative has been formed and an oil mill is due to be built. It is still too soon to pass judgment on the success of the experiment because it takes several years before a palm plantation reaches its full output. Under this scheme no training is given except on the job, although members automatically benefit by belonging to a farm co-operative using modern methods.

The central government budget only makes a small contribution to the cost, i.e. provision of the necessary supervisory personnel. Most of the cost is met by French bilateral aid, the Aid and Co-operation Fund and the European Overseas Development Fund. It costs 110,000 CFA francs to plant one hectare of palms. Co-operators repay the cost of the investment to the Palm Plantations Renewal and Extension Fund.

The scheme is of interest partly because of its objectives (especially the granting of shares to those who contribute their labour) and partly because of the soundness of the National Rural Development Company. But it is impossible to form any final conclusions for the technical reasons just mentioned.

Schemes initiated by the Dahomeyan armed forces

Legislation

The legislation providing for participation in national economic development by servicemen, or at least by civilians called up for national service and placed under military supervision, is as follows:

(1) Order No. 1/MAID/CTM dated 15 January 1962 establishing the Dahomeyan armed forces.¹ Under this order the Dahomeyan armed forces comprise, in addition to specifically military units, a "pioneer training centre" and two "pioneer companies". Both the centre and the companies come under civilian administration as regards finance and under Army Headquarters as regards personnel.

(2) The National Defence and Armed Forces Act (No. 62-10 of 26 February 1962) as amended by Act No. 62-20 dated 14 May 1962.²

¹ *Journal officiel*, No. 5, 1 Feb. 1962, p. 197.

² *Ibid.*, 73rd year, No. 8 (special number), 1 Mar. 1962, p. 286, and No. 13 (special number), 15 May 1962, p. 552.

Section 21 of Act No. 62-10 makes every physically fit male or female citizen between the ages of 18 and 50 liable for national service. During this service he or she "shall engage in such activities as may be prescribed by law". Thus, in theory, military and civic service is compulsory for men and women alike.

(3) The Recruitment Act (No. 63-5 dated 26 June 1963)¹, which contains details concerning call-up and length and conditions of service. Some of the provisions of this Act have now lapsed.

(4) Order No. 39/GPRD/SGDN dated 15 January 1964 reorganising the Dahomeyan armed forces², and creating the present structure. The units assigned to development work consist of a purely military unit (the First Engineering Company attached to the Second Battalion), and two pioneer companies attached respectively to the Second and Third Battalions.

Number One Engineering Company

This unit, which is stationed at Kandi, was due to become a third pioneer company under an order dated 28 March 1963, which was not implemented. In fact, however, it is a purely military unit containing regulars and about 100 conscripts. In order to make use of their army training the men are employed on road-building and the repair of damaged bridges. They have proved highly efficient and in some cases have worked much faster than private contractors. The unit operates in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works, which supplies equipment, technical advice, fuel and even funds for the repair of mechanised equipment.

Army pioneers

Section 2 of the Recruitment Act, dated 26 June 1963, is worded as follows: "Patriotism and civic spirit shall be fostered at all levels." The primary objective would therefore appear to be to achieve a sense of nationalism and unity in a country where the concept of the "nation" has not everywhere taken root. In practice, however, the pioneers are nowadays usually recruited from the areas around their camps, and it is therefore better to rely on the definition of the purposes of the scheme given in a document prepared for officers taking a further training course in June 1963.

According to this document the pioneer companies "are required in time of peace to take part in the task of national development by performing agricultural or engineering projects, either independently or in co-operation with civilian bodies; to train conscripts so that on demobilisa-

¹ *Journal officiel*, 74th year, No. 15 (special number), 26 June 1963.

² *Ibid.*, No. 4, 1 Feb. 1964, p. 67.

tion they can work with modern equipment; to serve as an example to the rural population and to assist it in its work and development; and lastly to maintain the physical fitness, morale and technical standards of the military personnel so that the pioneer units can, if necessary, operate in conjunction with No. 1 Battalion in the defence of the country or in internal security operations". The organisation referred to in this text dates back to the period before the order of 15 January 1964, and some phrases clearly refer to the unit which subsequently became the engineering company. But there is no evidence that the general spirit of the system has changed.

Act No. 63-5 makes service compulsory for men at the age of 20 and women at the age of 18, but in practice these principles have been considerably relaxed. In the first place no woman has yet been called up for civic service, and it seems unlikely that any will in the near future. And in the second place it is impossible to call up all the young men who are liable; so that, apart from the conscripts who are doing their strictly military service, there are in fact about 200 young pioneers, 94 of them in No. 1 Company at Ketou and about 100 in No. 2 Company stationed at Okpara Camp near Parakou.

At first conscripts doing their military service were assigned to agricultural work, but this proved unsatisfactory because of the difficulty of reconciling the farming calendar with the demands of military training. It was accordingly decided that after an initial selection had been made among the conscripts, mainly on the basis of physical fitness, some of those who had been selected would be allowed to sign on voluntarily as "pioneers". A further choice would, of course, be necessary if the number of volunteers exceeded the number of vacancies. It is not known what steps would have been taken to make up for any shortage of volunteers because, according to the information available, this never happened. The position now is that, although the pioneers are regarded as civilians and their uniform is different from that of the soldiers, they are also treated as deserters if they defect and are subject to military discipline.

Since the last call-up, the army General Staff has requested the Israeli Nahal and Gadna¹ delegation in Dahomey to handle the administrative aspects of the recruitment of pioneers, subject to a target figure fixed by the army. The Israeli delegation appears to have confined recruitment to the Ketou and Okpara areas. As under the preceding system of recruitment no account seems to have been taken of the ethnic or sociological factors which might predispose certain groups of the population to accept a form of compulsion. In addition, since the issue of Order No. 373, dated 31 July 1963², some of the intermediate classes in the state primary schools have been converted into "Dahomey Pioneer Youth" classes in

¹ For a description of these institutions see the article on Israel below.

² *Journal officiel*, No. 20, 15 Aug. 1963, p. 538.

which children are given a civic training in addition to their general education; the Israeli delegation supervising the course intends to recruit future pioneers from these classes. A large pioneer youth centre has been built at Sakete between Porto-Novo and Ketou.

The service is administered by the Prime Minister (who also holds the portfolios of the Interior, Defence and Information) and comes under the immediate authority of the Chief of Staff of the armed forces. The pioneer companies are attached to the civilian administration for finance, to the General Staff for personnel and to the Quartermaster's Department for equipment.

There is some liaison with the Ministry of Agriculture, officials of which carry out technical inspections of the camps. The marketing of produce from the camps will presumably require further liaison. There is no co-ordination at present between the activities of the pioneers and the development plan, although Mr. Devernois, a United Nations expert, has suggested to the Government that measures should be taken to secure co-ordination between the pioneers, the general administration of the country and the Planning Agency within the regional co-ordination and development committees; this should apply to both planning and execution. It seems likely that reforms will be introduced along these lines.

The pioneers are supervised by regular instructors of the Dahomeyan army. In Ketou there are ten military instructors for 94 pioneers, viz. a captain, a sergeant-major and sergeants responsible for either administration or instruction. The Israeli Nahal and Gadna delegation to Dahomey, which consists of ten persons, is responsible for technical supervision of the general organisation of the pioneer companies. Members of the delegation make inspection visits to the camp at Ketou and some of them are quartered permanently at Okpara.

According to officials of the Ministry of Labour the young pioneers enjoy much better living and working conditions than other Dahomeyans of the same age. The camps are divided into sections of 30 pioneers, each headed by a sergeant. Discipline is military. The pioneers are entitled to the same welfare facilities and pay (1,090 CFA francs a month) as soldiers. They are fed, clothed and housed (in large tents at Ketou where, however, the administrative and communal buildings are permanent, and in semi-permanent buildings at Okpara). Hours of work are eight a day for five-and-one-half days (i.e. 44 a week). The first year of the pioneers' service is spent in camp, but during the last six months they perform all the preparatory work, especially land clearance, needed to build a village near the camp to house them when they are demobilised.

The pioneers grow cotton, maize, groundnuts and manioc, in addition to raising poultry; before long they will be breeding cattle. High output is not the main object, since the aim is to train the men during their service to farm the land using mechanised equipment.

Nevertheless, yields are said to be higher than in other villages in the area, at least in recent months because, at the start of the scheme, when work was performed by servicemen, progress was extremely disappointing. At Ketou the " farm " has an area of 33 hectares, with one hectare taken up by the camp itself. Land clearance and the removal of stumps, for which machinery has been used since the start, have plainly been carried out more efficiently than on the Manpower Service farm at Agonvy, and the crops in November 1964 appeared to be more promising, despite the drought in the area.

Training consists mainly of practical work in farming and stock raising. Of the 44 working hours per week, four are devoted to theory and the remainder to practical work. As the average standard of the pioneers is fairly high there is no provision for any general or civic education. The men are, however, given some military instruction whenever it does not interfere with their farm work.

In the village near the camp where he will live on demobilisation, each pioneer will have 3.5 hectares of land and will be able to install his family. Five villages consisting of 50 homes each are to be built progressively around each camp. The former pioneers, who will use modern farming methods, will be independent but will belong to agricultural machinery co-operatives. Their incomes will therefore be their own, and immediately after demobilisation they will be able to harvest the crops planted on the land brought under cultivation during their last six months' service. When visited in November 1964 the first batch of pioneers were beginning to clear the land assigned to them.

In 1964 the Dahomeyan armed forces accounted for 1,000 million CFA francs out of a total budget of 6,000 million. Of the armed forces' share, only 16 million were earmarked for the pioneers. This sum, which the General Staff placed at the disposal of the Israeli delegation, had to cover all the expenses of the pioneer companies, including the cost of military instructors for both the companies and the pioneer youth classes. It can be reckoned that about 11 million francs were spent on the maintenance of the pioneers themselves. The army proper receives no foreign financial assistance and no aid in kind. The land of the " farms " and future villages belongs to the State, which retains the income from the sale of crops produced by the camps.

This scheme for using army pioneers, which in its present form is still quite novel, is on too small a scale to have had any economic impact. It is planned to form a total of five pioneer companies (within Nos. 2 and 3 Battalions) so that in all 25 villages with 50 homes each can be established. If the scheme is developed on this scale, then the former pioneers can serve as examples to the villages and contribute to the agricultural development the country needs. On the other hand, as a means of absorbing unemployment, the scheme appears to have had only very limited effects.

In view of the difficulties encountered by the Manpower Service's farms based on the voluntary principle it would appear that compulsion, which is the basis of the pioneer scheme, can hardly be avoided if genuine progress is to be made.

Conclusions

1. Dahomey gives the impression of a country with no lack of projects for coping with unemployment and encouraging or organising the return of young workers to the land. In the view of everybody who was consulted, a return to the land is the only course open to the country.

2. It is worth noting the importance of schemes launched by private organisations, such as the Young Christian Workers' Movement and the Scout Movement, which now have a certain amount of experience in this field.

3. Such rural development schemes as have been attempted, viz. the agricultural blocks leading to the establishment of farm co-operatives, form part of an effort to spread modern farming methods and reform the system of land tenure. One distinctive feature of this scheme, however, is the special treatment of those with only their labour to contribute, who receive shares in the co-operative—an excellent incentive to voluntary work.

4. There is a contrast between the schemes of the Ministry of Labour and the Manpower Service—which have been based on the voluntary principle but have hitherto been short-lived or undermined by defections as at Agony—and those carried out by the Dahomeyan armed forces, which are based on conscription, well organised and, apparently, more efficient, but are also more expensive, as well as being too new for any final judgment to be passed.

5. None of the persons consulted, including the representatives of the trade unions, made any objection to the principle of civic service. They did not appear to regard it as in any way akin to "forced labour", which would immediately cause an outcry. All consider it to be necessary and appear to be somewhat sceptical about the well-meaning endeavours of the Manpower Service. However, the unions regret that they were not consulted by the Government over its schemes and prefer voluntary work, where possible, emphasising the need to preserve the workers' self-respect.

6. All these schemes suffer from lack of co-ordination. The individuals in charge of one scheme are usually unaware of the technical standards observed on farms operated by another. At a higher level, the national and departmental development committees have hardly ever met, and a United Nations expert has been forced to urge that the activities of the pioneers, the central Government and the Planning Agency, should

be co-ordinated. Some of the trade union leaders appear to be willing to help the Government to make better use of the labour force, provided these efforts form part of a definite plan and the workers are given enough supervision of sufficient quality.

7. None of the schemes, either past or present, appears to take account of ethnic or sociological factors which might facilitate success.

8. A last point, which should not be overlooked, is the need to settle the question of the legal status of the holdings on which these back-to-the-land or development experiments are carried out. This question has been solved in the case of the pioneers and the agricultural blocks, but has seriously handicapped the Manpower Service in its efforts and contributed to the failure of the common land scheme.
