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DEPENDENT CAPITALISM AND THE MAKING OF
THE KENYAN WORKING CLASS DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

by



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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to analyse the making of the working class in Kenya during the colonial period. First, the process of primitive colonial accumulation is traced and the coercive labour system which emerged in the first few decades of Kenya's dependent capitalism is examined. The study also deals with the impact of the Second World War on the Kenyan working class and further looks into the position of Kenyan workers in a post-war world marked by profound transformations in the global and local political economies. Moreover, the study focuses on the internal recomposition of the Kenyan working class during the emergency, and shows the effects that this, together with the contradictions arising out of the decolonisation process itself, had on tendencies towards the bureaucratisation and de-radicalisation of the Kenyan trade union movement on the eve of independence. Finally, the question of the movement's relations with international labour movements is considered.

The study seeks to examine the objective conditions underlying the process of Kenyan working class formation and the subjective propensities exhibited by this class both in response to those conditions and in reshaping them. The analytical concepts and paradigms used in the study are derived from underdevelopment and Marxist perspectives on dependent capitalism, articulation of modes of production, and the processes of class formation and class struggle in peripheral social formations. The study, therefore, attempts to depart from the more 'conventional' approaches that have tended to dominate Kenyan and African labour studies, and African historiography in general.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------|---|
| AATUF - | All African Trade Union Federation |
| ACIE - | Association of Commercial and Industrial Employers |
| AFL-CIO - | American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations |
| AFRO - | African Regional Organization |
| ATUC - | African Trade Union Confederation |
| AUCCTU - | All Union Central Council of Trade Unions (Soviet Union) |
| AWF - | African Workers' Federation |
| CO - | Colonial Office |
| COTU - | Central Organization of Trade Unions (Kenya) |
| CPP - | Convention Peoples' Party |
| CPWU - | Coffee Plantation Workers' Union |
| CUP - | Cambridge University Press |
| DN - | Daily Nation |
| DWU - | Dockworkers' Union |
| EAFBCWU - | East African Federation of Building and Construction Workers' Union |
| EAPH - | East African Publishing House |
| EARH - | East African Railways and Harbours Corporation |
| EAS - | East African Standard |
| EATUC - | East African Trades Union Congress |
| FKE - | Federation of Kenya Employers |
| GAWU - | General Agricultural Workers' Union |
| GTUC - | Ghana Trades Union Congress |

| | |
|---------|--|
| ICATU - | International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions |
| ICFTU - | International Confederation of Free Trade Unions |
| IFCTU - | International Federation of Christian Trade Unions |
| ITS - | International Trade Secretaries |
| KADU - | Kenya African Democratic Union |
| KANU - | Kenya African National Union |
| KAWC - | Kenya African Workers' Congress |
| KCA - | Kikuyu Central Association |
| KCGA - | Kenya Coffee Growers' Association |
| KDCWU - | Kenya Distributive and Commercial Workers' Union |
| KFL - | Kenya Federation of Labour |
| KFPTU - | Kenya Federation of Progressive Trade Unions |
| KFRTU - | Kenya Federation of Registered Trade Unions |
| KLGWU - | Kenya Local Government Workers Union |
| KPAWU - | Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers' Union |
| KNA - | Kenya National Archives |
| KQMWU - | Kenya Quarry and Mineworkers' Union |
| KTUC - | Kenya Trade Unions Congress |
| KUSPW - | Kenya Union of Sugar Plantation Workers |
| LDAR - | Labour Department Annual Report |
| LTUEA - | Labour Trade Union of East Africa |
| Mak - | Makhan Singh Papers |
| MRP - | Monthly Review Press |
| n.d. - | no date |
| NKG - | New Kenya Group |
| OUP - | Oxford University Press |

RAU(K) - Railway African Union (Kenya)
SACTU - South African Congress of Trade Unions
SCPWU - Sisal Plantation Workers' Union
TUC(B) - Trades Union Congress (British)
WFTU - World Federation of Trade Unions

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: AFRICAN HISTORY, UNDERDEVELOPMENT, MODES OF PRODUCTION, AND WORKERS

The study of Kenyan labour history, like that of general African socio-economic history, has increasingly been attracting much attention. The reasons for this have as much to do with changing academic fashions as well as the availability of new information hitherto inaccessible to an earlier generation of students of Africa as a result of the 30 year rule at the British and Kenyan archives. No less important, perhaps, are the sharp theoretical and ideological controversies that have come to characterise discourse on African studies. Indeed, it would not be farfetched to talk of a crystallisation of divergent schools of thought.

The present study has been undertaken with some of these considerations in mind. Two things will be attempted. First, to explore themes that have tended to be ignored or obscured in the literature on labour in Kenya. Second, to provide an interpretive framework that is both empirically adequate and theoretically valid. It is, therefore, hoped that new material will be brought to light and a theoretical contribution will be made to the study of Kenyan and, indeed, African labour history in general. In pursuit of this objective I will, in this chapter, try to make a general survey of the development and theoretical contributions of nationalist historiography and underdevelopment studies in order to situate the underlying premises of this study and its scope and methodology in a wider framework. It will be argued that the

challenge posed to nationalist historiography by theories of under-development and dependency, and similarly the Marxist critiques of under-development in recent years, do not constitute a crisis in African historical scholarship, but rather they represent healthy and welcome attempts to ask more penetrating questions and to provide more satisfactory answers on problems that are central to a deeper understanding of African history and society. Finally, there will be an attempt to review the literature on Kenyan labour history in order to highlight some of the major themes that have been dealt with and to pinpoint their shortcomings. It cannot be stressed enough that any classification of intellectual tendencies must necessarily entail oversimplification.

Nationalist Historiography

In 1976 Terence Ranger noted that there was "a crisis for African history arising out of the collapse of the consensus of the golden age",¹ a complaint that has been echoed by others since then.² A year later, Ranger warned further against the emerging "romanticisation about 'the

¹T.O. Ranger, "Towards a Usable African Past", in C. Fyfe, ed., African Studies Since 1945. A Tribute to Basil Davidson, Longman, London, 1976.

²See B.A. Ogot, "Three Decades of Historical Studies in East Africa, 1947-1977", in Kenya Historical Review, Vol. 6, Nos. 1 and 2, 1978. Also see J.E. Flint, "African Historiography - A Subjective View", Centre for African Studies, Dalhousie, 1982, mimeo; J.B. Webster, "Footnote to Flint - A View from the Periphery", Centre for African Studies, Dalhousie, 1982, mimeo. For a survey of West African historiography, see J.D. Fage, "Continuity and Change in the Writing of West African History", African Affairs, Vol. 70, No. 280, 1971.

people",³ which was prompted by the criticisms of his work particularly made by Isaacman and Depelchin.⁴ Such sad and nostalgic reflections on a supposedly receding 'golden age' in the face of new historiographical trends, betray a crisis in nationalist historiography, of which Ranger was one of its major and ablest proponents, and not in the study of African history as a whole.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to review in any great detail the complex subject of nationalist historiography, or other 'schools' in the study of African history which sprung from imperialist or anti-colonial traditions.⁵ Suffice it to say that the development of nationalist historiography in the sixties was peculiarly fitted to an era marked by euphoria about the achievements of the nationalist movements and full of great expectations about the future. Cultural heroes were reclaimed from the Hegelian world of "natural man in his completely wild and

³T.O. Ranger, "The People in African Resistance: a review", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 4, no. 1, 1977, p. 142.

⁴Allen and Barbara Isaacman, "Resistance and Collaboration in Southern and Central Africa, ca. 1850-1920", International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 10, no. 1, 1977; and Jacques Depelchin, "Toward a Problematic History of Africa", Tanzania Zamani, 18, Jan. 1976.

⁵For seminal reviews of African historiography see John Lonsdale, "The State and Social Processes in Africa", African Studies Association, Bloomington, October, 1981, mimeo; Frederick Cooper, "Africa and the World Economy", African Studies Association, Bloomington, October, 1981, mimeo. Also see A.D. Roberts, "The Earlier Historiography of Colonial Africa", History in Africa, Vol. 5, 1978. For a periodisation and trends in African studies since 1945 see the papers in C. Fyfe, ed., op. cit.; Jean Copans, "African Studies: A Periodisation", in P.C.W. Gutkind and P. Waterman, eds., African Social Studies. A Radical Reader, Heinemann, London, 1977; and special issue on "African Studies, 1955-1975", in Issue, Vol. 6, nos. 2 and 3, 1976.

untamed state", and glorious empires were exhumed from the Africa of the "Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit".⁶ It was discovered that Trevor Roper, the eminent Oxford don, had mistaken cultural resilience against colonial cultural oppression for the "gyrations of barbarous tribes".⁷ The 'native agitators' of colonial rulers and imperial ideologues became the founding fathers of the new nations, the 'modernising elites' in the sanitised vocabulary of the development economists and political scientists who were scurrying across Africa with briefcases full of advice.

Chiefs, spirit mediums, and valiant warriors who had resisted the imposition of colonial rule were finally absolved of slanderous charges that they were 'backward looking', inspired by atavistic instincts of their primitive past; they became the precursors, in fact, mentors, of the latter-day nationalists. The legitimacy of the nationalists was shored up, continuity in African history was re-established, and colonialism became just one other episode in the long history of Africa separating the idyllic and egalitarian past and the post-colonial future of nation-building and unity, development and equality, pride and dignity.

⁶G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, New York, 1944, pp. 93 and 99, as quoted in Thomas Hodgkin, "Where the Paths Began", in C. Fyfe, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁷See I. Wilks, "African Historiographical Traditions", in J.D. Fage, ed., *Africa Remembered*, O.U.P., London, 1970, p. 7.

Thus at last anti-colonial writers and critics from Morel, Leys, to Hodgkin and Davidson⁸ lost their marginality; nationalist historiography incorporated their critiques of colonial oppression and exploitation. The wandering prophets of Pan-Africanism finally reached the promised land.⁹ The age-old nationalist cry 'Africa for the Africans' no longer echoed in the wilderness but became a clarion call to students of African history and society to resurrect "African activity, African adaptations, African choice, African initiative"¹⁰ from the onerous weight of colonial oppression, overlaid by Euro-centric and sometimes racist imperialist historiography and ideology. It was a big challenge, but few historians seemed unduly daunted by it. Their enthusiasm carried them through. National histories appeared. Colonial policies were de-mythologised as the inherently exploitative and oppressive

⁸E.D. Morel, Red Rubber, Negro Universities Press, New York, 1969, and The Black Man's Burden, Monthly Review Press, N.Y., 1969; N. Leys, Kenya, Hogarth, London, 1926; Thomas Hodgkin, Nationalism in Africa, Muller, London, 1956; Basil Davidson, Africa in History, Macmillan, New York, 1974; The African Past: Chronicles from Antiquity to Modern Times, Grosset and Dunlap, New York, 1967; Old Africa Rediscovered, Gollancz, London, 1961; Black Mother, Gollancz, London, 1961; Thomas Hodgkin, Nationalism in Colonial Africa, Muller, London, 1956.

⁹See the writings of W.E.B. Dubois, especially, The World and Africa; an Inquiry into the Part which Africa has played in World History, Viking, New York, 1947; George Padmore, How Britain Rules Africa, Negro Universities Press, New York, 1936; Africa: Britain's Third Empire, Negro Universities Press, New York, 1949; and Pan-Africanism or Communism? The coming struggle for Africa, Dobson, London, 1956. Cheikh Anta Diop, The African Origin of Civilization: myth or reality?, Hill, New York, 1974; and W.L. Hansberry, Africa and Africans as seen by classical Writers, Howard Univ. Press, Washington, 1977.

¹⁰T.O. Ranger, "Introduction", in T.O. Ranger, ed., Emerging Themes in African History, O.U.P., Nairobi, 1968, p. xxi.

nature of the 'colonial situation' came to be emphasised. Other subjects, such as the study of messianic movements and independent churches, which in a bygone era would have raised the eye-brows of the imperial historian as a confirmation of the barbarism of the 'dark continent', were carefully analysed. The 'Hamitic factor' was questioned; the Zimbabwe ruins were after all built by the Rozwi and not Phoenicians. It was also shown that African traders had engaged in long distance trade centuries before the introduction of 'legitimate commerce'. Vansina brought oral tradition out of the jungle.¹¹ African history finally achieved institutional respectability.

Ironically, anthropology, which had produced so many detailed studies of African societies long before the study of African history was even recognised, found itself on the defensive. It became the butt of innumerable attacks to the effect that it was a handmaiden of colonialism, from which it has never fully recovered.¹² But while the study of African history as a whole continued to thrive, from the early seventies

¹¹Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965.

¹²For a very penetrating critique of the functionalist-positivist paradigms of anthropology see Archie Mafeje, "The Problem of Anthropology in Historical Perspective: An Inquiry into the Growth of the Social Sciences", Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1976. Also see K. Gough, "Anthropology: Child of Imperialism", Monthly Review, Vol. 19, no. 11, 1968; D. Goddard, "The Limits of British Anthropology", New Left Review, 58, 1969; and Bernard Magubane, "A Critical Look at Indices Used in the Study of Social Change in Colonial Africa", Current Anthropology, Vol. 12, 1971. The Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 8, no. 1, 1981, is a special issue on history and anthropology and addresses itself to the crisis in the latter discipline and how the former can help.

nationalist historiography fell victim to its own enormous success: nobody could any longer seriously contest that Africa had its own history. Cabral's impassioned call for the 'inalienable right' of Africans to have their own history, like other people, had been heeded.¹³ Students now began to ask new questions for which nationalist historiography did not have the methodology to provide satisfactory answers.

Criticisms began to flow.¹⁴ It was charged that 'African voices', which nationalist historiography had reclaimed, were voices of the leaders, whether the kings and chiefs of the pre-colonial era, the 'new men' of the early colonial period, or the nationalists who later became the rulers of the independent states. In short, nationalist historiography narrowly focussed on the activities and foibles of traditional and modern ruling classes, and not the 'people' themselves, those beloved 'masses' of the nationalist demagogues. Politics was also emphasised at the expense of economic struggles for survival. But the 'people' in the teeming urban slums and impoverished rural areas could not be fed on heroic stories of Africa's picturesque empires of the past, or the glories of nationalism, and empty promises of a better

¹³ Amílcar Cabral, Revolution in Guinea, Love and Malcomson, London, 1969.

¹⁴ See D. Denoon and A. Kuper, "Nationalist Historians in Search of a Nation. The 'New Historiography' in Dar es Salaam", African Affairs, Vol. 69, no. 277, 1970; and T.O. Ranger's response, "The 'New Historiography' in Dar es Salaam", in African Affairs, Vol. 70, no. 278, 1971. Also see William Ochien, "Undercivilisation in Black Africa", Kenya Historical Review, Vol. 2, no. 1, 1974; Henry Bernstein and Jacques Depelchin, "The Object of African History: a Materialist Perspective", Part 1, History in Africa, 5, 1978; Part 2, idem 6, 1979, and Basil Davidson, "Questions about Nationalism", African Affairs, 302, 1977.

future. Thus theoretical questions and practical concerns coalesced into a profound critique of nationalist historiography, whose practitioners declared there was a general crisis in the study of African history as a whole.

There was never any crisis. What had happened is that the theoretical and ideological consensus in African historical scholarship which had emerged in the sixties had collapsed. In nationalist historiography nationalism had become so 'overdetermining' that only faint efforts were made to provide systematic, comprehensive and penetrating analyses of imperialism, its changing forms, and their impact, not to mention the processes of local class formation and class struggles. By ignoring these themes nationalist historiography over-stated its case: the role and impact of imperialism was underplayed, and African societies were homogenised into classless utopias. Nationalist historiography had proved all too susceptible to pressures to provide 'cultural heroes' and validation for myths of African classlessness propagated by African ruling classes in order to mask and legitimate their vested privileged interests.

The vagaries of time soon took their toll. As the much-vaunted 'political kingdom' failed to deliver much in terms of material and social progress for the 'masses', apart from flags and national anthems, faith in the capacity of the new independent states and their leaders to generate self-sustaining and self-perpetuating economic and social development dwindled. Decolonisation was re-examined. It was pronounced 'false'. The 'radical pessimism' of Fanon, which in 1971 Ranger had correctly predicted would become the main adversary of the 'Africanist

historian', and not the "discarded colonial school",¹⁵ was vindicated. The nationalist movements began losing some of their glitter. Conspiracy theories gained currency; the colonial powers had made 'deals' with the nationalist leaders to perpetuate the oppression and exploitation of the 'masses'. Neo-colonialism became the new catchword. Nkrumah was praised for his foresight.¹⁶ Nationalist historiography had lost both its inspiration and audience. Imperialism was brought out of the closet, and the 'national bourgeoisie' were condemned as its agents; they had become the 'modern collaborators'. Amidst this political and intellectual ferment, Africa was subsumed into the 'Third World'. Gunder Frank was discovered and imported into Africa. The continent's enduring poverty finally became underdevelopment.

Underdevelopment and Dependency

Notions of underdevelopment and dependency developed out of dissatisfaction with prevailing bourgeois descriptions, analyses and prescriptions for Latin America, as well as Marxist ideas about 'backward' countries. Orthodox development theory saw underdevelopment as an original or traditional state. Consequently, the underdeveloped countries ntries could only wrest themselves out of this state by passing through a

¹⁵Ranger, "The 'New Historiography' ..." p. 53. See Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, Grove Press, New York, 1963.

¹⁶Kwame Nkrumah, Neo-Colonialism: The Highest Stage of Imperialism, Panaf Books, London, 1963.

number of Rostovian stages,¹⁷ acquiring Parsonian value systems,¹⁸ and keeping their doors open to 'free' trade, and the diffusion of Western investment and technology.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Marxists still clung tenaciously to Marx's optimistic prognosis that the expansion of capitalism through trade and investment would eventually break down all pre-capitalist modes of production and bring about capitalist economic development in the image of Western Europe.²⁰ Contrary to the 'progressist' projections of both theories, however, the 'Third World' failed to break out of underdevelopment.

¹⁷W.W. Rostow, Stages of Economic Growth, A Non-Communist Manifesto, C.U.P., Cambridge, 1971.

¹⁸Talcott Parsons, The Social System, Free Press, Glencoe, 1951.

¹⁹Some of the most influential essays in development economics can be found in A.N. Agarwala and S.P. Singh, eds., The Economics of Underdevelopment, O.U.P., New York, 1958; and G.M. Meier, ed., Leading Issues in Development Economics, O.U.P., New York, 1976. For the origins of development theory and its various critics see A. Foster-Carter, "Neo-Marxist Approaches to development and underdevelopment", Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 3, no. 1, 1974; Henry Bernstein, "Modernisation theory and the Sociological study of development", Journal of Development Studies, Vol. 7, 1971. Also see essays in E. de Kadt and Gavin Williams, eds., Sociology and Development, Tavistock, London, 1974; and in I. Oxaal, T. Barnett and D. Booth, Beyond the Sociology of Development, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975. Finally, see E. Wayne Nafziger, "A Critique of Development Economics in the US", in Journal of Development Studies, Vol. 13, 1976; and J.S. Valenzuela and A. Valenzuela, "Modernisation and Dependency: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Latin American Underdevelopment", Comparative Politics, Vol. 10, no. 4, 1978.

²⁰See Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1978, p. 91; Communist Manifesto, International Publishers, New York, 1976, pp. 13-14. For Marx's views on pre-capitalist, including the so-called 'Asiatic mode of production', see K. Marx, Pre-capitalist Economic Formations, with an introduction by Eric Hobsbaum, International Publishers, New York, 1980. Also see S. Avineri, Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernisation, Doubleday, New York, 1969.

Prebisch and the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), which was formed in 1948, led the challenge against conventional theories of international trade and economic development. The ECLA showed how the international division of labour was not a natural outcome of world trade, and that it brought greater benefits to the centre than the periphery. The commission advocated the use of a structuralist and historical perspective in order to understand underdevelopment and devise solutions for its eradication.²¹ But the failure of the import-substitution industrialisation model of the ECLA encouraged writers on Latin American underdevelopment to seek for more radical analyses and solutions. The reformulation of ECLA analyses and strategies almost occurred simultaneously with attempts by the Latin American left to reconceptualise obstacles facing capitalist development, particularly industrialisation, in the periphery as a result of pervasive 'feudal-imperialist' alliances.²² It was left to Baran to provide the first systematic analysis of underdevelopment from a Marxist perspective.²³ He insisted

²¹ Paul Prebisch, Change and Development in Latin America: The Great Task, Praeger, New York, 1971.

²² For a brilliant review of the intellectual origins of underdevelopment theory, see Gabriel Palma, "Dependency: A Formal Theory of Underdevelopment or a Methodology for the Analysis of Concrete Situations of Underdevelopment"? World Development, Vol. 6, 1978.

²³ Paul Baran, The Political Economy of Growth, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1956. Among those who followed his critique of original optimistic Marxist hopes on opportunities for capitalist development in backward countries see, B. Sutcliffe, "Imperialism and Industrialisation in the Third World"; M. Barrat-Brown, "A Critique of Marxist Theories of Marxism", in B. Sutcliffe and Roger Owen, eds., Studies in the Theory of Imperialism, Longman, London, 1972. Others have contended that this critique is untenable because Marx himself, as shown by his later views on Ireland, eventually became keenly aware of the

that Western development had historically taken place at the expense of underdeveloped countries, and that the dominant interests in the advanced capitalist countries were profoundly inimical to economic development in the periphery. The dependency school, therefore, had its roots in the ECLA's critique of conventional development theory, and subsequent reformulations of that critique, and the tradition of Marxist thought on the development of capitalism in non-Western societies. All these critiques were united by a common pessimism regarding the possibility of capitalist development in the periphery.

Fanon's radical pessimism no longer seemed so radical or strange anymore; it assumed axiomatic familiarity. The dependency school found ready and eager students of poor old Africa, impoverished by centuries of imperialist exploitation. Frank's²⁴ grand reconstruction and

destructive and distorting effects of colonialism. See H.B. Davis, "Capital and Imperialism: A Landmark in Marxist Theory", Monthly Review, Sept. 1967; and Davis, Nationalism and Socialism: Marxist and Labour Theories of Nationalism to 1917, New York, 1967. Also see Kenzo Mohri, "Marx and Underdevelopment", Monthly Review, April, 1979. The debate would not have been so misleading if it were sufficiently recognised that 'classical' Marxist writers tried to analyse the contradictory character and effects of imperialism, or capitalism in backward countries. See N. Bukharin, Imperialism and World Economy, Martin Lawrence, London, 1929; R. Luxemburg, The Accumulation of Capital, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1963; and V. Lenin, The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1967, and, of course, his Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1970. It is surely not helpful to reduce the debate to whether Marx was a typical 19th century European racist or not as O. Oculi, "Marx's Attitude to Colonialism", does, and disputed by K. Botchwey, in a rejoinder, both in The African Review, Vol. 4, no. 3, 1974.

²⁴A.G. Frank, Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1967; Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1969. Others closest to Frank's tradition are T. dos Santos, "The Structure of Dependence", American Economic Review,

periodisation of Latin American history was repeated for Africa by Amin,²⁵ Wallerstein,²⁶ and Rodney.²⁷ It was demonstrated that from the time of the Atlantic slave trade, to the era of formal colonisation, and, finally, the post-independent period, the history of Africa, like that of Latin America, was characterised by a constant siphoning off of 'social surplus' from Africa to the West through numerous mechanisms, principally the operation of unequal exchange, which was a product of an asymmetrical international division of labour. In short, the underdevelopment of the periphery and development of the centre was constantly being reproduced through an interminable satellite-metropolis chain, in which the surplus generated at each stage is successively drawn to the centre. African, or Third World, underdevelopment was, therefore, simply one side of the same coin of Western development. The dualist models of modernisation theory were buried; the world had become a

May, 1970; "The Crisis of Development Theory and the Problem of Dependence in Latin America", in Henry Bernstein, ed., Underdevelopment and Development, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976; also see, C. Furtado, Economic Development of Latin America: A Survey from Colonial Times to the Cuban Revolution, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1970.

²⁵Samir Amin, "Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa: Historical Origin", Journal of Peace Research, 2, 1972; Accumulation on a World Scale. A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment, Vols. 1 and 2, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1974; and Unequal Development. An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1976.

²⁶Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Three Stages of African Involvement in the World Economy", in P.C.W. Gutkind and I. Wallerstein, eds., The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa, Sage, London, 1976.

²⁷Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Tanzania Publishing House, Dar es Salaam, 1972.

single integrated unit. Capitalism attained universal omnipresence, and the 'development of underdevelopment' assumed a Sisyphean inevitability.

Thus, one approach within the dependency school consists of attempts to construct what Palma calls a mechanico-formal theory of Third World underdevelopment in which the dependent character of these economies is the hub on which the whole analysis of underdevelopment turns.²⁸ Crucial to such analyses is the concept of 'unequal exchange', which is seen as the linchpin of self-perpetuating exploitative relationships of centre and periphery. Needless to say, there is no simple and agreed measure of unequal exchange.

Aghiri Emmanuel²⁹ bases his concept of unequal exchange on 'an unequal rewarding of factors', notably the 'labour factor', between 'poor' and 'rich' countries. In other words, wage disparities between poor and rich countries, brought about by imperialism's historic tendency to ever greater unevenness of development, which in turn dictates an international division of labour that is detrimental to the former group of countries in that they exchange commodities which took a relatively large number of hours with those from the rich countries incorporating a much smaller number of labour-hours, are at the root of unequal exchange. Thus the periphery is drained of much of the social value of its labour. The polarisation of the world between centre and periphery is deepened; the

²⁸Gabriel Palma, *op. cit.*, pp. 898-906.

²⁹Arghiri Emmanuel, *Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1972; "Myths of Development and Myths of Underdevelopment", *New Left Review*, 85, 1974.

contradictions between classes in the metropolitan countries become historically secondary. Henceforth, the principal contradiction and driving force for change are located in the realm of international economic relations. Marx is 'internationalised' as the world becomes divided into 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' nations, 'North' and 'South'. The proletariat of the periphery takes over from their privileged metropolitan brethren the role of a vanguard in the global socialist revolution. Underdevelopment finds its historic mission. It is the gravedigger of capitalism.

Samir Amin agrees with the broad outlines of Emmanuel's theory of unequal exchange. He insists, however, that unequal exchange can only be fully grasped if it is understood in a broader theoretical context of exchange relations between different social formations, and not within the narrow confines of exchange inside the capitalist mode of production. He, therefore, locates the transfer of value from the periphery to the centre in the sphere of accumulation, or through what he calls the 'permanent' mechanisms of primitive accumulation. For him accumulation on a world scale involves a continuous process of primitive accumulation in the periphery for the benefit of the centre. He argues that, unlike expanded normal reproduction, the mechanism of primitive accumulation is unequal exchange, that is the exchange of products of unequal value, or rather whose prices of production are unequal. The dynamic of unequal exchange is rooted in the very structure of linkages between socio-economic formations of peripheral capitalism and of capitalism at the centre. Unlike the latter, capitalist formations on the periphery are characterised by unevenness of productivity between sectors,

disarticulation and extraversion of the economic system, and domination from outside. The combined and cumulative effects of these factors create the conditions for the drainage of surplus to the centre, thereby reinforcing and reproducing the commercial, financial, and technological dependence of underdeveloped countries on the centre. Under such a system there can only be 'growth without development' at best. Breaking out of the world capitalist system, therefore, becomes the only alternative to perpetual dependency.

While Amin's attempts to show the development, features and contradictions of peripheral social formations display a keen awareness of the complexities of the world capitalist system, Immanuel Wallerstein's work portrays a world system that is as complex as it is mechanical. Wallerstein tries to systematise dependency notions of 'incorporation', 'transfer of surplus', 'specialisation' into a 'metatheoretical' construct with which to explain the origins of capitalist development and underdevelopment and to locate the mainspring of their subsequent evolutions. He sees capitalism as a trade-based world division of labour in which a unique pattern of labour usage characterises the core (free, skilled labour), and the periphery (coerced, unskilled labour). "When labour is everywhere free", he contends, "we shall have socialism".³⁰ According to Wallerstein, therefore, the development of capitalist production, which facilitated the growing division of labour, was itself made possible by the regional specialisation of methods of labour control. Capitalism

³⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein, The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century, Academic Press, New York, 1974, p. 127.

is depicted as a system of labour rationalisation and of unequal exchange. In short, Wallerstein's world system is a global Parsonian monster in which the peripheries are assigned specific economic roles, and all they can do is jockey either for semi-peripheral or core status, until the system self-destructs sometime in the "twenty-first or twenty-second century". Consequently, in Wallerstein's world system social struggles are spectacularly trivial, and historical processes are reduced to a series of ahistorical functionalist games of system maintenance. Pessimism finally matures into fatalism. Fanon is turned on his head.

In a devastating critique, Brenner³¹ refutes Wallerstein's theory of the extrinsic origins of capitalism. He argues that capitalism originated out of class struggles arising from the internal contradictions of feudalism, which led to the emergence of a system of 'free' wage labour — labour power as a commodity — one of the fundamental basis of the capitalist mode of production. Aronowitz³² attacks Wallerstein's very usage of the concept 'system', and shows how its inadequacy forces Wallerstein to adopt nominalist conceptions of conjuncture in which historical change is perceived as a function not of the internal contradictions of a system but of pure contingency.

³¹ Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: a Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism", New Left Review, 104, 1977.

³² Stanley Aronowitz, "A Metatheoretical Critique of Immanuel Wallerstein's The Modern World System", Theory and Society, 10, 1981.

Brenner and other Marxist critics³³ charge that Wallerstein, Amin, Emmanuel, Frank, and others who construct grand teleologies of development and underdevelopment mislocate the dynamic of capital accumulation by concentrating on exchange relations (unequal exchange), and not production relations (class structure, class struggle). The 'external' determination of dependency is so overemphasised that the role of 'internal' structures in reproducing dependency is obscured. Thus, set against the 'unequal exchange' of the underdevelopmentalists, is the 'comparative advantage' of the development economists, so ferociously attacked by the former;³⁴ both dwell on trade at the expense of production itself,

³³See Bettelheim's critique of Emmanuel, in A. Emmanuel, *op. cit.*, appendix 1-5; Geoffrey Pilling, "Imperialism, trade and 'unequal exchange': the work of Arghiri Emmanuel", Economy and Society, Vol. 2, no. 2, 1973. For a critique of Amin see, Sheila Smith, "The Ideas of Samir Amin: Theory or Tautology?" Journal of Development Studies, 17, 1980. For general critiques of dependency see the influential essay by E. Laclau, "Feudalism and capitalism in Latin America", New Left Review, 67, 1971; also see R. Fernandez and J. Ocampo, "The Latin American Revolution: a theory of imperialism not dependency", Latin American Perspective, Vol. 1, no. 1, 1974; John Taylor, "Neo-Marxism and Underdevelopment - A Sociological Phantasy", Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 4, no. 1, 1974; D.W. Nabudere, The Political Economy of Imperialism, Zed Press, London, 1977; G. Palma, *op. cit.*; Gavin Williams, "Imperialism and Development: A Critique", World Development, Vol. 6, 1978; Cooper, *op. cit.*; and, Michael Bratton, "Types of Development and Underdevelopment: Towards Comparison", International Studies Quarterly, 1982, (forthcoming).

³⁴A.G. Hopkins criticises the dependency thesis from two main perspectives. First, he argues that it simplifies conventional international trade theory, and, at any rate, most of its criticisms have long been incorporated into that theory. Second, the dependency approach of "the Frank-Rodney line leaves little room for an independent, internal approach to African history before the impact of the West": "Clio-Antics: A Horoscope for African Economic History", in C. Fyfe, *op. cit.*, p. 34; and "On importing Andre Gunder Frank into Africa", African Economic History Review, 2, 1975.

disregard classes which emerge from the productive process, the ensuing class struggles, and the complex and contradictory effects of those struggles on the social formations of the so-called peripheral capitalist societies.

By 'blaming' the metropolises and international capital for poverty, backwardness and stagnation in the periphery, the local ruling classes are absolved, thereby misdirecting political struggle. Indeed, the tendency to portray the local bourgeoisie as 'lumpen', 'comprador', or 'auxiliary', incapable of rational accumulation and rational political activity, forces political activists to choose between immediate socialist revolution or permanent state of capitalist underdevelopment. One leads to adventurism, the other to complacent pessimism. Moreover, dependency notions of unequal exchange and international specialisation undermine international working class solidarity and encourage 'third worldist' ideology.

Yet the kaleidoscopic reality of the Third World strains any attempt to homogenise that world into a 'periphery', to see their history unfolding according to the lockstep of a predetermined Rostovian-like pattern. For Warren, the chances for successful capitalist development, that is, industrialisation, are quite good for a number of major underdeveloped countries. In fact, "substantial progress in capitalist industrialisation has already been achieved" in these countries.³⁵

³⁵Bill Warren, "Imperialism and Capitalist Industrialisation", *New Left Review*, 81, 1973, p. 3. These arguments have been elaborated further in his book: *Imperialism. Pioneer of Capitalism*, Verso, London, 1980. Among his critics see, William Hansen and Brigitte Schulz, "Imperialism, Dependency, and social class", *Africa Today*, 3rd Quarter, 1981; A. Emmanuel, "Myths of Development ..."; P. Michael, J. Petras,

Imperialism is actually declining as capitalism in the periphery grows. Swainson is moved to assert that the much-abused national bourgeoisie is not merely an "impotent class of intermediaries for international capital".³⁶ Independence does matter. Lall³⁷ wonders whether the characteristics of dependent economies are not characteristics of capitalism in general since they are not exclusive to the former. Is it not, Palma asks, confusing a socialist critique of capitalism with the analysis of the obstacles of capitalism in the Third World to talk of

and R. Rhodes, "Imperialism and the Contradictions of Development", New Left Review, 85, 1975. They all point out that Warren's basic thesis is misconceived, and its implications are dangerous. Not only has he mistaken a short-run expansion of industrialisation that already seems to be running out of steam for a long-term trend, but he ignores the accompanying massive debt burden, problems of rising unemployment, continuing agricultural stagnation, inflation, and enormous poverty and suffering.

³⁶Nicola Swainson, "The Rise of a National Bourgeoisie in Kenya", Review of African Political Economy, 8, p. 40. Anne Philips poignantly notes, however, that "the discovery that there is a national bourgeoisie ... that it is capable of accumulation, that it is not necessarily restricted to most obviously 'comprador' activities such as commerce or construction, could after all mean no more than that Africa will be able to achieve the same form of 'underdevelopment' as Latin America": "The Concept of Development", Review of African Political Economy, 8, p. 8. It is interesting to note that Colin Leys who initially talked of the foreign bourgeoisie as the dominant class in Kenya, and that industrialisation in the periphery "does not lead to an autonomous process of capitalist development, but a further consolidation of underdevelopment", has become less dismissive of the 'national bourgeoisie': Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1974, p. 17. In a critical piece on dependency he argues that the core-periphery framework is nothing but a "polemical inversion" of well-known "simplistic pairings": "Underdevelopment and Dependency: Critical Notes", Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 7, no. 1, 1977.

³⁷S. Lall, "Is dependence a useful concept in analysing underdevelopment?" World Development, Vol. 3, no. 11, 1975.

'growth without development'?³⁸ Cooper concludes: "dissecting complex problems with concepts like underdevelopment, incorporation, unequal exchange, and core-periphery relations is rather like performing brain surgery with an ax: the concepts cut, but messily".³⁹

Some of these theoretical, ideological, and empirical criticisms are exaggerated, for after all, there is not one but several overlapping dependency approaches, and not all of them have been guilty of these inadequacies.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that dependency

³⁸G. Palma, op. cit., p. 908.

³⁹F. Cooper, op. cit., p. 16.

⁴⁰G. Palma, for instance, distinguishes two other approaches apart from that associated with Frank. First, there is an approach which is "characterised by the attempt to reformulate the ECLA analyses of Latin American development from the perspective of a critique of the obstacles to national development". Second, there is the approach "which deliberately attempts not to develop a mechanico-formal theory of dependency by concentrating its analysis on what have been called 'concrete situations of dependency': Palma, op. cit., pp. 898, 906-911. The first approach can be found in the work of writers like O. Sunkel, "Big Business and dependency", Foreign Affairs, Vol. 24, no. 1, 1972; and "Transitional capitalism and national disintegration in Latin America", Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 22, no. 1, 1973. The second approach is associated with the work of F.H. Cardoso and his notion of dependent development. Cardoso has attacked the model-building of some dependency writers. As he puts it at one point: "instead of making a dialectical analysis of historical processes and of conceiving them as the result of struggle between classes and groups that define their interest and values in the process of the expansion of a mode of production, history is formalised and ... the ambiguity, the contradictions and disjunctions of the real are reduced to 'operational dimensions', which are by definition uniform but static": "The consumption of dependency theory in the US". Latin America Research Review, Vol. 12, no. 3, 1977; also see, "Dependency and development in Latin America", New Left Review, 74, 1972; and with E. Faletto, Dependency and Development in Latin America, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1979. It might be mentioned that Frank responded to his critics in, Lumpenbourgeoisie: Lumpendevelopment, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1972, and tried to include class analysis in, On Capitalist Underdevelopment, O.U.P., London, 1975, and some of his later work. An attempt to relate dependency and internal

theory has lost its novelty. Like nationalist historiography before it, it has 'proved' its case: development and underdevelopment are interconnected. Africa or the Third World had been integrated into the capitalist world system and in the process her poverty has lost some of its exoticism.

It is the contention of this writer that dependency perspectives on unequal exchange, the changing international division of labour, and uneven development, are not necessarily mutually contradictory with Marxist concerns with accumulation within the sphere of production, the processes of class formation and class struggle. In the case of Kenya capitalist development took place during the colonial period in the Leninist sense of capitalist development as an increase in the productive forces of social labour and in the socialisation of that labour. But this capitalist development took place under the conditions of colonialism in the era of imperialism. Consequently, it was dependent capitalist development. In short, a 'dialogue' between dependency and Marxist theories has tremendous potential to offer us insights into the past and contemporary history of the so-called Third World so often obscured under a plethora of barren functionalist assumptions and sterile liberal and nationalist moralising.

class structures in Africa can be found in Joel Samoff, "Underdevelopment and its Grass Roots in Africa", Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 14, no. 1, 1980.

Articulation of Modes of Production, the Colonial State, and Class

A number of writers have tried to advance beyond the ubiquitous and homogeneous capitalism of many dependency theorists by positing the concept of 'articulation of modes of production', whereby pre-capitalist modes of production are articulated in their diverse relations with the capitalist mode, including through (unequal) exchange relations. According to this paradigm, therefore, the introduction of capitalism does not eliminate pre-capitalist modes, but reshapes them. In other words, pre-capitalist modes of production continue to exist, but are progressively subordinated to capital through a contradictory process of destruction, preservation and transformation. The treacherous marshland of dualist theories and dependency's universal capitalism is thereby carefully skirted.⁴¹

All too often, however, articulation is conceived solely as a continuous process of interaction through which pre-capitalist modes pay the costs of reproduction for the capitalist mode, especially the reproduction of the labour force.⁴² "Yet in recent years", Mafeje pointedly tells us, "we have witnessed in South Africa the dumping of unwanted labour in the reserves, not to reproduce their labour-power but to

⁴¹See Aidan Foster-Carter, "The modes of production controversy", New Left Review, no. 107, 1978.

⁴²Frederick Cooper, "Peasants, Capitalists, and Historians: A Review Article", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 7, no. 2, 1980, p. 286; Cooper, "Africa and the World Economy", p. 19.

perish".⁴³ This is a sobering reminder that at one stage in the process of articulation, pre-capitalist modes of production can be used to 'subsidise' capital accumulation, while at another to provide dumping grounds for the flotsam and jetsam of capitalism, especially the unemployed.

We are back to stages. Rey distinguishes three stages of articulation, namely:

1. an initial link in the sphere of exchange, where interaction with capitalism reinforces the pre-capitalist mode; 2. capitalism 'takes root', subordinating the pre-capitalist mode but still making use of it; 3. (not yet reached in the Third World) the total disappearance of the pre-capitalist mode, even in agriculture.⁴⁴

In essence, Rey's "periodisation of stages of articulation is rooted in capitalism's increasing (and eventually total) ability to look after itself".⁴⁵ Articulation assumes unilinear progression. In reaction to this, others insist that it is crucial to emphasise that different capitals at various times require different things from pre-capitalist societies, so that there should be no "bland talk of 'capitalism' doing

⁴³ Archie Mafeje, "On the Articulation of Modes of Production: Review Article", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 8, no. 1, 1981, p. 134. He is reviewing Harold Wolpe's, ed., The Articulation of Modes of Production, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980.

⁴⁴ Foster-Carter, op. cit., p. 56.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

or being this and that, in relation to other modes of production".⁴⁶ Kay takes this position even further.⁴⁷ He contends that at least until the 1930s it was merchant, and not industrial capital, which articulated with the pre-capitalist modes of production. Merchant capital created markets on behalf of industrial capital and obtained raw materials produced by non-capitalist producers, or on plantations and in mines that paid below subsistence wages. So long as merchant capital was dominant in the colonies, therefore, pre-capitalist modes of production had to be preserved. In the end he generalises the distinction between industrial and merchant capital into the determining characteristic of underdevelopment. Once again, explanation of specific historical processes is abstracted into a grand teleology of development and underdevelopment.

Part of the difficulty in trying to 'concretise' articulation lies in the fact that while the capitalist mode of production can be specified, it is not easy to do the same with pre-capitalist modes. Coquery-Vidrovitch has talked about an 'African mode of production',⁴⁸ some have come up with the lineage mode of production, and yet others with a slave

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 69. This position is mainly associated with B. Bradby, "The Destruction of Natural Economy", Economy and Society, Vol. 4, no. 2, 1975.

⁴⁷ G. Kay, Development and Underdevelopment, A Marxist Analysis, Macmillan, London, 1975. Kay offers that eminently provocative remark that "capital created underdevelopment not because it exploited the underdeveloped world, but because it did not exploit it enough", pp. ix-x.

⁴⁸ C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, "The Political Economy of the African Peasantry and Modes of Production", in P.C.W. Gutkind and I. Wallerstein, eds., op. cit.

mode, all of which have their own problems.⁴⁹ The problem lies in trying to construct a single mode or a few distinctive modes of production for the diverse and complex historical reality that is Africa. The same can be said of attempts to formulate a concept of 'colonial capitalist mode of production' (CCMP). The question is, can one then talk of a post-colonial mode of production? Or is the CCMP a transitional one from pre-capitalist modes to capitalism? Using this ill-defined concept, it is not surprising that Magubane can argue that "colonial oppression and exploitation impoverished all strata of African society without creating social divisions typical of the mature capitalist countries".⁵⁰ In effect, the 'civilising' mission of capitalism in Africa failed because of colonialism. Amin certainly did better to distinguish between 'Africa of the colonial economy', 'Africa of the concession companies', and 'Africa of the labour reserves'.⁵¹ In short,

⁴⁹ See Robin Law, "In Search for a Marxist Perspective on Pre-Colonial Tropical Africa: Review Article", Journal of African History, Vol. 19, no. 3. It is a brief but excellent review of B. Hinds and P.Q., Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975; D. Seddon, Relations of Production: Marxist Approaches to Economic Anthropology, Frank Cass, London, 1978; J. Goody, Production and Reproduction: A Comparative Study of the Domestic Domain, C.U.P., London, 1976. For a sharply critical review of Hinds and Hirst, see, T. Asad and H. Wolpe, "Concepts of Modes of Production", Economy and Society, Vol. 5, no. 4, 1976.

⁵⁰ B. Magubane, "The Evolution of the Class Structure in Africa", in Gutkind and Wallerstein, eds., op. cit., p. 178. Also see, Hamza Alavi, "India and the Colonial Mode of Production", in Socialist Register, 1975, edited by Ralph Miliband and John Saville; Jairus Banaji, "For a Theory of Colonial Modes of Production", Economic and Political Weekly, (Bombay), Vol. 7, no. 52.

⁵¹ Samir Amin, "Modes of Production and Social Formations", Ufahamu, Vol. 4, no. 3, 1974.

the concepts of colonial mode of production or CCMP "get so far away from the point of production that they merely shift the question of determination to another sphere: why should a political process, colonialism, determine production ...?"⁵²

The concept of articulation is better equipped than concepts of colonial modes of production to analyse African societies during the era of colonialism and after, despite some of the aforementioned difficulties. The point to bear in mind when discussing articulation is that it is a process in which the capitalist mode of production establishes its domination over the non-capitalist mode. Lest modes of production become actors in themselves endowed with their own inexorable logic, it should be underlined that this process essentially involves a struggle between classes these modes define. Moreover, the process of articulation is too complex to be interpreted mechanically as referring to sharply defined and sequentially structured stages. Berman and Lonsdale's eminently reasonable characterisation of articulation ought to be quoted at some length:

Concretely, articulation involved extracting surplus product from and/or forcing labour into capitalist or quasi-capitalist formations, thereby partially transforming them and making their self-reproduction increasingly impossible. The form of articulation varied according to the particular character of capitalist penetration, the nature of the indigenous modes of production, and the local ecology and resource endowment. The resulting variations in the

⁵²Cooper, "Africa and the World Economy", p. 18.

subjugation and transformation of local societies and the degree to which capitalist forms of production were introduced also determined the differing patterns of class formation within and between colonies.⁵³

The process of articulation is accompanied by violence,⁵⁴ certainly during the phase of 'primitive accumulation', when the capitalist mode of production is being introduced. Since conquest paved way for the importation of capitalism, "the colonial state was necessarily instrumental with regard to metropolitan capital, 'opening up' Africa's modes of production".⁵⁵ But to what extent is the colonial state simply an instrument of metropolitan capital?

A number of Marxist writers emphasise that the capitalist state acts as a 'factor of cohesion' for capital's diverse and competing fractions in order to protect capitalist relations of production as a whole. In other words, the state must have 'relative autonomy' from the dominant class forces, at least at the level of political practice, so as to secure reproduction of conditions of capitalist production and ensure the system's legitimation and hegemony over the dominated classes. Thus,

⁵³B.J. Berman and J.M. Lonsdale, "The Development of the Labour Control System in Kenya, 1919-1929", Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 14, no. 1, 1980, p. 60. More recently, Lonsdale has tried to distinguish four different forms of articulation, namely, transitive, intransitive, tributary, and syncretic. It is tempting to see this as an exercise in reification. See Lonsdale, "The state and social processes ...", pp. 35-7.

⁵⁴According to Foster-Carter, op. cit., pp. 57-63, this factor is emphasised in Rey's concept of articulation. Also see Foster-Carter's "Marxism and the 'Fact of Conquest'", The African Review, Vol. 6, no. 1, 1976.

⁵⁵Lonsdale, op. cit., p. 36.

the contradictions of capitalist production, that is accumulation and class struggle, are reproduced or 'condensed' within the state, thereby necessitating the existence of the 'relative autonomy' of the state at the structural or institutional level.⁵⁶

The colonial state, Berman and Lonsdale have argued, is a variant or subtype of the state in the advanced capitalist formations, so that it, too, has 'relative autonomy'. They emphasise, however, and correctly, that the colonial state faces an even more complex task

as the 'factor of cohesion' in peripheral economy based on articulated modes of production ... The colonial state indeed straddled not one but two levels of contradiction: between the metropole and the colony as a whole as well as within the colony itself. It therefore bore a dual character: it was at once a subordinate agent in its restructuring of local production to meet metropolitan demand, yet also the local factor of cohesion over the heterogeneous, fragmented and contradictory social forces jostling within. This very Dual Mandate defined the dilemmas of the colonial state.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The literature on the capitalist state is vast and growing so that here we can only mention some of the key participants in the debate: Nicos Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Classes, Verso, London, 1968; R. Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1969. The two have carried on a lively debate in the New Left Review: Poulantzas, "The Problem of the Capitalist State", no. 58, 1969; Miliband, "Reply to Nicos Poulantzas", no. 59, 1970; Miliband, "Poulantzas and the Capitalist State", no. 82, 1973; Poulantzas, "The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau", no. 95, 1976. For an analysis of this debate see, E. Nash and W. Rich, "The specificity of the political: the Poulantzas-Miliband debate", Economy and Society, Vol. 4, no. 1, 1975. For a good survey of the various positions on the capitalist state see the essays in J. Holloway and S. Picciotto, eds., State and Capital, a Marxist Debate, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1979.

⁵⁷ J. Lonsdale and B. Berman, "Coping with the contradictions: the development of the colonial state in Kenya", Journal of African History,

Not surprisingly, therefore, the colonial state was more interventionist in the economy than contemporary capitalist states. It was also dependent to an extraordinary degree on force, although once it had "subdued and subordinated local societies, the colonial state had to convert superior force into legitimate authority based on a substantial degree of at least tacit consent from the subject population".⁵⁸

The last point should not be overemphasised to obscure the fact of resistance to colonialism; after all, the Kenyattas and the Bandas born around the time colonialism was being imposed lived to see it overthrown. Moreover, it must be noted that the colonial state took different forms in settler and non-settler colonies because it faced different conditions

Vol. 20, no. 4, 1979, p. 490. For comparable efforts to conceptualise the state in colonial and peripheral societies see, B. Chandra, "Colonialism, Stages of Colonialism and the Colonial State", Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 10, no. 3, 1980; W. Ziemann and M. Lanzendorfer, "The State in Peripheral Societies", in Socialist Register, 1977, edited by Miliband and Saville. It has been argued that the post-colonial state is 'overdeveloped'. For this rather tedious debate see, H. Alavi, "The state in post-colonial societies", New Left Review, 74, 1972, who coined the concept of the 'overdeveloped' post-colonial state. John Saul applied it to East Africa in, "The State in Post-Colonial Societies — Tanzania", The Socialist Register, 1974, edited by Miliband and Saville. Colin Leys criticised Saul and the whole concept for its ambiguities in, "The 'Overdeveloped' Post-Colonial State: A Re-evaluation", Review of African Political Economy, 5, issue on 'the State in Africa'. Also see, M. von Freyhold, "The Post-Colonial State and its Tanzanian Version", Review of African Political Economy, 8; Nicola Swainson, "The Post-Colonial State in Kenya", Centre for African Studies, Dalhousie, mimeo, March, 1978; and Lonsdale's critique of the whole debate in, "The State and Social Processes ..."

⁵⁸Berman and Lonsdale, "The Development of the Labour Control System", p. 61.

and intensity of contradictions.⁵⁹

It is tempting to conclude that the concept of 'articulation of modes of production' can help us in understanding the colonial state as a complex historical process. Consequently, colonial policy, that favourite subject of history students, can be situated into its broad perspective and not attributed to the wisdom or bureaucratic infighting of colonial officials. Further, 'articulation of modes of production' enables us to comprehend the specific forms that accumulation, the labour process, and class struggle took.

There have been many objections to the use of the concept of class in analysing African societies, ranging from those who simply contend that these societies have not 'developed' enough to generate distinctive and antagonistic social classes, or that the 'elites' and the workers are numerically so small that neither can constitute a coherent stratum, to those who assert that 'tribalism' or ethnic particularism undermines the growth of class consciousness and class-based action, and that since

⁵⁹ See, for example, the analysis of the South African State by S. Clarke, "Capital, fractions of capital and the State: 'Neo-Marxist' analysis of the South African State", Capital and Class, 5, 1978. Kenya's political economy was in between that of the Southern African settler colonies and the West African peasant export production colonies, and this was reflected in the peculiar dual character of the Kenyan state. The nature of the colonial state in Portuguese colonies was even more complicated. See Perry Anderson's excellent essay, "Portugal and the end of ultra-colonialism", New Left Review, nos. 15-17, 1962; and G. Bender, Angola Under the Portuguese, the Myth and the Reality, Heinemann, London, 1978. For a very perceptive analysis of settler colonialism see, A. Emmanuel, "White-Settler Colonialism and the Myth of Investment Imperialism", New Left Review, no. 73, 1972. Also see K. Good, "Settler colonialism: economic development and class formation", Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 14, no. 4, 1976; and T.O. Ranger, "White Presence and Power in Africa", Journal of African History, Vol. 20, no. 4, 1979.

the great majority of Africans reside as an undifferentiated mass in the rural areas, it is meaningless to take class stratification as the overall basis of such societies. Under such circumstances, some argue, it is better to use the theory of cultural or social 'pluralism'.⁶⁰

This is not the place to present a detailed critique of these objections to the use of the concept of class in analysing African societies. Suffice it to say, the criticisms of class analysis are based on the elite theory's rather simplistic 'elite-mass' dichotomy which fails to take into account the differentiation within the latter category. The fixation with numbers is also unhistorical and betrays a static conceptualization of social reality. Moreover, these objections are based on a fundamental misconception: class is rendered non-existent outside of the subjective manifestation of classes in the capitalist West. Granted that peripheral social formations are not exactly the same as those to be found in the metropolitan centres, the articulation of social classes will obviously be different. That, however, is not the same as saying classes are non-existent in Africa. The cultural determinism of pluralism simply obfuscates the underlying complex forces behind so many seemingly 'tribal' conflicts in Africa.⁶¹

⁶⁰ See, for instance, Leo Kuper and M.G. Smith, eds., Pluralism in Africa, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1969. Many of the arguments against employing class analysis in Africa can be found in K. Grundy, "The 'Class Struggle' in Africa: an examination of conflicting theories", Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 6, no. 2, 1968.

⁶¹ M. Legassick, "The concept of pluralism: a critique", in P. Gutkind and P. Waterman, op. cit.; Magubane, op. cit. Among those who have generally argued in favour of using class analysis see, R. Cohen, "Classes in Africa: Analytical Problems and Perspectives", in Socialist Register, 1972, edited by Miliband and Saville; R. Ledda, "Social Classes and Political Struggles in Africa", International

The question of 'tribalism' is really a vexing one. Unlike 'conventional' writers who have tended to regard 'tribalism' as "Africa's natural condition",⁶² or rejected the term 'tribe' in favour of the less evocative 'ethnicity' and stressed its situational character,⁶³ the subject has confounded Marxist writers. Their treatment has veered from a contemptuous dismissal, to an acknowledgement that though 'unreal' ethnicity serves an ideological function. Sklar offered one of the earliest critiques of the concept when he observed that it is instigated and politicised by the leaders. In this context, he argued, 'tribalism' "becomes a mask for class privilege. To borrow a worn metaphor, there is often a non-traditional wolf under the tribal sheepskin ... tribalism should be viewed as a dependent variable rather than a primordial political force in the new nation."⁶⁴ Southall⁶⁵ demonstrated that going

Socialist Journal, 22, 1967. Also see G.N. Kitching, "The concept of class and the study of Africa", The African Review, Vol. 2, no. 3, 1973.

⁶²Colin Legum, "Tribal Survival in the Modern African Political System", in Journal of Asian and African Studies, Vol. 5, nos. 1-2, 1970. The whole issue is a 'special number on the passing of tribal man in Africa'. Except for Herbert Chitepo's and Aidan Southall's articles, the rest espouse similar views of tribalism-cum-ethnicity as a given reality.

⁶³This less 'offensive' and more 'objective' concept is advocated by C. Enloe, Ethnic Conflict and Political Development, Little Brown, Boston, 1973; C. Young, The Politics of Cultural Pluralism, Univ. of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1976; W. Connor, "Nation-building or Nation-Destroying", World Politics, Vol. 24, no. 3, 1972.

⁶⁴R.L. Sklar, "Political Science and National Integration - A Radical Approach", Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 5, no. 1, 1967, p. 6.

⁶⁵Aidan Southall, "The Illusion of Tribe", Journal of Asian and African Studies, Vol. 5, nos. 1-2.

by the generally accepted characteristics of a tribal society, then such societies have been extinct for a very long time indeed. Apart from this definitional problem, he continues, there is the 'problem of illusion', that is, the notion of tribe is falsely applied to artificial or misconceived entities. In effect, he identifies that many so-called tribes, like the Luyia of Kenya, were created by colonialism.

Mafeje took up the issue and declared categorically that 'tribalism' was nothing but an ideology. To use 'tribe' as an analytical unit, he stated, is to ignore the profound impact of the colonial political economy. "While anthropologists", he alleges, "use their tribal ideology to explain both successes and failures in modernisation, political scientists of all persuasions use theirs to explain only failures".⁶⁶ "This is not to deny", he stresses, "the existence of tribal ideology and sentiment in Africa", rather, it is to argue "that they have to be understood — and conceptualised — differently under modern conditions".⁶⁷ Leys accepts that 'tribalism' is an ideological phenomenon created by colonialism. "The foundations for modern 'tribalism'", he argues, "were laid when the various tribal modes and relations of productions began to be displaced by capitalist ones, giving rise to new forms of insecurity, and obliging people to compete with each other on a national plane for work, land, and ultimately for education and other services seen as necessary for security".⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Archie Mafeje, "The Ideology of Tribalism", Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 9, no. 2, 1971, p. 258.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 259.

⁶⁸ Leys, Underdevelopment in Kenya, p. 199.

These writers seem to be arguing that ethnicity, or to quote Saul, the ethnic variable, has to be understood "as part of the structure of Africa's peripheral capitalism".⁶⁹ Saul sees ethnicity, first, as developing in response to imperialism. He urges that we should supplant the term ethnicity with nationalism to avoid unnecessary confusion. Second, ethnicity should be understood in the context of the articulation of modes of production, in which certain aspects of pre-capitalist modes of production are perpetuated. Finally, ethnicity forms an integral part of class struggle in the ideological sphere. In short, Saul contends that it is pointless to deny the ethnic, preferably national, pluralism in the artificially created African states; but he would rather see emphasis placed on the way in which the ethnic 'interpellation' (together with the national 'interpellation') is spawned by internal class contradictions as well as the centre-periphery contradiction. He rejects a juxtaposition of ethnic and class analysis as too crude.

Other writers have used the concept of class so loosely that it ceases to have much meaning. According to them class is determined by behavioural patterns. J.C. Mitchell, for instance, "identified the African middle class as those 'people who used Europeans as a reference group for their behaviour'".⁷⁰ Society is thereby divided into the 'middle class' and 'lower classes'. Thus class is determined by

⁶⁹J.S. Saul, "The Dialectic of Class and Tribe", in his The State and Revolution in Eastern Africa, Heinemann, London, 1979, p. 398.

⁷⁰J.C. Mitchell, "The African Middle Class in British Central Africa", in Development of a Middle Class in Tropical Countries, Brussels, 1956, pp. 222-32, as quoted by V.L. Allen, "The Meaning of the Working Class in Africa", Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 10, no. 2, 1972, p. 173.

'civilising' factors, and is reduced to a prestige phenomenon. Little effort is made to comprehend the structural determinants of class positions.

Those who dismiss class analysis out of hand presumably on account of Africa's uniqueness, the 'dark continent's' impenetrability to such 'alien' concepts as class, as well as those who use it loosely, suffer from, to quote Robin Cohen,

the tendency to place concepts in an historical deep freeze, embalmed around a particular historical conjuncture, conditioned by an image of an ideal or pure form of the social object ... The second pitfall in a purist position is an incapacity to comprehend the processional character involved in all social change. Thus categories are rejected out of hand because they fail to conform in every respect or in what are deemed essential respects, to an idealised reconstruction in the mind of the scholar ... The origins of African scholarship are rooted in a pursuit of the exotic folklore of people previously unknown to Western experience and this tradition is still conveniently manifested in a constant insistence on the situationally specific and unique feature of African data.⁷¹

It is perhaps no wonder that pages and pages are devoted to discussions of definitions, say of the peasantry and the working class. What is a peasantry? Can one even realistically talk of 'peasants' in Africa? If so what is a peasant mode of production? Are peasants reactionary or progressive? Are peasants, indeed, semi-proletarians in the international division of labour "producing surplus value for capital

⁷¹R. Cohen, "From Peasants to Workers in Africa", in Gutkind and Wallerstein, op. cit., pp. 155-6.

but located outside the direct labour process"?⁷² Is one better served to talk of those who enter wage employment as migrants, peasant target-wage earners, worker-peasants, or lumpen-proletarians, and not workers?⁷³

What is important is not to freeze processes into static definitional schemas. Social classes can only be understood within the contexts of the production process itself and the social relations of production. Working class formation, or proletarianisation, refers, therefore, to the process by which producers are separated from their means of production, say land, so that they have to sell their labour power for a wage in order to subsist, irrespective of whether they do so permanently or not. Thus those who are involved in selling their labour power belong to the same objective economic position. This is a necessary condition for membership of the working class in a capitalist system, but working

⁷²J. Boesen, "On Peasantry and the 'modes of production' Debate", in Review of African Political Economy, Nos. 15-16, p. 155. For exercises in trying to define the peasants see, J.S. Saul and R. Woods, "African Peasantries", in T. Shanin, ed., Peasants and Peasant Societies, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979; M.A. Klein, "Introduction", in Peasants in Africa, historical and contemporary perspectives, Sage, London, 1980; Henry Bernstein, "African Peasantries: A Theoretical Framework", Journal of Peasant Studies, 6, 1979; L.A. Fallers, "Are African Cultivators to be called 'Peasants'?", Current Anthropology, 2, 1961; and T.O. Ranger, "Growing from the Roots: Reflections on Peasant Research in Central and Southern Africa", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 5, no. 1, 1978.

⁷³For similar exercises on workers see, V.L. Allen, op. cit.; H. Heisler, "A Class of Target Proletarians", Journal of Asian and African Studies, Vol. 5, no. 3, 1970; R. Sandbrook, and R. Cohen, eds., "Workers and Progressive Change in Underdeveloped Countries", in The Development of an African Working Class, Longman, London, 1975; and P.C.W. Gutkind, R. Cohen and J. Copans, eds., African Labour History, Sage, London, 1978.

class consciousness is manifested through collective organisation, political action, and so on. Hence, Marx made the distinction between class-in-itself, i.e., its objective existence, and class-for-itself, i.e., its subjective existence. That, however, does not mean the material conditions determine the superstructural elements in a mechanical way. They mutually determine each other, or as it is sometimes put, the former 'conditions' the latter, or the latter 'corresponds' to the material base.⁷⁴

It is not necessary to 'prove' the existence of African working classes by swelling their ranks with peasants and traders, as Allen does.⁷⁵ It is more important to analyse the actual processes of working class formation. The present study has been undertaken with the aim of examining how the Kenyan working class, to borrow E.P. Thomson's phrase, "made itself as much as it was made".⁷⁶

⁷⁴Poulantzas dismisses Marx's distinction between 'class-in-itself' and 'class-for-itself' as "merely Hegelian reminiscences. Not only do they fail to explain anything, but they have for years misled Marxist theorists of social classes. These formulae have in particular played a protective role for the historicist schema, by permitting the conception of an economic structure 'set in motion' by the politico-ideological class, a structure inside which classes are nevertheless to be inserted in the mysterious mode of the 'class-in-itself': Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Classes, p. 76. This is one example that Poulantzas's writings sometimes tend to be rarefied.

⁷⁵V.L. Allen, op. cit., pp. 187-9.

⁷⁶E.P. Thomson, The Making of the English Working Class, Gollancz, London, 1963, p. 194.

African Labour Studies

Serious research interest in African labour did not begin until the turn of the sixties.⁷⁷ Before that, the field was almost left entirely to reports and publications by colonial government labour departments, commissions of inquiry,⁷⁸ visiting ILO and ICFTU missions,⁷⁹ and movements sympathetic to colonial peoples, like the Fabian Colonial Bureau.⁸⁰ The labour departments' publications were primarily concerned with the needs of colonial governments for data on labour. These reports are an invaluable source of information for students of African labour

⁷⁷Part of the following discussion is drawn from the works of C.A. Orr, "Trade Unionism in Colonial Africa", Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 4, no. 1, 1966; V.L. Allen, "The Study of African Trade Unionism", *idem*, Vol. 7, no. 2; W.H. Friedland, "African Trade Union Studies: Analysis of Two Decades", Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, 55; and the introductions in Cohen and Sandbrook, eds., op. cit., and Gutkind, Cohen and Copans, eds., op. cit.

⁷⁸These will be frequently used in this study. But for general inquiries on African labour by Colonial Office officials see, G. St. J. Orde Browne, The African Labourer, O.U.P., London, 1933; and Lord Hailey's massive, An African Survey, O.U.P., London, 1938.

⁷⁹Apart from periodic publications, such as Minimum Standards of Social Policy, Montreal, 1944; Social Policy in Dependent Territories, Montreal, 1947; the ILO also published the International Labour Review, which contained numerous articles on African labour matters. For instance, in the case of Kenya there are such articles as by the ILO itself: "Labour Conditions in East Africa", I.L.R., Vol. 54, nos. 1-2, 1946; "Employment in Kenya", I.L.R., Vol. 51, no. 6, 1945. Occasionally the ILO sent memoranda to colonial governments themselves. "Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance: Report to the Government of Kenya on the Development of Vocational Training", Geneva, 1965, is a much later case. The ICFTU also had its own publications and produced numerous articles on African labour. These will be examined in full in Chapter 7.

⁸⁰See, for instance, Walter Bowen, Colonial Trade Unions, Fabian Publications Ltd., London, Research Series no. 167.

history. The publications after the Second World War tended to concentrate on productivity, efficiency, labour turnover, selection, control, training and incentive schemes.⁸¹ Some of them are, in fact, highly regarded as pioneering studies of modern African industrial sociology. The Northcotte 'Labour Efficiency Survey', conducted in Kenya in 1946 and 1947 has, for instance, been hailed as "the first study in tropical Africa restricted mainly to the behaviour and interaction of workers inside the plant".⁸² As for the ILO, ICFTU, and the Fabian Colonial

⁸¹The literature on these topics is quite extensive. Here, it will be sufficient just to give a sample. There were a number of papers published in the Kenya Labour Department Bulletin, such as, G. Gibson's "Incentives for African Labour", Vol. 3, no. 1, 1949; also by the same author, "The Relation of Business Organization to the Productivity of Labour", *idem*; A. Devroye, "Agreements Between Employers and Employees on Terms and Conditions of Employment", Vol. 4, no. 1, 1950. Others appeared in the East African Economics Review, such as, P.J. Rogers', "The African Worker and Productivity", Vol. 4, no. 1, 1957; "The African Workman in Industry", Vol. 1, no. 2, 1955. Still others appeared in East African Trade and Industry: G.J. M. Gray, "Health, Safety and Welfare in Industry", Vol. 4, no. 10, 1957. Finally, there were those which came out in miscellaneous journals such as the ICFTU's Free Labour World: J. Ridell, "Blueprint for Industrial Peace in Kenya", no. 154, April, 1963; and The Colonial Review: Walter Elkan, "Incentives in East Africa", Vol. 9, Dec. 1956. Most of these were extremely brief and impressionistic. It might just be mentioned that from the late fifties some attention began to be focussed on the problems of unemployment. See, for example, A. Segal, "Problem of Urban Unemployment", Africa Report, Vol. 10, April, 1965. Also see, "Underemployment: Africa's No. 1 Problem", in Free Labour World, July, 1962. The Kenyan government which was acutely aware of this problem either commissioned studies or published findings of researchers in its official mouthpieces. A.G. Dalgleish's Survey of Unemployment, Ministry of Labour and Social Services, Nairobi, 1960, is just one example.

⁸²See, W. Smith, "Industrial Sociology in Africa: Foundations and Prospects", Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 6, no. 1, 1968, p. 85. Others included in this early crop of such studies is Orde Browne, *op. cit.*; and UNESCO's (in conjunction with the International African Institute), Social Implications of Industrialisation and Urbanisation in Africa South of the Sahara, Paris, 1956.

Bureau, their publications were mainly interested in effecting policy and practical changes in colonial labour policies and conditions.

It would be misleading, of course, to assume that the subject of African labour was confined to institutional studies. One only needs to mention the work of Leys and Ross,⁸³ Nzula and Potekhin,⁸⁴ and Hodgkin,⁸⁵ to show that there were a number of people who wrote critically about labour policies and conditions in Africa. Although the books by Leys, Ross, and Hodgkin dealt with the labour question only as part of a larger concern with the impact of colonialism and the growth of nationalism, their analyses profoundly affected later academic research on labour.

Leys and Ross belonged to that beleaguered group, the humanitarian lobby. They strongly attacked forced labour in Kenya, especially abuses of female and child labour, and called for sweeping reforms in the methods of labour recruitment and working conditions. They also urged the curtailment of settler power, and greater respect for African culture which was supposedly breaking down at an alarming rate, not because 'modernization' was inherently destructive but because it was being

⁸³ N. Leys, op. cit.; and W. McGregor Ross, Kenya From Within, A Short Political History, Frank Cass, London, 1968. This is part of the tradition represented by writers like E.D. Morel, op. cit.

⁸⁴ A.T. Nzula was the first Black General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, whereas I.I. Potekhin lived on to become the doyen of Soviet Africanists. Their book was first published (with A.Z. Zusmanovich) as The Working Class Movement and Forced Labour in Negro Africa, Moscow, 1933. It has been translated as Forced Labour in Colonial Africa, Robin Cohen, ed., Zed Press, London, 1979.

⁸⁵ Thomas Hodgkin, Nationalism in Colonial Africa.

introduced in the wrong manner. These were among the first efforts to see African labour within a wider spectrum of people moving from one economic system to another, the 'traditional' African world into the 'modern' Western one.

Nzula and Potekhin made an even more devastating attack on the labour policies of all the colonial powers, as well as those of South Africa. Unlike the liberal critiques of writers like Leys and Ross, Nzula's and Potekhin's assault is against capitalism itself, in this case, in its peculiar colonial garb. Unfortunately, this book was not published in English until 1979, so that it hardly influenced African labour studies in the 1960s and 1970s.

Hodgkin's contribution was to be more immediate and far-reaching. In reaction to widespread views that trade unions were unnecessary and only existed as hotbeds of political agitation, Hodgkin tried to show that African trade unions played a critical and progressive role in the nationalist struggles. He argued that with their proximity to the colonial urban centres and close links with the rural areas, workers and their organisations provided institutional links between rural and urban forms of protest. He saw trade unions, therefore, as vehicles through which the consciousness of the rural peasantry could be raised and the bourgeois nationalism of the urban elites could be checked.

Thus, as interest in the study of African labour and trade unions blossomed after decolonisation, there were already three major approaches, namely, there was formal-descriptive work produced by governmental and inter-governmental agencies or writers biased towards official views, second, there were writers who made attempts to situate the problems of

labour utilisation and the development of trade unionism within a broader context of social change, and, finally, others emphasised the political significance of African labour.

Formal-descriptive studies produced in the sixties continued to be written from Euro-centric perspectives and were underlined by conservative biases. Such studies were almost entirely dependent on, and uncritical of, official sources and descriptions. Not surprisingly, therefore, they saw trade unions as 'alien' institutions in Africa, and their work was devoted to showing the difficulties of trade unions operating in such 'strange' African settings. Lomas declared categorically that "examples of successful African unions are hard to find".⁸⁶ Meynaud and Bey argued that in the British colonies it was the British government itself which fostered the growth of trade unions. Local initiative was not crucial. "Left to themselves during this period", we are told, "African workers never organised permanent collective action. Trade unionism at the time needed advice and impetus from outside ... This is borne out by official reports of the period."⁸⁷ A variant to this theme of outside influence dwells on the 'decisive' role played by the trade union internationals in creating or at least strengthening fledgling African trade unions. Lynd,⁸⁸ an unabashed cold-warrior, praised the

⁸⁶P.K. Lomas, "African Trade Unionism on the Copperbelt", in The Survey Journal of Economics, Johannesburg, 26, June, 1958, pp. 114-15, as quoted in V.L. Allen, "The Study of African Trade Unionism", p. 295.

⁸⁷J. Meynaud and A.S. Bey, Trade Unionism in Africa, Methuen, London, 1967, p. 24.

⁸⁸G.E. Lynd, The Politics of African Trade Unionism, Praeger, New York, 1967. Interestingly, we are told that Lynd "is a nom de

role of the British TUC, ICFTU, and AFL/CIO and vented his spleen on the WFTU. He met more than his match in Woddis⁸⁹ who praised the role of the WFTU and subjected the Western trade union organisations to virulent invectives.

B.C. Roberts' work is perhaps most representative of all in this formal-descriptive approach. According to him, British labour policies were not only essentially enlightened, they also encouraged the growth of trade unions. Consequently, the problems which afflicted African trade unions had little to do with hostile government policies, but should be attributed to the fact that the trade union model was a foreign import. He chides those "critics of colonial trade unions" who "have, in effect, assumed that these organisations should have started from a state of development that has only been reached elsewhere in the world after considerable experience and when certain conditions have been fulfilled".⁹⁰ Not surprisingly, his analysis of collective bargaining is unsatisfactory. Industrial relations are reduced to a set of formal relationships between unions, employers, and the governments, with little reference to the social and economic context in which they operated.

plume of an author who has had wide experience in the field of international labour affairs, both in and out of government", which is very suggestive.

⁸⁹Jack Woddis, "African Trade Unions Come to Fore", in Africa, The Lion Awakes, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1961.

⁹⁰B.C. Roberts, Labour in the Tropical Territories of the Commonwealth, London School of Economics and G. Bell, London, 1964, p. 88; and with Bellecombe, Collective Bargaining in African countries, Macmillan, London, 1967.

In short, studies using the formal-descriptive approach are long on factual descriptions and short on analysis of the structural determinants of labour utilisation, and, of course, labour protests. The tendency to analyse industrial relations narrowly, that is imputing roles to unions, government agencies, and employers without initially situating their respective positions in the context of the political economy, leads to a mystification of industrial relations. "Descriptive studies and theoretical analyses in terms of consensus", Allen notes correctly, "are static in conception, for they assume an organic unity and deal only with the end of a causal sequence".⁹¹

Allen's critical observation can also be applied to those writers who tried to analyse the development of labour organisations from an anthropological perspective. Such studies tried to examine "the importance of ethnicity or tribal affiliation in understanding the internal dynamics of African unionism".⁹² Scott,⁹³ for instance, argued that Ugandan trade unionism could be better understood by using the ethnic variable, while Friedland⁹⁴ and Smock⁹⁵ cast doubt whether

⁹¹Allen, "The Study of African Trade Unionism", p. 307.

⁹²Friedland, *op. cit.*, p. 584.

⁹³Roger Scott, The Development of Trade Unions in Uganda, E.A.P.H., Nairobi, 1966; and "Trade Unions and Ethnicity in Uganda", *Mawazo*, 1, June, 1967.

⁹⁴W.H. Fiedland, Vuta Kamba: The Development of Trade Unions in Tanganyika, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1969.

⁹⁵D.R. Smock, Conflict and Control in an African Trade Union: A Study of the Nigerian Coal Miners' Union, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1969.

ethnicity really played such a crucial role in determining the formation and politics of trade unionism in Tanzania and Nigeria, respectively. The pre-occupation with the role of ethnicity in the labour process, particularly with regard to trade union organisation, partly arose out of the influence of anthropologists writing on urbanisation,⁹⁶ and was partly a product of insufficient understanding of the many contradictions of colonial capitalism. Thus instead of understanding the system of labour migration as an outcome of articulated modes of production, it was often seen as a product of the economic 'irrationality' of Africans, or put more politely, the resistance of traditional culture to modern values and institutions.⁹⁷ In short, the writers who donned anthropological glasses to interpret social change, including the labour process, tended to have a truncated vision of historical and contemporary processes of change. As for the liberal critics of labour policies, laws, and conditions, their sensitivity to the gross abuses of colonialism was not matched by any clear understanding that the dynamics of colonial capitalism made those abuses imperative and not aberrations which could be blamed on the idiosyncrasies of some demented officials.

Finally, in the 1960s and early 1970s many writers came to focus on the structural or institutional links between unions and political parties. Trade unions were, therefore, seen merely as an appendage of

⁹⁶See, for instance, A.L. Epstein, Politics in an African Community, Manchester Univ. Press, Manchester, 1958, chapter 4: "Trade Unionism and Social Cohesion".

⁹⁷Walter Elkan's Migrants and Proletarians, O.U.P., London, 1960, is perhaps one of the often quoted studies on labour migration and the African workers' incomplete proletarianisation.

nationalist parties. Consequently, a lot of emphasis was placed on showing the organisational and political subordination of trade unions, usually meaning their leadership, to political parties during the nationalist struggles and to the post-colonial governments.⁹⁸ Berg and Butler challenged such views by showing that except for Guinea and Kenya, "what is most striking about the political role of labour movements in the countries of tropical Africa is their failure to become politically involved during the colonial period, their limited political impact when they did become involved and their restricted role after independence".⁹⁹ But a lack of constant co-operation between unions and parties does not necessarily mean that unions were politically quiescent or apathetic. It is misleading to judge any attempt by workers to preserve their autonomy from political parties as a sign of apathy, for after all, the nationalist parties were not exactly revolutionary. Moreover, workers' action can often have serious political repercussions even where these were not intended. Thus Berg and Butler's tendency to dismiss workers struggles, including strikes, as 'economistic' and not 'political' is rather simplistic.

⁹⁸ See, for example, the papers in W.A. Beling, The Role of Labour in African Nation-Building, Praeger, New York, 1968. A notable exception to these early studies on African trade unionism in terms of its depth of analysis and range of scope is undoubtedly Ioan Davies' African Trade Unions, Penguin, Baltimore, 1966.

⁹⁹ E.J. Berg and J. Butler, "Trade Unions", in J.S. Coleman and C.G. Rosberg, eds., Political Parties and National Integration in Africa, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1966, p. 340.

It can be argued, therefore, that studies which focussed on the integral connection between unions and parties made workers and their organisations 'invisible'. By making labour an adjunct of politics, the erroneous impression was created that unions developed because of 'outside' leadership and influence, thereby buttressing official and Euro-centric views that African workers were too backward to form trade unions, except when manipulated by unscrupulous political agitators. Berg and Butler's argument that unions were not solely instruments of political parties was a useful corrective, but they reinforced workers' invisibility by reducing their acts to 'economism' and denying them political consciousness. The dichotomy of the 'economic' and the 'political' is nowhere clearly premised so that it is nothing but an arbitrary empirical judgement.

From the mid-seventies students of African labour history began, to quote Sandbrook and Cohen's crisp comment, "to write the labour history of Africa — not simply in terms of the self-interested concern of white supremacists and colonial governments about labour supply, the cost of labour and the workers' productivity — but rather in terms of a worker-directed perspective of a social aggregate groping for group expression and class action".¹⁰⁰ Writing three years later, Cohen, Copans and Gutkind noted that many labour historians were laying more stress on the 'grass roots', "in an attempt to look at the texture of working class life from below and to plot more sensitively the forms of consciousness and action that develop below the control, and

¹⁰⁰Sandbrook and Cohen, op. cit., p. 16.

sometimes even awareness, of the official trade union leadership".¹⁰¹
 The present study will attempt to explore some of these themes using Kenya as a case study.

Kenyan Labour Historiography

Among the earliest full-length studies of Kenyan labour history are the works written by the veteran trade unionists themselves: Mboya,¹⁰² Lubembe,¹⁰³ and Singh.¹⁰⁴ This is not the place to go into details about their books, not least because these writings are in themselves important primary sources which will be used frequently in this study. Suffice it to say that they show that the origins of trade unionism in Kenya lie in internal economic, social and political conditions. Second, they all emphasise that the trade union movement was an integral part of Kenya's nationalist struggle. For them, therefore, labour and political protests were different aspects of the same struggle, and as for the organisational forms these movements took, despite periodic moments of tension, they were complementary to each other. Singh's account takes us from the early colonial period to the outbreak of Mau Mau, while Mboya takes off from there to the early sixties, and Lubembe's

¹⁰¹ Gutkind, Cohen and Copans, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁰² Tom Mboya, Freedom and After, Andre Deutsch, London, 1963.

¹⁰³ Clement Lubembe, The Inside Labour Movement in Kenya, Equatorial Publishers, Nairobi, 1968.

¹⁰⁴ Makhan Singh, History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952, E.A.P.H., Nairobi, 1968.

book spans almost the entire colonial period. Despite differences in style and approach, the three books have one thing in common: like nationalist historiography they have a tendency to see the labour and political struggles in Kenya as generalised and undifferentiated struggles between Africans and Europeans, the colonised and the colonisers.

One of the first major academic studies on Kenyan labour was undertaken by Amsden,¹⁰⁵ who sought to analyse how the Federation of Kenyan Employers (FKE) influenced the growth of the industrial relations system in Kenya after the Second World War, especially from the mid-1950s. She convincingly shows that the FKE played a key role in the formulation of the industrial relations machinery which emerged in Kenya during the twilight years of colonial rule and became consolidated after independence. One of her central arguments is that the FKE was formed and took these measures because of the 'enlightened' management policies of metropolitan industrial firms being established in the country after 1945. This is only a half-truth. Having enlightened management policies (themselves results of protracted struggles of metropolitan working classes) is one thing, introducing them into a colony is another. In other words, Amsden assumes the 'capital-logic' of these firms, but fails to give full consideration to the 'class-logic', that is, the struggles by Kenyan workers themselves to force improvements in their depressing working and living conditions. It is significant that Kenya was rocked by the worst wave of recorded strikes precisely during this

¹⁰⁵ Alice Amsden, International Firms and Labour in Kenya, 1945-70, Frank Cass, London, 1971.

very period that the industrial relations machinery was being established. This shows the fragility and limits of strategies to co-opt labour during this period, essentially because of the intense contradictions generated by the decolonisation process itself, and the recomposition of the Kenyan working class during the emergency. This is to suggest that Amsden's scope needs to be widened: the terrain to collective bargaining was rough and marked with intense struggles and should not be confined to the enlightened self-interest of international firms. Nor was, indeed, collective bargaining the altar at which Kenyan workers sought to pray.

In 1974 Clayton and Savage published their voluminous work,¹⁰⁶ which covered the whole span of the colonial period, and painstakingly chronicled the evolution of government labour policies and the development of labour protests from the early period when labour was unorganised to the heyday of colonial trade unionism under the stewardship of Mboya. This massive work brings together some of the strands we looked at above. It charts out the relationship between labour, land, and nationalism. The central thrust of the book, however, is on the evolution of colonial labour policy, and it is here that the conceptual weaknesses are more than apparent. The problems of labour control, the formulation and changes in labour policy are posed largely in terms of the personalities of local officials. In fact, one gets the impression that these issues are not determined so much by struggles by the Africans themselves but by occasional dispatches and rebukes from politically sensitive London

¹⁰⁶Anthony Clayton and Donald C. Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya 1895-1963, Frank Cass, London, 1974.

officials.

Notwithstanding the flurry of details, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the two authors are more interested in the intricacies of policy formulation than in the actual growth of the African labour force and the delineation of the various stages which such a process passed through. It should be stressed that these changes could not have been simple products of policy changes from above, but corresponded with the major transformations within the country's political economy, which were themselves generated by specific forms of accumulation and social struggles. When discussing African struggles the book suffers from a predilection for using cultural and psychological factors as key explanations for either the state of accommodation or confrontation between African workers and their European employers. No wonder that their work reads like an apologia for the colonial government and the colonial situation as a whole. And when they do examine organised workers' protests they hardly go beyond the political schema analysed earlier, under which trade union struggles are seen as adding nothing little more than fuel to the raging fires of nationalism. Clayton's and Savage's almost uncritical treatment of Mboya simply belies this view.

Zwanenberg¹⁰⁷ displayed little fascination with the contradictions of accumulation and labour control viewed as personal ordeals for officials walking a thin line between economic policy objectives and morality. Instead, he tells us that his work is an attempt to offer analysis of

¹⁰⁷Roger M.A. van Zwanenberg, Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, 1919-1939, E.A.P.H., Nairobi, 1975.

Kenyan labour history radically different from what he terms colonial and post-colonial empiricist historiography. He proposes to use the theory of underdevelopment. His work analyses the process of colonial capital accumulation, how relations of 'dominance and dependence' were generated within the colony itself, among Africans, settlers, and the colonial state, and between the latter and the imperial state, and, finally, how all these forces shaped the process of proletarianisation in Kenya. He argues that the failure by 1939 of settler agriculture to create a full proletariat was due to its own weaknesses and not some supposedly 'tribal attachment' or 'traditionalism' of Africans.

He bases his discussion of the emergence of a wage labour force on the needs of settler capital. Other forms of capital are virtually ignored. Consequently, he only gives us a partial picture of the working class which emerged in Kenya by 1939, when he stops. While he deals at length with squatters and their struggles, for example, there is hardly any discussion of the emerging urban proletariat, the struggles they waged, and their attempts to form trade unions. Discussing the emergence of the Kenyan working class solely in terms of settler capital, mediated by the colonial state, underplays the process of accumulation in the reserves themselves, which served to accentuate the deprivation of increasing numbers of people from their means of production, principally land. It is incorrect to view underdevelopment, as he does, simply as "a process by which existing forms remain static in terms of technology and productivity, in a community where development is occurring in another sector".¹⁰⁸ 'Static' is a rather unhistorical term to

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. xx.

use. That is the ghost of 'dualism' stalking us. Thus, despite its many merits, Zwanenberg's work is somewhat limited by some of its theoretical inadequacies.

Like Zwanenberg's study, Stichter's work is among the corpus of studies which adopt a radical perspective. In a series of essays, she has tried to identify the main stages of working class formation in Kenya from 1895 to 1975. Central to her analysis is the concept and phenomenon of peripheral capitalism, an approach which is broad enough to enable her to escape the pitfalls of drawing unnecessary distinctions between labour and trade union history. Moreover, it enables her to analyse workers pressures 'from below', as opposed to the almost obsessive concern with trade union leadership and government responses and policies. She shows that the persistence of labour migration during the inter-war period should not obscure the capacity of African workers to engage in sustained labour action.¹⁰⁹ She also demonstrates that workers not only played an important, but distinctive role during the Mau Mau struggle.¹¹⁰ While others emphasise ethnicity, Stichter singles out the racially divided social structure as one of the major impediments against the formation of Kenyan as opposed to strictly African working class solidarity.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Sharon Stichter, "The Formation of a Working Class in Kenya", in R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen, eds., op. cit.

¹¹⁰ Stichter, "Workers, Trade Unionists, and the Mau Mau Rebellion", Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 9, no. 2, 1975.

¹¹¹ Stichter, "Trade Unionism in Kenya, 1947-1952: the Militant Phase", in Gutkind, Cohen and Copans, eds., op. cit.

Although Stichter has raised many important questions and tried to clarify some knotty problems, her work suffers from a number of unsatisfactory theoretical formulations, the most important of which is the concept of 'labour aristocracy', which is the main subject of one of her essays.¹¹² She asserts that

the working class in Kenya is divided into two sections, one incorporated in the 'formal' sector of the economy and the other outside it, and that the upper segment in the formal sector constitutes a 'labour aristocracy'. The political differences between the two sections are only incipient, yet in fundamental respects their interests lie far apart.¹¹³

This differentiation in the structure of the working class is attributed to the changes in the structure of investment after the Second World War.

Stichter derives her labour aristocracy thesis from two main sources. First, there is Fanon's categorical dismissal of the working class as a whole in Africa as a privileged segment of the colonial population and therefore abysmally lacking in revolutionary potential.¹¹⁴ Second, it is based on the seminal essays written by Saul and Arrighi.¹¹⁵ Briefly

¹¹²Stichter, "Imperialism and the Rise of a Labour Aristocracy in Kenya, 1945-1970", Berkeley Journal of Sociology, 21, 1976-77.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 157.

¹¹⁴Frantz Fanon, op. cit.

¹¹⁵G. Arrighi, "International Corporations, Labour Aristocracies and Economic Development in Tropical Africa", in R. Rhodes, ed., Imperialism and underdevelopment, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1970; G. Arrighi and J.S. Saul, Essays on the Political Economy of Africa, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1973.

stated, they argue that investment in the peripheries after the Second World War shifted in favour of multinational corporations, who are biased in favour of capital intensive production, so that they require a highly skilled and stabilised labour force. This relatively highly paid, high-level manpower constitutes a 'labour aristocracy' which is divorced from the rest of the working class and develops economic and political interests "essentially congruent with those of the African state bourgeoisie". This, Stichter maintains, "in fact holds true for Kenya".¹¹⁶

It is absurd on both empirical and theoretical grounds to suggest that the interests of the African working class, or its upper strata, are essentially congruent with those of the national bourgeoisie. The obscene disparities in their living standards are too obvious for there to be any congruence of interests between them. But even if the upper echelons of the working class had "one foot on the steeply rising embourgeoisement ladder",¹¹⁷ political attitudes cannot simply be reduced mechanistically to standards of living. It is important to emphasise that the workers and the national bourgeoisie occupy different and essentially antagonistic positions in the production process. Moreover, it has to be recognised that neither the colonial nor the

¹¹⁶Stichter, "Imperialism ...", pp. 157-8.

¹¹⁷Phrase borrowed from R.D. Jeffries, "Populist Tendencies in the Ghanaian Trade Union Movement", in Sandbrook and Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 276. Jeffries is highly critical of the labour aristocracy thesis. For a survey of the debate see, P. Waterman, "The Labour Aristocracy in Africa; Introduction to a Debate", Development and Change, Vol. 6, no. 3, 1975.

neo-colonial economic system can deliver payoffs to the working class as much as is sometimes assumed by the advocates of the labour aristocracy thesis.

The notion that workers constitute a privileged group in relation to the urban unemployed and the rural peasantry also has to be rejected on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Such an argument is, to quote Gavin Williams, "a classic example of the 'displacement' of the 'primary contradiction' between interests of the exploiting and the exploited categories on to a 'derived' contradiction between exploited classes".¹¹⁸ It is not helpful to concentrate on the expropriation of surplus from the peasant economy by the urban-based industrial sector and, therefore, to envisage the exploitation of the peasantry by all social classes engaged in the latter sector. That is a simplistic juxtaposition of two modes of production when in fact there are articulated modes in which the capitalist one is dominant. The simple fact of the matter is that workers do not receive crumbs from the exploitation of the peasantry. If anything, there are numerous mechanisms through which income is transferred from workers to the so-called 'informal' sector and the rural peasantry.

Peasants are not analogous to a working class so that it is difficult to see how the latter can constitute a privileged 'labour aristocracy' in relation to them. In an age of imperialism where skilled workers in the periphery, as argued by Amin and Emmanuel, receive rewards

¹¹⁸G. Williams, "The Political Economy of Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism in Nigeria", unpublished paper, as quoted in A. Peace, "The Lagos Proletariat: Labour Aristocrats or Populist Militants", Sandbrook and Cohen, op. cit., p. 300.

that are lower than those paid at the centre for the same productivity, serious questions are raised as to the analytical and descriptive validity of the term labour aristocracy used for workers under dependent capitalism.¹¹⁹ These workers look incredulous in the 'aristocratic' robes borrowed for them by scholars either ashamed of the workers' overalls or too hasty to spread the sins of capitalist exploitation around. Certainly no state, whether colonial or post-colonial, would feel threatened by a thesis that provides a rationale for holding down wages. Saul himself has come to the view that

The African working class should not be pre-maturely labelled (as seems to have been the mistake in referring to it in such an evocative term as 'labour aristocracy'). The role of this class is far from being frozen by history or by any internal logic of the current African socio-economic structure. What is needed instead is to concentrate attention upon the processes which are at work in specific African settings.¹²⁰

Thus, Stichter's indulgent use of the labour aristocracy thesis considerably mars her study of Kenyan labour history, especially for the period from the early 1950s.

¹¹⁹For brief analyses on the way Engels and later Lenin used the term 'labour aristocracy' with reference to the English trade union movement and workers in imperialist countries see, Martin Nicolaus, "The Theory of the Labour Aristocracy", Monthly Review, April, 1970; and Eric Hobsbawm, "Lenin and the 'Aristocracy of Labour'", idem.

¹²⁰J.S. Saul, "The Labour Aristocracy Thesis Reconsidered", Sandbrook and Cohen, op. cit., p. 308.

Lastly, there is the study by Sandbrook, which mainly focuses on the post-colonial period, which is outside the scope of this study.¹²¹ He shows that the post-colonial state turned the essentially regulatory and supervisory roles of the colonial state into more stringent economic and legal sanctions against unions. He also notes that the trend towards trade union oligarchy resulted in the stifling of formal and informal channels of communication between the union leadership and rank and file members, although this did not by any means end internal trade union conflicts. On the contrary, factional struggles intensified in the sixties, fueled more by ethnic than occupational cleavages. They were also exacerbated by political conflicts at the national level. He shows that all this has not in any way dampened trade union militancy over their 'economistic' goals.

Sandbrook tends to describe the overt manifestations of the relationship between the trade union movement and the post-colonial state by focussing mainly on the interplay and clashes of personalities. Inevitably, the deeper and more complex structural factors are at best merely assumed, or worse still, not given their due weight. Furthermore, it needs to be noted that the concept of 'clientelist politics' which underlines his analysis of trade union politics and factional struggles has less explanatory value than he assumes. It has to be underscored that "contemporary patron-client relationships are themselves contingent upon the established hierarchies of a neocolonial economy" so that "to propose a description based on clientelism as an

¹²¹Richard Sandbrook, Proletarians and African Capitalism - the Kenya Case, 1960-1972, C.U.P., London, 1975.

alternative to class analysis ... is patent nonsense as soon as one moves from the most limited micro-analysis to ask questions about the system as a whole and in whose interest it works".¹²² More specifically, Sandbrook merely succeeds in producing "as many good reasons for believing that the militant oratory and competitive behaviour of Kenyan trade union leaders is born out of their frustrations as out of their radicalism".¹²³ Clientelism itself, like ethnicity has to be explained and not employed as an analytical tool.

Conclusion

These studies have been singled out for examination mainly because they are among the most important ones on Kenyan labour history and are, therefore, fairly representative of the main trends, strengths and weaknesses of Kenyan labour historiography.¹²⁴ As a result of the

¹²²J.S. Saul, "The Dialectic of Class and Tribe", p. 395.

¹²³J.S. Henley, "Pluralism, Underdevelopment and Trade Union Power in Kenya", Univ. of Edinburgh, mimeo., p. 6. A version of this paper appears in the British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol. 16, no. 2, 1978. An interesting discussion on clientelist politics by Sandbrook can be found in, "Patrons, Clients and Factions: New Dimensions of Conflict Analysis in Africa", Canadian Journal of Political Science, 5, March, 1972.

¹²⁴Thus, for example, although Grillo's work offers us a lot of information on railway workers in Kenya his approach is essentially an odd combination of Clayton, Savage and Stichter. He argues that the railway workers constituted a 'labour aristocracy', and yet, he argues, they were not fully 'proletarianised' because of their ethnic ties to rural areas fostered by labour migration. He also maintains that the fixation of wages in Kenya was based on the "free play of economic forces". In the context of the Kenyan state's high level of intervention in labour control, one wonders what he is talking about. His further indulgent use of anthropological paradigms further distorts his analysis: R.D. Grillo, African Railwaymen, C.U.P., London,

theoretical work of the last few years, in which concepts of underdevelopment and dependency, articulation of modes of production, the colonial state, and class have been refined, it is possible to avoid some of the more glaring conceptual inadequacies which characterised earlier labour studies. Better theoretical understanding of social change, of course, equips one to interpret the actual historical processes more satisfactorily.

It perhaps ought to be stated that the political economy approach will be the one used in this study. Political economy here is understood not as a simple juxtaposition of political and economic studies, but rather, it refers to a framework that is explicitly historical and non-disciplinary and concentrates on the processes of accumulation, class formulation, and class struggle.¹²⁵ Of late, there has been a flourishing of studies and debates on the development of Kenyan capitalism so that, although the task of trying to study the formation of the Kenyan working class has not been made any easier, it has certainly

1973; and Race, Class, and Militancy - An African Trade Union, 1939-1965, Chandler, New York, 1947. Also see his "Anthropology, Industrial Development and Labour Migration in Uganda", in D. Brokensha and M. Pearl, eds., The Anthropology of Development in Sub-Saharan Africa, Univ. of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1969. Similarly, Leitner's examination of the labour movement after independence does not depart significantly from that of Sandbrook. She mainly deals with the relationship between COTU and the Industrial Court, classifies the issues that are dealt with and looks at the government's overall policies and role, but largely glosses over the basis of trade union power (or weakness) in the social relations of production: Kerstin Leitner, "Workers, Trade Unions and Peripheral Capitalism in Kenya after Independence", Ph.D. dissertation, Freie Universitat, Berlin, 1977.

¹²⁵See L. Leontyev, Political Economy, International Publishers, New York, 1981; and John Eaton, Political Economy, International Publishers, New York, 1981.

become more exciting and possibly more fruitful to undertake. The present study, then, is an attempt to examine the objective conditions underlying the process in which producers were deprived of their means of production and transformed into a wage-earning class, and the subjective propensities exhibited by this class both in response to those conditions and in reshaping them. In short, this is a study on dependent capitalism and the making of the Kenyan working class during the colonial period.

CHAPTER TWO

KENYA'S POLITICAL ECONOMY AND LABOUR BEFORE 1940THE PROCESS OF PRIMITIVE COLONIAL ACCUMULATION IN KENYA

So-called accumulation ... is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producers from the means of production. It appears as 'primitive' because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital ... And this history, the history of their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire ... The history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs.

Karl Marx¹

There are some similarities between the national capitalist accumulation which occurred in Britain and the colonial accumulation which was being attempted in Kenya. In both situations the extraction of a labour surplus was of very considerable importance, and in both the state was used to facilitate the process. Also, in both situations we are faced with the same evolutionary process, where the introduction of agricultural capitalism ended age-old schism of the traditional methods of cultivation, and which brought the latter into contact with the wider market place. However, here the similarities end. In Britain the new mode of production was introduced relatively slowly, while in Kenya it occurred much faster and from invaders. Also, the precapitalist producers were

¹K. Marx, Capital, Volume 1, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1978, pp. 875-6.

not robbed of all their means of production, a large proportion of their land was left to them, and as a consequence the process towards proletarianisation was of a different character.

R. Van Zwanenberg²

There is considerable divergence of views as to what primitive accumulation actually means. Samir Amin, who has looked at primitive accumulation at the level of the world economy, contends that "primitive accumulation is not something that belongs to the prehistory of capital, it is something permanent, contemporary".³ This position has been attacked on the grounds that it tends "to emphasise surplus-value (usually 'surplus') appropriation as a primary function of metropolitan-periphery relations, and the object of study ... the shift away from analysis of the emergence (however uneven) of capitalist social relations as the essence of the process of primitive accumulation, represents a shift towards the empiricist conception of capital as a thing".⁴ Banaji has presented a more complex perspective:

Any process of primitive accumulation implies an articulation of modes of production. The early phases of the process of expanded reproduction

²R.M.A. van Zwanenberg, Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, E.A.P.H., Nairobi, 1975, pp. 288-9.

³Samir Amin, Accumulation on a World Scale, Vol. 1, Modern Reader, New York, 1974, p. 22.

⁴Philip McMichael, "The Concept of Primitive Accumulation: Lenin's Contribution", Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1977, pp. 498-9.

derive their dynamism from certain relationships between the nascent capitalist mode of production and an established capitalist or pre-capitalist mode of production. Historically the dominant form of these relationships was the subordination of pre-capitalist modes of production to capitalism ... capitalism's subordination of non-capitalist modes of production tended not only to dissolve them but also to conserve them.⁵

The above quotes from Marx and Zwanenberg manage to capture the general and specific characteristics of primitive accumulation in process in different social formations, while Banaji's theoretical construct enables us to understand the contradictory developments that mark and evolve out of such a process. Primitive colonial accumulation in Kenya, more so than in West African colonies, was written in "blood and fire", in which pre-capitalist modes of production were violently restructured and articulated with the capitalist mode of production. Early colonial accumulation was primitive because capital could not be derived from previous accumulation of capital but had to be derived from pre-capitalist economies through brutal exploitation. During this phase it was imperative that pre-capitalist modes of production be retained in some form, but as complementary and no longer as self-sustaining and self-perpetuating structures. This was the role played by the reserves and other areas of peasant production in Kenya before the Second World War. This meant that Africans could only be partially integrated into the wage labour force. Thus the peculiar forms that colonial labour organisations took during this period, namely, the squatter system and

⁵Jairus Banaji, "Backward Capitalism, Primitive Accumulation and Modes of Production", Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1973, p. 396.

labour migrancy, developed because the capitalist mode of production was incapable of paying for the maintenance and reproduction of workers. It was not because, as some colonial ideologies both past and present would like us to believe, Africans were 'irrational economic men' miserably bound to their primitive ways, and incapable of acquiring the discipline of regular work, except when in pursuit of 'target wages'.⁶ Rather the long-term costs of maintaining and reproducing labour were carried out in the spheres of pre-capitalist production.

The development of the Kenyan working class before the outbreak of the 2nd World War, therefore, needs to be analysed within the context of the contradictory process of primitive colonial accumulation. In other words, in order to outline the character of the wage labour force which emerged during this period in terms of its total size and its internal structure with regard to sectoral, geographical and ethnic distribution, it is important to examine some of the salient features of this complex historical process of primitive accumulation. Firstly, it is important to understand the role of the colonial state in the articulation of the capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production in Kenya. The colonial state acted as an instrument of primitive accumulation on the settlers' behalf by appropriating African land, confiscating livestock, introducing taxation, building rail and transport networks and creating marketing

⁶For a critical analysis of the myth of the 'target worker' or in its more sophisticated form, 'the backward-sloping supply curve effort', see Eliot Berg, "Backward Sloping Labour Supply Function in Dual Economies - the African Case", in *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. LXXV, 1961; and H.G. Vatter, "On the Folklore of the Backward Sloping Supply Curve", in *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. XIV, 1961.

and financial structures highly favourable to settlers, and, finally, through the imposition and institutionalisation of forced labour. But it needs to be emphasised, secondly, that despite this imposed dominance of settler production, peasant commodity production was not 'destroyed'. On the contrary, many Africans responded favourably to the opportunities presented by the commodity market. Thus the organisation of African labour needs to be situated within the context of the contradiction between settler and peasant production. Thirdly, the Kenyan working class grew in response to the development of corporate capitalism in the country, so that it is also important to show the extent and tendencies of international capitalist penetration during these formative decades of colonial capitalism.

In short, we will attempt to show that settler production, peasant production, and foreign firms, initially almost exclusively merchant, all competed for African labour. It will be argued that the 'labour problem' in Kenya was rooted in the combined and cumulative effects of these contradictory demands upon African labour. It is also to this complex of contradictory demands and workers' responses to them that the distinctive features of the Kenyan working class in the period before the Second World War should be attributed.

The Colonial State and Settler Production

The colonisation of Kenya came in the wake of the scramble for Africa in the late 19th century. There are many conflicting theories which have been advanced to explain the factors and processes behind this

scramble; they are too well-known to be recounted here.⁷ For our purposes it is sufficient to note that settler estate production was introduced in Kenya as a result of a specific conjunction of economic, political and geographical factors.⁸ It was only a few years after Kenya, then known as the East African Protectorate, had been colonised that the Foreign Office, which was responsible for running the colony until 1905 when the Colonial Office took over, began complaining about the imperial grants-in-aid which were being sent regularly to the colony for the running of the administration and the execution of punitive military expeditions. Consequently, the Foreign Office urged the colony to become self-sufficient and pay for itself. Meanwhile, the Treasury was getting concerned about the recovery of the £5½ millions sunk in the Uganda Railway, and the means by which the railway would continue to be maintained since "at that time there was virtually no freight for

⁷The literature on imperialism and colonialism is vast. For some short and clear expositions of the various theoretical interpretations of imperialism and colonialism see essays in Robert B. Sutcliffe and Roger Owen, eds., Studies in the Theory on Imperialism, Longman, London, 1972; W. Roger Louis, ed., Imperialism: The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy, New Viewpoints, New York, 1976; and E.F. Penrose, ed., European Imperialism and the Partition of Africa, Frank Cass, London, 1975.

⁸For accounts of the colonisation of Kenya see D.A. Low, "British East Africa: The Establishment of British Rule, 1895-1912", in V. Harlow E.M. Chilver, eds., History of East Africa, O.U.P., London, 1965; G.H. Mungeam, British Rule in Kenya, 1895-1912, O.U.P., London, 1966; C.W. Hobley, Kenya from Chartered Company to Crown Colony, London, 1929; M.P.K. Sorrenson, Origins of European Settlement in Kenya, O.U.P., Nairobi, 1968; W. McGregor Ross, Kenya From Within, A Short Political History, Frank Cass, London, 1968; and Norman Leys, Kenya, Hogarth Press, London, 1925.

the Uganda Railway to carry".⁹ Thus the British government was faced with the "immediate problem of how to develop local export production which would generate freight revenues for the railway and dutiable imports to sustain the new state".¹⁰

In the meantime, by 1902 the few hundreds of European settlers who were already in the colony had founded a Society to Promote European Immigration and they appealed successfully to Sir Charles Eliot, the first Commissioner, to stop encouraging Indian settlement and support European immigration. London was already suspicious of the settlers' ability to develop the new colony without immense support from the colonial state, but these reservations were thrown aside. It was in the hope of attracting private capital for development and investment in the colony that "London supported Eliot's policy of encouraging small, European settler immigration, including the settlers who came from South Africa. For the same reason large European syndicates were given grants ... After 1905 the question of who would play the key role in economic development had been decided. How development proceeded remained the great question."¹¹

⁹Elsbeth Huxley, Settlers of Kenya, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1975, p. 7. For a more detailed and adulatory account of settlers, especially settler leaders like Delamere, see her two-volume study, White Man's Country: Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya, Macmillan, London, 1935. On the Kenya-Uganda railway see the standard work by M.F. Hill, Permanent Way: The Story of the Kenya and Uganda Railway, East African Railways and Harbours, Nairobi, 1950. Also see G.N. Uzoigwe, "The Mombasa-Victoria railway, 1890-1902: imperial necessity, humanitarian venture, or economic imperialism?" Kenya Historical Review, iv, 1976.

¹⁰John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, "Coping with contradictions: the development of the colonial state in Kenya, 1895-1914", Journal of African History, 20, 1979, p. 495.

¹¹R.D. Wolff, The Economics of Colonialism, Britain and Kenya, 1870-1930, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1974, p. 55.

With the exception of the large 'aristocratic' landowners like the Delameres, Scotts and Grogans, the vast majority of settlers who came to Kenya consisted of small-scale farmers who were not only grossly under-capitalised, but "usually they lacked even the elementary skills of farming, and were dependent on the colonial authority in Kenya. It is this group of small estate farmers who were behind the turbulent economic and political demands of the settlers in colonial Kenya."¹² It was the very weakness of settler capital which forced the colonial state to intervene actively on their behalf.

The necessary precondition for establishing any form of export production and administrative financial self-sufficiency was military subjugation of the African peoples, followed by the establishment of political control over them. In addition to laying the foundation for effective colonial authority over the African population, the military campaigns

often made new lands available for alienation. The punitive raids also involved sizeable transfer of captured livestock from Africans to Europeans. The normal procedure was to sell to Europeans, at low prices, the cattle captured from offending tribes; this was a way of reimbursing the protectorate authorities for the military costs incurred. Importing livestock was always an extremely expensive and risky transaction.¹³

¹²R.M.A. van Zwanenberg, "The Economic Response of Kenya Africans to European Settlement: 1903-1939", in B.A. Ogot, ed., Politics and Nationalism in Colonial Kenya, E.A.P.H., Nairobi, 1972, pp. 206-7.

¹³R.D. Wolff, op. cit., p. 86; also see R.L. Tignor, The Colonial Transformation of Kenya, The Kamba, Kikuyu, and Maasai from 1900-1939, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1976, chaps. 1-4; Leys, op. cit., and Ross, op. cit.

Thus through the wars of conquest the colonial state expropriated the means of indigenous production on behalf of settlers, which could not have been obtained in any other way since economic necessity overlaid by custom and religious beliefs prevented most Africans from selling their land and livestock to settlers.

The question of land alienation to settlers was the source of many a controversy and inspired one commission of inquiry after another.¹⁴

Above all, it was perhaps the single most important cause of African discontent and the ultimate symbol of their dispossession by colonialism. After having decided in favour of settler agriculture as the backbone of colonial development in Kenya, the necessity of allocating large areas of land to settlers was never seriously questioned in official colonial circles before the 2nd World War. By the mid-1930s about one fifth of all usable land in the country was under the exclusive control of settlers.¹⁵ Not only were the settlers provided with large quantities of land, it was also land of the best quality, fertile and well-watered, and in the vicinity of the railway. As Lord Hailey remarked in his monumental study of African colonies: "about half of the land in Kenya worth cultivating lay in what came to be called the White Highlands".¹⁶

¹⁴See M.P.K. Sorrenson, Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country, a study in government policy, O.U.P., Nairobi, 1967. Among the most important land commissions were the Report of the Land Settlement Commission, Kenya government, 1919; and the Report of the Kenya Land Commission, 1933, British government, Cmd. 4556, 1934.

¹⁵E.A. Brett, Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa, Heinemann, London, 1978, p. 172.

¹⁶Lord Hailey, An African Survey, London, 1938, p. 751.

The location of the White Highlands in an area served by the Uganda railway which was ideal for the area's import-export trade with the outside world, is a further indication of the extent to which the colonial state sought to help settler production. The colonial state saw the railway building programme as an instrument for opening up the Highlands to more white settlement. This is particularly evident when we look at the construction of branch lines in the 1920s, which took up a large percentage of the country's developmental efforts. Brett has calculated that of the nearly 544 miles of line built after 1920, nearly 400 passed through European areas, and the rest through African areas, apparently simply because circumventing the African areas would have been too costly.¹⁷ In 1930 two further branch lines were authorised to serve European areas, which would have been built but for the depression. Since the branch lines were built to serve potential white settlement, and therefore no vigorous economic surveys were made, the railways registered huge losses.

Total losses of £ 713,000 were estimated for 1926 to 1931, the calculation leaving out of account the whole of the capital cost involved (in constructing the branch lines), which must have been very high since total railway payments amounted to more than £ 800,000 per annum in the thirties. The railway in fact stopped publishing these figures because of the criticism which they aroused.¹⁸

¹⁷E.A. Brett, op. cit., p. 200.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 201.

Consequently the railway needed massive subsidisation in order for it simply to be operational. By the use of a graduated rating structure the railway administration was able to force African producers and the two other East African territories to subsidise the railway system as a whole on behalf of settler production.

Railway rates on the exports of maize and wheat, almost exclusively exported by settlers, were low, and items geared for settler production, such as agricultural implements, breeding stock, and commercial seeds, were exempted from customs duties. Meanwhile, railway rates on exports of raw cotton, which was almost entirely produced by African peasants, especially in Tanganyika and Uganda, and other crops largely produced in these two territories, were very high, and so were customs duties on imports of cheap textiles, largely geared for African consumption. In 1921 the general 10% ad valorem tariff in effect from 1904 to World War I, which exempted items meant for settler production already mentioned, rose to 20%, with specific adjustments thereafter.¹⁹

It is not surprising, therefore, that railway rates and tariff policy were a primary source of conflict among the three East African territories, as well as between European expatriates and settlers, and between the latter and Africans in Kenya itself. In 1930 this conflict led to some changes in the tariff structure.

¹⁹R.D. Wolff, op. cit., p. 118.

The existing system of classification by rates was abandoned in favour of classification by commodities and ad valorem groups were converted into duties for specific items... There was a general move of tariff rates downwards which was in response to the European consumers who had instigated the Cost of Living Commission (of 1929). There was a reduction in rates of duty on imported sugar ... cotton piece goods ... cement. The most drastic reduction was on wheat and wheat flour ... It would seem from examining the changes in the tariff structure in 1930 that the white consumers of the colony were taking precedence over the principle of protecting local farming produce. This was most certainly not the case, due to the existence of highly protective railway rates for local produce.²⁰

Colonial state policy on road building was no different. In the European settled areas roads were built and maintained by the settler-controlled Rural District Councils, which were entirely and generously financed by the state, whereas in the reserves it was the responsibility of local Native Councils, whose only source of funds came from extra taxation. In 1930, for example, Arcdeacon Owen sent a memorandum to the Colonial Office, in which he claimed that "only £9,264 was spent on non-trunk roads in African areas, £44,968 on such roads in settled areas".²¹

Such inequitable allocation of resources and funds were all the more critical for the unequal development of settler and peasant production when it is borne in mind that investment in transport claimed the lion's share of all capital investment during the greater part of the

²⁰Nicola Swainson, The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya, Heinemann, London, 1980, pp. 41-42.

²¹Brett, op. cit., p. 202.

inter-war period. Nevertheless, we ought not lose sight of the fact that "this heavy investment in infrastructure at an early stage was to pay off by 1939, by which time a thorough basis had been laid for the expansion of capitalist production".²²

The task of providing extensive services fell upon the shoulders of the Department of Agriculture:

The Department established several experimental farms; distributed equipment, seeds, seedlings, and stud animals; and published innumerable articles, both original studies and reprints from other sources. The department designed all its activities to inform Europeans and improve their farming. In addition, it provided absolutely essential supervision, grading, and certification of crops for export ... It is no exaggeration to conclude that the quantity and quality of official assistance to European agriculture in Kenya were among the highest in any colonial experience.²³

It is indeed important to bear in mind that the colonial state did not only play a critical role in determining what crops were to be grown in the areas of European settlement, but the state also tried, with varying degrees of success, to prevent Africans from cultivating similar cash crops, especially coffee and pyrethrum, for fear of undermining settler efforts.²⁴ It was not until 1933 that the cultivation of coffee was

²²Swainson, op. cit., p. 35.

²³Wolff, op. cit., p. 88.

²⁴Ibid., chap. 6. Wolff discusses in considerable detail the international factors that prompted the British government working in conjunction with the Kenyan government and the settlers themselves to adopt the cultivation of crops such as coffee.

permitted in a few African areas on an experimental basis.

The colonial state also tried to help settlers establish a monopoly over the internal distribution of commodities. There was little, of course, that either the colonial state or the settlers themselves could do to influence the vagaries of commodity fluctuations on the international market, but they had considerable leverage over the local and East African markets. The settler co-operative marketing organisations, such as the Kenya Farmers' Association (KFA), set up in 1919 to handle maize and wheat, and the Kenya Co-operative Creameries, set up in 1925 to handle butter and milk, had the sympathetic hearing of the state. Protective duties on a wide range of temperate-climate foodstuffs like wheat, butter, cheese, bacon, timber and sugar, were first introduced in 1923 when the Tariff Amendment Ordinance was passed. The protective tariff gave the settlers "higher prices on the internal market than the external; the decline in world prices after 1929 widened this differential and made the internal market a great deal more profitable than the external, provided that production for this market and competition for the crop could be regulated".²⁵ In 1930 the Sale of Wheat Ordinance, which gave the KFA the sole right to purchase and sell locally-produced wheat was passed, and in the following year a Butter Levy Ordinance was also passed to help subsidise producers of export butter.

The settler marketing organisations had little difficulty in controlling the internal distribution of commodities like butter and wheat which, in any case, were primarily consumed by the European population

²⁵Brett, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

in Kenya and East Africa as a whole, so that in this case it was the Europeans who were directly bearing the brunt of the efforts to protect local settler produce. The situation with regard to maize was quite different. Maize was grown by both Africans and settlers, and although the latter controlled its export through the KFA, they faced stiff competition on the internal market from African producers. It was particularly during and immediately after the depression that the settlers appealed for greater state support so that they could achieve more control over the internal maize market.

In 1935 when the local market was threatened with 'collapse', the Legislative Council appropriated £12,550 to guarantee farmers a minimum return of Shs. 4/50 per bag on everything sold on the export market; the following year the Railway, that old friend of the settler maize grower, gave a temporary rebate of Shs. 5 per ton on maize railed, and abolished branch-line charges and port surcharges. But the Kenya Farmers Association could not induce the government to give it any further assistance and the position of the maize farmer therefore remained weak.²⁶

This is a pointer to the fact that when faced with buoyant peasant production, despite all the restrictions put in its way, the ability of the state to practice primitive accumulation on behalf of settlers was limited.

Finally, the development of settler agriculture was further buttressed by the kind of credit structure which was created in Kenya. Before the depression most of the agencies which provided credit were

²⁶Ibid., p. 204-5.

branches of British commercial and merchant banks, and private money-lenders, some of whom were Indian.²⁷ Initially these banks had been established to finance external trade, but as capitalism expanded in the colony, they began to provide credit to private farmers. The credit agencies based their concept of loan security on the market prices of land which were very inflated. The credit provided was mostly short-term, high-interest finance, so that borrowers were placed heavily in debt, especially as the credit also tended to be acquired largely to buy land itself and not to invest in actual production.²⁸

It seems that in the 1920s the settlers, government officials and the financiers themselves were caught in a momentary fit of euphoria about the prospects of settler agriculture. For one thing, the prevailing high purchase prices enabled the settler farmers to bear their huge debts. Land speculation was as old as the colony itself. In the first two decades of colonial rule land prices rose so fast - they shot up by some 4,000 percent between 1908 and 1914, from 6d to £1 per acre - that expectations of profits from speculation proved well-founded. One consequence of this widespread speculation was that the established settlers developed "a vested interest in further immigration of Europeans interested in buying or leasing land".²⁹ Gradually a point was reached in the twenties when land prices rose beyond the productive capacity of the land. Since

²⁷R.M.A. van Zwanenberg and Anne King, An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, Macmillan, London, 1975, chapter 14.

²⁸See van Zwanenberg, Colonial Capitalism and Labour, chapter 1.

²⁹Wolff, op. cit., p. 60. Also see Lonsdale and Berman, op. cit., p. 499.

credit granted had been assessed on the basis of land price and not on its productive capacity, when land prices plummeted during the depression many settler farmers drowned along with them, and the very future of white settlement in Kenya seemed to sink into the quicksands of apparently irrepayable debt. Twenty-five percent of the settlers went bankrupt. In 1936 the Agricultural Indebtedness Committee revealed that insolvent farmers were indebted to the tune of £3 million, a figure which was most probably on the conservative side.³⁰

In the aftermath of the depression the financial structures in Kenya were drastically overhauled. For the first time the colonial state came to play a direct interventionist role in shaping the development of credit institutions. The state embarked on extraordinary measures to rescue the insolvent farmers and to make settler agriculture more viable. A number of ordinances were passed to protect settler farmers threatened with extinction, such as the Agricultural Mortgages Ordinance in 1936, which legally prevented mortgagers from taking over a farmer's property. The most important measure was perhaps the formation of the Land Bank in 1931. By then original protestations against setting up such a bank from commercial and merchant banks had collapsed under the weight of the depression. The Land Bank's capital was raised on the London money market with a Kenya government guarantee, and lent at low interest rates. By September 1939 the Bank had advanced £865,000 to the settlers, solely for the purpose of discharging their debts.³¹

³⁰See van Zwanenberg, Colonial Capitalism and Labour, p. 18.

³¹See Ian Spencer, "Settler dominance, agricultural production and the second world war in Kenya", J.A.H., Vol. 21, No. 4, 1980, p. 497.

Thus by the time the Second World War broke out settler agriculture despite immense and, indeed, over-generous support from the colonial state, was a textbook case of terminal inefficiency. An average indebtedness level of £2,000 per farm, could certainly not be construed as success even by the most favourable standards of the time.³² Perhaps the most telling commentary on the inefficiency and unproductivity of settler production lies in the fact that between 1919 and 1939 only 10% of the European reserved lands were ever used for arable farming at any given time.³³ Not surprisingly, therefore, output per acre was generally low, and in some cases even lower than that found in the overcrowded African reserves.

Two main conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing discussion. First, by virtue of the enormous resources allocated to it, settler production had, by 1939, emerged as the commanding feature of Kenya's political economy, so that it could plausibly be argued that settlers had become economically dominant. The social cost of settler development on the African population, as it will be demonstrated later, was indeed high. However, the fact still remains that the presence of settlers provided the basis for wartime and, especially, postwar expansion of capitalism in Kenya. This was the long-term impact of settler production and state support for it. But the fact that settler production was not very successful before the outbreak of the World War also meant that both the colonial state and the emerging African working class needed the

³²Zwanenberg and King, op. cit., p. 289.

³³See Zwanenberg, Colonial Capitalism and Labour, p. 1.

continued existence of a peasant sector that was productive enough to generate surplus to provide revenue for the state so that it could pay for the running of the administration, subsidise settler production itself, and also provide such conditions that the maintenance and reproduction of the working class would be ensured. Thus our second conclusion, or rather subject to examine, is that the weakness of settler capital made it possible and necessary for peasant production to continue, and, indeed, expand in some areas and during certain periods before the Second World War.

Peasant Production and Rural Class Formation

Some writers were so overwhelmed by the evidence of colonial state support for settler agriculture that they concluded that the Kenyan peasantry was hardly born when it became an atrophied community pushed into the barren reserves.³⁴ In the hands of less sophisticated writers

³⁴See, for example, Wolff, *op. cit.*, especially chapter 7; H. Fearn, An African Economy: A Study of the Economic Development of the Nyanza Province of Kenya, 1903-1953, O.U.P., London, 1961; E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo, "The rise and decline of the Kenya Peasant 1881-1922", in The Paradox of Collaboration and other Essays, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1974. On the surface Atieno-Odhiambo's essay seems to evoke Colin Bundy's seminal work on the rise and fall of the South African peasantry first published in an article entitled, "The emergence of a South African Peasantry", African Affairs, 71, 1972 and subsequently incorporated into his book, The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry, Heinemann, London, 1979. But the strength of South African or indeed Southern African settler agrarian capitalism is in stark contrast to the weaknesses of settler agrarian capitalism in Kenya so that the 'rise and fall' thesis is difficult to apply in its entirety. As Frederick Cooper has noted, "the famous attempt to build the White Highlands is beginning to look to historians less like a small South Africa than an unsuccessful one, crimped by a failure to subdue the independence of African cultivators or even pull the state out of its ambivalence into a decisive assault on the peasantry". See F. Cooper,

this approach can easily degenerate into a static dichotomisation of colonial society along racial lines, thereby freezing the history of colonialism into a virtually never-changing conflict between the 'colonised' and the 'colonisers' so beloved in nationalist historiography and folklore. Moreover such an approach can trumpet the fact of African subjugation so loudly that it obscures the distinctive regional forms of that subjugation, the various levels of resistance and incorporation into the colonial capitalist economy, and the emerging multiple contradictions in the colonial social formation. Finally, such an approach does not give sufficient attention to how labour was organised and reproduced in a situation where although the capitalist mode of production was increasingly becoming dominant, pre-capitalist modes of production were still very much alive.

Of late it has come to be recognised that despite land alienation and discriminatory state policies which favoured settler production, the trend toward capital accumulation by Africans was discernible even in these early decades of colonial rule, although, of course, it was accelerated after 1945 and, particularly, once the nationalists captured

"Peasants, Capitalists and Historians: A Review Article", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1981, p. 299. Brett, op. cit., is another writer who failed to see the resilience of the Kenyan peasantry because he did not go beyond his regional characterisation of Kenya as a settler society where settler production was triumphant, Uganda as the bastion of peasant production, and Tanganyika a peculiar if miserable combination of both settler and peasant production. Such an approach can obscure the dynamic features of the development of capitalism in Kenya.

control of state power in the early 1960s.³⁵ As a result of the work of these last few years it can no longer be doubted that African peasants in Kenya responded vigorously to local and international market demands for commodities such as maize, cotton, tea, sisal, groundnuts, copra, sim sim, potatoes and tobacco.

The value of exports from African areas, according to the statistics of the Labour Department, rose from £ 175,000 in 1922 to £ 498,000 in 1938.³⁶ Zwanenberg estimates that the total value of African exports rose from £ 193,528 in 1931 to £ 651,573 in 1937, that is an increase of 340% in money value.³⁷ However, care should be taken not to over-

³⁵For lucid re-examinations of the development of settler and peasant production see Lonsdale and Berman, *op. cit.*; also see their article, "The Development of the Labor Control System in Kenya, 1919-1929", in Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 14, no. 1, 1981. Also see Swainson, *op. cit.*, chapter 5; and Colin Leys, "Capital Accumulation, Class Formation and Dependency - The Significance of the Kenyan Case", in The Socialist Register, 1978, edited by Ralph Miliband and John Saville; and the interesting debate between Leys and Raphael Kaplinsky, in Review of African Political Economy, No. 17, 1980. Kaplinsky's piece, "Capitalist accumulation in the periphery - the Kenyan case re-examined", challenges Ley's deviation from his previous work, Underdevelopment in Kenya, while Ley's piece, "Kenya: what does 'dependency' explain?" responds to Kaplinsky's critique. For a critique of this debate see, Bjorn Beckman, "Imperialism and capitalist transformation: a critique of a Kenyan debate", in Review of African Political Economy, no. 19, 1980. The debate on the Kenyan agrarian question has been carried further in Review of African Political Economy, No. 20, special issue on Kenya, entitled "Kenya: The Agrarian Question". For some attempts to examine the growth of African capitalist classes from the early 1900s to the late 1960s see G.N. Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite Bourgeoisie, 1905-1970, Yale University Press, 1980. Kitching's analysis is, however, marred by a tendency to include too many people under the rubric of petite bourgeoisie without any clear identification of their underlying class basis.

³⁶Swainson, *ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁷See R.M.A. van Zwanenberg, "The Development of Peasant Commodity Production in Kenya, 1920-40", in The Economic History Review, Vol. XXVII, No. 3, August, 1974, p. 45.

emphasise the proportion of African produce in the export trade. In fact, it has been argued that "independent African production for the export trade, conservatively estimated at 70 percent of agricultural exports in 1912-13 fell to 20 percent in 1928 ... from the mid-twenties onwards the absolute value of African exports gradually declined".³⁸

This decline in exports does not necessarily mean that there was also an absolute decline in African production. As we have already tried to show, over the years settlers tried to establish a monopoly over the export trade. It was also a widely known practice that settlers often bought African produce at low prices and resold it as settler produce at higher prices to the merchant firms which conducted the export trade. What is important to bear in mind in this connection is the fact that by 1929, three decades after the imposition of colonial rule, "African subsistence agriculture", Swainson reminds us, "accounted for 60% of Kenya's GNP. It was an uncomfortable reality for the settlers that the African farmers were subsidising their production indirectly."³⁹

In analysing the development of peasant production it has to be emphasised that there were important regional differences within Kenya which were dependent on many factors like the potential for local cash crop production and proximity to settler-occupied areas and towns. In other words, there emerged different regional patterns of class formation since there were different pre-colonial social formations which were

³⁸See Frank Furedi, "The Social Composition of the Mau Mau Movement in White Highlands", Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1974, p. 487. Also see C.C. Wriggley, "Kenya: The Patterns of Economic Life, 1902-45", in V. Harlow and E.M. Chilver, eds., op. cit., pp. 239f.

³⁹Swainson, op. cit., p. 35.

incorporated on different terms into the local and international capitalist system.⁴⁰ For example, the pastoral peoples like the Maasai, and agricultural peoples like the Kikuyu, were affected and responded differently to the growth of capitalism in Kenya; thus while the latter generally responded favourably to the opportunities presented by the opening up of commercial markets, the former did not and their areas ended up as "peripheries of the colonial-capitalist system".⁴¹

Among the agricultural peoples themselves there also emerged different regional and district patterns of socio-economic differentiation depending on each area's accessibility to suitable land for the production of cash crops, commodity markets, and the manner in which their underlying social forces and political institutions were transformed by capitalism and the colonial state.

⁴⁰This point is developed by Lionel Cliffe, "Rural Class Formation in East Africa", Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1977, p. 206. Leys has delineated four main economic regions in Kenya, first, the Central Province, second, the Rift Valley Province, third, the Nyanza and some districts of the Eastern Province, and, finally, the pastoral areas of the Rift Valley and the coast. He bases this regional differentiation mainly on economic and political criteria. See Colin Leys, "Politics in Kenya: the Development of Peasant Society", British Journal of Political Science, 1, p. 317. His characterisation of Kenya as a peasant society, however, now sounds rather dated. For a perceptive analysis of the coastal economy, its incorporation into the wider Kenyan colonial economy and the international capitalist system, and the coastal region's subsequent decline into virtual economic paralysis, or relative backwardness, see Frederick Cooper, From Slaves to Squatters, Plantation Labor and Agriculture Labor in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1980, especially chapter 6. Also see P.A. Memon and E.B. Martin, "The Kenya Coast: An Anomaly in the Development of an 'Ideal Type' Colonial Spatial System", Kenya Historical Review, 4, 1976.

⁴¹See Hans Hedlund, "Contradictions in the Peripherisation of a Pastoral Society: the Maasai", Review of African Political Economy, No. 15 and 16, p. 15. Also see Zwanenberg, "The Economic Response of Kenya Africans", pp. 223-25.

If there is one field that has received close scholarly attention in Kenyan history then it is the study of land alienation from Africans and the resultant land shortages in African reserves.⁴² At the risk of oversimplification, in the next few paragraphs, we will attempt to highlight how land alienation and land shortages in the African reserves affected peasant production and rural class formation which, in turn, conditioned the development of the Kenyan working class.

It cannot be stressed too much that the amount of land alienation and therefore the intensity of land shortages varied from region to region and within each region or district. In fact it has to be pointed out that except in very few cases, initially the problem was not that there was shortage of land as such, rather the reserve boundaries which were imposed by the colonial state introduced severe limitations on future expansion of African agriculture. Restriction of African agriculture behind the boundaries of the reserves was not accompanied by any profound changes in farming methods and techniques to replace pre-colonial methods of shifting and extensive cultivation, so that in a number of reserves land became in short supply as population grew and more land was brought under cultivation, either for stock or for cash crops. Moreover, continuous cultivation of land unaccompanied by modern facilities of replenishing it like fertilisers, eventually made its adverse impact felt in terms of soil erosion in some areas.⁴³ In short,

⁴²This point has been made by Sorrenson, op. cit., chapters 1-3; Tignor, op. cit., chapters 1-7; Leys, op. cit.; and Ross, op. cit. Also see the Elspeth Huxley - Margery Perham debate, in Politics and Race in Kenya, Faber and Faber, London, 1944.

⁴³Zwanenberg, "The Economic Response of Kenya Africans", pp.220-1.

it was only when population started growing fast in the 1920s that land shortages and ecological deterioration became acute enough to force an increasing number of Africans to seek work on settler farms and in the towns for their livelihood.

It is not enough, however, to leave the discussion of the development, or underdevelopment, as some would have it, of the Kenyan peasantry at this general level of analysis. Increased commodity production in the reserves was marked by trends towards individualisation of land and its concentration, modifications in uses of household or family labour, the beginnings of direct employment of wage labour, an expansion of surplus production and the appropriation of surplus value.⁴⁴ In a situation where Africans as a whole were constrained by the land-grabbing settlers, the fact that some people in the reserves began to accumulate more land and livestock than others simply meant that alienation of the less successful and youths from the means of production was hastened. Needless to say, all these changes generated changes in all social relationships; kinship and family patterns and obligations were reshaped by shifts in land tenurial arrangements, and the changes in the organisation and division of labour that were taking place.

It is usually not sufficiently stressed in the literature that the articulation of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production in which the long-term costs of maintaining and reproducing labour power were carried out in the pre-capitalist spheres led to a contradictory process of destroying, preserving and transforming the pre-colonial sexual

⁴⁴See Lionel Cliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

division of labour. Since it was mostly men who were recruited into the expanding army of wage earning workers, women remained behind to carry out rural subsistence production so that their function was relegated to that of reproducing and maintaining cheap labour reserves.⁴⁵

Thus increased commodity production in the rural reserves when combined with all the other demands made on these reserves by the colonial state and the settlers not only led to the growth of economic differentiation between and within regions and districts, but equally important, they also led to concentration of wealth and the formation of distinct groups of African accumulators, and contributed to subtle changes in the sexual division of labour, all of which represented qualitative transformations in social relations, the development of antagonistic 'class interests' in the rural hinterlands.

The process of rural class formation was most advanced among the peoples of the Central Province, particularly the Kikuyu. In addition to the fact that these people were close to the major centres of capitalist enterprise, the Kikuyu were more socially differentiated than most other peoples in what came to be known as Kenya, at least in the sense that an

⁴⁵For an insightful analysis of the role of women's labour in underdeveloped societies see Carmen D. Deere, "Rural Women's Subsistence Production in the Capitalist Periphery", The Review of Radical Political Economics, Vol. 8, No. 1, Spring 1976. Also see Barbara Rogers, The Domestication of Women, Discrimination in Developing Societies, Tavistock Publications, New York, 1981. Rogers offers a provocative and persuasive critique of the subordination of women in peripheral capitalist societies, including those in Africa, and how international development and aid agencies help in reinforcing that subordination through the kind of programmes they sponsor. For a concise theoretical discussion of women's participation in the labour force and women's domestic labour as part of capitalist development see, H.I.B., Saffioti, "Women, Mode of Production, and Social Formation", Latin American Perspectives, 4, nos. 1 and 2, Winter and Spring, 1977.

important distinction already existed between independent landowners (githaka owners) and tenant farmers (ahoi).⁴⁶ With the twin pressures of settler land expropriation and commodity production, land shortages and the ethic of individualised property ownership, it was in the interests of the githaka owners to push the ahoi off their lands. The latter, therefore, had little choice but to seek wage employment. It is interesting to note that many people lost their claims to land "in the litigation which began to flood Kikuyu courts from at least as early as 1932".⁴⁷ This is as vivid an illustration as any that pre-colonial social differentiation was being subordinated to the dominant dynamic of colonial capitalist accumulation.

⁴⁶Sorrenson, *op. cit.*, chapter 1; Tignor, *op. cit.*, chapters 1 and 2. An indication of the different patterns and levels of regional incorporation into the colonial labour system in Kenya as a result of both state pressure and local processes of capital accumulation, can be gleaned from the fact that by 1942 it was estimated that while the national average for able-bodied males in civil employment was 40.3%, the figure for the Giriama was 19.1%, and 9.25% for 'coastal tribes' as a whole. See Report of Labour Committee, Jan. 1942, KNA MAA 8/123, as referred to in Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters*, p. 252. This, however, should not obscure the far-reaching social changes that were taking place even in the most 'backward' regions. In a thoughtful discussion on the Giriama, Parkin has shown the slow, subtle, but no less profound changes in Giriama social structure as a result of changed methods and forms of agricultural production, commodity exchange and capital formation introduced by the colonial state and the colonisation process itself, which resulted in the integration of the Giriama economy into wider local and international mercantile networks. Parkin argues that through custom and ritual, especially the overarching idioms of intergenerational cleavage, the deference to elders, and persistence of bridewealth and reciprocal funerary expenditure, Giriama society was trying to mystify the emerging social inequalities, the widening cleavages generated by different accumulative interests and opportunities. David J. Parkin, *Palms, Wine, and Witnesses. Public Spirit and Private Gain in an African Farming Community*, Chandler, San Francisco, 1972.

⁴⁷Sorrenson, *ibid.*, p. 39.

Other peoples in Kenya, like those in the western region, did not have the advantage of being close to the market centres and towns of the Highlands. Long distances meant incurring heavy transport costs which only served to depress the already low prices for African produce. This probably accounts for the failure of cotton production in Nyanza Province in the 1920s; there were even some years during which there were virtually no buyers for the cotton grown. The fact that agricultural instructors forcibly tried to compel peasants in this region to grow cotton only aggravated matters and encouraged the peasants to abandon cotton growing.⁴⁸ The same was true of the coastal Africans.⁴⁹ This only goes to show that peasants not only had a keen appreciation of market prices, they also often displayed remarkable resistance against the use of naked force by the colonial state for the cultivation of certain crops. It was for this reason that the colonial state in Kenya, as

⁴⁸Zwanenberg, "The Economic Response of Kenya Africans", pp. 445-8. Also see M.A. Ogotu, "The Evolution in the Agrarian Economy of East Africa 1895-1960", in Journal of Eastern African Research and Development, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1973, p. 176.

⁴⁹See Frederick Cooper, From Slaves to Squatters, p. 260. In chapters 5 and 6 Cooper convincingly demonstrates how the colonial state, first before the First World War, unsuccessfully tried to smash squatter agriculture by ex-slaves and the Mijikenda in an effort to turn them into workers, and, then how after the war, the state tried to frustrate peasant production by creating marketing, licensing, taxation and transport conditions which presented obstacles to peasants' capital accumulation. Through struggle, epitomised by the Giriama (a sub-group of the Mijikenda) rebellion, the coastal peoples, both ex-slaves and non-slaves were able to assert control over their production and therefore restructure coastal agrarian relations. However, out of this struggle between squatters, landlords and the state, there emerged an economic structure which acted as an obstacle rather than a prod to dynamic and rapid agricultural change and capital accumulation. For an excellent study of Giriama history see, C. Brantley, The Giriama and British Colonialism: A Study in Resilience and Rebellion, 1800-1920, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1981.

elsewhere in Africa, regarded peasants as being unpredictable. Although peasants were integrated into the circuits of the market, their continued ability to grow food for their own subsistence gave them sufficient leverage to withdraw from the market, if only temporarily, when conditions were too unfavourable for them. In short, peasants could effectively disrupt local output and supply of commodities on which the colonial state and the spheres of capitalist production were so dependent both directly and indirectly.

Proximity to the centres of capitalist production, therefore, enabled the people of the Central Province to respond aggressively to opportunities on the domestic and export markets. This was to have profound effects on labour recruitment: the principal labour producing districts in Kenya became "simultaneously the major areas of peasant commodity production, with the provincial administration having to maintain a tenuous balance in the contradictory articulation of the peasant and settler spheres".⁵⁰ This explains why the question of how peasant production could be manipulated was so central to the colonial state and the settlers. Both realised that despite relative neglect of peasant production - between 1926 and 1927 7% of the agricultural budget was spent on the African areas⁵¹ - peasants still responded vigorously to the limited opportunities open to them. It was important for the state and European trading firms to shape the decisions peasants made by imposing monopolistic control of commodity purchasing and a host of

⁵⁰ Lonsdale and Berman, "The Development of the Labour Control System in Kenya", p. 77.

⁵¹ Zwanenberg, "The Development of Peasant Commodity Production", p. 450.

marketing regulations if they were not going to lose control of peasant production which could then lead to a severe drop in labour supply to settlers.

Before the depression European trading firms were virtually excluded from trade in the reserves where it was monopolised by Indian traders. The Indian traders not only purchased local produce and sold manufactured goods and determined local prices, they also sponsored many pioneer African traders by providing them with stock usually on credit since these aspiring traders rarely had the necessary capital, contacts, or credit standing to purchase directly from wholesalers in Nairobi or Mombasa. During these early decades of colonial capitalism the position of Indian traders was directly facilitated by the colonial state's policy towards gazettement of trading centres. The Indian traders were seen by the state as invaluable economic 'middlemen' who could stimulate trade and the consumption of imported commodities among Africans, which would then lead to increased production in the rural areas, and general monetization of rural economies, a necessary pre-condition for the integration of those areas into the colonial and wider international mercantile networks.⁵²

⁵²P.A. Memon, "Colonial Marketing and Urban Development in the Reserves", *Journal of Eastern African Research and Development*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1976, 201-8. Asians were initially brought to East Africa to build the railway. Between 1896 and 1901, 31,983 of them were brought from India and of these 6,724 decided to remain after the expiry of their agreements. In subsequent decades more came either to take up trade opportunities or to follow relatives. By 1931 there were over 17,000 of them in Nairobi alone. There were also, of course, many Asians on the Kenyan coast who had been there for generations. For more details on the East African Asian community with reference to their commercial and trading activities, communal and political organisations during the colonial and post-colonial periods see the following:

From the 1920s African traders gradually developed their own marketing system in the reserves, or rather some of them ceased to serve merely as agents of Indian traders. One key impetus to the development of such a marketing system or group of traders was the lack of transport from the main areas of African peasant production to the market centres and towns at a time when peasant production was on the increase. This period therefore saw

the growth of small African traders and of ownership of pack-horses and ox-carts among the local people. At spasmodic intervals these developments were noted in the Agricultural Reports of most districts in the Nyanza and Kikuyu Provinces ... Such developments do indicate strongly the emergence of a trader class among the peoples in the cash-producing areas.⁵³

The African-controlled markets had simple beginnings, but the range of articles bought and sold there increased gradually. Although they owed their development and organisation almost entirely to African initiative, from the mid-twenties they were gradually transferred to the jurisdiction of the newly established Local Native Councils because they

Mary N. Varghese, "The East African Indian National Congress, 1914-1939: A Study of Indian Political Activity in Kenya", Ph.D. dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1975; John I. Zarwan, "Indian Businessmen in Kenya: A Case Study", Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1977. Also see J.S. Mangat, A History of the Asians in East Africa, 1886-1945, O.U.P., London, 1969; Y.P. Ghai and D.P. Ghai, Portrait of a minority: Asians in East Africa, O.U.P., Nairobi, 1970; A. Bharat, The Asians in East Africa - Jayhind and Uhuru, Nelson Hall, Chicago, 1972; Indira Rothermund, The Political and Economic Role of Asian Minorities, Berlin, 1965; and R. Gregory, India and East Africa, London, 1972.

⁵³ Zwanenberg, "The Development of Peasant Commodity Production", p. 453.

tended to be located on communal land. There were also large numbers of itinerant traders, especially in Central and western Kenya, to be found crowded at road sides during the height of the produce buying season. In short, "by the 1920s African traders were reported to be gradually able to compete, here and there, with their Indian counterparts. Thus the groundwork was being laid for the emergence of an indigenous trading class whose interests tended to conflict with those of the immigrant Asiatic traders."⁵⁴ This conflict was not to be decided in favour of the African traders until the nationalists took control of the state in the 1960s and provided more favourable conditions for their accumulation.⁵⁵

After the depression both Indian and African traders were faced with a serious challenge from settler marketing organisations and international merchant firms who wanted to bring marketing of African produce directly under the centralised settler marketing institutions like the KFA and to control imports and their distribution. The depression had taught the settlers the importance of controlling the local market in addition to the more remunerative export market. However, attempts to form cooperative societies in Kiambu and Fort Hall to deal in maize and wattle bark, in which a Nairobi based European firm would act as agents

⁵⁴ Memon, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 210. Memon shows that in the thirties African traders, like the Kavirondo Native Chamber of Commerce, representing Luo and Luhya traders from Western Kenya, were content to pass resolutions seeking restriction on the activities of Indian traders. In their resolutions they also condemned the Local Native Council's practice of allocating plots to Indians in the trading centres.

for the cooperatives, fell through: African suspicions and Indian competition proved too strong.⁵⁶ The settlers and the European merchant firms then appealed for direct state support. In 1935 the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance was passed with the aim of providing for the collection of African produce in bulk. To this end, the ordinance provided for the establishment of special produce buying markets at trading centres and other such places.⁵⁷

Through the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance settler and merchant firms hoped to reduce the number of selling points for designated African produce which could then enable them to bypass the numerous African and Indian traders who had previously handled this trade. There is little evidence to suggest that the activities of Indian and African traders were seriously curtailed after the passing of this ordinance. It would not be until the 1950s that branches of international firms like BAT would combine forces with African traders to loosen the grip of Indians on rural trade. Ironically, it would be the articulation of indigenous and metropolitan capital which would accelerate the demise of settler economic and political dominance. But that is to anticipate future developments.

⁵⁶ Indian traders also dominated the import/export, wholesale and retail trades and services in the country as a whole. Only a few Asian firms seem to have moved into primary processing before 1939. But by this time the big Asian merchants had accumulated enough capital so that after the war some of them quickly moved into industrial production and absorbed weak settler enterprises. See Swainson, *op. cit.*, p. 54. This issue will be considered in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

⁵⁷ Memon, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-16. The ostensible reason for enacting this ordinance was that there were too many unscrupulous Indian and African traders who were exploiting African peasants!

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that despite numerous obstacles imposed by the state and settlers, a class of local African capitalists had emerged by 1939. This new class had its basis in links between commodity production in the reserves, trade, and salaried positions in the state apparatus. This class was composed of those who had collaborated with the British during and after the conquest of Kenya, and others who 'straddled' between permanent employment, as teachers, for instance, and private accumulation, through trading or acquisition of land.⁵⁸ The much maligned 'collaborators', as Lonsdale and Berman have clearly demonstrated, have to be distinguished in two groups.

While some of the earliest 'chiefs and headmen' were appointed from among the African military auxiliaries and camp-followers of conquest, perhaps marginal men in their own communities, they were soon replaced - just as the old African hands were supplanted by Oxbridge men - by appointments from among individuals or lineages which had already come to the fore as accumulators of wealth and power ... The legitimacy of the colonial state was hitched to the ox-cart of African accumulation.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Swainson, op. cit., pp. 173-4.

⁵⁹Lonsdale and Berman, "Coping With the Contradictions ...", p. 497. On the theme of collaboration and the links between chiefs and the establishment of local administration see J.M. Lonsdale, "The Politics of Conquest: the British in Western Kenya, 1894-1908", Historical Journal, Vol. XX, No. IV, 1977; P. Rogers, "The British and the Kikuyu, 1890-1905: a re-assessment", J.A.H., 20, 1979; M.A. Thomason, "Little Tin Gods: the District Officer in British East Africa", Albion, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1975; B.A. Ogot, "British Administration in the Central Nyanza District of Kenya, 1900-60", J.A.H., 6, 2, 1963; W.R. Ochieng', "Colonial African chiefs: were they primarily self-seeking scoundrels?" in B.A. Ogot, op. cit.; also see essays by Atieno-Odhiambo, op. cit.; Low, op. cit.; Tignor, op. cit.; and J. Forbes Munro, Colonial Rule and the Kamba, O.U.P., Oxford, part 1.

Thus, while it is correct to say that when peasant production came into conflict with settler production, the colonial state came to the aid of the latter, it is wrong to assume that the rural reserves therefore consisted of undifferentiated and poverty-stricken peasants. There were groups of Africans who began concentrating wealth in their hands at the expense of others, and foremost among them were chiefs and other administrative functionaries, for whom a certain amount of state support was necessary. After all, they were needed to help the state and settlers to recruit and control labour. It is, therefore, tempting to conclude that apart from providing the state with much needed revenues, the expansion of peasant commodity production laid the material base for the emergence of a local capitalist class and the reproduction of cheap labour. In other words, within the womb of peasant commodity production lay the embryos of small groups of wealthy producers on the verge of birth as an indigenous capitalist class, and a much larger class of poor peasants, and yet another whose umbilical cord with the peasantry was about to snap as it emerged into a landless proletariat.

The Penetration of Metropolitan Capital

The spheres of peasant and settler production were not the only ones which made demands on African labour. There were also trading, agricultural, manufacturing and mining enterprises established by metropolitan capital, which needed varying quantities of labour. The competition between settler and metropolitan capital has been sufficiently dealt with by Nicola Swainson in her penetrating analysis on the development

of corporate capitalism in Kenya,⁶⁰ so that there is no need here to go into details about this competition, except to underline the overall features of corporate expansion before the Second World War.

The colonisation of Kenya was followed by the entry of British merchant firms such as Bauman & Co., Smith Mackenzie, Gibson & Co., Leslie & Anderson, Mitchell Cotts, and the British East African Corporation (BEAC). These trading and shipping firms became involved in exporting primary produce from Kenya and distributing imported manufactured goods on the local market. Since the competition among them was very intense, they had little choice but to get involved in the production of the commodities which they exported.

Consequently, the merchant firms made heavy investments in plantation agriculture, where one crop was farmed, usually sisal, tea or sugar, in which the firms had a global interest. Apart from producing and exporting their own commodities these firms also became involved in the primary processing of their commodities, which gave rise to the establishment of manufacturing or processing units. The merchant firms were compelled to set up processing plants as a result of competitive conditions on the world market. Local processing of items like tobacco and cigarettes by the British American Tobacco Company (BAT), or tea by Brooke Bond, was also intended to give these firms control of the local market against competitors. These provided early cases of 'import substitution',

⁶⁰Swainson, *op. cit.*; also see her long article, "Company Formation in Kenya before 1945 with Particular Reference to the Role of Foreign Capital", in Raphael Kaplinsky, Readings on the Multinational Corporation in Kenya, O.U.P., Nairobi, 1978. Except for a few minor alterations the article forms part 1, chapters 1 and 2 of the book. The discussion which follows draws heavily from these works.

which was to become the linchpin of post-independent development strategies in Kenya and other African countries as well.

Thus by 1939 tobacco and cigarettes, tea, flour, sugar, dairy products, twine, and cement were being locally produced. In short, manufacturing was limited to the processing of raw materials and agricultural products. As for mineral exploitation, mining ventures in Kenya, especially during the ill-fated gold rushes of 1929 to 1934 and the 'Kakamega Gold Rush' of 1937, were as short-lived as they were speculative. Certainly mining in Kenya pales into insignificance when compared to the huge and very profitable mining concerns of Southern Africa; Soda ash at Magadi, which was one of the world's largest deposits, was the only significant mineral to be exploited in Kenya. It was exploited by the Magadi Soda Company, which was under the control of the giant British conglomerate, Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI), from 1925.

The absence of any significant industrialisation in Kenya before the Second World War was no different from the situation that prevailed in other African countries, although arguably outside Southern Rhodesia, Kenya's industrialisation was ahead of elsewhere in Africa. Metropolitan capital showed little interest in manufacturing in Kenya partly because "the scale of primitive accumulation restricted demand for consumer goods", and partly due to the fact that "merchant capital, in the form of large British trading companies", which dominated foreign investment in the country, "acted as agents of British industrial capital by linking up East African markets for manufactured goods with metropolitan markets for raw materials".⁶¹ In other words, it was in the interests of

⁶¹Swainson, The Development of Corporate Capitalism, p. 67.

metropolitan capital to restrict colonial industrialisation. This was the basis of the widespread metropolitan opposition to industrialisation in the colonial territories, although different groups expressed their opposition differently.⁶² The economic policies of the imperial state towards the colonies, therefore, continuously sought to maintain the metropolitan-colonial division of labour, by reproducing and extending the initial structural change in colonial economies from subsistence to cash crop production for exports and as 'dumping grounds' for British manufactured goods, which would have been frustrated by any large-scale programme of colonial industrialisation.⁶³

It was Kay who first made an elaborate distinction between merchant and industrial capital and their interdependence at a global level, by arguing that merchant capital was the only form of capital present in the colonial and other capitalist peripheries, yet within the world economy as a whole it became an aspect of industrial capital.

⁶²As Brett puts it: "Conservative interests supported the development of this 'complementary' rather than 'competitive' economic system for the reasons already given. Humanitarian interests also tended to support this restrictive attitude out of a wholly sentimental desire to shelter African populations from the rigours of an industrial revolution and a more hard-headed desire to avoid the development of low wage competition", Brett, *op. cit.*, p. 268, also see his chapter three.

⁶³Not surprisingly the Empire Marketing Board and the Colonial Development Advisory Committee virtually ignored giving assistance to the industrial sector in the colonies. The former limited itself to marketing food and raw materials and gave no assistance to manufacturing, whereas the latter, despite the fact that there were no limits placed on its sphere of activity, had, by 1939 allocated, from a total fund of nearly £8 million, a mere £ 151,000 for industrial projects, of which only £ 23,000 or 0.3% was actually disbursed. See Brett, *ibid.*, chapter 3. Also see Wolff, *op. cit.*, chapters 1, 2 and 7; and D.J. Morgan, *The Official History of Colonial Development, Vol. 1, The Origins of British Aid Policy, 1924-1945*, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, 1980.

In other words, merchant capital in the underdeveloped countries after the establishment of industrial capitalism in the developed countries in the nineteenth century existed in its two historical forms simultaneously. At one and the same moment it was the only form of capital but not the only form of capital. This apparent paradox is the specifica differentia of underdevelopment ...⁶⁴

Kay's argument about the virtual absence of industrial capital at the beginning of colonial capitalism, or during the phase of primitive colonial accumulation, is quite persuasive. But we ought to be careful not to let the dynamic relationship between merchant and industrial capital degenerate into a schematic trap of crude determinism, one that overlooks important differences which emerged between different countries. In other words, we should not entirely ignore the 'internal' factors which blocked or created opportunities, whichever case it might be, for some form of limited industrialisation. In short, why did Kenya, and not Uganda and Tanganyika, begin to emerge as the manufacturing and distribution centre in East Africa during these early decades of colonialism?

It can hardly be a coincidence that the only direct attempts by the Colonial Office to undermine colonial industries in East Africa occurred in Uganda in the twenties, where a Japanese firm wanted to set up a match factory, and in Tanganyika in the thirties, where a British firm wanted to set up a factory making twine from sisal, and not Kenya.⁶⁵ The

⁶⁴G. Kay, Development and Underdevelopment: A Marxist Critique, Macmillan, London, 1975, p. 100.

⁶⁵Brett, op. cit., chapter 9; also see Paul Zeleza, "The Sisal Industry in Tanganyika", M.A. Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1978.

Tanganyika debacle in particular amply demonstrates that even when individual capital set out to establish colonial industries, the opposition of British industrial capital as a whole, backed by the imperial state, finally triumphed. It is significant that a sisal manufacturing factory was set up in Kenya in 1938, although its external markets were confined to the other East African territories, including Tanganyika. This is a testimony to the strong political position of the settlers in Kenya and their ability to manipulate situations to their advantage, notwithstanding their economic weaknesses. Thus while settler capital itself was too weak to branch into and sustain any significant industrialisation programme, they could manipulate the colonial state to help them achieve some of their ambitions for some form of manufacturing, as was the case with the setting up of the Liebig meat factory in the 1930s.⁶⁶ Certainly the instability which characterised early local company formation gave way to greater stability from the mid-1920s.⁶⁷

Thus although there was little investment in secondary manufacturing in Kenya before the Second World War, Kenya did not experience the

⁶⁶The colonial state which undertook to provide the loan capital for the construction of the plant, partly saw the establishment of the meat factory as an "opportunity to forcibly destock the Kamba herds, which the administration considered to have seriously overgrazed the land". See Swainson, "Company Formation in Kenya Before 1945 ...", p. 30.

⁶⁷Swainson has delineated two main phases of company formation before 1945. During the initial phase, which, according to her, lasted until 1922, company formation was characterised by general instability, and most of the investments were of a highly speculative nature and confined themselves to land, property development, agriculture, trading and small-scale servicing. From the mid-twenties companies grew in numbers and size and survived for longer periods, and for the first time capital began to expand into basic manufacturing.

outright suppression of industries as Uganda and Tanganyika did. This can be attributed to the 'economic nationalism' of the settlers. A combination of this aggressive 'economic nationalism', and the penetration of metropolitan capital, as well as extensive trading activities of Indian merchants and expanding peasant commodity production, created the conditions for the development of not only the biggest and most internally diversified proletariat in East Africa, but also the most oppressive system of labour recruitment and control.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A KENYAN WORKING CLASS

Through the initial act of alienating land to settlers, the colonial state deprived some Africans of their means of production and laid the basis for the entry of Africans in ever increasing numbers into the wage labour force. Taxation was also used for the same purpose to force Africans to enter into wage employment. It is not enough, however, simply to assert that, apart from providing the government with much needed revenue, taxes were a method of pressing Africans into wage labour, for that begs the question: "why, after all, should men not have simply avoided paying taxes, or was the system so efficient that its tax demands could be enforced?"⁶⁸ Tax evasion was in fact quite endemic and harsh measures were often taken to rectify the situation, such as seizing the stock of defaulters, burning their huts, imposing fines on them, or arresting and imprisoning them for terms of up to three months. But in spite of all these measures there was hardly any increase in the

⁶⁸See Zwanenberg, Labour and Colonial Capitalism, p. 76.

value of direct taxation during the inter-war period.⁶⁹

It would appear that taxation as a mechanism to secure labour was most effective before the First World War when it was first introduced. Attempts to raise the rate of hut or poll tax after the war as part of a co-ordinated effort to increase labour supply triggered the Nairobi General Strike of March 1922, which was the first of its kind, where a key demand was that taxes should be reduced. After the bloody massacre that accompanied the 1922 demonstrations the government agreed to reduce the basic rate to Shs. 12, where it remained unchanged for most of the inter-war period, so that from then on taxes were never raised for the sole purpose of forcing men to go and work. Taxation still imposed an intolerable burden on Africans, but through political struggles, culminating in the 1922 disturbances, Africans managed to prevent the tax burden from becoming even heavier as many settlers would surely have preferred.

After the 1922 disturbances the initial thrust of taxation as a means of forcing Africans into wage employment was being overtaken by the need to retain labour. The payment of taxes was increasingly undertaken by employers by deducting taxes from wages in advance. By 1937 this system had acquired the force of law, and helped to simplify and

⁶⁹In 1923, for instance, £ 575,000 was collected from Africans and twelve years later, thanks to the depression, the amount had declined to £530,000. Since the population increased during these years, it is hard to escape the conclusion that this reflected the growing adeptness by Africans escaping taxes. The value of indirect African taxation through customs duties of items geared for African consumption increased, however. See Zwanenberg, *ibid.*, p. 82f; and Wolff, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-118.

reduce the costs of tax collection.⁷⁰ But apart from the danger of provoking political unrest among Africans, taxation in itself was a double-edged sword: it encouraged peasant production as much as wage employment.⁷¹ Among some people in those areas which had sufficient land and easy access to markets, they could meet their tax obligations by expanding their production, while those who had none of these advantages, including youths, had little option but to seek wage employment. Thus taxation accentuated the emerging regional and social inequalities; but the real contradiction lay in the fact that peasant commodity production increased precisely in those areas near European settlement from where settlers hoped to draw their labour. Therefore, over and above mechanisms like land alienation and taxation, it became necessary to resort to direct use of forced labour. A legal and administrative apparatus was erected with which to implement and justify the formation of a severely exploited labour force.

Forced Labour

Forced or compulsory labour was widely used and became institutionalised during the first few decades of colonial rule in Kenya. This was a period when massive supplies of labour were required to lay the very foundations of the colonial economy; rail lines and roads had to be

⁷⁰It should be noted that although no formal arrangement was ever reached, the government was sympathetic to settlers' practice of synchronising tax collection with harvesting periods. See Zwanenberg, Labour and Colonial Capitalism, p. 91.

⁷¹Lonsdale and Berman, "Coping with contradictions", pp. 502-3; Zwanenberg, Labour and Colonial Capitalism, p. 103.

built, dams and bridges constructed, administrative centres erected, and forests cleared and settler farms established. Consequently labour had to be obtained and retained at whatever social cost either through voluntary recruitment or compulsion. But since voluntary labour was, at the best of times, unavailable in sufficient quantities, for, after all, there was little need for Africans to sell their labour power in order to survive, forced labour inevitably became the most reliable means of securing labour. Few government officials or settlers ever questioned the need for some form of labour coercion. For many it was even an act of benevolence, a necessary 'shock therapy' for a people deeply mired in idleness and indolence. Indeed, it was all part of the 'white man's burden', in the service of their civilising mission.⁷²

These practices and their accompanying justificatory notions of African inferiority and laziness were perpetrated most unabashedly before the First World War. Many settlers, especially those of South African

⁷²Leys, *op. cit.*, and Ross, *op. cit.*, are the two most well known critics of the Kenyan government while they were at the same time government officials. Ross was the Director of the Public Works Department and Leys was a health officer. Also see the correspondence between Leys Oldham, in J.W. Cell, ed., By Kenya Possessed: The Correspondence of Norman Leys and J.H. Oldham 1918-1926, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1976. The humanitarian lobby had some serious limitations, however. Cooper has convincingly argued that the humanitarian critics of 'forced labour' and 'native policy' in Kenya such as Leys and missionaries did not, just like their abolitionist predecessors, go beyond questioning the use of state coercion for private profit. Anti-slavery ideology of the abolitionists, humanitarianism of the early 20th century, and the prescriptions of development economics of the last few decades, share a common ideological thread in that they offer no more than a liberal critique of capitalism, without questioning the underlying exploitative and greedy property relations inherent in capitalism. Indeed, they implicitly or explicitly advocate the inculcation of a steady and disciplined 'work ethic' among Africans as a precondition for them to attain 'civilisation' or 'development'. Cooper, From Slaves to Squatters, p. 62-68.

origin, urged and used corporal punishment in order to force Africans to work. Legislation was passed which included penal clauses for breach of contract on the part of workers, since dismissal was deemed neither an effective economic or moral threat. Professional labour recruiters were given a practically free rein and it was not unusual for them to use dubious and cruel methods in order to get labour. The behaviour of most chiefs in this matter was hardly any better. They were expected to recruit labour on behalf of the settlers and government. They also were supposed to provide communal labour for public works programmes, and many of them were only too glad to do it. After all, it paid to be a 'colonial bully-boy'.

The deplorable working conditions during this period cannot be over-emphasised. Wages, if paid at all, were extremely low, and it was conventional wisdom that raising them would only succeed in 'corrupting' the African and making him lazier. As for workers employed by contractors their lot consisted of "frequent beating, poor feeding and housing, and ill-treatment generally leading to many deaths ... Sometimes workers had tried to run away, those successful dying in large numbers of hunger and fatigue".⁷³ Settlers and private contractors were not the only employers with this dubious distinction as bad employers. The record of the Railway, the Public Works Department (PWD), the municipalities and even the poorer missions was equally appalling.

The pressures of the First World War only made matters worse, for additional labour had to be secured for the military forces and the

⁷³See A. Clayton and D.C. Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895-1963, Frank Cass, London, 1974, p. 37.

carrier corps. Moreover, as a result of wartime conditions the voices of critics, both in Kenya and especially Britain, were silenced so that the much needed labour reforms were postponed. More repressive labour legislation was passed and, for the first time, a documentation system was introduced in 1915 which was later to be known as the infamous kipande registration system. The War Council, with its strong settler membership, recommended low wage rates for carriers so as not to depress labour supplies and push up wage bills for settler farmers. The conditions of the carriers themselves were, of course, extremely poor, ranging from inadequate food rations, bad sanitation and virtually no accommodation, to hazardous and exhausting work, long working hours and endemic diseases, with all the predictable tragic consequences. In fact more carriers and askaris died from these poor conditions than from actual combat. In 1917 the government even resorted to recruitment through armed raids in order to increase the diminishing ranks of the carrier corps. Adding grievous insult to irreparable injury the British government refused to pay unclaimed carriers' pay despite repeated requests by the Kenyan government and promises that the latter would use this money to improve African welfare.⁷⁴

In the meantime settler demands for labour were unabated. In fact during the war years the settlers seized the opportunity and succeeded in wielding greater power and exerting more influence over the administration of the colony than ever before. They were able, for instance, to get strong representation on the Economic Commission appointed in 1917 to consider post-war commercial and industrial policy and on

⁷⁴The money was finally paid to the Kenyan government in the early 1930s. See Clayton and Savage, ibid., pp. 90-1.

another committee set up to plan increased white settlement after the war. Debt-ridden as they were, and encouraged by their new found power, the settlers agitated for tougher measures to 'encourage' African labour, which was simply another euphemism for coercion. It was in this context that they succeeded in opposing the development of African reserves and forestalling even the token efforts by the government to help peasant agriculture. They correctly argued that such a policy would only lead to labour shortages more severe than they already were. The government was in a weak position to resist these demands, especially when many officials themselves used compulsory labour for state purposes.

By the end of the war, then, the labour situation was as deplorable and harsh as ever. The reserves were on the verge of social and economic ruin; not only had large numbers of men died in war, more people still were decimated by diseases, famine and natural calamities. In its first couple of decades, therefore, 'Pax Britannica' had a dismal record to show. From perhaps four million Africans in 1902, the population fell to three million in 1911, and to less than two-and-half million in 1921. It was not until the mid-thirties that the population probably reached its 1895 level.⁷⁵

After the war the Kenyan government was faced with an almost intractable problem. On the one hand, it had to find a way to continue and legitimise forced labour in order to satisfy the insatiable demands of the settlers who had been impressed by the wartime mobilisation of

⁷⁵See R.R. Kucynski, Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire, O.U.P., London, 1949, Volume 2, pp. 144-48, as quoted in Wolff, op. cit., pp. 106-7; also see Sorrenson, Land Reform, pp. 34-5.

labour and wanted to see it continued, as well as to sustain general post-war reconstruction and economic expansion. At the same time it had to accommodate the Colonial Office's creeping paternalism and the enlightened labour conventions of the ILO, and avoid provoking the wrath of the humanitarian lobby in Britain.⁷⁶ The more astute members of the Kenyan government were also aware of the need to avoid unleashing African discontent and labour unrest, and to make sure that the system would not lead to gross abuses, wasteful uses of labour and inefficiency. It was a tall order, for these were mutually contradictory demands, and not surprisingly perhaps, the worst came to pass; more settlers arrived as a result of the soldier-settlement schemes, the notorious Northey Circulars were issued, and the involvement of the provincial administration in the recruitment of labour for settlers was stepped up and reached a peak in 1919-21. Wages were reduced by a third following the depression in international commodity prices and the change in local currency from rupees to shillings.⁷⁷ Just as determinedly African protest intensified until it erupted in the disturbances of 1922.

All these factors, new European immigration after the war, the financial crisis, and the fact that the settlers had become more assertive than ever before, reinforced old pressures for labour coercion. The government itself wanted large supplies of labour; the twenties, as already noted, witnessed great railway extensions and expansion in the

⁷⁶See, for example, Diana Wylie, "Confrontation Over Kenya: The Colonial Office and its Critics, 1918-1940", J.A.H., 18, 3, 1977.

⁷⁷For more details see Zwanenberg and King, op. cit., chapter 14; also see Clayton and Savage, op. cit., pp. 139-46.

transportation system as a whole, as well as in other public works programmes. Acute labour shortages in the immediate aftermath of the war also served to fuel pressures for forced labour. One does not need to seek far to explain why there were such shortages. Apart from Africans' unwillingness to enter such unremunerative wage labour when subsistence production was still resilient, there was also the general demographic problem; the war, following hard on the heels of a fairly violent colonisation process, together with outbreaks of famine and epidemics, had led to a decline in population, especially of able-bodied males, general deterioration in health and thinly stretched manpower resources. The colonial hen was coming home to roost.

Some coastal planters suggested allowing the immigration of indentured Indians to alleviate the labour shortages, which hit them particularly hard. Indentured Indian labour, after all, had once been used to build the Uganda railway. The Colonial Secretary, however, decided against such immigration because settlers on the whole were opposed to it; the Indians who were already in the country had proved that they could be formidable economic competitors. Settlers also objected to Nyasaland labour because it was accustomed to high wages and, the settlers feared, it would "tend to raise the price of other native labour".⁷⁸ Forced labour within the country was seen as the only solution. This old policy was given a new baptismal name, 'encouragement'. The government liberally defined essential services, for which compulsory labour was legal, as roads, railways, wharves, harbours, portage,

⁷⁸See Wolff, op. cit., p. 95.

telegraphs and telephones, and their repairs. The definition went further to include private contractors working for the state, which under the circumstances could mean anybody, including settlers. It was not unusual for men signed under the compulsory labour procedure to be forced to sign labour contracts.⁷⁹

Probably the worst abuses of forced labour and certainly the most widely publicised occurred in the reserves under the disguise of communal labour. Originally communal labour was supposed to be undertaken voluntarily by people to build and improve services in their community, if not with gusto then at least with a clear understanding of what they would benefit from it. But as everything else under colonial capitalism African institutions were distorted in order to serve wider colonial objectives. They were emptied of their social and cultural meaning and remoulded into vehicles of naked extortion and exploitation. To begin with, communal labour became compulsory, and the tasks and projects involved became larger and harder and took longer to complete, while their relevance to the community lessened. It was not unusual for men past working age to be sent to work on roads, or for men to be seized by 'tribal retainers' and sent to work far away from their homes. What attracted most concern, however, was the compulsion of women and children to take part in communal labour. The practice of involving women and children in communal labour had been enshrined in the Native Authority Ordinance of 1912 which, in effect, amounted to forced labour for government purposes within the reserves. In spite of the constant attacks upon the use of compulsory female and child labour, the practice

⁷⁹Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 135.

became more widespread in the 1920s and early 1930s, especially whenever the spectre of labour shortage reared its dreaded head. It was not until 1933 that legislation was passed for the first time specifically designed to curb the worst effects of female and child labour. But passing a law was one thing and implementing it was another. There is reason to believe that the practice continued well into the Second World War.⁸⁰

It is of course extremely difficult to arrive at any accurate assessment of the numbers of children and women involved in forced labour, not to mention the men. According to official estimates about 15,000 people were called upon each year in the 1920s under the compulsory labour programme. But the official figures grossly underestimate the real numbers involved. For one thing those conscripted for railway construction were excluded from the count. So were those engaged in communal labour.⁸¹ It can reasonably be assumed that thousands more were forced labourers, only that they were not defined as such, their real status being disguised in the labyrinth of a sophisticated, if callous, labour recruitment system.⁸² Under the policy of 'encouragement', chiefs, district commissioners and their deputies, European and Asian recruiting agents and their African sub-recruiters, were engaged in labour raids and labour recruiting campaigns noted more for their spectacular acts of brutality and deception than their occasional concern and care

⁸⁰Zwanenberg, Labour and Colonial Capitalism, chapter 5; Clayton and Savage, ibid., chapter 4.

⁸¹Calculated from Native Affairs Department Annual Reports, 1920-1930.

⁸²For more details see Zwanenberg, Labour and Colonial Capitalism, chap. 6.

for the recruits. The latter would end up in private employment, often subject to abysmal working conditions and paid paltry wages.

Further, the government and settlers were in basic agreement that labour from the remoter areas of the country should be subject to compulsion, leaving the labour nearer the centres of settler agriculture and commerce available for the private employer. In order to implement this policy lower wages were paid to compulsory workers, the strategy being that "as a consequence Africans would prefer to work for three months (the minimum to secure exemption from compulsory labour) at a higher wage in relatively congenial work rather than two months of hard construction work at a lower wage".⁸³ Africans could not have been presented with a worse Hobson's choice. The attempts to regulate and rationalise forced labour reached their apex with the development of the kipande registration system.

The first Native Registration Ordinance was passed in 1915, then it was later amended by a bill which became law in 1920. The ordinance made it compulsory for all adult male African workers in Kenya to wear a chain and a metal container around their necks. The container kept an identification paper with two sets of information; first, a man's personal details including his district, location, sub-location, 'tribe', age and his left thumb-print, and, second, his employment record filled in by a current or last employer showing the employer's name and signature, date and nature of employment, rate of wages last paid, if supplied rations or posho, and the date of discharge. There was also

⁸³ Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 134.

provision for additional information on the conduct of the worker, for example, if he was lazy, rude, punctual, and so on.⁸⁴ The container together with the paper was what came to be called kipande by Africans. In official parlance, however, it had a less evocative term, a Certificate Issued Under the Native Registration Ordinance, 1921.

Kipande meant different things to the Africans, and to settlers and the state, respectively. For Africans wearing the kipande around their necks, like dogs, was a source of deep humiliation; it was 'a badge of slavery'. Kipande, like land dispossession, was to galvanize Africans into a nationalist crusade. In the eyes of the settlers and the state, the value of kipande was never in doubt. Some earnestly believed that "the native of good character sets great value on the record of service contained in the kipande".⁸⁵ Since once registered a worker could not be deregistered, kipande was designed to be used as an instrument with which to keep track of available labour supplies. More specifically kipande was necessary to enforce labour contracts in that it enabled penal sanctions to be applied to 'deserters' and for the latter to be returned to their erstwhile employers. For example, of the 2,790 reported desertions by the end of 1921, 2,364 were traced and large-scale prosecutions took place.⁸⁶ Once again, chiefs played a key role in tracing deserters in their communities. Kipande also restricted

⁸⁴See Sultan H. Somjee, "Kipande, the symbol of imperialism, 1915-1948: A study in colonial material culture", Seminar paper, Department of Literature, University of Nairobi, June, 1980.

⁸⁵See East African Standard, 22-11-24, and 1-8-25 where it was argued that kipande was good for the African because it led to "the recognition ... of his individuality and personality rather than of his existence merely as a member of a tribe ..."

⁸⁶Ibid.

workers' freedom to leave their work and change employers. If an employer wanted to keep a worker for a long or an indefinite period of time all he had to do was to refuse to sign the worker's kipande to certify that he had been discharged. In most cases the worker would be given indefinite leave, of course, without pay, until he was recalled by the employer. Finally, the kipande system led to standardisation of low wages because it made it virtually impossible for a worker to bargain with a new employer for a wage that was higher and unrelated to his former wage. It can also be argued that by trapping labour in a specific area kipande enabled the maintenance of regional surplus labour which was used to keep wages low. This was particularly so from the 1930s when the problem of labour shortages disappeared.⁸⁷

Kipande became so central to the labour control system in Kenya that when the Colonial Office demanded its abolition in 1931 on the grounds that it was racially discriminatory and widely disliked by Africans, the Kenyan government responded by pointing out that while kipande was liable to abuse by bad employers, the whole system of labour contracts would collapse without it. Never again until after the Second World War would the functional value of kipande be called into serious question, except by the fringe circles of colonial critics and, of course, Africans.

It is rather significant that the emerging African petty-bourgeoisie, such as religious ministers, teachers, skilled employees, self-employed men with a standard VI education, could be granted exemption from

⁸⁷Somjee, op. cit., p. 31.

kipande, and compulsory labour, at a fee of £ 4. This, it has been argued, "concretised the privileged position of the petty-bourgeoisie from the mass of the African peasants and workers, "and was an important indicator of growing social differentiation among African people. Also significant is the fact that kipande

divided the Indian and African workers on racial grounds. The use of the word 'native' in the colonial labour laws distinguished the Indians of coolie, artisan and balla classes from the Africans of the same classes. The African worker was then onwards to be recognised by a metal container around his neck which gave him a status lower than that of an Indian worker.⁸⁸

Thus kipande also concretised the racial structure of the society with equally serious repercussions on the growth of working class consciousness and solidarity. In this particular case it served to undermine the growth of class consciousness across racial lines.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that forced labour, kipande and other such despotic measures of recruiting and retaining labour were products of the process of primitive accumulation, and not simply a dent in the system which could be mended if the Kenyan government could only stand up to the vociferous, rugged settlers, as so many otherwise well-meaning liberal and humanitarian critics tended to believe. The virtual absence of secondary industrialisation or any extensive mining activities during this period meant that the main centres of employment lay in the areas of settler agricultural production. It is not difficult

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 20.

to see that given their notorious inefficiency and chronic insolvency, wages on settler farms and conditions of service could never in themselves constitute incentives with which to attract and retain labour. Hence, the widespread use of coercion by the colonial state and the settlers. In this respect the performance of the foreign owned plantations was no different. The low level of skills required to perform tasks on the settler farms and expatriate plantations meant that what was required was a regular supply of labour, regardless of high labour turnover. This only served to reinforce the system of labour migrancy and militate against the growth of a stabilised labour force. In short, the plundering of resources which primitive colonial accumulation entailed was accompanied by massive coercion and brutal exploitation of labour.

Squatter Labour

Overt coercion was, however, not an entirely reliable system of labour supply and control. Consequently, settler farms and expatriate plantations also came to rely heavily on resident, or what was popularly termed 'squatter', labour. From as early as 1911 settler farmers had realised that the squatter system was one way of keeping a 'free' cheap labour force and countering the problem of perennial labour shortages. The trend toward the resident labour system was intensified by the war, as shown in the passage of the Resident Natives Bill in 1916, the first in a series of such bills. Increased post-war demands for labour only served to reinforce pressures to extend and legalise the squatter system. By 1930 squatter labour had become the main source of labour on settler

farms and estates, and the total number of squatters was in the neighbourhood of 120,000 people. They occupied at least 20% of settler land.⁸⁹

The growth of squatting belies the fact that undercapitalised settler production could not operate fully capitalist relations of production and, short of direct compulsion, needed semi-servile labour, almost feudal in nature. Before it was abolished in 1918 under the Resident Native Labourers Ordinance, many settler farmers actually depended on share-cropping or 'kaffir farming', as some called it. The whole squatting system was riddled with the contradiction that the more squatting became entrenched the more difficult it would be to prevent the eventuality of "slowly and surely giving back the white highlands to the natives".⁹⁰ Since squatters only provided part-time labour, in the early days usually for three months, for which they were paid meagre incomes, squatters tended to rely on their cultivation and stock, produced and reared on plots of about six to seven acres provided by the settlers, so that they emerged as independent commodity producers, and, therefore, posed a serious challenge to the settlers themselves.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Clayton and Savage, *op. cit.*, p. 128. For more detailed statistical data on squatters see Zwanenberg, Labour and Colonial Capitalism, pp. 215-220.

⁹⁰ Zwanenberg, *ibid.*, p. 264.

⁹¹ In the twenties most of the food grown in the so-called white highlands was produced by squatters. See Frank Furedi, "The Kikuyu Squatters in the Rift Valley: 1918-1929", in B.A. Ogot, ed., Economic and Social History of East Africa, Hadith 5, Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1976, p. 183; also see Furedi, "The Social Composition of the Mau Mau ...", p. 490.

Consequently, for settler production to expand, it required eliminating the independence of squatters by reducing the amount of land available to them, and turning them more into wage labourers than 'labour tenants'. This laid the basis of the profound conflict between squatters and settlers which was to end violently in the Mau Mau war. The contradiction within the squatting system clearly shows that capitalist production and pre-capitalist reproduction were often combined within the capitalist estates, and did not simply involve physical movement from the reserves to the settler estates and expatriate plantations.

Africans were attracted to squatting by a nexus of forces. First, and almost certainly the most important of all, was the worsening problem of land shortages in the reserves. The ahoi, for instance, were among those who preferred trading their lives as landless peasants in the reserves for new ones as 'labour tenants'. There is ample evidence to show that some people left the reserves in order to escape the restrictions of reserve life, especially conscription during the war, and the rigours and abuses of communal and forced labour after the war. Another compelling motive for emigrating to settler estates was that the reserves were increasingly being afflicted by food shortages, especially after the First World War, both as a result of natural disasters and the cumulative effects of land shortages, soil erosion and increasing cash crop production. Some people also came to resent the arbitrary powers that chiefs were able to exercise over them. In addition, there was a tiny minority who were motivated by sheer economic adventurism, or they wanted to escape the creeping Western cultural influences such as education and missionary activities which, paradoxically, were

becoming more pervasive in the reserves than on the settler farms.⁹² This shows the complexity of the squatter system, the interpenetration of economic pressures and cultural forces in its development, and the contradictory nature of its effects; squatting as a means of realising economic and cultural independence only succeeded in buttressing the structures of colonial capitalism which sustained the very institutions of colonialism so feared and opposed by most.

Conditions for squatters began deteriorating from the mid-1920s, at first imperceptibly, then dramatically from the 1930s. There were three main inter-related reasons for this. The established squatters were beginning to have adult children who needed, or actually occupied, more settler land. In addition, as conditions in the reserves deteriorated more and more people flocked to become squatters so that for the first time settler farmers were relieved of worries about labour shortages. Unfortunately for the incoming squatters this was happening precisely at the time when a growing number of settlers were trying to

⁹²Furedi, "The Kikuyu Squatters ...", pp. 181-82; also see R.M. Wambaa and Kenneth King, "The Political Economy of the Rift Valley: A Squatter Perspective, in B.A. Ogot, Economic and Social History, pp. 198-202. Squatting on the coast emerged under a different set of circumstances. Ex-slaves turned to squatting as a way of maximising their newly won 'freedom' and to ensure some form of economic independence. Meanwhile, the Giriama turned to squatting on a more massive scale following the 1914 rebellion and the failure of the state to turn them into a labour reservoir. On the whole, coastal squatters escaped the major assaults that were being inflicted on squatting in the Central and Rift Valley Provinces from the twenties. This is not simply a reflection of intense resistance against the erosion of their 'rights and privileges' on the part of coastal squatters, but more important, squatting on the coast was saved by the very failure of coastal plantation agriculture to develop along capitalist lines as originally envisioned. See Cooper, From Slaves to Squatters, chapters 5 and 6.

shift to mixed farming and intensive farming generally. This meant that the settler farmers were beginning to regard the squatter system as inefficient and were becoming attracted to the advantages of making more labour demands from their squatters, and even employing casual labour. As a result plots for squatters' cultivation and grazing were reduced, and the squatters were also obliged to work for longer periods, which by 1925 meant a minimum period of six months, and by the mid-thirties this had been extended to nine months, but without any corresponding increase in wages.

Measures to control squatter stock were particularly severe. Settlers demanded that no more squatter stock should be brought into their areas, and that the stock already there should be gradually returned to the reserves. They had even less sympathy for the stock of the forest squatters which they wanted to see entirely removed for, it was believed, the forests offered refuge to stock thieves and a haven for diseased and stolen cattle. Forest squatters were there as employees of the Forestry Department and they were subjected to frequent raids and sometimes arrests by government officials for alleged theft of settler cattle. Settlers went as far as demanding that stock in the reserves should be kept permanently in quarantine to prevent the spread of disease to their cattle.⁹³

It is interesting to note that plantation owners who needed large amounts of stable squatter labour and did not own stock so as to be concerned about potential diseases were not enthusiastic about the measures to limit squatter stock in case it led to the dreaded labour

⁹³Zwanenberg, Labour and Colonial Capitalism, pp.150-52.

shortages of the past. Fears were also expressed in official circles that any ill-prepared programme to restrict squatter stock would have grave consequences, if it involved large-scale return of squatter stock to the already badly overstocked reserves. The Colonial Office and the humanitarian lobbies both in Kenya and Britain also expressed the same fears. Nevertheless in the end legislation was passed which gave the settler-controlled local district councils powers to prohibit or limit squatter stock. It was not long before forcible removal of squatter stock back to the reserves became widespread. Some settlers were even callous enough to shoot their squatters' stock in order to press the point home.⁹⁴

As a result of all these pressures there began in the late 1920s an exodus of squatters to the reserves, but by 1930 most of them were returning to settler areas because there was simply not enough land in the reserves to accomodate them. Thus began a circular movement of squatters from their reserves, to settler-owned land and back again to the reserves. The crisis deepened when settler demands that the numbers of squatters on their lands should be reduced gained more currency. These were years when the numbers of squatters were at an all-time peak. The settlers were anxious to remove any lingering notions among squatters that they had land rights in the white highlands. This presented an acute dilemma for the government which was only too aware of the grim realities of population congestion and growing poverty for most people in the reserves. Also breathing down the government's neck were admonitions from a Colonial Office increasingly suspicious of settler interests and power. There was to be no solution to this

⁹⁴Furedi, "The Kikuyu Squatters ...", p. 190.

problem until the time of the outbreak of Mau Mau when the government implemented a massive land settlement and consolidation programme. Not even then was the problem of landlessness actually resolved.

The government was under great pressure to diffuse the growing crisis by securing land elsewhere for the evicted squatters. In 1939 52,000 acres were purchased from the Maasai and 33,500 acres were taken from the Crown Forest Reserve and earmarked for the former squatters.⁹⁵ But this was not to be the real solution. Not only was the land very poor in quality, but the Kikuyu, who constituted the largest portion of the evicted squatter population, refused to move to these lands. With over 30,000 evicted and landless squatters by 1939,⁹⁶ the settler economy had sowed the seeds of rural discontent and the eventual demise of settler power itself.

Clearly, therefore, changes in the conditions of squatters were directly related to the economic and political interests of the settler community. Up to the mid-1920s it was in the interests of settler production to encourage squatters in order to curtail the problem of labour shortages. After this period, conditions in the reserves began deteriorating so badly that more Africans were compelled to emigrate and become squatters. Fearful of being overtaken by events and losing their land, and also prompted by moves towards intensive agriculture, the settlers demanded the eviction of the surplus squatter population. This could be seen as an attempt to make the essentially inefficient squatter

⁹⁵Zwanenberg, Labour and Colonial Capitalism, p. 274.

⁹⁶Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 178.

system more efficient. But the result was neither efficiency nor, indeed, social and economic progress for either the squatters who remained or those who were evicted. The former remained without the accompanying advantages previously associated with squatter life and without the remuneration and social amenities to sustain themselves as workers, while the latter returned to a life of abject poverty in the reserves, or drifted to the mushrooming colonial towns in search of employment.

Urban Labour

The anomalies and contradictions inherent in the Kenyan labour system before the Second World War were nowhere more apparent than in the mushrooming urban centres. Since African workers were regarded as temporary migrants virtually no efforts were made to provide social services for them, not to mention adequate wages. The process of slum development was unleashed with all the attendant social dislocations.

As in most other colonies a 'colonial urban pattern' emerged in Kenya, in which there was a growth of a few major urban centres while the vast majority of the population continued living in rural areas.⁹⁷ This was primarily because there was hardly any industrialisation so that urbanisation was "not a consequence of secondary industrial development but was directly related to the supply of export services. The export-based cash crops of the countryside demanded urban centres for their distribution, centres which were very different to urban centres in the

⁹⁷ See, for example, B. Holmolen, "Capitals in the New Africa", Economic Geography, 40, 1964.

west."⁹⁸ Nairobi, for instance, initially grew up as a centre to provide such services as administration, a transportation system, commercial facilities and trade for the running of the settler agricultural economy, and was not in itself a source of economic stimulus. Not surprisingly, up

⁹⁸See R. Van Zwaneberg's illuminating essay, "History and Theory of Urban Poverty in Nairobi: The Problem of Slum Development", in Journal of East African Research and Development, Vol. 2, no. 2, 1972. The literature on Kenyan urbanisation is fairly extensive and growing. Most of the studies tend to focus on the main cities, Nairobi or Mombasa or both. On urban developments in Nairobi see, D. Myers, "Nairobi's first thirty years", in Kenya Past and Present, Vol. 2, no. 1, 1973; David Clark, "Unregulated housing, vested interest, and the development of community identity in Nairobi", in African Urban Studies, No. 3, winter, 1978/79, and also in the same issue, G.P. Ferraro, "Nairobi: an overview of an East African city"; K.G. Macvicar, "Twilight of an East African Slum: Pumwani and the evolution of African settlement in Nairobi", Ph.D. dissertation, California (Los Angeles), 1968/69; M.H. Ross, "Politics and Urbanisation in two communities in Nairobi", Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern, 1968/69; and R.L. Silberman, "The distributional impact of public housing: a case study of Nairobi", Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan, 1972. Unlike Nairobi which was a creation of colonialism, Mombasa was a very old city, with at least 750 years of recorded history. It boasted of peoples from diverse cultures and religions - the Indian subcontinent, Arabia, Africans from the interior, and indigenous coastal peoples themselves. Even in the nineteenth century Mombasa was more of a cosmopolitan trading and distribution centre and less of an area of intensive agricultural production than its coastal neighbours. For this early and later history of Mombasa see, Frederick Cooper, Plantation Slavery on the East African Coast, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977, especially chapter 3; Cooper, From Slaves to Squatters, chapter 6; F.J. Berg, "The Swahili Community of Mombasa, 1500-1900", J.A.H., Vol. 9, no. 1, 1968; Karim Janmohamed, "A History of Mombasa, c.1895-1939: Some aspects of economic and social and economic life in an East African port town during colonial rule", Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern, 1977; and Richard Stren, Housing the Urban Poor in Africa: Policy, Politics, and Bureaucracy in Mombasa, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978; F.J. Berg and B.J. Walter, "Mosques, population and urban development in Mombasa", in B.A. Ogot, ed., Hadith, 1, 1968. For an earlier study of state policy and municipal development in Kenya see M. Parker, "Political and social aspects of the development of municipal government in Kenya", Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1949. For a perceptive argument that urbanisation should be analysed "in the broader context of economic growth and social change, rather than in the city itself or in its structures", See V.L. Urquidí, "The Underdeveloped City", in Jorge Hardoy, ed., Urbanization in Latin America, Garden City, New York, 1965, p. 358.

to 1939 the urban centres in Kenya provided few employment opportunities, certainly much less than in the areas of settler agriculture. This meant that the dominant patterns of labour relations were not set in the urban centres but were derived from the primitive system of labour control prevalent on settler estates. As service and administrative centres rather than industrial centres, there were no attempts to stabilise the work force in Kenya's major colonial towns as there were, for instance, in some of the mining towns in Zambia and Zaire.⁹⁹ It is in this context that the persistence of labour migrancy and the growth of an endemic slum problem in Kenya's towns can best be understood. It was also why the emergence of a stabilised working class had to wait until the phase of primitive accumulation was over and the process of secondary import-substitution industrialisation was well under way.

Africans flocked to the urban centres because of unbearable conditions in the reserves, and deterioration in the status of squatters. It was not because they were 'pulled' by the prospects of high wages and opportunities for individual self-improvement for the simple reason that wages in the urban centres were extremely low and the working and living conditions depressing. It was as true as ever that to enter urban wage employment was "to choose between celibacy and syphilis", a most unpleasant choice to make.¹⁰⁰ Thus the 'push' factors would seem to

⁹⁹See for instance, G. Kay, 'the Towns of Zambia', in R.W. Steel and R. Lawton, eds., Liverpool Essays in Geography, Longmans, 1967; and C. Young, Politics in the Congo, Princeton University Press, 1965; both quoted in Zwanenberg, 1972, op. cit., pp. 175-76.

¹⁰⁰Labour Commission, 1912, quoted in Huxley, Settlers of Kenya, p. 53.

explain why Africans migrated to the colonial towns to seek work; landlessness in the reserves was becoming more acute, overcrowding was increasing as thousands of squatters returned having been thrown out from settler farms. The 'push' and 'pull' theory, however, offers an inadequate explanation of the labour migration process.¹⁰¹ It leaves us with a dismal picture of life in the reserves and the impression that the urban workers persisted in working by sheer stamina. Descriptively correct as this may be, it still does not explain how the urban wage labour force subsisted. In other words, how was labour power reproduced both generationally and on a daily basis?

It is not enough to assert that generational reproduction of labour power and the long-term costs of maintaining the urban work force were carried out and borne by the rural pre-capitalist sectors. The central position of women within these pre-capitalist spheres of production has to be underlined.¹⁰² Among the Kikuyu of Kiambu, Fort Hall and Nyeri,

¹⁰¹ See for instance Gerald Breeze, Urbanisation in Newly Developing Countries, Englewood Cliffs, 1966; J. Clyde Mitchell, 'The Causes of Labour Migration', in Bulletin of the Inter-African Labour Institute, Vol. VI, i, 1959; and A.W. Southall and P.C.W. Gutkind, Townsmen in the Making, Kegan Paul, London, for the East African Institute of Social Research, 1957; W. Elkan, 'Circular Migration and the Growth of Towns in East Africa', in International Labour Review, Dec. 1967.

¹⁰² The study of the social, economic, political roles and activities of Kenyan, indeed African, women is no longer neglected as it used to be, or merely confined to anthropological monographs. See Sharon Stichter, "Women and the Labour Force in Kenya, 1895-1964", IDS/DP, 258, Nairobi; Janet M. Bujra, "Women Entrepreneurs of Early Nairobi", Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 9, no. 2, 1975; Sally J. Kosgei, "Kipsigis women and the colonial economy", Dept. of History, Staff Seminar Paper, no. 3, 1979/80, Univ. of Nairobi; C.A. Presley, "Kikuyu women as wage labourers: 1919-1960", Dept. of History, Staff Seminar Paper, no. 24, 1978/79, Univ. of Nairobi; and Margaret Strobel, Muslim Women in Mombasa, 1890-1975, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979. Strobel's

for example, it was estimated that by the end of the 1920s some 69-77% and 35-45%, respectively, of able-bodied males were away on employment in any given month. The figures for the other nationalities, such as the Kipsigis, Luhya, Luo and Taita were not far behind. They ranged from 45% to not less than 26%. But in spite of such large-scale withdrawals of male labour from the reserves, agricultural production increased quantitatively. As Stichter contends; "the absence of any substantial change in African agricultural technology or organisation in this period, coupled with the high level of male absenteeism, points to the conclusion that the bulk of the increased agricultural labour fell to the women".¹⁰³

Not surprisingly, the pre-colonial sexual division of labour began breaking down, becoming transformed in most communities as women

study is a particularly detailed examination of the marginalisation of women in Mombasa from the late-nineteenth century to the mid-seventies. It is argued that although women were excluded from making major contribution in the labour market and retail trade, they continued to play a significant role in providing key social services for the reproduction, maintenance, and socialisation of the labour force, new and old. Her analysis is particularly rich in showing how colonialism altered the class and patriarchal structures of the precolonial period, and women, both free and ex-slaves, tried to redefine their participation in Mombasa society, and developed a complex subculture involving Lelemama (dance), improvement, and makungwi (performance of puberty rites) associations.

¹⁰³Stichter, "Women and the Labour Force ...", p. 6. Hay has emphasised that Luo women of Kowe did not simply maintain the pre-colonial agricultural production techniques, but actively tried to experiment with new crops and implements in an effort, initially to maintain a certain level of food production and improve their limited opportunities for capital accumulation, and later in order to cope with a steadily worsening economic situation: M.J. Hay, "Luo women and economic change during the colonial period", in N.J. Hafkin and E.G. Bay, Women in Africa. Studies in Social and Economic Change, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1976. Also see Christine Obbo, African Women. Their Struggle for Economic Independence, Zed Press, London, 1980, which deals with the present-day position and struggles of both rural and urban women in Uganda and Western Kenya.

increasingly did what had previously been taken as 'men's work'. The combination of the indigenous and colonial forms of the sexual division of labour probably led to the intensification of women's inferior status and, no less significant, the development of male-female class consciousness was stultified, for the men experienced the development of proletarian class consciousness as they partook in social production, and the women agriculturalists, in contrast, had to rely on their individual self-sufficiency within the circumscribed horizons of rural culture.

Women's subsistence agricultural production was, therefore, critical for colonial capitalist accumulation and expansion. By producing foodstuffs and supporting the family household, women subsidised their husband's incomes, thereby enabling employers to pay meagre wages to their workers, and to maintain a low wage structure in order to realise profits higher than would have been realised otherwise. Women's labour within the pre-capitalist sectors was, however, not simply used to maintain low wages, it was also deployed to maintain a sufficient level of subsistence in the face of gnawing rural poverty.

A growing number of women were employed seasonally, particularly for the harvesting of coffee. By 1927 there were perhaps 30,000 women and children so employed.¹⁰⁴ But women's participation in regular employment, especially in the urban centres was rather minimal and it would remain so until after the Second World War. For example, when the first survey of African employment was conducted in Nairobi in 1938, there were a total of 230 positions in the wage labour force for women,

¹⁰⁴ Clayton and Savage, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

all of which involved the sale of domestic labour.¹⁰⁵ But such figures do ignore a critical aspect of women's involvement in the urban labour milieu: prostitution.

The immediate causes of prostitution were, of course, complex; some were propelled into prostitution by purely personal reasons such as marital discords at home, death of spouses, failure to get husbands, and so on. But what sustained the institution of prostitution in the urban centres was the demographic imbalance of the sexes, the lack of wage opportunities for women, the monopolisation of small-scale trading by Asian petty traders which thereby deprived women of the opportunity of engaging in extensive small-scale trade as in West Africa. Prostitution was, therefore, a form of labour which proved to be more profitable to its practitioners than other forms of labour available to them. Thus prostitution was part and parcel of the labour process, and not an illegitimate form of labour, a morally degenerate practice to be decried.

Luise White has argued persuasively that prostitution should fall under the purview of domestic labour, for like other forms of domestic labour, prostitution played an important role in the daily reproduction of labour power, that is, the daily maintenance of the worker.¹⁰⁶ It was

¹⁰⁵ See Eric St. A. Davies, 'Some Problems Arising From the Conditions and Employment of Natives in Nairobi', August 1939, Rhodes House Library, Oxford. RH: MSS Afr.t.13.

¹⁰⁶ Luise White, "Women's domestic labour in colonial Kenya: Prostitution in Nairobi, 1909-1950", Boston University, African Studies Centre, Working Paper no. 30, also presented at the Centre for African Studies, Dalhousie, April 11, 1980. For another account of prostitution, female property and dependence in a much smaller place in Kenya see Janet Bujra, "Production, property, prostitution: 'Sexual politics' in Atu", *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 65, 1977. For a comparable and stimulating study on women's labour in the mining areas of Southern

in the interests of urban-based employers to tolerate, if not encourage, prostitution, despite all their constant fits of moral outrage. The Davies Report of 1938 recognised how prostitution served as a source of savings to the Nairobi Municipality:

25,886 males employed and living in Nairobi have only 3,356 female dependants in the town. This is a proportion of just over 1 to 8. A demand arises at once for a large number of native prostitutes in Nairobi ... The immigration into Nairobi of young Kikuyu girls is continually mentioned by the Kikuyu Local Native Councils urging steps to be taken to stop it. The position there again is aggravated by the lack of proper native housing; whereas the needs of eight men may be served by the provision of two rooms for the men and one for the prostitute, were housing provided for these natives and their families, six rooms would probably be needed.¹⁰⁷ (emphasis added)

It is hard not to agree with White's contention that prostitution in the urban centres served as a "wage depressant, a dis-incentive for labourers to bring their families to town", and facilitated the daily reproduction of labour power. She has also convincingly shown how the forms of prostitution changed in response to the changing patterns and finances of the urban wage labour force.¹⁰⁸

Africa, see George Chauncey, "The Locus of Production: Women's Labour in the Zambian Copperbelt, 1927-1953", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 7, no. 2, 1981.

¹⁰⁷ Davies Report, "Some Problems Arising from ...", pp.3-4. By the fifties one-third or more of houses in the older African areas in Nairobi, like Pangani and Pumwani, were owned by women, most of whom had been prostitutes in the twenties and invested their savings in urban property. Strobel, op. cit., pp.143-145.

¹⁰⁸ Luise White, op. cit.

Social reproduction of the working class as a whole was, therefore, provided by production in the peasant sphere, especially by women's 'subsistence' production, which enabled the settlers and urban enterprises to extract semi-servile labour at a price below its cost of reproduction. Meanwhile as the ranks of urban male workers swelled, prostitution quickly grew and it came to play a key role in the daily maintenance of the poorly paid, lonely, migrant workers.

Throughout the period under consideration the patterns of employment in the urban centres altered remarkably little. The majority of workers continued to be engaged in administrative and service occupations and only a tiny minority were involved in 'productive' manufacturing industry. As late as 1939, for instance, of the 27,769 employed workers in Nairobi, over 8,000 were domestic servants, and nearly 15,000 were employees of the government, railway, municipality, or they were headmen, garage hands and so on; less than 5,000 were skilled workers, such as tailors and bakers.¹⁰⁹ The pattern in Mombasa was not very different; the labour market there was dominated by the port, the railway and the municipality, of which the port was the most important.¹¹⁰ By 1933 the number of workers in employment in the town was a little over 8,000. It is safe to assume that by 1939 the numbers had increased.¹¹¹ It is significant to note that the majority of Africans were unskilled or semi-skilled workers and that Asians occupied the most skilled categories and

¹⁰⁹Zwanenberg, "History and Theory of Urban Poverty ...", p. 170.

¹¹⁰Clayton and Savage, *op. cit.*, pp. 218-20.

¹¹¹See Karim K. Janmohamed, "African Labour in Mombasa", in B.A. Ogot, *Economic and Social History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-5.

monopolised artisanal jobs. As we shall demonstrate later, this had serious implications for Afro-Asian working class solidarity and Afro-Asian relations generally. As for European workers their numbers were always small, although by 1939 they were much smaller than they had been in the 1910s and 1920s.

The rate of population increase in the towns was much higher than for the rest of the population. Nairobi, for instance, doubled its population between 1914 and 1934,¹¹² with its African population almost tripling from 14,000 in 1920 to 40,000 in 1938.¹¹³ Predictably the spatial distribution of the population in the towns was largely determined by race. Europeans lived separately in well-laid out, sumptuous neighbourhoods, while Asian areas had an intermediary character, and Africans lived in slums. Within each sector, of course, there were differences between the rich and the poor. The racial divisions were most pronounced in Nairobi. Mombasa was a much older town with a wealth of tradition behind it; for generations it had always had a heterogeneous population, which included up-country Africans, the Swahili and other coastal peoples, Arabs and Asians. But even here the racial structure of colonial society gradually made itself felt.¹¹⁴

¹¹²Zwanenberg and King, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

¹¹³Clayton and Savage, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

¹¹⁴The colonial state imposed separate rates of taxation and wages, discriminatory provision of educational facilities and public housing, which helped to accentuate underlying social, ethnic and religious antagonisms in Mombasa. Moreover, as the old economic structures crumbled, coastal peoples who had previously preferred squatting to regular wage employment found themselves having to compete for jobs with upcountry Africans who had become entrenched in the labour market

The architects of colonial urban policy never regarded Africans as permanent residents of the colonial towns. They were prone to hold the so-called 'detrribalised' or 'semi-detrribalised' urban African up to ridicule, suspicion and contempt. Writing in 1915, M.H. Moore, a deputy governor stated categorically:

It is only proper that the townships, which were primarily established for occupation by non-natives, should be reserved for those who should properly reside there, and that the residence therein of natives should be confined as far as possible to those whose employment or legitimate business requires them so to reside.¹¹⁵

In Mombasa this policy expressed itself in the various attempts to control the influx of Africans into the town, through the use of the kipande system, legislation to regulate the flow of up-country labour and differentiate between permanent and temporary residents, as well as the forcible repatriations of 'undesirable natives' back to their reserves. But the casual nature of port labour and the nature of Mombasa itself made it difficult for these regulations to be enforced satisfactorily in that city.

The principle of the urban area as a 'non-native area' was more assiduously followed and enforced in Nairobi. Sustained efforts were

by the late twenties. This often led to confrontations and riots between the local and up-country workers. See Karim Janmohamed, "History of Mombasa ..."; A.I. Salim, The Swahili Speaking Peoples of Kenya Coast, 1895-1965, EAPH, Nairobi, 1973; and Hyder Kindy, Life and Politics in Mombasa, EAPH, Nairobi, 1967.

¹¹⁵ Karim Janmohamed, "African Labour in Mombasa", p. 171.

made by the municipality, the police and the Native Authorities to control the influx of population into the town and to supervise their employment. The main objective was to ensure that Africans in Nairobi were only there as labourers. Moreover it was an attempt to correct the imbalance whereby Nairobi and the other urban areas were being swamped by surplus labour while the settler farms frequently suffered from labour shortages. The rationale given by the municipal authorities, however, was that the flow of Africans into the town had to be controlled in order to reduce the health hazards that sprung from the urban squatter villages and slums, improve the security of the European residents and make African labour more efficient.¹¹⁶

Two main strategies were adopted to enforce this policy. Firstly, urban segregation became institutionalised. In 1923 the ad hoc African villages of Kaburini, Kileleshwa, Masikini and Mombasa, which had grown around Nairobi and provided homes for its workers, were finally destroyed. Their inhabitants were moved to Pumwani, then specially built as a model location designed to resolve the 'native urban problem' and accommodate all Africans coming to and working in Nairobi. Secondly, the administration used an elaborate system of stringent pass laws, the first of which was issued in 1918. There were various types of passes but they all stipulated the period of time a person could stay in the town depending on whether he was employed, a casual worker, unemployed or looking for work. In order to enforce the pass laws a vagrancy ordinance was passed which empowered the police to arrest without warrant

¹¹⁶Zwanenberg, "History and Theory of Urban Poverty ...", p. 185.

suspected vagrants. In the first six months of 1933 alone it was reported that 1,947 Africans were convicted in Nairobi for vagrancy.¹¹⁷

Finally, the administration resorted to forcible evictions of 'undesirable natives' sending them back to their reserves. The lack of sufficient housing, however, and the never-absent possibility of labour shortages, coupled with the system of cheap labour itself, limited the effectiveness of the urban labour control programme.

With such a colonial urban policy it comes as no surprise that living and working conditions in Kenya's colonial towns were atrocious. Housing was extremely short and of the poorest quality, with the result that overcrowding and destitution were common. During a raid on Pangani, a Nairobi African location, in 1930, for example, it was found that 2,226 people were living in 335 one-roomed houses.¹¹⁸ In 1939 the Chief Native Commissioner reported that nearly 20,000 Africans in the town lived in highly overcrowded and unhealthy conditions.¹¹⁹ As for conditions in Mombasa they were reputedly even worse.¹²⁰ Compounding the acute housing shortage in these towns were the exorbitant rents which were charged. Yet wages were very low and most employers did not pay their workers housing allowances, let alone build accommodation for them. The cost of living was simply too high for the majority of urban workers to make ends meet.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹¹⁹ Clayton and Savage, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

¹²⁰ Janmohammed, "African Labour in Mombasa", pp. 173-4.

Sanitary conditions left much to be desired. Clayton and Savage have painted a graphic, if unsettling, picture which deserves to be quoted at some length:

The worst of these were the communal latrines, where the bins and trenches became quickly over-full, spreading to the floor space of the sheds surrounding them. The municipal staff responsible for emptying and cleaning were often late, the sheds ill-lit or not lit at all, the water supply in the trench latrines not always reliable and quickly blocked. Flies, faeces, pieces of tapeworm and foul odours filled the latrines. The streets were at best poorly lit, muddy in the rains, dusty in dry weather. There were no nurseries or children's playing fields ... The Labour Section and medical officers commented unfavourably on these urban conditions each year with little visible effect.¹²¹

Despite these revolting conditions the municipalities were extremely reluctant to spend enough money to improve African welfare. The Nairobi Municipal Council, for instance, was only willing to spend a paltry 1% to 2% of its net revenue on African services.¹²² An interesting report concerning 'free' water for Africans was published in the East African Standard which fully captures the racial stereotyping and European contempt for Africans. The story read:

Fear that the 'free' supply of water to the Natives residing in the locations of Government African Housing, Pumwani and Shauri Moyo would lead to wastage were expressed ... at Tuesday's meeting of

¹²¹Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 210.

¹²²Zwanenberg, "History and Theory of Urban Poverty ...", p. 186.

the Nairobi Municipal Council ... If the native had free water there would be no control.¹²³

It is not surprising, therefore, that diseases were chronic and endemic; plagues frequently broke out in Nairobi and Mombasa in the 1910s and 1920s, tuberculosis terrorised the slums with deadly results, malaria epidemics took their toll, and pneumonia and other diseases struck with impunity. Meanwhile the Medical Department tirelessly issued gloomy warnings that the health of most Africans in the urban centres was rapidly deteriorating.

By 1938 it was estimated that the monthly average for registered adult male Africans in employment throughout the colony was 182,964, up from the depression low of 157,359 in 1930, and 169,000 in 1922.¹²⁴ If we included women and juveniles in wage employment, Asian workers, squatters and those recruited for compulsory labour, we cannot fail to conclude that by 1939 Kenya had a labour force of between a quarter and half a million men, women and children.

When compared with the total labour force and rate of participation in other colonies, Kenya is revealed to have had a larger total number of Africans in employment than any colony except the Belgian Congo, and a higher proportion of the African adult male population at work than any except the labour-producing territories of southern Africa, the Transkei and Basutoland ... Significantly, only approximately half of the

¹²³East African Standard, 1-6-39.

¹²⁴See tables in Clayton and Savage, op. cit., pp. 153, 200.

monthly employed laborers worked in estate agriculture, with the rest in various branches of government and commerce, with the state, including the railroad, being by far the largest single employer in the colony.¹²⁵

Through the use of brutal force, coercive administrative and legal mechanisms, adoption of a system of labour tenancy, the colonial state on behalf of the settlers, corporate plantation owners, and other employers, had managed to create a fairly large and cheap labour force. It was a labour force subjected to depressing working conditions, and semi-servile labour relations. Despite considerable fluctuations, especially during the economic expansion of the mid-twenties and the depression of the early thirties, Van Zwanenberg has estimated that real wages in 1939 were essentially the same as in 1909.¹²⁶ The Kenyan government resisted all attempts by the British government, under ILO pressure to implement conventions which Britain had adopted, to pass minimum wage legislation. Needless to say, the eight hour day, pension schemes, higher rates for overtime pay, provision of gazetted holidays, sick leave with pay, and other such facilities, were hardly known. As for training, one study noted that "the prison industries carried on in Nairobi and Mombasa were the chief means at this time of providing

¹²⁵ Lonsdale and Berman, "The Development of the Labour Control System ...", p. 65.

¹²⁶ R. van Zwanenberg, The Agricultural History of Kenya to 1939, E.A.P.H., Nairobi, 1972, p. 34.

industrial training for Africans".¹²⁷ A contemporary South African observer was moved to say that the Kenyan labour force was "probably the cheapest in the world".¹²⁸ But despite the fact that it was cheap and generally not stabilised, the emerging Kenyan working class was anything but politically quiescent. On the contrary, it displayed remarkable militancy and tireless efforts to forge enduring and distinctive working class organisations through struggle.

Working Class Struggle and Organisations

Labour protests in Kenya can be traced back to the very first few years of colonial rule. As Cohen has reminded us, "there was a high element of labour protest in events that have been interpreted by colonial historians as wars of pacification and by post-1950s Africanist historians as 'proto-nationalism'".¹²⁹ The Giriama revolt of 1913-14, for instance, in which 400 Giriama were killed, was a direct result of the Kenyan government's attempts to use Giriama labour on the European and Arab plantations. The communal revolts were, therefore among the earliest forms of labour protest in Kenya. Over the years various patterns of labour protest and organisation emerged encompassing the

¹²⁷M. Parker, "Political and Social Aspects of the Development of Municipal Government in Kenya", CO doc. DH 65550/1, mimeographed, n.d., p. 17, as quoted in Wolff, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

¹²⁸T. Sleith, Report on the Trade Conditions in British East Africa, Uganda, and Zanzibar, 1919, Union of South Africa Dept. of Mines and Industry, Cape Town, as quoted in Wolff, *ibid.*, p. 130.

¹²⁹Robin Cohen, "Resistance and Hidden Forms of Consciousness Amongst African Workers", Review of African Political Economy, No. 19, p. 15.

whole spectrum from the spontaneous to the organised, from the individual to collective forms of action, depending on the nature of labour recruitment, utilisation and composition, which, in turn, effected changes in the subsequent relationship between labour and colonial capitalism. In the first two decades of colonial rule labour protests usually took the form of desertions, whereas by the end of the 1930s workers frequently resorted to strike action. It is safe to say that in the 1920s the two forms co-existed. This is not to say, however, that strikes were absent in the 1900s, or that desertions had ceased by 1939. Rather we are talking about the dominant forms of labour protest during the early years of colonialism and on the eve of the Second World War. Throughout this period and during the subsequent decades 'covert' and 'overt' forms of labour protest did not simply exist simultaneously but they cross-fertilised each other.

Initially desertions emerged as a means of avoiding recruitment into the wage labour force. In the 1900s people sometimes ran away from their villages and went into hiding to avoid being taken and forced to work on railway construction, the building of roads and other such public works programmes, as well as the clearance and tillage of virgin lands for the settler farmers and plantation owners. During the First World War some went as far as Uganda so as to escape enlistment into the notorious carrier corps.¹³⁰ In this sense desertions were an attempt to avoid incorporation into the colonial labour system. But as the

¹³⁰Clayton and Savage, *op. cit.*, p. 85. Also see Sharon Stichter's discussion of desertions, "The Formation of a working class in Kenya", in R. Sanbrook and R. Cohen, The Development of an African Working Class, Longman, London, 1975.

government tightened its grip over the country and African political institutions and traditional authorities were integrated into the colonial administrative structures, desertions increasingly became a means of protest against labour conditions. It was not unusual for people to desert from communal labour tasks, and 'bad' employers, including the PWD and other government departments, the railway, the Mombasa port, private contractors and others. Squatters were also known to leave estates and return to their reserves in protest against poor conditions.

Both forms of desertions could either be spontaneous or organised, undertaken individually or collectively. The really distinctive feature of desertion as a form of labour protest is that it represented permanent withdrawal of labour from the capitalist sectors. For effectiveness desertions depended upon the continued ability of the 'subsistence' economy to reabsorb the deserters. Therefore desertions occurred most frequently during a period when the capitalist mode of production was struggling to become dominant over the pre-capitalist modes of production. Once the reserves began feeling the pressures of land alienation and the entire political economy was being reorganised as to the requirements of colonial capitalism, desertions inevitably became a declining form of labour protest, although they did not by any means entirely disappear since forced labour continued to exist in one form or another. This period was reached sometime in the 1920s when desertions were resorted to more as acts of desperation than attempts to alleviate deplorable labour situations. From then on struggles between labour and capital took place within the capitalist spheres. Hence, the growing importance of strike action as an instrument of labour protest from the 1920s onwards.

Strikes had indeed taken place before this date. There is evidence to show that there was a strike, for instance, in 1900 which involved railway workers. The strike was apparently initiated by European subordinate staff and later joined by some Asian and African workers. The strike had started in Mombasa and spread to other centres along the line. Other strikes took place in Mombasa in 1902 among policemen, in 1908 among dockworkers also in Mombasa, and in the same year too among African workers employed at a government farm at Mazeras near Mombasa. Later in the same year railway Indian workers also went on strike at Kilindini harbour works, and in 1912 African boat workers struck in Mombasa as well. In July, 1914, most of the Indian railway and PWD workers and some African railway workers "went on strike in order to oppose the introduction of poll tax and for the removal of other grievances regarding housing, rations, medical facilities and low wages".¹³¹

An interesting pattern emerges when we examine these strikes closely. Skilled and semi-skilled workers first saw the power of the strike weapon. Indian artisans and skilled workers in particular played a critical role in the growth of trade unionism and popularisation of strike action, especially in the early stages. The Indian workers not only had more skilled workers within their ranks than Africans, the Indians were also more proletarianised because as immigrants they did not have one foot in the peasant sector and another in the struggling capitalist sector; they had both their feet in the latter. This put them in a very difficult position, for on the one hand, the government and settlers accused

¹³¹ See Makhan Singh, History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement up to 1952, E.A.P.H., Nairobi, 1969, p. 7f.

them of being agitators who were misleading African workers, and on the other, Africans felt that Indians were blocking their chances for advancement. Obviously this did not augur well for the development of working class solidarity between Africans and Asians, as indefatigable trade union leaders of Makhan Singh's calibre were later to find out.

It is also significant that strikes tended to occur among what were then the pillars of the colonial capitalist economy and concentrated in the urban centres - the railway, Mombasa port and harbour, the PWD and other government departments. Perhaps this was because it was in these concerns that some of the first attempts to stabilise labour were made. Thus when trade unions and staff associations came on the scene they did so first among railway and dock workers, and government employees.

Strikes among agricultural labour, especially squatters, should not be entirely overlooked, however. From the late twenties and "throughout the thirties squatters went on strikes, illegally occupied European-owned land and refused to accept many of the settlers' attempts to restrict their agricultural activities".¹³² An East African Standard report of a meeting of settler farmers in 1938 underlines the point:

Several farmers spoke of indiscipline and unrest among the local labour force ... It would seem that there is a strong inclination towards the worst form of trade unionism starting amongst the local squatter labour, even amongst old men, who have been on the farms for 15 to 20 years. Attempts by local farmers to assist in the reafforestation of the district by the issue of free seeds for young trees have been met by flat refusals and threats to leave the farm in a body.¹³³

¹³²Furedi, "The Social Composition of the Mau Mau ...", p. 491.

¹³³East African Standard, 9-10-38.

Strikes were seen as a direct threat to the whole colonial order, detestable machinations of political agitators intent on rocking colonial development. As for trade unions, they were regarded as unnecessary at best, or feared like a plague. In the absence of trade unions in the 1920s, labour protests tended either to be spontaneous or were organised by political bodies like the Kikuyu Central Association, formerly called the East African Association, and to a lesser extent the Kavirondo Taxpayers Welfare Association. The East African Indian National Congress also occasionally raised protests about labour laws and conditions in Kenya. It was the KCA however which waged the most sustained campaign against labour conditions in the country. It attacked forced and communal labour, deplored the payment of low wages and poor conditions of service, and urged the abolition of the kipande registration system. According to the Native Affairs Department Annual Reports, the KCA inspired a number of strikes among squatters and casual workers in the twenties and thirties. The most well-known case, of course, is that of the 1922 General Strike in Nairobi, which took place following the arrest of Harry Thuku, one of the leaders of the East African Association. The strike was as much a labour protest as a political demonstration against colonial rule in Kenya, for its demands included the abolition of kipande and forced labour and the improvement of wages and working conditions, the reduction of taxes, return of African lands, provision of higher education and more social facilities for Africans. It also demanded that Africans should be elected to the Legislative Council and Kenya should not be a colony. The strike and the consequent massacre of about 150 people by the police was to become a symbol of

African resistance and heroism, a source of inspiration for the nationalist militancy of the late 1940s and 1950s. For our purposes, the 1922 strike also anticipated the growth of a labour movement which combined labour, social and political grievances and objectives in its struggles against colonial capitalism.¹³⁴

An attempt to formalise the KCA's role as a labour front in addition to its broader social and political functions was made in the association's revised constitution of 1930, in which it was stipulated that the KCA could take part in "the negotiation and settlement of differences that may arise between members of the association and employers, members of other African associations or others by means of collective bargaining or agreement or by other legal actions".¹³⁵ Indicative of the KCA as an omnibus association is the fact that the revised constitution also empowered the KCA to act as a cooperative for African producers and traders. It was not until the formation of staff associations that some direct attempts at trade unionism were made in Kenya.

The first staff or civil servants' associations came into existence at the end of the First World War and were almost exclusively confined to separate European and Asian clerical staffs of the railways and the government departments. The Kenya African Civil Service Association was not formed until 1933. These associations were not open to artisans and other workers, so that they were more of welfare associations

¹³⁴ See Carl G. Rosberg and John Nottingham, The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya, Praeger, New York, 1966, chapters 2-5.

¹³⁵ Singh, op. cit., p. 38.

than trade unions. Workers' organisations can probably be traced back to the formation of a short-lived Indian Trades Union in Mombasa in March 1914. In fact, all attempts at trade unionism before 1935 were noted for their brief existence. In 1922 Indian workers in the railways formed the Railway Artisan Union in order to protest against the threat of retrenchment and a 10% reduction in wages. The government's response was to deport the leaders to India. Eight years later, in Mombasa another attempt was made to form a trade union after a tragic accident in which several workers had died. The Trade Union Committee of Mombasa, as the union was called, attracted the support of Indian artisans and some unskilled African workers. Its main purpose was to achieve workmen's compensation and to prevent the fall in wages which had been precipitated by the depression. But a few months later the union collapsed. A further attempt at trade unionism was made in October 1931 when the Workers' Protective Society of Kenya was formed, again by Indian artisans. However, like the others before, it did not exist for more than a few months, nor did the Indian Labour Society formed in 1933. Meanwhile, in the following year the Kenya Indian Labour Trade Union was formed which was subsequently to evolve into the Labour Trade Union of Kenya (LTUK) in 1935, the first durable union in East Africa. It was also in 1934 that the Kenya African Teachers Union was formed.

Why did all these early efforts at trade unionism fail? Part of the explanation lies in the fact that employers and the government were extremely hostile to the idea of trade unionism and they did not hesitate to victimise union leaders and organisers. Labour legislation

tolerating the existence of trade unions had yet to be passed. Equally important was the fact that there was hardly any industrialisation in the country so that the employment of a worker was usually short-lived. Indeed, the system of labour migration was not conducive to the development of a stable labour force which could then organise itself collectively in order to defend and promote its own interests. So long as trade unionism was confined to a few skilled workers who also happened to be predominantly Asian, the labour movement in Kenya could easily be held in check by the state and employers.

Some of the organisers of the Kenya Indian Trade Union were aware of this and in April 1935 the union became the Labour Trade Union of Kenya with Makhan Singh as Secretary.¹³⁶ According to its constitution the union was a general workers' union open to workers of all races. Its objects were:

to organise the workers of Kenya on a class basis; to organise with every possible means of improvement in the economic conditions of workers; to safeguard and promote the interests and welfare of workers and to raise voice to get their grievances redressed and difficulties removed; to organise the unemployed, to render them every possible assistance, to endeavour to obtain for them unemployment allowances from the Government.¹³⁷

It then went on to list fifteen immediate demands which included a

¹³⁶For more details see Makhan Singh's Records, Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi: Mak/B/1/1 Fols. 1-147.

¹³⁷The Constitution of the Labour Trade Union of Kenya, *ibid.*

minimum wage of Shs. 200 per month, an eight hour day, abolition of daily wages and payment of wages on a monthly basis, full pay during illness, setting up of workmen's compensation schemes, provision of suitable housing, abolition of temporary and casual labour and prohibition of child labour.

The union's strategy was to use propaganda through its publications, first the Kenya Worker, published in Punjabi and Urdu, before its name changed to East African Kirti, published in three other languages - English, Gujarati and Swahili, and to make direct campaigns and appeals to employers. In 1939, for instance, leaflets were sent out to 47 Asian contractors requesting them to agree to an eight-hour day. Most of them agreed, and the few recalcitrant ones were forced to do so after a short strike. After this, the union felt confident enough to tackle the larger European and Asian firms, and in December 1936 it demanded a 25% wage increase by 1 April 1937, the recognition of the union by employers, and the re-instatement of workers dismissed because of their involvement in strikes. Some European employers declared lockouts rather than agree to these demands. A wave of strikes broke out in Nairobi. The government reacted harshly; on 31 May 1937 the union's president and six prominent members were arrested by police while they were peacefully picketing. A number of Asian contractors got together and decided to sponsor the formation of a rival union to undermine the LTUK, the Rangarhia Artisan Union. But none of these measures deterred the LTUK or brought a stop to the strikes. The East African Standard editorialised:

Trades unionism can't start on the lines it has now began if the welfare of the whole community - Indian, European - is to be wisely protected. It is important that trades unionism should be begun, if it is to start at all, on lines which will lead to wise development, preserving the essentials of partnership between worker and employer, and maintaining the dignity and respecting the legitimate interest of both. The African knows nothing definite of these movements. He is unaware of their history or of their purpose or responsibilities and nothing could be worse for him than that he, too, should be introduced to the principle by the slogans and the methods which are now being put before him by a group of people competing with him for a living.¹³⁸

This was an appeal to establish a system of industrial relations which would pre-empt the growth of militant trade unionism. Pressures for trade union legislation were also coming from the ILO, the Colonial Office and, of course, the LTUK. The Native Affairs Department in its Annual Report for 1937 conceded that as a result of the April - May strikes in Nairobi and other strikes in Mombasa, Kisumu and other parts of the country "it was decided to introduce trade union legislation and a bill to provide for this for all races passed by Legislative Council in August".¹³⁹ The 1937 Trade Union Ordinance was severely restrictive. It gave enormous powers to the Registrar of Trade Unions who had the right to inspect annually trade union records, their funds, election of officials, and so on. There was no provision for union federations or inter-territorial unions, and appeal against the registrar's refusal for registration could be made only to the governor. Unregistered trade

¹³⁸East African Standard, 11-5-37.

¹³⁹Native Affairs Annual Report, 1937, pp. 212-13.

unions did not enjoy even vague protection against actions of tort, and their members were liable to prosecution under the ordinance. Finally, the ordinance did not safeguard peaceful picketing and explicitly forbade unions to get involved in political matters. Although it was also Colonial Office policy that trade unions should not be involved in issues other than industrial, the secretary of state requested the Kenyan government to make provision for legalising peaceful picketing and to protect trade unions against actions of tort. The bill to incorporate the secretary's proposals was not introduced until 1940.¹⁴⁰

The LTUK, now renamed the Labour Trade Union of East Africa, immediately applied for registration under the Trade Union Ordinance, 1937, which was granted on 30th September, 1937. This marked the beginning of a new era in Kenyan labour history - trade unionism had come to stay. The LTUEA had proved itself a force to reckon with and strike action had become a weapon of whose ominous power more and more workers were becoming aware. The structure of the LTUEA was to have a permanent impact on Kenyan trade unionism; general workers' trade unions became the favoured form of union organisation in the 1940s, and later on in the 1950s and 1960s the national trade union centre determined the course and evolution of trade unionism in the country. The LTUEA was responsible for the formation of such unions as the Press Workers'

¹⁴⁰Clayton and Savage, op. cit., pp.194-6.

Union and the spread of trade unionism to Uganda and Tanganyika.¹⁴¹ It is clear, however, that until 1939 the union's membership consisted mainly of Asian artisans and skilled workers, although Jesse Kariuki and George Ndegwa, both leaders of the KCA, were members of the executive committee. But official membership was one thing, influence was another. It is therefore perfectly safe to say that the LTUEA had greater influence than the figure of its paid membership would suggest. For one thing it popularised the use of strike action, and the need for a pan-national workers' organisation.

Capping the thirties was the Mombasa General Strike, in which a series of strikes broke out throughout the town in July and August 1939. At its height the strike involved about 6,000 workers, according to official estimates, who were employed in various industries and firms, including workers of the municipality, the P.W.D., the Electric and Power Co., the oil companies, the Posts and Telegraphs Department, Mombasa Aluminium Works, Mombasa Port and Harbour, dairy workers, and others. Meanwhile, in Nairobi where there had been a strike of African railway apprentices in June, a mass rally was held on 5th August to express solidarity with the Mombasa workers. Before long the Mombasa strike had spread along the East African coast and dock workers at Tanga in Tanganyika also went on strike. The LTUEA held more mass rallies in Nairobi, called for an end to police repression, and asked

¹⁴¹See Singh, *op. cit.*, chapters 8-10. For the growth of trade unionism in Tanzania and Uganda see, W.H. Friedland, Vuta Kamba: The Development of trade unions in Tanganyika, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1969; and Roger Scott, The Development of Trade Unionism in Uganda, E.A.P.H., Nairobi, 1966.

the government to appoint a commission of inquiry with representation from labour.

To most European observers, the general strike was caused by 'native agitators' from Nairobi. The government responded by sending police detachments to break up the strikes. Over one-hundred and fifty arrests were made. The Colonial Office, however, was of the opinion that it was "obvious that the natives have genuine grievances, and it is only the more pity that they were forced to bring them to the notice of the authorities in such violent manner".¹⁴² The Colonial Office particularly called attention to the lack of any industrial relations machinery through which labour disputes could be resolved, the "indefensibly low wages", and the system of casual labour which resulted in "most unsatisfactory abuses". Like the British TUC, the Colonial Office agreed with the position of the LTUEA that labour should be represented in any commission of inquiry appointed to look at the general strike.¹⁴³ The Kenyan government, however, was not convinced of the wisdom of taking such a course and believed that it would be enough for the LTUEA simply to appear before the commission to give evidence.

Although there is no direct evidence that the LTUEA organised, let alone 'caused' the general strike, its memorandum submitted to the commission of inquiry was an exhaustive incrimination of the labour condi-

¹⁴² Colonial Office Minute, 8-9-39. CO 533 507.

¹⁴³ TUC Secretary-General to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 18-8-39; and Secretary of State to the governors of Kenya and Tanganyika, 25-8-39. CO 533 507.

tions which had led to the outbreak of the strike.¹⁴⁴ Not only did it call attention to the deplorable working conditions and low wages in the face of the high cost of living, long working hours, appalling housing coupled with exorbitant rents, and lack of workmen's compensation, it also demanded their immediate rectification if future trouble was to be avoided. Its recommendations included the enactment of minimum wage legislation, recognition of unions, more and better housing, workmen's compensation and pension schemes.

The Willan Commission tried to meet some of these demands,¹⁴⁵ but the results did not really satisfy the LTUEA and the workers. A wage of Shs. 18/50 per month was recommended and the creation of a labour department with the provision of adequate housing since housing, in its opinion, was the main source of trouble in Mombasa. No mention was made of the need to establish industrial relations machinery, and more, importantly, the need for the state and private employers to move away from the system of cheap labour and start paying workers sufficient wages that would enable them to live with their families and bear the full costs of reproducing and maintaining the working class as a whole, and not transfer these costs to the rural reserves. Several of the more commendable proposals contained in the report were to remain untried and unheeded as a result of the outbreak of the Second World War. No new housing was constructed, no machinery of industrial relations was set up, no

¹⁴⁴Memorandum submitted by the LTUEA to the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Examine the Labour Conditions in Mombasa, Mak/B/1/1.

¹⁴⁵See Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Examine Labour Conditions in Mombasa, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1939.

minimum wage ordinance was passed and the conditions of service showed no signs of improvement. This was a sure recipe for future strikes and militant labour protest.

Conclusion

The labour situation had by 1939 undergone several transformations. Gross labour abuses of the first decades were gradually being replaced by labour exploitation, and African labour protest was more often than not taking the form of strikes, slow downs and other such types of industrial action rather than the widespread desertions of the earlier period. But labour migrancy, squatter labour and forced labour still persisted and, in fact, made it unnecessary to have a large stabilised labour force. Consequently there was a small urban and permanent labour force, within which Indian artisans and skilled and semi-skilled workers played a crucial role, especially when it came to attempts at trade union organisation. In conclusion, therefore, a proletariat had emerged in Kenya by 1939, although labour did not generally live and organise itself like the metropolitan working classes. This was because the working class in Kenya, as in other colonies, was emerging under the conditions of primitive colonial accumulation, where accumulation had to be generated from the pre-capitalist spheres of production through a particularly brutal process of plunder and exploitation.

CHAPTER THREE

LABOUR IN KENYA DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Second World War period had several features of a transitional stage in the history of Kenya. Many aspects of the pre-1940 period lingered on while at the same time the roots of the post-war era began to form. This chapter will attempt to examine this admixture of the old with the new by delineating those aspects which lingered on from the phase of primitive colonial settler accumulation considered in the previous chapter, the new forms they took, and the beginnings of the patterns which were destined to characterise Kenya's political economy in the subsequent decades.

It has long been argued by many Latin American theorists of under-development and dependence that throughout their colonial and post-colonial history Latin American countries experienced relatively faster capitalist development when their ties to the developed capitalist metropolises were at their weakest.¹ Apparently in this century this occurred during the First World War, the Great Depression and the Second World War.

In this chapter we will try to assess the thesis's validity with regards to colonial societies in Africa. Can we discern periods when links between the African colonies and their metropolises were relatively weak during which there was correspondingly higher internally generated

¹See, for instance, Andre Gunder Frank, Capitalism and Under-development in Latin America, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1967.

impetus for capitalist development? Was the Second World War indeed one such period? In other words, to what extent did wartime circumstances specifically create conditions favourable to capitalist expansion, in Kenya, for instance?

Presenting a detailed formulation of Kenya's political economy during these five critical years is, of course, outside the scope of this study. Instead we will merely attempt to highlight the major economic developments during the war in order to situate the complex and ever-changing relations between labour and colonial capitalism in a context that is comprehensive enough to be explanatory and not simply descriptive. It will be demonstrated that settler agricultural production expanded appreciably and the process of import-substitution industrialisation began to gather momentum. The main thrust of the chapter, however, is to show how these changes affected the development of a Kenyan working class.

CHANGES IN KENYA'S POLITICAL ECONOMY

The Apotheosis of Settler Hegemony

Like the First World War, the Second World War gave the settler community a unique opportunity to further consolidate its position. The conditions generated by the two wars were, however, not exactly analogous; the latter was not simply the replay of the former. Between 1939 and 1945 the stakes for the settler community were much higher, the obstacles against them infinitely more complex, and their dream of

turning Kenya into a 'White Man's Country' more pressing than ever before.

Circumstances during the war conspired to increase settler prosperity and power. This provides a strong contrast to the wartime experience of most Africans in the reserves and in the bustling colonial towns where, in some cases, conditions deteriorated markedly, and demonstrated the contradictions inherent in capitalist development. Gathering settler prosperity on the one hand, and relative pauperisation of the majority of the African population, on the other, were not only an outcome of preceding decades of primitive settler colonial accumulation, but also arose out of the specific way in which the wartime economy was organised.

There can be little doubt that the re-organisation of Kenya's economy between 1940 and 1945 was, to a large extent, conditioned by the wartime re-organisation of the British economy itself. As in peacetime, so during the war, the colonial economies were expected to play a complementary role to the British economy. With the outbreak of the war, Harold Macmillan has written,

the immediate task of the Colonial Office and the Colonial Governments could be summed up in a single sentence - the mobilisation of all the potential resources of the Colonial Empire, both of men and of materials, for the purposes of war ... we therefore needed to increase colonial production for war purposes on an immense scale.²

²Harold Macmillan, The Blast of War 1939-1945, Macmillan, London, 1967.

Both the Kenyan Government and the settlers did not need any persuasion to be convinced that increased agricultural production in Kenya would constitute an important contribution to the imperial war effort. In his radio broadcast to the nation shortly after Britain had declared war on Nazi Germany, the Governor, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, called upon the people of Kenya of all races to rise and defend the empire. He reminded them of the

tremendous sacrifices (that) have been made by the people of Great Britain to ensure that the armed forces of the nation are strong enough to overcome the attack of our enemies and to defend the empire and with it this country ... All the more reason then for all of us in Kenya to help Great Britain by every means in our power, especially by ensuring that we are ready to face any eventuality, that we continue to be self-sufficient in all essential foodstuffs and in so far as we are able, we produce what Great Britain wants most.³

Before long, the Kenyan Government outlined its wartime agricultural policy. It was dubbed 'farming as usual PLUS', and it called for greater efforts to increase production, particularly by intensification of production. In fact the government was of the conviction that the war provided unprecedented opportunities "for establishing a sound and permanent farming system in the colony".⁴ In many ways the government's policy was not new at all; it was old wine in a new bottle. There was hardly any mention of the need to restructure the division between

³East African Standard, 8-9-39.

⁴East African Standard, 29-9-39.

settler and peasant or African agriculture. On the contrary, the Acting Director of Agriculture reiterated:

native farming in Kenya must be regarded as supplying food for the whole of the African population, including farm labour ... On the other hand, European farming is predominantly an export supplier ... War-time agricultural policy will not have to concern itself as much with our food requirements, as with exports.⁵

As the food shortages of 1942 and 1943 were to prove, this policy was short-sighted and it bore the seeds of catastrophe for the country.

Among the settlers, the war provoked an outburst of patriotic fervour. When it broke out the East African Standard, that faithful chronicler of settler opinion, editorialised imperiously:

The issue is clear, far clearer than it was in 1914. The world is faced with a challenge for power, not power backed by righteousness, but power supported by all that is foul and evil ... In these young East African Territories we are once again called upon to make sacrifice for the ideals and traditions which we brought with us to Africa. They lie at the root of our Trust in this part of the Empire and in all struggles we should remember those of our charges who have innocently been brought into this terrible catastrophe by a man to whom the white man's burden of responsibility for the uplifting of primitive peoples meant as little as truth and justice to him.⁶

⁵Ibid.

⁶East African Standard, 8-9-39.

It would be a mistake, however, to take such statements at face value. Underneath the rhetoric there usually was hard-nosed economic self-interest. The settler farmers did not hesitate to call for increased agricultural production by, and greater state support, for themselves. Little wonder that their spokesmen warned against the disastrous consequences that a lack of proper agricultural planning would have on the country's economy. As the EAS proclaimed:

In 1914 a great part of Kenya's agricultural production was brought to a standstill by a lack of planning - many farms were abandoned whilst their owners were marching and fighting over half of East Africa or beyond the seas ... Kenya's potential production may be the most powerful weapon that she can contribute to the Imperial armoury. But that weapon needs forging and in the forging care must be taken lest we forget that the principles of sound farming apply equally in time of war as in time of peace.⁷

It is indeed one of the great ironies that the war, which prompted the British government to call for intensified production in the colonies and to control the marketing of colonial produce more tightly than ever before, actually led to the decline of Colonial Office control and the increase of settler influence in Kenya. As early as 1940 Governor Moore was able to admit that "there has never been a time in Kenya when unofficial opinion has so much influenced policy or been so intimately

⁷East African Standard, 1-9-39.

involved in the counsels of Government".⁸ The Colonial Office could not have agreed more. In a long memorandum prepared by Sir A. Dawe on a federal solution for East Africa, partly designed to counteract the baneful influence of South Africa in the region, and more generally to checkmate any unbridled power of Kenyan settlers, it was conceded that the main object of settlers since 1931 had been "to secure effective control over the executive Government of Kenya. They have made big advances in that direction," and they were only waiting for "an appropriate moment when they could face the British Government formally and constitutionally to ratify their position in Kenya", as a prelude to an extension of their influence over their neighbours and the eventual establishment of a "White Dominion through the whole of East Africa".⁹

In practical terms, of course, the Colonial Office had never really imposed its policies on Kenya, except for brief periods of spectacular constitutional wrangling as in 1923, or during episodic scandals over land and labour as in 1931. During the war Colonial Office influence in Kenya was whittled down even further. The Colonial Office's impotence to impose policy on Kenya was frequently admitted by the British government on a number of occasions. In 1942, for instance, when Creech Jones, then Labour's Parliamentary spokesman on colonial affairs, called for the appointment of an African to the Kenya

⁸Governor Moore to Dawe, 6-6-40. CO 533/517 38077. For more details on the increase of settler political power during these years see George Bennet, "Settlers and Politics in Kenya, up to 1945", in V. Harlow, E.M. Chilver, and A. Smith, eds., History of East Africa, Vol. 2, OUP, London, 1965.

⁹Sir A. Dawe's Memorandum on a federal solution for East Africa, 27-7-42. CO 967/57.

Legislative Council in order to counterbalance the increased power of settlers, the Assistant Under-Secretary of State responsible for East Africa confessed that the Colonial Office had no power to impose such a policy on Kenya.¹⁰ Admittedly, Colonial Office fear of the settlers was prone to much exaggeration, which was not really surprising, for, after all, save for a few rare exceptions, none of the Colonial Office officials had ever visited or served in the colonies, let alone Kenya, so that there was a tendency for them to address themselves to the "advocates in Great Britain of a pro-native policy". The latter, and not the Africans themselves, were seen as the ones who posed a threat to continued settler domination.¹¹

Nevertheless, during the war the Colonial Office made occasional efforts to resolve the so-called 'intractable settler element' in Kenya. Dawe's proposals constituted one such effort. The most imaginative proposals, perhaps, and certainly the most prophetic, as it turned out, were made by Macmillan in 1942 when he was an Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office. He challenged the assumption that Kenya was a 'White Man's

¹⁰See Minute by A.J. Dawe, 25-5-42 CO 533/524 38032/A. Also see other minutes 1-4-43 CO 533/526 38091/12; 30-7-42 CO 533/528 38232; 9-2-44 CO 533/524 38008. In 1944 however the first African was nominated to the Legislative Council. He was Eliud Mathu, who was educated at the famous Alliance High School, Fort Hall in South Africa, and Oxford University and was one of the founders of the Kenya African Teachers' Union. He was at the time of his appointment Principal of the Kikuyu Karing'a school at Waithaka. Nobody, least of all the settlers, looked upon his appointment as a step toward eventual African self-government in the immediate future. See J. Roelker, Mathu of Kenya, A Political Study, Hoover Institute, Stanford, 1976.

¹¹Dawe's memorandum is replete with examples of such thinking. See CO 967/57, 27-7-42.

Country', because Kenya could never become "a country where - assuming that native and Indian labour were not available - Englishmen could do the jobs ... without fear of physical deterioration". He was able to show that the majority of the 20,000 odd Europeans in Kenya had had less than 10 years residence in the country. His scheme called for the Kenya Government to buy up the freehold of the larger farmers and turn their owners into managers or tenants, and for the purchase of the smaller farms, with a view to their resale to Africans, so that the worsening problem of land shortage for Africans could be arrested before it was too late. He was convinced that failure to take such drastic action would make civil war inevitable.¹²

The Macmillan scheme makes fascinating reading; the poignancy of its analysis and its forthrightness show a keen imperial mind at work. It was a foreshadow of what was to become all too apparent after the war - a Colonial Office increasingly bent on pursuing policies of 'benevolent paternalism' by responding to local grievances and initiating pre-emptive reforms in order to preserve the wider imperial system, and pitted against the myopic concerns of a settler community many of whose members were still inspired by the ethos of a bygone era: rugged individualism and their 'civilising mission'. As practical policy during the war itself, however, Macmillan's proposals were a dead letter; it was an outlandish scheme for economies geared to war production with hardly any extra revenue to spare. It also betrayed an element of political wishful thinking, especially as to how much power

¹²Macmillan's memo, counter proposals to Dawe, 15-8-42. CO 957/57.

the Kenyan government had or could marshal to overhaul the economic system in Kenya without provoking the wrath of the settlers.

It is therefore hard to escape the conclusion that during the Second World War the hand of the settlers vis-a-vis the Kenyan government, and that of the latter vis-a-vis the Colonial Office were undoubtedly strengthened. Such significant changes in the 'balance of power' among the settlers, the colonial state, and the imperial state, could not but have far reaching repercussions on the growth of capitalism in Kenya and the way in which its system of labour control developed from then on.

However it would be too simplistic to attribute these changes solely to the failure of Colonial Office policy. The war itself was a crucial conditioning factor. The British government was naturally more concerned with the execution and fortunes of the war than with the political pretensions of settlers in the outskirts of the empire. At any rate, the Colonial Office itself was streamlined during the war and operated under severe pressures,¹³ so that its powers, not to say its effectiveness, to oversee the colonial empire were considerably reduced. In this regard communication difficulties during the war should not be underestimated. As for the anti-settler circles, their voices were nothing but whimpers amidst bomb explosions in and out of war-weary London.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the settlers themselves were largely responsible for some of these changes. "While officials in London", Flint writes, "were building files and writing minutes on Hailey's report, settler political leaders in Kenya were assuming almost

¹³See H. Macmillan, The Blast of War, chapter 7.

total control of the executive instruments of government, and extending to use the East African Governor's Conference to control the East African situation as far as possible."¹⁴ Thus the settlers consciously and deliberately exploited the war to promote their own interests. Settler misgivings of the Kenyan government, and suspicions of the Colonial Office, had frequently surfaced before, most notably in 1923 during the ill-fated threat of armed rebellion. Aided by the war they resolved to flex their muscles once again and regain lost ground. It has been argued that settlers had come to the conclusion that

Britain had less and less to offer them. The increasing influence of Attlee and other Labour Party politicians in colonial affairs, and the entry of the USSR into the war as Britain's ally, alarmed white settlers considerably. An article in the Kenya Weekly News of November 7, 1941 revealed the drift among settlers towards South African ideals. "The war is for democracy, not only in Britain, but also in East Africa", it began challengingly. After the war Kenya must face the influence of "advanced Russian doctrines" and should look for "advanced socialist policies being applied to the Empire ... no attention will be given to European settlers in these post-war policies ... we must make every single effort we can to interest Southern Rhodesia and South Africa in our problems."¹⁵

The war, therefore, brought out an uneasy balance between the settlers' own nationalism and their support for the British anti-Nazi crusade.

¹⁴John Flint, "Last chance for the White Man's Country; constitutional plans for Kenya and East Africa, 1938-1943", unpublished paper, presented to History Seminar, Dalhousie University, February, 1982, p. 13.

¹⁵See John Flint, "The Colonial Office and the 'South African Menace', 1940-43, unpublished paper, presented to History Seminar, Dalhousie University, winter, 1979, p. 5.

Some of the most virulent settler attacks against the British government during the war were reserved for economic issues. The war was only a few weeks old when the EAS took the opportunity to attack imperial control over the Kenyan economy. A commentary on the governor's farewell speech bemoaned the fact that the governor

like every Governor ... was ... handicapped by by the unfortunate fact that the pace of colonial progress is largely dictated by the pace of Colonial Office decisions ... It is a ridiculous situation that the economy, not only of the agricultural industry, but of Kenya as a whole, should be jeopardised by the failure of the Imperial Government to state which crops can be grown with some prospects of a market.¹⁶

In 1942 the settlers were still making the same complaint that the Colonial Office had failed to tell them which crops to grow for the war effort.¹⁷

The colonial state co-operated with the settlers more than ever before. It may be that government officials did not relish the prospect of a drawn out confrontation with the settlers under the circumstances of a protracted war. It is also possible that the perennial feuds between officials and settlers were subsumed under a heightened sense of racial solidarity and intense patriotism; all triggered off by the brutal realities of facing a common external enemy. It is certainly the case that "the extension of government functions, the block placed on further

¹⁶East African Standard, 29-9-39.

¹⁷For correspondence on the subject see CO 957/57, 1942.

recruitment to the colonial administration, the failure to replace officers who either enlisted or died, all caused the government to seek closer settler co-operation".¹⁸ In short, the interests of the state to expand and reorganise the wartime economy and administration dovetailed neatly together with the interests of the settlers to penetrate the administration. So emboldening was the war for the settlers that in March 1942

there took place a kind of clandestine coup d'etat in which settlers set up, and took over, de facto machinery which amounted to a system of virtual self government. Without seeking any approval from London, and without even informing the Colonial Office of his action, Sir Henry Moore in March 1942 established the Civil Defence and Supply Council, composed of 2 official and 6 unofficial (settler) members. In effect the CDSC was informal cabinet government, for each member was in effect given a ministry, though it was not called such, for which he was responsible.¹⁹

A settler also headed the Settlement and Production Board formed in September, 1939 to co-ordinate economic activity in the colony.

Thus, everything considered, the settlers made significant advances during the Second World War. Indeed, all the indicators point to the remarkable expansion of settler agriculture. Some of the glaring technical, commercial and marketing shortcomings which had made settler

¹⁸See Ian Spencer, "Settler dominance, agricultural production and the Second World War in Kenya", Journal of African History, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1980, p. 503.

¹⁹J. Flint, "Last chance for the White Man's Country", pp.14-15.

agriculture so inefficient and unproductive before 1940 were overcome. Backward agricultural techniques and lack of machinery were giving way to mechanisation, credit facilities improved, and erratic commodity prices stabilised under a profitable bulk purchase system. The picture for African agriculture was vastly different.

The settler drive to mechanise their farming was greatly assisted by the Anglo-American Lend-Lease Agreement in which the USA undertook to provide Britain and her colonies with credit for essential wartime needs. The Kenya government "used the agreement to increase her purchases of farm machinery tenfold, and mechanisation of European farming began in a serious fashion from 1941".²⁰ War booty from Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland also formed part of the machinery pool. Consequently new lands were opened up. Moreover the use of artificial fertilisers which had been restricted before 1939 by their high cost, became commonplace, largely as a result of government subsidies, which cut fertiliser prices to farmers.²¹ Storage facilities were also expanded and improved, again with state assistance.

It would seem that official support for settler agriculture was probably greater between 1940 and 1945 than ever before. This was particularly so in finance. It is interesting to note that the government offered direct credits to farmers so that commercial and merchant banks ceased to be important in the financing of settler agriculture. In addition, the Land Bank lowered its interest rates and offered

²⁰See R.M.A. van Zwanenberg and Anne King, An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, 1800-1970, Macmillan, London, 1975, p. 44.

²¹I. Spencer, op. cit., p. 504.

other attractive terms, with the result that nearly a third of all settler farmers who wished to extend their acreage but had no capital to do so availed themselves of the bank's services.²² In fact, it was during the war that "the district committees and the marketing structures were co-ordinated to provide finance for the individual farmers".²³

With such support it is not difficult to see why settler agriculture was able to expand on a substantial scale. Mixed farming was stimulated and became popular because of an expanding demand for meat by the military authorities. But there was also another reason; wartime shortages of shipping space made it unprofitable to export bulky commodities like maize so that the production of such relatively cheap products could be converted into more valuable ones, which, in the case of maize, meant using the surplus to feed livestock. The Board of Agriculture set up production committees in each district in order to co-ordinate these activities and to ensure maximum production. The board decided which crops were to be grown and set out production targets, and the local committees were expected to implement them. Despite manpower retrenchment the colonial state maintained, and in some cases increased, the numbers of technical advisers and the amount of assistance given to settler farmers. It would be correct therefore to say that settler agriculture came under a strict central control that was unprecedented.

²²For more details see E. Huxley, No Easy Way: A History of the Kenya Farmers' Association and Unga Ltd., Nairobi, 1957, pp. 140-1.

²³R. van Zwanenberg, "Neocolonialism and the Origin of the National Bourgeoisie in Kenya Between 1940 and 1973", Journal of Eastern African Research and Development, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1974, p. 164.

The quantity and quality of produce improved remarkably.²⁴

The centralisation of production was coupled with the stabilisation of the market. The British government, through the Colonial Office, established a system of bulk buying and bulk selling of colonial produce. This was designed to synchronise Britain's wartime economic interests with those of colonial producers. The former wanted to ensure the sufficient flow of unprocessed agricultural products for the war effort, while the latter sought stable markets, especially now that German, Japanese and their allies' markets were no longer reliable.²⁵ The prices offered were generally high; the British Ministry of Food which bought substantial amounts of these colonial exports was of the opinion that "it was common human experience that maximum production is obtained by raising prices".²⁶

The war therefore provided conditions in which production and distribution could be rationalised in order to increase output and cut costs. The effects of this concentration of capital differed from colony to colony. In West Africa, where governments were opposed to paying the peasant producers high prices ostensibly to prevent these countries from being flooded with money while there was no corresponding increase in the goods that money could buy, the

²⁴For some relevant statistics on this see Nicola Swainson, The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya, Heinemann, London, 1980, pp.84-5.

²⁵For more details on how the bulk purchase system was organised and operated see Charlotte Leubuscher, Bulk Buying in the Colonies, OUP, London, 1956.

²⁶See H. Macmillan, op. cit., p. 174.

difference between the full price and the price ... paid to producers was to constitute a kind of collective post-war credit ... By the end of the war, the total reached many hundreds of millions and became the basis of the great capital expansion ..., in the post-war years.²⁷

According to Zwanenberg and King in Uganda the peasant producers were also paid below bulk purchase prices.²⁸

In Kenya the situation was different. Given their relatively high level of organisation and political leverage with the colonial state, the Kenyan settlers certainly benefited tremendously from the bulk buying system. Each of the major crops, such as sugar, sisal, coffee, cotton, tea and maize was centralised and sold in bulk. The role of the KFA was accordingly transformed; for the first time it "became firmly established as a para-statal organisation ... European producers and government thus became irrevocably tied together ..."²⁹ The Government also undertook for the first time to guarantee minimum prices. Elspeth Huxley, that idiosyncratic muse of the settler conscience, gloated, "this revamping of the (agricultural) industry gave the farmer, for the first time in Kenya's history, a genuine measure of security".³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., pp.174-5. Also see A.G. Hopkins, Economic History of West Africa, Longman, London, 1973.

²⁸ Zwanenberg and King, op. cit., p. 215.

²⁹ For instance, the KCA began to handle government credit finance to farmers, Ibid., p. 214.

³⁰ E. Huxley, No Easy Way, p. 140.

If economic security was the epitome of settler life during the war, many Africans were condemned to a Sisyphean ordeal of poverty. It was the extensive state support given to settler agriculture which was responsible for the growing gap in efficiency and productivity between settler and peasant production. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the government's maize pricing policy. In December 1941 the Agricultural Production and Settlement Board announced a guaranteed price per bag for settler-produced maize which was later followed by breaking and clearing grants for settler maize and other cereals like wheat, and offers of guaranteed returns per acre for maize and wheat. The price of settler maize was fixed at Shs. 9 per 200 lb. bag whereas that of African producers for the same quality was Shs. 4/90.³¹ A number of specious arguments were advanced to justify such a policy of blatant discrimination. In the words of the deputy chairman of the Agricultural Production and Settlement Board, "a man is entitled to a fair reward for his labour whether native or white, but it does not mean they have actually to get the same price."³² It was contended furthermore that the costs of production were lower for African farmers than for settler farmers. Some even went so far as to argue that any vigorous encouragement of African agriculture could only lead to overproduction with the consequent loss of soil fertility in the reserves.

³¹For details see Food Shortage Commission of Enquiry Report, Nairobi, 1944.

³²Ian Spencer, op. cit., p. 505. Also see East African Standard, 8, 11, 14, 22 and 25 August, 1942, on the maize control controversy.

The main impetus behind the differential maize prices, however, seems to have been twofold, first, to halt declining settler maize acreages, and, second, to achieve the KFA's long-term objective of monopolising the lucrative internal maize market. By the end of the war prices for settler maize stood at Shs. 13, Shs. 3 higher than they were for African maize, the differential having narrowed down thanks to a flurry of Colonial Office criticisms, and, more importantly perhaps, as a result of protestations from African producers themselves and the severe food shortage crisis of 1942-43.

Price differentials were also extended to livestock whereby African cattle were purchased at lower prices than settler-owned cattle. For instance, first grade beef from settlers sold for Shs. 34/- per 100 lb. which was Shs. 8/- higher than the price of African beef of the same quality. Moreover, all European cattle, irrespective of quality, were always bought as first grade beef.³³ Not surprisingly, this encouraged settlers to buy African cattle, through the Livestock Control which was established in 1940, to be used temporarily as work oxen before selling them as settler cattle. That this was a lucrative system for the settler farmers cannot be seriously contested. After all, this was a period when demand for meat by the military and civil authorities was extraordinarily high.

The twin pressures of high wartime demand for meat, coupled with age-old settler attempts to establish a viable meat or livestock industry, explain the differential cattle prices and the lack of economic incentives for Africans to sell their cattle. Instead, coercive

³³See Food Shortage Commission of Enquiry Evidence, KNA Agr. 3.

controls were set up aimed at reducing the levels of African cattle ownership, which by then stood at over 95%. A quota system was established from 1940 whereby Africans in each district were allocated an annual target for supply to the Livestock Control. The system was co-ordinated by the Director of Veterinary Services, run by the provincial and district commissioners and local functionaries, including chiefs, enforced by the military authorities and 'tribal' police, and justified in the name of the African contribution to the war effort.³⁴ So effective were these measures in the first couple of years that about 20,000 cattle were collected annually. Towards the end of the war, however, there was widespread resistance against the compulsory cattle sales, and in some districts, especially among the Maasai the quota system collapsed entirely, and in others there was threat of civil insurrection.

The policies of differential maize and cattle prices, coercive destocking of African producers and pastoralists, accompanied by other discriminatory agricultural and economic practices, which were often engineered by settlers and more often than not facilitated and sustained by state policy, had, as it will be demonstrated, negative consequences on general living standards, particularly in the urban slums and the rural reserves.

Notwithstanding the enormous advances made by settler estate agriculture and corporate plantation production during the war, it does not mean that the process of class differentiation among Africans was frozen

³⁴Ian Spencer, *op. cit.*, pp. 510-11.

during the war. Nothing could be further from the truth; by 1939, as demonstrated in the last chapter, Africans did not constitute an undifferentiated mass of subsistence cultivators, and during the war the accumulative interests and opportunities for the various embryonic African classes diverged further. Although the colonial state continued to impose numerous restrictions on peasant production as a whole, and that unlike the situation in Uganda and West Africa the number of Africans who could take advantage of wartime conditions were relatively few, this does not detract from the fact that there was a general extension of commodity relations in the reserves during the war years as a result of expanded commodity production.³⁵ This accentuated the tendency towards individualisation of land tenure and land concentration, and crystallisation of rural class formation, all of which typified the spread of capitalist relations of production throughout the country.

It is more than apparent that even government officials were aware that this process was taking place in the reserves despite all their attempts to keep rural developments within check. According to Sorrenson, in April 1945, Governor Mitchell himself noted "the growth of individual tenure among the Kikuyu, a process that had been hastened by the increase in cash cropping during the war", and that, "there had been extensive

³⁵See R. van Zwanenberg, "Neocolonialism and the origin of the national bourgeoisie ...", *op. cit.*; Nicola Swainson, *op. cit.*, chapter 5; and M.P. Cowen, "Cattle production in the Central Province, capital and household commodity production, 1903-64", mimeo, IDS, Nairobi, July, 1975.

development of individual tenure".³⁶ More ahoi were thrown off the land, or the ahoi relationship was commuted to cash.³⁷ In 1944 the Kiambu District Annual Report stated that there was a "large landless class growing up in this district which is asking what government is going to do for them and hoping that ... additional settlement areas for them will be made available".³⁸ Matters were, of course, made worse by population increases in the reserves as a result of natural increases as well as the returning squatters evicted from settler estates. It was estimated in 1945, for instance, that Nyeri district was "so overpopulated that almost half of the people - c. 70,000 - would have to be moved if the remainder were to make an adequate living".³⁹

The colonial state was still hesitant as to how much support it should give to the African landowners. As one memorandum put it:

Many of these 'landowners' belong to the more educated section of the people and tend to be antagonistic to tribal influence but as yet have evolved no consciousness of civic responsibility ... At the present time they may include one or two progressive farmers but the majority are landminers, whose depredations are increased by the use of hired labour. Unless it is the government policy to encourage the evolution of the big landowner and employer of labour, it will be

³⁶M.P.K. Sorrenson, Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country, OUP, London, 1967, p. 56.

³⁷See Kiambu District Annual Report, 1945.

³⁸Kiambu District Annual Report, 1944, as quoted in Sorrenson, op. cit., p. 78.

³⁹Ibid., p. 58.

necessary for such men to realize they must re-orient themselves on clan lines sufficiently to ensure their conformation to sound land usage.⁴⁰ (emphasis added)

This passage aptly captures the reluctance of the colonial state to come to terms with the fact that an African capitalist land owning class had emerged and that it increasingly resorted to the employment of wage labour. It would not be until the late forties, and especially from the early fifties, that the colonial state, in response to a sustained and militant challenge to settler economic and political power, waged by African nationalists, Mau Mau fighters, and metropolitan interests, would finally sanction fully and create conditions that would accelerate the breakdown of traditional tenurial arrangements and their replacement by patterns of capitalist land ownership. African traders would also receive the same boost. But that belongs to another chapter. Our argument here is that during the war the competition between peasant production and settler production for labour, among other things, showed no signs of letting up. Also, pressures in the reserves tending to deprive an increasing number of Africans of their means of production - land - intensified.

Wartime Industrialisation

Another major bequest of the war and one which was fundamentally to transform the relations, or rather struggles, between labour and capital

⁴⁰Tomkinson to Chief Secretary, 14-5-45, KNA LO LND 30/2/2, quoted in Sorrenson, ibid., p. 57.

in Kenya after the war was the expansion of import-substitution industrialisation. During the war there was a convergence of two major factors which made this possible; first, there was an intensification of internal pressures for industrialisation, and, second, external constraints against it slackened. While these general factors undoubtedly applied to most other colonies as well, there were few African colonies in which industrialisation proceeded so far during the war. It would seem that only Rhodesia among the British African colonial dependencies was a rival. The explanation for this undoubtedly lies in the fact that both Kenya and Southern Rhodesia were settler colonies, and the settlers, if we may repeat, were indomitable economic nationalists, precursors of the national bourgeoisies of the future, who took every opportunity to promote their interests, including that of secondary industrialisation. The war gave them a good opportunity to implement this objective.

The war made it extremely difficult for the settlers and well-to-do Asians and Africans to obtain consumer goods that they had been used to having previously. One of the reasons for this state of affairs was that under war conditions ships were prone to attack so that only essential war supplies were sent to East Africa from Europe.⁴¹ Shipping space was severely restricted. With the war British consumer industries either switched to production of war materials or they could simply not produce enough to supply a far flung empire, especially when it is borne in mind that Germany and Japan had provided significant portions

⁴¹Zwanenberg and King, op. cit., p. 126.

of manufactured exports to British colonies. By 1939, for example, 72% of all cotton textiles imported into Kenya came from Japan, while Britain's share of the market was a mere 12%.⁴² Thus even goods aimed for peasants and workers, like cheap textiles, were also in short supply. As it will be shown later, this had serious implications for wage policy during the war.

The only alternative to importing such goods was to manufacture them locally. In 1942 the Nairobi Chamber of Commerce issued an important memorandum in which it stated that it

strongly advocate(d) government encouragement of what are known as secondary industries ... it is now accepted that for a state to depend entirely on primary industries, such as agriculture and animal husbandry, means an unbalanced economy. Furthermore, primary industries cannot absorb the whole population.⁴³

These sentiments were echoed by many, especially since the government had introduced stringent import restrictions on commodities which could not be regarded as essential in order to preserve much-needed revenue.

The colonial state responded to some of these pressures and began to encourage industrialisation. A series of surcharges in the basic tariff were introduced in order to protect local industrial projects. In addition, bodies were set up specifically to foster industrial development. In 1942, for instance, the Kenyan Government sponsored the

⁴²See East African Standard, 28-4-39.

⁴³East African Standard, 26-8-42. On restriction of imports see editorial East African Standard, 7-8-42.

formation of East African Industrial Management Board to manufacture essential items whose supplies had been cut off because of the war. Two years later this was followed by the formation of the Industrial Management Board (IMB), which was charged with supplying the armed forces with manufactured items. Under the IMB's umbrella there grew up engineering works, wood workings, bricks, ceramics and tiles manufacturing enterprises. The board was later to be taken over by the Industrial Development Council in the 1950s, a forerunner of the post-colonial Industrial and Commercial Development Corporation (ICDC).

The colonial state's provision of such protection for industrial projects marked the beginning of what was later to become one of the most salient features of industrialisation in Kenya; the erection of a barrage of tariff walls by the state in order to stimulate and protect local industries. Thus the colonial state's traditional interventionist role in the economy was extended; support for settler agriculture was being accompanied by support for industrialisation. This was a significant development, one which heralded the post-war decline of settler political predominance within the Kenyan state and the country's political economy as a whole.

It was also during the war that the imperial state ceased to display its former undisguised hostility to colonial industrialisation. This can partly be accounted for by the fact that

the prime object of Colonial Office measures towards the colonies during the war was to preserve the gold and foreign-exchange reserves of the U.K. Colonial governments were instructed

to restrict the import of consumer goods and instigate a system of import licences.⁴⁴

British firms were therefore no longer subject to the same pressures and restrictions if they wanted to establish industries behind colonial tariff walls.

The new policy was enshrined in the Colonial Welfare and Development Act of 1940, which made available to the colonial governments £50 million for a period of ten years, and was supplemented by an additional £500,000, set aside exclusively for scientific research on problems affecting colonies. The Act represented a major advance over the 1929 Colonial Development Act both in the sheer amount of money involved and the range and scope of its objectives. It was a mark of the changed times that the Act, drawn up in the aftermath of the West Indian Riots of 1937 and liberalised on the insistence of a group of Labour MPs, made aid to a colony contingent on the passage of protective trade union legislation in order to "promote the prosperity and happiness of the peoples of the colonial empire".⁴⁵

⁴⁴Swainson, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁴⁵See Statement of Policy on Colonial Development and Welfare, Cmd. 6175, 1940, p. 8. The Act arose out of an awareness that the prosperity of Britain itself could only be ensured if the colonies were released from the shackles of industrial backwardness. In a large measure the act represented a compromise formula: some hardline Tories committed to a laissez-faire policy of colonial development would have preferred smaller amounts of funds, while on the left there were those Labour MPs who believed in a more interventionist role by the imperial state and would have preferred to see more funds committed. See The Official History of Colonial Development, Vol. 1, The Origins of British Aid Policy, 1924-1945, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, 1980. Also see George Padmore, Africa: Britain's Third Empire, Negro Universities Press, New York, 1969, chapter 7.

Arguably the entry of the USA into the war may have given an added stimulus to some of these changes in colonial economic policy. American capital was interested in penetrating the colonial empires; old colonial policies could therefore no longer go unchallenged. As the Secretary of State for the Colonies revealed, in his talks with John Foster Dulles in July 1942, the latter

said that we (the British) should realise that deeply embedded in the mind of most Americans was a fundamental distrust of what they called 'British imperialism' ... The only way in which we could remove this deep-seated prejudice would be to invite the co-operation of the United States in the development of our colonies after the war ... They were merely concerned with the welfare of the indigenous populations and the development of the material resources of the territories.⁴⁶

During the war, therefore, grounds were set for import-substitution industrialisation in Kenya. Old manufacturing concerns were expanded and new ones established, including blanket, clothing and shoe factories as well as beer and pharmaceutical plants.⁴⁷ Those who ventured into

⁴⁶Quoted in H. Macmillan, *op. cit.*, p. 179. For the most detailed examination of the American anti-colonial position during the Second World War period and the policy or ideological imperatives behind it see W.R. Louis, Imperialism at Bay: The Role of the US in the Decolonisation of the British Empire, O.U.P., London, 1977.

⁴⁷See Zwanenberg and King, *op. cit.*, 126-29; there are also numerous accounts in the papers talking about the new industries. See, for example, EAS, 29-9-39 and 18-9-42. The Registrar General's Annual Report for 1946 provides the following statistics:

manufacturing consisted mostly of the large-scale estate producers, local subsidiaries of international firms, and the big Asian merchants. Needless to say, there were as yet no Africans involved in manufacturing. The pattern was for "a merchant firm which had specialised in the import of one or two commodities such as cloth to move into the production of that commodity".⁴⁸ By 1946 there were 280 companies incorporated in Kenya, valued at £40 million, among which manufacturing firms were gradually becoming sizeable both in numbers and in the share of the total value.⁴⁹

Although this was small compared to the post-war manufacturing boom, it demonstrates that the roots of that boom lie in the war period. In other words, the fairly rapid pace at which manufacturing industries were established after 1945 was not a sudden, if spectacular, development, signifying a break with the past, as those who periodise Kenyan history between the pre- and post-1945 periods tend to imply.⁵⁰ In any event,

Number of Companies and their Nominal Capital 1940-45

| <u>Year</u> | <u>No. of Cos. Registered on Jan. 1st</u> | <u>Cos. Registered during the year</u> | <u>Nominal Capital</u> | <u>Wound up and struck off the register</u> | <u>Total No. of Cos. on register on 31st Dec.</u> |
|-------------|---|--|------------------------|---|---|
| 1940 | 656 | 22 | £ 239,850 | 26 | 652 |
| 1941 | 652 | 41 | £ 336,300 | 23 | 670 |
| 1942 | 670 | 50 | £ 392,714 | 18 | 702 |
| 1943 | 702 | 68 | £ 625,005 | 13 | 757 |
| 1944 | 757 | 65 | £ 1,117,250 | 11 | 811 |
| 1945 | 811 | 93 | £ 1,040,650 | 16 | 888 |

⁴⁸Swainson, op. cit., p. 125.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Writers as varied as the contributors to the Oxford History of East Africa and Swainson, ibid., have tended to do that and unwittingly obscure the real significance of the war period in Kenyan history.

it is important to underline the nature of wartime industrialisation because it had serious effects on the composition and organisation of the Kenyan work force during the war itself, and most certainly affected the post-war struggles between labour and capital, as well as the realignment of class forces within Kenyan society and the state.

EXPANSION OF THE WORKING CLASS

The expansion of capitalism in Kenya during the Second World War meant that more people than ever before became incorporated into capitalist relations of production. The traditionally high demand for labour from settler farms and plantation estates became even higher. In addition, increasing amounts of labour were required for the fledgling manufacturing industries expanding in the colonial towns, principally Nairobi and to a smaller extent Mombasa. Finally, there was the wartime demand for troops and military labour. Thus the first thing to note about the war period is the remarkable expansion of the work force. Secondly, the colonial state played a key role in regulating this process of proletarianisation, for it adopted emergency compulsory powers over production and labour. In many ways, therefore, amidst the new forms of labour organisation and exploitation which began to appear, it will be demonstrated that the war period had some features of the gross forms of labour exploitation reminiscent of the earlier phase of primitive accumulation considered in the last chapter.

Labour Conscription

At the outbreak of the war the colonial state acquired broad powers of coercion over labour, among a host of other things. Accordingly new regulations were passed, such as the 1940 Defence (Native Personnel) Regulations, which gave the governor power to order provincial commissioners to produce quotas of workers for military and essential services. All such regulations emanated from the Emergency Power (Defence) Acts passed by the British Government when the war broke out, which suspended all constitutional guarantees, and were made applicable to the colonies through Orders-in-Council.⁵¹ In Kenya the colonial state used its new and reinforced coercive powers not only to mobilise and recruit labour for the army and services designated as essential, but also to ensure that private farmers and employers received sufficient labour.

Many of the Africans who joined the King's African Rifles in Kenya were conscripted. They were either captured by chiefs on DCs orders and sent to join the army, or they were ordered to get into lorries while at labour recruiting centres with the promise that they were being taken to places of work, but only to find themselves landing at military training depots. Still others were forcibly removed from school and sent to the army, and some unlucky ones found themselves being disposed of by their employers by being told "to get into the military lorry which

⁵¹See CO 533/503, circular telegram, Secretary of State, 15 Sept. 1939. The Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, 1939 was passed into law in Britain on 24th August 1939 and applied with modifications to Kenya through the Emergency Powers (Colonial Defence) Order-in-Council, 1939 and the Emergency Powers (Colonial Defence) (Amendment) Order-in-Council.

was standing there waiting for" them.⁵² Initially recruitment was restricted to the so-called 'martial tribes', but as such sources dried up other nationalities and regions became hunting grounds as well, and by 1941 recruitment was virtually extended to the whole of Kenya.

Those who joined the army voluntarily did so either because the army was just "another one of the European jobs" available, or they fell prey to false rumours that military service would exempt them from paying taxes. Rumour had it, too, that those who waited to be conscripted into the army and did not join voluntarily were always sent to the front lines where fighting was fiercest. Propaganda was indeed extensively used to persuade men to join the army. The Italians and Germans were painted as the 'bad guys', who, Lord forbid, if they conquered Kenya, would have all the men castrated. The propagandists pointed out that the Italians had already threatened the existence of the King of Abyssinia, who until 1935 was the only independent African King. Fear of losing their masculinity and an awakened sense of African patriotism may have moved some, but the most effective and compelling propaganda was simply the promise of a better and fuller life after the war; funds for trade and business, land for settlement, permanent and high wage employment, and other such tantalising opportunities were dangled before them like wands that the magic of war would bring.

Apart from requiring men for the army itself, the military authorities, in conjunction with the government, recruited labour for works of urgent operational necessity, such as the construction and extension of

⁵²The section which follows draws on the work by O.J.E. Shiroya, "The Impact of World War II on Kenya: The Role of Ex-servicemen in Kenyan Nationalism", Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1968.

air fields, roads, harbours and military training camps. About 20,000 Africans were recruited into the East African Military Labour Service and a further 16,000 into the African Auxilliary Pioneer Corps. All in all, there were about 98,000 Kenyans who served in the armed forces in one capacity or another, the maximum total "serving at any one time appears to have been some 75,000 in 1944".⁵³

It was agricultural production, however, which was regarded as Kenya's main contribution to the war effort. Consequently, even larger numbers were conscripted for the settler farmers and other private employers. Such crops as sisal, sugar, pyrethrum, rubber and flax, were designated as essential, which meant that it was permissible to use conscript labour for their production. Essential undertakings also included government and local government work.⁵⁴ Initially the decision as to which undertakings could be defined as essential lay with the Essential Undertakings Board. The board was composed of the Chairman of the Supply Board, the Chairman of the Agricultural and Settlement Board and the Director of Agriculture.⁵⁵ In other words, there were two settlers and one government official on the board. It is not surprising, therefore, that conscript labour was also used for undertakings not even defined as essential. The governor wrote the Secretary of State that

⁵³See A. Clayton and Donald Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895-1963, Frank Cass, London, 1974, p. 232.

⁵⁴See, for instance, the 'returns of conscript labour', Governor Moore - Secretary of State, 20-4-44, 24-7-44, 4-12-44 CO 533 38091/12.

⁵⁵Secretary of State - Gov. Moore 24-8-43. CO 533 38091/12.

conscription was allowed for private employers "to ensure the maximum production of food for East Africa itself and for the Mid-East",⁵⁶ and the Secretary of State talked of the "application of compulsory labour for private undertakings in East Africa (being) accepted only with reluctance by His Majesty's Government".⁵⁷

This 'reluctance' may have been exaggerated. However, it cannot be denied that settlers exerted enormous pressure in favour of conscript labour for private employers, which neither the British government, let alone the Kenyan government, could resist. The immediate cause of settler agitation for conscript labour was the labour shortage which was gradually making itself felt. The shortages were partly instigated by the large-scale mobilisation and recruitment of men by the armed forces, which, according to the settlers, threatened to cheat them of their prosperity, now looming over the horizon. The settlers, never known for their temperate or charitable views of Africans, were seized by outbursts of hysteria: "in these days of turmoil, dust and noise", one summed up the feelings of the rest,

one looks back with regret to twenty and twenty-five years ago, when many of us left England full of hope and trust, to settle in what was then the pleasant land of Kenya ... native tribes were mostly pleasant, willing and wishful to learn, and to help us with our work. During these years, they have indeed changed for the worse. Not only do

⁵⁶Gov. Moore - Secretary of State for the Colonies 19-9-43. CO 533 38901/12.

⁵⁷Secretary of State - Gov. Moore, 5-6-44. CO 533 38901/12.

they work less but they demand far higher wages. They have become lazy, dirty, dishonest and noisy. One is appalled to watch them, and wonders what it is all leading to.⁵⁸

Another concluded, with the government obviously in mind:

what the farms want at times like these is a good, honest and plentiful supply of labour and a well-staffed police force - not gallons of ink and yards of paper. It is only work that counts.⁵⁹

Throughout 1940, 1941 and 1942 farmers' associations in various districts met and overwhelmingly passed resolutions calling for labour conscription and attacking the alleged lack of government support.⁶⁰ The KFA added its voice and protested against government inaction. Other organisations followed suit and echoed similar sentiments; in August 1941 the Settlement and Production Board declared its dissatisfaction with the position of 'native labour',⁶¹ and in January 1943 the East African Chamber of Mines met in Limuru together with a number of representatives from the agricultural industry and voted in favour of selective labour conscription.⁶² The EAS threw its full weight behind the

⁵⁸East African Standard, 17-1-41.

⁵⁹East African Standard, 15-2-41.

⁶⁰For Nanyuki Farmers Association see EAS, 2-1-41; Thomson's Falls Farmers Association see EAS, 7-2-41; and for Kitale Farmers Association see EAS, 9-1-42.

⁶¹East African Standard, 22-8-41.

⁶²In particular they supported the Coffee Board and the Trans-Nzoia district council. See East African Standard, 2-2-42.

settlers in a series of leading articles in October, 1941. It called for the temporary suspension of military recruitment for the EAMLS and the AAPC.⁶³

It was not long before the government took measures designed to placate the settlers. In October 1941, it "requested all employers to report their exact shortages of labour to the local district commissioner who would pass it along through the provincial commissioner to the reserves. This was widely regarded as a formal application for labour."⁶⁴ District labour committees were established and discharged with the responsibilities of approving the applications for labour. Local officials, chiefs and other administrative functionaries were expected to ensure that labour was forthcoming.

There were also attempts to strengthen the kipande system, or at any rate, to prevent it from lapsing into disuse. Government Notice No. 771 of 1942 stipulated that

in the native lands, the native reserves or the native leasehold areas government headmen may demand the production by a native of his registration certificate, and, if he has been granted leave of absence by his employer, his leave certificate.⁶⁵

⁶³See for instance East African Standard issues for 3, 4, 6, and 8 October, 1941.

⁶⁴Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 239.

⁶⁵G.M. Rennie (Chief Secretary) - See 1 5-3-43. CO 533 38091/12.

By this authorisation it was hoped that the hands of village headmen would be strengthened against deserters and the latter would be returned to their erstwhile places of employment. Many headmen used these powers with considerable callousness.

Further, screws were tightened on the squatter system. In March 1944 the statutory number of days which squatters were allowed to work in a year were increased from 180 to 240 throughout Kenya. The reason for "making this increase colony-wide", the governor explained in a despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, "was that squatters were tending to move from those districts where a reasonable quantity of work was required to where there was not".⁶⁶ The real burden was to fall on squatters in forest areas, probably the last remaining areas where squatters had a modicum of freedom and economic independence reminiscent of the earlier decades. All licensees were required to enter into labour contracts with their squatters who cultivated in excess of half an acre,⁶⁷ conditions for the squatters were tightened,⁶⁸ and supervision of forest areas by Labour Department officials to see to it that these measures

⁶⁶Governor Moore - Secretary of State 12-6-44. CO 533 38091/12.

⁶⁷See the following correspondence Labour Officer Kisumu - Labour Commissioner 24-1-45; Conservator of Forest - Labour Commissioner 10-2-45; Acting Labour Commissioner - Labour Officer 7-3-45; Conservator of Forest - Labour Commissioner 13-3-45; and Ag. Labour Commissioner - All Labour Officers 31-3-45; Kenya National Archives (KNA) Labour 9/10.

⁶⁸Ibid.

were being enforced was intensified.⁶⁹ The object was both to control the flow of squatters into forest areas and to limit their numbers, for these areas were becoming havens for those who wished to escape from conscription to avoid working for settler farmers. The policy would also reduce "the amount of money which (could) be made by the squatter off his holding, as compared to his wage".⁷⁰ In short, these measures were designed to achieve the full proletarianisation of squatter labour and, in turn, to eliminate what were now increasingly seen as the deficiencies of the squatting system.⁷¹

Finally, moves were made to control the influx of Africans into the towns and to repatriate the unemployed to the reserves. Municipal by-laws requiring Africans to carry passes were more actively enforced. It was hoped that these measures would offset the imbalance between urban labour oversupply and rural labour shortages and help ameliorate the labour position of settler farmers. Moreover, they were intended to put to rest European complaints that the government was doing

nothing about the native pests who are infesting
Nairobi these days ... the loafers, the pimps,
the touts, who, taking advantage of the influx of
strangers, are reaping an unearned harvest by

⁶⁹ See for instance Resident Labour Inspector's Report for March 1945 Labour Officer Nakuru - Ag. Labour Commissioner 10-4-45 KNA Labour 9/10.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ For an impassioned plea against the inefficiency of the squatter system and the need to change it see editorial in East African Standard, 7-3-45.

means of petty thieving, their share of immoral earnings and other illicit activities.⁷²

Reasons to justify these tough measures were not lacking. Conscript labour was allegedly acceptable to most Africans because elders had "always accepted the principle that the young men should work in a common war effort, and many of them welcomed the introduction of conscription as it enabled them to ensure that the unwilling shared the burden equally with the willing".⁷³ A more subtle version was that conscription was necessary as a result of wartime conditions because there were few economic incentives for people to sell their labour:

In peacetime the stimulus for labour to seek work and to increase output is the desire on the part of the labourer to improve his economic position; in war, when the lack of manufactured goods removes the greater part of that stimulus, some other action must be taken ... In consequence the power to conscript ... provides the necessary incentive to seek voluntary work of the labourer's own choosing.⁷⁴

As we shall see later, this tortuous reasoning provided the rationale for a system of low wages, too.

Conscript labour, however, was neither acceptable to Africans, nor benevolent in its effects. It led to serious dislocations of peasant

⁷²See Sunday Post 15-6-41. Correspondence on this subject, African labour in towns, can be found in KNA file Labour 2/64.

⁷³Governor Moore - Secretary of State 12-6-44. CO 533 38091/12.

⁷⁴Ibid.

agriculture through the withdrawal of large numbers of Africans, especially men, from the reserves, although, of course, women did their best to maintain production as high as possible. In fact, conscription contributed to an outbreak of famine in 1942-43, of which more will be said later. At this juncture suffice it to say that the famine forced the government to capitulate and suspend labour conscription. The governor wrote to the Colonial Office:

Owing to food shortages and the consequent difficulty of ensuring that sufficient food is forthcoming for large batches of labour, it was decided in Executive Council on 18-2-43 to suspend for the time being all compulsory recruitment for essential undertakings throughout the colony.⁷⁵

The suspension was to be short-lived. Pressures from settler and plantation producers were more than the Kenya Government could withstand. The requirements of war production could not be easily disregarded either. Consequently, in June 1943 conscription was resumed once again, initially for sisal,⁷⁶ and was soon extended to the other essential undertakings and private employers.⁷⁷ This about-turn unleashed

⁷⁵Governor - Secretary of State 12-6-44. CO 533 38091/12.

⁷⁶Governor Moore - Secretary of State 2-7-43. CO 533 38091/12.

⁷⁷For sugar see Governor Moore - Secretary of State 2-9-43. CO 533 38091/12 and also see CO minutes 13-11-44, 23-11-44, 25-11-44 and 27-11-44. CO 533 38091/12; for lime burning and flax harvest, see Governor Moore requesting Secretary of State's approval 19-9-43 and the latter's approval 24-9-43. CO 533 38091/12; for rubber, Secretary of State - Governor Moore 18-11-43 and coffee CO minute 8-5-43. CO 533 38091/12.

criticism from a number of humanitarian groups in Britain.⁷⁸ In order to mollify these critics the Secretary of State for the Colonies ordered that conscription should "not be resumed in the case of any undertaking without prior reference to myself", and a number of safeguards against abuse of conscript labour were proposed.⁷⁹ This was nothing more than window-dressing; the Colonial Office was keenly aware of the limits of its ability to regulate conscription in Kenya. In November, 1943, the Secretary of State cabled the governor that "compulsory labour may be approved without prior reference to me".⁸⁰ In return the Kenyan government was asked to abolish the settler-dominated Essential Undertakings Board, and the governor was vested with the sole power to declare what undertakings were essential.⁸¹ Although the abolition of the Essential Undertakings Board did not signal any real change in the immediate position of conscripted workers, it signified a reassertion of colonial state control over the labour system and therefore represented a crack in the edifice of settler power.

⁷⁸See for instance Secretary of Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society - Under-Secretary of State for Colonies 29-7-43 and Secretary, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom - Under-Secretary of State for Colonies 4-8-43. CO 533 38091/12.

⁷⁹For example it was proposed that there should be strict enforcement of recruiting procedures and conscripts should not work beyond the period they were recruited for. Secretary of State - Governor Moore 24-8-43. CO 533 38091/12.

⁸⁰Secretary of State - Governor Moore (and the Governor of Tanganyika) 5-11-43; other telegrams reiterating the same message were sent on 15-11-43 and 18-11-43. CO 533 38091/12. Also see Secretary of State - Governor Moore, 4-5-44. CO 533 38091/12.

⁸¹Governor Moore - Secretary of State, 10-12-43. CO 533 38091/12.

Growth in the Size of the Work Force

It is common wisdom to caution against the accuracy and reliability of colonial statistics, especially for the earlier periods of colonial rule. Such statistics cannot be entirely disregarded, however, if only because there is nothing better in their place; failing complete accuracy we can at least try to seek for indications of the general trends in the course of colonial developments. The following tables demonstrate the overall expansion in the numbers of Kenyans in wage employment during the years of the war.

Table 3.1: Total Number of African Employees Working on Census
Date 1936-45

| Year | Men | Women | Juveniles | Total |
|------|---------|--------|-----------|---------|
| 1936 | 194,172 | 10,904 | 8,767 | 213,844 |
| 1941 | 267,339 | 16,429 | 59,895 | 233,602 |
| 1942 | 281,537 | 14,623 | 51,226 | 347,380 |
| 1943 | 286,793 | 27,465 | 64,288 | 378,546 |
| 1944 | 287,058 | 28,187 | 62,853 | 378,098 |
| 1945 | 294,999 | 28,356 | 55,931 | 379,286 |

Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1950.

able 3.2: Agricultural Employees - African, 1936-45.

| Year | Monthly Paid | | | Daily Paid Casual Labour | | | Resident Labour | | |
|------|--------------|-------|--------|-----------------------------|--------|--------|-----------------|--------|--------|
| | Men | Women | Juven. | Men | Women | Juven. | Men | Women | Juven. |
| 1936 | 154,698 | - | - | 11,178 | 10,904 | 8,768 | - | - | - |
| 1941 | 159,638 | - | 46,972 | 18,151 | 16,422 | 11,145 | 23,325 | - | - |
| 1942 | 106,249 | - | 35,597 | 2,036 | 13,737 | 5,366 | 23,702 | - | - |
| 1943 | 98,010 | - | 35,408 | 1,913 | 9,924 | 3,310 | 26,757 | 16,118 | 16,268 |
| 1944 | 98,169 | - | 36,201 | 1,738 | 9,377 | 2,876 | 34,656 | 15,981 | 15,215 |
| 1945 | 99,424 | 5,802 | 34,487 | 2,133 | 6,593 | 2,525 | 31,930 | 13,524 | 13,144 |

Sources: Labour Department Annual Report, 1950

The overall increase in the number of Africans in wage employment during the war is more than apparent. It can be observed that the number of men in agricultural employment gradually fell so that by 1945 just a little over a third of the male labour force was engaged in agriculture. Undoubtedly this was because many men were called up to join the army, and it is also reasonable to assume that some were absorbed into the growing manufacturing and service industries in the towns. Nevertheless, a trend was set in which agricultural employment was never again to employ more than a third of the African male wage labour force, and not more than half of the total wage labour force.

The number of resident labourers seems to have increased, reaching its wartime peak in 1944. This promised to be the last time that the number of resident labourers would be this high. From over 66,000 resident labourers in 1944 there would be about 44,500 resident labourers

by 1952.⁸² The figures for resident labour in Table 3.2, however, probably underestimate the real strength of the resident labour force, for according to a special labour census conducted in 1945, it was found that there were 101,038 Kikuyu resident labourers and their families on settler farms,⁸³ as compared to a total number of 57,598 resident labourers for 1945 shown in Table 3.2. This is one further indication of the unreliability of statistical data during this period. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to argue that, on the whole, during the war the trend towards the decline of resident labour as a major source of labour was not halted. The expansion in acreage and increasing mechanisation of settler farming certainly made sure of that.

It can also be observed from the two tables that juvenile employment expanded during the war. A juvenile was defined as anybody between the age of puberty and the tax paying age of sixteen; African children, it was maintained were precocious and reached adulthood faster than European children. Such a policy could and did easily lead to abuse of child labour. From Table 3.1 we can see that the numbers of juveniles in employment increased sixfold between 1936 and 1945, or from about 4.1% of the total African wage labour force to about 16% in 1945. To show that child labour had become a permanent feature of the labour scene in Kenya and not merely a seasonal phenomenon, is the fact that the overwhelming majority of such labour was listed under 'monthly paid labour', as in Table 3.2. It is suggestive that 1943, the year in

⁸²See Labour Department Annual Report, 1952.

⁸³See Labour Department, Special Labour Census, 1945, table 16.

which conscription was temporarily suspended, was precisely the year when the highest number of juveniles were employed. Child labour, however, was not restricted to agricultural activities alone. For instance, of the 55,931 juveniles in wage employment in 1945 over 5,000 were not employed in agriculture. In fact the figures of juveniles employed in non-agricultural production were much higher than accounted for in these two tables. There are numerous reports highlighting the employment and abuse of children in the towns, particularly Nairobi.⁸⁴

Finally, it is evident that despite the noticeable increases in the ranks of female wage labour, women were grossly under-represented in wage employment. By 1945 they constituted a mere 7.5% of the total wage labour force, practically half the number of employed juveniles. It is quite revealing that, apart from squatter labour, more women were engaged in daily paid casual labour than in monthly paid labour. The weight of the evidence, therefore, seems to suggest that during the war the women wore the burden of peasant production more than ever before. A number of District Annual Reports indicate that in the Central Province and in the Nyanza region, for example, percentages of male labour away from home at any given time rose to over 50%.⁸⁵ The colonial state paid only scant attention to the labour shortages in the reserves, which, if it may be added, contributed to the 1942-43 food shortages. It is tempting to conclude that the exploitation and marginalisation of women

⁸⁴ See for instance Labour Commissioner - Chief Secretary 6-6-41 KNA Labour 2/64. It was the government's attitude that juvenile labour was absolutely essential for the tea and pyrethrum industries. See Governor Moore - Secretary of State 14-3-43. CO 533 38091/12.

⁸⁵ See for instance Annual Report, Fort Hall District, 1941 and 1942.

were intensified during the war.

In all probability there were more people in wage employment than the official statistics seem to indicate. Generally there were technical difficulties in collecting sufficient and reliable data. In the case of conscript labour, however, it is more than likely that the figures were underestimated for political reasons. According to the following table, conscript labour at its peak never exceeded 23,000.

Table 3.3: Conscript Labour, 1944.

| Item | For the Quarter Ending | | |
|--|------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| | 31 March | 30 June | 30 September |
| Production of essential foodstuffs (including pyrethrum) | - | 998 | 1,770 |
| Civil labour for Urgent Operational work | 1,520 | 1,562 | 1,566 |
| Government and local government work. | 382 | 646 | 1,061 |
| Lime burning | - | 157 | 225 |
| Sisal | 10,981 | 12,141 | 13,213 |
| Sugar | 701 | 1,106 | 1,386 |
| Rubber | - | 354 | 490 |
| Flax | - | - | - |
| Mixed farming | 557 | - | - |
| Number in labour camp or transit | - | 1,039 | 3,207 |
| Total | 14,141 | 18,003 | 22,944 |

Source: Returns of Conscript Labour, Governor Moore - Secretary of State 1944 CO 533 38091/12.

But even if the numbers of conscripts were not alarmingly high, it is conceivable that "the very threat of conscription was sufficient to drive the African on to the white farms".⁸⁶

The figure of the total wage labour force in Kenya would be boosted by several thousands more if Asian workers are included. Again, according to official estimates, there were about 10,000 Asian artisans, and probably a few thousand more in clerical, semi-skilled and unskilled occupations.⁸⁷ Despite such seemingly small numbers, Asian workers were a crucial component of the total wage labour force during the war, largely because of their skills, which were in great demand, not least by the military authorities, since this was a period of major military and naval construction works. In the early years of the war there was a severe shortage of artisans which was accentuated by the fact that large numbers of artisans had returned to India in 1939 before the war broke out.⁸⁸ From March 1942 the government ruled that no Asians could leave the country without the permission of the Director of Manpower, and in the following month the government began registering skilled Asian workers. Finally, in August 1942 the government announced its conscription programme for Indian clerks.⁸⁹ So serious was the shortage of

⁸⁶See article by Mr. Leo Abse reprinted from the Tribune in Kenya Weekly News, 10-11-44.

⁸⁷See Committee of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into working of Defence (Fixing of Wages) Regulations, 1940, appointed on 22-11-43.

⁸⁸See Secretariat Minutes 5-8-40 KNA Labour 9/267.

⁸⁹East African Standard, 21-8-42.

skilled manpower that proposals were made, although not implemented, to bring artisans from India "on agreement for a stated period, after which they would be repatriated at government expense".⁹⁰

Small relief was provided by South African 'works companies', which brought skilled workers.⁹¹ It was not until towards the end of the war, however, that the shortage of skilled manpower was slightly eased. For one thing, military construction projects were all but completed so that the demand for skilled labour from that quarter had dropped considerably. Moreover, thousands of Italian prisoners of war were brought in and some of them were skilled enough to do the jobs formerly performed by Indian artisans. The advantages of using prisoners-of-war as labour were obvious; as prisoners they had no bargaining power over their conditions of service, let alone wages, unlike, in employers' opinion, the 'hot-headed' Asian artisan agitators. The situation changed so much in fact that by the end of 1943 there were reportedly over 2,000 unemployed Indian artisans. This was a welcome development to employers, for it meant that there would be no more "difficulty in finding (skilled) men", and the labour militancy of Indian artisans would be dampened.⁹²

⁹⁰Director of Public Works - Chief Secretary 19-6-40 KNA Labour 9/124.

⁹¹Ibid. By that time there was one South African works company with 300 workers and there were promises from the South African Government that more were to come. This is another example of South Africa trying to spread its tentacles in East Africa. It is not clear who these workers were, whether black or white, but probably the former.

⁹²See Committee of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire Into Working of Defence (Fixing of Wages) Regulations, 1940. I. Spencer, op. cit., mentions that some Italian Prisoners of war were used on settler farms as well for general ploughing and operating combine harvesters.

Paradoxically, therefore, the scourge of unemployment for skilled and semi-skilled workers was making itself felt seriously for the first time during the war. This was only a dress rehearsal of what was to become all too prevalent in the post-war period, and especially after independence; it was an anticipation of the struggle of capital to maintain and expand itself by relegating part of the work force to the reservoir of unemployment and subjugating the rest to the fear of unemployment. Labour productivity, the Labour Commissioner said in a major policy statement in 1946, would improve only when 'the sack' became a genuine threat, that is, "until the conditions of the African are such that he doesn't want to lose his job, or has been put out of work by conditions in the reserve and has become a landless person".⁹³

Unemployment for thousands of unskilled African workers, especially in the urban centres, was, of course, not new. During the war the problem persisted and probably worsened as people drifted from the hunger-stricken reserves or ran away from conscription. In 1941 it was estimated that there were about 6,000 unemployed Africans in Nairobi.⁹⁴ By the end of the war the figure could only have been higher despite official attempts to stem the tide of urban influx.

There are some indications, however, that the war did not simply lead to the expansion of the working class quantitatively, but it also witnessed a continuation in the gradual trend towards stabilisation, especially among the long established enterprises, such as the railways,

⁹³Labour Policy by Mr. Hyde Clarke, the Labour Commissioner, KNA Labour 9/2.

⁹⁴See Sunday Post, 22-6-41.

where for some job categories there was need for skilled labour. In itself increased industrialisation also reinforced the need for skilled labour, which, in turn, required a certain amount of stabilisation. Table 3.4 below gives us some idea of the extent to which labour stabilisation had reached in the railways by the end of the Second World War.

Table 3.4: Sample of Labour Stabilisation in the Kenya Uganda Railway and Harbours, 1945.

| Period at work | Numbers of Employees | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|--------|
| | For KUR&H | | Those under Engineer-in-Charge | |
| | Nos. | % | Nos. | % |
| Less than 6 months | | | 208 | 21.6 |
| Up to a year | 547 | 26.3 | 125 | 13 |
| Between 1-2 years | 426 | 20.5 | | |
| More than 2 years | 1,108 | 53.2 | | |
| 1-5 years | | | 435 | 45.2 |
| 5-10 years | | | 94 | 9.8 |
| 10-15 years | | | 78 | 8 |
| Over 15 years | | | 23 | 2.4 |
| Total | 2,081 | 100.0 | 963 | 100.00 |

Source: Worked out from Report of Committee of Enquiry into Labour Unrest at Mombasa (the Phillips Report), 1945.

It is tempting to argue that the figures in this table assume added significance when it is borne in mind that they are figures mostly of workers who belonged to the lowest income groups. It might

also be added that notwithstanding its carefully nurtured image and self-proclaimed reputation as a relatively enlightened employer, the railway can generally be taken as representative of the big employers in the towns whose policies were basically the same. However, on the basis of this data alone we must be careful not to generalise too broadly. What is needed is to look closely at the working and living conditions in the various centres of employment in order to make tentative assessment of the extent to which the trend towards labour stabilisation proceeded during the war.

Living and Working Conditions

In examining the actual living and working conditions of the African population at large, and the working class in particular, one is struck by the persistence of hardships and poverty. Wages did not keep pace with the sharp rises in the cost of living, housing remained in very short supply and of very poor quality, and there were severe shortages of goods so that the black market flourished, thereby straining the meagre resources of the workers even further. Then there was the food shortage of 1942-43, which was perhaps the most tragic economic crisis of the war years in Kenya. The East African Production and Supply Council called it "the greatest economic crisis of the war".⁹⁵

There was a wide divergence of opinion at the time as to what the causes of the food shortage were. In evidence submitted to the Food Shortage Commission of Inquiry, 1943, the settlers blamed the shortage

⁹⁵Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 241.

on the lack of "encouragement given to European farmers to produce maize",⁹⁶ and a similar "lack of machinery and spare parts ... which reduced the production of European farms".⁹⁷ They also pointed to the fact that more maize was retained by farmers and fed to livestock other than sold.⁹⁸ Some blamed the failure of the short rains, as well as the prolonged heavy rains in 1942.⁹⁹ According to the Maize Controller, the food shortage was essentially an outcome of the fact that there had been heavy buying and selling of maize prior to the institution of Maize Control in mid-1942 because of rumours "that on the introduction of Control the price to be paid for the stocks in the hands of traders and millers might be less than that at which they had bought the maize".¹⁰⁰ It was further alleged that some producers did not deliver their maize to Maize Control because higher prices could be obtained elsewhere.¹⁰¹ This was more a criticism of the way in which the Control functioned than a convincing explanation of the causes of the food shortage for, as the commission noted "the maize would still be in the colony and would be bound to be consumed sooner or later and on this account couldn't have had any effect in helping to create a shortage of

⁹⁶Food Shortage Commission of Enquiry Report, p. 23.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 29.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 24.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 29.

maize".¹⁰² The commission concluded, correctly: "neither each of the above reasons, nor the cumulative effect of them all, account for the serious shortage of maize".¹⁰³

The commission's own explanation of the food shortage, however, also left a lot to be desired. It offered generalities which simply begged more questions. "The shortage", the commission stated,

was due to the fact that the rate of consumption increased to such a degree that it overtook and ultimately surpassed actual production, and this factor was not appreciated owing to the lack of sufficient information and statistics regarding the consuming requirements of the Colony. This shortage was inevitable, irrespective of the failure of the short rains; the failure of these rains made matters worse.¹⁰⁴

Some Africans also submitted evidence to the commission and the reasons they gave for the food shortage were generally closer to the truth. It was certainly the case, as most of them emphasised, that the reserves had been drained of manpower as a result of conscription and large numbers of men joining the armed forces and taking up employment in the towns, so that cultivation and production of foodstuffs in the reserves was left to old men and the womenfolk¹⁰⁵ who despite all their

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 29.

efforts could not meet the combined heavy demands of rural subsistence and 'contribution' to the war effort. They stressed, too, that the low prices paid for African-grown maize discouraged many Africans from growing surplus maize for the market.¹⁰⁶ Finally, in their view the food shortage was the outcome of increased cash crop production at the expense of food cultivation.¹⁰⁷

The food shortage was a grim but eloquent testimony to the harsh conditions generated by the war, and an outcome of the cumulative effects of discriminatory agricultural and production policies. Not surprisingly, the shortage affected the various segments of Kenyan society differently. "We are", the commission conceded, "left in no doubt that although there has been a shortage in some commodities for several months, the non-natives of Kenya have been no more than inconvenienced".¹⁰⁸

The same could not be said for the rest of the population. On the contrary, a considerable number of Africans died from starvation, especially in the Central and Nyanza Provinces, which were the most affected areas, and tens of thousands more gauntly watched their health deteriorate.¹⁰⁹ As already noted, the government responded by suspending conscription temporarily, and it also set up a Reserve Foodstuffs

¹⁰⁶ For example, "in the Kericho area the 1942 crop of native-grown maize was only half the 1941 crop, due entirely to the natives being discouraged on account of the low prices they had received in 1941". *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Committee which was empowered with purchasing and distributing food supplies to the reserves. But this was too little, too late. Nonetheless, the crisis was the sombre inspiration from which the post-war reconstruction of agriculture, in terms of giving official support to peasant farming, sprang.

For the conscripted, squatter and urban workers, the food shortage only served to make an already intolerable situation devastatingly worse. The shortage immediately led to the extension and tightening of rationing schemes. By the Defence (Employees' Maize Ration) Regulations, February 1943, it was made an offence for any employer to issue a ration of maize meal in excess of 1½ lb. per day to any employee. Moreover, it was clearly stipulated that the unemployed and families of workers were not entitled to rations. On some settler estates posho rations were reduced from 2 lb. to 1 lb. per day.¹¹⁰ Conscripted labour probably had the worst deal, for their posho ration was reduced to ½ lb. per day, and their ration scale of animal protein consisted of a weekly issue of 6 oz. of biltong (a form of dried meat), or 12 oz. of dried fish for those engaged in 'heavy labour', and 4 oz. of biltong or 8 oz. of dried fish for 'light labour'.¹¹¹

In the towns employers became more strict and, like the Railway Administration in Mombasa, switched from giving rations of posho

¹¹⁰ Director of Intelligence and Security - Chief Secretary 3-11-42
KNA Labour 9/59.

¹¹¹ Circular from Secretariat Nairobi - all Provincial Commissioners and major employers and military authorities 20-4-44 KNA Labour 9/59. Also see Governor Moore - Secretary of State 2-9-43
CO 533 526 38091/12.

monthly to giving them daily, to the discontent and inconvenience of the workers because daily rations entailed the arduous task of standing in long queues daily, and more critically, it effectively ruled out having enough food for guests, let alone to support a family.¹¹² Indeed, it had become government policy to repatriate thousands of unemployed men, wives and children of workers forcefully from towns and squatter farms to the reserves, where, in some cases, the food shortage was even more severe. It was estimated, for instance, that in 1943 about 10,000 people, 6,000 of whom were women and children, were repatriated from Nairobi alone.¹¹³ Once again, colonial capitalism was demonstrating its tendency to maintain and reproduce itself by exploiting and transferring the costs of reproducing the labour force to the peasant sectors.

Predictably Nairobi was the scene of the most far-reaching urban rationing scheme for Africans. In March 1943 a coupons system was introduced replacing the previous arrangement of rationing through employers, that is, whereby employers would give their workers posho as part of their remuneration. The new scheme was organised by the Nairobi Commodity Distribution Board and carried out by the Municipality Affairs Officer assisted by the Nairobi Labour Officer. It covered posho, wheat flour, bread and rice. Through this scheme Africans currently in employment drew coupons to buy one day's ration at a number

¹¹²See Director of Intelligence and Security - Chief Secretary, 3-5-43 KNA Labour 9/59.

¹¹³Food Shortage Commission of Enquiry Report, op. cit., p. 61.

of registered shops scattered throughout the town. This meant that even if an unemployed person had money it was virtually impossible for him or her to buy food. Significantly the ration card was fixed at the back of each worker's kipande. Although never proved, there were allegations that Indian merchants would sign "the kipandes of 'loafers' at fees from 5/- to 10/- indicating that the bearers (were) in employment".¹¹⁴ Such charges that they were profiteering from and sabotaging the rationing scheme unleashed a crescendo of angry letters from Indians to the press. The whole episode frayed the wartime Euro-Indian truce and threatened to rekindle the old fires of mutual antagonism and suspicion.¹¹⁵

In 1945 the Report of Committee of Inquiry Into Labour Unrest at Mombasa, also known as the Phillips Report, concluded that "there is reason to believe that the African's normal diet today is inferior in nutritive value to that which was customary a generation or two ago", and warned that under the "present conditions, ravaged by disease, often undernourished and with their moral qualities being undermined, a considerable proportion of the African population is likely to decline in effectiveness as a labour force".¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴East African Standard, 3-3-43 and 18-3-43. Europeans had their own coupons and shops to use.

¹¹⁵See correspondence EAS, 11-3-43 and correspondence in the Indian edited Kenya Daily Mail and leader article, 17-3-43. The Indian Association also protested, and Indian political representatives like A.B. Patel raised the issue in the Legislative Council. See KNA Labour 2/30.

¹¹⁶Phillips Report, op. cit.

Not surprisingly, the shortage of food and goods provided ammunition for the advocates of a low wage economy. In the words of the governor: "an increase of wages to attract labour at this juncture would have no practical effect, since it is impossible to provide East Africa with adequate supplies of consumption goods of the kind on which the African would normally spend his wages".¹¹⁷ One commission of inquiry after another harped on the theme that cash wages should remain static and any increases should be paid in kind. This, it was argued, would be the only way to avoid fueling inflationary pressures from which the workers themselves would suffer most.¹¹⁸ The business community was in agreement with this kind of reasoning. As the President of the Nairobi Chamber of Commerce put it: "the only method by which the maintenance of (the worker) ... can be achieved is, in the main, by ensuring that the employee shall get his share of the available foodstuffs in kind."¹¹⁹

Interestingly enough though, Europeans were exempted from payment in kind, and, rather characteristically, racial stereotypes were invoked to justify it:

the simpler tastes of Arabs and Africans facilitate the grant of relief in kind ... but the practical difficulties of so doing in relation to

¹¹⁷Governor Moore - Secretary of State, 19-9-43 CO 533 38091/12. See minute by Orde-Browne, the Labour Adviser to the Secretary of State, 10-5-43 CO 533 38091/12.

¹¹⁸President, Nairobi Chamber of Commerce - Chairman, Trade Disputes Tribunal, 30-10-42 KNA Labour 2/14.

¹¹⁹Phillips Report, op. cit., pp. 67-8.

European and Asian requirements were found to be so great that we've later had to recommend cash relief in the case of these two races.¹²⁰

The inclusion of Asians in this pronouncement was designed to avert criticism that the exemption was overtly racist. Asian workers, however, neither benefited from this nor were they impressed, as it will be shown later. It will also be demonstrated that African workers protested vehemently against such discrimination in general, and payment in kind, in particular, especially since the ration scales were so low.

It is difficult to make an accurate assessment of the rise in the cost of living between 1939 and 1945. One tribunal at the end of 1942 estimated that the prices of basic goods had risen by over 40% since 1939. The actual rate of increase may have been higher, for the tribunal based its calculations on controlled prices,¹²¹ and did not take into account the black market prices which became so pervasive as a result of the shortages. In 1945 the Phillips Report pointed out that between 1942 and 1944 the landed value of imported cloth had increased by approximately 100%, so that workers were spending much more than ever to provide themselves and their families with the barest necessities of clothing.¹²²

¹²⁰The statement was made by the General Manager of the KUR & H and quoted by the Phillips Report.

¹²¹V.S. Cooke member of Trade Disputes Tribunal, 8-11-42 KNA Labour 2/14.

¹²²The report recommended amendment of the customs tariff.

Meanwhile, wages failed to keep pace with the spiralling cost of living. In fact, at least until 1942, the basic wage was almost the same as in 1939.¹²³ The signing on rate for unskilled workers for a thirty-day ticket was between Shs. 8/- and Shs. 12/- in 1940-1, and rose to Shs. 10/- to Shs. 16/- by 1945, plus rations, war bonus or cost of living and housing allowances, whenever these were provided, which was not always the case. Altogether the total remuneration for the vast majority of workers was less than Shs. 40/- per month until 1945, which was far below the expenditure required even for an individual worker to survive, as the trade unions did not cease to point out. The minimum wage, the first legal minimum of its kind in Kenya, was set at 28/- per ticket if housing and food were not provided, or a cash payment of Shs. 18/- if these were provided.¹²⁴ The proclamation of a legal minimum wage marked an advance over previous wage policy, but not only was the minimum set at an artificially low level, it actually became the wage rate offered by many employers. Others did not follow it at all and there was little the government could do to enforce it, especially during the war.

Wage rates in rural areas were considerably lower. By 1945 the

¹²³The question of wages was a very sensitive one and the subject of a number of tribunals and inquiries. See Colonial Office Minutes on wages in Kenya, 13-11-42, 24-11-42, 25-11-42, 7-12-42 and Secretary of State - Governor Moore 19-12-42 CO 533 526 38091/6. Also see the following papers - EAS 19-9-42, 26-10-42, 29-10-42, 30-10-42, 30-11-42; Mombasa Times 17-10-42 and 19-10-42; and Kenya Weekly News 13-10-42.

¹²⁴See Minimum Wage (Nairobi Advisory Board) Rules, 1943 and Kenya Government Gazette, 25 April, 1944.

government was paying its rural workers an average of Shs. 14/- per thirty-day ticket. Conscript labour was paid between Shs. 8/- and Shs. 10/- for 'light work' and Shs. 14/- for heavy work. Wages on some settler farms were even less than this. The income of squatters actually fell on the whole as their conditions of service deteriorated. Their average wage earnings were Shs. 96/- per year; previously this had been more than made up for by earnings from their holdings.¹²⁵

Wages offered by the military authorities provoked spirited attacks from settler farmers and other employers because they were reputedly high so that they tended to push the average wage rates to intolerable levels.¹²⁶ The fact of the matter, however, is that apart from the askaris, those in the East African Military Labour Service and the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps, earned wages almost equal to those paid to workers in civil employment. The askaris were not so much better off. "The East African pioneers were the lowest paid, but their rate of Shs. 32/- per month compared favourably with Kenya wages. From this rate, however, there were uniform upkeep and expenses and the generally high cost of beer and local cinemas to be deducted."¹²⁷ Askaris complained of low wages as well as discriminatory treatment in food,

¹²⁵ See Labour Officer Nakuru - Ag. Labour Commissioners, 10-4-45 KNA Labour 9/10.

¹²⁶ Director of Public Works - Chief Secretary, 6-6-40 KNA Labour 9/124. Also see Mombasa Times 11, 12 and 26 September, 1942.

¹²⁷ Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 232.

medical facilities, and general freedom of movement.¹²⁸

The position of Indian artisans' wages clearly shows that the failure of wages to keep pace with rises in the cost of living was not a dubious distinction that belonged to the masses of unskilled workers. There is no question that artisans' wages rose quite remarkably at the beginning of the war, although they generally fell short of the overall increase in the cost of living.¹²⁹ The government passed regulations in 1941 setting the wages of Asian artisans; the minima ranged from 72 cts. to 85 cts. per hour and the maxima from Sh. 1/- to Sh. 1/25. For a time the artisans made themselves heard, if not actually heeded, in their demands for the payment of maximum rates of wages.¹³⁰ But by the end of the war any wage advances that may have been made had been eroded. The 1942 demand, for instance, by railway artisans that they should all be placed on permanent staff at Shs. 260/- p.m. remained unmet.¹³¹ Instead, for the first time the government decided to introduce a form of kipande for skilled Asian workers which would have required them to be graded and possess certificates of service indicating the man's wages

¹²⁸Shiroya, "The Impact of World War II on Kenya ...", pp.59-61.

¹²⁹For details see 'Meeting on Asian Artisans: Control of Wages for Casual Employment and Supply to Meet Emergency', held on 22-6-40 and attended by government officials and representatives of major employers. KNA Labour 9/124.

¹³⁰Some companies gave increments of up to 25% of pre-war rates. See Memorandum Asian Artisans Staff of KUR & H demanding similar wage increase from the Railway Administration. KNA Labour 9/124.

¹³¹See Chief Mechanical Engineer - Ag. Labour Commissioner, 9-6-42 KNA Labour 9/124.

and name of his employer.¹³²

One of the most pertinent features of the wartime wage structure is that it continued to be based on the needs of a single man and ignored his family responsibilities. At no time during the war was it seriously planned in government and employer circles to re-structure the system. To base wages on a recognition of workers' family responsibilities, the General Manager of the Railway Administration claimed, rather unconvincingly, would mean that "there would in fact be no unmarried in industrial employment ... Any substantial increase in monetary reward will inevitably be dissipated in further polygamy."¹³³

In 1945 the Phillips Report offered strong criticism, the first of its kind by a commission of inquiry, against the system of low wages:

Progress towards the establishment of a permanent labour force, consisting of married men whose household economy is based entirely on wage-earning, has now advanced to a point at which its continuance can no longer be reconciled with a wage system consistent only with the employment of raw labourers who are temporary migrants from rural areas ...¹³⁴

Even the East African Standard was critical of the prevailing low wages.

"In East Africa", the paper wrote, "we've been mistakenly discouraging the development of a working class wholly dependent upon wages as

¹³²See Minutes of Secretariat meeting, 6-11-42, KNA Labour 9/124.

¹³³Quoted in Phillips Report, op. cit.

¹³⁴Phillips Report, p. 66.

distinct from employing wage-earning members of land-owning classes at wages well below the family living costs of the employee".¹³⁵ Both the Phillips Report and the East African Standard were arguing for the need to stabilise labour by paying wages based on the needs of a worker and his family. It would be years before the state and certain employers would come to accept the desirability of a higher wage system. In the meantime peasant production continued to subsidise production in the capitalist sphere, and women subsidised their husbands' low wages.

Housing was another area of great concern to workers, particularly those in the towns. The government was quick to express concern but slow to take concrete action to improve the housing situation. Many employers turned a blind eye to the problem, while others did not even bother to pay housing allowances, despite stipulations by the Employment of Servants Ordinance that they should either provide free quarters or housing allowance in lieu. It was difficult to enforce these regulations partly because there were other regulations in the Code of Regulations which, "while laying down that free quarters or an appropriate house allowance in lieu, shall be provided for higher grade members of the (work force), make no mention of the lower ranks".¹³⁶ This legal loophole provided a convenient escape for many employers. The war of course could always be used as an excuse to postpone taking action on the housing question.

¹³⁵East African Standard, 7-3-45.

¹³⁶Lord Moyne - Governor of Kenya, 17-12-41 CO 533 526 38091/6.

In 1940 a housing survey in Mombasa came up with the startling recommendation that "no general municipal housing scheme for the native population would be justified at present".¹³⁷ There was a tendency among government officials and employers to blame the shortage on the influx of casual workers and the unemployed, which bred the belief that the problem would only be solved "by a reduction in the number of natives coming into Mombasa to seek casual work".¹³⁸ In Nairobi, the Labour Commissioner pleaded: "the government should take steps to prevent natives from becoming town dwellers".¹³⁹ Not surprisingly, the government was not prepared to spend more than £10,000 in Mombasa and £20,000 in Nairobi for the construction of African housing during the war.¹⁴⁰

The shortage of housing inevitably led to steep rises in rents, so that, as the Phillips Report put it mildly, "rent at the current rates presents a quite disproportionate item in the monthly expenditure of ... workers".¹⁴¹ It was virtually impossible to institute any measures of rent control, and there was little the workers could do against the landlords; lodging complaints against them was certainly out of the question, if only because it was an expensive venture and could lead to

¹³⁷ This decision found some sympathy at the Colonial Office see Ibid.

¹³⁸ Governor Moore - Secretary of State 30-9-41. CO 533 526 38091/6.

¹³⁹ Labour Commissioner - Chief Secretary 6-6-41 and other correspondence on labour in towns see KNA Labour 2/64.

¹⁴⁰ Governor Moore - Secretary of State 30-9-41 op. cit.

¹⁴¹ Phillips Report, op. cit., p. 87.

eviction.¹⁴²

Overcrowding was therefore endemic, with all the social and health hazards that this implied. As the Weller Report on housing for government employees in Nairobi lamented:

The general picture reminded me strongly of those very pictures and descriptions of the worst of the Japanese prisoner of war camps ... This camp [African Lines, Machakos Road, Nairobi] contains probably more than 1,000 men, women and children. It boasts of one slow running standard pipe. This pipe is available six hours out of 24. This camp further boasts of 2 latrines to accomodate 4 persons each and these in a state which beggars description.¹⁴³

Many others had no accomodation at all and would sleep out in the open and on shop verandahs, despite constant police harassment.¹⁴⁴

It would not be pressing too far, therefore, to argue that with such deplorable conditions - poor housing, low wages, food shortages - the long-term costs of maintaining and reproducing the working class were still borne by the reserves, hence the persistence of labour migrancy. In the urban centres prostitution continued to play its role of helping to maintain many workers by not only meeting their sexual needs, but

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 88. A deposit of Shs. 20/- was required to start proceedings and, moreover, it was a lengthy process which was a handicap in itself because a worker could not easily take time off from work.

¹⁴³See Committee Appointed to Examine African Housing for Government Employees in Nairobi, 30-5-42, no. B/HO 2/9/1/1/28. Files in KNA Labour Deposit 3 are mostly devoted to living conditions such as housing and the urgency of the problem. See for instance, Labour 3/3. Also see EAS on the housing problem, 8-8-41.

¹⁴⁴Governor Moore - Secretary of State, 30-9-41, op. cit.

also food and accomodation. It is evident that the low wages forced more and more workers to come to rely on the system of credit trade and debt with shopkeepers, most of whom were Indian.¹⁴⁵ Indebtedness was an affliction easier acquired than discarded; it became a source of great hardship; one of whose effects was to poison relations between Africans and Indians in the country. There also developed a system called chango whereby two or more workers would pool their wages each month and each member of the group would draw the total amount in his turn.¹⁴⁶

All these were attempts by the working class to survive in the face of great odds, and they are signs that a distinctive working class culture was evolving. In the final analysis, labour's only recourse is combination against capital, and this occurred in Kenya too, and was a sign of genuine class formation.

LABOUR PROTESTS AND UNIONISATION

The six years of World War II witnessed labour unrest of unprecedented proportions in Kenya. On the one hand, there was the re-emergence of desertions as a major form of labour protest, especially among conscripted workers, and, on the other, workers resorted to strikes on a

¹⁴⁵A number of commissions of inquiry recommended that the credit system be brought to an end. See for example, President Trade Disputes Tribunal, 9-11-42, KNA Labour 2/14 and the Phillips Report, op. cit.

¹⁴⁶Phillips Report, ibid., p. 73.

scale hitherto unknown in Kenya, and wielded the strike weapon with fierce tenacity despite the government's repressive labour policies. Indeed, the seeds of trade unionism sown in the 1920s and 1930s firmly began to take roots.

Desertions

Conscription was extremely unpopular in the country, so much in fact that

it caused men to leave their homes and hide in fear of a return to the horrors of the 1914-18 carrier corps ... District commissioners throughout the colony reported the general dislike of civil conscription, particularly for work on the sisal estates ... Resistance took the traditional form of desertion. For instance, every year between 1942 and 1945 the district commissioner in Kitui remarked on the dislike of conscription for work on the Thika sisal estates. By 1943 P.S. Osborne, the then district commissioner was contemplating the creation of a small force expressly hired to search for deserters. 'The unpopularity of conscript labour is so evident', he wrote, 'that some deserters have been arrested and rearrested two and three times without in any way damping their intention to desert a fourth time'. The following year this special force was created ...¹⁴⁷

The actual extent of desertions among civil conscripts can be gauged from the quarterly returns of conscript labour sent by the governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Under the category of 'discharges' these returns indicate the numbers of those who had deserted by the end of each quarter. "It is alarming", a Colonial Office

¹⁴⁷ Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 243.

official minuted, "that the number of desertions was as much as 11% of the total engagements during the quarter" ending 30th September, 1944.¹⁴⁸

Desertions were also widespread among soldiers. At one time there were as many as 15,000 who were listed as having 'overstayed' their leave, that is, deserted.¹⁴⁹ The Director of Intelligence and Security kept almost a daily record of desertions, strikes and labour unrest, among other things, and the following entry on Nakuru is a typical one and demonstrates the scope and effects of desertions among soldiers and labour conscripted for military works:

24 soldiers deserted last night and they haven't been traced; so far 50 desertions have occur this month ... production of military material has been reduced by half accordingly.¹⁵⁰

Under the Employment of Servants Ordinance deserters were not supposed to be prosecuted unless a sworn complaint had been made by the employer within the prescribed period of 14 days after the latter became aware of the offence or alleged offence. Nevertheless prosecutions were fairly common irrespective of whether the above conditions had been met or not. In fact it was sufficient for deserters to be prosecuted or returned to their former employers as long as it could be proved that they were engaged in essential work which covered most undertakings.

¹⁴⁸CO minute 7-11-44. Also see 'Returns of Conscript Labour', CO 533 38091/12.

¹⁴⁹Shiroya, "The Impact of World War II on Kenya ...", p. 36.

¹⁵⁰Director of Intelligence and Security - Chief Secretary
13-12-42 KNA Labour 9/59.

Meanwhile, despite frequent allegations of abuses, by 1943 there had still not been a single employer convicted under the Defence (African Labour for Essential Undertakings) Regulations, supposedly enacted to protect conscripted workers.¹⁵¹

In many ways the wartime desertions were not very different in their objectives and forms of organisation from the desertions of the earlier decades discussed in the last chapter. The desertions were invariably instigated by harsh working conditions for conscript labour: heavy work, inadequate rations, brutal treatment, paltry wages, and so on. This would be the last time that desertions would constitute a major form of protest by an incipient working class, except for a brief resurgence of desertions during the emergency in the early fifties, as it will be shown. In this context, it might be argued that the Second World War marked a transition from the phase of primitive colonial accumulation of the first four decades of colonial rule, to a latter phase of colonial capitalism. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that the last major drama of labour's struggles against colonial capital taking the form of desertions should have been played out during this period.

Strikes

Strikes were widespread among all groups of workers, from conscript labourers, soldiers and squatters to urban workers. The strike wave broke loose particularly from 1942 and lasted until the end of the war. The

¹⁵¹ See for instance GM Rennie - Seel 5-3-43, op. cit., on the prosecution of 20 deserters who had been employed by an Indian contractor engaged in essential work.

available information on strikes in Kenya during the war is sufficient to form the basis of an extended chapter on its own. Therefore, in this section we can only attempt to highlight the more salient features of the use of strike action by Kenyan workers and what they accomplished.

Examples of strikes by conscript workers are numerous. In July, 1942, for instance, some 200 conscript workers working at a sisal factory at Gazi "left work in protest against too much work and marched en masse to Mombasa".¹⁵² Work on sisal estates seems to have been extremely unpopular and the cause of one strike after another. The following September all 700 conscript workers on an aerodrome in Kisumu went on strike over posho rations, lack of proper drinking water in the area and the non-payment of wages during sickness.¹⁵³ Other conscript workers were known to go on strike if not discharged after the expiry of their contracts and for increased wages.¹⁵⁴ The government and the employers took this problem seriously but more often than not they did not meet the demands of conscript workers; the ring leaders were usually picked up and sent elsewhere and the rest persuaded to return to work by labour officers. In a number of cases the striking conscripts deserted rather than return to work; the government, of course, could always find replacements by conscripting more people. Thus although they were strategic to the wartime economy, conscript workers were

¹⁵² Makhan Singh, History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952, EAPH, 1969, p. 112.

¹⁵³ Labour Officer - Labour Commissioner, 10-9-42 KNA Labour 9/59.

¹⁵⁴ Director of Intelligence and Security - Chief Secretary 3-11-42 KNA Labour 9/59.

handicapped by the very nature of their employment; they were temporary workers and unorganised, so that their strikes tended to be localised incidents which employers and the colonial state could contain.

The military forces were not immune from the show of discontent in the form of riots. In 1940 there was a riot at Garba Tula among the Pioneer Corps "in which seventy pioneers were injured and one killed and which was put down by the K.A.R."¹⁵⁵ Poor conditions of service seem to have been at the root of the incident, which was by no means an isolated one. At Moyale, members of the Pioneer Corps staged another strike; they refused to dig ditches, clear bushes and build roads claiming that they had been recruited to be askaris to fight. The military authorities used Nyasaland soldiers to break the strike after K.A.R. soldiers from Kenya had refused. In the event many striking soldiers were killed.¹⁵⁶ In his interviews with ex-askaris Shiroya was told that on several more occasions when conditions were 'unbearable and intolerable' some Kenyan soldiers planned rebellion against their British officers but what usually held them back was the lack of co-ordination among the askaris in the army, navy and air-force. In fact, askaris were not allowed to assemble in large unauthorised groups, and most of the time they were without their weapons and their British officers would not even let them "learn how to repair or clean their own guns", for fear of what the askaris might do. Moreover there was always the difficulty of how they would get home from the Middle East or

¹⁵⁵See Clayton and Savage, *op. cit.*, p. 232. Also see EAS, 17-1-40 and Ag. Governor - Secretary of State 9-1-40 CO 820/37.

¹⁵⁶See Shiroya, "The Impact of World War II on Kenya ...", p. 67.

the Far East if their rebellion succeeded. Not a few were deterred by the ruthlessness with which the British handled the strikes among the Pioneer Corps. Towards the end of the war anti-British songs had become enormously popular among the askaris, and as we shall try to show in the following chapter, the ex-askaris were later to play a critical role in the nationalist offensive of the post-war era.¹⁵⁷

During the war, squatters also became acutely aware of their exploitation and deprivation as a class. The more they became proletarianised the more they adopted explicitly working class forms of protest, among which was the strike weapon and refusal to work. To quote one source on the subject:

Administrative reports and occasional African evidence alike commented 'that the normal resident native labourer is less advanced than his brother in the Reserve'. Rumours of large-scale European settlement planned for the post-war period led to unrest and refusals to work among squatters in 1944. The grave consequences of these pressures and frustrations were to be seen in the open resistance to follow in the next few years.¹⁵⁸

In the post-war period squatters were to form one of the main supports of the Mau Mau struggle.

The most sustained use of strike action was to be found among workers in the urban centres. The strikes were the result of a complex set of factors, some emanating from the socio-economic hardships

¹⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 65-67.

¹⁵⁸Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 246.

generally prevailing in the country and in the towns particularly and others from specific conditions of work places, and, more often than not, strikes were products of a combination of the two sets of factors and their cumulative effects.

From the detailed reports of the Director of Intelligence and Security, Annual Reports, Labour Department reports and reports by district labour officers, it is abundantly clear that scores of strikes erupted in Nairobi, Mombasa and other towns after the food ration scales had been reduced in 1942 and 1943, and that until 1945 urban workers continued agitating against food and consumer shortages. Coupled with that, there were strikes which broke out because of the acute housing shortages and the appalling living conditions. These were problems which exercised the minds of unskilled and very lowly paid workers and the skilled and relatively better paid Indian artisans alike.¹⁵⁹ There are other examples of strikes taking place because of intolerable war-time conditions. In August, 1941 all taxi-drivers in Mombasa went out on strike in protest against 'increasing hooliganism' on the part of some of the military and naval personnel who gave them trouble and against lack of police protection. The following month a similar strike broke out in Nairobi. Both strikes ended only after the necessary assurances were given by the authorities.¹⁶⁰ Asian workers on their part waged a successful campaign, which included the threat of strike

¹⁵⁹On strikes and related matters see files in KNA Deposit Lab 2, Lab 3, Lab 5, and Lab 9.

¹⁶⁰See Singh, History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement, p. 108. Also see East African Standard, 9-9-41.

action and a mass demonstration held on 8th November, 1942, against proposals to introduce a form of kipande for them. The regulations were suspended "until further consideration" just four days before they were supposed to be implemented.¹⁶¹ Nothing much was heard of them again.

The low wage structure was, of course, a universal source of worker's protest and agitation in Kenya during the war. The year 1942 was particularly memorable. In October African railway workers in Mombasa went out on strike in demand for higher wages. The strike only came to an end after the railway administration had agreed to the appointment of a Trades Disputes Tribunal which recommended a general wage increase. The implementation of the tribunal's recommendations ignited other workers in Mombasa, and like fire in the harmattan, strikes spread all over the town, including government employees and only ended when assurances were given that their demands would also be met in accordance with the tribunal's recommendations. The tribunal awarded an increase of Shs. 5/- in the basic wage thus raising it from Shs. 23/- to Shs. 28/-, and another Shs. 5/- was added over and above this minimum for railway workers in their cost of living allowance, which in effect meant that the workers were awarded an overall increase of Shs. 10/- per month. This was more than a modest success for the strikers although the wage increase fell far short of their original demands.¹⁶²

By late October the strike wave had reached Nairobi and other parts of Kenya. It might be useful at this juncture to discuss briefly how

¹⁶¹Singh, ibid., p. 115.

¹⁶²See Trades Disputes Tribunal Award, 1942. KNA Labour 2.

information and news about strikes were communicated from one place to another, for that gives us some insight into the nature of workers' organisation during this period and some of the problems they faced organisationally. In the absence of a well organised nation-wide trade union network and a general lack of channels of communication, either through the pro-settler media or some other independent medium, the railway line virtually became the lifeblood linking coastal and upcountry workers, through which strike news was communicated and coordinated. This might explain why railway workers played such a key role in workers' struggles in Kenya at the time; numerically large and placed in a major industry of strategic importance, railway workers managed, through their own strikes, to pull other workers from the possible morass of sporadic and localised strike incidents, from time to time.¹⁶³ This however could not be a complete substitute for an extensive and efficiently organised trade union apparatus, hence the lack of a nation-wide general strike during these and the following years.

When the strike wave spread to Nairobi many employers in the town were adamantly opposed to applying the Mombasa award which they considered rather extravagant. In the end the tribunal was invited to sit in Nairobi and make an award specifically for Nairobi. Employers were careful enough to have one of their representatives added to the tribunal as a member. Nairobi workers, to their bitter disappointment, were awarded an overall increase of merely Shs. 6/50 and, worse still, in kind and not in cash.¹⁶⁴ The strikes continued throughout the town and gathered

¹⁶³See KNA Labour 9/59 for details.

¹⁶⁴See Trades Disputes Tribunal Nairobi Award, 1942, KNA Labour 2.

a new ferocity; over 2,000 railway workers downed their tools and many more workers from small firms who had so far watched from the side joined in. The threat of a general strike in Nairobi grew.¹⁶⁵ In time-honoured fashion the colonial state invoked its punitive sanctions to end the strike; through arrests and police repression many workers returned to work. Others stopped striking when threatened with dismissal by their employers, although the Nairobi Chamber of Commerce prevailed upon its members to abide by the award and pay more if they could.¹⁶⁶

Throughout 1943 and 1944 sporadic strikes broke out in Nairobi and Mombasa involving both large and small firms. It is difficult to determine with any degree of accuracy the number of man-days lost because of the strikes since there are no reliable statistics on the subject. However, it is reasonable to assume that both government and employers felt the pressure and were forced to realise that things could not go on as before. Apart from wages the strikes were over other conditions of service, such as long working hours, lack of workmen's compensation, lack of provisions for sick leave with pay or social security benefits like pension schemes, unfair dismissals and highhanded attitude by employers, including racial insults. Skilled and clerical workers demanded permanent employment and an end to casual labour, differential pay among the races and agitated for equal pay for equal work.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵Labour Commissioner - Ag. Chief Secretary, 22-10-42 KNA Labour 2/14.

¹⁶⁶East African Standard, 19-11-42.

¹⁶⁷Director of Intelligence and Security - Chief Secretary 10-2-42 KNA Labour 2/14.

The year 1945 saw another spate of strikes in Mombasa and Nairobi, and there was a threat of a general strike which was narrowly averted in the former town. There is some evidence to indicate that Kenyan workers were strongly influenced by news of the general strike in Uganda, which spread along the railway line and affected railway employees in the big towns. In Nairobi strike notices were put up in African residential areas calling for a strike on 1st February. The situation in Mombasa was even more tense. The Railway African Staff Union presented demands to the railway administration for an increase in basic wages and war bonus, which the latter rejected. The railway workers and others braced themselves for a general strike. The situation looked so ominous that the government intervened; the Provincial Commissioner and the Labour Commissioner arranged for two chiefs from Nyanza to come to Mombasa and address workers and dissuade them from striking. At the first meeting there gathered 2,000 angry and hostile workers, who

abused the chiefs and government bitterly. They refused to listen to the chiefs when they appealed to the meeting on the grounds that a strike would harm the war effort. A young Mkamba addressed the meeting and was approved by a large number present. He said that they would strike on 2nd April, and if necessary die, in the same way as their compatriots had died in Burma. Chiefs were accused of being spies and the government of cheating all natives ... ¹⁶⁸

Other workers in Mombasa, who looked up to the railway workers for action, eagerly awaited the results of the chiefs' conciliation mission.

¹⁶⁸Chiefs report on Labour Unrest in Mombasa quoted in Phillips Report, *op. cit.*

On 1st April the two chiefs tried a different tactic; they held meetings separately with the Luo and Baluhya workers. This was a classic case of divide and rule, using ethnic consciousness to undercut class solidarity. The strike was called off the next day. RASU then made a formal complaint to the governor which resulted in the appointment of the Phillips Committee of Inquiry. The committee recommended an immediate increase of Shs. 5/- and the establishment of a minimum wage. More significantly for the future it challenged the assumptions behind labour policy in Kenya. In the first place, the report stated,

it is assumed that the worker is not dependent on his wages as his sole source of income ... Secondly, the level of wages has been directly related to the standard of living in the reserves. That standard being low, wage-rates have been such as to create the impression that labour in Kenya is 'cheap' ... Thirdly, it has been assumed that the worker's family can be supported entirely by income derived from the reserve, and that in fixing a reasonable wage family commitments need not be considered ... These assumptions are being challenged, to some extent, it is a direct challenge by the workers themselves ...¹⁶⁹

The Phillips Report represented a radical departure for it rejected the recommendations and findings of previous inquiries.¹⁷⁰ It armed the

¹⁶⁹The Phillips Report made major recommendations, including the need for more and better housing, the establishment of a permanent machinery to assess and review cost of living for African workers price control of basic commodities, among others. But by the end of 1945 none of them had been implemented. See Labour Commissioner - Chief Secretary 10-11-45 KNA Labour 9/60. It is revealing that the Report was suppressed.

¹⁷⁰The following commissions of inquiry were appointed between 1939 and the appointment of the Phillips Committee in 1945: The William Commission, 1939; The Trades Dispute Tribunal, 1942; The Fact-

members of the Labour Department to challenge the paternalistic and coercive labour system and push for a modern system of industrial relations. In short, it became the platform on which post-war labour reforms were based.

Thus strikes and other similar forms of working class struggles were instrumental in forcing changes in labour policies and practices. These strikes are all the more remarkable because for the greater part of the war, strikes were banned in Kenya. This was in itself a manifestation of the colonial state's punitive sanctions against workers. We have already alluded to the use of arrests, police repression and dismissals as means of breaking strikes and moderating labour militancy. The use of chiefs in Mombasa in 1945 to avert the general strike was a telling commentary on the primitivity of labour relations in the country at the time. The appointment of commissions of inquiry, moreover, including the Phillips Committee, betrayed a tendency common to many states both colonial and non-colonial to use commissions to deal with crises in order to buy time. The colonial state was as yet to adopt relatively enlightened labour policies. The impetus for this would come from pressures by the workers themselves through trade unions as much as anything else.

Finding Committee, 1942; The Cost of Living Relief Committee, 1942; The Stronach Committee, 1942; The Warren Wright Board of Inquiry, 1943; The War Bonus Commission, 1944. It is significant that most of these committees were appointed in 1942.

Trade Union Organisation

It is evident that a number of strikes, especially among railway workers and those employed in large industries like the East African Power and Lighting, the Public Works Department, just to mention a few, were organised by unions or staff associations as some of them were called. It is also known that the LTUEA and the East African Ramagarhia Artisan Union masterminded the campaign against the extension of kipande to Asian workers. The great majority of strikes, however, were not organised by unions at all. Instead, during a strike, a temporary organisation would be set up, and delegates appointed to talk with management or to make representations to a tribunal.¹⁷¹ Organisational problems were more intractable among rural workers, partly because of the nature of their employment and partly as a result of the intransigence of settler farmers. Indeed it would not be until the late 1950s that rural workers were to organise themselves into trade unions.

Workers' organisational difficulties cannot be overemphasised. Both the colonial state and the overwhelming majority of employers were opposed to trade unionism. A few months after the war broke out prominent leaders of the KCA and other associations, some of whom were trade unionists, were arrested and sent to a detention camp at Kapenguria, where Kenyatta was later to be tried, and remained there for most of the war period.¹⁷² Arrests and police harassment of trade union leaders during the war was accompanied by repressive trade union legislation.

¹⁷¹Singh, History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement, p. 114.

¹⁷²Ibid., pp. 100, 104.

In 1940 the Kenyan government sought financial help from the British Government, which pointed out that under the terms of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, 1940, aid could only be given if Kenya's trade union legislation of 1937 were amended by removing its restrictive provisions. Accordingly, in January, 1941, the Kenyan Government published a bill to amend the Trade Unions Ordinance, 1937. One key section proposed that:

any action against a trade union, whether of workmen or masters, or against any members or officials thereof on behalf of themselves and all other members of the trade union in respect of any tortuous act alleged to have been committed by or on behalf of the trade union, shall not be entertained in any court ...¹⁷³

The bill was welcomed by trade unions, but it raised a storm of indignation among settlers and many other employers. The Nairobi Chamber of Commerce declared categorically that it was "opposed to any such legislation as envisaged in the bill", and the newspapers were flooded with letters opposing the bill. The East African Standard attacked the government for introducing the bill at a very inopportune time:

If this is all the business the Colonial Office and its Kenya agents can provide for the Legislative Council in war time then we might as well consider dispensing of the Legislative Council altogether ... It is hardly proper that either time or practice be provided at present for the careful study of a

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 105.

complicated issue such as is raised by this measure to give state protection to immature trade unions against actions at law.¹⁷⁴

The government succumbed to the pressure and the bill was withdrawn.

The labour unrest of 1942-43 brought the issue of trade union legislation to a head once again. The Labour Department lobbied vigorously in favour of passing a new trade union ordinance. The department recognised that trade unions had come to stay, and that it was far better to regulate and monitor their development by making them legal than to push them underground where they would inevitably become more militant. The economic crisis facing the country made the government even more desperate to get financial aid from the British Government. Under the concerted blows of strikes and economic woes, the government introduced the Trades Unions and Trade Disputes Ordinance, 1943 and repealed the Trade Unions Ordinance, 1937. The new law was passed in March 1943 and included the much debated freedom from 'tort' provisions of the abortive 1941 Trade Unions bill. Employers grudgingly accepted the new ordinance. The Association of Chambers of Commerce of Eastern Africa at its annual conference in the latter part of 1943 agreed unanimously that

organised labour was now generally regarded as being a part of the economic machine in advanced countries and was of benefit to employer and employee. The commercial community had no desire to check any development towards the institution of properly run trade unions but the structure had to be built on solid foundations. It was therefore suggested that before registration a projected trade union must be

¹⁷⁴ East African Standard, 25-2-41.

subject to the closest scrutiny by Government. In the early stages registration should be confined to those who dignify their craft by their skill. Those craftsmen could be accepted as men of responsibility who would recognise that a trade union ticket not only conferred a benefit but implied obligation also.¹⁷⁵

In the meantime the government proceeded to create a Labour Advisory Board, one of whose members was an African. The board was created with the explicit purpose of giving the Labour Commissioner advice on all matters relating to labour and labour conditions in the country. The government also reversed its earlier stand and agreed to the appointment of a trade union adviser from Britain. It was not until 1947, however, that the adviser arrived.¹⁷⁶

By the end of 1943 ten unions had been registered in the country. They were mostly organised on racial lines even within the same industry, for instance, in the railway and East African Standard, Asian and African workers had separate unions.¹⁷⁷ Efforts to bridge this racial divide and bring the workers together continued to be made but without much success, and with most of the union leadership either arrested, harassed or out of the country, like Makhan Singh who spent the war years in India mostly in jail because of his trade union and political activities, the task was made more difficult.¹⁷⁸ The unions were also

¹⁷⁵East African Standard, 6-10-43.

¹⁷⁶For more details see KNA Labour 2/57.

¹⁷⁷See Clement Lubembe, The Inside Labour Movement in Kenya, Equatorial Publishers, Nairobi, 1968, p. 61.

¹⁷⁸See Mak/A/16.

crippled by poor finances for, in most cases, their numbers of paid up members tended to be very low. Organisational efficiency was another talent in short supply. Nevertheless, considerable advances had been made since the end of the 1930s both in terms of the numbers of unions and unionised workers and the amount of influence exerted by organised labour within the working class itself, on the one hand, and with employers and the state, on the other.

Conclusion

It was during the war, therefore, that the roots of post-war labour reforms were established. The changes were brought about by a complex combination of a number of forces and their cumulative effects. The expansion of the economy as a whole, and manufacturing industry in particular, led to a transformation of production relations. In quantitative terms the working class expanded, and, more importantly perhaps, more and more workers were becoming stabilised and increasingly showing signs of organised militancy, despite numerous obstacles placed against them by employers and buttressed by the colonial state. Significant changes were also taking place within the state itself, the formation and growing importance of the Labour Department being the most important development in so far as labour relations were concerned. Over and above this there were signs that the imperial state was also being transformed and through the Colonial Office, re-orienting its colonial policy from 'coercive paternalism' to 'enlightened paternalism'. All these forces were, of course, conditioned by the war and the transformations taking place within the international capitalist system as a

whole.

It cannot be denied that most of these changes became more evident and their development accelerated after 1945. It was the war period, however, which set them in motion. It is indeed tempting to conclude that, more than any previous period of equal duration, the six war years saw unparalleled expansion of capitalism in Kenya and intense struggles by workers against exploitation.

In this chapter we have tried to show that during the war the settlers, precursors of the latter-day Kenyan 'national bourgeoisie', seized the opportunity to assert more control over the production process and helped in fostering further industrialisation both directly and indirectly. Amidst all the outward signs of patriotic fervour for the metropole displayed by settlers, therefore, the war gave them a chance to consolidate their economic position and maximise their political power. In fact, one can conclude that the war provided the settlers with their 'last chance' to realise their dream of turning Kenya into a white man's country.¹⁷⁹ In short, one of the main contradictions of the war for Kenya was that, like all British colonies, it was further integrated into the metropolitan economy, through London's efforts to mobilise the colonial empire for the war effort and the setting up of overall production targets and bulk purchase schemes. But unlike many African colonies, in Kenya, because of the settler presence, wartime earnings provided the basis for immediate capital expansion rather than constitute what Macmillan characterised as post-war credit. In this

¹⁷⁹Phrase from Flint, "Last Chance for the White Man's Country ..."

sense developments in Kenya during the war partly corresponded to the dependence hypothesis that during the two world wars local bourgeoisie in peripheral capitalist societies tended to expand and maximise their control over capitalist development in their respective countries. But Kenya, unlike Latin American countries, was still a colony so that it is easy to see any 'relative autonomy' which the settlers may have gained during the war as temporary. One can even go so far to argue that this provided the very basis of Kenya's further integration into the post-war metropolitan and world capitalist system. In this sense the dependence perspective helps to explain wartime developments in a colony like Kenya but that should not obscure the long-term effects of those developments.

CHAPTER FOUR

KENYA'S POST-WAR POLITICAL ECONOMY AND LABOUR:

THE ERA OF GENERAL STRIKES, 1946 - 1952

The year 1945 did not simply mark the end of the Second World War, it also signalled the beginning of a new era for both the Imperial Metropolitan powers and the colonial world. This chapter seeks to trace the contours of change in the post-war Kenyan political economy and how they affected labour processes and organisation by, first, trying to analyse post-war changes in British colonial policies in the context of the changed position of the British imperial state in the global political economy, and, second, underlying the major structural transformations in Kenyan agriculture and industry. Through this approach we hope to demonstrate that changes in policy, including labour policies, were determined by complex and often contradictory factors, and were not hatched out of the fertile imagination of some official sitting in the Colonial Office or Government House in Nairobi. In short, colonial policies and their changing patterns can only be fully understood in the context of the ever changing structures of the imperial-colonial political economies themselves.

Even a casual reading of post-war colonial history shows that after 1945 imperial-colonial relations entered a stormy period that was probably unprecedented, which in most places culminated in formal decolonisation. While much emphasis has been placed on the intensification

of nationalist struggles to explain this phenomenon, in this chapter we want to stress the manner in which colonial capitalism developed after the war and how the workers responded and organised themselves. In the case of Kenya it will be shown that the country underwent profound agricultural and industrial transformations which not only increased the numerical strength of the working class but also deepened the contradictions and struggles between the latter and the local and metropolitan capitalist classes.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE GLOBAL AND LOCAL POLITICAL ECONOMIES

Changes in the World Economy

One of the most salient features of the post-war era was a shift in the relative balance of power among the metropolitan capitalist countries. Both Marxist and non-Marxist writers have noted that after 1945 the USA emerged as the undisputed hegemonic power in the capitalist world and the economies of colonial powers like Britain lost their previous predominance.¹ This emergence of a fundamentally new hierarchy

¹See for instance, Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, Monopoly Capital, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1966; E. Mandel, Late Capitalism, New Left Books, London, 1975; Harry Magdoff, Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1978; Samir Amin, Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment, 2 vols. Monthly Review Press, New York, 1974; J. Dunning, (ed.) International Investment, Penguin, Hamondsworth, 1972; William R. Louis, Imperialism at Bay: The Role of the US in Decolonisation of the British Empire, 1941-45, OUP, London, 1977; Immanuel M. Wallerstein, The Capitalist World Economy, Oxford University Press, New York, 1979.

marked by the hegemony of the USA in political, economic and military spheres had far-reaching repercussions on the colonial powers and their colonial policies which, in turn, affected the political economies of the colonies themselves.

The roots of the USA's rise to dominance lie in a set of complex factors which we cannot go into here. Suffice it to say that it was during the Second World War that the USA made huge advances in technology, productivity and labour organisation, so that she eclipsed the war-ravaged economies of the Old World. The colonial world could no longer permanently remain sheltered from the spreading tentacles of American capital. The shadows of colonialism, if not its face, could never be the same again.

The rise of American capital to a hegemonic position significantly contributed to the re-organization of the home economies of the colonial powers, if only because of their heavy reliance on Marshall Plan Aid in their reconstruction programmes. In the case of Britain it has been argued that:

With British capital no longer being strong enough to compete with America on a global scale, it was logical that laissez-faire capitalism should give way to a higher level of state intervention in the British economy ...²

The reorganisation of the British economy was inevitably followed by adjustments in British colonial policy; the enhanced interventionist

²See Nicola Swainson, The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya, 1918-1977, Heinemann, London, 1980, p. 102.

role of the British imperial state at home was to be accompanied by an equally extended interventionist role of the latter in colonial economies, as it will be demonstrated.

Another important feature of the post-war world economy was the growing multilateralisation of foreign investment. New international agencies, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the EEC Development Fund and the EEC Investment Bank were established, initially to facilitate the reconstruction of war-torn Western capitalist countries before they later extended their operations to the colonial and capitalist peripheries. Like official Western Governments' loans and grants, loans from these international agencies tended to be geared towards the development of infrastructure, a prerequisite for the entry of private investment and capitalist expansion. In purely quantitative terms this meant that the amount and sources of capital available to colonies were greater than ever before. In East Africa, Kenya was in a more favourable position than its neighbours to attract investments from these multilateral agencies. Thus in the long run capital investment in the colonies ceased to be almost an exclusive preserve of the metropolitan colonial powers. Paradoxically, it was such diversification in the sources of capital which led to a fuller integration of colonies into the world capitalist system and laid the roots of neo-colonialism.

Finally, this period witnessed the growing predominance of multinational corporations, which was a reflection of the intensifying concentration and centralisation of capital on a world scale.³ The

³The literature on multinationals is, of course, very vast so that we can only refer to a few works. See, for instance, J. Dunning,

tendencies of international capital export were accordingly altered; the lion's share of private capital investment came to be mediated through multinational corporations, mostly in the form of capital for the establishment and operation of overseas enterprises and branch plants. Consequently, "it was in this era that the export of capital rather than commodities became the dominant tendency".⁴ Consequently, the pace and level of industrialisation in the peripheral capitalist world underwent some notable transformations which led to the development of more complex capitalist formations and reorganisation of labour.

Once again, as the centre within the East African periphery, Kenya attracted fairly considerable investment from multinational corporations, to the effect that by the end of the 1960s these corporations occupied a strategic position in the country's economy. The entry of multinational corporations in Kenya vastly expanded opportunities for import-substitution industrialisation, so that manufacturing industries came to account for a substantial portion of both the gross national product and recorded wage employment. One consequence of this was that the contribution of settler farming to the GNP began its irreversible decline which was only a prelude to the settlers' subsequent political eclipse.

(ed.), The Multinational Enterprise, Allen and Unwin, London, 1972; H. Radice (ed.), International Firms and Modern Imperialism, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1975; Raphael Kaplinsky, Readings on the Multinational Corporation in Kenya, O.U.P., Nairobi, 1978; S. Rolfe and W. Damm, (eds.), The International Corporation, Praeger, New York, 1970; C. Tugendhat, The Multinationals, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973; and Carl Widstrand, (ed.), Multinational Firms in Africa, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1975.

⁴Swainson, op. cit., p. 101.

This rather cursory survey of the post-war structural transformations within the world capitalist systems cannot do full justice to such a vast and complex subject. However, it highlights a few pertinent points. First, industrial capital no longer shied away from the capitalist peripheries and, henceforth, the forms of international specialisation began to change; foreign investment in the colonial world, for instance, ceased to concentrate almost exclusively on plantation agriculture and extractive industries and increasingly ventured into secondary manufacturing. Internal pressures in the colonies by the dominant classes for some kind of industrialisation also intensified. In other words, the era of primitive colonial accumulation, characterised by the predominance of merchant capital, had passed its heyday as conditions became conducive to the development and accumulation of industrial capital, since capitalist modes of production had become sufficiently generalised to subsume and marginalise pre-capitalist modes of production. Second, the more the colonial world became integrated into the world capitalist system, the greater were the pressures, both internal and external, to change colonial policies and relationships. Finally, the extension of capitalist formations within the colonies meant that the functions and role of the colonial state became more complex as the state increasingly came to be called upon to mediate the interests of ever-diverging social classes. The manner in which these processes manifested themselves varied from one colony to the next in response, partly to the extent of capitalist development, and partly to the nature of the prevailing political conditions and administrative practices.

British Post-War Colonial Policy

A study of the origin and aims of colonial development and welfare illustrates better than any other aspect of post-war colonial policy the British genius for making virtue of necessity. The end of the Second World War found Great Britain with a shattered economy at home and the loss of old markets and extensive foreign investments abroad ... sheer necessity therefore dictates a search for new untapped sources of raw materials and foods. And where more naturally than the still vast British Colonial Empire in Africa, with its apparently unlimited potential resources of labour and materials?⁵

It was in 1948 that George Padmore offered this assessment. The main thrust of his argument has been substantiated by the recently published five-volume study of The Official History of Colonial Development.⁶ The formulation of a new development policy became imperative as part of measures aimed at British economic reconstruction. In addition, British post-war colonial policy evolved in response to new realignments in world politics and intensifying nationalist pressures from the colonies themselves.

Britain emerged, from the 1939-45 war, from being one of the largest creditor nations in the world to being perhaps the biggest debtor nation,

⁵George Padmore, Africa: Britain's Third Empire, Negro Universities Press, New York, 1949, p. 155.

⁶D.J. Morgan, The Official History of Colonial Development, Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1980; Volume I - The Origins of British Aid Policy, 1924-1945; Volume 2 - Developing British Colonial Resources, 1945-1951; Volume 3 - A Reassessment of British Aid Policy, 1951-1965; Volume 4 - Changes in British Aid Policy, 1951-1970; Volume 5 - Guidance Towards Self-Government in British Colonies, 1941-1971.

owing £6,000 million.⁷ The seriousness of the dollar drain was such that in August 1947 there was a balance of payments crisis which forced the British Government to adopt drastic dollar conservation policies.⁸ By July 1949 the gravity of the situation prompted the Lord President of the Council to warn:

at this moment our last reserves of gold and dollars are vanishing at the rate of about £12 million worth a week. At the present rate they would be down to zero in just over 200 days from now, and in far fewer days than that our position will become untenable unless the fall can not only be stopped but reversed.⁹

For the next few years the situation continued to deteriorate as the balance of payments accounts of Britain and the independent members of the sterling area ran into rapidly increasing deficits in their current accounts both with the dollar area and the rest of the world.¹⁰ A consensus emerged in British ruling circles that the dollar crisis could only be resolved by developing colonial resources.¹¹ Some also

⁷D.J. Morgan, *ibid.*, Volume 5, p. 89.

⁸*ibid.*, Volume 2, pp. 4-17. Also see the following, A.R. Conan, The Problem of Sterling, London, 1966; T. Balogh, The Dollar Crisis, Cause and Cure, OUP, Oxford, 1949; R. Gardner, Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy, New York, 1967; E. Zupnick, Britain's Post-War Dollar Problem, New York, 1957; J.C.R. Dow, The Management of the British Economy, 1945-1960, Cambridge, 1964.

⁹D.J. Morgan, *ibid.*, Volume 2, p. 29.

¹⁰*ibid.*, p. 31, and Volume 5, p. 311.

¹¹See, for instance, Volume 5, pp. 331-33 where official arguments for the 1945 CD & W Act are summarised.

argued that rapid colonial development would help make Britain independent of the USA.¹²

Aggravating the dollar deficit and balance of payments problems was the food crisis. Food stocks, especially of oils and fats, were dangerously low; indeed, the prospect of further cuts and shortages seemed inevitable unless supplies could be increased.¹³ So serious was the situation that the Prime Minister

proposed the setting up of a Ministerial Committee on World Food Supplies (WFS), under his chairmanship, to keep the situation under review, to co-ordinate action and to focus on the major issues calling for decision by the Cabinet or international bodies concerned.¹⁴

The WFS held numerous meetings and published reports on the deteriorating food situation. In the end it recommended that the only viable solution lay in increasing colonial agricultural production.¹⁵

Britain unveiled its new colonial policy, therefore, amidst the throes of economic hardships. Thus hiding behind the rhetorical flourish

¹²Bevin, for instance, put it thus: "if we only pushed on and developed Africa, we could have the US dependent on us, and eating out of our hands, in four or five years ... US is very barren of essential minerals, and in Africa we've them all". See, P.S. Gupta, Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964, Macmillan, London, 1975, p. 306.

¹³D.J. Morgan, op. cit., Volume 2, Chapter 4.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁵Missions were sent to places like West Africa to assess the agricultural potential of those areas and their infrastructural problems. Morgan, ibid., Chapter 4.

of the term colonial development and social welfare was hard-nosed British economic self-interest. Gone was faith in laissez-faire capitalism at home and in the colonies, and resort to ad hoc policies resurrected from the imperial closet each time there was a crisis in some colony. "In the past", stated the Economic Policy Committee,

it had not been necessary for the Colonial Office to exercise a direct control over (colonial) economic investment. As a result of the government's policy of direct participation in the task of colonial development ... it was a necessary corollary ... that the Colonial Office should be in a position to maintain general control over colonial development.¹⁶

Henceforth, colonial development was to be closely co-ordinated with British reconstruction and development plans. The idea of "integrated economic development of the colonies and the UK as a dominating factor in development policy"¹⁷ acquired the status of an orthodoxy. Imperialism was coming home to roost.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that despite often spirited differences over internal economic and social policies, when it came to the question of colonial development, there was a remarkably high degree of bi-partisan cooperation between the Governing Labour Party and the opposition Conservative Party in the first critical years when British post-war colonial policy was being formulated and the machinery to

¹⁶ Ibid., Volume 5, p. 313.

¹⁷ Ibid., Volume 2, p. 80.

implement it was being created. It is indicative of the prevailing mood that such a stalwart of the Fabian Colonial Bureau and the Labour Movement as Rita Hinden could say categorically:

we have not the intention, and we know it, of sacrificing our standard of living for the sake of colonial development, we do not contemplate an evening out of wealth; we know, too, that our development plans are partly inspired by our own needs.¹⁸

Apart from these internal economic considerations, British post-war colonial policy evolved in response to the changed position of Britain, including the other colonial powers, in the global political economy. In other words, colonial policy developed as an integral part of British foreign policy. The end of the Second World War saw the emergence of the USA and the USSR as the hegemonic powers of the capitalist and socialist blocs, respectively, and the relative decline of Western Europe. Therefore, increased colonial production would serve a dual purpose in that it would aid the economic reconstruction of Western Europe

¹⁸R. Hinden, 'Dilemma in Colonial Policy' (Editorial), Socialist Commentary, April, 1949, p. 89, quoted in P.S. Gupta, op. cit., p. 324. Gupta attributes the labour movement's failure to adopt more progressive colonial policies radically different from those pursued by the Conservatives to the fact that the former "divided the colonial world according to a racial-cultural typology [so that] its policy towards Africa had differed from that of the Colonial Office only in degree and not in kind ...", p. 275. It would seem that labour critics tended to attack the operational details of the Empire and did not seriously question the nature and essence of imperialism itself. There are numerous references in Padmore, op. cit., and D.J. Morgan, ibid., showing the bi-partisan approach towards colonial policy. Also see David Goldsworthy, Colonial Issues in British Politics, 1945 - 1961, O.U.P., Oxford, 1961; J.M. Lee, Colonial Development and Good Government, O.U.P., Oxford, 1967.

and bolster the latter's position in the corridors of world diplomacy and politics. As the British Foreign Secretary put it:

The other two great world powers the United States and Soviet Russia, have tremendous resources ... If Western Europe is to achieve its balance of payments and to get world equilibrium, it is essential that colonial resources should be developed and made available.¹⁹

In order to pool the resources of the colonial empires attempts were made to establish close organisational contacts between the Colonial Office and its French counterpart, the Ministry of Overseas Territories, and before long the Belgians were included as well. Anglo-French-Belgian collaboration was soon extended to colonial Africa itself where a number of joint conferences were held on economic and labour issues.²⁰

The policy of colonial development was further elaborated to blunt criticisms against colonialism. From both sides of the international ideological divide, and for very different reasons, and from the recently formed United Nations and newly independent ex-colonies like India, there came unprecedented and almost universal condemnation of either 'colonialism' or 'imperialism' or both.²¹ The colonial powers

¹⁹Padmore, *ibid.*, pp. 155-56.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 189; Also see Morgan, *op. cit.*, Volume 5, pp. 19-20. Files in KNA Lab 9/133-64 deal extensively with some of these conferences at which the Kenyan Government was represented, usually by the Labour Department.

²¹Morgan, *ibid.*, Volume 5, Chapter 1. For more details on the role of the Soviet Union in the anti-colonial offensive during this period, see E.T. Wilson, 'Russia's Historic Stake in Black Africa', in

were on the defensive. "The overriding reason", the Secretary of State told the Chancellor of the Exchequer, "why I feel that these proposals (for colonial development) are essential is the necessity to justify our position as a Colonial Power".²² The Chancellor agreed wholeheartedly.²³

The British government was particularly concerned about a possible rush of American investment in the colonies and the adverse impact this could have on the dollar balances of the sterling area. The Secretary of State noted that American investment

normally carries with it a dollar liability for remittance of dividends or profits and an ultimate liability for repatriation of capital. So long, therefore, as the dollar problem is with us, our policy must be selective and we must satisfy ourselves that any given project will either give a net earning or saving of dollars, or will be of such substantial economic benefit to the colonial territory concerned as to justify any possible loss of dollars involved.²⁴

Underlying all this was the fear that if not checked American capital would acquire "a dominating position in individual colonial territories".²⁵ As a recipient of Marshall Aid, however, one of whose

D.E. Albright (ed.), African and International Communism, Macmillan, London, 1980; and Demetric Boersner, The Bolsheviks and the National and Colonial Question, Geneva, 1957. In the case of the USA's role see W.R. Louis, op. cit.

²²Morgan, ibid., Volume 1, p. xxvii.

²³Ibid., pp. xxvi-ii.

²⁴Ibid., Volume 2, pp. 106-7.

²⁵"Economic Development in the Colonies", Note by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Feb. 1948, quoted in Gupta, op. cit., p. 322.

provisions gave US nationals access to colonial raw materials, there were limits as to how far the British Government could go in obstructing the entry of American capital into the Colonial Empire.²⁶ Thus, it was in order to meet the American challenge and possible challenges from a resurgent Japan and West Germany that British firms were encouraged to set up manufacturing industries in the colonies. Colonial industrialisation also promised to cut down colonial imports of manufactured goods from America and other dollar areas and increase British exports of capital goods to the colonies which would help to revitalise British industry.²⁷ However, as a result of the British rearmament programme and the Korean war, British industry was incapable of satisfying colonial needs for iron and steel, so that supplies of these items to the colonies virtually became subject to central allocation from London. Thus, restrictions against colonial imports from the dollar area and shortages of goods in Britain served to re-enforce the centralisation of colonial development planning.

Pressures for colonial industrialisation and rapid economic development also emanated from the colonies themselves. The colonies were not only aware of their contribution to the British war effort and their huge sterling balances held in Britain as well as their contributions in lessening Britain's dollar deficits, they were also intent on eliminating

²⁶For details on Marshall Aid conditions and their impact on colonial policy see Morgan, op. cit., Volume 2, pp. 97-108.

²⁷On pressures to colonies to limit their imports from dollar and other hard currency areas see Morgan, ibid., Volume 2, pp. 4-17.

wartime misery and shortages and fearful of unfulfilled mass expectations. The colonies were therefore impatient for change in British colonial policy. The British government could only ignore these pressures at the peril of fueling the fires of nationalism.

So rapid was the increase in colonial sterling assets that by 1951 they surpassed the £1,000 million mark,²⁸ up from £573 million in 1944,²⁹ and £805.5 million in 1947.³⁰ By 1955 sterling balances from African colonies alone stood as high as £1,446 million, or "more than half the total gold and dollar reserves of Britain and the Commonwealth, which then stood at £2,120 million".³¹ The British Government sought to freeze the colonial assets, on the one hand, and on the other, to promote colonial development. It was a contradiction which many, especially colonial spokesmen and sympathisers, deplored.³² In response to queries why colonial sterling balances were not being turned over to colonies

²⁸Ibid., Volume 5, p. 311.

²⁹Ibid., Volume 1, p. 201.

³⁰Volume 2, p. 59.

³¹Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Bogle-L'Overture Publications, London, 1972, p. 188.

³²The issue of colonial sterling balances was a source of fierce interdepartmental infighting between the Treasury which wanted to have the balances cancelled altogether in view of Britain's economic problems and the Colonial Office which feared that such a measure would enrage the colonial world and create serious political problems for Britain, instead the latter proposed that colonies should be asked to "convert a part of their existing holdings into interest-free loans to His Majesty's Government, which would be repayable only when required to meet certain specified obligations of colonial governments". See Morgan, op. cit., Volume 2, p. 58 and pp. 46-63 for more details.

to finance their development,

it was pointed out that while, from a colonial development point of view, the use of balances to finance development expenditure was likely to accelerate growth, the expedient would be likely to involve increased unrequited exports from the United Kingdom, thus aggravating the balance of payments position, and so should be avoided.³³

The British Government's Chief Economic Adviser was therefore not exaggerating when in October 1954 he quipped:

Is it not the case that the increase in colonial sterling balances, i.e., short-term lending by the colonies to the United Kingdom, is well in excess of the United Kingdom's long-term lending to the Colonies?³⁴

Apart from maintaining huge sterling reserves in Britain, the colonies also played a critical role as dollar earners for the sterling area as the dollar deficits of the United Kingdom and the Dominions grew bigger.³⁵ This prompted Padmore to ask: "who says colonies don't

³³Ibid., p. 60.

³⁴Volume 5, p. 336.

³⁵The Colonial Empire was in deficit for dollars in 1945, but by 1948 was a net dollar earner at the rate of \$200 million per annum and in the subsequent years the colonies altogether maintained substantial surpluses, while the dollar deficits of the UK and the Dominions grew larger. In 1951, for instance, the dollar deficit in the UK current account was £472 million and £34 million for the Independent Sterling Area, i.e., Dominions, or a total of £506 for both, whereas the dollar surplus in colonial current accounts was £235 million. See Morgan, ibid., Volume 2, p. 1 and pp. 30-1.

pay?"³⁶ Writing almost two decades later Rodney concluded indignantly: "Britain was living on the dollar earnings of the Colonies".³⁷

It is in this context that the policy of colonial development and welfare can fully be understood. It grew out of complex and often contradictory forces; it was a policy instigated by the imperatives of British economic reconstruction, designed to placate hostile world opinion and colonial critics, and tempered by colonial demands for rapid colonial development.

A number of institutional mechanisms were accordingly created to implement the new colonial development policy. Firstly, there was the CD & W Act of 1945 which, together with the amending Acts of 1949 and 1950, provided for a total of £140,000,000 to be available over the years 1946-56.³⁸ The colonies were invited to submit ten-year development plans.³⁹ By June 1948, 17 plans, including Kenya's, had been received. Kenya's plan earmarked a total expenditure of £17,586,000 of which £ 3½ million was to be provided from CD & W funds.⁴⁰ For the

³⁶Padmore, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

³⁷Rodney, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

³⁸Original sum was £120 million. For more details see Morgan, *op. cit.*, Volume 1, Chapter 15.

³⁹These development plans were to take into account money provided under the Act, money raised from internal resources and on the money markets. Although virtually all the plans related to development in the public sector, the coverage of what constituted such a sector varied from colony to colony so that it was difficult to apply a single yardstick in making allocations. For details see Morgan, *ibid.*, Volume 2, Chapter 2.

⁴⁰See Padmore, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

entire post-war period that the CD & W was in operation, Africa received 45% of the funds. Kenya ranked second after Nigeria as the recipient of the largest grants, with £23 million to Nigeria's £40 million. As a percentage of the Colony's GDP, however, the contribution of CD & W to Kenya was greater than to Nigeria.⁴¹

The Colonial Development and Welfare programme with its emphasis on the construction of infrastructure and public services such as education, medical and health services, housing and town planning, was useful in paving the way for the eventual entry of private capital on a large scale, but was unlikely to fulfil British economic needs in the short-term. Consequently, the Colonial Office and the Ministry of Food established the Colonial Development Corporation and the Overseas Food Corporation, respectively, both of which were to be run on purely commercial lines.

The CDC was formed in 1947 with a capital loan of £100 million from the Treasury, and the right to borrow an additional £15 million from private sources, and later its borrowing powers were increased by £30 million.⁴² Initially the corporation preferred short-term projects to long-term ones, and those requiring a minimum of capital goods, especially US imports. Eventually the corporation excluded from its sphere of operations loan finance for colonial governments, public

⁴¹The Caribbean area was allotted 22% of the total CD & W funds, the Mediterranean area (principally Malta) 8%, Western Pacific 7%, South-East Asia 6%, and the rest to the small islands and on services in Britain, mainly survey work and student training. For details see Morgan, *ibid.*, Volume 4, Chapter 1.

⁴²*ibid.*, pp. 118-20.

works schemes and any such enterprises that could be financed from other sources. Instead, the corporation invested in, or ran, mining projects, manufacturing and processing industries, civil engineering works, fisheries, agricultural and forestry projects. In order to facilitate its functions, colonial governments were encouraged to form public corporations which established working relationships with the CDC.⁴³

The financial structure and operational procedure of the OFC was almost similar to that of the CDC, although the former was to have a shorter life-span. The OFC was also established in 1947 with an authorised capital of £50 million, including the £25 million originally advanced to the United African Company, some of whose operations the OFC took over. The OFC was expected to organise large-scale plantations and food growing projects in the colonies. The disastrous East African Groundnut Scheme, which was originally started by the UAC, was its largest project and the scheme's eventual failure spelled the end of the OFC itself, which was dissolved in 1954.⁴⁴

Through these corporations and CD & W Acts, and other less visible institutional measures, the imperial state mobilised itself to maximise colonial production and, in conjunction with the colonial states, laid the groundwork and provided the necessary pre-conditions for the successful accumulation of private capital. The stage was therefore set for the further integration of the colonial empire into the British economy, which, in the final analysis, meant the colonies' fuller

⁴³For more details, see *Ibid.*, Chapter 5; and also see Volume 2, Chapter 6.

⁴⁴See Volume 2, Chapter 5 and Volume 4, Chapter 4, for more details.

incorporation into the world capitalist system since, on a world scale, British capital was now subordinate to American capital. Expanded colonial production also entailed that the process of colonial proletarianisation would be accelerated.

The architects of British post-war colonial policy recognised that drawing elaborate plans for increasing colonial production was an exercise in futility unless colonial workers could be harnessed effectively enough to undertake such a massive production drive. The formulation of a new and comprehensive labour policy, therefore, became imperative.

British post-war labour policy was influenced by three major factors. First, it was a continuation of the 1940 CD & W Act provisions which made aid to a colony contingent upon the Secretary of State's satisfaction that the law of the colony provided "reasonable facilities for the establishment and activities of trade unions", and that "fair conditions of labour would be observed in carrying out the works".⁴⁵ The fact that the Labour Party assumed power in 1945 could only have strengthened the desire to tailor colonial policies and practices according to acceptable minimum international standards.

In fact international pressures against colonial labour exploitation were on the increase, and for a colonial power as concerned with international opinion as Britain was, these pressures had their effect. The ILO issued its Philadelphia Charter in 1944 which stipulated, among other things, that "the improvement of living standards shall be

⁴⁵See Volume 1, p. 124.

regarded as the principal objective in the planning of economic development".⁴⁶ The ILO Charter together with subsequent ILO Conventions outlined a fairly comprehensive Labour Code for the colonies. As a signatory to these conventions, and keen to be seen as a collaborator of the ILO,⁴⁷ the British government pressed the colonial governments to try and enforce the relevant ILO codes in their territories.

Finally, and perhaps most critical of all, the Colonial Office was increasingly becoming aware of the mounting discontent and militancy of colonial workers. Indeed, it was the West Indian riots of 1937, as noted in the last chapter, which had inspired the trade union provisions of the CD & W Act of 1940. During the war, as we saw in the case of Kenya, the colonial empire was rocked by an unprecedented wave of strikes, which persisted into the post-war period. It was feared that if this trend continued colonial development programmes would flounder, thereby seriously undermining Britain's economic reconstruction programme. Therefore, despotic and paternalistic labour policies and practices had to give way to a new system of labour relations and control. This was as much a 'safety-valve' against possible 'extremist' reaction by workers as an essential precondition for increased labour productivity.⁴⁸ As Orde Browne, who was the Labour Adviser to the Secretary of State, noted in his Labour Conditions In East Africa Report, 1946, labour

⁴⁶ ILO, Social Policy in Dependent Territories, Studies and Reports, Series B, No. 38, Montreal, 1944, p. 173.

⁴⁷ See Morgan, op. cit., Volume 5, p. 12.

⁴⁸ See A.H. Amsden, International Firms and Labour in Kenya, 1945-70, Frank Cass, London, 1971, pp. 4-5.

productivity in East Africa was low and one of the surest ways of raising it was through "the well-tried principles of collective bargaining and negotiation", on top of establishing training programmes and incentive schemes.⁴⁹ Other reports also made similar recommendations, particularly the need to accommodate labour by recognising and tolerating the existence of trade unions.⁵⁰

From the record of the colonial sterling balances and the colonies' dollar earning capacity, it is more than evident that colonial production expanded enormously after the war. But the question is, was there a 'new deal' for colonial workers, the introduction of 'welfare colonialism' for colonial societies as writers like Amsden, Clayton and Savage seem to imply?⁵¹ Were the two, that is, the expansion of colonial capitalist

⁴⁹ Labour Conditions in East Africa, Colonial No. 193, by G. St. J. Orde Browne, 1946, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Trade Unionism in African Colonies, written by R.E. Luyt in 1949, who subsequently became trade union adviser in Zambia and Labour Commissioner in Kenya in the early 1950s, where the point is made that "African workers, growing rapidly aware that it is in their interests to organise and act collectively ... will organise and act collectively whether governments or employers or anybody else wish to permit it or not". Illegal or unrecognised unions were bound to be "led by men more revolutionary and more irresponsible and less reasonable than the accepted and recognised Trade Union leaders have been". The same general points are made by S.S. Awbery and F.W. Dalley in the report on Labour and Trade Union Organisations in the Federation of Malaya and Singapore, 1948, where it is stated that the decision facing the government there was "just a question whether a) responsible Trade Unions for collective bargaining should be encouraged or ... b), the field should be left entirely to the Malayan Communist Party, or c) the whole movement be driven underground. The Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Malayan government chose the first course and, we are convinced, chose rightly." Both quoted in Roger Woddis, The Mask Is Off! An Examination of the Activities of Trade Advisers in the British Colonies, Thames Publications, London, n.d., pp. 8-9.

⁵¹ Amsden, op. cit., chapter 1; and Clayton and Savage, op. cit. chapter 9.

production and raising the living standards for the growing armies of colonial workers, in fact, compatible, notwithstanding the particular predilections of stated imperial and colonial state policy?

Kenya's Post-War Political Economy and Labour Policy

The dollar crisis and its repercussions on the colony's economy were closely examined with a view to falling into line with the needs of the UK in, among other things, reducing expenditure of hard currencies and the expansion of productive activities.

Kenyan Colony Annual Report, 1947, p. 4.

The post-war period in Kenya was marked by a remarkable expansion of both agricultural and industrial production, which created the necessary pre-conditions for permanent proletarianisation or stabilisation for significant sections of the rapidly growing working class.

As agriculture expanded the incidence of landlessness in the African reserves rose so that tens of thousands of people were thrown into wage employment. Thus landlessness in itself encouraged the growth of the working class and labour stabilisation regardless of the prevailing employment conditions and the system of low wages. In fact the rapid growth of a landless class in the absence of a corresponding increase in employment opportunities meant that the ranks of the unemployed and under-employed rose, too, thereby reinforcing pressures for a low wage economy. Landlessness was a product of two main sets of factors; first, the expansion of settler and corporate agriculture and, second, individualisation of land tenure among Africans.

As we have shown in the previous chapter, during the war settler and corporate agriculture expanded in both the quantity and quality of produce and in the total area under cultivation. This trend continued and gathered added momentum after 1945, which was in part a response to favourable marketing conditions in a post-war world hungry for food and raw materials. Between 1945 and 1960 about £46 million was invested in settler and corporate agriculture, mainly for the construction of roads, dams, buildings, fencing, machinery and vehicles.⁵² Existing estates and plantations were able to expand and, in addition, after the war there was an influx of new settlers, mostly British ex-servicemen, for whom large tracts of land had to be found. The government encouraged more European settlement because it saw settler agriculture as "a sanctuary of efficient agriculture which had to be preserved at all costs against the ravages of the land destroying African peasants".⁵³ The fact that the relative efficiency of settler agriculture when compared to peasant agriculture was a product of decades of state support for the former and discriminatory policies against the latter was, of course,

⁵²For more details see R.M.A. van Zwanenberg and Anne King, An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, 1800-1970, Macmillan, London, 1975, pp. 45-7; L.H. Brown, Agricultural Change in Kenya, 1945-60, Food Research Institute, Stanford University, 1968; L.W. Cone and J.F. Lipscomb (eds.), The History of Kenya Agriculture, Univ. Press of East Africa, 1972.

⁵³See M.P.K. Sorrenson, Land Reform in Kikuyu Country, OUP, Oxford, 1967, p. 55. For more information on the government's post-war agricultural policy see the following: 'The General Aspects of the Agrarian Situation in Kenya', Despatch No. 44 of 1946 from the Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies; 'Land and Population in East Africa', Despatch No. 193 of 1951 from the Governor to the Secretary of State; 'Land Utilisation and Settlement, A Statement of Government Policy', Sessional Paper No. 8, 1945; and Philip E. Mitchell, African Afterthoughts, Hutchinson, London, 1954.

forgotten. Instead, as a rationalisation, it was argued that more European settlement would bring more employment to Africans and thereby assist in the demobilisation programme for ex-askaris.⁵⁴

In 1946 the Agricultural Settlement Board was established and charged with running European settlement schemes. The Board bought all the remaining crown land and any uncultivated land that existing settlers cared to sell, and distributed it to the new arrivals. The number of settler farmers more than doubled from 1700 in 1948-49 to 3600 by 1960.⁵⁵ Increased European settlement simply meant that many African squatters lost the use of land they had previously occupied for cultivation and grazing purposes. It was in fact the premise of the 1944 Settlement Committee that "any talk of close (European) settlement is farcical unless the (squatter) system is abolished and abolished very quickly".⁵⁶ There could have been no better recipe for disaster; thousands of squatters were evicted and sent back to the overpopulated reserves or despatched to barren new settlements. This only served to exacerbate the poverty, bitterness and unrest that characterised life in the African land units. The explosion that was to be Mau Mau was brought so much closer. Squatters and other landless classes were to be its vanguard.

The problem of landlessness was accentuated by natural population

⁵⁴See 'The General Aspect of the Agrarian Situation in Kenya', Despatch No. 44 of 1946.

⁵⁵Zwanenberg and King, op. cit., p. 94.

⁵⁶Report of the Settlement Schemes Committee, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1944, p. 9.

increases in the African land units. Since the rise in the population was not accompanied by any notable technological improvements in farming methods it meant that the land's capacity to sustain the rural masses was rapidly deteriorating.⁵⁷ Extension of cash crop production, indeed, of capitalist relations of production in the reserves, instigated the transformation of the land tenure system which deepened class differentiation between landed and landless classes.

Despite continued official biases in favour of settler and corporate agriculture, after the war the government, for the first time, embarked on a planned, coherent and long-term assistance programme for African agriculture. In 1946 the Worthington Plan was drawn up providing £11 million to be spent over a period of ten years on agriculture, over half of which was allocated to the African Land Development Programme and earmarked for African agriculture, mainly for the prevention of soil erosion. The adoption of a policy favourable to African agriculture was determined by three main factors.

First, the government wanted to prevent the recurrence of the disastrous wartime food shortages and the problem of rural poverty from worsening. It was recognised that unless African agriculture was capitalised and progressive farming methods were introduced production in the reserves would fall. Second, it became imperative to encourage African agriculture because increased African production could only help to maximise overall production so that the country could have enough to feed itself and for export to satisfy British needs. Paradoxically

⁵⁷See Sorrenson, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5 for a detailed account of the growing rural agrarian crisis.

this production drive contributed to land deterioration in the rural areas for it meant that land previously reserved for grazing or left under fallow was turned over to cultivation.⁵⁸ Finally, the government could no longer afford to ignore the growing numbers of increasingly vociferous African cash crop producers who, against many odds, had taken advantage of economic opportunities both before and during the war and managed to carve a niche for themselves within colonial capitalism. Mathu, the first African member of the Legislative Council, was speaking for these 'progressive farmers', as they were called, when he stated:

The Private Title or Individual Title Deed is now a necessity in many parts of Central Province. The security it would give the right holders would encourage better farming methods ... People are now growing permanent crops; they are establishing permanent buildings and other improvements, like fencing and dips. Individualism in the areas under consideration has come to stay. The Native Lands Trust Ordinance, 1938, will have to be amended to fit with the times.⁵⁹

Initially the government's land and agricultural policy was ambiguous and full of contradictions. There were those officials, including Governor Mitchell, who were nostalgically wedded to the virtues of the African communal land tenure system and were antagonistic to the emergence of 'economic individualism' among Africans which, in their opinion, was to blame for most of the problems in the

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 74.

⁵⁹Report of Committee on Agricultural Credit for Africans, Government Press, Nairobi, 1950, pp. 24-25.

reserves. They proposed that titles should remain with the kinship group which, "it was thought, would assist in comprehensive planning and agricultural improvements".⁶⁰ This was the basis of the policy of 'planned communal farming' which the government encouraged in some districts up to 1952. Many settler farmers were, of course, averse to the emergence of a competitive African entrepreneurial class.

From 1948, however, official attitudes began to change and many were gradually persuaded of the merits of the growth of exclusive individual rights to land among Africans. It was recognised that buying and selling of land in many African areas had already gone too far to be reversed; among the Kikuyu the ahoi system of land tenure had irretrievably broken down in most areas. In Kiambu district, for example, an estimated 40% of the population had no land.⁶¹ It became widely held that individual land tenure was meaningless unless it was accompanied by a policy of consolidating the uneconomic fragments in the African reserves into larger production units.⁶² Land litigation in Kikuyuland became widespread and, unlike before, the provincial administrators hailed the developing agrarian class relations. As the Central Province Annual Report for 1950 put it:

⁶⁰Sorrenson, *op. cit.*, p. 60; Also see H.E. Lambert and P. Wyn Harris (who was the Labour Commissioner), 'Memorandum on Policy in Regard to Native Land Tenure in the Native Lands of Kenya', and other contributions in The Kikuyu Lands, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1945.

⁶¹See Frank Furedi, "The Social Composition of the Mau Mau Movement in the White Highlands", Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1974, p. 488.

⁶²See African Land Development in Kenya, 1946-62, Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Water Resources, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1962; also see Sorrenson, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-93.

a small but growing body of landowners provided an example to their fellows of the benefits and profits to be derived from good farming practice. Paddocking was increased to such an extent that it has now become the local equivalent of the Enclosure in England ... this will lead to a land owning class ... The corollary will be the growth of a large landless class (which already exists in embryo) either staying as agricultural labourers in the Reserve or finding employment in the Towns in the Settled Areas. The problems of finding adequate work for these men in as yet undeveloped industries must be solved if they are not to degenerate into an idle and fearless mob with no stake in the country - a ready instrument of every agitator.⁶³

This landless class "in embryo" already comprised almost 50% of the population in the Kikuyu reserves by the time the state of emergency was declared at the end of 1952.⁶⁴ By 1952, therefore, the logic of capitalist agriculture in African areas was triumphing and individual land tenure coupled with a programme of land consolidation had become the basis of colonial land and agricultural policy and was subsequently to be enshrined in the 1954 Swynerton Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture, which permanently transformed the face of Kenyan agriculture and left an indelible mark on its class structure.

All these changes were reinforced by structural transformations taking place within industry. "Kenya is on the eve - as, indeed, is all East Africa - of large-scale industrial development", proclaimed the East African Standard in 1949. It continued:

⁶³Central Province Annual Report, 1950, p. 11.

⁶⁴R. Buijtenhuijs, Mau Mau Twenty Years After, Mouton, 1973, p. 97.

with that development will come a new stability in the Colony's economic conditions and an answer to at least some of the very difficult problems which the agricultural character of the country has hitherto created ... There is, of course, no lack of capital. In 1948 in Kenya alone £ 23,000,000 was invested in private and public companies and probably nine-tenths of this money went into industry ... Over the last three years at least £ 54,000,000 has been invested in new companies in Kenya.⁶⁵

The industrial expansion was of such magnitude that the number of private companies incorporated in the country were 280 in 1946, valued at £40 million and in the next twelve years another 3380 private companies were established valued at £120 million, which, incidentally was more than double the number and value of private companies incorporated in Uganda and Tanganyika put together.⁶⁶ Items produced by the new industries included pharmaceuticals, leather and shoes, beer and light drinks, fertilisers, cement, boats and yachts, building materials, furniture and household requisites, gas, metal cans, canned goods, packaged biscuits, plastics and paper containers, textiles, sisal, paint, soaps and perfumery, and electrical machinery. Between 1948 and 1952 the output of private industry increased by about 70%.⁶⁷ The East African Royal Commission estimated that by 1953 "the contribution of manufacturing activity to the monetary economy was in the region of 12% of the

⁶⁵East African Standard, 7-6-49 and issues of 14th and 21st June, 1949 all of which carry the series entitled 'The New Industrial Era'. Also see the Annual Reports of 1947 (pp. 42-43) and 1949 (pp 33 and 43-44) hailing the dawn of the new era.

⁶⁶Zwanenberg and King, op. cit., p. 129.

⁶⁷Amsden, op. cit., p. 50.

total".⁶⁸

Kenya's industrialisation, as almost in all other colonies in a similar position, was restricted to import-substitution and there was hardly any investment in intermediate and capital goods industries without which rapid and massive industrial growth and the emergence of a genuinely integrated industrial society was virtually impossible. Colonial industrialisation at this juncture took the form of import-substitution mainly because investment in manufacturing was dominated by foreign capital, especially the multinational corporations. Multinational corporations tend to be vertically integrated and they export some, if not all, of their profits, use imported material inputs usually from other subsidiaries, and establish plants in the capitalist peripheries usually involved in the final stages of production. Moreover, there is a tendency for the parent company to control key policy and management decisions.⁶⁹ This does not mean local capital was negligible in Kenya. On the contrary, local investment in industry was fairly sizeable, although it followed the basic pattern of import-substitution industrialisation. Particularly remarkable was the movement of Asian capital into manufacturing. The expansion of Asian capital

⁶⁸Zwanenberg and King, *op. cit.*, p. 133. The centrality of Kenya within the East African periphery was borne out by the fact that the contribution of the manufacturing sector to the country's GDP was over 50% greater than Uganda's in 1954 and 350% greater in 1968.

⁶⁹See Richard Eglin, 'The Oligopolistic Structure and Competitive Characteristics of Direct Foreign Investment in Kenya's Manufacturing Sector', Steven Langdon, 'The Multinational Corporation in the Kenya Political Economy', and Raphael Kaplinsky, 'Technical Change and the Multinational Corporation: Some British Multinationals in Kenya', in R. Kaplinsky (ed.), *op. cit.*

after the war was facilitated by the easing of state restrictions against Asian enterprise and the availability of finance capital to Asian entrepreneurs after the Banks of India and Baroda were set up in Kenya in 1945. Some Asian firms even managed to absorb settler-owned enterprises.⁷⁰ This was one further manifestation of the fact that the heyday of settler economic hegemony was gradually drawing to a close.

The colonial state actively encouraged local industrialisation by undertaking the construction and expansion of infrastructure. There was, of course, nothing new in this; from the beginning the colonial state had always taken upon itself to make provisions for infrastructure. What was new, however, was that unlike the war and pre-war periods public expenditure was no longer predominantly earmarked for settler production. Though there was an increase in absolute terms, there was a relative decline in the amount of capital formation attributed to settler agriculture and a corresponding rise of capital formation directed into industry and other non-settler farming sectors.⁷¹ Once again this was an indication that the facade of settler economic and political dominance was beginning to crack.

Swainson has shown that after the war the colonial state actually went out of its way to protect locally established industries from external competition. Although a comprehensive tariff system for local

⁷⁰See Swainson, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-30; also see Robin Murray, 'The Chanarias: The Development of a Kenyan Multinational', in R. Kaplinsky, *ibid.*

⁷¹Swainson, *ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

industry was not introduced until 1958, wartime measures of imposing surcharges on imported manufactured items were continued after the war, to the obvious satisfaction of firms established in the country.⁷² It is in fact evident that it was the imposition of high colonial tariff walls which attracted those fractions of British capital which had become uncompetitive on a world scale to invest in colonies like Kenya. Not only were such firms ensured of the exclusion of competitors from the colonial markets, this also allowed them to charge high local prices, which enabled them to enhance their profits on their local operations and recoup losses elsewhere. In addition to the erection of a protective tariff structure, post-war industrial strategy in Kenya was based on Industrial Licensing Ordinances. Under these ordinances a license was required to engage in any one of a handful of scheduled industries. The aim was to discourage the proliferation of small firms which would undermine the profitability of the big firms. Thus the licensing system encouraged "the movement of capital into large, oligopolistic units and a highly concentrated industrial structure emerged".⁷³

There is also another sense in which industry became concentrated; the vast bulk of the new manufacturing enterprises were established in the towns of Nairobi and Mombasa. This "differed somewhat from pre-war practice where much industry (which processed agricultural products) was located in rural areas".⁷⁴ This dual concentration of industry had

⁷²Ibid., p. 120, and R. Eglin, op. cit., p. 110.

⁷³Swainson, ibid., p. 123.

⁷⁴Amsden, op. cit., p. 51.

a crucial impact on the development of post-war labour relations, for it was to give a decisive edge to large firms and urban labour in the determination of the industrial relations system. Thus, as in other areas, settlers were losing their grip over the organisation of labour.

In pursuit of its industrial policy the government was later to create the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) as an umbrella organisation to "facilitate the industrial and economic development of the Colony by initiating, assisting or expanding industrial, commercial and other undertakings in the Colony".⁷⁵ The IDC functioned as a state finance corporation to assist private firms in their industrial undertakings.

Finally, the colonial state sought to promote industrialisation and economic growth by adopting a new labour policy that aimed at the development of a more permanent and skilled proletariat. In the words of the Labour Commissioner:

We know that population increases and soil deterioration in the reserves are bringing about a change in the African social and economic background, we know we must look towards more stable labour conditions in the towns and that no longer will it be possible for employers, whether enlightened or otherwise, to offer terms and conditions of employment to Africans which are subsidised either to a greater or lesser degree by land holdings and the work of their wives in the Native Land Units. We know that to put employment on a proper footing, we have got to aim towards reasonable married quarters

⁷⁵Memo on Industrial Development in Kenya, prepared for A. Hope-Jones, the Member for Commerce and Industry, 16-5-52, KNA/MCI.

and a wage that will enable the labourer to keep himself and his family which must include an element of education and recreation.⁷⁶

This was a theme that was repeated with persistence by the Labour Commissioner and the Labour Department on many occasions. At one time the former put it this way:

conditions of food and housing must be improved, then there must be response from the African, and then more pay for him. It is no good considering this business of their pay without bearing in mind that it has considerably decreased from 20 years ago ... I feel they (Africans) haven't received a fair share of the prosperity that has grown up.⁷⁷

Calls for a new labour policy came from other quarters as well. One of the memoranda submitted to the Mombasa Trades Tribunal, 1947, provides a critique of the prevailing labour policies as eloquent as any issued at the time:

evidence is not lacking to prove that the maintenance of low wage levels was just as much a part of government labour policies as it was that of private employers. This was the first major error in the history of colonial labour administration, and from it can be traced a whole succession of labour disputes of increasing severity down to the present day.

⁷⁶Labour Commissioner to Chief Secretary 6-9-48. KNA Lab 9/99.

⁷⁷Statement on Labour Policy by the Labour Commissioner, Hyde Clark, Jan. 1946, KNA Lab 9/2.

The memorandum did not hesitate to point its finger to the very structure of colonial-metropolitan relations as the source of colonial labour problems:

questions of African welfare, soil erosion and overstocking measures, education, agricultural production, marketing facilities etc., are all involved in the overriding problem of how to keep down the cost of imperial imports. It is probably of no great concern to the metropolitan country who produces the goods, so long as they are produced.

In conclusion, the memorandum attacked the justificatory assumptions behind previous colonial labour policies:

The line of reasoning which makes these practices not only permissible, but commendable, is based on the antiquated attitude that Africans and other 'primitive' people are best regarded as completely undifferentiated units of raw materials, to be adapted and moulded at will with the ease of chewing-gum. Added to this has been the contradictory desire to maintain tribal systems while at the same time trying to create a detribalised proletariat of wage labourers.⁷⁸

The African Labour Efficiency Survey Report, 1947, put it more succinctly and forcefully: "the vicious circle of low work-output, low wages, malnutrition and poor housing conditions must be broken".⁷⁹

⁷⁸Memorandum by T.P. O'Brien to the Labour Disputes Tribunal 26-5-47, CO 533 544.

⁷⁹African Labour Efficiency Survey, 1947, Colonial Research Publications No. 3, p. 86.

The government reluctantly admitted that international pressure, especially from the ILO, was also partly responsible for its attempts to devise a new labour policy. To quote the East African Standard:

The Kenya Government, said Mr. Hyde-Clarke "... is being forced by world opinion to take action in regard to labour conditions in the country. This action is along the lines of international labour agreements and new legislation on labour conditions, including minimum wages, is pending ..." The Labour Commissioner went on to say that legislation would shortly be introduced which would remove from the labour laws of the country certain of the penal clauses. The international Labour Office had been pressing for the entire removal of all penal sanctions, but it was hoped in Kenya that if some sanctions were removed it might be possible to retain others.⁸⁰

What was hardly conceded, however, was the fact that African labour militancy, which will be demonstrated later, probably more than all these other factors combined, made the adoption of a new labour policy imperative.

What did the new labour policy amount to in reality? Its immediate impact was the reorganisation of the Labour Department. The Department was strengthened by adding to it more officials, including a Trade Union Officer, appointed for the first time and whose responsibility was to oversee the development of trade unions along moderate and apolitical lines.⁸¹ It would, indeed seem that this is as far as the

⁸⁰EAS 10-9-46.

⁸¹Those added to the Dept. included a deputy Labour Commissioner, 3 senior labour officers, a senior medical officer, a trade union officer, a boiler inspector, and about 9 labour officers. See KNA Lab 2/57 and 59. Also see Sessional Paper No. 5 of 1945, and EAS 10-9-46.

new labour policy went. As it will be shown later, conditions of employment for Kenyan workers fell far short of the pious rhetoric propagated by the advocates of a new labour policy.

GROWTH AND STRUCTURE OF THE POST-WAR WORKING CLASS

The agricultural and industrial changes outlined above fundamentally affected the manner in which the Kenyan working class grew after the war. It is evident that apart from the obvious increases in the overall number of workers, there were significant changes in the composition and distribution of the labour force.

It is indicative of the extent to which capitalism had developed in Kenya by the end of the war that the remarkable expansion of wage employment owed less and less to overt state coercion. Conscription for essential undertakings was terminated in 1946,⁸² and although three years later the Voluntarily Unemployed Persons (Provision of Employment) Ordinance was passed empowering the government to seize vagrants and unemployed people in urban centres and send them to work on projects of 'national importance' for specified periods,⁸³ the days of direct and

⁸²See Sessional Paper No. 7, 1945.

⁸³This ordinance, ostensibly applicable to all races, was a revised version of a 1946 draft bill called 'The Removal of Undesirable Natives', which was not approved by the British Government because of its "being racial and having an unpleasant sounding title". See KNA Lab 9/2. Also see Annual Report, 1949. In 1947 there were approximately 2,300 and apparently their numbers were never again to exceed 10,000. See KNA Lab 3/18.

pervasive state intervention in the recruitment of labour were fast receding into the past.

A factor of some importance in the growth of the labour force in the first few years after the war was the return of tens of thousands of ex-askaris. Much emphasis has been placed on the ex-askaris failure to be reabsorbed into civilian life, or at any rate, how their expectations for better lives after the war proved illusory so that they felt cheated and betrayed by both the Kenyan and British Governments and subsequently channeled this anger and frustration into anti-colonial nationalist agitation. It has also been noted frequently that many ex-askaris made ill-advised or abortive forays into trade and business, while a fortunate minority entered the world of the growing African petit-bourgeois class of successful traders, farmers, teachers and civil servants.⁸⁴ Not as much, however, has been written on the ex-askaris incorporation into the working class and their contribution to working class life and organisation.

Just before the end of the war the Kenyan Government appointed a Civil Reabsorption Board and charged it with making detailed arrangements for the demobilisation of ex-servicemen of all races.⁸⁵ Initially it was the government's view that the majority of the ex-servicemen would willingly, if not happily, return to their previous existence as subsistence cultivators in the African land units. Consequently projects

⁸⁴See J.E.O. Shiroya, 'The Impact of the Second World War on Kenya: The Role of Ex-servicemen in Kenyan Nationalism', Ph.D. Thesis, Michigan State University, 1968.

⁸⁵Annual Report, 1946, p. 15.

preparing them for rural and agricultural life were to be encouraged.⁸⁶ This rather cosy illusion was soon shattered, however, as many ex-servicemen voiced their opposition and made it clear that they would not be dragged back into the poverty, drudgery and anonymity of reserve life. They wanted training and skilled jobs, preferably in the towns. In the end the government established training schemes not only to placate the restive ex-askaris and defuse a potentially explosive situation, but also to help alleviate the severe shortage of skilled manpower afflicting the country.

Two training centres for ex-servicemen were established and run by the Labour Department, which also tried to assist those ex-askaris not fortunate enough to secure places in the training centres, to find employment. The demobilisation programme was largely a failure; the numbers were large and training facilities were too few. In 1946, of over 50,000 Africans who were demobilised that year, employment was found for a mere 1,958 and only 1,384 were trained in a variety of crafts including artisans, builders, blacksmiths, carpenters, mechanics, electricians, fitters, masons, tailors, social welfare workers, and sanitary assistants.⁸⁷ By 1949 when the demobilisation programme was virtually completed no more than 3,700 men, 4% of the total number of

⁸⁶See Shiroya, op. cit., pp. 104-8.

⁸⁷Annual Report, 1946, p. 53. Also see Sessional Paper No. 8, 1948 and KNA Lab 9/28 for more details on the ex-askari training programmes.

ex-askaris in Kenya, had received training.⁸⁸ Characteristically the demobilisation programme for European and Asian ex-servicemen was more successful. The government solicited assistance from Britain and South Africa for their training. Separate Labour Exchange Bureaus were established for each of the three races and those for Africans were the least effective in placing people in employment.⁸⁹

The demobilisation programme affected the development of Kenyan labour in two main ways. First, the trained ex-askaris formed the core of the semi-skilled and skilled African workforce, so that they came to play an important role in organising labour during these years. Second, the failure of the programme meant that there were many thousands of ex-askaris who joined the ranks of underpaid and disenchanted workers prone to militancy.

Industry began to account for a sizeable portion of the wage labour force, and after 1945 this trend was accelerated as shown in the following table.

⁸⁸Unfortunately not all those trained got jobs. See Shiroya, op. cit., pp. 115-119. General demobilisation was completed in 1948. See Annual Report, 1948. The training schemes for ex-servicemen were soon discontinued and henceforth the Kabete Technical School and the Trade School of the Jeanes School changed to offering two year training courses for civilians. See Annual Report, 1949, p. 12.

⁸⁹See Labour Department Annual Report, 1948, p. 19.

Table 4.1: Sectoral Distribution of Employment (including casual and part-time workers and apprentices), 1948 and 1952.
(in thousands)

| Sector | 1948 Total Number | % of Total | 1952 Total Number | % of Total |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Agriculture and Forestry | 193.9 | 46.1 | 205.8 | 43.3 |
| Private Industry and Commerce | 124.5 | 29.6 | 154.3 | 32.4 |
| Public Services | 102.1 | 24.3 | 115.7 | 24.3 |
| Total | 420.5 | 100.0 | 475.8 | 100.0 |

Source: Labour Department Annual Reports for 1948 and 1952.

Although employment in all sectors increased, the rate of increase in agriculture was below that for total employment. The share of agriculture in total employment declined from 46.1% in 1948 to 43.3% in 1952, while that of public services remained static; private industry and commerce showed an increase from 29.6% in 1948 to 32.4% in 1952. The implications for labour organisation were profound; with industrialisation, social conditions of production became increasingly conducive to organisation among workers. Industrialisation also encouraged urbanisation as thousands flocked to the towns to seek work in the new factories, while the incidence of rural landlessness increased and rural employment opportunities declined.

Table 4.2: The Rural and Urban Distribution of Adult Male Africans in Wage Employment (including casual workers), 1948 and 1954

| | Employment in 9 main towns | Employment in all other areas | Of which agricul- tural employment | Total |
|-------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|
| <u>1948</u> | | | | |
| Numbers | 97,718 | 212,356 | 126,451 | 310,074 |
| % | 31.5 | 68.5 | 59.5 | 100.0 |
| <u>1954</u> | | | | |
| Numbers | 135,385 | 249,421 | 139,784 | 384,806 |
| % | 35.2 | 64.8 | 56.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Reported Employment and Wages in Kenya, 1948-60, East African High Commission, East Africa Statistical Department, Kenya Unit, August 1961.

The table shows that employment in the nine main towns⁹⁰ increased much faster than employment in all other areas. In fact as a percentage of total African male adult employment the latter's share declined from 68.5% in 1948 to 64.8% in 1954, while for the former it was the reverse. It is interesting to note that even in the other areas agricultural employment accounted for 59.5% of the total in 1948 a figure which had dropped to 56.0% by 1954, thus reinforcing our observations of the trend towards industrialisation.

As could be expected the towns did not develop evenly. Nairobi and Mombasa accounted for the heaviest concentration of urban population and

⁹⁰ They are the following: Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Kisumu, Eldoret, Kitale, Nanyuki, Nyeri and Thika.

industry. Between 1948 and 1962, for example, Nairobi's population more than doubled from about 119,000 to 267,000, and while the percentage of increase for the population of the country as a whole for this period was 54% the figure for Nairobi was a staggering 156%. Mombasa trailed behind slightly; its population rose from about 102,400 in 1947 to 173,000 in 1962. Between them Nairobi and Mombasa represented over three times the population of the nine next largest towns combined.⁹¹

The rapid growth of these towns was all the more remarkable when it is borne in mind that colonial authorities made enormous effort to control the influx of people into the urban centres. We have already referred to the Voluntarily Unemployed Persons (Provision of Employment) Ordinance, 1949, aimed at curbing urban inflow, which was essentially a new version of a long-chain of vagrancy ordinances operative since 1902. As more people flocked into the towns so did the numbers of people who became long-term residents increase. The rising trend towards urban labour stabilisation was observed for both Nairobi and Mombasa.⁹²

Meanwhile, as urban labour showed signs of becoming stabilised, rural labour displayed marked tendencies towards greater proletarianisation. This was partly reflected by the steady decrease in the number of

⁹¹ See Zwanenberg and King, *op. cit.*, Chapter 13.

⁹² A survey conducted in Mombasa by the H.S. Booker and N.M. Devrill, showed that the length of stay for upcountry Africans resident in Mombasa had become longer over the years. Also see Zwanenberg and King, *op. cit.*, chapter 13. In 1952 the Labour Department pointed out that "50% of the adult male population (was) employed outside the native land units at one given time; one-third of this (i.e., some 150,000) live permanently outside ..." LDAR, 1952, p. 21. (emphasis added). The point to bear in mind about labour stabilisation in this context is that we are talking about the rate of African participation in the labour market which kept rising, irrespective of whether real wages were static, increasing, or even falling.

Table 4.3: African Agricultural Workers, 1946-1952

| | 1946 | | 1947 | | 1948 | | 1949 | | 1950 | | 1951 | | 1952 | |
|--|---------|--------------------------------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|
| | No. | % of all employ- ment | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| All African employment | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 376,781 | 100 | 388,361 | 100 | 385,567 | 100 | 394,912 | 100 | 422,206 | 100 | 412,416 | 100 | 434,539 | 100 |
| Men | 287,134 | 76.2 | 300,833 | 77.3 | 310,074 | 80.5 | 323,867 | 82.0 | 341,063 | 80.8 | 327,401 | 79.4 | 351,368 | 80.9 |
| Women | 34,755 | 9.2 | 33,849 | 8.7 | 30,589 | 7.9 | 32,741 | 8.3 | 34,479 | 8.2 | 41,402 | 10.0 | 40,354 | 9.3 |
| Juveniles | 54,892 | 14.6 | 54,179 | 14.0 | 44,904 | 11.6 | 38,304 | 9.7 | 46,664 | 11.0 | 43,613 | 10.6 | 42,817 | 9.8 |
| Monthly Paid Agric. Labour | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 137,931 | 36.6 | 139,170 | 35.8 | 136,908 | 35.5 | 140,775 | 35.6 | 143,432 | 34.0 | 149,094 | 36.2 | 149,823 | 34.5 |
| Men | 90,651 | 24.1 | 93,093 | 24.0 | 94,593 | 24.5 | 100,358 | 25.4 | 100,510 | 23.8 | 105,045 | 25.5 | 105,957 | 24.4 |
| Women | 8,932 | 2.4 | 9,193 | 2.4 | 10,728 | 2.9 | 12,516 | 3.2 | 14,228 | 3.4 | 14,449 | 3.5 | 15,092 | 3.5 |
| Juveniles | 38,348 | 10.1 | 36,484 | 9.4 | 31,587 | 8.1 | 27,901 | 7.0 | 28,694 | 6.8 | 29,600 | 7.2 | 28,774 | 6.6 |
| Daily Paid Agric. Casual Labour | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 15,852 | 4.2 | 22,397 | 5.7 | 14,901 | 3.9 | 12,208 | 3.1 | 18,877 | 4.5 | 25,969 | 6.3 | 21,492 | 4.9 |
| Men | 3,288 | 0.9 | 4,983 | 1.3 | 8,324 | 2.2 | 2,478 | 0.6 | 8,492 | 2.0 | 7,196 | 1.7 | 5,911 | 1.4 |
| Women | 9,296 | 2.4 | 13,015 | 3.3 | 2,633 | 0.7 | 8,365 | 2.1 | 6,730 | 1.6 | 14,074 | 3.4 | 11,820 | 2.7 |
| Juveniles | 3,268 | 0.9 | 4,399 | 1.1 | | | 1,816 | 0.4 | 3,655 | 0.9 | 4,699 | 1.2 | 3,761 | 0.8 |
| Resident Agric. Labour | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 49,545 | 13.1 | 43,600 | 11.2 | 40,793 | 10.6 | 43,479 | 11.0 | 48,075 | 11.4 | 41,953 | 10.2 | 44,524 | 10.2 |
| Men | 27,746 | 7.3 | 26,625 | 6.8 | 25,359 | 6.6 | 27,916 | 7.1 | 27,690 | 6.5 | 25,522 | 6.2 | 27,445 | 6.3 |
| Women | 14,045 | 3.7 | 9,087 | 2.3 | 8,739 | 2.3 | 9,470 | 2.4 | 9,960 | 2.4 | 9,633 | 2.3 | 9,989 | 2.3 |
| Juveniles | 7,754 | 2.1 | 7,888 | 2.1 | 6,695 | 1.7 | 6,093 | 1.5 | 10,425 | 2.5 | 6,798 | 1.7 | 7,090 | 1.6 |

Source: Labour Department Annual Reports, 1946-52.

resident labourers as shown in table 4.3.

Resident labour as a proportion of total agricultural employment fell from 24.4% in 1946 and 22.1% in 1949 to 20.6% in 1952. In contrast, numbers of both monthly paid and casual labour rose, with the latter showing a slightly faster rate of growth, possibly suggesting that some settler farmers who were disposing off squatters but could not afford monthly paid labour were turning to daily paid casual labour. The table also reveals a decline in the number of female squatters from 14,045 in 1946 to 9,989 in 1952, or from 28.3% of the total squatter labour force to 22.4%. It appears that fewer male squatters were allowed to bring their wives. In a sense, therefore, squatter labour was being forced to assume some of the characteristics of a migrant labour force.

The gradual demise of the squatter system was a result of the fairly rapid post-war expansion of settler and plantation agriculture, which meant that settlers and plantation owners could now ill-afford to give squatters large tracts of land for their cultivation and grazing. More than ever before, therefore, it had become necessary to deprive the squatters of their land rights, from which they derived most of their income, and turn them into workers entirely dependent on wages, however low those wages were. The Labour Department noted in 1952 that

District Councils in the areas of European settlement are limiting the maximum size of plots which might be allotted to the labourer and his family with the intention of limiting 'kaffir farming' and like abuses ... Resident labour is no longer attractive to Africans.⁹³

⁹³See Labour Department Annual Report, 1952, p. 11. The records kept in the Kenya National Archives on squatter labour are truly

The Uasin Gishu District Council was one of the first councils to resolve that "no new Resident Labourer with stock shall be engaged by any occupier ... no existing contract for resident labourers with stock shall be renewed except from year to year".⁹⁴ Elaborate plans were laid out for the eventual removal of all squatter stock.⁹⁵ Other district councils adopted similar destocking measures. The Forestry Department did the same as well.⁹⁶ Stock reduction went hand in hand with measures to reduce land given to squatters for cultivation and grazing purposes. In 1946, for instance, the Naivasha district council restricted squatter cultivation to 2 acres and increased the required number of days for a squatter to work from 240 to 270 in a year, that is, from eight to nine months. In Nakuru squatters were allowed a mere 1½ acres by 1953 down from 2½ acres in 1946.⁹⁷

These measures were not only harsh in themselves, but they were also enforced with calculated cruelty. Squatters whose contracts had expired were promptly served with notices to quit and were sent back to the overpopulated and overstocked reserves sometimes regardless of

voluminous so that here we can only give a very select sample of those deposits specifically dealing with squatter labour, from which the following discussion has been based. See KNA Lab 3/41; Lab 5/1; Lab 5/35; Lab 9/3; Lab 9/9-11; Lab 9/304; Lab 9/309-312; Lab 9/334-340; Lab 9/601; Lab 9/1044; MAA 3/41, no. 214.

⁹⁴Uasin Gish District Council Minutes 24-6-42, KNA Lab 9/9.

⁹⁵The system envisaged 20% reduction each year either in the numbers of resident labour with their stock or in the numbers of stock. See Statistician - Labour Commissioner, 30-9-48. KNA Lab 9/9. Also see EAS 22-10-48; KNA Lab 9/9, Lab 9/304 and Lab 9/309. None of the districts succeeded in getting rid of all their squatters in the time allotted.

⁹⁶Divisional Forest Office - Conservator of Forests 19-7-47. KNA Lab 9/10.

⁹⁷For details see Annual Reports, 1946-52, for Trans-Nzoia, Uasin Gishu, Nakuru. Naivasha and Kiambu.

whether the date of the expiration of their contract was before the normal harvesting season, so that many were forced to leave their crops behind. Aged squatters, some of whom had been squatters for practically the whole of their adult lives were not spared either, and, of course, there were many evicted squatters who had neither been born or bred in the African reserves, to which they were now supposed to return as to their 'homes'. Needless to say, this had the effect of accentuating the already deepening poverty for the great majority of people in those areas most affected and contributing to the growth of rural social conflict.

Inspections of squatter colonies, including those in the forest areas employed by the Forestry Department,⁹⁸ were also carried out more actively, and woe to those squatters who were found keeping 'excessive' stock or harbouring 'hangers-on', for they either received stiff fines or were evicted. Forced seizure, sale or repatriation of squatter stock by both employers and the Forestry Department became commonplace and were given the force of law. Records of squatters were better kept and updated so that the cases of illegal squatting were more vigorously pursued.⁹⁹ "Council believes", the Uasin Gishu District Council tried to justify its policy after issuing one of its tough squatter regulations, "that the African by and large, is still savage and a child and that he understands and responds to firmness, that he fully understands

⁹⁸Labour Officer (Thomson's Falls) - Labour Commissioner, 2-10-47. KNA Lab 9/10. For more details on pressure against forest squatters see Lab 9/337 and the Humphrey Report at 9/338.

⁹⁹Registrar of Natives, 27-7-46. KNA Lab 9/10.

the reasons for council's proposed order, and far from losing confidence if the order is implemented and enforced, will gain respect and liking for the European".¹⁰⁰ Coming on the eve of Mau Mau these were sentiments of truly monumental self-deception, complacency and contempt for the African.

The Labour Department would have preferred to give the squatting system a more decent burial than either the settlers or the Forestry Department were doing. A detailed memorandum was prepared envisaging a phased change in the status of the squatter from being dependent more on land than wages to being entirely dependent on wages. First, squatters were to be turned into 'crofters' who would receive higher wages and be less dependent on land and stock and, in addition, employers would provide them with social services and schools. The next stage in the transition would see the 'crofters' turned into 'cottage' labourers who would rely almost entirely on wages, except for being given small plots of land for vegetables. Finally, conditions would be created to absorb the former squatters into a class of 'independent workers' who would earn all their income from wages and live in permanent and well planned and administered villages in the so-called White Highlands.¹⁰¹ Bold though the proposals were in trying to solve the squatter problem, they not only betrayed an astonishing disregard for the enormous social and economic obstacles to be faced in implementing them, but they were

¹⁰⁰Uasin Gishu District Council Minutes, 1-5-47, KNA Lab 9/9.

¹⁰¹Memorandum on 'The Resident Labour Problem', 3rd March, 1947. KNA Lab 9/11. Also see Lab 3/42.

also irrelevant, since the settler-dominated district councils had already taken matters in their own hands to change and restructure the resident labour system.

While squatter labour was being eliminated and thus creating serious social and economic dislocations in the rural areas, there was also another movement, though less noticeable, but no less indicative of the changing landscape of Kenya's political economy for that matter; women were entering wage employment in steadily increasing numbers. There is some reason to believe that as the squatting system no longer became economic for the settler and plantation economies to maintain, a need arose for a new source of very cheap labour. Hence the absorption of women in increasing numbers and not surprisingly they were concentrated in low-paying jobs, particularly the coffee, tea and pyrethrum picking industries.

Table 4.3 above shows that the number of women in wage employment increased from about 35,000 in 1946 to just over 40,000 by 1952. As a percentage of total African employment, however, the increase was a negligible one. In 1946 women constituted 9.2% of the African labour force and by 1952 their position was barely a notch higher at 9.3%. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there was a major reorientation in the distribution of female labour even within the agricultural sector. It is clear that there was an absolute decline in the number of women resident labourers, and a marked rise for those in both daily and monthly paid labour. Significantly, the rate of increase was higher for the latter category than for daily casual labour. Indeed, by this date women accounted for about 10% of all monthly paid African

agricultural labour, the figure having risen from 6½% in 1946.

Meanwhile, the numbers of juveniles in recorded employment began to fall. From nearly 55,000 in 1946 they were reduced to about 43,000 in 1952, which was a drop from almost 15% of total African employment to 10%. Thus, by 1952, there were nearly as many women as juveniles in wage employment. This can partly be attributed to a tightening of regulations concerning the recruitment and employment of juveniles. To a considerable extent these provisions were inspired by international labour conventions of the ILO which were binding on Kenya,¹⁰² and intended in part to placate a hostile missionary and humanitarian lobby in Kenya and Britain. In the beginning it was difficult to enforce them but as time went on the situation began to improve.¹⁰³ It is probably significant that the most notable fall in juvenile labour occurred in the category of monthly paid labour (from 38,348 in 1946 to 28,774 in 1952), while the numbers engaged in daily paid casual labour and resident labour remained almost constant. Perhaps it was much easier to enforce regulations restricting the employment of juveniles on large estates and plantations which were more likely to employ regular monthly paid labour than say on the smaller farms which were more likely to depend on casual or resident labour.

Although the overwhelming majority of working women continued to be employed in agriculture, after the war there was a gradual advance of

¹⁰² Like other signatories to the ILO Convention, Kenya was expected to send annual 'progress' reports to the ILO. See KNA Lab 3/18.

¹⁰³ See Labour Department Annual Reports, 1947, pp. 11-12, 1948, p. 13, 1950, p. 12 and 1952, p. 11.

women into non-agricultural employment as shown in tables 4.4 and 4.5.

Table 4.4: African Women in Non-agricultural Employment, Private and Public Sectors, 1945-1952.

| Year | Total |
|------|-------|
| 1945 | 2,371 |
| 1946 | 2,424 |
| 1947 | 2,405 |
| 1948 | 2,663 |
| 1949 | 2,390 |
| 1950 | 3,561 |
| 1951 | 3,246 |
| 1952 | 3,453 |

Source: Special Labour Census, 1943-48 by Labour Department and Labour Department Annual Reports, 1949-52.

Table 4.5: Distribution of Women of all Races Reported in Employment, 1948 and 1954

| | 1948 | | | 1954 | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| | Number | % of all female employment | % of total employment (X) | Number | % of female employment | % of total employment |
| Agriculture and Forestry | | | | | | |
| African: | 27,791 | 99.7 | 14.4 | 48,371 | 99.7 | 21.9 |
| European: | 76 | 0.3 | 0.7 | 152 | 0.3 | 9.8 |
| Asian: | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Total: | | | | | | |
| Private Comm. and Industry | | | | | | |
| African: | 2,060 | 44.0 | 2.0 | 6,065 | 55.3 | 4.3 |
| European: | 2,139 | 45.6 | 36.0 | 3,671 | 33.4 | 40.2 |
| Asian: | 484 | 10.4 | 0.3 | 1,239 | 11.3 | 5.6 |
| Total: | 4,683 | 100 | 3.7 | 10,975 | 100 | 6.4 |
| Public Service | | | | | | |
| African: | 738 | 36.4 | 0.8 | 2,772 | 52.4 | 2.1 |
| European: | 1,142 | 56.3 | 25.0 | 2,087 | 39.5 | 26.8 |
| Asian: | 148 | 7.3 | 0.2 | 431 | 8.1 | 4.3 |
| Total: | 2,028 | 100 | 2.0 | 5,290 | 100 | 3.6 |
| All Employment | | | | | | |
| African: | 30,589 | 88.5 | 7.9 | 57,208 | 88.3 | 11.6 |
| European: | 3,357 | 9.7 | 32.0 | 5,910 | 9.1 | 32.0 |
| Asian: | 633 | 1.8 | 0.3 | 1,674 | 2.6 | 5.1 |
| Total ^z : | 34,579 | 100 | 8.2 | 64,792 | 100 | 11.9 |

Source: Reported Employment and Wages in Kenya, 1948-60, East African High Commission, East Africa Statistical Department, Kenya Unit, August, 1961.

(X) i.e., 14.4% of total Africans employed in agriculture were women.

(z) includes a very small number of Asians engaged in agriculture.

In the six years between 1948 and 1954, according to Table 4.5, the number of women in non-agricultural employment almost trebled from about 6½ thousands to a little over 16,000, which represented almost a quarter of total female employment. Statistically in 1948 African and European women were equally represented in private industry and commerce, but by 1954 there were twice as many African women in this sector as European women, and the latter had also been overtaken in the public service sector. In reality, however, there were huge occupational discrepancies between the two groups; African women were concentrated in unskilled and low paying jobs, while European women occupied clerical and secretarial jobs. This might partly explain why Asian women were such an insignificant part of the female work force; the skilled and semi-skilled jobs available for women were taken up by European women, and the unskilled ones by African women. Moreover, there were some communal and cultural restraints working against the entry of Asian women into wage employment.¹⁰⁴

A substantial majority of African women were engaged in domestic service and very few of them were as yet employed in manufacturing industries, although the trend was slowly changing. It ought to be noted, however, that female domestic workers were grossly outnumbered by their male counterparts. In 1947, for instance, the latter numbered

¹⁰⁴See Reported Employment and Wages in Kenya, 1948-60, op. cit., p. 9 where it is argued that the situation among Asian women in the late 1940s "was that the vast majority of [them] married at an early age, going straight from their parents' home to that of the husband, and no work was ever undertaken outside the home, except by a few who remained single for an unusual number of years".

nearly 22,000 to about 1,000 for the former.¹⁰⁵ The position did not really change until the Emergency period of the 1950s when thousands of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru male domestics, like other workers of the same ethnic groups, were evicted from Nairobi en masse. There was another segment of female domestic labour not contained in the official statistics but which nonetheless expanded considerably in the first post-war years. The urban expansion and its associated influx of thousands of men into towns, including many free-spending ex-askaris, stimulated the further growth of prostitution.¹⁰⁶

The occupational divisions among female workers along racial lines that we have noted were only a pale reflection of the more pronounced and yet complex divisions within the labour force as a whole which can be seen in table 4.6.

Apart from the more obvious aspects that Africans were predominant in all sectors, the table also shows that Asian and European labour grew steadily during this period, particularly in the non-agricultural sectors. In 1948, for example, there had been 16,000 Asian workers¹⁰⁷ and by 1952 the number had increased to over 25,000. In the case of European employment the rise during this period, when compared to the war years, or better still the pre-war period, was not far short of phenomenal.

¹⁰⁵See Sharon Stitchter, 'Women and the Labour Force in Kenya, 1895-1964', Institute of Development Studies/Discussion Paper 258, Nbi.

¹⁰⁶Luise White, 'Women's Domestic Labour in Colonial Kenya: Prostitution in Nairobi, 1909-50', African Studies Centre, Boston Univ.

¹⁰⁷See Labour Department Annual Report, 1948, p. 5.

Table 4.6: Racial Distribution of Employment (including casual and part-time workers and apprentices), 1948 and 1952.
(in thousands)

| Sector | 1948 | | 1952 | |
|--------------------------------------|--------|------------|--------|------------|
| | Number | % of total | Number | % of total |
| Agriculture and forestry | | | | |
| Total: | 193.9 | 100 | 205.8 | 100 |
| African: | 192.6 | 99.3 | 204.0 | 99.1 |
| European: | 1.0 | 0.5 | 1.4 | 0.7 |
| Asian: | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.4 | 0.2 |
| Private Industry and Commerce | | | | |
| Total: | 124.5 | 100 | 154.3 | 100 |
| African: | 103.9 | 83.5 | 129.0 | 83.6 |
| European: | 6.0 | 4.8 | 8.6 | 5.6 |
| Asian: | 14.6 | 11.7 | 16.7 | 10.8 |
| Public Services | | | | |
| Total: | 102.1 | 100 | 115.7 | 100 |
| African: | 89.0 | 87.2 | 101.6 | 87.8 |
| European: | 4.5 | 4.4 | 5.9 | 5.1 |
| Asian: | 8.6 | 8.4 | 8.2 | 7.1 |
| All employment | | | | |
| Total: | 420.5 | 100 | 475.8 | 100 |
| African: | 385.5 | 91.7 | 434.6 | 91.3 |
| European: | 11.5 | 2.7 | 15.9 | 3.4 |
| Asian: | 23.5 | 5.6 | 25.3 | 5.3 |

Source: Labour Department Annual Reports, 1948 and 1952.

In the 12 years after 1948 European employment increased by some 100% while African employment trailed behind with a 45% rise during the same period.¹⁰⁸

The fairly rapid advance of Asian and European employment owed a great deal to the rapid expansion of manufacturing industries after the war which led to greater demand for skilled and semi-skilled manpower. So severe was the shortage of skilled labour that the government resorted to importing such labour from overseas. As the Annual Report for 1947 noted, there was an acute

shortage of trained artisans in the colony ... until trained African artisans from the government training centres can be produced, the importation of skilled artisans from outside the country appears to be the only immediate solution.¹⁰⁹

Two years later the Labour Commissioner reiterated:

to keep pace with the needs of the gigantic development schemes now envisaged, larger and still larger numbers of qualified European workers, supervisors and technicians will have to come to the aid of Africans because of the unsolved problem of African output.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Reported Employment and Wages in Kenya, 1948-60, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁰⁹ Annual Report, 1947, p. 6. Also see KNA Lab 2/24 on labour recruitment from the neighbouring territories, which even at its height was nowhere near the proportions of labour migration experienced in the South.

¹¹⁰ EAS 19-1-49. Also see KNA Lab 9/3.

Employers were accordingly encouraged to submit applications for entry permits for immigrant workers. In 1947 alone 10,000 new immigrants entered the colony, half of whom were from India and the rest from Britain. The manner in which the Indian immigrants were recruited says something about the organisation of Indian labour in Kenya at this time.

Nearly all the applications received from employers are requests for entry permits into Kenya for relatives or friends in India who are alleged to possess the necessary qualifications, and are usually accompanied by a proviso that only applicants of a certain caste need apply.¹¹¹

Such caste provisions can partly be explained by the fact that except for 30% who were employed by European firms and the government, the overwhelming majority of Asians were employed in Asian-owned businesses and firms.¹¹² All this points to the complexity of the Asian work-force in Kenya and its inherent contradictions; since they were mostly employed by fellow Asians the horizontal pull of racial solidarity was undercut by the vertical wedge of class antagonism. No wonder that Asian workers exhibited an uneasy mixture of militancy and moderation.

Some of the British immigrants, of course, became settler farmers, and as for the vast majority who joined the workforce, they generally occupied supervisory and managerial positions. This, when coupled with

¹¹¹Labour Officer (Mombasa) - Asian Employment Bureau 8-8-47.
KNA Lab 9/124.

¹¹²Minutes of meeting to investigate Asian artisan wages, 27-1-48.
KNA Lab 9/267.

their racial identification with the colonial ruling classes, reinforced their alienation from the bulk of African and Asian workers, organisationally and ideologically. There were also a couple thousand Italian ex-servicemen who were imported by the Kenyan Government with the approval of the Secretary of State to work in agriculture, industry and in the East African Construction Force which built depots for military stores removed from the Middle East and India. Most of them returned to Italy after the expiry of their contracts and those who remained either became businessmen or farmers.¹¹³

It is ironical that, as so many thousands of skilled workers were being imported from outside the country, some African artisans were finding it difficult to get suitable employment. To quote the Labour Department Annual Report for 1948:

there has been a noticeable change during the year in the demand for certain classes of African artisans, with the result that their market value has fallen considerably. There are many trained mechanics, blacksmiths, tinsmiths and electricians now unemployed, since they are not prepared to work for less than 80/- to 90/- per month.¹¹⁴

The government was, in effect, blaming the skilled African workers for pricing themselves out of the labour market. Yet Asian and European skilled workers, including the new immigrants, were being paid several times more. Ex-askaris were bitter at the way they were neglected and

¹¹³See Labour Department Annual Reports, 1947, p. 23; 1948, pp. 10-11; 1949, p. 15. Also see Padmore, op. cit., p. 169.

¹¹⁴Labour Department Annual Report, 1948, p. 11.

official preference appeared to be for Italian ex-servicemen.¹¹⁵ This contradiction of having skilled labour shortages while many skilled Africans were unemployed was rooted in the prominence that is given to racial ideology in settler-colonial social formations. It was this, too, which undermined the chances for class solidarity across racial boundaries and, as we shall show later, ensured that African working class struggles would be an integral part of the movement for political emancipation.

CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

Despite the numerical growth of the working class and the fact that many workers were staying at their jobs for longer periods than before, the weight of the evidence seems to point to the conclusion that during the period under review improvements in employment conditions as well as general living conditions were minimal. In short, it can be demonstrated that despite numerous policy statements urging the adoption of new labour practices, the Kenyan labour force was, on the whole, as cheap as ever.

The Wage Structure

Although some officials in the Labour Department argued that it was time to adopt a high wage economy in order to stabilise labour and

¹¹⁵Shiroya, op. cit., p. 154.

increase productivity,¹¹⁶ arguments and rationalisations for a system of low wages still guided wage policy during the early post-war years. There were those who still clung tenaciously to the myth that the African was merely a target worker so that raising wages, particularly setting up a 'family' minimum wage, would mean less work since it would "enable him to leave earlier", thus further reducing productivity.¹¹⁷ Others objected on the grounds that raising wages would create a class of privileged urban workers and widen the income gap between the rural areas and the urban enclaves.¹¹⁸ This, in turn, would lure tens of thousands more people to the towns which, in the end, would lead to severe labour shortages for rural employers, thereby forcing up their labour costs. In addition, urban social services would be overstrained, thus aggravating economic destitution and social discontent: a perfect recipe for political unrest.¹¹⁹ This line of reasoning found particular favour with settlers who were afraid that urban wages might rise too high for them to compete effectively, and with town municipalities, impatient to stem the tide of urban drift. Some even resorted to such specious arguments as the contention that increasing wages would only whet the

¹¹⁶These arguments can be found advanced in various ways in KNA Lab 3/77; Lab 3/80; Lab 9/2 - 3; Lab 9/99; Lab 9/265 and Lab 9/267; and in the daily summaries of the verbatim records of proceedings of Disputes Tribunal, Mombasa, 1947, KNA Lab 3/12 - 17. Also see such reports as the African Labour Efficiency Survey, 1947.

¹¹⁷Orde Browne Report, 1946, p. 5.

¹¹⁸H.S. Booker - P.A. Wilson 16-3-48. CO 533 544. Also see Booker and Devrill Report, 1947, p. 15.

¹¹⁹Booker and Devrill Report, p. 17.

African's insatiable appetite for marrying many wives and encourage him to waste money on luxuries.¹²⁰ It was also pointed out that raising wages would lead to a serious unemployment problem because employers would be forced to cut back on the numbers of workers they could afford to pay in order to cut costs.¹²¹ Finally, some contended that raising wages would be counter-productive because they would be inflationary, especially since they were unlikely to be matched by corresponding increases in labour productivity. The economy, it was maintained, could not sustain a system of high wages.¹²²

The Manager of Michael Cotts and Co. Ltd. offered an overdue antidote to these arguments in 1947 when he stated:

one of the main troubles in this country is that many organisations expect to make far too high a profit in comparison to the risk involved and the amount of capital outlay. If the profit ratio were reduced to compare with other countries employing similar labour, there would be no question whatsoever but that the African could receive a higher wage, without the necessity of increasing the cost of living, as a result of that wage increase.¹²³

¹²⁰See Evidence submitted to Mombasa Tribunal 15-2-47 KNA Lab 3/15.

¹²¹See P.E. Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 237. Also see Speech by Hyde Clark, Labour Commissioner, EAS 4-10-46, and Acting Governor - Secretary of State 6-3-48. CO 533 544.

¹²²General Manager (KUR and Harbours) - Labour Commissioner 8-1-47. KNA Lab 3/13. General Manager (KUR & H) - Chief Secretary 13-11-47. CO 533 544. Also see EAS 19-1-49 and 21-7-49.

¹²³Manager Messrs. Mitchell Cotts and Co. Ltd. evidence submitted to Mombasa Disputes Tribunal 20-2-47. KNA Lab 3/15. This did not mean, however, that his own company paid high wages. On the contrary, this

Such views would not gain currency until the mid-fifties as shown by the appointment and adoption of some recommendations made by the 1954 Committee on African Wages.

As could be expected the wage structure reflected the racial divisions within the society. Europeans were on top of the salary scale, Asians in the middle and Africans at the bottom, as shown in table 4.7. Overall, Europeans earned about 24 times as much as African workers and Asian workers ten times as much. The biggest wage differentials between African workers and workers of the other two races were in agriculture. In contrast, the wage differential between Asians and Europeans was smallest in agriculture, where the latter earned 1.8 times more than the former as compared to 2.4 in private commerce and industry and 2.3 times in public services. The table also shows that sectoral wage differentiation was highest among African workers.

Differential wage rates based on racial lines were, of course, as old as the colony itself. In 1947 the East African Salaries Commission Report argued forcefully that the time had not yet come for introducing a common salary scale for all races,¹²⁴ a recommendation which the government fully endorsed, except for one minor alteration. Instead of using the terms European, Asian and African the salary scales were redesignated A, B, and C. But this fooled no one; even the most qualified Africans and Asians, including holders of University degrees, were

merely shows that employers were aware that wages were extremely low, but only a courageous minority was prepared to state it in public.

¹²⁴The East African Salaries Commission Report, 1947, paragraphs 73-97.

(Numbers in Thousands)

| | AFRICAN | | | | ASIAN | | | | EUROPEAN | | | | TOTAL | |
|-----------------------------|---------|-----------------------|------|----------------|-------|-----------------------|------|----------------|----------|-----------------------|------|----------------|-------|-----------------|
| | Nos. | Total Wages £ Mil. | % | Av. Per Worker | Nos. | Total Wages £ Mil. | % | Av. Per Worker | Nos. | Total Wages £ Mil. | % | Av. Per Worker | Nos. | Wages £ Mil. |
| Agriculture & Forestry | 192.6 | 3.3 | 82.5 | 17.1 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 2.5 | 333.3 | 1.0 | 0.6 | 15.0 | 600 | 193.9 | 4.0 |
| Private Commerce & Industry | 103.9 | 3.3 | 31.1 | 38.8 | 14.6 | 3.7 | 34.9 | 253.4 | 6.0 | 3.6 | 34.0 | 600 | 124.5 | 10.6 |
| Public Service | 89.0 | 3.2 | 38.6 | 36.0 | 8.6 | 2.3 | 27.7 | 267.4 | 4.5 | 2.8 | 33.7 | 622.2 | 102.1 | 8.3 |
| All Sectors | 385.5 | 9.8 | 42.8 | 25.4 | 23.5 | 6.1 | 26.6 | 259.6 | 11.5 | 7.0 | 30.6 | 608.7 | 420.5 | 22.9 |

Source: Reported Employment and Wages in Kenya, 1948-60, East African High Commission, East Africa Statistical Department, Kenya Unit, August, 1961.

to receive no more than 3/5 of the appropriate European scale.¹²⁵

Needless to say, union demands for equal pay for equal work became increasingly more fierce. Predictably these demands were met with opposition from both the government and employers. With no small audacity some officials and employers went so far as to argue that the prevailing system was actually in the interests of the African worker. "If the African worker", the general manager of the Kenya Uganda Railway and Harbours said, "is as efficient as the Asian but his wages are lower he is almost certain to be employed in preference to the Asian. If his pay is the same he is not so likely to get his job. Thus, equal pay for equal work would also act as a protection to the employment of Asians."¹²⁶ He went on to reject the idea that "the standard of Africans ought to be raised substantially, even at the expense of Europeans if necessary ... the only way to increase African standards generally and substantially is by increasing production by Africans themselves".¹²⁷ The disproportionate share of the wage bill paid to European employees recalls a similar dominance by settlers in the economy as a whole. It is tempting to conclude that the wage structure worked to frustrate efforts at inter-racial working class solidarity, most particularly between African and Asian workers where such an alliance was at least possible.

¹²⁵See Sessional Paper No. 2, 1948: Proposals for the Implementation of the Recommendations of the East African Salaries Commission.

¹²⁶General Manager of the KUR & H quoted in Booker and Devrill Report, p. 16.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 17.

To be sure, for the first time in Kenya's history the government introduced a minimum wage policy and other important wage regulatory measures after the war. A minimum wage ordinance was passed in 1946 despite concerted opposition from many employers.¹²⁸ In the following year the Central Minimum Wages Advisory Board was set up with the objective of devising wage minima for industry and the major towns, although it could also appoint regional minimum wage advisory boards to review and recommend wage rates for rural agricultural workers.¹²⁹ At no time during this period, however, did the board seek to impose minimum wages on the agricultural sector. On the contrary, the board's exclusive concern with urban workers was formalised in 1951 when the Regulation of Wages and Conditions of Employment Ordinance was passed. The board operated under the provisions of this ordinance which were solely confined to industrial workers. Thus statutory wage minima did not embrace the whole workforce, and since workers in agriculture, who constituted more than a third of the total workforce, were not covered, its impact was limited from the start. The exclusion of agricultural workers was most certainly a result of successful settler opposition. It also says something about the organisational level of rural labour as compared to urban labour.

¹²⁸Material on minimum wage legislation and fixing machinery can be found in KNA Lab 2/75; Lab 9/431; Lab 9/443 - 444; Lab 9/452; Lab 9/509 and Lab 9/538. Also see EAS 4-10-46 and 23-11-46.

¹²⁹For terms of reference of the Central Minimum Wage Advisory Board see KNA Lab 9/452 and Lab 3/18. Also see Annual Report, 1946 and 1947.

Initially, minimum wage orders were restricted to the three towns of Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu, before six other towns were included. The rates differed from town to town, as shown in table 4.8, depending on the cost of living.

Table 4.8: Minimum Wage Order, 1948. (inclusive of rations)

| Area | Ticket Contracts | Other Contracts | Additional for Housing |
|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Nairobi Municipality | 41/- p.m. | 35/- p.m. | 5/- p.m. |
| Nanyuki Township | 34 | 29 | 3.75 |
| Nyeri Township | 34 | 29 | 5 |
| Nakuru Municipal Board | 34 | 29 | 8.50 |
| Eldoret Municipal Board | 34 | 29 | 5 |
| Kitale Municipal Board | 34 | 29 | 6 |
| Thika Township | 34 | 29 | 5 |
| Kisumu Municipality | 27 | 23 | 5 |
| Mombasa Municipality | 42 | 35 | 5 |

Source: Kenya Government Report to ILO for the period 1-10-47 to 30-9-48. KNA Lab 3/18.

In almost each case these wage minima represented a rise over 1945 wage rates, and they continued to increase steadily, thanks to, as we shall see, a relentless wave of strikes culminating in the Mombasa General Strike of 1947 and the Nairobi General Strike of 1950, so that by 1952 the minimum wage varied from Shs. 44/50 per month in Kisumu to Shs. 52/25 per month on Mombasa island, excluding housing allowance. Outside the towns the minimum wage for government employees stood at Shs. 23/25 per month, plus housing or housing allowance.¹³⁰

¹³⁰See Governor - Secretary of State 18-11-52, KNA Lab 9/17.

These rises, however, were deceptive for they fell far short of the steep increases in the cost of living and, worse still, they were mostly theoretical. The formula on which the calculation of minimum wages was based, namely the Poverty Datum Line (PDL) and the Effective Minimum Line (EML), which was one third higher than the PDL, was questionable because it was based on an artificially low calculation of the barest minimum for essentials.¹³¹ Further, increases in wage minima were based on the Mombasa African Retail Price Index which, as the Carpenter Report noted in 1954, was defective since it was based on an arbitrary and insufficient sample of goods thought to be necessary for the subsistence of an urban African worker.¹³² Between 1947 and 1952 the index showed an increase of 64%, to which the minimum wage rates were accordingly adjusted, but in reality the overall cost of living rose much higher than this.¹³³ Government statisticians used to base their estimates of prices for basic goods like food, housing and clothing on controlled prices and not the prevailing 'blackmarket' prices, so that there was a tendency to underestimate the actual increases in the cost of living.¹³⁴

It was one thing to enact minimum wage orders and quite another to implement them. As early as 1948 the governor conceded that it was

¹³¹The government invited Prof. Batson of the University of Cape Town to come and work out the minimum wage formula. KNA Lab 2/75.

¹³²See Report of the Committee on African Wages, 1954.

¹³³Booker and Devrill Report, pp. 19-20.

¹³⁴See The Pattern of Income, Expenditure and Consumption of African Labourers in Nairobi, 1950, pp. 7-16. Also see EATUC Memorandum on Labour Problems, Mak/A/12 fol. 40.

virtually impossible to enforce them and that many employers were easily obtaining labour at lower rates of pay.¹³⁵ This was hardly surprising; the Labour Department had a mere 13 field officers aided by a handful of African sub-inspectors to ensure that the minimum wage orders were being complied with.¹³⁶ In 1952 the department was alarmed when a survey it had conducted revealed that no more than 10 or 11 percent of the African workers in Nairobi earned the barest statutory minimum.¹³⁷ The Carpenter Report was later to give a harsh verdict on the statutory wage minima; the policy had miserably failed to offer a "social safety net", as originally intended, and instead it "acted like a magnet to hold wages down", for employers treated minimum wages as guideline for wage maxima.¹³⁸

The most glaring deficiency of the statutory wage minima was the fact that it was based on the needs of the individual worker and not those of his family. One of the few attempts to come to terms with the predicament of the married worker proved abortive. The Labour Commissioner proposed setting up three wage minima; 40/- plus 5/- housing allowance on engagement, 55/- plus 8/- housing allowance after 5 years and 75/- plus 8/- housing allowance after ten years.¹³⁹ The rationale

¹³⁵Acting Governor - Secretary of State 6-3-48. CO 533 544.

¹³⁶Annual Report to the ILO for period 1-10-47 to 30-9-48 KNA Lab 3/18.

¹³⁷Labour Department Annual Report, 1952, p. 8.

¹³⁸Report of the Committee on African Wages, p. 55.

¹³⁹Labour Commissioner - General Manager (KUR & H) 28-9-45 KNA Lab 3/18.

behind this, as the Acting Coast Provincial Commissioner explained, was that,

in order to avoid 'borrowed' families to claim a married man's pay, labour should be regarded as unmarried for the first five years, married but without children for the next five years, and thereafter married with a family of two or more. ¹⁴⁰

Not only was this scheme hilariously impractical, but also most employers, including the Railway Administration,¹⁴¹ were not yet ready to assume the full costs of maintaining their workers. It would not be until 1954 when the Carpenter Report recommended the adoption of a dual wage structure based on different rates for bachelors and married workers that wage rates would be tailored for a man to support his family.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Northcott Report could conclude that wage figures "raise a strong doubt as to whether wage rates were not seriously below the level of 1939, giving point to the complaint that wages were too low to enable the lower paid workers to live in town, and possibly being one of the factors in the amount of labour turnover".¹⁴² The Booker and Devrill Report was even less guarded in its appraisal of the situation. "All the evidence", it stated, "is, therefore, that some of the urban Africans in Mombasa are living at lower standards

¹⁴⁰ Acting Provincial Commissioner, Coast - Divisional Engineer, PWD, 15-11-45 Lab 3/13.

¹⁴¹ General Manager (KUR & H) - Labour Commissioner, 8-1-46. KNA Lab 3/13.

¹⁴² African Labour Efficiency Survey, p. 66.

than they were before the war".¹⁴³ Thus urban workers were living in a state of perpetual misery and chronic indebtedness.¹⁴⁴ As table 4.9 below shows, a staggering 72% of their total expenditure went on food alone.

Table 4.9: Average Monthly Expenditure Per African Worker in Nairobi, 1950.

Average Wage: Shs. 43.91 (excluding housing allowance)

| Item | Shs. per month | % of total expenditure | % of average wage |
|---|----------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Food | 39.64 | 72.9 | 90.3 |
| Tobacco, drinks and liquor | 2.7 | 5.0 | 6.1 |
| Furnishing and household goods | 2.32 | 4.3 | 5.3 |
| Soap, charcoal and paraffin | 3.58 | 6.6 | 8.2 |
| Clothes (including those sent home) gifts and other remittances | 4.45 | 8.2 | 10.1 |
| Rent | 0.54 | 1.0 | 1.2 |
| Transport | 0.24 | 0.4 | 0.5 |
| Football | 0.18 | 0.3 | 0.4 |
| Medicine | 0.40 | 0.7 | 0.9 |
| Other | 0.35 | 0.6 | 0.8 |
| Total | 54.40 | 100.0 | 123.8 |

Source: The Pattern of Income, Expenditure and Consumption of African Labourers in Nairobi, Oct-Nov. 1950. East African Statistical Department, February, 1951.

¹⁴³Booker and Devrill Report, p. 11.

¹⁴⁴"Some two-thirds of the sample interviewed borrowed money during the month and in many cases the amount was substantial. Also, a number of advances of pay were recorded ... For many of the Africans it appeared to be accepted policy to give more than half their wages to their creditors immediately after receipt of their wages, thus they had to borrow again by the middle of the month to balance their budgets to the next pay day." See The Pattern of Income ..., p. 12.

This should go some way to dispel the notion that urban workers were much better off than rural workers. It is difficult to calculate in real terms the difference between rural and urban wages, especially given the considerable discrepancies between rural and urban costs of living. By 1952 the basic wages of monthly paid agricultural workers ranged from Shs. 18/- to Shs. 40/-. In the case of casual labour, female and juvenile workers their wages were even lower than this. The lack of even a token rural minimum wage ensured that rural wages fell behind rises in rural cost of living. It does not require special imagination to see that these wages "were insufficient for a man to support a family without relying to a greater or lesser extent on small holding in the African land units".¹⁴⁵ Since more and more workers were actually entering wage employment because they were being deprived of land we cannot escape the conclusion that many African workers were destitute.

The most sustained decline in real wages occurred among resident labourers or squatters. As already noted, their access to land and their stocking rights were severely curtailed so that their income, derived from the cultivation of land and the keeping of stock, fell drastically. Meanwhile, their wages did not rise sufficiently enough to offset the loss of income from these sources, consequently, by the early 1950s, the squatters were poorer than they had ever been before. In the words of the East African Royal Commission 1953-55 Report:

¹⁴⁵Labour Department Annual Report, 1952, p. 8.

In 1946 ... resident labourers and their families who derived their income from wages, the cultivation of land and the keeping of stock, obtained an annual average of Shs. 187 from cash wages, the equivalent of Shs. 358 in cash from cultivation and Shs. 198 from stock. The cash wage, therefore, represented about 25% of the cash value of the total income of the family. The average cash wages of a resident labourer in 1946 in this area (Nakuru district) were approximately Shs. 12 a month ... In 1953 the average cash wage of a resident labourer in the Nakuru District was Shs. 16 a month ... whereas the 25% of the total income derived from wages was increased by one third, 75% of the total income attributable to cultivation and stock was reduced by more than a third on account of removal of stock alone ... It would have required at least a five-fold increase in the cash values of produce over the period to leave the cash position of the labourer unchanged so far as his crops were concerned. Thus even leaving out of account the general depreciation in the value of money, and despite the rise in cash wages, the resident labourer's income was materially reduced ...¹⁴⁶

This was to have profound political consequences. Squatter bitterness at their increasing misery and deprivation was to be one of the main contributory factors to the outbreak of Mau Mau. Not surprisingly, squatters were to play a crucial role as the organisational and ideological vanguard of Mau Mau in rural Kenya.

Thus both urban and rural workers in their different settings were experiencing growing hardships. For the former it was not simply a question of wages failing to keep pace with rising costs of living. The capacity of the rural reserves to subsidise them and provide full

¹⁴⁶ East African Royal Commission, p. 33. Wages in some parts of Trans-Nzoia and Uasin Gishu for squatters were as low as Shs. 8/- to Shs. 9/- per month. See Annual Reports, 1946-7, for Uasin Gishu and Trans Nzoia districts.

maintenance for their families was also decisively falling, so that the deterioration in their living standards was as real as it was unmitigated. In the case of agricultural workers, especially squatters, the decline in real wages was even more painfully clear.

Housing and Social Welfare

The provision of adequate housing and social services remained as elusive as ever. Indeed, to borrow Orde Browne's phrase, post-war Kenya was haunted by "the disastrous legacy from the past".¹⁴⁷ The Director of Public Works underscored the enormity of the problem when he wrote:

The problem of providing proper accommodation has been neglected over a number of years ... and is now so large that the funds required to set it right could only be provided over a period of several years.¹⁴⁸

The government tried to do something about it by continuing and expanding its housing programme; new quarters were built and old ones were extended in all the major towns to provide accommodation for government employees.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷Orde Browne Report, 1946, p. 75.

¹⁴⁸Director of Public Works - Labour Commissioner, 26-11-47 KNA Lab 3/3.

¹⁴⁹In Nairobi the government housing schemes were in Pumwani, Ziwani, Shauri Moyo, Starehe and Marurani. For details of government housing in the towns see Sessional Paper No. 2, 1948, chap. v, Sessional Paper No. 8, 1948. Labour Department Annual Report, 1946, pp. 19-20; 1947, p. 9; 1948, p. 12. Also see Report by P.E.D. Wilson (Labour Officer), 'Labour Conditions Generally in the PWD with special reference to housing', 16-11-47; and his other report, 'Labour Conditions Generally in the Central Division (North) of the PWD, with

In addition,

municipal halls and football stadiums began to appear, much of this financed by the profits on the sale of beer in the locations. By 1946 both Nairobi and Mombasa had Municipal Affairs Officers ... to promote community activity particularly football and deal with juvenile delinquency and other social problems.¹⁵⁰

The railway was another major employer which tried to provide housing and social welfare to its workers. Old railway housing estates were extended and new ones built in Nairobi and Mombasa, a welfare officer was appointed, a few welfare clinics, schools and shops were opened. Moreover, the railway inaugurated a football competition and "sponsored communal broadcasting in the locations both for entertainment and for education".¹⁵¹

However these programmes were too limited in scope to have any real impact on the living conditions of the vast bulk of the workers. Of the 80,000 Africans estimated to be in Nairobi in 1949, for instance, about 25,000 of them, or nearly a third, reportedly "had no fixed abode".¹⁵² The situation in Mombasa was no better. In the other towns

particular reference to housing', 20-12-47, both at KNA Lab 3/3. For PWD housing conditions also see KNA Lab 2/8.

¹⁵⁰ A. Clayton and D.C. Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895-1963, p. 297. Also see Labour Department Annual Report, 1952, p. 19.

¹⁵¹ Clayton and Savage, ibid., p. 299. Also see KNA Lab 3/122 on the KUR & H's social welfare policies and Reports of the General Manager of the KUR & H, 1946-52.

¹⁵² Minutes, Labour Commissioners' Conference, Dar-es-Salaam, June 1949. KNA Lab 10/92.

it was mitigated only by the extent to which workers lived in and commuted from nearby villages. Shortage of housing was only one side of the problem; the existing houses themselves were in a deplorable state. Commenting on government housing in one of the African locations in Nairobi, one investigator lamented:

The housing situation in this camp is very much worse today than it was in 1941 ... the shortage of latrines, standard pipes and other amenities and the absence of storm water drainage ... are the same today except that another four years worth of damage and filth has been added.¹⁵³

The housing provided by the Public Works Department (PWD), the largest government department employing African labour, usually consisted of corrugated iron sheets, or "some very poor mud and wattle dwellings".¹⁵⁴

According to the Wilson Report, Government housing in Mombasa was

perfectly disgraceful ... latrines are either non-existent, too shallow, dirty or without a proper house over them to protect them from the rain ... in several camps the water supply consists of stagnant pools where the water is green... at the moment they (the PWD) are setting an extremely good and criminal example as to exactly how they (workers) should not be housed.¹⁵⁵
(emphasis original)

¹⁵³Acting Labour Commissioner - Chief Secretary 10-7-47 KNA
Lab 3/3.

¹⁵⁴P.E.D. Wilson, 'Labour Conditions ...', op. cit.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

The report blamed this state of affairs on "the complete lack of genuine interest regarding how PWD employees are housed, by those in authority, particularly at the very top".¹⁵⁶ For instance, of the £50,000 the Director of Public Works asked for provision of African housing in 1948, only £ 10,000 was provided.¹⁵⁷ The housing provided by the railway was hardly any better, whose style of building in 1947, to quote the Northcott Report, was that of

barrack-like structure built in rows of 20 ...
 The situation at the date named was that 2,271
 married men were provided with one room per
 family, while 4,013 were treated as 'single'
 men ... Many were living three in a room, even
 five in a room.¹⁵⁸

As for casual labour, which the railway employed in quite large numbers, no housing was provided.¹⁵⁹

Most employers provided no housing at all, nor any housing allowance. The government largely abandoned its requirements that employers should provide housing to their workers. The Deputy Labour Commissioner disclosed at the Labour Commissioners' Conference held in Dar es Salaam in June 1949 that

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Minute 21-8-48 KNA Lab 3/3.

¹⁵⁸African Labour Efficiency Survey, p. 76.

¹⁵⁹Booker and Devrill Report, p. 7.

it had become clear to him during his recent visit to South Africa to study the problem that it was no good compelling employers to provide housing if this was not economically sound.¹⁶⁰

In the following year this was virtually enshrined into policy when the Report on African Housing in Townships and Trading Centre, also known as the Vasey Report, declared categorically that most industries could not afford to provide housing for their workers, and that the solution to the housing problem lay "in the building by the African of houses for himself or for the accommodation of other Africans".¹⁶¹ The government could provide financial help and further assistance by installing and maintaining services such as roads, water supplies, sanitation and drainage. Since the government could always plead insufficiency of funds, which it frequently did, this was a prescription for slum development. The teeming slums of Nairobi and Mombasa, consisting of shacks built of mud, grass, metal and iron sheets, and surrounded by filth and stench, expanded with a vengeance. Slum clearance operations carried out periodically could do little to check the development of these slums.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰Minutes of the 8th Meeting of the Industrial Sub-Committee, 13-6-49 KNA Lab 10/92.

¹⁶¹Vasey Report, p. 4.

¹⁶²On slum clearance legislation see Annual Report, 1964, p. 65. "The Vasey housing scheme in Thika for owner-built houses took shape ... although 110 good houses were built and occupied much of the unsatisfactory housing in Thika is still in occupation. Similar stories could be told over the rest of the colony ... of illegal and unplanned shanty housing around the large towns", Medical Department Annual Report, 1952, p. 12.

The extent to which many an employer's indifference to the living conditions of their workers could go can be observed from the following interview between the Mombasa Disputes Tribunal and a spokesman from the Posts and Telegraphs Department:

Question: Do you think that the lower paid worker gets enough to live on?

Answer: I would not give it a thought.

Question: But you should know if they are able to live?

Answer: They always want more than they get and they are not worth that.

Question: Do all the staff get housing?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Does this include water?

Answer: I'm not sure.

Question: Does anybody in your Department see to the housing?

Answer: No, they simply tell the employees that there is a house for them.

Question: Does anybody in your Department find out if the wage is a living wage and take any interest in it?

Answer: No.

Question: In short your attitude is summed up in that you have not given a thought to all this?

Answer: Yes.¹⁶³

European and some Asian workers were spared this tragic negligence. The Labour Department conceded that: "living conditions for European and Asian employees, however are almost without exception better than those prevailing in their countries of origin".¹⁶⁴ The situation for the majority of Asian workers should not be exaggerated, for "their housing

¹⁶³See Evidence submitted to the Disputes Tribunal, 15-2-47, KNA Lab 3/15.

¹⁶⁴Labour Department Annual Report, 1952, p. 19.

[was] badly overcrowded and quite unable to cope with the dual problem of a rapidly increasing younger generation and the tide of new immigrants".¹⁶⁵

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the acute shortage of housing was not only a boon for landlords so that workers came to spend an increasingly disproportionate part of their wages on rent, it also led to overcrowding with all the deleterious effects that this had on workers' health. The Labour Commissioner's observation in 1946 that living conditions had conspired to lead "to a great deterioration in the actual physical state of the African worker today",¹⁶⁶ was more than borne out by investigations and reports by the Labour and Medical Departments and countless other observers. The medical team on the African Labour Efficiency Survey concluded that many African workers suffered from 'malignant malnutrition' and that this, when coupled with overcrowding in their homes, made them very susceptible to respiratory infections which became "the commonest cause of death and absence from work".¹⁶⁷ Pneumonia became particularly widespread and earned the dubious distinction of being responsible for the greatest number of deaths among Africans. Tuberculosis also exacted a heavy toll. The incidence of tuberculosis in urban areas was "particularly high when

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 1947, p. 7. On problems of Indian urban housing problems also see KNA Lab 2/31.

¹⁶⁶ See Statement on Labour Policy by the Labour Commissioner, Hyde Clark, KNA Lab 9/2.

¹⁶⁷ African Labour Efficiency Survey, p. 90, and pp. 83-116 for more details.

compared with other areas ... It [was] estimated that 30% of Africans entering employment[were]in this state."¹⁶⁸ Many typhoid cases were also reported among workers, sexually transmitted diseases became widespread as did cases of hookworm, dysentery and anaemia.¹⁶⁹

Most knowledgeable observers were agreed that these diseases could only be prevented if housing were improved and overcrowding and unhygienic ways of living were eliminated. That, too, could ensure higher labour productivity. Employers were caught in a classical dilemma: they wanted higher labour productivity but in order to preserve their high profit margins they were not prepared to provide their workers with the working and living conditions conducive to such productivity. Thus the vicious circle of poor working and living conditions and low productivity was continually reproduced.

The deplorable living conditions mirrored perfectly the equally despicable state of affairs at the work places themselves. Nominally, according to the Native Labourers (Medical Treatment) Rules, employers were required to provide their workers with free medical care. In reality, however, very few did this. Significantly, the vast majority of employers made no provisions whatsoever for sick pay.¹⁷⁰ Some progress was made, at least on paper, with regard to workmen's compensation.

¹⁶⁸See Labour Department Annual Report, 1952, p. 20; also see 1951 report, pp. 12-13, and Medical Department Annual Report, 1946, p. 16.

¹⁶⁹See Labour Department Annual Report, 1946-52; Medical Department Annual Report, 1946-52. Also see medical inspections and surveys of labour in KNA Lab 2/25 - 26 and Lab 9/101.

¹⁷⁰See KNA Lab 9/55 and Lab 9/459. Also see Memorandum by Justice Thacker CO 544 545 1947.

As noted in Chapter 2, the Labour Trade Union of East Africa (LTUEA) had been making relentless demands for its introduction since the mid-1930s. The Workmen's Compensation Ordinance was finally introduced in 1946 and passed into law in 1947, with an additional amendment passed in 1948. The amount of compensation to be paid in case of death, total incapacity or partial incapacity were clearly established.¹⁷¹ It was not always easy to enforce the law, however, so that many accidents were never reported and compensation never paid. Nor were the compensation rates high enough to reflect realistically the 'true value' of the worker's or his family's loss of earning power.

Attempts were also made to introduce factory legislation stipulating required minimum standards of safety, equipment installation procedures and such matters, but it was not until the early 1950s that the bill was finally introduced and passed. Again, it left much to be desired, for it was far from comprehensive and, in any case, the government lacked the manpower, capacity and know-how to enforce and implement it. In the case of pensions, superannuation schemes or provident funds, only a negligible minority of Africans were covered.¹⁷² The length of the work day, despite slight variations from industry to industry, was uniformly long. The era of the eight-hour day, high rates of overtime

¹⁷¹ See KNA Lab 3/126. In 1952 it was recorded that a little over £14,000 was paid out in compensation involving 2,598 accidents, of which 79 were fatal, 436 permanent partial disablement and the rest either permanent disablement or minor. See Labour Department Annual Report, 1952, p. 23; also see 1948, p. 14 and 1949, p. 19.

¹⁷² See Beveridge report on social insurance and allied committee, KNA Lab 9/301. Also see Labour Department Annual Report, 1952, pp. 23-24; and KNA Lab 2/2 on factory safeguards.

pay and paid holidays had yet to arrive.¹⁷³ As for race relations in industry, as with the settler-dominated agricultural sector, there is no reason to believe that there were any marked changes for the better during this period. Thus workers had an uphill struggle ahead. No wonder, therefore, that trade unionism grew with unprecedented force and workers' activities entered a phase of stunning militancy.

TRADE UNIONISM AND WORKING CLASS STRUGGLES

Development of Trade Unions

After the war trade unionism made tremendous advances despite numerous obstacles. Between 1946 and 1952 12 new trade unions were registered. They covered a wide range of industries and occupations as shown in table 4.10.

The figures contained in this table are almost certainly on the conservative side. In the case of the Transport and Allied Workers Union (TAWU), for instance, according to TAWU records corroborated by the Industrial Relations Officer, James Patrick, who was closely involved in TAWU's organisational efforts in an attempt to make the union a model union, at the end of 1952 TAWU had over 13,000 paid-up members in 22 branches

¹⁷³On average, in industry people worked between 50 to 60 hours a week, while in agriculture the hours varied depending on the season and could be strenuous during the peak growing and harvesting seasons. Most employers either paid no overtime or made no provisions for different and higher rates of overtime pay when compared to the regular rates. See KNA Lab 9/169.

Table 4.10: Registered Trade Unions and Reported Membership, 1952.

| Date of Registration | Name of Trade Union | Reported Paid-up Membership |
|----------------------|--|--|
| 5-9-46 | Typographical Union of Kenya | 280 (Asian and African) |
| 5-4-41 | 'East African Standard' Asian Staff Union | 72 (Asian) |
| 12-4-47 | East African Railway Asian Union | 780 (Asian) |
| 30-7-46 | Transport and Allied Workers Union | 9,823 (African) |
| 10-7-48 | Tailors, Tent and Sail Makers and Garment Workers' Union | 283 (African) |
| 10-12-48 | Shoemaker Workmen's Union | 120 (Asian and African) |
| 20-8-51 | Trade Union Port and Shipping Workers of East Africa | Nil (European) |
| 27-11-51 | Domestic and Hotel Workers' Union | 7,161 (African) |
| 3-12-51 | British Air Line Pilots' Assn. | Nil (European) |
| 29-3-52 | Habour Asian Union of East Africa | 223 (Asian) |
| 6-2-52 | Aeronautical Radio Association of East Africa | 17 (European) |
| 27-6-52 | East Africa Federation of Building and Construction Workers' Union | 7,530 (African) |
| 11-6-52 | Nightwatchmen, Clerks and Shopworkers' Union | 1,300 (African) |
| Total | | 27,589 (26,250 Africans; 1,320 Asians; 17 Europeans) |

Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1952.

spread in 12 major towns throughout the country, while Table 4.12 gives the figure of 9,823.¹⁷⁴ TAWU became one of the biggest and strongest

¹⁷⁴TAWU membership was broken as follows:

| | | | | | | | |
|---------|-------|---------|-------|----------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| Nairobi | 9,596 | Mombasa | 1,000 | Nakuru | 200 | Eldoret | 200 |
| Thika | 1,115 | Kitui | 50 | Machakos | 25 | Nyeri | 30 |
| Kericho | 80 | Kisumu | 100 | Kikuyu | 100 | Thomson's Falls | 50 |

Total 13,296.

See Minute 26-10-52; Industrial Relations Officer - Labour Commissioner 26-11-52, KNA Lab 10/71.

unions in the country at the time. Its history is in many ways illustrative of the general trends in the growth of trade unionism in post-war Kenya.

TAWU grew out of the Nairobi African Taxi Drivers Union and the Thika Native Motor Drivers Association. For many months the two unions had been bitter rivals, engaged in virulent propaganda and press campaigns against each other and poaching on each other's members, before they merged in 1947 after realising that their interests could best be served only if they and all other drivers' unions were united. The Kenya African Drivers and Mechanics Trade Union was subsequently formed. In May the following year, at its annual conference, the union changed its name to the Transport and Allied Workers' Union (TAWU) "in order to accommodate all races ..." because "the name 'African' excluded half-castes, Afro-Arabs and others".¹⁷⁵ The new union's constitution clearly stated that the union was "open to any person irrespective of sex, creed, colour employed in the Transport and Allied Industry", as long as they could pay an entrance fee of 5/- and a monthly contribution of 1/- both of which were subject to alteration at the annual conference.¹⁷⁶ There is in fact some evidence that there were a number of Asians who were TAWU members. Many other unions adopted similar constitutions and policies so that the picture of union racial exclusiveness portrayed in the above table is

¹⁷⁵The Registrar of Trade Unions had earlier objected to the proposed title called 'Transport and General Workers Union', on account of the term 'General'. See KNA Lab 10/70.

¹⁷⁶See TAWU Constitution and Rules KNA Lab 10/71.

slightly exaggerated.¹⁷⁷

The case of TAWU shows that unions first emerged in the towns and that after periods of intense rivalry unions within the same industry tended to merge into industry-wide unions. Constitutionally many of the unions welcomed members irrespective of race, although in practice some unions were racially exclusive in their membership.

All the unions without exception concerned themselves with bread and butter issues and demanded higher wages, shorter working hours, social security and pension schemes, improved accommodation and better working and living conditions generally. The way these demands were articulated differed, of course, from union to union depending on the particular situation and the peculiarities of the industry or occupation covered by the union. Opposition to Municipal by-laws, for instance, instigated a number of campaigns and strikes by TAWU. The union felt that the by-laws were unnecessarily restrictive and punitive and made it easy for driving licenses to be suspended for minor offences, or led to too many arrests for unjustifiably long periods, and were prone to abuse by a police force all too eager to squeeze bribes out of the poorly paid drivers.¹⁷⁸ As for the Domestic and Hotel Workers' Union, which grew out of the United Kenya Houseboys' Association, originally composed of the Nairobi Houseboys Association of Employees of Europeans and the Nairobi Houseboys' Association for Employees of Indians and Goans, it called

¹⁷⁷See African Press Workers Association where attempts were even made to include European workers. KNA Lab 10/69. Also see Mak/A/11. Fol. 53 dealing with Makhan Singh's pleas to workers to forge Afro-Asian unity.

¹⁷⁸See KNA Lab 10/70 - I.

particular attention to their long hours of work, sometimes lasting up to twelve hours a day, objected to the use of the denigrating term 'boy' by their employers and lack of provisions for overtime pay and holidays, including gazetted holidays and sundays.¹⁷⁹ The Tailors, Tent and Sail Makers and Garment Workers' Union, in turn, complained of too much work, long hours and shoddy treatment from their employers, most of whom happened to be Asian.¹⁸⁰ Meanwhile, workers in the printing industry laid stress on the need for higher allowances during apprenticeship, provision of uniforms and opposed dismissals without due notice or pay in lieu of notice.¹⁸¹

The bigger the union the more likely it was to address itself to a wider range of issues, including politics and national questions which, in the government's view, lay outside the scope of trade union concerns. The African Workers' Federation (AWF) and the East African Trade Union Congress (EATUC), in succession to each other, sought to act as central organisations of all the country's trade unions, which for them meant more than simply representing the particularistic economic and social interests of the workers and also entailed giving those interests a wider social expression and political force. The AWF enjoyed a spectacular if short-lived history. It emerged during the 1947 Mombasa

¹⁷⁹See Makhan Singh, History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952, EAPH, Nairobi, 1969, pp. 130-1. Also see EAS 27-9-45.

¹⁸⁰EAS 24-9-47.

¹⁸¹They demanded, for instance, 4 months notice or 4 months pay in lieu of notice. See KNA Lab 10/69.

General Strike and quickly spread its tentacles to Nairobi where a branch was formed in July 1947. Plans were afoot to establish branches in Kisumu, Nakuru and other parts of Kenya and East Africa when its President, Chege Kibachia, was arrested in the following month. Its offices were aptly named offisi ya masikini, i.e., offices of the poor. The fact that the federation sprang up in the eye of the general strike storm shows the extent to which the level of workers' consciousness had developed; spontaneity was giving way to organisation; individual helplessness was maturing into collective action and the burden of deprivation and exploitation was turning into a source of organised militancy.¹⁸²

The federation exerted strong influence over the striking workers during the Mombasa General Strike. This was probably the only feature of the strike on which the government, employers, the press and the strikers themselves were in agreement both during the strike and in the diagnosis conducted in its aftermath. The power of the federation to seek redress from the government was more than borne out when it successfully challenged the interim award of the Thacker Tribunal which was appointed to investigate the strike. The award was made to a section of the workers in Mombasa, particularly those in the major concerns like government and Municipal Board employees, workers of the Railways and

¹⁸²The following discussion is based on material that can be found in Labour Department Annual Report, 1947; Annual Report, 1947. Also see 'Labour: African Workers Federation, Secret', CO 537/2109; KNA Lab 10/64 and press reports in EAS 21-1-47; 1-2-47; 26-2-47; 16-4-47; 24-4-47; 2-5-47 and 23-5-47. Singh, *op. cit.*, Chapter 14 and Clayton and Savage, *op. cit.*, Chapter 8 also provide a lengthy coverage of the AWF's activities.

Harbours, the three stevedoring companies and the East African Power and Lighting, among others, while the rest, including casual, domestic and agricultural workers, were excluded. Adding insult to injury, the award was small. At the urging of the federation, the workers who were eligible for the award declined to receive their wage increases when their wage-packets for March came, thereby raising the spectre that there might be another general strike. The Tribunal promptly reconvened and improved upon its earlier offer. The final award applied to workers in the major concerns already mentioned but as a sop to the rest the minimum wage rates for Mombasa were raised alongside increases in the minimum wages for Nairobi and Kisumu.

In the weeks and months ahead the federation continued to grow as more workers joined it and thousands more flocked to its mass meetings where the mood was one of electrifying defiance and militancy. Speaker after speaker would rise to attack the government's policy of repatriating unemployed Africans from Mombasa, deplore the monopolisation of shops by the state and certain employers, condemn the system of low wages, miserable living conditions and the proliferation of vice and immorality, and even demand an end to colonial rule itself.

On paper at least only the EATUC dealt with a wider set of issues than the AWF. Founded on May Day, 1949, by five registered trade unions at a huge rally attended by thousands of Indian and African workers, trade union leaders and nationalist politicians, including Kenyatta, Mbiyu Koinange, Jesse Kariuki and Mathu, the EATUC had in Fred Kubai and Makhan Singh, president and general secretary, respectively, able and militant leadership which, coupled with the comprehensive programme

it set for itself, made the congress a potentially formidable organisation.¹⁸³ Among the congress's constitutional objectives were the traditional trade union demands for equal work for equal pay, higher wages, leave with pay during holidays and sickness, including 12 weeks paid maternity leave for women. Further, the EATUC demanded the implementation and improvement of workmen's compensation, provision of schemes for provident funds, gratuities or pensions. The EATUC also wanted to see kipande, and juvenile and forced labour abolished, better and cheap housing provided, including recreation facilities for workers and their families. Moreover, the congress demanded that there should not be dismissals without notice or one month's pay in lieu. Finally, the congress wanted to ensure the protection of workers' civil liberties, particularly freedom of speech, assembly and association, and the right to strike, and for trade union representation in the Legislative Council, municipal and district councils, public committees and advisory boards.

To this end the Congress conducted surveys on the cost of living and constantly warned the government and employers against putting the burden of economic hardship upon the shoulders of the workers. In May 1950, for instance, demands were submitted by the LTUEA, which the EATUC supported, to the Nairobi Chamber of Commerce and the Indian Chamber of Commerce calling for wage increases and swift action to arrest the deteriorating standards of living for workers and to improve all

¹⁸³For more information on the EATUC see Singh, *ibid.*, Chapters 9 and 10; Mak/A/11 fol. 213-244 and Mak/A/12 fol. 40-423. The unions which were affiliated to the Congress at its formation were the Labour Trade Union of East Africa, TAWU, The Tailors, Tent and Sail Makers and Garment Workers' Union, Typographical Union of Kenya and Shoemaker Workmen's Union.

aspects of their working conditions. A year earlier the congress had demanded representation not only on all government committees but also on the ILO as part of the East African representative group. The congress in fact continually prodded the government to repeal repressive and pass more progressive legislation. This was a period when the post-war legal edifice was being erected so that there was a flurry of legislation. The congress tried to influence each piece of legislation by sending detailed memoranda to the government, holding mass meetings, and in 1950 even sent cables to the United Nations and the Secretary of State for the Colonies asking them to urge the Kenyan government to repeal the Essential Services (Arbitration) Ordinance, 1950. The law provided for the employment of so-called 'voluntarily unemployed persons', and it was a "slave labour law" in the congress's views. In 1950 the congress also successfully organised a boycott of the civic celebrations in Nairobi granting the town city status. When the government refused to allow the congress to hold its May Day rally that year the congress pledged that it would do its "utmost for the achievement of workers' demands, complete freedom and independence of East African territories ..."¹⁸⁴ It was the subsequent arrest of the congress's leaders which provided the spark that finally presented Nairobi with its second general strike.

The eventual disintegration of the EATUC and AWF had as much to do with their internal organisational weaknesses as with pressure from an unsympathetic government and hostile employers. Although these unions were in many ways more advanced than their predecessors, they were far

¹⁸⁴Singh, *ibid.*, p. 263.

from being financially viable and had yet to develop structures and an ideology strong and coherent enough to withstand outside pressures. The unions operated on tiny budgets which made it extremely difficult for them to maintain full time union officials who could devote all their time to building and organising the unions. A vicious circle was therefore created; insufficient funds led to poor organisation which, in turn, complicated the task of collecting funds, so that the institutionalisation of channels of communication say between a union headquarters and its branches through regular visits, correspondence, newsletters and meetings was grossly undermined. This is why the AWF was virtually restricted to Mombasa and the EATUC to Nairobi despite all their efforts to become national organisations.

To make matters worse the AWF and EATUC, had their fair share of poor accounting methods and corruption.¹⁸⁵ Nor were the unions immune from the fissiparous tendencies of ethnic and racial antagonism, particularly among their leaders, although ethnicity had not yet developed into a potent divisive and mobilising ideology as it would later do within Kenya's trade union movement and the country's social formation as a whole. The smaller unions were no less afflicted by this malaise than the big ones, the only difference was that because of their size the big unions' problems were all too visible and often overpowering. On the whole, however, it would seem that the leaders were not alienated from their members, as they were to become later on, so that far from being a drag on the unions' effectiveness, lack of powerful bureaucratic

¹⁸⁵ Clayton and Savage, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

organisation was the essence of their dynamism.¹⁸⁶

Nevertheless, it was a sign of their rudimentary organisational structures that the AWF and the EATUC collapsed following the arrest of their main leaders. Chege Kibachia, the President of the AWF, was arrested in August 1947 on trumped up charges that he was "conducting himself so as to be dangerous to peace and good order", and deported to Kabarnet in the Baringo District where he remained under restriction for the next ten years until his release early in 1957.¹⁸⁷ Kibachia was an early representative of that breed of young, educated and ambitious trade unionists who deftly combined trade unionism and nationalist politics, an art that was to be perfected by that consummate trade unionist-cum-politician, Tom Mboya. Like most trade union leaders at the time, Kibachia's militancy was inspired by nationalist sentiments and not rooted in any coherent left-wing or working class ideology, although at the Thacker Tribunal he claimed that he had read some works by Karl Marx. It was not long after his arrest and banishment that 18 other leaders of

¹⁸⁶ Interview: Mr. Ohutso, COTU Administrative Secretary, Nairobi, 22 March 1980.

¹⁸⁷ For details of his trial see CO 537/2109 Secret. Kibachia was educated at Alliance High School, that prestigious centre of the emerging Kenyan African educated elite, where he obtained his Cambridge School certificate. He tried his hand at business in Nairobi for a while operating a chicken and egg business, and was active in politics as editor of the African Leader, but he eventually resigned from KAU because of strong differences with its 'compromising' leadership. When he came to Mombasa he worked as a salesman of the East African Clothing Company, before the Mombasa General Strike catapulted him to leadership as President of the AWF at the age of 28. See his letters to the press where it is clear that according to him "racial discrimination is at the bottom of the whole affair" of African exploitation, and not capitalism as such, Mombasa Times, 2-8-47 and 11-8-47.

the AWF were arrested, soon followed by 13 others, all of whom were charged with various offences and imprisoned.¹⁸⁸ By 1949 the federation had disintegrated and nothing that its successor the EATUC could do or say through protests and campaigns could save the incarcerated leadership.

In fact the EATUC itself was soon to be overtaken by the same fate. Almost a year after its formation, its leaders, Singh and Kubai were arrested, the congress's records were seized and its offices were closed and sealed by the police. It was at his celebrated trial that Makhan Singh's uncompromising stand against colonial rule and workers' exploitation was expressed with fearless eloquence. He was certainly the most experienced trade union leader in the country at the time and his knowledge of left-wing and Marxist doctrines was unsurpassed. He was a declared communist who worked indefatigably to forge durable inter-racial working class alliances and organisations and to radicalise nationalist politics. From his records it is more than apparent that he was painfully aware that he represented a marginal tendency within a labour movement overwhelmingly gripped by populist, and sometimes obscurantist, nationalist ideologies. He was to spend the next 11½ years until October 1961 in detention camps in the most desolate areas of Kenya.¹⁸⁹ As for Kubai, the records show that he was an able and energetic organiser, and that while

¹⁸⁸See EAS 26-8-47; 1-9-47; 10-9-47; 24-9-47; and 2-10-47.

¹⁸⁹He spent those years at Maral, Dol Dol and Lokitaung. See Mak/B/2/1-4 for the trial proceedings against him and his detention experiences, which not only gives us a moving testament of his indomitable spirit, but also gives us a glimpse of the brutal inhumanity that was British detention life in the colonies.

not as steeped in left-wing ideologies as his colleague Singh, he most definitely belonged to the more radical and progressive wing of the trade union and nationalist movements. He was to spend the next two years, from 1950, being tried, acquitted and re-arrested several times before he was subsequently tried and sentenced, together with Kenyatta, the other veteran radical trade unionist, Bildad Kaggia, and others at Kapenguria in 1952 and sent to detention camps where he remained until 1961. Meanwhile, other leaders of the EATUC, like the acting president Chege Kiburu and Mwangi Macharia the general secretary, were also arrested and imprisoned not long after Singh's and Kubai's arrests. Many more lesser-known trade unionists were arrested and imprisoned, others merely fell under the shadow of constant police harassment.¹⁹⁰

Through arrests, imprisonment, detentions and deportations, the government hoped to strangle the trade union movement before it had grown too big and menacing. Employers also played their part. The various chambers of commerce and the new employers associations which emerged, mostly between 1950 and 1952, generally advised their members to refuse recognition to trade unions and not to negotiate with them.¹⁹¹ The guiding and co-ordinating organisation of Kenya's chambers of commerce and individual employers was the Colonial Employers Federation, formed in November 1945. Two Kenyan representatives were on its executive committee one of whom was the federation's honorary secretary.

¹⁹⁰See Mak A/11 - 13.

¹⁹¹See, for instance, Kenya Weekly News 24-2-50 and 31-3-50; also see EAS 14-9-48, 23-9-48, 14-1-49 and 22-4-50 where employers' antipathy to trade unions is graphically clear.

The federation stressed the need for joint consultation among members and greater vigilance against trade unions. It is not coincidental that the federation was formed soon after the formation of the World Federation of Trade Unions, which threatened to launch a crusade against the exploitation of colonial workers.¹⁹²

Employers made it extremely hard for trade unionists to organise on their premises; union officials were prohibited from collecting subscription anywhere near work places, regardless of the time.¹⁹³ The most lethal weapon in the employers' arsenal was, of course, victimisation of union members. One union file after another is replete with cases of workers dismissed for no apparent reason except that they had joined a union. Threat of dismissal, therefore, hung around the necks of trade unions like a rock and deprived them of thousands of potential members. Besides police harassment, there were stringent rules for permission to hold meetings. Municipalities tended to refuse unions the use of grounds and social halls for union meetings, or even for tea parties where these were suspected as disguised union gatherings.¹⁹⁴ The problems of recruitment and union organisation were truly formidable.

Trade union legislation was also employed to halt the development of new unions and allow the 'criminalisation' of existing ones. In the

¹⁹²See Mak/A/1 fol. 439. Also see EAS 23-11-45. The relations of the Kenyan labour movement with international labour organisations will be examined fully in Chapter Seven.

¹⁹³See Senior Labour Officer, Coast - Employers 30-4-52 KNA Lab. 10/71.

¹⁹⁴TAWU, for instance, was frequently banned from using Pumwani Hall in Nairobi, including for tea parties for its members. See Minutes African Advisory Council, 17th and 18th Dec. 1951 KNA Lab. 10/71.

aftermath of the Mombasa General Strike, a bill was passed in March, 1948, amending the Trade Unions and Trade Disputes Ordinance, 1943, providing for compulsory registration of trade unions. The bill was primarily aimed at preventing the registration of general workers' unions like the AWF, or trade union federations like the EATUC, and to monitor registered unions and control their funds. It gave the Registrar of Trade Unions power to reject registration of any union if he was satisfied that there already existed a union "sufficiently representative of the whole or of a substantial proportion of the interests in respect of which the applicants seek registration", or cancel the registration of a union if he was satisfied that "the trade union is used for unlawful purpose". He could also demand detailed accounts, lists of members and other pertinent documents from a registered union.¹⁹⁵ The bill was not only attacked by trade unionists themselves, but also by Indian and African members of the legislative council, while employers warmly welcomed it.¹⁹⁶ Legislation regulating the registration of unions was further tightened in September 1949 with the passage of the Trade Union Re-Registration Bill, which required all unions registered before 20th April, 1948, to file new applications for registration. It was through the provisions of this bill that AWF was refused registration.¹⁹⁷ The EATUC was similarly banned when it was refused registration and its

¹⁹⁵See Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-7. For more details concerning trade union legislation and other laws relating to labour see KNA Lab. 3/91; Lab. 3/93 and Lab. 3/117.

¹⁹⁶See EAS 15th, 22nd and 23rd March, 1948.

¹⁹⁷See Mak/A/11 fol. 235. Also see EAS 13-8-49.

leaders were arrested on a charge of being officials of an unregistered trade union.

Finally, in April, 1952, the government passed a new trade union bill to replace the Trade Union Disputes Ordinance, 1943, and its amending ordinances despite intense and concerted opposition from trade unionists and some Asian and African politicians.¹⁹⁸ The bill retained all the features of previous trade union legislation and introduced new provisions which gave the Registrar of Trade Unions power to put trade unions on probation periods of up to 12 months before granting them registration. Obviously, if they 'misbehaved' during the probation period they would automatically not be registered. The new bill further stipulated that union officials should be literate in either English or Swahili, should restrict their activities solely to one union and that they should actually be employed in the industry or occupation with which their union was concerned. This was designed to put trade unions into a straight-jacket of narrow 'economism'. Cancellation and suspension of unions was also made easier, for all that was now needed was to show that a union had either infringed upon the provisions of the ordinance, or its own rules. With such regulations it is no wonder that many unions waited or remained unregistered for years.¹⁹⁹ The 1952 trade union legislation also formally legalised the existence of staff associations and organisations, and provided that the Registrar of Trade Unions should exercise

¹⁹⁸ See Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 306-10, EAS 2-4-52 and Mathu's speech condemning the bill, Hansard, Vol. XLVI and XLVII 20 February 1952, Col. 37-39.

¹⁹⁹ Such as the Railway African Workers Association which was later to become Railway African Workers Union (RASU). See Singh, *ibid.*, pp. 163-4.

overall control over them. Encouragement of staff associations, works councils, or Whitley councils as they were sometimes called was a key tactic in the government's and employers' strategy to weaken trade unions. As the Labour Department put it in 1949:

much more harm would be done to the [trade union] movement by permitting the registration of a large number of illiterate, ill-disciplined groups of persons mainly actuated by a political and not economic bias than by restricting such legislation ... It has become clear that the proper approach to industrial organisation lies through the development of staff associations, Whitley Councils and the like as a means of giving practice to both sides in industry in the art of consultation.²⁰⁰

Staff associations, works councils, or joint industrial councils, as well as wages councils, were established in the civil service and government departments,²⁰¹ the port industry,²⁰² the agricultural industry,²⁰³ and within many private industries.

²⁰⁰ Labour Department Annual Report, 1949, p. 23. Also see EAS 13-7-50.

²⁰¹ For example, see Senior Civil Servants Association, Kenya Medical Staff Association, P.W.D. Workers Staff Association, Air Ministry Directorate General of Works, RAF Station, Eastleigh, African Staff Council in KNA Lab. 10/131 and Lab. 10/169.

²⁰² See Landing and Shipping Coy. of East Africa Joint Staff Council non-clerical Asian and African. KNA Lab. 10/159. As for wages councils in the transport industry, see KNA Lab. 3/89 A & B.

²⁰³ See Kenya Farmers Association (Co-operative Ltd.) Asian and African Works Councils, KNA Lab. 10/170.

These councils were impotent discussion bodies whose recommendations the management was entirely free to accept, modify or reject altogether. It is indicative of the latter's virtually undisputed control over them that council rules were often drafted by the management. The more astute employers would attempt to give the councils an aura of authenticity by giving them some of the trappings of trade unionism - payment of membership fees, holding of meetings, election of officials and sometimes they were given registration. They also had their fair share of corruption and mismanagement and at least until the mid-1950s they were encouraged to be racially exclusive like some unions. Trade unionists saw through all this, however, and they were vehemently opposed to these councils; "Trade Unions and nothing but Trade Unions" became their rallying cry.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless there cannot be much doubt that these councils deprived the unions of some of their potential membership and usurped a few of their functions.

Finally, attempts were made to control trade unions through the appointment of a Trade Union Officer in the Labour Department who was charged with the task of fostering the development of 'responsible', non-political trade unions. James Patrick, a Scottish trade unionist, was Kenya's first trade union adviser. His stormy career epitomises the many contradictory forces which determined the government's labour policy at the time. In a sense Patrick was sandwiched between employers' hostility, on the one hand, and workers' suspicions, on the other. Employers' implacable opposition to the very limited objects of his mission was nowhere better expressed than at a meeting held in January

²⁰⁴See Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-294.

1949 at Thika attended by about 100 important settler leaders. Echoing the views of most of those present, one of them stated unequivocally:

I consider that the institution of trade unions in this country constitutes the most fearful threat of all ... I have been here for over twenty years and I have no differences with my labour ... I think Mr. Patrick is about 500 years premature ... Today he can only be to the detriment of our workers. (applause)²⁰⁵

As had become customary for him in such meetings, Patrick went out of his way to be reassuring. He declared that he had not come to Kenya to start or organise trade unions but to offer advice when it was sought.

"I cannot imagine", he said,

anything more disastrous to the progress of the colony than the development of trade unionism by uneducated people and it will be my constant endeavour to prevent such a possibility ... I shall take such steps as are necessary to have those [trade unions] which are unsatisfactory de-registered.

Patrick was instrumental in the eventual dissolution of the AWF.

According to his own testimony:

When I arrived in Kenya two years ago [in 1947] an organisation calling itself the African Workers' Federation was very much to the fore. The leader became such a danger to the mainten-

²⁰⁵EAS 14-1-49.

ance of law and order he had to be deported.
I personally had to discourage the growth of the
Federation ...²⁰⁶

It became one of his main pre-occupations to discourage would-be trade unionists from organising trade unions. Instead he advised them to form staff councils. He deplored what he saw as undue haste to form trade unions on the part of workers before they even understood the rudimentary principles of trade unionism,²⁰⁷ to which one trade unionist replied: "Mr. Patrick cannot expect trade unions to be led by only 'yes men' and we are not prepared to follow him".²⁰⁸ As might be expected, Patrick was actively involved in the framing of the restrictive and repressive trade union legislation already examined. It is not surprising, therefore, that many trade unionists distrusted him and wondered whether he had been sent to discourage and confuse them or to help them.²⁰⁹

It is more than evident that Patrick actively interfered in the running of individual unions, particularly TAWU, which he intended to develop into a 'model' union. He engineered the removal of union leaders whom he found too militant and disagreeable, like TAWU's Kisii Branch Chairman, and rewarded and promoted those he found moderate like

²⁰⁶J. Patrick, Memorandum on Trade Unions Development and Policy, 1949, KNA Lab. 10.

²⁰⁷Ibid., also see EAS 27-4-50.

²⁰⁸EAS 2-5-50.

²⁰⁹See, for instance, minutes of TAWU meetings KNA Lab. 10/70 - 71.

Meshack Ndisi, TAWU's general secretary, for whom he secured a scholarship to study trade unionism at Ruskin College, Oxford, and who on his return became Patrick's deputy. Patrick also regularly examined the accounts and records of TAWU and other unions, including the LTUEA.²¹⁰ Those trade union leaders who stood to gain from such intervention had, of course, nothing but praise for Patrick, while the more radical elements were resentful. Thus Patrick's activities simultaneously instigated and reflected the growing ideological factionalism between 'moderates' and 'militants' within the ranks of the trade union leadership.

It was in fact one of Patrick's major functions to disseminate the ideology of 'economist' and non-political trade unionism. He organised courses on trade unionism, wrote and distributed such pamphlets as "The Organisation of a Trade Union", "Trade Union Rules", and "What is a Trade Union?". In the latter publication, for instance, he maintained that

a trade union is not an organisation with political aims, it is an association which has as its main object the regulation of relations between workers and their employers or between one group of workers and another group of workers, or between employers and other employers ... Some people seem to think that trade unions are chiefly concerned with strikes. That is not true. Trade unions are formed so that strikes can be avoided. Trade unions try to make sure that workers and employers understand one another.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Quoted in Singh, op. cit., p. 170.

Such sermons found ready converts among some trade unionists. In Mombasa, for instance, there was a campaign against militant trade unionists like Kubai by others who accused the former and his colleagues of being "always troublesome and always anxious of organising strikes. We have nothing to strike for ..." ²¹² Aggrey Minya who was then national organising secretary of TAWU and was later to become the first secretary-general of the Kenya Federation of Registered Trade Unions (KFRTU), could go as far as saying:

we can't blame the government for not getting us enough wages, it is a mistake of the workers. Government has already agreed that Trade Unions should be formed. If we unite together and ask government to help us in obtaining fair wages I'm sure they will call employers and the matter will be discussed ... The Labour Department is impartial and it is very important that first we must invite and ask the Labour Department to help us in getting fair wages. ²¹³

There were, of course, many other sources, apart from Patrick, from which such doctrines of labour moderation could be derived. Kenyatta's caution against labour militancy, particularly the use of the strike weapon, were widely publicised in the press and well known. ²¹⁴ There were still others who were moderated because they essentially saw trade unions as potential co-operative business societies. For instance,

²¹²Minute by Fred Kubai 9-9-48, KNA Lab. 10/70.

²¹³Minutes of TAWU meeting collected by Labour Inspector Mombasa 2-2-53, KNA Lab. 10/71.

²¹⁴See, for instance, EAS 13-9-47.

John Mungai president of the Nairobi African Drivers Union contended that his "union was originally started for the purpose of stopping mis-behaviours of the taxi drivers", and he envisaged a time when the union would own and run its own taxis and garages.²¹⁵ This idea of trade union co-operatives was to be revived and implemented by the Mboya faction in the early 1960s.

For the Singhs, Kubais, Kaggias and Kibachias moderation was anathema to them and a betrayal of the workers' cause. They harboured few illusions about the teachings of Patrick, expressed suspicions of the nationalist politicians when it came to labour matters and were wary of turning trade unions into glorified welfare societies.²¹⁶ The most compelling rejection of 'responsible' trade unionism, which also displayed the remarkable resilience and strength of Kenyan workers despite all the attempts to frustrate their organisational efforts, came with the wave of strikes that engulfed the country between 1946 and 1952, reaching their peak during the Mombasa General Strike of 1947 and the

²¹⁵Minutes by John Mungai 23-6-47 KNA Lab 10/70. In fact some members of the union initially subscribed as much as 100/- each on the assumption that the union was some kind of business or co-operative society, although there are no indications that they withdrew their money when they learnt otherwise.

²¹⁶See Singh, *op. cit.*, 170-1; Mak/A-10-15, where it is clearly shown that trade unionists of Singh's, Kubai's and Kaggia's orientation were very distrustful of Patrick and his lectures and wary of Kenyatta's compromising outlook and tactics, including when it came to politics. In fact Kubai and Kaggia felt it imperative to warn Kenyatta to temper his public anti-Mau Mau onslaught. See John Spencer, "Kau and 'Mau Mau': Some Connections", in W.R. Ochieng and K.J. Janmohamed, (eds.), *Some Perspectives on the Mau Mau Movement, Special Issue of Kenya Historical Review, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1977.* Also see B. Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom: Autobiography*, EAPH, Nairobi, 1975.

Nairobi General Strike of 1950. The turn of the 1950s also witnessed the outbreak of a liberation struggle that was to be dubbed Mau Mau by frightened and shocked ruling classes.

Strike Action

During the years immediately following the end of the Second World War more workers than ever before resorted to strike action to press their demands for higher wages and better working and living conditions. Though fluctuating from year to year the numbers of strikes and workers involved in them remained persistently high. Only in 1949 and 1951 when there were 71 and 57 strikes, respectively, did the number of reported strikes fall below 80. Otherwise it hovered between 80 in 1947 and 84 in 1952, with a high of 87 in 1948.²¹⁷ It is interesting to note, however, that although there were more reported strikes in 1948 than in 1949 there were more workers involved in strikes in the latter year; 10,148 as compared to 7,287. This suggests that the strikes were becoming larger in size. In the same two years, 32 out of the 87 strikes in 1948, or 37%, were major strikes, which involved over 50 workers and lasted for over a day, while in 1949 30 out of the 71 strikes, or 42%, were major strikes. The strikes peaked in 1947 and 1950, the years of the general strikes, both in terms of the numbers of major strikes and the workers involved.

Although no sector remained untouched by strikes, the agricultural sector seems to have had the least percentage of reported strikes, workers

²¹⁷See Labour Department Annual Report, 1946-52.

involved in strikes and man-days lost. This can be seen for the year 1951 in table 4.11.

Table 4.11: Strikes Distributed According to Industrial Groups and Showing Numbers of Workers Involved and Man-Days Lost, 1951.

| Sector | Number of Strikes | Workers Involved | | | Man-days Lost | | |
|---|-------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------------|
| | | No. | % of Total (x) | Average Per Strike | No. | % of Total (y) | Average Per Strike |
| Agriculture | 14 | 976 | 14.78 | 70 | 774 | 7.23 | 55 |
| Industry | 15 | 1,815 | 27.45 | 121 | 1,170 | 10.91 | 78 |
| Construction | 11 | 1,634 | 24.72 | 149 | 6,707 | 62.64 | 602 |
| Government, Municipalities, Railways and Harbours | 6 | 463 | 7.00 | 77 | 339 | 3.17 | 56 |
| Services | 1 | 200 | 3.03 | 200 | 50 | .47 | 50 |
| Trade | 9 | 1,022 | 15.46 | 114 | 668 | 6.24 | 74 |
| Mining | 1 | 500 | 7.56 | 500 | 1,000 | 9.34 | 1,000 |
| Total | 57 | 6,610 | 100 | 116 | 10,708 | 100 | 188 |

Source: Department of Labour Annual Report, 1951.

(x) i.e., 14.78% of workers involved in strikes were engaged in agriculture.

(y) i.e., 7.23% of man-days lost in strikes were in agriculture.

The low level of reported strikes among agricultural workers was a direct outcome of the lack of rural labour organisation which, in turn, was determined by the attenuated structure of agricultural employment. Unlike the heterogeneous urban industrial workers who were concentrated in fairly large production units conducive to labour organisation and collective action, agricultural workers were scattered on hundreds of farms. It is

not surprising, therefore, that strikes among rural workers tended to occur on the big coffee plantations and among the rural-based food processing plants. Examples were the series of sporadic strikes among coffee workers in Kiambu in 1947 and on plantations in Thika in 1951 and Uasin-Gishu in 1952.²¹⁸ There was a major strike at the Uplands Bacon factory near Lari in September, 1947, where three of the strikers were killed and six others wounded when the police opened fire on them in an attempt to break the strike.²¹⁹ It is possible to underestimate the frequency and extent of strike outbreaks among rural workers if one relies too much on the official statistics of recorded strikes, for given their relative isolation both farmers and workers were not prone to publicise strike incidents as readily as their more strategically placed urban counterparts. There is some evidence to suggest that rural workers, like urban workers, developed other forms of labour action apart from strikes; cases involving slow-downs, deliberate absenteeism, sabotage of crops and farm machinery, the maiming and killing of cattle on settler farms became more widespread as the 1940s rolled into the 1950s.²²⁰

Space does not allow us to discuss in detail the hundreds of strikes that erupted in the factories, mills, commercial enterprises and public

²¹⁸See Annual Reports, for instance, Kiambu, 1947; Thika, 1951; Uasin Gishu, 1952.

²¹⁹See C.G. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya, Praeger, New York, 1966, p. 238.

²²⁰See, for instance, J. Spencer, op. cit., pp. 214-18; also see F. Furedi, 'The Social Composition of the Mau Mau Movement in the White Highlands', Journal of Peasant Studies, 1 (1973-4), p. 495.

services located in the major towns of Kenya before the declaration of the state of emergency on 20th October, 1952. The general strikes have been singled out not only because they were the biggest and the most spectacular and, in fact, the last general strikes in Kenya up to the present, but these strikes also throw into sharp relief the organisational and operational patterns of strike action, the responses of the colonial state and employers, and the immediate and long-term impact of strikes in restructuring relations between colonial labour and capital.

The Mombasa General Strike, 1947

The Mombasa general strike was the culmination of scores of strikes that had plagued the town since the 1930s. The strike started with those seasoned harbingers of labour militancy in Mombasa, the dock and railway workers. After negotiations between their representatives and the railway administration and the Labour Commissioner had broken down, the strike quickly spread to virtually all workers including hotel and domestic workers, sugar workers at Ramisi on the mainland, and municipal and government workers. It was to last eleven days from 13th to 24th January and involved more than 15,000 workers from skilled and semi-skilled workers to unskilled and casual labour, whose demands concerning pay, employment and living conditions were as comprehensive as they were unwelcome to the government and other employers.²²¹

²²¹The following discussion has been based on data found in CO 533/544 38091/b part I; CO 533 545 1947; KNA Lab. 3/12 - 17; reports and returns monthly intelligence KNA Lab. 2/67; as well as press reports of the EAS and Mombasa Times 14th to 25th January, 1947. The labour problem in Mombasa was accentuated by the desire of casual workers as well as the government to decasualise labour, while

Initially the strike was mobilised and co-ordinated through word of mouth before the fledgling organisational efforts of the AWF began to have effect. The AWF rapidly moved in to monitor and, where it could, to co-ordinate and control the growth of the strike. The federation held frequent meetings to express the collective goals of the strike, cement the solidarity of such a diverse group of workers, rally the reluctant, and keep up spirits and prevent enthusiasm for the strike from faltering in the face of determined intimidation from the government and employers. Taxi drivers, who were also on strike, offered their services and took carloads of union organisers all over the town to oversee the way the strike was progressing. A network of patrol groups composed of the striking workers themselves and, interestingly enough, unemployed youths, emerged in order to prevent strike breaking. These groups were also sometimes sent to visit those few premises where workers were not yet on strike to persuade the latter to join the strike and to present their employers with letters from the AWF demanding "the withdrawal of such people to avoid trouble".²²² Given its rudimentary structures, however, the AWF could not hope to organise the strike on its own, and as for the railway clerical and civil service associations they gave little support to the strike. The upshot of all this was that some of the strike patrol groups functioned independently and sometimes in isolation,

employers were adamantly opposed to it for they believed it would undermine the port industry. In essence, however, the employers were trying to avoid responsibility for paying for the social costs of labour. See KNA Lab. 9/1835, and Lab 9/1838.

²²²AWF letter to employers quoted in Governor Mitchell - Secretary of State 3-3-47 CO 533 544 38091/b part I.

and temporary strike committees emerged among several groups of workers employed in the same industry or occupation. Consequently staff associations were discredited in the eyes of most workers and the need for and usefulness of permanent trade union organisations struck them with particular urgency. This may go some way to explain the rapid growth of trade unions in the years following the strike.

The over-worked propaganda machine of the government churned out charges that the majority of workers were "not in sympathy with the strike and only came out by reason of well-planned campaign of intimidation".²²³ Except for the case of a handful who had their heads shaved in public, the government could provide no evidence of widespread intimidation. On the contrary, none other than the Mombasa Chamber of Commerce and the East African Standard, as well as the bulk of those people who gave evidence to the Thacker Tribunal, not to mention the AFW's own accounts, all testified to the lack of violence and intimidation. These charges reflected the all too familiar pattern of reluctance by the colonial state and employers to acknowledge the inherently exploitative and oppressive nature of the colonial capitalist system and, in addition, it served as a convenient justification for the draconian measures which were adopted to crush the strike.

Four major tactics were adopted to break the strike after immediately declaring it illegal under the Defence Regulations, which were still in force. First, police and army units were mobilised and within days of the strike's outbreak hundreds of policemen, including some from Nairobi with additional European special police, and five companies of

²²³Governor - Secretary of State 18-1-47, ibid.

the 4th Battalion of the KAR, reinforced by a platoon of seamen from a British naval ship which had just docked at Mombasa, circled and made a show of force in the town in battledress with steel helmets, rifles and fixed bayonets and bren-gun carriers. They guarded key installations, maintained essential services, dispersed strikers, more than 500 of whom were arrested. Second, gangs of strike breakers were recruited consisting of several hundreds of African, Asian and Arab volunteers, over 800 European men and women volunteers and about 700 Italian civil internees, including 12 prisoners-of-war who were awaiting a ship to Italy. A Central Manpower Committee was formed for the duration of the strike to co-ordinate the distribution of this labour corps.

Further, extensive use was made of threats and propoganda through loudspeakers blaring in the streets and leaflets showered from the skies by the R.A.F. which dropped as many as 10,000 leaflets in English and Swahili at a time, urging the strikers to return to work immediately or risk losing their pay and their jobs altogether. The tone of the leaflets can be gauged from the following: "your leaders of foolishness have deceived you since the beginning. Every day on which you refuse to work your lot is getting worse."²²⁴ Finally, the government encouraged people like Rev. L.J. Beecher, who was the other representative of African interests in the legislative council, to come to try to persuade the strikers to go back to work. Beecher's mission failed when he told a mass rally that they should return to work before he would talk to the government and present their demands. The workers then asked for Mathu's

²²⁴See Reuter despatch 2108 Jan. 1947, CO 533 545.

mediation. Before his arrival in Mombasa, where he addressed over 10,000 workers, Mathu had secured guarantees from the government that a tribunal with mandatory powers would be appointed and a survey of living conditions in Mombasa would be conducted.

The tribunal and social survey team, appointed as promised, have come to be known as the Thacker Tribunal and Booker and Devrill Report, respectively. The tribunal's award fell far short of the strikers' demands, and as for the report, it was not even published and its proposals did not go beyond those offered by the Phillips Report, which had as yet to be implemented.²²⁵ Nevertheless, the general strike was an important milestone in the history of the Kenyan labour movement. In the short-term it certainly provided some impetus to the Kisumu general strike which lasted from 14th to 16th April, 1947, and numerous other smaller strikes all over the country.²²⁶ The strike also produced the AWF and although the federation was to be proscribed before long, the consciousness and organisational level of workers in Mombasa and the country as a whole had been elevated to a new plane. The colonial state and employers, faced with such determination from workers, devised new mechanisms with which to control labour like those shown above. In short, labour and capital in Kenya had entered a new terrain of protracted struggle.

²²⁵See Governor - Secretary of State 31-3-47, ibid.

²²⁶Labour Department Annual Report, 1947, p. 18.

The Nairobi General Strike, 1950

The Nairobi general strike followed hard on the heels of a wave of strikes that rocked the city and its surrounding areas in 1949 and 1950, including the boycott in March, 1950 of the Nairobi civic celebrations which was organised by the EATUC which argued that the celebrations were pointless for workers who lived in

dirty and unhealthy slums ... when plans are being secretly hatched to add to Nairobi more land of Africans. How can they take pleasure in the expansion and 'progress' of Nairobi, which has been built by exploiting the toil and sweat of hundreds of thousands of workers by a handful of moneylords ... By their boycott they wish to demonstrate that the so-called 'progress' is not the progress of the millions of toiling people but a handful of capitalists.²²⁷

Boycotting the celebrations which were presided over by the Duke of Gloucester touched a raw nerve among the ultra-royalist settlers who called for swift and stern action to be taken against the labour leaders. Nairobi was gripped by explosive tension.²²⁸

The General Strike broke out on 16th May, 1950, a day after Singh and Kubai had been arrested and only hours after the arrest of the acting president of the EATUC, and the publication in an extraordinary issue of the Official Gazette of additions to the Schedule of the Essential

²²⁷Statement issued by Central Council of the EATUC, see Singh, *op. cit.*, 253-4; also see Mak/A/12 fol. 423.

²²⁸See KNA Lab. 9/81 and Lab. 9/86. Also see Kenya Weekly News, 20-3-50, 31-3-50; and EAS 22-4-50.

Services (Arbitration) Ordinance, for which strikes were illegal. However, the strike which lasted eight days and involved, according to Singh, about 100,000 workers, spread to workers in both 'essential' and 'non-essential' industries and services. In fact, unlike the Mombasa general strike, the Nairobi general strike was not strictly limited to Nairobi alone. Within days it had spread to Limuru where about 1,000 workers downed their tools, and strikes were also reported from Thika, Nyeri, Nanyuki and Nakuru in the Central Province, Kisumu, Kisii, Kakamega in the Nyanza Province and Mombasa.²²⁹

The government acted quickly to contain the situation. Some of the tactics used were reminiscent of those used three years earlier in Mombasa. Strong patrols of police broke up picket lines and workers' gatherings by using batons and, for the first time in Kenya's history, tear gas was used. Many arrests were made; the main leaders of the EATUC and other unions were arrested just before or immediately after the strike broke out in order to deprive the strike of a strong mobilising and co-ordinating organisation. The fact that the strike went on despite these arrests was ample proof that an elaborate trade union organisation was not absolutely necessary for a major strike of long duration to break out. In the total absence of any strike funds or pay from their employers, the success of the strikers depended considerably on the amount of support they could muster from the rest of the population. Not only was there an outpouring of sympathy for them, this was soon translated

²²⁹Singh, *op. cit.*, chapter 18. Also see Annual Report, Kiambu District, 1950; Central Province Annual Report, 1950; and issues of the East African Standard and the Daily Chronicle (which was Indian owned and run, and generally tended to take a progressive stand) 16th to 25th May, 1950.

into solidarity when food donations to the strikers and their families began flowing into Nairobi and the other towns from the adjoining areas.²³⁰ The role of women in organising food distribution and helping in the general co-ordination of the strike was critical. It was a sign of the times and the prevailing mood that when Mathu and J. Jeremiah, the other African member of the Legislative Council, attended a meeting of the strikers at Kaloleni Hall in Nairobi, they received a stormy reception.²³¹ As a symbol of their determination and defiance, workers kept a bonfire burning in the valley of Pumwani and Shauri Moyo for the duration of the strike.

The strike was called off when the Central Minimum Wage Advisory Board recommended an increase of Shs. 6/- in the minimum wage and as it became apparent to the strike organisers that some workers were drifting back to work as their money ran out. The consequences of the strike were contradictory; the class consciousness of workers in the country was elevated further, especially in view of the lukewarm support if not outright opposition to the strike expressed by the nationalist political leadership.²³² But, on the other hand, the strike gave the government an opportunity to adopt tougher labour regulatory measures, some of which we have already noted above. In the case of trade unions this was to lead to the formation of the Kenya Federation of Registered Trade Unions in 1952, the precursor of the Kenya Federation of Labour, which was

²³⁰Singh, *ibid.*, p. 272.

²³¹EAS 19-5-50.

²³²See, for instance, some of the politicians' attacks against the EATUC in EAS 24-4-50 and 12-6-50.

dominated by moderate leadership since most of the militant leaders had been incarcerated. The government quickly moved to recognise the new federation, undoubtedly in an effort not to alienate the new crop of union leaders and to consolidate moderate trade unionism. Significantly, the federation's constitution was drawn up with the help of the Labour Department. The year 1952, therefore, marked a watershed in the development of the Kenyan labour movement.

Political Participation

Most of the writing on workers' participation in colonial political processes has concentrated on trying to show how much or how little the labour movement contributed to the nationalist movement. Consequently, many writers, for too long, have centred on formalistic issues, such as the nature of institutional linkages between the two movements, especially at the level of leadership, that is, comparisons have often been made between the personalities, tactics and rhetoric employed by the leaders of the two movements. This approach posits a mechanistic dichotomy between 'politics' and 'trade unionism' that fails to capture the material and social basis of these movements; in short, it ignores the dialectic of class struggle in colonial capitalist social formations. Others have fallen under the temptation of lumping strikes and other forms of labour protest rather indiscriminately under the omnipresent umbrella of the nationalist struggle, which has the effect of denying the Kenyan working class a separate historical identity, of tending project nationalism over and above the ever-changing contradictions between labour and capital and, indeed, of homogenising the nationalist movement

itself. In order to avoid dismissing the working class at this historic juncture as nothing more than an appendage of the nationalist movement and to take into account the country's social formation in all its complexity and contradictions, it might be useful to examine the tendencies of political orientation exhibited by the working class.

It ought to be emphasised that the forms of political action adopted by the trade union movement constituted only a part of the wide range of possibilities available to the working class as a whole, which was still predominantly unorganised. At the risk of oversimplification and repetition, we see that until the Mau Mau struggle erupted in earnest following the declaration of the state of emergency, organised labour was split between a militant faction which advocated rapid decolonisation and the use of revolutionary violence to achieve it, and another which either sought to limit itself to 'pure' trade union concerns or actively supported the moderate and constitutionalist politics of the dominant wing of the KAU nationalist leadership. It has been argued that the latter union faction consisted of unions and leaders in government and public services,²³³ while the former belonged to unions like TAWU and LTUEA, which shows that the level of government intervention was a significant determinant of factional political orientation within the trade union movement as much as was occupational differentiation such as that between skilled and unskilled workers.

²³³See Sharon Stichter, 'Workers, Trade Unions, and The Mau Mau Rebellion', in Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1975, p. 273.

The militant faction reached the zenith of its influence and power in 1951 when it took over the Nairobi branch of KAU, which rapidly developed into one of the key organisational centres of Mau Mau, while the moderate faction saw its fortunes rise with the arrest of most of the radicals, the banning of the EATUC and the formation of the KFRTU.²³⁴ Among the union rank and file and the vast bulk of the non-unionised workers, including the so-called lumpen-proletariat consisting of the unemployed, petty traders and prostitutes, the trend towards greater militancy and politicisation was unmistakable. In Nairobi and the towns of the Central Province this expressed itself in the enormous increase in the number of workers who took the Mau Mau oath, whereas in the rest of the urban centres the new levels of political activism among workers were manifested in less salient forms, which were no less disturbing to the colonial administrators.²³⁵

The political radicalisation of the rural proletariat was all the more remarkable in view of the absence of labour organisations and the acute logistical problems of organising any wide-scale anti-colonial movement. The squatter movement, which came to constitute an important component of the Mau Mau liberation struggle, grew so rapidly that according to the government's estimate by the time of the Emergency about 90% of all the squatters in the so-called White Highlands had taken the

²³⁴ Ibid. Also see KNA Lab. 3/66.

²³⁵ Ibid. Also see J. Spencer, *op. cit.*, B. Kaggia, *op. cit.*, M. Tamarin, 'Mau Mau in Nakuru', in Kenya Historical Review, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1977, and F. Furedi, 'The African Crowd in Nairobi: Popular Movements and Elite Politics', Journal of African History, Vol. XIV, No. 2, 1973.

oath.²³⁶ In contrast, the percentage of people who had taken the oath in the Kikuyu Reserve, where there was a fairly sizeable class of potential collaborators composed of chiefs, landowners, businessmen and the mission-educated literati with a stake in the colonial system, was much lower. According to Furedi, the social base of the

Mau Mau Movement in the White Highlands consisted of at least two distinct social strata: the rank and file of the movement ... was made up of Kikuyu squatters; the majority of the activists came from the ranks of the more skilled farm labourers, artisans and petty traders. The survival of the Kikuyu squatter community depended on a united stand against the settler onslaught. The squatter headmen, artisans and traders formed a distinct stratum on the farms. By themselves, they were an insignificant force compared to the Europeans. Moreover, their position and authority was dependent on their close relations to the squatter community. Consequently at this point, the political interests of these two groups merged within a common movement.²³⁷

Faced with such widespread militancy the government declared the State of emergency and proceeded to arrest hundreds of people, which sparked off the outbreak of the Mau Mau liberation struggle.

Conclusion

The period between 1946 and 1952, therefore, can be characterised as one in which Kenya underwent tremendous economic changes in the fields of

²³⁶Furedi, 'The Social Composition of the Mau Mau ...', p. 495.

²³⁷Ibid., pp.502-3.

both agricultural and industrial production as a result of changed conditions of accumulation at the levels of the world and local political economies. Consequently, an unprecedented number of people in Kenya entered wage employment. Despite the adoption of some seemingly new and more enlightened labour policies, conditions for workers whether at their places of work or where they lived hardly changed for the better. A major onslaught against squatters was in fact launched. Thus it is not surprising that strikes and labour protests in general became endemic, including the outbreak of general strikes in Mombasa and Nairobi within three years of each other. These strikes and the other forms of labour protest had their effect on matters concerning wages and the abolition of kipande in 1947.²³⁸

Finally, in this chapter it has been shown that workers, especially squatters, played a key organisational and ideological role in the outbreak of the Mau Mau liberation struggle. The 1947 Mombasa General Strike and the 1950 Nairobi General Strike and the beginning of Mau Mau, marked the highwater-marks of working class struggles in Kenya. But the arrest of most of the militant trade union and political leaders during these years, and the declaration of the state of emergency under which the

²³⁸The abolition of kipande came after the government had tried unsuccessfully to introduce a system of identification applicable to all races. There was a storm of settler protest, which in the end fueled African protest against the retention of kipande still further. Without in any way underestimating the impact of the anti-kipande protests, it has to be recognised that by this period kipande was no longer very useful as a means of controlling labour because the problems associated with labour shortages had long since disappeared. See, Sultan H. Somjee, "Kipande, the Symbol of Imperialism, 1915-1948: A Study in Colonial Material Culture", Seminar paper presented in the Department of Literature, University of Nairobi, June, 1980.

colonial state assumed extraordinary powers of political repression and labour control, represented a major historic defeat for the Kenyan labour movement whose impact was to be felt for many years to come.

96
3241
750

CHAPTER FIVE

IN THE EYE OF THE STORM: THE RECOMPOSITION OF KENYAN LABOUR
DURING THE EMERGENCY, 1953-1963

The historiography of Kenya for the period between 1953 and 1963 is rich in debate and controversy. Some have seen Mau Mau as representing a relapse into a collective fit of atavism by a people hopelessly incapable of coming to terms with the conditions of modern civilisation, and at the other extreme, there have been those for whom the emergency was nothing short of naked oppression of historic monstrosity and Mau Mau a heroic movement which was betrayed by the emerging Kenyan middle class. In between this great divide lie accounts which seek to explain Mau Mau as the violent expression of nationalism.¹

¹The literature on the Mau Mau liberation struggle and the government's efforts, both military and political, to defeat it is as voluminous as it is varied in the range of interpretations. For the official view see F.D. Corfield, Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1960. For interpretations of Mau Mau by African nationalists actually involved in the struggle one way or another, see J.M. Kariuki, 'Mau Mau' Detainee. The Account by a Kenya African of his Experiences in Detention Camps, 1953-63, London, Penguin Books, 1964; D.L. Barnett and K. Njama, Mau Mau From Within. Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1966; W. Itote, 'Mau Mau' General, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1967; B. Kaggia, Roots of Freedom, EAPH, Nairobi, 1975; J.K. Muriithi (with P. Ndoria), War in the Forest. The Autobiography of a Mau Mau Leader, EAPH, Nairobi, 1971; J. Wamweya, Freedom Fighter, EAPH, Nairobi, 1971. Also see I. Henderson and P. Goodhart, The Hunt for Kimathi, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1958; and F. Kitson, Gangs and Counter-Gangs, Barrie and Rockliff, London, 1960 for details on the war from pro-government and pro-settler perspectives. For works based on academic research and basically sensitive and sympathetic to the nationalist and political

In this chapter my aim is to go beyond the question of how to characterise Mau Mau, the emergency and decolonisation, and to understand the processes of capital accumulation, class formation and class struggles during this critical decade in Kenya's history. How did the emergency specifically condition the sharpening contradictions in Kenya's political economy? How was the Kenyan working class reorganised both as a result of changes in the country's political economy and the working class' own responses to those changes?

In short, in this chapter I will try to show that developments in Kenya during this era, which marked a transition from a settler colonial to a neo-colonial society, were extremely complex and full of contradictions, and thus do not lend themselves easily to simplistic notions of imperial conspiracy or nationalist betrayal. The subject of trade union development during this period, especially with reference to the strategies which the colonial state and capital adopted to co-opt organised labour, is too important to be dealt with in a summary fashion, consequently it will be handled separately in the following chapter. Presently, therefore, the main focus will be on the political economy of the emergency and decolonisation and the recomposition of the Kenyan working class during this last decade of colonial capitalism in Kenya.

nature and objectives of Mau Mau, see F. Majdalany, State of Emergency. Full Story of Mau Mau; C.G. Rosberg, J. Nottingham, The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya, F.A. Praeger, London and New York, 1966; and R. Buijtenhuijs, Mau Mau Twenty Years After, Mouton, 1973.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE EMERGENCY AND DECOLONISATION

The declaration of the state of emergency ushered in a period of profound economic and political change which altered the relations between the imperial and colonial states, and restructured the social and institutional bases of the colonial state itself both as a reflection of and a response to, the realignment of class forces in the country brought about by new conditions of accumulation.

The emergency led to a reassertion of the imperial presence in Kenya. On the military front British infantry battalions, heavy bombers and logistics units were sent to strengthen the inadequate military resources of the Kenyan Government in order to defeat Mau Mau. This was accompanied by a reassertion of imperial political control. One need only mention the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 and the Lennox-Boyd Constitution of 1957 to see how pervasive this control gradually became. The former introduced a new central government structure based on a ministerial system and broached the principle of multi-racial representative parity between Europeans and non-Europeans. The Lennox-Boyd Constitution extended the multi-racial formula by raising African representation in the Legislative Council to 14, thereby giving Africans parity with the Europeans. In addition, African ministerial portfolios were increased to two. This was as much an exercise in co-optation of the African nationalist leadership as it was pre-emptive in that it sought to deradicalise nationalist politics. Thus when the first elections were held for Africans in 1957 the franchise was severely restricted to levels of education and property which favoured the political leaders

not detained during the emergency.²

However, this does not mean that African political leaders were simply being manipulated, or that they were passive recipients of change initiated by imperial self-interest. On the contrary, they were very active. They aggressively pursued not only their own conflicting immediate and long-term class interests but also successfully mobilised the political potential of mass nationalism so that more often than not they held the initiative and dictated the pace of events.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the reactive nature of some imperial-inspired political reforms did not initially represent any explicit programme of decolonisation, rather these reforms were essentially piecemeal, conjunctural responses to intensifying political struggles within the country. Nevertheless, the reforms do show that among the imperial government, the colonial government and the settlers, initiative for political reform was unmistakably shifting in favour of London. The enhanced interventionist role of the imperial state which the emergency brought about undermined the political legitimacy of the settler class which, in turn, transformed the social basis of the colonial state itself. Under the new ministerial system, for example, the division of agriculture into separate and independent African and European departments was ended when the two were combined under the Ministry of Agriculture. A separate Ministry of Finance was also created to plan

²For detailed accounts of the political history of this period, see George Bennet, Kenya: A Political History; the Colonial Period, OUP, London, 1963; J.R. Roelker, Mathu of Kenya. A Political Study, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1976; B.A. Ogot (ed.), Politics and Nationalism in Colonial Kenya, EAPH, Nairobi, 1972.

and coordinate overall national economic development. Thus the ministerial system

finally broke up the old unitary structure under the control of the Administration into several ostensibly equal ministries ... In addition, ministerial and cabinet responsibility and the increasing number of unofficial ministers began to partially differentiate the government from the permanent state apparatus, opening the way for the development of the role and power of the professional politician and a corresponding diminution of the hitherto diffuse and all-encompassing authority of the bureaucracy.³

No wonder that "with one or two exceptions ... senior officers of the Provincial Administration never really accepted the ministerial system".⁴

As the gates of African representation to the central structures of the colonial state were opened so did the political fortunes of the settlers decline. In the face of this decline the facade of settler unity was broken as the settler community split into distinct conservative and liberal camps with increasingly divergent priorities and tactics. The former were represented in the United Party, later regrouped in 1960 under the banner of the Kenya Coalition, whose aim was to preserve settler dominance and the status quo as much as possible, while the liberals were in the United Country Party which was transformed into a multi-racial New Kenya Group in 1959. The NKG recognised the

³B.J. Berman, "Becoming A Developing Nation: The Political Economy of Transition in Kenya, 1954-1969", paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Halifax, June, 1981, p. 33.

⁴Michael Blundell, So Rough A Wind, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1964, p. 173.

inevitability of fundamental social, economic and political change but wanted to preserve the capitalist system by underpinning the society on class, not on racial stratification, and building up, and aligning with, a moderate African middle class.⁵

The eventual eclipse of settler political power and the increasingly active interventionist role of the imperial state as well as the incorporation of the African middle class into the apparatus of the colonial state were reflections of, and further shaped, the underlying structural changes in Kenya's political economy. This was a period, therefore, which not only witnessed intense political and military struggles and subtle and dramatic shifts in colonial policy by both the imperial and colonial states, but also saw gradual and rapid economic and social change which was in part predicated on a growing level of articulation of African commodity production with metropolitan capital.

In agriculture we see that the process of land consolidation and individualisation of land tenure in the African land units was accelerated through government sponsored programmes and reforms and, as independence approached, African land settlement and purchase schemes in the once exclusive and sacrosanct 'White Highlands' were embarked upon. As a result of these developments African commodity production expanded substantially, while settler agriculture went into relative decline. This not only led to the growth of more pronounced class stratification and struggles in rural areas and the beginnings of mass unemployment,

⁵See Gary Wasserman, The Politics of Decolonisation: Kenya Europeans and the Land Issue, 1960-1965, CUP, Cambridge, 1976.

it also contributed to the erosion of settler economic and political power as the African petty-bourgeois class grew both in size and economic strength.

Specifically, the land consolidation and registration campaign was envisaged as a means of providing an overdue and comprehensive legal basis for individual land tenure in a region where customary tenure was no longer viable after many decades of capitalist penetration. In order to prevent a flood of litigation from torpedoing the consolidation programme while it was underway and before substantive legislation had been passed, the government quickly enacted Land Tenure Rules and a Suspense of Suits Ordinances. It was not until 1959 that the Registration and Land Control Ordinance was finally passed by which time the consolidation exercise was virtually over. This only goes to show the haste with which the government tried to implement consolidation.⁶

It was hoped that security of tenure would permit African farmers to borrow from banks and other lending institutions which would in turn

⁶See M.P.K. Sorrenson, Land Reform In The Kikuyu Country, A Study In Government Policy, OUP, London, 1967, Chapters 6-11. The literature on land consolidation and individualisation of land tenure is quite extensive. See for example, L. Branney, 'Towards the Systematic Individualisation of African Land Tenure', Journal of African Administration (J.A.A.), Vol. XI, No. 4 (Oct. 1959); and also by the same author in the same issue, 'The Kenya Working Party on African Land Tenure'; F.D. Homan, 'Consolidation, Enclosure and Registration of Title in Kenya', Journal of Local Administration Overseas, Vol. II, No. 1 (Jan. 1962); G.J.W. Pedraza, 'Land Consolidation in the Kikuyu Areas of Kenya', J.A.A., Vol. VIII, No. 2, (April, 1956); and R.G. Wilson, 'Land Consolidation in Fort Hall District', J.A.A., Vol. VII, No. 3. For a very perceptive analysis of land and agrarian class struggle during this period, see A. Njonjo, 'The Africanisation of the White Highlands: a study in agrarian class struggles in Kenya, 1950-1974, Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton, 1977.

enable them to expand and improve their farming. In other words, it was believed that production in the African land units could not be maintained, let alone increased, unless there was substantial long-term capital investment in the land; and that could only be done if economic landholdings were created and individualisation of tenure universalised. Consolidation was therefore also seen as a means of providing the basis for an agricultural revolution without which rural poverty, unemployment and discontent would increase thereby adding fuel to the Mau Mau inferno. It virtually became an article of faith in official circles "that the enclosure movement of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries in England was about to be repeated in Kenya, albeit more quickly, but also, under the management of the Provincial Administration, more humanely".⁷

The Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya, 1954, more popularly known as the Swynnerton Plan which provided the land consolidation programme with both its rationale and some of the funds with which to carry it through was unambiguous about the government's ultimate objectives. "Former government policy", the report stated, "will be reversed and able, energetic or rich Africans will be able to acquire more land and bad or poor farmers less, creating a landed and landless class. This is a normal step in the evolution of a country."⁸

⁷Sorrenson, op. cit., p. 222.

⁸See R.J.M. Swynnerton, A Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1955, p. 10. Apart from the need to reform the African customary land tenure system, the Report also recommended the establishment of provincial marketing boards, support for co-operative societies among

Clearly, consolidation had political objectives as well. Through it a conservative land owning African class would be expanded and stabilised. As one government official put it, the members of this class would be "too busy on their land to worry about political agitation".⁹ Consequently, consolidation became part and parcel of the anti-Mau Mau crusade and was partly designed to buttress the position of loyalists and other conservative forces and seal the landlessness of Mau Mau fighters and their supporters. No wonder the sense of urgency, the ruthless efforts to finish consolidation while the emergency regulations were still in force: "Strike while the iron is hot" was a refrain repeated with religious fervour on many an official's lips. With the politicians safely tucked away in detention camps, political parties proscribed and the people themselves immobilised into forced emergency villages, the conditions were indeed favourable for compulsory consolidation. The fact that the emergency also brought great increases of staff and finance from Britain only made the situation easier. Moreover,

African farmers, intensification of agricultural investigation in African areas in order to determine soil types and appropriate fertilisers, expansion of extension services to improve agricultural education among Africans, and the construction of dams and boreholes and the establishment of a Rural Water Irrigation Department and district irrigation boards in the semi-arid and pastoral areas. The Report further proposed the setting up of a £2 million African Loan (or Land) Bank to finance the 'progressive' farmers and their co-operative societies. The whole programme was expected to cost £6,955,058 of which Britain would provide £5,000,000. It was hoped that the programme would help the surplus output of about 600,000 families from a few pounds a year to 100 or more apiece. See also L.D. Smith, 'An Overview of Agricultural Development Policy'; and H.W.O. Okoth-Ogendo, 'African Land Tenure Reform', in J. Heyer, J.K. Maitha, W.M. Senga, Agricultural Development in Kenya: An Economic Assessment, OUP, Nairobi, 1976.

⁹Quoted in Sorrenson, op. cit., p. 117.

vociferous support for the government from loyalists and others who stood to gain from consolidation was not lacking, nor did African politicians in the Legislative Council mount an effective opposition campaign, so that it was possible for the government to claim that consolidation was popular, indeed, wanted by the vast majority of the Africans themselves.

Consolidation as an emergency measure was initially concentrated in the Central Province where it began in June 1953 and ended in 1960. In areas outside the province consolidation was not deemed necessary because fragmentation of land holdings was not as advanced, although an enclosure movement was completed among the Kipsigis in the 1950s and was later extended to the Nandi and other Kalenjin groups. Attempts to start consolidation in Nyanza Province failed because the Luo would have none of it since they "regarded consolidation as a punishment inflicted on the Kikuyu for rebellion".¹⁰ By 1965, however, consolidation was in progress in all provinces, although, of course, under somewhat different circumstances.¹¹

Almost invariably, in each district consolidation started in an area of a prominent loyalist chief. The land of loyalists was in fact consolidated first and that of suspected Mau Mau supporters last so that the former were more likely to get larger and more fertile holdings. In the case of the Mau Mau guerrillas themselves, their land was confiscated under the Forfeiture of Land Ordinance, 1954, and put into a

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 251-2.

¹¹See Colin Leys, Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism, Heinemann, London, 1975, p. 69. See also Report of the Mission on Land Consolidation and Registration in Kenya 1965-66, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1966.

common pool from which land for public sites could be drawn. Furthermore, in all cases consolidation was facilitated by the "villagisation" policy in which people were moved into specially created villages. With the vast bulk of the population moved into such villages the government was free to "adjudicate claims to fragments and replan the new consolidated holdings without the hindrance of established homesteads on the land".¹² The original intention of these villages had been, of course, to frustrate and break contacts between the Mau Mau guerrillas and their supporters. Before long, however, some government officials came to believe that these villages could be turned into permanent viable communities for workers commuting to nearby towns and plantations or, better still, they could be transformed into bustling centres of rural trade and commerce, cottage and light industries and thus provide employment for the growing armies of landless and unemployed people. One is tempted to see this as nothing more than mere rationalisation of a policy that recreated conditions in many ways reminiscent of wartime concentration camps.

It is noteworthy that initially only loyalists with economic holdings were allowed to leave the emergency villages and return to their farms after consolidation had been completed in each particular district. Although these restrictions were dropped by the beginning of 1960 when the emergency ended, enormous damage had already been done; those who had returned to their farms were in a favourable position to

¹²Sorenson, *op. cit.*, p. 112. On villagisation policy also see O.E.B. Hughes, 'Villages in the Kikuyu Country', *J.A.A.*, Vol. VII, No. 4 (October, 1955); and D.J. Penwill, 'A Pilot Scheme for two African Villages', *J.A.A.*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (April, 1960).

take advantage of any economic opportunities that might arise, while those who were landless or too poor to return to their holdings and develop them had little choice but to remain in the derelict slums of the former emergency villages where the anticipated social and economic developments had failed to materialise. In Nyeri district, for example, about 16% or 8,500 of the families had failed to establish any claims to land at all.¹³ Thus consolidation led to the accentuation of rural class differentiation between landed and landless classes; the ahoi lost their customary protection and had their landlessness confirmed and legalised, and squatters who were no longer needed in the Highlands were to find no refuge in the reserves either, while Mau Mau guerrillas and some of their sympathisers also lost in the land sweepstakes.

The land reforms were accompanied by the removal of the remaining restrictions against African production of cash crops. To take only the case of coffee, between 1955 and 1967 acreage under African cultivation jumped from 3,702 acres to 133,100 acres, which is a phenomenal increase of 3,595%. Altogether, the smallholding's sector increased its share of the total gross marketed output from 18% in 1958 to 22% in 1963 and 51% in 1968.¹⁴

The expansion in African cash crop production had serious repercussions on the problem of landlessness; it encouraged a relatively

¹³See William Barber, 'Some Questions About Labour Force Analysis in Agrarian Economies with Particular Reference to Kenya', Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University, Reprint Series: No. 16.

¹⁴See Leys, op. cit., p. 53; Sorrenson, op. cit., pp. 229-30; Berman, op. cit., p. 3. Also see W.M. Senga, 'Kenya's Agricultural Sector', in Judith Heyer, J.K. Maitha, and W.M. Senga, op. cit.

small number of prosperous African producers to concentrate land in their hands, thereby squeezing more people off the land. Since workers would increasingly emerge from this landless strata it meant that the capacities of the rural reserves to subsidise their low wages were quickly declining.

As late as 1961 this problem of landlessness was ignored. In fact, in that year the government embarked on a land settlement scheme that sought to bail out European landowners and buy off the emerging African bourgeoisie, while ignoring the worsening plight of the landless. The 'Yeoman' and 'Peasant' schemes envisaged the settlement of 1,800 'yeoman' farmers on 50 acre plots intended to provide a net income of 5,000 Shs. per annum, and 6,000 'peasant' farmers on 15 acre plots providing an income of 2,000 Shs. by 1963. The Land Development and Settlement Board was appointed to administer the scheme. The board would purchase undercultivated land from Europeans and sell it to Africans. Since the capital requirement for the prospective 'yeoman' farmers was 10,000 Shs., and for the 'peasant' farmers 1,000 Shs., there can be little doubt as to whom the programme was intended to benefit among Africans; to most workers and subsistence cultivators with their meagre incomes, "the price of admission to the settlement was a king's ransom".¹⁵

There are also other indications that the scheme was intended for the emerging African bourgeoisie. The 'yeoman' farmers would be scattered throughout the highlands in order to integrate and socialise them

¹⁵ Christopher Leo, 'Who Benefited from the Million-Acre Scheme? Toward a Class Analysis of Kenya's Transition to Independence', Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1981, p. 212.

into the prevailing economic system as well as to "reduce the visibility and precariousness of the European farming system ... [since] confining [African] settlement to the periphery of the Highlands invited expropriation".¹⁶ Although participants in the peasant programme were not to be integrated into the large-scale farming areas, they "would be given an opportunity to buy excellent smallholdings in areas which had previously been barred to Africans".¹⁷ It was hoped that both groups would have vested interests in property rights, including the validity of the transfer schemes themselves and would, therefore, "act as a buffer against agitation by the rural masses" and "provide a means of consolidating the rural populace around a moderate government and stabilising society".¹⁸

Within a year or so, however, the scheme had to be abandoned. Leo suggests two main reasons. First,

European settlers were not prepared to sell high-potential land at prices which reflected its present worth rather than its ultimate potential ... The idea was vintage colonialism: Europeans should be paid for the potential of their land, although the actual development of that potential might as well be left to Africans.¹⁹

¹⁶See Gary Wasserman, 'Continuity and Counter-Insurgency: The Role of Land Reform in Decolonising Kenya', Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1973, p. 141.

¹⁷Leo, op. cit., pp. 211-212.

¹⁸Wasserman, op. cit., pp. 135, 140-1.

¹⁹Leo, op. cit., pp. 214-15.

"There are even cases" Ruthenberg wrote, "where Europeans have bought derelict farms and developed their production for the sole purpose of selling them" to the board at inflated prices.²⁰ The board based its land purchase values on "current crop profitability, fertility, and recent land usage", which was a perfect recipe for encouraging speculative inflation of land prices. Ruthenberg continued:

Britain, in paying eight times the average annual profit to outgoing European farmers ... is certainly granting one of the most generous compensations for political losses of landownership known in history.²¹

Second, many potential African settlers were put off by the scheme because of the patronising attitude of the government and the stiff supervisory conditions that were being imposed on buyers. As Leo argues, colonial racialism blinded officials to the fact that the kind of African entrepreneurs for whom the scheme was intended in the first place "were no different, in their aspirations and in many of their attitudes, from successful European entrepreneurs";²² they did not need to be persuaded of the value of large-scale capitalist farming, after all many "had already started buying land in the Highlands outside the scheme

²⁰See R. Ruthenberg, African Agricultural Production: Development Policy in Kenya, 1952-1965, Springer-Verlag, Berlin, 1966, pp. 80-1.

²¹Ibid., p. 68. It was the Independent Government of Kenya and not Britain which shouldered the bulk of the cost.

²²Leo, op. cit., p. 220.

on a straight commercial basis".²³

In short the scheme encouraged speculation and was based on some fallacious assumptions so that it became difficult to find both willing sellers and buyers. A third reason not mentioned by Leo but which ought to be underlined is that struggles by the landless people themselves forced the government to abandon the narrow scope of the 'yeoman' and 'peasant' scheme in favour of a more comprehensive land settlement programme that would include at least some of the landless.

By 1962 it was obvious that the hoped for employment opportunities on the consolidated holdings had failed to materialise.²⁴ The problem was more than aggravated as large numbers of workers were thrown out of work as some settlers and firms left rather than accept the prospect of an African government. The country teetered on the brink of a renewed explosion. Landless people began taking the law into their own hands as they moved onto abandoned or undercultivated farms, and the Land and Freedom Army appeared on the verge of revival.²⁵ The stakes were high, for unless something was done urgently not only would the tortuous process of constitutional decolonisation collapse, thereby throwing the

²³Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 44. For more details on the development of small and large sectors, see J. Heyer and J.K. Waweru, 'The Development of the Small Farm Areas', and S.N. Hinga and J. Heyer, 'The Development of Large Farms', in J. Heyer (et al.), *op. cit.*

²⁴See Barber, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8; Sorrenson, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-7. Holdings of less than six acres, and there were many, tended to use family labour and therefore hardly employed wage labour.

²⁵See J.T. Kamumchuluh, 'Meru Participation in Mau Mau', *Kenya Historical Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1975, pp. 211-12; and Geoff Lamb, *Peasant Politics: Conflict and Development in Murang'a*, Friedman, Lewes, 1974, pp. 13-14, 31-32.

country into an intractable political crisis, the whole fabric of the colonial economy would also be destroyed.

Therefore, in order to diffuse rural unrest and to preserve large-scale capitalist agriculture as much as possible it became imperative to launch a fairly massive land resettlement scheme in the highlands. It was the only way of "letting steam out of the boiling kettle". As the Director of Agriculture stated:

we have ... been forced into settlement through widespread unemployment and distress and the need to make a beginning in the extraction of that part of the European farming community which wishes to leave Kenya.²⁶

Thus were born the controversial settlement schemes that are collectively known as the Million-Acre Scheme, after the 1.2 million acres which were allocated to 35,000 families in the 1960s.

The scheme did not succeed in eliminating the problems associated with landlessness, and certainly not during the dying months of colonial

²⁶Kenya National Archives, Ministry of Agriculture 2/352. The literature on the Million-Acre Scheme has grown quite considerably. Most of the works we have already quoted in this section on developments in agriculture deal with it in one way or another. Others also include C.P.R. Notridge and J.R. Goldsack, The Million Acre Settlement Scheme 1962-66, Department of Settlement, Nairobi, which presents the government's point of view; R.S. Odinga, 'Land Settlement in the Kenya Highlands', in J.A. Sheffield, (ed.), Education, Employment and Rural Development, EAPH, Nairobi, 1967, who tries to situate the scheme within the political context of the time. Colin Leys, 'Politics in Kenya: The Development of A Peasant Society', British Journal of Political Science, Vol. I, Part 3 discusses the process of class stratification in Kenyan society from the colonial to the post-colonial era within earlier formulations of underdevelopment theory which now sound rather dated.

rule, as government officials readily admitted,²⁷ nor, indeed, was the scheme expected to. The Million-Acre Scheme represented a delicate and complex bargain which sought to contain, if not resolve, the conflicting economic and political demands of the settlers, the nationalist leaders, the emerging African bourgeoisie, the landless poor, and metropolitan capital. It certainly ensured the shape and direction that post-colonial Kenyan society would take.

The scheme was funded by the British Government, the Colonial Development Fund and the World Bank to the tune of £ 7½ million. The financing of the scheme by metropolitan capital, both official and private, presents one of those fascinating ironies that Kenyan history is replete with. Settlers of both liberal and conservative persuasion, as well as the British government, were agreed that the entry of international capital would stabilise the economic system against possible ravages of nationalist expropriation. The Kenya National Farmers Union, that conservative bastion of settler interests, believed that post-independence land prices could only be stabilised

so long as international finance is involved pre-independence, both in the source of supply and amongst the trustees. The flow of money will not only be stabilising land values, it will also be

²⁷ See, for example, the following statement by the Minister of Lands and Settlement in March, 1963: "It was thought that settlement schemes could make a large contribution to the problem of landlessness and unemployment. It is now known that there can be no solution to this problem." Wasserman, *op. cit.*, p. 140. For more details on the failure of the Million-Acre scheme, see Christopher Leo, "The Failure of the 'Progressive Farmer' in Kenya's Million-Acre Settlement Scheme", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 1978.

of vital use in the development of African agriculture. No government is likely to forego such a source of supply, in order to reduce land values by arbitrary removal of price supports.²⁸

An Assistant Under-Secretary of State in the Colonial Office specifically underscored the important role that the World Bank could play in preserving the capitalist system in Kenya when he told one settler leader:

There is no government in the world which has yet dared to offend this institution and, therefore, it is most important with independence on the way, the Bank should be linked with Kenya's development. It would constitute a stabilising factor.²⁹

Many African leaders were only too glad to accept the entry of international capital if only because it provided them with the means of undermining the dominance of settler capital. More specifically, with the exception of the militant faction within KANU which opposed paying compensation for land transfer in the White Highlands, KANU and the moderate NKG-supported KADU, like the government, saw in land settlement a way of killing two birds with one stone: defusing rural unrest and promoting the interests of the African middle class. Kenyatta's conservative leadership certainly played a moderating influence in KANU

²⁸KNFU Memorandum: 'Kenya Economy - Finance for Land Development and Stabilisation of Land Values', 4 April, 1960. KNFU Papers, quoted in Gary Wasserman, 'The Independence Bargain: Kenya Europeans and the Land Issue 1960-62', Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, Vol. II, No. 2, July, 1973, p. 106.

²⁹Ibid., p. 111.

and there seems to have been some fear in the party that, unless they agreed to compensation, independence might be delayed, or that in fact if KADU agreed first KANU might be excluded from the government as it indeed turned out during the first transitional government after the 1961 elections. KANU militants acquiesced because they believed, to their own subsequent peril, that they could press for fundamental change after Independence.³⁰

Metropolitan capital not only underwrote the settlement programme, including the African landed petty-bourgeois class, at a critical moment in the country's history, it also became instrumental in promoting the expansion of the African trader class. From the mid-1950s foreign firms like BAT, Bata Shoe Company, East African Breweries and Unga Flour Company Africanised the distribution of their products in the rural areas by providing African traders with wholesale facilities and credit. In this way the development of commodity relations in the African districts was encouraged and that of government sponsored co-operatives undermined.³¹ Moreover, competition between African and Indian traders intensified, which boded ill for the latter after Independence when the post-colonial state went out of its way to support African accumulation.

At the same time as foreign firms were forging links with African traders the government was lifting a number of regulations limiting

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 116-17; also see Leys, op. cit., p. 56, J.W. Harbeson, 'Land Reforms and Politics in Kenya, 1954-70', Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1971, pp. 244 and 248, and for more information see his book, Nation-Building in Kenya, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973.

³¹ Nicola Swainson, The Development of Colonial Capitalism in Kenya 1918-1977, Heinemann, London, 1980, pp. 180-2.

this class' ability to accumulate. A Working Party on 'Assistance to African Traders, 1954-55' was appointed to make recommendations, and loans to African traders, administered through the IDC, were more forthcoming, although it was mainly those with proven entrepreneurial skills who stood to gain; that is, assistance was given to those who had weathered the storms of the previous decades and survived.³² Thus, in trade as in land ownership, the state was consolidating class stratification that had already taken place and creating conditions for the further reproduction of classes and class relations.

It ought to be noted, however, that accumulative opportunities for African traders were uneven. The declaration of the Emergency had led to the sealing off of

the Central Province from the rest of Kenya and, as most of the new joint companies were formed by the Kikuyu ... the expansion of African enterprises in the mid-1950s was drastically curtailed ... [B]etween 1953 and 1954 the number of registered African firms dropped to zero and only picked up again after 1958.³³

This made Kikuyu traders feel that traders from other ethnic groups had had an unfair advantage during the bleak days of the emergency, sentiments which, however exaggerated, could easily be augmented by the fact that Kikuyu workers were also deported from the main centres of employ-

³²Ibid., pp. 176-80. Also see R. van Zwaneberg, "Neo-Colonialism and the Origin of the National Bourgeoisie in Kenya Between 1940 and 1973", Journal of Eastern African Research and Development, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1974.

³³Swainson, p. 194.

ment and replaced by those from other ethnic groups. This contributed to a further segmentation of indigenous capital along ethnic lines apart from the already highly pronounced racial ones, with the result that ethnicity became more politicised than ever. The political consequences of this cannot be overstated.

Asian capital made remarkable advances as well, so that "by 1961 the number of Asian firms registered for the first time exceeded the 'European' group with 134 and 105 companies respectively.³⁴ The big Asian merchant capitalists like the Chandaria, Khimasia and Madvani groups moved into industrial production and swallowed a number of settler enterprises which had become bankrupt, uncompetitive, or whose owners had decided to leave the country as independence approached. One effect of this was that European business representing both settlers and international firms, as well as the so-called multi-racial NKG, despite its Asian members, expressed grave misgivings about "potential Asian domination of the industrial sector and emphasised the importance of increased external investment".³⁵ In an effort to protect themselves from political uncertainties, these big Indian concerns began internationalising their operations by transferring their headquarters outside Kenya. In a sense this served to accelerate the gravitation of the Kenyan economy toward the international capitalist system. Most of the Asian firms, however, were still relatively small.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 195.

³⁵ Berman, op. cit., p. 86; also see Leys, op. cit., pp. 44-5.

The expansion of Asian and African capital spelled the end of the hegemony of settler capital. The trend was accelerated as major corporate investments flowed into the country from the mid-1950s despite the emergency. The emergency provided the conditions for the political demise of the recalcitrant settler class and the internationalisation of the economy since it led to an enhanced interventionist role by the imperial state over whose wings metropolitan capital could ride more freely.

Except for the tense military situation all other indices point to a favourable investment climate in the 1950s. Indeed, the Mau Mau struggle itself had, by 1955, been virtually contained. The East African Royal Commission Report, 1953-55, recommended that the Kenyan Government should attract more investment by providing better infrastructure and offering inducements and tax concessions to investors and raising the general standard of education and social services in the country in order to promote a more skilled proletariat for the proliferating industries.³⁶ In 1955 the Economic Assistance for Primary and Secondary Industries Report urged the government to provide more protection for locally established industries.³⁷ The Kenyan government followed through with most of these recommendations. More roads were built and additional primary, intermediate secondary schools and technical training centres were established. Meanwhile, the Industrial Development

³⁶East African Royal Commission 1953-1955, Cmd. 9475, 1955.

³⁷Economic Assistance for Primary and Secondary Industries Report, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1955.

Corporation (IDC) was formed in 1954 to promote industrial and economic development, and four years later a comprehensive protective tariff system was introduced.³⁸ In 1963 two important financial institutions were set up, the East African Development Bank (EADB) charged with supporting industrial projects in the whole of East Africa, although its operations tended to be concentrated in Kenya, and the Development Finance Corporation of Kenya (DFCK), which was jointly owned by the ICDC, CDC, the German Development Corporation and the Netherlands Finance Company, initially established to support existing agricultural and industrial enterprises before it was allowed to consider new projects in the 1970s.³⁹

The years between 1953 and 1960, therefore, saw the establishment of major new plants and the extension of old ones for the production of soft drinks, beer, food processing, leather and shoes, paints and varnishes, tobacco and cigarettes, chemicals, cement, bicycle parts, glass works, aluminium works and a £5 million oil refinery in Mombasa.⁴⁰ Private capital formation reached its peak in 1956 when it amounted to 30.7 million, or 21% of the gross cash product.⁴¹ Although private

³⁸It has been argued often that foreign firms themselves have pressured the government to set up high tariff walls. See Richard Eglin, 'The Oligopolistic Structure and Competitive Characteristics of Direct Foreign Investment in Kenya's Manufacturing Sector', in Raphael Kaplinsky (ed.), Readings on the Multinational Corporation in Kenya, OUP, Nairobi, 1978, pp. 106-13, 128.

³⁹Swainson, op. cit., pp. 225-7.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 131-2; Eglin, op. cit., p. 101. See also Barry Herman, 'A Case of Multinational Oligopoly in Poor Countries: Oil Refinery Investment in East Africa', in R. Kaplinsky (ed.), op. cit.

⁴¹Swainson, ibid., p. 110.

foreign capital still predominantly came from Britain, firms from other countries, notably the USA, began making some inroads. It is also interesting to note that from the late 1950s the incidence of takeovers of local firms by foreign firms increased, aimed more at restricting competition than at achieving diversification as such,⁴² so that industry in Kenya became more oligopolistic than ever. This could not fail to have serious repercussions for labour organisation.

As early as 1955 the value of goods manufactured in the country exceeded the total value of European agricultural production. By 1958 the settler mixed farms

represented no more than 15-20% of the total assets invested in the colony by Europeans and Asians. Moreover the cleavage in the estate sector between corporate plantations and settler mixed farms widened. The plantations not only continued to dominate production of the principal export crops of coffee, tea and sisal, amounting to 60-70% of total agricultural exports into the 1960s, but also they were increasingly an allied sector of dominant industrial capital.⁴³

The expansion of industrial production meant that the stabilisation of at least a significant portion of the working class had become absolutely imperative.

But the vicissitudes of the politics of decolonisation were such that no sooner had the British Government announced its intention to hand over power to Africans at the first Lancaster House constitutional

⁴²Eglin, op. cit., pp. 129-31.

⁴³Berman, op. cit., p. 9.

conference in January, 1960, than the flow of capital into the country turned into an outflow of the order of a million pounds a month. By January 1962 the Nairobi Stock Exchange Index had fallen to 58.8 from 136.4 where it had stood at the end of 1955.⁴⁴ As already noted, some settlers abandoned their farms and the rest stopped making new investments in their farms. Meanwhile, the building industry virtually came to a standstill. Inevitably, unemployment shot up dramatically. The economy was contracting precisely at the same time that tens of thousands of detainees were being released and restrictions against the Kikuyu workers had been dropped.

When the British Government made its announcement in 1960 to grant Kenya independence, it was generally thought that this would not be achieved probably until after 1975, following the independence of Tanganyika and Uganda.⁴⁵ But three years later Kenya had become independent. What accounts for this rapid evolution? There can be little doubt that the economic crisis from 1960 helped to quicken the pace of decolonisation, telescoping it to three years. It was widely realised by all those concerned, and in their own different ways, from the British and Kenyan Governments to the African and European political parties in the country and corporate interests that if left to bleed for too long the economy would suffer fatal damage; the crisis would become 'organic' so that it would be the capitalist system itself that would be destroyed in the process. The level of political and labour protests

⁴⁴Leys, op. cit., p. 58.

⁴⁵Blundell, op. cit., pp. 261-2.

had already reached dangerous proportions and, as noted above, there were land seizures by the landless and the renewal of clandestine oath taking. Politics, it was feared, might become so irrevocably radicalised that the dominance of the petty-bourgeois nationalism of both KANU and KADU would be terminated and with it the continuity of the prevailing economic system would be in serious jeopardy.⁴⁶

The decolonisation of Kenya was, therefore, essentially a delicate compromise representing a partial containment of deeply embedded contradictions and struggles and at the same time it reflected complex shifts in the balance of power between the various social classes within the country and between the colonial state and the imperial state, as well as new forms of articulation of the Kenyan economy with international capital. In short, decolonisation was neither an inevitable outcome of imperial conspiracy or planning, nor an unadulterated victory of nationalist militancy, as imperial and nationalist historians are respectively wont to portray it.

⁴⁶As the Nairobi Chamber of Commerce put it in 1961 to Reginald Maudling, the Colonial Secretary of State when he visited Nairobi: "We did not believe that the economy of the country could recover from its present plight until there was enhanced security for land titles and the sanctity of contract, and that the quicker self-government and independence following it came, the better ... We therefore urged him to find a solution as quickly as he could to the political problems with which he was faced." Minutes of Annual General Meeting, 27 November, 1961, quoted in Leys, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.

LABOUR REORGANISATION AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENTChanges in the Composition of the Work Force

The widespread belief in government circles and among settlers that Mau Mau was a 'rebellion' by the Kikuyu people aided by their Embu and Meru neighbours was to have profound consequences on the composition of the Kenyan labour force and the development of trade unions. Members of these ethnic groups were subjected to mass evictions from all the main centres of employment and their movements were rigorously controlled as part of an overall strategy to crush Mau Mau. The situation was ominously reminiscent of the brutal and mean days when colonial rule was first being imposed and forced labour was widely used and accepted.

Hardly had the emergency been declared when the campaign to repatriate Kikuyu, Embu and Meru people from the Rift Valley Province and farms in the Central Province began. So anxious were the agitated and frightened settlers to get rid of their Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers that in most cases they gave them neither the chance nor the time to collect and take their property and foodstuffs with them.⁴⁷ The Labour Department organised transit camps for the workers. These camps "presented a depressing picture of wretched, confused and frightened humanity". The evicted workers "were carried out in over-crowded trains or PWD

⁴⁷ Kenyan Federation of Registered Trade Unions, Annual Report, 1955. Also see Labour Department Annual Report (hereinafter LDAR), 1953 and 1954.

lorries."⁴⁸ Several hundred others were also repatriated from Uganda and Tanganyika. Altogether some 100,000 were repatriated to the overcrowded reserves from the Rift Valley and other areas in the so-called European settled areas in the Central Province.⁴⁹

The mass repatriation campaign was not restricted to the rural hinterland of the Rift Valley and Central Provinces but struck at the heart of Nairobi itself beginning with 'Operation Jock Scott' in 1952 under which thousands of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers were rounded up and evicted from Nairobi together with their dependants. Other towns in the Central Province were similarly affected and people had their property and livestock confiscated. In Nyeri and Nanyuki it was apparently only because of the large-scale screening operations, which were regarded as successful by the administration, that mass removals were avoided.⁵⁰ Finally, in 1954 'Operation Anvil' was launched. It was brutally successful; over 30,000 Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers, that is a quarter of the Nairobi labour force, together with their dependants, were removed from the city. About sixteen and half thousand of them did not even have the dubious privilege of going back to the reserves but were sent to detention camps.⁵¹

⁴⁸A. Clayton and D.C. Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya 1895-1963, Frank Cass, London, 1974, p. 353.

⁴⁹See D.H. Rawcliffe, The Struggle For Kenya, Victor Gollancz, London, 1954, p. 60.

⁵⁰Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 353.

⁵¹LDAR, 1955, p. 9.

Congested as they were, the reserves were in no position to accommodate such a large influx in so short a time. In 1953 alone, for instance, 37,000 evicted people arrived in Kiambu and about 20,000 each in Nyeri and Fort Hall districts.⁵² Some of these people were coming into the reserves for the first time because they had always belonged to the European settled areas, while others had spent the greater part of their lives as squatters on settler farms. No wonder that in the most affected areas violence often erupted, thereby leading some historians to mistakenly regard Mau Mau essentially as a civil war among the Kikuyu.⁵³

Beside these deportations, legal and administrative mechanisms were used to control the movement of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru peoples. The Labour Department was charged with the task of documenting all workers from these ethnic groups and to ensure that any of their members "working, seeking work, outside their native land units were compelled to obtain an additional document called the 'Kikuyu History of Employment' (Green Card). Approximately 2% of those covered by the Emergency Regulations refused to be documented and had to be prosecuted."⁵⁴ In 1954 a more elaborate 'passbook' system was introduced to replace the 'green card'. The passbook contained information about a man's particulars, record of

⁵²See Central Province Annual Report, 1953, for more details.

⁵³See, for example, B.A. Ogot, 'Revolt of the Elders: An Anatomy of the Loyalist Crowd in the Mau Mau Uprising 1952-1956', in Ogot (ed.), 1972, op. cit.

⁵⁴LDAR, 1953, pp. 6-7.

employment, fingerprints and a photograph. Pressures from settlers to include details about a man's wage rates in the passbook were, however, resisted, although some employers inserted them all the same.

The passbook system represented a resurrection of the much hated kipande. Many settlers in fact welcomed it as such and wanted to see all Africans compelled to possess passbooks as in the old days of kipande. By implementing the passbook system as well as organising the eviction campaigns, the Labour Department was reverting to a role it had tried to abandon only recently: an instrument of overt labour coercion. Compulsory labour was actually revived. Detainees were forced to work on a number of public projects such as irrigation and land reclamation schemes.⁵⁵ Resistance against forced labour was widespread and took many forms including violent confrontations between the detainees and the prison authorities, which inevitably led to greater brutality and torture on the part of the latter. It all culminated in the infamous Hola Camp Massacre of March 1959 during which eleven of the detainees who had refused to work were killed after being beaten by warders.⁵⁶ The massacre deeply embarrassed the Kenyan and British governments. It inspired bitter debate in the House of Commons, and led to the reorganisation of the detention system, the speeding up of the screening process,

⁵⁵ See Central Province Annual Report, 1954 and 1955.

⁵⁶ There is hardly any book on Mau Mau that does not deal with this massacre. For official accounts see, Record of Proceedings and Evidence in the Inquiry into the Deaths of Eleven Mau Mau Detainees at Hola Camp in Kenya, Cmd. 795 of 1959; Documents Relating to the Deaths of Eleven Mau Mau Detainees at Hola Camp, Cmd. 778 of 1959; Further Documents Relating to Deaths of Eleven Mau Mau Detainees at Hola Camp in Kenya, Cmd. 816 of 1959.

and contributed to a re-evaluation of decolonisation policies and strategies.

As for the reserves themselves, they were not spared the revival of forced communal labour. Such labour was used "for terracing road repairs, water supplies, fencing, bush-clearing, grass planting and such emergency projects as clearing the Mile Zone and digging the fifty-five mile defensive ditch. This was seen to be as much a punishment as a productive enterprise; it remained as unpopular as ever."⁵⁷

What was the impact of all this on the people and workers of Kenya? For the government and its apologists all these measures were necessary to defeat Mau Mau. The Labour Department even contended that after the launching of 'Operation Anvil' "workers were once more able to move freely about their business".⁵⁸ Set against the background of mass deportations, rigorous control of people, arrests without trial, brutal torture in detention camps which led to many deaths, maiming and even castration and insanity, and the revival of forced communal labour in the camps and the reserves, the Labour Department's contention becomes a cruel characterisation of the effects of the emergency, a hollow celebration of a human tragedy. Nevertheless, it has to be recognised that the government desperately and unsuccessfully as it turned out, tried to use

⁵⁷ Clayton and Savage, *op. cit.*, p. 355. Also see Kiambu District Annual Report, 1954-55; Naivasha District Annual Report, 1954-55; and Nyeri District Annual Report, 1954-55. Kariuki, *op. cit.*, also paints a vivid picture of the unpopularity of communal labour. Communal labour was also carried on in Ukambani for reclamation schemes, terracing, grass planting and soil conservation and building dams. See Annual Report, Southern Province, 1958.

⁵⁸ LDAR, 1954, p. 4.

the emergency to control, if not to resolve, the increasingly worsening urban problems of congestion and slum development, poverty and squalor, social dislocation and violence. The emergency also gave the government the opportunity to break the back of organised labour and steer trade unions away from the militancy of the late 1940s. Their efforts in this sphere were to pay some dividends as will be shown later.

The removal of so many tens of thousands of workers could not fail to have profound effects on labour supplies and wage movements. As the Labour Department Annual Reports for the years 1953, 1954 and 1955 show, all the major sectors of the Kenyan economy suffered from acute shortages of labour. Consequently strenuous attempts were made to find replacements for the repatriated and detained Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers. Intense recruiting operations were undertaken in the Nyanza and Southern Provinces which provided the only remaining sufficient sources of labour. In many cases the recruiting methods used recalled the long discredited practices of 'encouragement' used by chiefs, district commissioners and other government functionaries in the days of open labour coercion. In a way this was tantamount to a programme of "crash proletarianisation" for peoples and regions hitherto largely maintained as reservoirs of peasant production. The entry of members of other ethnic groups into wage employment in Nairobi and other areas of the Central and Rift Valley Provinces on such a large-scale and within such a short time permanently changed the ethnic composition and balance of the African labour force which, in due course, altered the social bases of trade union organisation and leadership and the role of ethnicity in the labour movement as well as within the wider spectrum of national

political struggles.

In the short term the new labour recruits presented some difficulties for the employers. To begin with, they tended to prefer urban employment to work on settler farms and plantations. Further, settlers soon began complaining that they found their new labour inferior to Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers,⁵⁹ which in settler parlance was another way of saying the new workers were not experienced. It was in an effort to redress this apparent problem that the government waived restrictions against, and the settlers re-employed, those Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers who had passed severe screening tests and proved their opposition to Mau Mau. But the numbers of such people were not large enough to solve the problem of labour shortages satisfactorily.

The shortage of adult male labour brought about by the emergency also led to an increase in the numbers of African women entering wage employment. With so many men dismissed from work and incarcerated, more and more women became solely responsible for looking after their families so that it became necessary for them to enter wage employment. That was also a way of escaping the hardships of unremunerative communal labour. As Table 5.1 below shows, during this period there was a substantial increase in the number of African women employed so that by 1962 15.3% of the total African work force was comprised of women, up from 10.9% in 1953. To put it differently, between these two dates employment of African women increased by 62.4% compared to 19.2% for men. Meanwhile, the trend towards decline in juvenile employment was accelerated. The

⁵⁹See Central Province Annual Report, 1954.

TABLE 5.1 THE KENYAN LABOUR FORCE, DISTRIBUTION BY RACE AND SEX 1953-1963

| | AFRICANS | | | | ASIANS | | | | EUROPEANS | | | | Total for all Races |
|------|---------------|--------------|-------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------|----------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------|----------------------|---------------------|
| | Men | Women | Juv. | Total % of all races | Men | Women | Juv. | Total % of all races | Men | Women | Juv. | Total % of all races | |
| | No. % | No. % | No. % | | No. % | No. % | No. % | | No. % | No. % | No. % | | |
| 1953 | 362, 234 79.4 | 49, 561 10.9 | 43, 994 9.7 | 455, 90.9 789 | 27, 342 ^a | 6, 441 ^b | - - | - - | 11, 644 | 6, 441 ^b | - | - | 501,211 |
| 1954 | 390, 949 79.4 | 57, 208 11.6 | 44, 394 9.0 | 492, 90.6 551 | 31, 060 94.9 | 1, 674 5.1 | - - | 32, 673 6 | 12, 568 68 | 5, 910 32 | - | 18, 478 3.4 | 543,763 |
| 1956 | 426, 520 79.0 | 70, 640 13.1 | 43, 009 7.9 | 540, 90.5 169 | 33, 059 93.1 | 2, 194 6.2 | 251 0.7 | 35, 504 6 | 14, 386 68.2 | 6, 677 31.7 | 32 0.1 | 21, 095 3.5 | 596,768 |
| 1958 | 431, 886 80.8 | 72, 524 13.6 | 30, 323 5.6 | 534, 90.1 733 | 33, 020 92.1 | 2, 706 7.5 | 123 0.3 | 35, 849 6.1 | 14, 998 66.4 | 7, 576 33.5 | 14 0.1 | 22, 588 3.8 | 593,170 |
| 1960 | 453, 308 80.8 | 81, 894 14.6 | 25, 680 4.6 | 560, 90.2 882 | 34, 749 93.8 | 3, 435 9 | 80 0.2 | 38, 264 6.2 | 14, 966 65 | 8, 030 34.9 | 11 0.1 | 23, 007 3.7 | 622,153 |
| 1961 | 432, 961 81.7 | 78, 979 14.9 | 17, 446 3.4 | 529, 90.0 386 | 33, 890 89.6 | 3, 863 10.2 | 68 0.2 | 37, 821 6.4 | 14, 373 64.9 | 7, 793 35.1 | - | 22, 184 3.4 | 589,391 |
| 1962 | 431, 793 82.0 | 80, 501 15.3 | 14, 057 2.7 | 526, 90.6 351 | 54,923 | | | | | | | 581,274 | |
| 1963 | 400, 549 83.6 | 66, 909 14.0 | 11, 481 2.4 | 478, 90.0 939 | 54,408 | | | | | | | 533,347 | |

Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1953-63.

^aa includes other non-African, non-European males

^bb includes all non-African women.

increase in the number of female workers certainly contributed to this decline and so did the restriction of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru movements from whom most of the employed juveniles had tended to come.

The table shows that although there was an overall increase in the size of the labour force between 1953 and 1963, the period can be divided into two distinct phases. Between 1953 and 1960 over 120,000 more workers entered wage employment; while in the next three years the labour force dwindled by as many as 88,806 workers. This alone is a sufficient indication of the magnitude of unemployment during the twilight years of colonial rule in Kenya. The steady rise in the size of the wage labour force throughout the fifties and contraction after 1960 largely reflected changes in the economy itself. As indicated earlier, the fifties witnessed fairly steady economic expansion, while the sixties began on a note of economic slowdown.

It is also evident from the table, that on the whole, the racial composition and distribution of the work force hardly changed during this period. Within each racial group, however, as we have just seen in the case of African workers, there were significant changes. Among Asian workers we see that the proportion of Asian women made considerable advances. Between 1954 and 1961 the numbers of Asian women entering wage employment more than doubled and women came to constitute a tenth of total Asian employment. In other words, Asian female employment jumped by as much as 130.8% between 1954 and 1961, while Asian men trailed behind with a mere 9.1% increase. The entry of Asian women into wage employment on such a scale can partly be attributed to "an increasing proportion of women to men amongst the Asian community and in part to

changing economic and social conditions which led to women marrying at a later age".⁶⁰ As for the already insignificant numbers of Asian juveniles in employment their numbers became virtually negligible.

The employment of European women grew less rapidly than that of women of the other two races, if only because by 1954 their proportion of European employment was already higher than the respective shares of both African and Asian women in their respective groups. European women increased their share of the total European work force from 32% in 1954 to 35.1% in 1961. The higher proportion of employment for European women reflected the fact that European employment as a whole, unlike African employment, was mainly concentrated in private industry and commerce and public services where European women had easier access than African women because of their better skills. Moreover, unlike the Asian community, there were fewer social restraints against European women entering wage employment. What this table does not show was the increasing proportion of expatriates among the European work force in the country.

Table 5.2 below gives us a more comprehensive picture of the distribution of the Kenyan work force by sector, race and sex. Although throughout this period the general pattern was maintained in which the largest number of workers continued to be employed in agriculture, followed by private industry and commerce and public services, in that order, there were some noticeable fluctuations within this general

⁶⁰See Reported Employment and Wages in Kenya, 1948-60, East African High Commission, East Africa Statistical Department, Kenya Unit, August, 1961, p. 9.

TABLE 5.2 DISTRIBUTION OF THE LABOUR FORCE BY SECTOR, RACE AND SEX

| AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY | 1954 | | 1956 | | 1958 | | 1960 | | 1961 | |
|-----------------------------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| AFRICAN: | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 134,257 | 60.2 | 137,436 | 58.4 | 158,457 | 63.5 | 179,576 | 66.1 | 169,062 | 67.1 |
| Women | 48,371 | 21.8 | 57,423 | 24.4 | 60,770 | 24.4 | 68,078 | 25.0 | 64,317 | 25.5 |
| Juveniles | 38,179 | 17.1 | 38,238 | 16.3 | 27,991 | 11.2 | 21,423 | 7.9 | 16,385 | 6.5 |
| Total | 220,807 | 99.1 | 233,097 | 99.1 | 247,218 | 99.1 | 269,077 | 99.0 | 249,764 | 99.1 |
| ASIAN: | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 622 | 0.3 | 382 | 0.2 | 463 | 0.3 | 836 | 0.3 | 623 | 0.2 |
| Women | 4 | - | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | 5 | - |
| Juveniles | - | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 626 | 0.3 | 384 | 0.2 | 468 | 0.3 | 836 | 0.3 | 628 | 0.2 |
| EUROPEAN: | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 1,397 | 0.6 | 1,507 | 0.6 | 1,670 | 0.6 | 1,657 | 0.6 | 1,452 | 0.6 |
| Women | 152 | - | 150 | 0.1 | 159 | 0.1 | 191 | 0.1 | 177 | 0.1 |
| Juveniles | - | - | 5 | - | 4 | - | - | - | 5 | - |
| Total | 1,549 | 0.6 | 1,662 | 0.7 | 1,833 | 0.7 | 1,848 | 0.7 | 1,634 | 0.7 |
| GRAND TOTAL | 222,982 | 100 | 235,143 | 100 | 249,519 | 100 | 271,761 | 100 | 252,026 | 100 |
| PRIVATE INDUSTRY & COMMERCE | | | | | | | | | | |
| AFRICAN: | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 130,374 | 75.5 | 148,054 | 76.5 | 140,004 | 75.2 | 141,771 | 75.0 | 126,670 | 74.2 |
| Women | 6,065 | 3.5 | 6,036 | 3.1 | 7,407 | 4.0 | 7,605 | 4.0 | 6,440 | 3.8 |
| Juveniles | 4,965 | 2.9 | 4,248 | 2.2 | 2,231 | 1.2 | 1,726 | 1.0 | 979 | 0.5 |
| Total | 141,404 | 81.9 | 158,338 | 81.8 | 149,642 | 80.4 | 151,102 | 80.0 | 134,089 | 78.5 |
| ASIAN | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 20,802 | 12.1 | 22,816 | 11.8 | 22,650 | 12.2 | 23,205 | 12.3 | 22,143 | 13 |
| Women | 1,239 | 0.7 | 1,633 | 1.0 | 2,003 | 1.1 | 2,414 | 1.3 | 2,765 | 1.6 |
| Juveniles | - | - | 243 | - | 119 | - | - | - | 65 | - |
| Total | 22,041 | 12.8 | 24,692 | 12.8 | 24,772 | 13.3 | 25,619 | 13.6 | 24,973 | 14.6 |
| EUROPEAN: | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 5,472 | 3.2 | 6,388 | 3.3 | 6,982 | 3.8 | 7,246 | 3.8 | 6,943 | 4.1 |
| Women | 3,671 | 2.1 | 4,146 | 2.1 | 4,621 | 2.5 | 4,991 | 2.6 | 4,713 | 2.8 |
| Juveniles | - | - | 22 | - | 10 | - | - | - | 13 | - |
| Total | 9,143 | 5.3 | 10,556 | 5.4 | 11,613 | 6.3 | 12,237 | 6.4 | 11,669 | 6.9 |
| GRAND TOTAL | 172,588 | 100 | 193,586 | 100 | 186,027 | 100 | 188,958 | 100 | 170,731 | 100 |
| PUBLIC SERVICES | | | | | | | | | | |
| AFRICAN: | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 126,318 | 85.2 | 141,030 | 84.0 | 133,425 | 84.6 | 134,405 | 83.3 | 137,229 | 82.4 |
| Women | 2,772 | 1.9 | 7,181 | 4.3 | 4,347 | 2.8 | 6,211 | 3.9 | 8,222 | 4.9 |
| Juveniles | 1,250 | 0.8 | 523 | 0.2 | 101 | - | 87 | - | 82 | - |
| Total | 130,340 | 87.9 | 148,734 | 88.5 | 137,873 | 87.5 | 140,703 | 87.2 | 145,533 | 87.3 |
| ASIAN: | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 9,636 | 6.5 | 9,861 | 5.9 | 9,907 | 6.3 | 10,799 | 6.7 | 11,124 | 6.7 |
| Women | 431 | 0.3 | 561 | 0.3 | 700 | 0.4 | 1,010 | 0.6 | 1,093 | 0.7 |
| Juveniles | - | - | 6 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 3 | - |
| Total | 10,067 | 6.8 | 10,428 | 6.2 | 10,609 | 6.7 | 11,809 | 7.3 | 12,220 | 7.4 |
| EUROPEAN: | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 5,699 | 3.9 | 6,491 | 3.9 | 6,346 | 4.0 | 6,074 | 3.8 | 5,978 | 3.6 |
| Women | 2,087 | 1.4 | 2,381 | 1.4 | 2,796 | 1.8 | 2,848 | 1.7 | 2,903 | 1.7 |
| Juveniles | - | - | 5 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 7,786 | 5.3 | 8,877 | 5.3 | 9,142 | 5.8 | 8,922 | 5.5 | 8,881 | 5.3 |
| GRAND TOTAL | 148,193 | 100 | 168,039 | 100 | 157,624 | 100 | 161,434 | 100 | 166,634 | 100 |

Source: Labour Department Annual Reports, 1954-1961.

balance. At the height of the investment boom in industry, employment in agriculture as a percentage of total employment dropped; in 1956 agriculture provided employment for 39.4% of the total work force, its lowest portion until then, while employment in private industry accounted for 32.4% of the work force in that same year, the highest peak it had ever reached during this period, and the remaining 28.2% was employed in public services. During the following years, however, particularly from 1960, the percentage share of agricultural employment rose as that of industry declined, while that of public services almost remained constant. By 1961 employment in industry was down to 29% of the total and that of agriculture up to 42.7%, with the public services claiming the rest or 28.3%, a figure which was barely indistinguishable from that of 1956. This indicates that from an employment's point of view private industry and commerce suffered an even more severe downturn than agriculture, whereas public services just managed to maintain their relative 1956 levels. In fact among the three sectors, it is only in agriculture that 1961 employment figures were higher than those of 1956.

There was almost no shift in the racial composition of agricultural employment. The only notable change that occurred in this sector was the dramatic fall in juvenile employment and the corresponding increases in the numbers of both African male and female agricultural workers. In contrast, in the other two sectors, particularly in private industry and commerce, the employment of both Asians and Europeans showed some slight increases. With the steady increase in the pace of industrialisation in the 1950s, characterised not only by an increase in the number of factories and industrial firms established, but also the

introduction of more complicated production processes, the policy of encouraging immigration of Europeans and skilled Asians which started after the war was continued.⁶¹ There can be little doubt that the mass removal of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers temporarily diminished the numbers of skilled African workers so that the policy of recruiting skilled expatriate workers was reinforced. The actual increase of Asian and European employment in private industry and commerce moved from 12.8% and 5.3% in 1954 to 14.6% and 6.8% in 1961, respectively. This may be small, but its significance lies in the fact that during the same period African employment in this sector declined from 81.9% to 78.5%. This only goes to show that in an economic crisis the unskilled are the first to go, and in Kenya the unskilled were overwhelmingly Africans.

A closer examination of the figures in both tables 5.1 and 5.2 reveals that in 1954 33.3% of all African men in employment were in private industry, a figure that had dropped to 29.3% by 1961. The corresponding figures for European men in the same sector were 43.5% and 48.3%, and for Asian men 67% and 65.3%, respectively. During the same period the proportion of African men employed in agriculture increased from 34.3% to 39%. Despite these ups and downs, what essentially emerges is the fact that African male workers were more evenly distributed among the three sectors than Asian men, two thirds of whom were in private industry and the rest in public services, and European men who, save for a tenth in agriculture, were predominantly concentrated and almost evenly distributed in the other two sectors.

⁶¹See LDAR, 1957, pp. 3-4.

The sectoral distribution among female workers of the three races also displays strong contrasts. African women were predominantly employed in agriculture and Asian and European women in private industry and commerce and public services. One interesting development among African women, however, is that the proportion of those employed in agriculture actually began to decline (from 84.6% in 1954 to 81.4% in 1961). But it was not private industry and commerce which picked up the excess, for the proportion of African women working in that sector fell as well (from 10.6% in 1954 to 8.2% in 1961). It was, therefore, in public services that the greatest new opportunities for African women were to be found. Their numbers in that sector almost trebled between 1954 and 1961, which represented an increase from 4.8% to 10.4% of the total African female work force. Thus by 1961 there were more African women in public services than in private industry and commerce. Meanwhile, throughout this period, fluctuations notwithstanding, about three-quarters of all Asian women in employment worked in private industry and commerce and the remaining quarter in public services. In both sectors their numbers more than doubled between 1954 and 1961. Among European female workers, the proportion of those engaged in private industry declined slightly as those employed in public service increased correspondingly.

Another factor of considerable importance during this period for the Kenyan economy and labour organisation was the way in which firms grew in terms of the number of workers they employed as shown in Table 5.3 below. At first glance the table shows that the total number of employers gradually fell over the years. Between 1961 and 1963 their number dropped by as much as 1,130 or 17%. The hardest hit industries

TABLE 5.3 EMPLOYERS (EXCLUDING THE PUBLIC SERVICES) DISTRIBUTION BY INDUSTRY AND SIZE OF LABOUR FORCE, 1957 - 1963

| Size of Labour Force | Agriculture and Forestry | Mining and Quarrying | Building and Construction | Commerce | Transportation | Manufacturing and Repairs | Other Industries and Services | Total All Industries and Services | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|----------|----------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|---|
| NUMBER OF EMPLOYERS | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1957 | | | | | | | | | No. | % |
| 1-9 | 656 | 33 | 255 | 3,340 | 311 | 1,265 | 1,091 | 6,951 | 57.5 | |
| 10-19 | 511 | 23 | 111 | 376 | 63 | 261 | 167 | 1,512 | 12.5 | |
| 20-49 | 1,052 | 43 | 143 | 175 | 35 | 196 | 150 | 1,794 | 14.9 | |
| 50-99 | 1,308 | 29 | 62 | 57 | 13 | 89 | 43 | 1,601 | 13.2 | |
| 100-499 | - | 16 | 44 | 21 | 10 | 73 | 30 | 194 | 1.6 | |
| 500+ | - | 1 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 18 | 4 | 39 | 0.3 | |
| Total | 3,527 | 145 | 618 | 3,977 | 437 | 1,902 | 1,485 | 12,091 | 100 | |
| 1959 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-9 | 728 | 31 | 223 | 3,140 | 330 | 1,177 | 1,213 | 6,842 | 57.4 | |
| 10-19 | 515 | 9 | 121 | 337 | 53 | 201 | 181 | 1,473 | 12.4 | |
| 20-49 | 1,152 | 22 | 113 | 189 | 33 | 196 | 156 | 1,864 | 15.6 | |
| 50-99 | 705 | 34 | 41 | 52 | 16 | 78 | 55 | 978 | 8.2 | |
| 100-499 | 474 | 8 | 29 | 25 | 5 | 69 | 29 | 639 | 5.4 | |
| 500+ | 71 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 5 | 22 | 6 | 118 | 1.0 | |
| Total | 3,645 | 105 | 531 | 3,802 | 448 | 1,743 | 1,640 | 11,914 | 100 | |
| 1961 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-9 | 775 | 29 | 175 | 3,567 | 243 | 594 | 1,248 | 6,631 | 57.8 | |
| 10-19 | 486 | 14 | 11 | 369 | 53 | 175 | 204 | 1,372 | 12.0 | |
| 20-49 | 1,003 | 20 | 69 | 208 | 27 | 168 | 159 | 1,654 | 14.4 | |
| 50-99 | 770 | 13 | 39 | 50 | 13 | 72 | 54 | 1,014 | 8.8 | |
| 100-499 | 508 | 8 | 19 | 39 | 14 | 70 | 34 | 692 | 6.0 | |
| 500+ | 73 | 1 | 6 | 12 | 5 | 15 | 4 | 116 | 1.0 | |
| Total | 3,615 | 85 | 379 | 4,245 | 355 | 1,094 | 1,706 | 11,479 | | |
| 1963 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-9 | 706 | 11 | 100 | 2,843 | 194 | 534 | 1,113 | 5,501 | 56.4 | |
| 10-19 | 404 | 9 | 45 | 343 | 41 | 161 | 189 | 1,192 | 12.2 | |
| 20-49 | 869 | 13 | 65 | 175 | 38 | 156 | 155 | 1,471 | 15.1 | |
| 50-99 | 631 | 9 | 34 | 55 | 15 | 68 | 76 | 888 | 9.1 | |
| 100-499 | 408 | 3 | 13 | 45 | 11 | 71 | 42 | 593 | 6.1 | |
| 500+ | 60 | 2 | 2 | 14 | 55 | 15 | 3 | 101 | 1.1 | |
| Total | 3,078 | 47 | 259 | 3,475 | 304 | 1,005 | 1,578 | 9,746 | | |

Source: Labour Department Annual Reports, 1957-1963

were mining, manufacturing and repairs, building and construction. The total number of firms in these industries fell by 67.6%, 47.2% and 58.1%, respectively between 1957 and 1963. Mining had never been much of a success even in the best of times. As for manufacturing and repairs, this sharp fall can partly be explained by "the inclusion in this group of many tailors and shoe repairers whose prime function is probably retail trade, but who nonetheless, do in fact, manufacture shoes and clothes in a small way".⁶² These small businesses were easy prey to the onslaught of economic slowdown, and so were building and construction firms. Meanwhile, the total number of firms in transportation and communication declined by a relatively low figure of 30%. It was in agriculture and commerce that the rate of decline was lowest, 12.7% and 12.6% respectively.

This drop in numbers was mainly confined to small-sized firms employing less than fifty workers, most particularly those with no more than nine workers, for when we look at firms employing 50 workers and above, a different picture emerges. The numbers of such median and large firms actually increased in the transport industry by 10.7% and in commerce by 32.6% between 1957 and 1963, whereas in manufacturing and repairs the decline was no more than 14.4%. Altogether the number of firms employing more than fifty workers declined by 15.7% compared to 20.4% for those employing less than fifty workers. When we look at the large firms employing 100 workers and above the decline is actually reversed. Between 1957 and 1963 the number of firms employing 100 to

⁶²Reported Employment and Wages in Kenya, op. cit., p. 27.

499 workers trebled from 194 to 593, and those employing over 500 workers increased two and half times from 39 to 101 over the same period.

Thus, as small firms were collapsing because of the economic crisis, the trend towards concentration was continuing, indeed, it seems to have been accelerated. The disappearance of so many small firms may in fact partially be accounted for by the emergence of these firms employing large numbers of workers. But whatever the case, the steady growth in the size of firms in terms of employment certainly served to make conditions for labour organisation favourable. In other words, the basis for collective workers organisation was expanding as more and more workers were becoming concentrated together. The case of the labour intensive agricultural industry is instructive. Table 5.3 shows that in 1957 there was no agricultural employer with more than 100 workers, but two years later there were 545 such employers, their number reaching a peak of 581 in 1961 before declining to 468 in 1963 which, incidentally, represented 72%, 72% and 67.4% of all firms employing that number of workers, respectively. This shows that despite the settlement schemes employment in agriculture was becoming more concentrated so that conditions were becoming increasingly conducive for agricultural workers to organise themselves. This might partially explain why it was in the late 1950s that trade unions appeared for the first time in the agricultural industry. The growth of large-scale agricultural employers also goes some way to substantiate our earlier argument that corporate plantations were growing at the expense of settler mixed farming.

Agricultural employment like employment in the other industries was concentrated in the Rift Valley and Central Provinces as demonstrated in Table 5.4 below. The Rift Valley and Central Provinces accounted for 73.1% of all agricultural employment in 1962 and 80.7% in 1963; 63.3% of employment in private industry in 1962 and 64.5% in 1963; 79.9% in domestic services in 1962 and 81.8% in 1963; and, finally, 62.1% in public services in 1962 and 69.3% in 1963. Altogether, the two provinces provided employment for 67.6% and 71.4% of the total labour force in the country between 1962 and 1963, respectively.

These figures do indicate that in the span of one year the two provinces actually increased their percentage share of the total work force. Since these were years when there was virtually no economic expansion, this increase can be attributed to a decline in employment opportunities in the other provinces. In the Nyanza Province, for instance, the number of workers was halved from 84,359 in 1962 to 42,481 in 1963, that is 14.5% to 8.0% of the total labour force. Thus it was provinces with the least economic development which were most vulnerable from the economic crisis of the early 1960s. Others like the Northern Frontier Province simply degenerated into barren economic wastelands. This was but one graphic illustration of the stage which the process of unequal development between regions and districts had reached in Kenya after nearly seven decades of colonial capitalism.

Uneven development within regions and districts is more than borne out by the geographic concentration of industries and services in Nairobi and Mombasa. As the table below shows between 1962 and 1963 Nairobi alone accounted for over 40% of all workers employed in commerce

TABLE 5.4 DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY AND AREA, 1962-1963

| | AGRICULTURE | | | | COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY | | | | DOMESTIC SERVICES | | | | PUBLIC SERVICES | | | | ALL INDUSTRIES AND SERVICES | | | | |
|----------------------|-------------|------|---------|------|-----------------------|------|---------|------|-------------------|------|--------|------|-----------------|------|---------|------|-----------------------------|------|---------|------|--|
| | 1962 | | 1963 | | 1962 | | 1963 | | 1962 | | 1963 | | 1962 | | 1963 | | 1962 | | 1963 | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| COAST PROVINCE: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mombasa | 3,104 | 1.3 | 260 | 0.1 | 30,874 | 21.0 | 33,633 | 24.2 | 1,805 | 9.0 | 1,704 | 10.0 | 10,708 | 6.4 | 12,787 | 8.1 | 46,491 | 8.0 | 48,384 | 9.1 | |
| Other areas | 9,256 | 3.7 | 13,057 | 6.0 | 5,647 | 3.8 | 2,651 | 1.9 | 452 | 2.2 | 270 | 1.6 | 10,356 | 6.1 | 7,872 | 5.0 | 25,711 | 4.4 | 23,850 | 4.5 | |
| All areas | 12,360 | 5.0 | 13,317 | 6.1 | 36,521 | 24.8 | 36,284 | 26.1 | 2,257 | 11.2 | 1,974 | 11.6 | 21,064 | 12.5 | 20,659 | 13.1 | 72,202 | 12.4 | 72,234 | 13.6 | |
| RIFT VALLEY: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Nakuru | 96 | 0.04 | 37 | - | 5,177 | 3.5 | 4,309 | 3.1 | 460 | 2.3 | 532 | 3.1 | 6,149 | 3.7 | 4,348 | 2.8 | 11,872 | 2.0 | 9,226 | 1.7 | |
| Eldorek | 119 | 0.05 | 22 | - | 2,892 | 2.0 | 2,742 | 2.0 | 219 | 1.1 | 207 | 1.2 | 4,206 | 2.5 | 3,468 | 2.2 | 7,436 | 1.3 | 6,439 | 1.2 | |
| Kitale | 50 | 0.02 | - | - | 1,214 | 0.8 | 1,200 | 0.9 | 134 | 0.7 | 284 | 1.7 | 1,458 | 0.9 | 1,087 | 0.7 | 2,856 | 0.5 | 2,571 | 0.5 | |
| Other areas | 106,243 | 43.3 | 112,687 | 51.3 | 7,888 | 5.4 | 10,661 | 7.5 | 3,898 | 19.4 | 3,107 | 18.2 | 17,797 | 10.5 | 23,994 | 15.2 | 135,826 | 23.4 | 150,436 | 28.2 | |
| All areas | 106,498 | 43.4 | 112,746 | 51.3 | 17,171 | 11.7 | 18,912 | 13.6 | 4,711 | 23.5 | 4,130 | 24.2 | 29,610 | 17.6 | 32,897 | 20.9 | 157,990 | 27.2 | 168,672 | 31.6 | |
| SOUTHERN PROVINCE | 5,859 | 2.4 | - | - | 6,369 | 4.3 | - | - | 379 | 1.9 | - | - | 13,340 | 7.9 | - | - | 25,947 | 4.5 | - | - | |
| NORTH FRONTIER PROV. | - | - | - | - | 469 | 0.3 | 91 | - | 94 | 0.5 | 28 | 0.2 | 4,966 | 2.9 | 1,362 | 0.9 | 5,529 | 1.0 | 1,481 | 0.3 | |
| WESTERN PROVINCE | - | - | 4,136 | 1.9 | - | - | 1,378 | 1.0 | - | - | 106 | 0.6 | - | - | 5,985 | 3.8 | - | - | 11,605 | 2.2 | |
| NAIROBI CITY & DIST. | 5,498 | 2.3 | 2,289 | 1.0 | 60,536 | 41.1 | 59,399 | 42.6 | 8,224 | 41.0 | 7,409 | 43.5 | 38,586 | 22.9 | 41,004 | 26.1 | 112,844 | 19.4 | 110,101 | 20.6 | |
| CENTRAL PROV: Thika | 20 | 0.01 | 1 | - | 3,264 | 2.2 | 2,499 | 1.8 | 165 | 0.8 | 200 | 1.2 | 705 | 0.4 | 897 | 0.6 | 4,154 | 0.7 | 3,597 | 0.1 | |
| Nyeri | 42 | 0.02 | - | - | 1,054 | 0.7 | 763 | 0.5 | 158 | 0.8 | 136 | 0.8 | 1,884 | 1.1 | 2,564 | 1.6 | 3,138 | 0.5 | 3,463 | 0.6 | |
| Nanyuki | 25 | 0.01 | - | - | 668 | 0.5 | 812 | 0.6 | 68 | 0.3 | 231 | 1.4 | 1,464 | 0.9 | 1,124 | 0.7 | 2,225 | 0.4 | 2,180 | 0.4 | |
| Other areas | 67,339 | 27.4 | 64,483 | 29.4 | 10,497 | 7.1 | 7,478 | 5.4 | 2,707 | 13.5 | 2,062 | 10.7 | 32,363 | 19.2 | 19,608 | 19.4 | 112,906 | 19.4 | 93,400 | 17.7 | |
| All areas | 67,426 | 27.4 | 64,484 | 29.4 | 15,483 | 10.5 | 11,552 | 8.3 | 3,098 | 15.4 | 2,629 | 14.1 | 36,416 | 21.6 | 24,193 | 22.3 | 122,423 | 21.0 | 102,640 | 19.2 | |
| NYANZA PROV: Kisumu | 22 | 0.01 | 22 | - | 3,367 | 2.3 | 3,297 | 2.4 | 356 | 1.8 | 335 | 2.0 | 5,513 | 3.3 | 6,472 | 4.1 | 9,258 | 1.6 | 10,126 | 1.9 | |
| Other areas | 47,842 | 19.5 | 14,737 | 4.8 | 7,323 | 5.0 | 5,019 | 2.6 | 949 | 4.7 | 313 | 1.2 | 18,967 | 11.3 | 6,301 | 4.0 | 75,081 | 12.9 | 20,750 | 3.9 | |
| All areas | 47,864 | 19.5 | 14,759 | 4.8 | 10,690 | 7.3 | 8,316 | 6.0 | 1,305 | 6.5 | 648 | 3.2 | 24,480 | 14.6 | 12,773 | 11.9 | 84,339 | 14.5 | 30,876 | 5.8 | |
| EASTERN PROV: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Machakos | - | - | 159 | 0.1 | - | - | 470 | 0.3 | - | - | 89 | 0.5 | - | - | 1,623 | 1.0 | - | - | 2,341 | 0.4 | |
| Other areas | - | - | 11,207 | 5.4 | - | - | 4,300 | 3.1 | - | - | 353 | 2.1 | - | - | 16,837 | 10.7 | - | - | 33,397 | 6.3 | |
| All areas | - | - | 11,366 | 5.5 | - | - | 4,770 | 3.4 | - | - | 442 | 2.6 | - | - | 18,460 | 11.7 | - | - | 35,738 | 6.7 | |
| TOTAL ALL COUNTRY | 245,505 | 100 | 219,661 | 100 | 147,239 | 100 | 139,324 | 100 | 20,068 | 100 | 17,029 | 100 | 168,462 | 100 | 157,333 | 100 | 581,274 | 100 | 533,347 | 100 | |

Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1962-63.

and industry and domestic services, about a quarter of those in public services and a fifth of workers in all industries and services combined. Between them, Nairobi and Mombasa provided employment for about two-thirds of all workers in commerce and industry, over half in domestic services, almost a third of those in public services, and 27.4% of the total work force in 1962 and 29.7% in 1963. Thus the proportion of workers employed in these two towns actually increased between 1962 and 1963, thus reinforcing the argument that the less developed areas in the Central and Coast Provinces were the ones hardest hit by the economic crisis.

One central feature of the Kenyan labour scene during this period which needs to be underlined was the growing level of labour stabilisation. One indication of this was the diminishing rate of labour turnover and migration to and from centres of employment. After most of the openings made available by the mass eviction of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers had been filled, the number of workers entering the labour market for the first time progressively declined from the mid-1950s. According to the Labour Department, in 1955 there were 21,000 such people, 19,000 in 1956 and 16,000 in 1957. Perhaps even more important is the fact that during these same years the proportion of completely unskilled workers fell from 49% to 43% and 39%, respectively.⁶³

In this connection it is not surprising to note that the numbers of resident or squatter labourers fell, while those of workers in regular employment and casual labour rose as shown in Table 5.5 below.

⁶³LDAR, 1957, p. 21; 1958, p. 24; 1959, p. 22; 1962, p. 2.

TABLE 5.5 COMPOSITION OF THE LABOUR FORCE BY TYPE OF CONTRACT, 1954-1963

| | Monthly Contract | | | | | | | | Casual Labour | | | | | | | | Resident Labour | | | | | | | |
|------|------------------|-----|--------|----|-----------|----|---------|----|---------------|---|--------|----|-----------|----|--------|----|-----------------|---|--------|----|-----------|----|--------|----|
| | Men | | Women | | Juveniles | | Total | | Men | | Women | | Juveniles | | Total | | Men | | Woman | | Juveniles | | Total | |
| | Nos. | % | Nos. | % | Nos. | % | Nos. | % | Nos. | % | Nos. | % | Nos. | % | Nos. | % | Nos. | % | Nos. | % | Nos. | % | Nos. | % |
| 1954 | 342,067 | 87* | 30,235 | 53 | 30,753 | 69 | 403,055 | 82 | 23,423 | 6 | 15,745 | 27 | 5,358 | 12 | 44,526 | 7 | 25,459 | 7 | 11,228 | 20 | 8,283 | 19 | 44,970 | 11 |
| 1956 | 370,704 | 87 | 44,259 | 63 | 34,696 | 81 | 449,659 | 83 | 33,300 | 8 | 20,076 | 28 | 4,679 | 11 | 58,055 | 11 | 22,516 | 5 | 6,305 | 9 | 3,634 | 8 | 32,455 | 6 |
| 1958 | 379,511 | 88 | 48,506 | 67 | 24,220 | 80 | 452,237 | 85 | 31,334 | 7 | 19,292 | 27 | 3,415 | 11 | 54,041 | 10 | 21,041 | 5 | 4,726 | 6 | 2,688 | 9 | 28,455 | 5 |
| 1960 | 404,328 | 89 | 56,304 | 69 | 19,568 | 76 | 480,200 | 86 | 27,850 | 6 | 20,290 | 25 | 3,489 | 14 | 51,629 | 9 | 21,130 | 5 | 5,300 | 6 | 2,623 | 10 | 29,053 | 5 |
| 1962 | 373,397 | 87 | 52,244 | 65 | 10,235 | 73 | 435,876 | 83 | 37,355 | 9 | 23,192 | 29 | 2,701 | 19 | 63,248 | 12 | 21,041 | 4 | 5,065 | 6 | 1,121 | 8 | 27,227 | 5 |
| 1963 | 358,671 | 89 | 44,332 | 66 | 8,245 | 73 | 411,248 | 86 | 27,533 | 7 | 20,416 | 31 | 2,555 | 22 | 50,504 | 10 | 14,345 | 4 | 2,161 | 3 | 681 | 6 | 17,187 | 4 |

*i.e., 87% of all men in employment were on monthly contract, that is in regular employment.

Source: Labour Department Annual Report, 1954-1963.

As a proportion of the total African workforce, resident labour fell from 11% in 1954 to 5% in 1960 and 4% in 1963. This rather sharp fall was a continuation of a long term trend towards the decline of the squatter system because squatter labour had lost most of its economic advantages for settler and corporate agriculture both of which had become more mechanised and capitalised, which resulted in greater usage of land that previously could be given to squatters. The mass deportation of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers from the Rift Valley and the reluctance of people from Nyanza and other areas to enter agricultural employment, let alone become squatters, simply accelerated the decline of the resident labour system. In fact,

despite the Emergency and the unpopularity such measures caused, the white-dominated district councils, promoted to county council status in 1953, continued to issue orders limiting stock and cultivation ... [and] resident labour inspectors continued to enforce these orders and to prosecute offenders.⁶⁴

The repealing of the Resident Labourers Ordinance in December 1962 spelled the death of the squatter system which had once been one of the main anchors for settler accumulation.

The rapid fall in the number of resident labourers may have contributed to the increase of casual labourers. The Labour Department attributed the dramatic upsurge in the number of casual workers in 1962 to "the strenuous efforts of employers to reduce labour costs by hiring

⁶⁴Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 356.

by the day rather than by the month".⁶⁵ 1962 was probably the year of the worst economic and political uncertainties. It was certainly a year which witnessed the greatest number of strikes since the era of the general strikes. The employment of casual labour, therefore, provided employers with one of the means to circumvent labour militancy. It is not coincidental that it was in 1962 that the proportion of regular employment among Africans fell to 83% from 86% in 1960. On the whole, however, the proportion of regular employment between 1954 and 1963 rose by 4% from 82% to 86% of the total African work force. Within each of the three groups, men, women and juveniles, the proportion of those in regular employment increased.

The growing stabilisation of labour reflected or was a result of some of the deep-seated structural changes in the Kenyan economy that we have already examined. Rising levels of landlessness in the rural reserves made migration to and from work a hazardous luxury for many workers, while swelling unemployment made it imperative that one kept one's job. To what extent, then, did changes in the wage structure contribute to this process of stabilisation?

Movement of Wages

Kenya's wage structure between 1953 and 1963 was characterised by two conflicting tendencies. On the one hand, there were pressures to maintain the prevailing system of low wages and, on the other, to overhaul it and establish a system of relatively higher wages. Not

⁶⁵LDAR, 1962, p. 5.

surprisingly, this was a period of both startling contradictions in labour policy and significant changes in the industrial composition or relative dispersion of the wage bill.

Nowhere are the contradictions in labour policy better demonstrated than in the 1954 Carpenter Committee on African Wages and the 1955 Committee on Rural Wages. No two reports issued by the same government within a year of each other and on the same subject could have been more dissimilar in their premises, objectives and recommendations.

The Carpenter Committee was appointed to recommend on how to provide African workers in urban areas "with greater incentives to industry, efficiency and increased output".⁶⁶ The committee bitterly accused employers of "reckless extravagance in the use of labour",⁶⁷ and noted that the prevailing wages were "insufficient to provide for the basic needs of health, decency, and working efficiency "even for a single man".⁶⁸ "The majority of unskilled workers", the committee went on, "are permanently in debt ... they often borrow from money lending groups at exorbitant rates of interest, and the payment of interest makes serious inroads into already meagre monthly wages".⁶⁹ This bred squalor and poverty, misery and social degradation. Consequently, there was "general instability of African labour ... reflected in the high labour

⁶⁶ Report of the Committee on African Wages, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1954, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 148.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

turnover common to practically all of the colony's industries". Such a high level of labour turnover led to

lowered efficiency and output; spoilage of materials due to unfamiliarity with production methods; greatly increased production costs for the African can't attain any degree of skill; low wages and consequently poor living conditions.⁷⁰

The committee concluded, in direct contradiction with conventional wisdom "that increases in wages must wait upon increased productivity", by declaring that "in Kenya low wages are a cause rather than an effect of the low productivity of labour".⁷¹

Labour stabilisation was the catch word in the committee's recommendations. Stabilisation required the provision of

such conditions, both social and economic, as will induce the African to sever his ties with tribal life and virtually start life afresh in a new environment ... payment of a wage sufficient to provide for the essential needs of the worker and his family; regular employment; a house in which the worker and his family can live; security for the worker's old age.⁷²

Moreover, with a permanent well-paid proletariat, employers would be compelled to "resort to higher standards of management efficiency ...

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 14.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 148-9.

⁷²Ibid., p. 16.

organisation and control of production".⁷³ On wages the committee specifically recommended a dual minimum wage system; a 'bachelor' minimum calculated on a more generous scale than previously, and a 'family' minimum which was to be two and half times that of the bachelor rate and be able to support a couple with two children. Only those male workers who were over 21 years old and with 36 months continuous employment outside their reserves were eligible for the 'family' minimum wage. The government accepted all the committee's major recommendations save for a few modifications; the designations 'bachelor' and 'family', for instance, were changed to 'youth' and 'adult', and the implementation was to be on a more flexible time scale.

Despite the fact that the committee did not include agricultural labour in its wage recommendations the settlers were up in arms when the Carpenter Report was published. Faced with labour shortages caused by the mass removal of the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru squatters and workers, a problem which was exacerbated by renewed incidents of desertion as a result of the revival of forced labour and coercive recruiting campaigns, settlers felt that the report's wage recommendations gravely undermined their ability to compete with the urban based industrial sector. It was in response to this wrath by the settlers that the Committee on Rural Wages was appointed by the government.

The settlers could not have been more pleased with the findings and the recommendations of the Rural Wages Committee. At the outset the committee stated that the main problem it had to deal with was the

⁷³Ibid., p. 149.

"general shortage of labour, which in some cases is very serious".

On desertions the committee had nothing but harsh things to say about African labour:

We have gone into the question of desertion at some length because we feel that the irresponsible attitude of the African worker to signing a contract or borrowing money from employers is a very serious matter. The sanctity of the contract or verbal understanding is becoming increasingly disregarded ... it is demoralising for an employee to be able to break a contract ... and leave employment without reference to his employer ... such practices are equally demoralising to the remaining labour.⁷⁴

In order to cut down "desertions and unauthorised departures" and ensure the stability of the rural labour force the committee bluntly recommended the immediate adoption of a punitive labour registration and control system involving "a comprehensive identification and record of service document ... made compulsory for all adult male workers".⁷⁵ In a language almost identical to that of the Barth Commission of 1912-13 which first introduced the kipande system, the committee argued:

We cannot see how any binding labour contract can be entered into unless the prospective employee can readily establish his identity and also prove he is not already under contract to another

⁷⁴ Report of the Rural Wages Committee, Government Printer, Nairobi, pp. 17-18. See EAS 24-8-5 for settlers' opposition to minimum wages.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

employer ... we recommend the setting up of a registered pool of casual labour in all major towns and that a system be introduced whereby the whereabouts of individuals in each pool can be traced.⁷⁶ (*italics original*)

In short, like kipande, the registration system recommended by the committee would make it difficult for a worker to change jobs and it would facilitate the tracing and apprehension of deserters.

In the committee's view, short-term solutions to the labour shortage crisis lay in re-employing screened Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers and importing labour from Rwanda-Burundi. Improvement of wages and provision of other 'positive' incentives were explicitly rejected as a means of stabilising agricultural labour. The myth of the target worker was resurrected in all its nakedness:

pre-eminently the cash reward for his labour is of so little importance to him [the African worker] as scarcely to constitute an incentive in the accepted sense ... any statutory wage regulation would be merely enhancing a convenience for one section of the community at the expense of another section.⁷⁷

In fact the committee went as far as recommending that the existing average wage of 21 cents an hour for an average week of 38 hours should be cut to 19 cents an hour for an extended 48 hour week. For workers not prepared to accept this, or, in the committee's scathing language,

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 21.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 22-23.

unable through mental or physical limitations to reach the standard of the more advanced tribes ... [and] not prepared to make the necessary effort to become useful members of society, there can only remain the possibility that they sell their scanty labour for what they can get for it.⁷⁸

Even the government found the committee's "theme and detailed recommendations so acutely embarrassing that the report, although printed in quantity was never actually published ..."⁷⁹ The committee's proposals had the effect of delaying a more constructive study of rural wages until the turn of the 1960s.

To a large extent the sharp contrasts between the two reports reflected the growing divergence of interests between settler agricultural capital and corporate industrial capital. In this sense, therefore, the Carpenter Committee articulated the logic of industrial capital and the Committee on Rural Wages was the embodiment of the retrograde assumptions of settler farmers on the decline both economically and politically. The latter were still dependent, especially in the event of Mau Mau and the consequent removal of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers, on the extraction of absolute surplus value from semi-servile low-wage unskilled labour for their profitability. This labour could only be 'stabilised' and maintained through punitive measures and coercive sanctions administered by the state. On the other hand, advanced industrial capital depended for its profitability increasingly

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 24.

⁷⁹Clayton and Savage, op. cit., pp. 361-2.

upon the extraction of relative surplus value through increased productivity. Consequently, the industrial sector required a stable and skilled proletariat gradually subjected to a bureaucratised system of industrial relations and managerial control.⁸⁰

Thus, despite some technical changes in the means of production, settler agriculture's needs for skilled, relatively high-wage labour were negligible. In contrast, the increasing mechanisation and sophistication of production processes in the industrial sector required the stabilisation and training of an ever increasing proportion of the non-agricultural work force. The wage differentials which emerged between the industrial and agricultural sectors can, therefore, partly be attributed to changes in demand for skilled and unskilled labour.

The different 'abilities to pay' between settler agriculture and advanced industrial capital were also indicative of the different conditions under which the two dominant forms of capital operated. As already noted, secondary industry in Kenya, as in most other colonies at a similar stage of development, was geared for import substitution and operated in an oligopolistic environment. Consequently, the big industrial firms could afford to pay wages above the average rates because they could pass on the extra cost to consumers. Apart from this market power which gave these firms capacity to earn monopoly profits, the large industrial firms tended not only to employ skilled labour so that their labour productivity was relatively high and they realised

⁸⁰ Also see the discussion by John Weeks, "Wage Policy and the Colonial Legacy - A Comparative Study", Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1971, pp. 370-1.

high net profits per worker, they could also operate economies of scale and afford to be long-term profit maximisers. Most agricultural farmers could, of course, not operate economies of scale. The agricultural industry was also export-market oriented and was subject to the vicissitudes of commodity fluctuations on the world market.⁸¹

It cannot be emphasised too strongly, however, that indicating an industry's 'ability to pay' does not necessarily explain why a particular industry or firm would choose to pay higher wages. From the available evidence it can be argued that the place where an industry was located mattered and that the influence of trade unions on wage determination was significant. The wage structure was also affected by the ebbs and flows in labour supplies.

⁸¹ Some of these points have been made by W.J. House and H. Rempel, "The Determinants of and Changes in the Structure of Wages and Employment in the Manufacturing Sector of the Kenyan Economy, 1967-1972", Journal of Development Economics, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1976; Howard Pack, "The Substitution of Labour For Capital in Kenya Manufacturing", The Economic Journal, Vol. 86, No. 341, March 1976; J.S. Henley and W.J. House, "The Changing Fortunes of an Aristocracy? Determinants of Wages and Conditions of Employment in Kenya", World Development, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1978; J.R. Harris and M.P. Todaro, "Wages, Industrial Employment and Labour Productivity", East African Economic Review, VII, June 1969; W.J. House and H. Rempel, "The Impact of Unionisation on Negotiated Wages in the Manufacturing Sector in Kenya", Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics, Vol. 38, No. 2, May 1976. In these papers the role of trade union struggles on wage determination is either ignored entirely, underplayed, or as in the case of the last mentioned article, rejected. Others, however, have recognised the role played by unions in raising wages above the opportunity cost of labour. See G.E. Johnson, "The Determination of Individual Hourly Earnings in Urban Kenya", Discussion Paper No. 115, Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi, 1971; and D.P. Ghai, "Incomes Policy in Kenya: Need, Criteria and Machinery", in R. Jolly, E. De Kadt, H. Singer and F. Wilson, eds., Third World Employment and Labour Productivity: Problems and Strategy, Penguin, Hammondsworth, 1973. On the whole, these papers deal mostly with the post-independence period.

We have noted the concentration of industry in the urban centres, particularly Nairobi and Mombasa. The concentration of public service employment in the towns was also marked and, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, this sector had always been one of the pace-setters of wages and it continued to be.⁸² In fact, as the two committees analysed above were making their investigations and recommendations, the state also appointed the Lidbury Commission in 1954 to look into salary scales in the public services. For the first time in Kenya's history equal pay for equal work was accepted in principle by the commission and the previous scale that Africans and Asians holding high posts should receive 3/5 of what their European counterparts received was abolished. Meanwhile, expatriates were given a special allowance.⁸³

The Lidbury Commission tried to kill two birds with one stone; to create better conditions for the stabilisation of a significant section of the proletariat as well as provide better opportunities for the African petty bourgeois elements to consolidate themselves in much the same way that they were being consolidated by land reforms and access to credit facilities. As one official in the Labour Department put it, the Lidbury Commission "did as much to defeat 'Mau Mau' as the

⁸²See D.P. Ghai, "Strategy for a Public Sector Wage Policy in Kenya", Discussion Paper No. 65, Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya, 1968.

⁸³Commission on the Civil Services of the East African Territories and the East African High Commission Report, 1953-54, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1954. See also Sessional Paper No. 17 of 1954: Proposals for the Implementation of the Recommendations contained in the Report of the Commission on the Civil Service of the East African Territories, and the East African High Commission, 1953-54, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1954.

British Army".⁸⁴ It is easy to exaggerate the impact of the Lidbury Commission's recommendations, for as Lubembe reminds us:

Although its aims were to synchronise salary scales, its recommendations fell far from meeting the demands of the Africans ... salaries were set according to the responsibility which one held although in actual implementation there was a high degree of racial discrimination.⁸⁵

In the case of statutory minimum wages, they continued to be restricted to the main urban centres for many years to come. It was in 1956 that the new statutory minimum wages for urban workers making separate provisions for adult male workers were introduced. By that date there were five industrial wage councils covering the following industries: road transport; tailoring, garment-making and associated trades; the hotel and catering trade; motor engineering; and baking, flour confectionery and biscuit making.⁸⁶ In 1962 the number of towns covered by statutory minimum wages increased to 13 from the previous 9, and the number of industrial wage councils had reached eight.⁸⁷ It was

⁸⁴See A.H. Amsden, International Firms and Labour in Kenya: 1945-70, Frank Cass, London, 1971, p. 9.

⁸⁵See Clement Lubembe, The Inside Labour Movement in Kenya, Equatorial Publishers, Nairobi, 1968, p. 100.

⁸⁶LDAR, 1956, pp. 6-7.

⁸⁷The thirteen towns included Eldoret, Kisumu, Kitale, Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, Nanyuki, Nyeri, Thika, Kericho, Machakos, Naivasha, and Thomson's Falls. See LDAR, 1962, pp. 6-7.

not until December 1962 that the government finally enacted legislation for statutory minimum wages in agriculture when the Regulation of Wages and Conditions of Employment (Amendment) Ordinance, 1962, was passed.⁸⁸ In the following year a wages council for the industry was created.⁸⁹

The virtual absence of a system of minimum wages in agriculture until such a late stage contributed to the growing gap between urban industrial employment and rural agricultural employment. The late introduction of minimum wages in agriculture was in part due to the absence of agricultural unions which could bring pressure on farmers to abandon their implacable hostility to the introduction of such a system. As some writers have put it, it was not until 1957

following a visit from representatives of the Plantation Workers International Federation (PWIF), that the government announced that it was intending to take powers to fix minimum wages in agriculture ... The year 1959 was spent in deciding how the powers should be taken; 1960 saw discussion of these powers by the Labour Advisory Bureau. But by 1961 conditions and circumstances had changed. Agricultural unions were by then in existence,⁹⁰

and their power was more than borne out by an unprecedented outbreak of strikes in the agricultural industry. The history of trade unionism and strikes seeking increases in wages in the industrial and commercial

⁸⁸Kenya Gazette, 31 December, 1962.

⁸⁹The Regulation of Wages (Agricultural Industry Wages Council Establishment) Order, Kenya Gazette, 10 December, 1963.

⁹⁰Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 362.

sectors was, of course, a long one and one of often spectacular confrontations and punctuated by periodic successes for the workers.

Although the strike weapon remained their ultimate defence against employers, and one which they indeed resorted to with growing frequency and effectiveness, trade unions also increasingly used channels of collective bargaining to press for wage rises as the 1950s rolled into the 1960s. The institutionalisation of collective bargaining procedures emerged out of a complex interplay of changes in government labour policies, greater articulation of employer self-interest and the active participation or at least acquiescence of trade unions. For all intents and purposes, therefore, collective bargaining in Kenya developed out of a protracted series of 'tripartite agreements' between the government, the Federation of Kenyan Employers and the Kenya Federation of Labour. Once again the agricultural industry was the last to travel the road of collective bargaining.

Unlike the big industrial firms which could stand relatively aloof from local politics and aspire to be seen as good 'corporate citizens', many settler farmers had never abandoned their faith in Kenya as a 'White Man's Country'. Politics and industrial policy became even more intertwined during the emergency for both settlers and the representatives of international firms. The latter wanted to establish an independent political voice, and distance themselves from the racist and recalcitrant settlers whom they tended to blame for the hostilities that had led to the outbreak of Mau Mau. They were also keenly aware of the need to recast their policies, to reorganise industrial relations so that they could adequately respond to, if not contain and shape, the

disruptive social forces emerging out of the emergency in order to preserve, indeed, expand the capitalist system.

The Association of Commercial and Industrial Employers (ACIE), renamed the Federation of Kenyan Employers (FKE) in 1959, was formed in 1956 to act as an instrument of industrial capital in Kenya. "It was necessary", Amsden paraphrases Sir Philip Rogers, first President of the ACIE,

to form a federation during the Emergency to correct the hostile image created by some of Kenya's 'old-timer' employers. It was necessary to create an agency through which employers might determinedly co-operate with the labour movement in the image of the new industrial state. At a time when African nationalism was in its ascendancy, it was necessary to organise a cohesive pressure group to exert influence on the government, for the chances were growing remote for Europeans to exert their will through the constitutional process ... Before the Emergency, management and labour were divided on racial lines ... The ACIE viewed collective bargaining as a medium for co-existence. The two sides of industry would confront one another in their conventional roles as management and labour, not as white and black man.⁹¹

It also ought to be noted that the ACIE was formed after a major strike in Mombasa in 1955. The award that was handed down by the arbitrator in the aftermath of the strike

was considered highly favourable to the strikers, the dockers improving their terms of service by 33%. Like the Mombasa Tribunal eight years earlier, the

⁹¹ Amsden, op. cit., p. 54.

1955 award rippled through industries ... The growing antipathy of employers to arbitration crystallised. It was objected that arbitrators sued for peace at any price, were unaware of the peculiar problems of each industry, and tended to make awards over too wide a range of issues. By contrast ... through collective bargaining employers would have some say as to when and by how much their labour costs rose; and if wages did rise part of the credit would redound on them.⁹²

Thus the formation of the ACIE was not a simple case of industrial capital initiating change to improve wages, for instance, but it was more of an attempt to stem the tide of big wage increases after each particularly devastating strike. In short, the ACIE sought to tame trade unions into moderation, to remove the government from the process of wage bargaining and to keep wage increases within limits acceptable to industry.

Finally, changes in the wage structure were influenced by changes in the labour market itself. "In areas most affected by Mau Mau", the Labour Department stated in 1953, "and the consequent labour shortages, there was a rise in signing on rates and general wage levels".⁹³ In the following year the department reported:

African wages rose sharply during 1954. While this was due partly to an increase in statutory minimum wages, a far more potent factor was the shortage of labour brought about by the Emergency.⁹⁴

⁹² Ibid., p. 56.

⁹³ LDAR, 1953, p. 11.

⁹⁴ LDAR, 1954, p. 12.

or to quote another passage from the same report:

In Nairobi wages rose sharply during the eight months following 'Operation Anvil' ... wage survey carried in Nairobi showed 75% of unskilled workers earned over 80/- p.m. (inclusive of value of housing and ration) (average 90/-) ... average rates for skilled Africans rose from 175/- to 215/- or 50/- higher than 1953 rates. Shortages of labour have also had an appreciable effect on rural wages. In 1953 starting wages seldom exceeded 25/- in 1954 there were about 35/-.⁹⁵

In 1955 wages "continued to rise".⁹⁶

From 1956, however, the picture began to change. "Labour surpluses", the Labour Department noted, were "reported in many areas", and although wages "continued to rise the trend became less marked as the year progressed; in domestic services there was even a tendency for wages to fall".⁹⁷ As emergency controls on members of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru ethnic groups were further relaxed, more and more people from these groups flowed back to the labour market so that "throughout 1957 labour supply over the country as a whole was in excess of demand", and, the Labour Department went on,

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 14-16.

⁹⁶ Between January and December 1955 the engagement rate in Nairobi rose from Shs. 94/50 per month to Shs. 105/50. See LDAR, 1955.

⁹⁷ LDAR, 1956, pp. 6-7. While early in the year casual labourers in Nairobi had been able to command from Shs. 8 to Shs. 12 a day, by the end of the year they were prepared to work for as little as Shs. 5 per day.

the upward trend in wage and salary levels, which had been a feature of the Emergency period with its associated labour shortages, was far less in evidence ... The rate of advance of statutory minimum wages was also slowed down during the year.⁹⁸

In 1958 wages simply "held to 1957 levels" and in "a few cases there was a downward trend of wages for unskilled labour on first engagement".⁹⁹

As the emergency came to an end, the problem of unemployment further worsened because the formerly detained and restricted Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers flocked to employment centres in their tens of thousands. The labour market was saturated. Moreover, this was also the period of a severe economic downturn as already suggested. One would therefore expect that the downward trend of wages would continue. Instead, however, we are told that

wage levels for African labour rose considerably during the year in a number of industries and services, as a result of voluntary collective bargaining, conciliation proceedings or arbitration. Indeed, trade union activity was a potent factor influencing wages in most urban areas and relative stability of wage levels in 1958 did not hold for 1959.¹⁰⁰

Three years later, at the height of the economic crisis, the Labour Department was still reporting:

⁹⁸LDAR, 1957, pp. 1, 5.

⁹⁹LDAR, 1958, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰LDAR, 1959, p. 5.

Despite adverse economic conditions and increasing unemployment, the upward trend in wage levels continued and trade union activity again influenced wages in many industries and services, particularly in the urban areas. This activity also accounted for wage increases in the sugar, tea and sisal plantation industries. The 1962 average of African earnings throughout Kenya was Sh. 130 per month (inclusive of the value of housing and rations) compared with Sh. 127 per month in 1961, Sh. 114 in 1960 and Sh. 107 in 1959.¹⁰¹

This shows that the impact of the so-called 'market forces' on wage determination should be seen in context. We also ought to be careful not to overemphasise the willingness of big employers to pay relatively high wages. It is by looking more closely at the struggles waged by the workers themselves for higher wages that the tortuous story of wage movements in Kenya during this period is really thrown into bold relief.

The tables which follow seek to highlight some of the observations we have made above. Table 5.6 demonstrates the growing gap between agricultural earnings and earnings in the other sectors. On the face of it there were no startling changes in the industrial composition of the wage bill between 1954 and 1960, and the changes which occurred seem to have been largely a corollary of changes in employment. Hence, the fall in the share of private industry and commerce of total wages from 48.4% to 47.2% during the period under review almost corresponded to a decline in the proportion of employment in private industry and commerce from 31.7% to 30.4% of total employment. Similarly the

¹⁰¹LDAR, 1962, p. 6.

temporary rise in the share of agriculture of total employment was followed by a rise in the share of agriculture of the total wage bill. Other than that, it is more than apparent that the level of agricultural earnings, which was already depressingly low, fell further behind earnings in private industry and commerce and the public services. According to Table 5.6 below, the average wage per worker in agriculture rose from £32.7 per annum in 1954 to £46 per annum in 1960, that is by 40.7%, while the corresponding rises for private industry and commerce and public services were 45.2% and 51.2%, respectively.

What the table does not show, but is important to underline nonetheless, is the fact that the earnings in agriculture varied according to area and type of agricultural industry. To take the latter point, we see that in 1955, for example, "average earnings were highest in ranching (Sh. 76 per month) and in plantation industries such as tea (Sh. 78 per month) and sisal (Sh. 71 per month); in mixed farming, the Colony average was Sh. 56 per month".¹⁰² By 1962 the colony average for African wages in agriculture was Sh. 65 per month, while in private industry and commerce the sum was Sh. 188 per month and in public services Sh. 201 per month.¹⁰³

When we examine the wage differentials between the three races an interesting pattern emerges. Overall the wage gap between Africans and members of the other two races narrowed; on average in 1954 Asians earned 8.8 times more than Africans and Europeans 21.4 times more,

¹⁰²LDAR, 1955, p. 8.

¹⁰³LDAR, 1962, p. 6.

TABLE 5.6 DISTRIBUTION OF THE WAGE BILL ACCORDING TO SECTOR AND RACE, 1954 and 1960

| | 1954 | | | | 1960 | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| | Nos. Employed | Wage Bill £ Million | % of Total Wage Bill | Average Per worker | Nos. Employed | Wage Bill £ Million | % of Total Wage Bill | Average Per Worker |
| Agriculture and Forestry | | | | | | | | |
| African | 229.8 | 5.6 | 10.7 | 25.4 | 269.1 | 10.0 | 11.8 | 37.0 |
| Asian | 0.6 | 0.3 | 0.6 | 500.0 | 0.8 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 500.0 |
| European | 1.6 | 1.4 | 2.7 | 875.0 | 1.8 | 2.1 | 2.5 | 1166.7 |
| Total | 223.0 | 7.3 | 14.0 | 32.7 | 271.7 | 12.5 | 14.7 | 46.0 |
| Private Industry and Commerce | | | | | | | | |
| African | 141.4 | 8.5 | 16.3 | 60.1 | 151.1 | 13.9 | 16.4 | 92.0 |
| Asian | 22.0 | 8.3 | 16.0 | 377.3 | 25.7 | 11.7 | 13.8 | 455.3 |
| European | 9.1 | 8.4 | 16.1 | 923.1 | 12.2 | 14.5 | 17.0 | 1188.5 |
| Total | 172.5 | 25.2 | 48.4 | 146.1 | 189.0 | 40.1 | 47.2 | 212.2 |
| Public Services | | | | | | | | |
| African | 130.3 | 7.7 | 14.8 | 59.1 | 140.7 | 14.4 | 17.0 | 102.3 |
| Asian | 10.1 | 4.2 | 8.1 | 415.8 | 11.8 | 6.6 | 7.8 | 559.3 |
| European | 7.8 | 7.7 | 14.8 | 987.2 | 9.0 | 11.3 | 13.3 | 1255.6 |
| Total | 148.2 | 19.6 | 37.6 | 132.3 | 161.5 | 32.3 | 38.1 | 200.0 |
| All Employment | | | | | | | | |
| African | 492.5 | 21.8 | 41.8 | 44.3 | 560.9 | 38.3 | 45.2 | 68.3 |
| Asian | 32.7 | 12.8 | 24.6 | 391.4 | 38.3 | 18.7 | 22.0 | 488.3 |
| European | 18.5 | 17.5 | 33.6 | 946.0 | 23.0 | 27.9 | 32.8 | 1213.0 |
| Total | 543.7 | 52.1 | 100.0 | 95.8 | 622.2 | 84.9 | 100.0 | 136.5 |

Sources: Labour Department Annual Report, 1954 and 1960.
 Reported Employment and Wages in Kenya, 1948-1960,
 East African Statistical Department, Aug. 1961.

compared to 7.1 times and 17.8 times in 1960, respectively. The wage ratios between Africans and Asians and Europeans actually fell in all three sectors. Meanwhile, the income gap between Asians and Europeans increased slightly in all three sectors to the latter's advantage. This probably reflected an increase in the numbers of Europeans on expatriate salaries. The racial imbalances in earning power were still scandalously wide by 1960, but, thanks to trade unions, periodic increases in minimum wages and all the other factors we have considered above, which helped to push African wages up, the great divide between African workers and workers of the other two races had narrowed a little.

Table 5.7 gives us an even more detailed picture of the changes in sectoral and racial income differentials between 1954 and 1960. The relatively unfavourable position of agriculture and the increasing gap for employed Africans between wages in agriculture and wages in other industries is immediately evident from the table. In this connection, it is also interesting to note the decline in the relative earnings of Africans in the building and construction industry between 1954 and 1960. Needless to say, the decline was because this industry was one of the worst victims of the economic crunch that set in at the turn of the 1960s.

The table also shows the considerable variations between industries in the relative earnings of Africans. This can be explained by the growing divergencies in the need for skilled and semi-skilled labour in the various industries as well as the differing levels that the process of Africanisation had reached in the various occupations. It is noteworthy that although there were increases in the relative earnings

TABLE 5.7 INDUSTRIAL DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT, WAGE BILL AND RELATIVE EARNINGS, KENYA
ALL EMPLOYMENT, 1954 and 1960

| | Percentage Distribution of Employed Population | | | | | | Percentage Distribution of Wage Bill | | | | | | Relative Earnings Per Head | | | | | |
|----------------------------|--|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|----------------------------|------|-------|------|---------|------|
| | European | | Asian | | African | | European | | Asian | | African | | European | | Asian | | African | |
| | 1954 | 1960 | 1954 | 1960 | 1954 | 1960 | 1954 | 1960 | 1954 | 1960 | 1954 | 1960 | 1954 | 1960 | 1954 | 1960 | 1954 | 1960 |
| PRIVATE SECTOR | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Agriculture & Forestry | 9.13 | 8.03 | 2.22 | 2.18 | 44.58 | 47.97 | 8.07 | 7.38 | 2.38 | 2.20 | 25.89 | 26.20 | 0.88 | 0.92 | 1.07 | 1.01 | 0.58 | 0.55 |
| Mining & Quarrying | 0.57 | 0.17 | 0.48 | 0.47 | 1.12 | 0.86 | 0.16 | 0.23 | 0.48 | 0.57 | 1.71 | 1.06 | 0.81 | 1.35 | 1.00 | 1.21 | 1.53 | 1.23 |
| Manufacturers & Repairs | 13.41 | 12.01 | 20.02 | 18.18 | 8.71 | 7.60 | 13.61 | 12.90 | 19.90 | 17.00 | 11.19 | 10.18 | 1.01 | 1.07 | 0.99 | 0.94 | 1.28 | 1.34 |
| Building & Construction | 3.71 | 2.29 | 7.63 | 6.17 | 3.95 | 3.25 | 3.92 | 2.67 | 7.85 | 5.27 | 5.87 | 3.97 | 1.06 | 1.17 | 1.03 | 0.85 | 1.49 | 1.22 |
| Commerce | 20.27 | 17.17 | 28.28 | 27.52 | 4.50 | 4.38 | 20.47 | 18.37 | 28.95 | 27.21 | 6.15 | 6.14 | 1.01 | 1.07 | 1.02 | 0.99 | 1.37 | 1.40 |
| Transport & Communications | 4.00 | 4.59 | 4.61 | 5.72 | 1.54 | 2.05 | 4.50 | 5.16 | 4.12 | 4.96 | 3.19 | 3.89 | 1.13 | 1.12 | 0.89 | 0.87 | 2.07 | 1.90 |
| Other Services | 7.99 | 16.95 | 4.61 | 8.9 | 9.01 | 8.8 | 4.78 | 12.66 | 3.65 | 7.76 | 10.72 | 11.04 | 0.60 | 0.75 | 0.79 | 0.87 | 1.19 | 1.25 |
| Total Private Sector | 59.08 | 61.22 | 67.85 | 69.14 | 73.41 | 74.91 | 55.81 | 59.37 | 67.33 | 64.97 | 64.72 | 62.48 | 0.94 | 0.97 | 0.99 | 0.94 | 0.88 | 0.83 |
| PUBLIC SERVICES | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Kenya Government | 24.43 | 24.54 | 10.93 | 15.48 | 15.60 | 15.69 | 27.90 | 24.82 | 11.18 | 16.41 | 19.84 | 22.91 | 1.14 | 1.01 | 1.02 | 1.06 | 1.27 | 1.46 |
| E.A. High Commission | 3.25 | 2.89 | 1.31 | 1.51 | 0.40 | 0.33 | 3.29 | 3.12 | 1.43 | 1.89 | 0.60 | 0.55 | 1.01 | 1.08 | 1.09 | 1.25 | 1.50 | 1.67 |
| Railways & Harbours | 5.82 | 5.12 | 12.01 | 7.64 | 5.46 | 3.99 | 5.94 | 6.24 | 11.97 | 9.89 | 8.55 | 7.18 | 1.02 | 1.22 | 1.00 | 1.29 | 1.57 | 1.84 |
| Posts & Telecommunications | 2.11 | 1.72 | 2.83 | 3.23 | 0.47 | 0.52 | 2.19 | 1.87 | 3.09 | 3.64 | 0.93 | 1.10 | 1.04 | 1.09 | 1.00 | 1.13 | 1.98 | 2.12 |
| Other Services | 2.57 | 3.34 | 1.38 | 1.51 | 3.88 | 4.20 | 2.77 | 3.73 | 1.59 | 1.97 | 4.16 | 5.11 | 1.08 | 1.42 | 1.15 | 1.30 | 1.08 | 1.22 |
| Defence | 2.74 | 1.17 | 3.69 | 1.49 | 0.80 | 0.45 | 2.10 | 0.85 | 3.41 | 1.23 | 1.20 | 0.67 | 0.77 | 0.73 | 0.92 | 0.83 | 1.50 | 1.49 |
| Total Public Services | 40.92 | 38.78 | 32.15 | 30.86 | 26.59 | 25.09 | 44.19 | 40.63 | 32.67 | 35.03 | 35.28 | 37.52 | 1.08 | 1.05 | 1.02 | 1.14 | 1.33 | 1.50 |
| GRAND TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |

Source: Reported Employment and Wages in Kenya, 1961.

for Africans in manufacturing, repairs and commerce between 1954 and 1960, these increases did not match, let alone did they come to equal, the average relative earnings in the public services. This reflected the fact that the degree of Africanisation of the top and middle level posts in the public services was more advanced by this date than in private industry. Moreover, the public services were more likely to follow through with minimum wage guidelines than employers in private industry. On the whole, the increase in the average level of earnings in the public services, manufacturing and commerce was partially related to the higher proportion of skilled and semi-skilled workers in these industries than in agriculture; the differences in earnings between the bulk of the unskilled agricultural and non-agricultural workers were not all that great. What this points to is the growing differentiation among African workers according to skill and income.

The continuing favourable position of the transport and communications industry, both in the public services and private industry in terms of relative earnings, is not only an indication of the high proportion of skilled and semi-skilled Africans in this industry, but equally important it is an eloquent testimony of the long history of organised labour militancy among railway and dock workers and taxi drivers.

Europeans and Asians derived the overwhelming portion of their wages from non-agricultural activities, the latter more so than the former. The European wage bill was distributed, in order of importance for the period from 1954 and 1960, between the government, commerce, manufacturing, agriculture and the railway and harbours. For Asians, on the other hand, the proportion of wages derived from government came

third after commerce and manufacturing, in that order, and the railways and harbours and building and construction followed behind. It is clear that, when compared to Africans, there was remarkably little variation between industries in the relative earnings of both Asians and Europeans. This can partly be attributed to the fact that the proportion of Asian and European workers in the low-wage agricultural sector was comparatively very small.

The differences in the inter-industry wage structure, as well as in the composition of the wage bill for each race, can further be observed from the tables which follow. It is readily apparent from these tables that the proportion of non-cash income in agriculture was higher than in any other sector. As much as 32% of the total African income in agriculture consisted of the imputed value of rations and board, whereas in the two other sectors these items accounted for slightly less than a tenth of the gross African income. To varying degrees agricultural employment also provided an exception to the generally high proportion of earnings received in cash by Europeans and Asians. Overall 15.1% of the total African wage bill consisted of benefits in kind, followed by Europeans with 7.5% and, finally, Asians with 5.8%. The relatively higher proportion of non-cash income among Europeans was solely due to the fact that there were more Europeans in agriculture than Asians. In effect, all this means that without the inclusion of the imputed value of rations and board the wage differentials between agriculture employment and employment in the other sectors and between Africans and Asians and Europeans were higher than has otherwise been suggested. And given the inclination of employers to overvalue these items in their wage

| <u>AFRICANS</u> | | | | |
|--|---------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| | Total Cash Earnings | Value of Rations | Value of Housing | Total Wage Bill |
| <u>Agriculture and Forestry</u> | | | | |
| '000 | 6,823 | 2,701 | 509 | 10,033 |
| Proportion of Total Wage Bill | 68% | 26.9% | 5.1% | 100.0% |
| <u>Private Industry and Commerce (Including Domestic Servants)</u> | | | | |
| '000 | 12,529 | 579 | 790 | 13,898 |
| Proportion of Total Wage Bill | 90.1% | 4.2% | 5.7% | 100.0% |
| <u>Public Service</u> | | | | |
| '000 | 13,190 | 144 | 1,037 | 14,371 |
| Proportion of Total Wage Bill | 91.8% | 1.0% | 7.2% | 100.0% |
| <u>All Employment</u> | | | | |
| '000 | 32,542 | 3,424 | 2,336 | 38,302 |
| Proportion of Total Wage Bill | 84.9% | 9.0% | 6.1% | 100.0% |
| <u>EUROPEANS</u> | | | | |
| <u>Agriculture and Forestry</u> | | | | |
| '000 | 1,740 | 28 | 290 | 2,058 |
| Proportion of Total Wage Bill | 84.6% | 1.3% | 14.1% | 100.0% |
| <u>Private Industry and Commerce (Including Domestic Servants)</u> | | | | |
| '000 | 13,551 | 139 | 796 | 14,486 |
| Proportion of Total Wage Bill | 93.5% | 1.0% | 5.5% | 100.0% |
| <u>Public Service</u> | | | | |
| '000 | 10,483 | 49 | 790 | 11,322 |
| Proportion of Total Wage Bill | 92.6% | 0.4% | 7.0% | 100.0% |
| <u>All Employment</u> | | | | |
| '000 | 25,774 | 216 | 1,876 | 27,866 |
| Proportion of Total Wage Bill | 92.5% | 0.8% | 6.7% | 100.0% |
| <u>ASIANS</u> | | | | |
| <u>Agriculture and Forestry</u> | | | | |
| '000 | 327 | 14 | 71 | 412 |
| Proportion of Total Wage Bill | 79.4% | 3.4% | 17.2% | 100.0% |
| <u>Private Industry and Commerce (Including Domestic Servants)</u> | | | | |
| '000 | 11,356 | 110 | 292 | 11,758 |
| Proportion of Total Wage Bill | 96.6% | 0.9% | 2.5% | 100.0% |
| <u>Public Service</u> | | | | |
| '000 | 5,956 | 76 | 530 | 6,562 |
| Proportion of Total Wage Bill | 90.7% | 1.2% | 8.1% | 100.0% |
| <u>All Employment</u> | | | | |
| '000 | 17,639 | 200 | 893 | 18,732 |
| Proportion of Total Wage Bill | 94.2% | 1.0% | 4.8% | 100.0% |

calculations, this may indeed have been the case.

The wage differentials between men and women in each particular industry and within each particular race must not be overlooked. There can be little doubt that the distinction made between 'adult' and 'youth' income levels in the minimum wage system served to increase and consolidate the wage gap between African male and female workers since the latter, irrespective of age, were paid 'youth' wage rates. In 1959, for example, "the statutory minimum wages payable to unskilled labour in the nine main urban areas averaged 112/- per month for adult men and 81/- for women and youths".¹⁰⁴ By 1963, on average, men received about 146/- per month and women and youths 89/- in the main towns covered by statutory minimum wage regulations. In other words, in urban areas the income gap between African male and female workers on the basis of the official basic minimum wages had increased by over nearly 84% in just about four years. There is reason to believe that in practice the overall wage gap between African male and female workers was actually higher in all sectors seeing as African women mostly worked in unskilled occupations.

Although European workers were not affected by the stipulations of the minimum wage regulations because of their relatively high wages, the same pattern of sexual wage differentiation was reproduced. Taking 1960 as an example, we see that the average or median wage for European men in the public services was £1,428 per annum and for European women £756 per annum, that is the former received twice as much as the latter. In private industry and commerce the gap was even wider; the

¹⁰⁴LDAR, 1959, p. 6.

the median wage for men was £1,453 per annum and for women £682 per annum. These differentials can also be found among Asian workers, although they tended to be narrower. In fact, the median wage for Asian women in public services in 1960 was equivalent to that of Asian males in private industry and commerce (£449). It has been suggested that this was because it was the more educated Asian women who tended to go to work so that on the whole they tended to occupy relatively well paying jobs.¹⁰⁵

Finally, the extent of geographic wage differentials in the country as it progressed towards independence can be seen from Table 5.9 below. The reasons for the disproportionate share of the main towns, especially Nairobi and Mombasa, in the total wage bill are fairly obvious and need not be repeated.

Conclusion

These regional, sectoral, racial, sexual and occupational differentiations in the distribution of the wage bill reflected the growing internal differentiation of the working class itself and points to the dynamic changes which occurred in Kenya's wage structure in response to changed conditions of accumulation and a new tempo in the perennial struggle between labour and capital. In this chapter, therefore, we have tried to examine the recomposition in the internal structure of the Kenyan working class in terms of sectoral, geographical, ethnic

¹⁰⁵See Reported Employment and Wages in Kenya, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-20 and see the appended tables VII-IX.

TABLE 5.9 ESTIMATED ANNUAL WAGE BILL, DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO LOCATION, 1960 (in £ '000)

| | Europeans | Asians | Africans | Total |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Nairobi | 15,631 | 9,969 | 8,390 | 33,990 |
| Thika | 133 | 143 | 347 | 623 |
| Nyeri | 284 | 114 | 503 | 901 |
| Nanyuki | 97 | 67 | 189 | 353 |
| Kisumu | 407 | 590 | 921 | 1,918 |
| Nakuru | 1,134 | 617 | 1,078 | 2,829 |
| Eldoret | 436 | 318 | 504 | 1,258 |
| Kitale | 191 | 140 | 229 | 560 |
| Mombasa | 2,719 | 4,119 | 3,833 | 10,671 |
| Total | 21,032 | 16,077 | 15,994 | 53,103 |
| Nairobi Extra Provincial District | 1,129 | 324 | 829 | 2,282 |
| Central Prov. | 2,037 | 480 | 7,054 | 9,571 |
| Southern Prov. | 536 | 277 | 1,681 | 2,494 |
| Nyanza Prov. | 1,020 | 625 | 4,772 | 6,417 |
| Rift Valley Province | 1,650 | 353 | 6,123 | 8,126 |
| Coast Prov. | 375 | 308 | 1,529 | 2,212 |
| Northern Province | 87 | 288 | 320 | 695 |
| Total | 6,834 | 2,655 | 22,308 | 31,797 |
| Grand Total All Towns and Provinces | 27,866 | 18,732 | 38,302 | 84,900 |

Source: Reported employment and wages in Kenya, 1961.

racial and sexual distribution as a result of conditions generated by the imposition of the state of emergency and the struggles for and momentum of decolonisation. What still needs to be analysed and demonstrated is the real meaning of these changes in the daily lives of the majority of Kenyan workers, as well as the forms and intensity of trade union struggles waged during this period in pursuit of both the immediate economic goals of union members and in articulating the wider interests of the working class as a whole.

CHAPTER SIX

TOWARDS THE BUREAUCRATIZATION OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT:

THE KENYA FEDERATION OF LABOUR ON THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE

There is a tendency in industrial relations studies to portray the development of collective bargaining in Africa, including Kenya, as a sign that relations between capital and labour, management and workers, were at last becoming "advanced", "modern", "progressive".¹ Such an approach is based on a functionalist assumption that, in essence, capital and labour, the capitalist and working classes, are compatible, despite 'periodic' conflicts that might arise between them. In this chapter an

¹For examples of writings which concentrate on the development of industrial relations machinery, especially with reference to collective bargaining and dispute settlement procedures, in Africa either as 'deviations' from the classical British or Western model, or without situating such developments within the context of the wider political economy, see the work of B.C. Roberts, Collective Bargaining in African Countries, MacMillan, London, 1967; and some of the papers collected in U.G. Damachi, H.D. Seibel and L. Trachtman, eds., Industrial Relations in Africa, MacMillan, London, 1979, especially the paper by E. Iwuji entitled, "Industrial Relations in Kenya". For similar descriptive and theoretical analyses of industrial relations which assume a consensus or organic unity between labour, capital, and the state, see J.D. Muir and J.L. Brown, "Trade union power and the process of economic development: the Kenyan example", Industrial Relations Industrielles, Vol. 29, No. 3, 1974; also see their article, "Labour legislation and industrial disputes: the Kenyan case", British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol. xiii, No. 3, 1975. For a general critique of such approaches to the study of industrial relations, see R. Hyman and I. Brough, Social Values and Industrial Relations, Blackwell, Oxford, 1975; and S. Hill and K. Thurley, "Sociology and industrial relations", British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol. xii, No. 2, 1974. For another such critique focussing on studies of industrial relations in Kenya see, J.S. Henley, "On the lack of trade union power in Kenya" Industrial Relations Industrielles, Vol. 31, No. 4.

attempt will be made to show that the development of collective bargaining in Kenya far from being the crowning achievement of capital-labour relations, resulted in the ossification of the trade union movement into a bureaucratic mould.

However, this did not mean that workers' struggles were effectively contained as a result of the gradual incorporation of the trade union movement into a network of collaborative arrangements with the state and capital. Nor did it mean, as some have emphasised, that struggles within trade unions were merely reduced to bureaucratic infighting, a perpetual game of patronage and clientelist politics.² In this chapter, it will be argued that while factional infighting among leaders in the trade union movement cannot be ignored, the full significance of that factionalism, or rather the forces behind that factionalism, cannot be understood if emphasis is not placed on the growing disjuncture between working class militancy and trade union conservatism on the eve of decolonisation in Kenya.

In short, in this chapter I will attempt to analyse the development of collective bargaining in Kenya from the mid-fifties to the time of independence, not necessarily as a 'desirable' end in itself, representing light at the end of a long tunnel of a very coercive system of labour control, but to underline the struggles and contradictions that lay behind its development. In particular, it will be demonstrated that working class militancy against capital, as well as opposition to the

²For an exhaustive study of patronage and clientelism in the Kenyan trade union movement see R. Sandbrook, Proletarians and African Capitalism. The Kenya case, 1960-72, C.U.P., London, 1975.

incorporation of trade unions into the new system of industrial relations was fierce at the very time that the structures and ideologies of that system were being erected and propagated. Workers, after all, had little cause to celebrate, for collective bargaining had as yet to offer them tangible benefits in terms of improved working and living conditions.

PERSISTENCE OF POVERTY

In the last chapter we examined changes in the wage structure between 1953 and 1963, and we saw that there were some notable increases in wages. It ought to be emphasised, however, that wages in Kenya had been historically so low, except for European and a minority of Asian workers, that there had to be really massive increases in wages before there could be any noticeable change in the standard of living for the majority of Kenyan workers. Clearly, this did not happen.

Rural wages did not rise sufficiently, either to cover earnings that were being lost as squatters continued to lose land from which they had previously derived most of their income, or to provide adequate maintenance for the rest of the agricultural workers and their families who increasingly became solely dependent on wages as more and more of them lost their land rights as a result of the land reforms and natural population increases and thus could no longer have their wages subsidised by subsistence production. For many agricultural workers, therefore, there was an absolute decline in their real wages, despite the increases in their cash incomes which we have noted. Consequently, many experienced a fall in their already miserable living conditions.

The majority of urban workers were in no better position. For sure wages in urban areas rose quite considerably between 1953 and 1963. To take only the case of Nairobi we see that average wage rates, including the value of rations and housing, for African workers increased by about 70% during this period. The increase in real wages was, however, much lower for during the same period the African retail price index in Nairobi rose by 23%, excluding rent and transportation.³ If rent increases were to be included, which were steep considering the acute housing shortage, then the rise in the cost of living was considerable indeed, and thus the actual increase in the average wage rates is diminished.

For the majority of urban African workers who were not paid much above the statutory minimum, if not below it, their wage rises barely kept pace with the rises in the cost of living. The system of minimum wages itself left a lot to be desired. The Carpenter formula of a dual wage system based on age and the size of a worker's family was arbitrary and open to abuse. If a worker said he was twenty-one an employer could refuse to pay him higher wages; birth certificates, after all, were

³These figures have been worked out from LDAR, 1953-63. The rise in the Nairobi African retail price index seems so low because the Labour Department's figures were based on controlled prices which had little bearing on the actual prices prevailing at the time. In 1957 it was estimated by the East African High Commission that the average expenditure on food alone for a single person in Nairobi was in the region of Shs. 140.70, and for a family of two or three, Shs. 187.70, sums which many workers did not even make in a single month as yet. See Lubembe, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-13. The difficulties that African workers had to make ends meet can also be found in The Pattern of Income Expenditure and Consumption of African Middle Income Workers in Nairobi, July 1963, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1964.

hardly known to workers born and bred in rural villages. Calculating a man's wage on the basis that he had two children was also unrealistic in a culture where large families were a norm and having more than one wife not uncommon. To make matters even worse, the limited guidelines of the Carpenter Committee were not fully implemented. In the words of the Labour Department:

Despite the government's policy of progressively increasing minimum wages in order for a man to maintain a family, the target of an 'adult' level of basic wages 67% above the 'youth' level, with housing allowance double the rates payable to women and youths, could not be reached by 1960.⁴

It was in recognition of all these inadequacies that the first African Minister of Labour in Kenya, Tom Mboya, declared in July 1962, that the Carpenter formula was "out of date".⁵ His government pledged to institute a high wage economy "that would provide a worker and his family with a reasonable standard of life", and that there would be a "move away from payment in kind to real wages".⁶ Characteristically, like most promises made by the nationalist leaders on the eve of decolonisation, little came to pass and the system of low wages continued.

⁴LDAR, 1959, p. 6.

⁵Daily Nation (hereinafter DN) 17-7-62.

⁶Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Labour in Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika, Kampala 20-8-62. COTU Archives (hereinafter CA) KFL File 169.

The Carpenter Committee, of course, did not provide for social security and old age pensions. But when the Dolton Social Security Committee recommended precisely just that, the government rejected the recommendations on the grounds that high costs would be incurred in administering an old age pension scheme and, in addition, there was a lack of vital labour statistics on which to base the pensions.⁷ By 1961 only 85,265 people or 14.5% of the total reported labour force, were members of formal pension or provident fund schemes.⁸ In that year, with the assistance of Colonial Development and Welfare Funds, the government appointed Mr. Turner of the British Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance to examine the recommendations of the Dolton Report and give advice on the establishment of a National Provident Fund scheme. But by 1963 nothing had been done, again despite rhetoric from Mboya's Ministry of Labour that "an alternative to land as the only security in old age among Africans must be created as a matter of urgency".⁹ Only those who were already in the high income brackets could afford to secure pension or provident fund schemes for themselves since these schemes were mostly operated by insurance companies and professional pensions' trustees. The majority of Kenyan workers, therefore, had neither security

⁷ Report of the Social Security Committee, Government Printer, 1957. See LDAR, 1957, pp. 19-20. See also 'Policy Statement by KFL General Secretary' KFL 1960 Annual Conference.

⁸ LDAR, 1961, p. 19.

⁹ CA KFL File 169. By 1962 101,420, 17.5% of the total labour force was covered by provident fund schemes of one kind or another. See LDAR, 1962, p. 21. In 1963 the number increased slightly when 3,482 more workers joined the schemes. See LDAR, 1963, p. 14.

for their old age nor enough wages to enjoy even the most minimum standards of living while they were still working.

Year after year, the Labour Department, newspapers and trade union reports, presented a gruesome picture of the worsening shortages of housing for workers in the urban centres and the expansion of squalid slums that this was leading to. Municipal officials hoped that with the mass deportation exercises of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers, housing shortages and congestion would finally be brought under control. But even after a quarter of Nairobi's labour force had been removed following 'Operation Anvil', "it was still difficult for Africans to obtain housing".¹⁰ This was a graphic illustration of the state of overcrowding in Nairobi. The situation in Mombasa was even worse.¹¹ In 1953 a Housing Ordinance was passed and a Central Housing Board was re-established with wider powers than its predecessor and could make loans for housing to local authorities, employers and individual applicants. The Nairobi City Council and the other urban local authorities embarked on builder-owner housing schemes under which Africans could build their own houses on a site already provided with services.¹² Most workers, however, could not afford to build houses, so that it was largely self-employed people or unscrupulous landlords who took advantage of such opportunities. Through such policies the government was absolving employers of the responsibility to provide decent housing for their workers, and

¹⁰LDAR, 1954, p. 24.

¹¹LDAR, 1955, p. 24.

¹²LDAR, 1953, p. 19.

increasingly, workers found themselves having to compete for living space in slums at higher and higher rents and at the risk of their own health. Squatter colonies in fact sprang up in areas without any services whatsoever, and more often than not the government turned a blind eye, or as independence approached, they were wary of pulling down the slums without providing alternative housing for fear of provoking unrest, an attitude that persisted into the post-colonial era. And so Mathare Valley, Pumwani and Kariobangi, some of the most notorious slums in Nairobi, grew in size and wretchedness.

As the emergency came to an end, and employment opportunities in rural areas dried up and tens of thousands of deported Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers and landless people flocked to the towns, the housing situation deteriorated further. Such was the magnitude of the problem that a conference was held in Nairobi on Housing and Urbanisation in January 1959 under the auspices of the Commission for Technical Co-Operation in Africa South of the Sahara to try and work out ways and means of dealing with the crisis of housing shortages and urban development in Kenya and Africa generally.¹³ The housing problem in Kenyan towns was aggravated

¹³LDAR, 1959, p. 21. There were fairly long articles in the press about the depressing shortage of housing in the urban centres for workers. See, for instance, East African Standard, 5-7th January, 1959. So acute was the housing situation and the problem of rent hikes that this led to the government appointing a Committee of Inquiry into Rent Restriction Legislation, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1963. Government attempts to control rent in the past had been ineffectual at best. The problem of housing was too deep-rooted to be resolved by passing tough legislation or even resorting to forcible evictions. For more information on the housing crisis and the government's attempts to deal with it, see Central Housing Board, Annual Reports, 1958-63.

by the policy of segregated residential areas and housing schemes. As the KFL put it:

Lighting, sewerage, water services, road services, refuse collection and the provision of other amenities that go to make a home have been readily provided in the European residential areas while the non-European communities and essentially the Africans are denied these services and amenities ... The policy of providing housing on a "bed space" basis fails to take into account very elementary needs, of the prospective tenants, such as marital status and even when he is single his needs for certain amenities to entertain and live decently ... There are thousands of Africans who have not even a roof over their heads in addition to those who after a days work must go back to live in congested, badly lit and badly ventilated houses. There are also those thousands who are unable to have their families live with them in their place of work due to lack of housing. Not only do these conditions adversely affect the productive capacity of the worker but it provides for dangerous opportunity of diseases as already indicated by the incidence of tuberculosis in various towns.¹⁴

In 1954 the Medical Department Annual Report also reported of "severe overcrowding in Asian housing ... building costs are so high at the moment that it's still difficult to afford sufficient accommodation for Asians at rents which the majority are prepared to pay".¹⁵ By 1963 the situation had grown even worse.¹⁶

¹⁴Policy Statement by KFL', 1960.

¹⁵Medical Department Annual Report (hereafter MDAR), 1954, p. 31.

¹⁶See East African High Commission Asian Staff Association, E.A.R. & H. Asian Union (Kenya), Asian Postal Union (Kenya), 'A Tragedy: A History of the Forgotten Men', January 1962.

In the same report we read of an outbreak of a typhoid epidemic in all the major districts of the country, particularly in the Central Province, as well as a rise in the incidence of diseases in the transit and detention camps and the deterioration of health services throughout the country as a result of "the detention, for political reasons, of trained African medical staff".¹⁷ It was also noted that "as a result of the emergency, large masses of the population necessarily had to resettle themselves in other areas, which later led to local shortages of food in parts of the Central Province".¹⁸

There seems to have been an increase in the incidence of diseases not only attributable to congested and unhygienic living conditions, but also to the low "standards of sanitary conveniences and washing facilities provided in many factories",¹⁹ especially among the smaller factories.²⁰ Occupational hazards in industry in fact increased dramatically. In the words of the Medical Department Annual Report:

Up to some little time ago hazards have been those connected with agriculture, such as anthrax, tetanus and phagedemic ulcers. Of recent years, however, industrial occupational hazards have been reported with increasing frequency. The specialist Medical

¹⁷MDAR, 1954, pp. 2-3.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 31. Also see J. Wilkinson, 'The Mau Mau Movement: Some General and Medical Aspects', The East African Medical Journal, 31, 7, July 1954.

¹⁹LDAR, 1957, p. 19.

²⁰LDAR, 1961, p. 17 and LDAR, 1962, p. 18.

Officer of the Labour Department draws attention to the type of risk connected with insecticides, dust and the use of caustic soda in industry ... manufacturing processes involving the creation of dangerous dusts are increasing and protective measures are necessary ... occupational skin diseases, the result of handling alkalis, have been reported from tanneries, in soda handlers and in the fabrication of aluminium ware.²¹

Tables 6.1a and 6.1b below substantiate some of these observations by the Medical Department. Between 1953 and 1963 there was an overall increase in the total number of occupational accidents reported, although there was a decline in the number of fatal accidents and accidents resulting in permanent incapacity. It is not surprising that the greatest number of accidents occurred among men, followed by women and then children. The total number of accidents reported among juvenile workers actually declined over the years. This undoubtedly reflected the fall in the overall number of juvenile workers during this period. The low incidence of accidents among women corresponded to the small proportion of women in manufacturing and repairs, transport, storage and communications, and building and construction, the three industries with the largest number of accidents. It is interesting to note that the number of reported accidents in the building and construction industry gradually fell between 1957 and 1963. This can be attributed to the depressed state of the industry during these years as the economy experienced a slowdown.

²¹MDAR, 1957, p. 12.

TABLE 6.1a REPORTED OCCUPATIONAL ACCIDENTS AND WORKMAN'S COMPENSATION

| Year | Accidents | | | | | | | | | | | | Compensation £ | | | |
|-------|-----------|---|----|-------|---|----|------|-----|------|---------|-----|------|----------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| | Children | | | Women | | | Men | | | Total | | | F and P | | Average rate of Compensation | |
| | F | P | T | F | P | T | F | P | T | F | P | T | | | | |
| 1953 | n.a. | | | n.a. | | | n.a. | | | 129 532 | | | | | | |
| Total | | | | | | | | | | 661 | | | 26388 | | 39.9 - | |
| | Total | | | | | | | | | | | | 26388 | | | |
| 1957 | 10 | 3 | 42 | 1 | 5 | 18 | 133 | 363 | 3090 | 144 | 371 | 3150 | | | | |
| Total | 55 | | | 24 | | | 3586 | | | 3665 | | | 42715 16482 | | 82.9 5.2 | |
| | Total | | | | | | | | | | | | 59197 | | | |
| 1961 | 1 | 7 | 24 | 2 | 7 | 49 | 90 | 350 | 3287 | 93 | 364 | 3360 | | | | |
| Total | 32 | | | 58 | | | 3727 | | | 3817 | | | 43601 22148 | | 95.4 6.6 | |
| | Total | | | | | | | | | | | | 65749 | | | |
| 1963 | 1 | 5 | 8 | - | 5 | 68 | 95 | 389 | 4190 | 96 | 399 | 4266 | | | | |
| Total | 14 | | | 73 | | | 4674 | | | 4761 | | | 65030 28840 | | 131.4 6.7 | |
| | Total | | | | | | | | | | | | 93870 | | | |

- Fatal P - Permanent Incapacity T - Temporary Incapacity

TABLE 6.1b REPORTED OCCUPATIONAL ACCIDENTS ACCORDING TO INDUSTRY

| INDUSTRY | 1957 | | | | 1961 | | | | 1963 | | | |
|---|------|------|------|-------|------|------|------|-------|------|------|------|-------|
| | Men | Wom. | Juv. | Total | Men | Wom. | Juv. | Total | Men | Wom. | Juv. | Total |
| Agriculture | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F- | 32 | 1 | 7 | 40 | 26 | 1 | - | 27 | 33 | - | 1 | 34 |
| P- | 61 | 1 | 2 | 64 | 96 | 4 | 2 | 102 | 92 | 2 | 5 | 99 |
| T- | 286 | 6 | 32 | 324 | 466 | 26 | 16 | 508 | 593 | 37 | 3 | 633 |
| Total | | | | 428 | | | | 637 | | | | 766 |
| Mining and Quarrying | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F- | 5 | - | - | 5 | 6 | - | - | 6 | - | - | - | - |
| P- | 8 | - | - | 8 | 6 | - | - | 6 | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| T- | 33 | - | - | 33 | 42 | - | - | 42 | 29 | - | - | 29 |
| Total | | | | 46 | | | | 54 | | | | 30 |
| Manufacturing and Repairs | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F- | 20 | - | 2 | 22 | 11 | 1 | 1 | 13 | 21 | - | - | 21 |
| P- | 127 | 4 | 1 | 132 | 135 | 2 | 4 | 141 | 145 | 3 | - | 148 |
| T- | 1131 | 7 | 7 | 1145 | 1075 | 10 | 4 | 1089 | 1483 | 16 | 3 | 1502 |
| Total | | | | 1299 | | | | 1243 | | | | 1671 |
| Building and Construction | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F- | 24 | - | - | 24 | 12 | - | - | 12 | 12 | - | - | 12 |
| P- | 65 | - | - | 65 | 33 | - | 1 | 34 | 40 | - | - | 40 |
| T- | 764 | - | 2 | 766 | 591 | 1 | 1 | 593 | 381 | - | 1 | 382 |
| Total | | | | 855 | | | | 639 | | | | 434 |
| Electricity, Water and Sanitary Services | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F- | 3 | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | 2 |
| P- | 5 | - | - | 5 | 4 | - | - | 4 | 7 | - | - | 7 |
| T- | 129 | 1 | - | 130 | 82 | 1 | - | 83 | 84 | - | - | 84 |
| Total | | | | 138 | | | | 87 | | | | 93 |
| Commerce | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F- | 3 | - | - | 3 | 6 | - | - | 6 | 5 | - | - | 5 |
| P- | 23 | - | - | 23 | 18 | - | - | 18 | 26 | - | - | 26 |
| T- | 74 | 1 | - | 75 | 142 | - | 1 | 143 | 160 | 3 | - | 163 |
| Total | | | | 101 | | | | 167 | | | | 194 |
| Transport, Storage and Communication | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F- | 15 | - | - | 15 | 13 | - | - | 13 | 9 | - | - | 9 |
| P- | 52 | - | - | 52 | 37 | - | - | 37 | 47 | - | - | 47 |
| T- | 581 | - | 1 | 582 | 652 | - | - | 652 | 1249 | 3 | - | 1249 |
| Total | | | | 649 | | | | 702 | | | | 1308 |
| Public Services | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F- | 31 | - | 1 | 32 | 16 | - | - | 16 | 13 | - | - | 13 |
| P- | 22 | - | - | 22 | 21 | 1 | - | 22 | 31 | - | - | 31 |
| T- | 92 | 3 | - | 95 | 237 | 11 | 2 | 250 | 211 | 9 | 1 | 221 |
| Total | | | | 149 | | | | 288 | | | | 265 |

Source for both Tables 6.1 a and 6: Labour Department Annual Reports, 1953, 1957, 1961 and 1963.

The average rate of compensation also went up quite considerably for those unfortunate enough to suffer fatal and permanently incapacitating injuries. The low level of compensation in the 1950s as shown in the average rate of compensation for 1953 bears testimony to an era when a comprehensive system of collective bargaining was still in its infancy. The relatively higher level of compensation reached by 1963, however, is a sad commentary on the value placed on African labour; the average rate of compensation for a worker who had died from injuries sustained at work or suffered permanently incapacitating injuries almost equalled one month's wages for a European worker with an average income. As for those who suffered the so-called temporary injuries their rate of compensation was so small as to be of little value, especially in cases where, depending on the nature of the job and the accident, they were discharged.

The prevalence of low wages and poor working conditions becomes all the worse in the face of the persistence of "fairly long hours with little if any overtime pay".²² Almost from the beginning of capitalist penetration and expansion in the country, the length of the working day had been the centre of some of the bitterest struggles between Kenyan workers and employers. In the 1950s and early 1960s the struggle to shorten the working day continued in all the industries with varying degrees of success. By 1963, in the manufacturing, building and construction industries, workers worked between 8 and 10 hours a day for 26 days a month, whereas in wholesale and retail, and transport and communications

²²LDAR, 1957, p. 8.

industries, the work day was from 8 to 12 hours and the number of standard days a month varied between 26 and 30. In agriculture the work day averaged between 5 and 12 hours for 26 to 30 days a month depending on the type of agricultural industry and the season.²³

Thus Kenyan workers worked long hard hours and the majority of them earned paltry wages and lived in miserable conditions. In 1954 the government appointed a committee to examine the extent of destitution among Africans in urban areas. In its report the committee noted that the number of beggars had increased substantially in Nairobi, Mombasa and the other major towns over the years. The report went on to say:

Among women, abandoned concubines are probably numerous. We received estimates of about 10 to 15 per cent of the female population in respect of Nairobi. Marriages of convenience are largely to blame, as the man has no obligation to support the woman and she is eventually cast off, possibly with children. It is usually quite impossible to trace the relatives. If the woman has a home it is not difficult for her to make a living. Usually they have neither home nor hope of employment ... As would be expected children of such unions are often left to roam the streets and there is in Nairobi the problem of vagrant African children and an ever present danger not only that such children will fall into the hands of the police, but that they will fall into criminal habits unless help is given at an early stage.²⁴

²³LDAR, 1963, p. 37. Working hours in the public services tended to be generally shorter than in most industrial undertakings. They ranged between 40 and 48 hours a week. By 1963 many firms offered paid annual leave of between 14 and 21 days. By that date also a number of firms had introduced the system of shift work.

²⁴Report on the Incidence of Destitution Among Africans in Urban Areas, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1954, p. 5.

The report attributed the rising incidence of destitution to "such matters as the break-down of tribalisation, land shortage, the loss of squatters of their homes".²⁵ It concluded:

It is clear to us that there is a problem of destitution among Africans and it seems likely that the number of indigent Africans will tend to increase by reason of the continued operation of factors already mentioned.²⁶

The government was urged to embark on immediate social welfare measures.

If the problem of destitution among Africans in urban centres was serious in 1954 by 1963 it had become catastrophic. Landlessness in the rural areas had increased, thereby forcing tens of thousands of people to migrate to urban centres looking for work, and emergency regulations restricting the movement of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru peoples had been removed so that they were free once more to seek for work in urban centres, precisely at a time when the economy was faltering, all of which led to a staggering growth in the problem of unemployment and a marked decline in the overstretched social services.

It is virtually impossible to give an accurate estimate of the rate of unemployment during these years because "the only figures relating to unemployment were those provided by the Employment Service which are a gross underestimation since the majority of workseekers and employers

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

did not make use of the Employment Services".²⁷ But, from the late 1950s, the enormity of the problem could no longer be denied by the government and the social effects of unemployment could no longer be dismissed by turning a blind eye. In a speech to the Legislative Council in July 1962, Mboya offered an indictment of the unemployment situation as eloquent as any given at the time, so that it is worth quoting at some length:

We are faced with the harsh reality that there are not enough job vacancies available for those who desperately need them. The unemployment situation has grown steadily worse ... Unless something is done about this we are bound to begin very soon to feel the effects of unemployment in other directions. At the moment we feel the effects in economic and social terms and in our various towns in terms of the rising incidence of crimes ... we will very soon be faced with bigger and more serious crimes. We cannot preach peace and law and order to a hungry man who has to steal in order to live, and many of these people have already reached that stage where the only means of survival is by stealing someone else's food. Soon they will be stealing other things. The effects are even more serious on the families of the unemployed, the youths and children. These young people are idle and have no means to live and in the majority of cases they are not taken care of by the local authorities or by the State. The result is that we have rising juvenile crime, prostitution and general degradation of people at a tender age. They sleep out in the open in

²⁷ LDAR, 1959, p. 4. Also see Unemployment, Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1959/60, Government printer, Nairobi, 1960 for more information on the gravity of the unemployment situation. The numbers of the unemployed can partly be gauged from the fact that when the Tripartite Agreement was signed in 1964 between the government, the KFL and the FKE in an effort to relieve the unemployment situation no less than 205,051 men and women reportedly registered for employment during March-April alone. See R. Sandbrook, Proletarians and African Capitalism. The Kenya Case, 1960-1972, p. 159.

abandoned cars and sheds and sometimes just anywhere. They ransack garbage pits and barrows to try to find something to eat and the sight is horrible.²⁸

Thus, increasing unemployment, relative and absolute poverty were leading to more crime, vagrancy and prostitution and swelling prison populations, that is apart from people interned for 'political' reasons under the emergency regulations. In short, political and social violence against workers and among workers in all its multifarious forms was escalating.

THE CENTRALISATION AND INCORPORATION OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The period under review was a very difficult and trying one for organised labour in Kenya. The almost spontaneous labour militancy of the late 1940s was lost in a thorny maze of harsh emergency regulations. When labour militancy did resurface from the late 1950s organised labour often advocated caution and moderation, for by then it had grown into a relatively highly organised bureaucratic machine with its sights set no further than the altar of collective bargaining. But as the trade union movement became more bureaucratised, so did factional and ideological struggles within the movement become more pronounced.

²⁸, 'Desperate Jobs Situation: Mboya', DN 19-7-62. In some industries even skilled workers lost their jobs as well. See LDAR, 1962, p. 3. The KFL discussed the unemployment problem regularly and sent detailed memorandums to the government from time to time on how to tackle it. See CA KFL File 48.

It had always been the aim of official policy since the government's acceptance of the inevitability of the development of trade unions to channel them into 'responsible' non-political trade unionism. The emergency provided the most propitious conditions under which this goal might be realised. Under the threat of proscription trade unions could be coerced into moderation and with the provision of possibilities for realistic collective bargaining over wages they could be lured into adopting 'responsible' attitudes and policies. It was a classic 'carrot and stick' approach.

The 'sticks' with which to beat the trade union movement into the desired shape and orientation were many. The mass removals of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers, in itself, severely disrupted the activities of trade unions. The removals meant that many trade unions lost many of their members and leaders. In the short term, therefore, the removals, arrests and detentions of trade union leaders and workers, and the restriction against their movements, undermined contacts between union branches and their head offices, mostly situated in Nairobi. The organisational weaknesses of the trade unions were aggravated. As the KFRTU first Annual Report put it in 1955:

The detention of some top officials of certain unions resulted in most unions being left with inexperienced leaders, most of whom were too frightened to take an active part in the organisation of their unions ... Some unions haven't held regular meetings, or annual conferences so that the unions have mainly been directed from the top, thereby eliminating the democratic principle which is so essential in any union movement. In most unions administration had been made even more difficult, because of the officials not being

sufficiently literate ... The handicap of illiteracy of many of the officials was greatly reflected in the keeping of union accounts ... several union offices closed down for lack of officials.²⁹

Before long, the unions came under a new, more moderate leadership. The KFRTU was led by Tom Mboya, a young moderately educated and ambitious former veterinary inspector.

However, in the absence of other channels "through which the workers' political problems could be brought to the notice of the government members flocked in union offices with grievances that would have been better dealt with by a political organisation".³⁰ In meetings with the Labour Department the federation raised issues concerning the property and the fate of detainees' dependants, it complained about screening methods and delays and it requested the quick re-instatement of screened union leaders and workers. On a number of occasions the federation reaffirmed its right to express opinion on political matters and, in this connection, it criticised the methods of selecting African members of the Legislative Council and expressed reservations about the Lyttleton Constitution.³¹

This was far from radical political involvement. On the contrary, when, in the KFRTU's own words, "in 1954 the (Mau Mau) terrorists imposed a bus boycott ... the unions strongly refused the suggestion",

²⁹Kenya Federation of Registered Trade Unions, Annual Report, 1955.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

and later when "the terrorists threatened to impose a general strike the government sought the assistance of the Federation to stamp out this threat. Fearlessly and at the risk of their own lives all trade union leaders actively organised against the strike and succeeded in completely stamping out the strike."³² In 1955 the "Federation fully supported the new surrender terms and hoped they would help to bring the Emergency to an end", and it urged "all terrorists and any other Mau Mau adherents to give themselves up before 10th July and warned that failure to do so would only bring harm to themselves".³³ Further, the federation "supported the idea of a multiracial government" and was in fact of the conviction that "responsible African opinion would definitely prefer to retain Colonial Office control in Kenya until such a time that the African will be given equality in all platforms of Kenya's life".³⁴

Despite this declared moderation and the Ministry of Labour's fear that "any legislation debarring trade unions from taking interest in political problems would inevitably result in the activities of the unions going underground, which would be more dangerous than if unions laid open their activities for anyone to see",³⁵ in February 1956 the government tried to ban the KFL. The Registrar of Societies under whom the KFL was registered issued a notice to the federation "calling on it to

³²Ibid.

³³EAS 25-2-56.

³⁴KFRTU Annual Report, 1955.

³⁵KFL Newsletter 8-6-55.

show why its registration should not be cancelled".³⁶ A motion was tabled in the Legislative Council to de-register the federation on the grounds that it was pursuing "objects other than those constitutional objects as set out in its rules and as declared in its application to register".³⁷ It was alleged that the Mau Mau movement had gone underground and infiltrated the trade union movement. The federation was asked to give a written statement that in future it would not involve itself in politics or else face de-registration.

The KFL leaders retorted that it was impossible to draw a line between political, economic and social matters. "Is there a Solomon", it asked bitinglly, "who can determine where the line can be drawn?"³⁸ "Every political issue", the federation contended, "affects workers and is therefore a legitimate concern of the Federation".³⁹ To back its rhetoric the KFL urged its affiliates to withdraw their support for, and representation on, wages councils which the federation regarded as

³⁶EAS 24-2-56. The government was particularly angered by Mboya's frank criticisms of the government's running of the emergency while he was in Europe during his study at Ruskin College, Oxford. This was the ostensible reason behind this attempt to ban the KFL, although what actually seems to have happened is that the government was finally buckling under pressure brought upon it by ultra-conservative settler representatives in the Legislative Council who wanted the last voice of African opinion and dissent muzzled. Familiar charges were levelled that the trade union movement was communist-inspired and part of the grand strategy by the Soviet Union to rule the world.

³⁷EAS 25-2-56.

³⁸EAS 2-3-56.

³⁹Ibid. Also see EAS 13-3-56 and 15-3-56.

ineffectual at best. With the withdrawal of organised labour's support these councils temporarily almost ceased to exist.⁴⁰ In the end, however, the federation realised that the government's threat to ban it was serious; it could certainly not be fended off by counter-arguments, wisecracks and impotent gestures. Consequently, the federation undertook "to have 'prior consultation' with the Kenya government over any 'marginal' matters it wishes to raise, but which the government may consider unduly political and outside normal trade union activity".⁴¹ The federation promised also that no trade union official would take part in any political organisation and political activities in the name of the federation.⁴² The federation was also saved by the direct intervention of the British TUC which sent its General Secretary to Nairobi. The trade union movement had been moved further down the road of 'economistic' unionism.

In addition to such direct confrontational tactics the government continued to employ legislation to hold trade unions under leash. At about the same time that the KFL was being threatened with deregistration the government passed a Trade Unions (Amendment) Ordinance which, in part stipulated that:

Every amendment or alteration of the rules of a trade union shall be sent to the Registrar within 7 days of the making of such amendment or alteration ... No amendment or alteration of the rules

⁴⁰ LDAR, 1956, p. 7.

⁴¹ Sunday Post, 8-4-56.

⁴² Ibid.

of a trade union shall have effect until registered by the Registrar,

who reserved the right to refuse to register such amendment or alteration.⁴³ The government argued that the bill was necessary in order to prevent any union, once registered, from amending its rules in such a way that, had they been submitted originally in their amended form, registration would have been refused.⁴⁴

After the abortive attempt to ban the KFL in 1956, more and more government officials, with the active support of the larger employers, came to the conclusion that if the unions, in the words of one newspaper, could "not be destroyed by a banning order, without qualification or compromise, then they must be cultivated. They must be influenced, not ignored, moulded not slapped in the face."⁴⁵ In short, a decision that had been long in the making had finally become accepted as a cornerstone of labour policy; the trade union movement would be given just enough carrots to chew in order to keep it busy, not restive; satisfied, not craving for action.

⁴³The Registrar could refuse to register any amendment if he was satisfied that by such amendment a) the principal objects of the trade union would be no longer in accord with those set out in the definition of 'trade union', or b) any of the objects of the trade union would be unlawful or would conflict with the provision of the Trade Unions (Amendment) Ordinance. See KNA Labour 11/339.

⁴⁴EAS 26-1-56.

⁴⁵Sunday Post, 8-4-56.

The Labour Department now sought to establish closer working relationship with the KFL and its leaders. To this end frequent meetings were held "over the questions of minimum wages formula, rural wages, unemployment, social security and many other important topics that arose from time to time".⁴⁶ In more practical terms trade unionists resumed their participation on wages councils in 1957 and, in addition to the Wages Advisory Board, the KFL was given representation on the Labour Advisory Board "and also on such other committees that were formed from time to time".⁴⁷ Finally, although trade union legislation was not changed, it became relatively easier than before for trade unions to register as can be seen from the dramatic increase in the number of trade unions registered from 1957. In this connection, we must mention the declassification of some industries formerly designated as essential and which lay outside the ambit of trade unionism. The government declassified these industries apparently in response to a joint KFL/ACIE request.⁴⁸

The last point clearly underscores the growing contacts between the KFL and the ACIE, which constituted the third pillar in the emerging tripartite industrial relations structure in Kenya. It is perhaps not coincidental that the ACIE was formed in 1956, the same year that almost saw the demise of the KFL. As noted already, the ACIE organised around

⁴⁶See KFL 1960 Annual Conference, Report of the General Secretary.

⁴⁷Ibid. Also see KFRTU Annual Report, 1955; and LDAR, 1957, p. 7.

⁴⁸LDAR, 1958, p. 16.

itself among some of the largest industrial firms in the country with the aim of working together with organised labour in order to set up "a system of voluntary negotiations in Kenya, which it was envisioned would be supplementary to and would gradually supersede the paternal industrial regulations set up by the government".⁴⁹ In the eyes of organised labour the ACIE or FKE held two main trump cards: it could provide unions much-needed negotiating power and financial stability.⁵⁰ Moreover, if encouraged the FKE could possibly try to standardise the terms of service throughout the country as much as possible which would help to improve wage and employment conditions among the smaller and more 'backward' employers.⁵¹ The FKE, on the other hand, believed that unions, as the organised voice of labour, were necessary to ensure 'industrial peace'; only they and not the so-called works councils had enough legitimacy among workers to make sure that agreements made with employers would be observed by the workers.⁵² The FKE also realised that despite their preferences or the preferences of the government some form of co-operation with the unions was necessary to prevent the re-emergence of those omnibus unions with mass striking power that had been such a scourge to

⁴⁹FKE Joint Consultative Report, 22 August 1957, (mimeographed).

⁵⁰According to the existing registration and prevailing practices, a trade union was not assured of recognition by employers even after it had been registered by the Registrar of Trade Unions. See KNA Labour 11/339.

⁵¹See KFL 1960 Annual Conference, Report of the General Secretary, and Policy Statement. Also see CA KFL File 238.

⁵²Amsden, op. cit., pp. 63-4.

industry in the late 1940s.⁵³ Thus was began a long courtship of convenience.

Meetings between the KFL and the ACIE were held regularly starting with one in November 1957 under the Chairmanship of the Minister of Labour. In 1958 a Demarcation Agreement embodying the principle of industry-wide unions was reached between the two federations. The agreement was essentially a delicate compromise; some employers would have preferred 'company' unions on the American pattern, unions which management could then easily manipulate or control, while some trade unionists favoured the development of powerful 'general' unions. Both sides were agreed, however, that 'craft' unions were simply inappropriate in an underdeveloped country where the level of skills was low. For the ACIE the development of industrial unions removed the spectre of general unions which could paralyse whole industries, and also minimised the potential for chaos that was deemed to be so rife in British labour relations where trade unionism was an incomplete 'synthetic product' of craft, general and industrial unions. For the KFL the advantage of industrial unions lay in the fact that unlike what 'craft' or 'company' unions could be in a country of Kenya's economic size, they were "large enough to be able to support themselves and to fulfil effectively the needs of the workers".⁵⁴ The consolidation of the structures of

⁵³Ibid., pp. 66-8.

⁵⁴See FKE 'Memorandum on Industrial (vertical), Craft (horizontal) and General (horizontal) unions', 1958 (mimeographed); 'Notes on the Demarcation Agreement', 1958 (mimeographed); and KFL 1960 Annual Conference, Report of the General Secretary, and Policy Statement.

industrial unionism was to be one lasting outcome of the KFL-FKE collaboration.

The processes of joint consultation were also strengthened as can be seen from the growth in the number of joint industrial councils and the number of workers they covered. In 1957 there were 78 such joint consultative and negotiating bodies with agreed written constitutions covering 195,000 workers.⁵⁵ Two years later the number of such bodies had increased to 92 and they covered 218,400 workers.⁵⁶ By 1961, owing to "the continued drive to bring agriculture and plantation workers more within the general pattern of negotiating and consultative machinery, "the number of these councils increased to and covered 240,700 workers, about 40% of the total work force.⁵⁷ Union responses to, and participation on, these councils, of course, varied depending on the industry concerned and the attitudes adopted by employers and the size of the union and ideological orientation of its leadership. According to one interviewee, the more radical trade unionists tended to be suspicious of these joint consultative councils because

they were manufacturing houses for getting information because employers wanted to know what workers felt ... their main aim was to bring about docility of labour, through them employers could smell rats and avert strikes and troubles ...

⁵⁵LDAR, 1957, pp. 14-16.

⁵⁶LDAR, 1959, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁷LDAR, 1961.

But despite their intention to negate the development of trade unions, by participating in these councils workers began getting conscious of their rights.⁵⁸

The more moderate trade unionists, on the other hand,

welcomed the joint industrial councils as useful tools in airing workers grievances ... union effectiveness depended on the strength of a particular union, properly organised unions naturally achieved more ... Most issues concerning workers conditions of service were negotiable ... their (the j.i.c.'s) main role was to ensure that when there was an industrial dispute the machinery to resolve it was available.⁵⁹

It was the latter view which prevailed. In the latter part of 1961 the KFL and the FKE went a step further and organised the National Joint Consultative Council. Mboya was elected its first Chairman. "The KFL and FKE", he said in his opening address at the first meeting,

had now formed independent machinery which would operate without the patronage of the Labour Department ... The KFL fully recognised its joint interests with the FKE in the economic development of the country and would speak firmly for such development and therefore security of investments. Expansion and prosperity could be looked forward to, and now industry, employer and employees were able to speak with one voice and make clear their needs.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Interview with COTU Research Officer, 3-7-80.

⁵⁹ Interview with COTU Administrative Secretary. 9-7-80.

⁶⁰ Minutes of the first meeting of the NJCC 13-9-61 CA KFL File 114.

At the second NJCC meeting union leaders argued forcefully for the introduction of a 'check-off' system. Such a system, in Lubembe's words,

would provide funds which would enable unions to employ responsible and able officials and strengthen the unions in general. There was a future danger that should unions be weak the government might step in and impose the 'check-off' system and 'closed shop' by law and then there would be no free negotiation without government intervention.⁶¹

The FKE agreed to withdraw their objections against the introduction of check-off and more and more employers introduced it in their firms. Before long, too, joint KFL-FKE "training courses between shop stewards and junior supervisors" were being held and covered "all matters related to industrial relations and the labour situation".⁶²

If only to underline the complexity of KFL-FKE relations, however, it ought to be mentioned that the two federations never ceased entertaining mutual misgivings. The KFL was troubled by the FKE's occasional failure to enlist the support of its affiliates to accept certain jointly agreed conditions. Sometimes "this lack of influence on the part of the FKE created a situation which almost led to a breakdown in the relations between the KFL and FKE".⁶³ Many FKE-affiliated firms continued to practise the coercive and paternalistic methods of the past; they

⁶¹Minutes of the first meeting of the NJCC 4-10-61 CA KFL File 460.

⁶²CA KFL File 187.

⁶³KFL 1960 Annual Conference Report of the General Secretary.

victimised trade union officials, refused or procrastinated on union recognition, and ran the joint industrial councils in a heavy-handed manner. The KFL, therefore, called upon the FKE to put its house in order, to ensure that its members genuinely advocated and implemented measures that would lead to labour stabilisation and the improvement of general working conditions. And more, the FKE was urged to launch a massive recruitment campaign so that more employers, including small Asian and African employers, became FKE members.⁶⁴

The FKE also levelled similar charges, that the unions suffered from indiscipline, that they sometimes failed to control the behaviour of their members and enforce joint agreements. Both parties were, of course, partially right, essentially because the joint exercise of collective bargaining they were engaged in represented an attempt to freeze the contradictions between labour and capital into an institutional framework and this was plainly impossible under the intensely volatile conditions of decolonisation. Hence, the persistence, one might say intensification, of labour protest during this very period when the KFL and FKE were busy erecting the edifice of a new industrial system.

The KFL's misgivings about the government were even more vociferous. First, the federation attacked the government's labour policies. The KFL drew attention to the tendency of labour officers to side with

⁶⁴Ibid. Also see P.F. Kibisu (Ag. Sec. Gen. KFL) - Minister of Labour 15-10-62 KNA Labour 11/339.

employers during industrial disputes.⁶⁵ The government was accused of "being very slow in fulfilling or meeting the conditions stipulated in the Carpenter Committee", especially with reference to rural wages.⁶⁶ The KFL called for the adoption throughout the country of a high wage policy so as to improve the livelihood of workers. On social security the KFL noted that although a social security committee had been appointed a few years earlier, by 1960 no steps had "been taken to introduce even a skeleton National Insurance Scheme to give a minimum of security in old age", and demanded that one be introduced without delay.⁶⁷ The KFL also argued that it was the government's responsibility to provide better housing for workers and to end the policy of segregated residential areas and housing.⁶⁸

Second, the KFL tried to press the government to "bring Kenya's legislation about trade unionism and trade disputes in line with ILO Conventions".⁶⁹ Among other things, the federation reminded the

⁶⁵In order to correct this bias the KFL suggested that the government should set up a well manned industrial relations department and an independent industrial or arbitration court. The government ignored these suggestions until Trade Disputes Act was passed in 1964 setting up the Industrial Court.

⁶⁶It is rather ironical that in its Annual Report for the same year the KFL argued against "a sudden move by the government to introduce statutory wage machinery" in the agricultural industry for fear that it "might have adverse effects on the efforts that were being made to establish voluntary negotiating and joint consultative machinery". KFL 1960 Annual Conference Report.

⁶⁷The KFL: This is our stand, 1960.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹KFL proposals for the Amendment of the Trade Unions Ordinance, 1952. KNA Labour 11/339.

government of ILO provisions which stipulated that workers and employers had the right to "establish and join organisations without previous authorisation" and that they also had the right to "draw up freely their own constitution with no interference from public authorities".⁷⁰ These proposals to change trade union legislation found little favour with the government.

Third, the KFL attacked the way the government was running the economy, particularly its failure to resolve the problem of unemployment. The KFL charged that the government's "negligence and carelessness in handling the situation during the Emergency was to blame, in particular, the fact that "land consolidation was implemented and carried through without serious thought as to the consequential problems that would arise after consolidation".⁷¹ The federation urged the government, instead of being contented with the setting up of an unemployment committee, to embark on something practical like introducing emergency public works schemes and persuading industry to limit the use of machines temporarily in order "to halt the replacement of labour in a

⁷⁰The KFL recommended that registration should be made voluntary and not compulsory; registration should accord automatic recognition to a trade union from the government and employers; there should not be provisions for probationary trade unions; the definition of 'trade unions' should be enlarged to include a central organisation of trade unions which was then not so that the KFL, for instance, had to be registered with the Registrar of Societies; the right to strike should be upheld and prohibitions against picketing in the name of 'intimidation' or 'creating public disorder' should be repealed. The Registrar of Trade made a lengthy reply but hardly conceded anything. See KNA Labour 11/339.

⁷¹KFL 1960 Annual Conference Report.

process of automation".⁷²

As was its practice, the government usually gave vague promises that it would address some of these issues if and when the economy improved. The KFL was well aware that unions had too much to lose if they adopted a completely confrontational attitude towards the government, or for that matter, the employers. And the government never let them forget that it was well within its powers to ban any unions which overstepped the bounds of 'responsible' trade unionism. Few union leaders relished the prospect of having their unions banned; these were men who had risen to positions of leadership during the harsh days of the emergency and direct confrontation was not their forte.

The government was also certainly lucky in having Tom Mboya as the Minister of Labour during this critical period. Mboya was not only a man who had been the longest serving and most powerful secretary general of the KFL until then, he was also an astute political operator. He was only too aware of the internal weaknesses of the KFL, its internecine factional rivalries and how to manipulate them. Moreover, as a Cabinet Minister and one of the top leaders of KANU, he had considerable powers of patronage at his disposal. No less important, he still had loyal lieutenants left in key positions in the KFL. As the quirks of decolonisation history would have it on 15th October, 1962, he sat facing his former colleagues from the KFL in his capacity as Minister of Labour

⁷²Ibid. Convinced that the government was doing nothing to alleviate unemployment the KFL went as far as asking for big reductions in the salaries of ministers and permanent secretaries! The idea was rejected outright, not surprisingly. See KFL Conference Resolutions - Governor, 15-6-62 CA KFL File 40 and KFL File 49.

and, together with the President of the FKE, they solemnly signed the Industrial Relations Charter, the magna carta of industrial relations in Kenya.

There was little that was new in the Charter; the Charter was first and foremost a codification of prevailing collective bargaining practices and procedures and embodied all the major provisions already agreed upon between the KFL, FKE and the government in the course of the preceding tumultuous years. Thus employers and unions undertook to "promote maximum co-operation in the interests of good industrial relations", and "to settle any or all industrial disputes ... by mutual negotiation, conciliation" with "compulsory arbitration, or strikes or lockouts as a last resort".⁷³ It was also agreed that there should be speedy implementation of awards and settlements agreed upon, and the charter and the spirit of peaceful industrial relations should be upheld by using the existing machinery, like the joint industrial councils, and in more difficult cases, the Joint Disputes Commissions. The Ministry of Labour was to be involved as little as possible in these conciliation procedures. Finally, the charter upheld the principles of equal pay for equal work and the abolition of any form of discrimination with regard to employment opportunities and conditions of service.

No sooner had the ink on the charter dried when 300 more firms sought refuge under the sprawling umbrella of the FKE. In 1956 when the FKE was formed it had about 30 affiliates and by 1960, 70.⁷⁴

⁷³Industrial Relations Charter, Nairobi, October 1962 (mimeographed).

⁷⁴See CA KFL File 238.

Clearly, the Industrial Relations Charter forced those employers reluctant to move with the times to see the writing on the wall that independence under an African government was indeed just around the corner. Moreover, as unions emerged in industries hitherto unaffected by trade union activity, more firms reached out for the seasoned helping hand of the FKE. Joining the FKE, therefore, became a matter of enlightened self-protection. In the next few years the FKE launched an effective membership drive. By 1967 the federation had 1,900 affiliates, 1,200 of them in the industrial sector and the remaining 700 in the agricultural sector.⁷⁵

Arguably, since the power of capital is based on control of the means of production and this control is not transferred to the interest associations of business by individual firms, while trade union power is based on the effectiveness of its collective organisation, it meant that the incorporation of the union movement into state structures was more significant for labour than the incorporation of the FKE for capital. To put it differently, trade unions, more than the business associations, play a more critical role for their class as agencies of struggle, of representation and of social control, if only because of the role of the capitalist state itself in cementing a common interest among capital's competing fractions.⁷⁶ Hence, in Kenya incorporation of the trade union movement not only encouraged unions to grow in numbers, the union

⁷⁵Amsden, op. cit., p. 86.

⁷⁶See Leo Panitch, 'Trade Unions and the Capitalist State', New Left Review, 125, Jan.-Feb. 1981, p. 42.

movement also became more centralised so that union policy increasingly came to be made through the permanent apparatus of the KFL and less at the level of individual unions or local branches for that matter. Thus, incorporation into a network of collaborative labour practices did not entail that unions cut their ties with their base, but rather that they used those ties to legitimate state policy and consolidate their control over their members.

It was not until emergency regulations began to be relaxed that the policy of fostering the growth of an institutionalised system of industrial relations could be implemented with few impediments. As Table 6.2 below shows, until 1956 when trade unions were still smarting under very prohibitive emergency conditions, the number of trade unions grew extremely slowly. But between 1957 and 1960 the number doubled from 19 to 38 and in the next three years 14 new unions were registered, thus bringing the total number of registered trade unions in 1963 to 52.

Before their registration some of these unions, like the three unions registered in 1957, had previously existed as staff associations.⁷⁷ Most of the newly registered trade unions were, however, of recent formation. Remarkable developments occurred in the agricultural industry where in 1959, for the first time, three unions were formed in the sisal, coffee and tea industries. In 1961 the coffee and sisal unions amalgamated to form the General Agricultural Workers' Union (GAWU). Two years later GAWU was joined by the tea union, and the Kenya Plantation and

⁷⁷LDAR, 1957, p. 13. In the following year two of the newly registered unions had also formerly existed as staff associations, See LDAR, 1958, p. 13.

TABLE 6.2 REGISTERED TRADE UNIONS AS AT 31ST DECEMBER, 1963

| Date of Registration | Name of Trade Union | Membership | | Race | Income to Nearest £1 | Expenditure to Nearest £1 | Total Assets to Nearest £1 |
|----------------------|--|------------|---------|----------|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| | | Book | Voting | | | | |
| 5- 4-61 | The East African Standard Asian Staff Union | 55 | 53 | Asian | 54 | 8 | 278 |
| 5- 9-46 | The Printing and Kindred Trades Workers Union of Kenya | 1,754 | 1,754 | Open | 2,302 | 3,644 | 619 |
| 21- 4-47 | East African Railways and Harbours Asian Union, Kenya | 1,728 | 1,728 | Asian | 1,136 | 2,064 | 2,880 |
| 27- 9-47 | Transport and Allied Workers' Union | 4,457 | 4,457 | Open | 4,159 | 4,331 | 316 |
| 10- 7-48 | Tailors and Textiles Workers' Union | 13,658 | 13,658 | Open | 4,386 | 4,414 | 488 |
| 27-11-51 | The Domestic and Hotel Workers Union | 34,683 | 34,683 | Open | 6,491 | 6,058 | 232 |
| 3-12-51 | Kenya Pilots Association | 93 | 93 | European | 666 | 971 | 507 |
| 4- 2-52 | Harbour Asian Union of East Africa | 5 | 5 | Asian | 37 | 244 | 1,142 |
| 22- 5-52 | East Africa Federation of Building and Construction Workers' Union | 2,837 | 805 | Open | 1,610 | 1,123 | 674 |
| 3- 6-52 | Kenya Distributive and Commercial Workers' Union | 13,988 | 13,988 | Open | 7,519 | 6,520 | 1,353 |
| 4- 9-53 | The Kenya Local Government Workers' Union | 11,130 | 11,130 | Open | 4,014 | 4,186 | 1,298 |
| 2-10-53 | Railway African Union | 14,929 | 14,929 | African | 8,973 | 8,179 | 2,397 |
| 20-10-54 | The Dockworkers' Union | 6,137 | 6,137 | Open | 7,643 | 7,823 | 761 |
| 12-12-55 | Mombasa Local Government Service Association | 70 | 70 | Open | 106 | 147 | 131 |
| 3- 3-56 | The Nairobi City Council Senior Staff Association | 153 | 153 | European | 67 | 62 | 815 |
| 17- 7-56 | The Nairobi Asian Local Government Staff Association | 123 | 123 | Asian | 31 | 129 | 287 |
| 7- 2-57 | Union of Posts and Telecommunications Employees (Kenya) | 2,348 | 2,348 | Open | 3,140 | 3,365 | 1,829 |
| 25- 4-57 | Civilian Clerical Association (War Dept.) | 155 | 155 | Open | 18 | 27 | 108 |
| 3- 7-57 | East African Railway and Harbours European Staff Association - Kenya | 188 | 188 | European | 237 | 448 | 1,116 |
| 18- 4-58 | Cable and Wireless Workers' Union of Kenya | 89 | 89 | Open | 167 | 283 | 213 |
| 28- 4-58 | East African Posts and Telecommunications Controlling Officers Association - Kenya | 66 | 66 | Open | 50 | 346 | 62 |
| 27- 6-58 | Tobacco, Brewing and Bottling Workers Union | 1,750 | 1,750 | Open | 2,018 | 1,944 | 1,831 |
| 21- 7-58 | Kenya Dyers, Cleaners and Laundries Workers' Union | 315 | 315 | Open | 306 | 219 | 136 |
| 28- 7-58 | Life Insurance Corporation of India Employees | 85 | 85 | Open | 21 | 15 | 60 |
| 30- 7-58 | Kenya Electrical Trades Workers' Union | 846 | 846 | Open | 1,323 | 1,325 | 171 |
| 5- 8-58 | Kenya Petroleum Oil Workers' Union | 1,925 | 1,925 | Open | 5,286 | 5,304 | 1,770 |
| 11- 8-58 | Kenya Chemical Workers' Union | 2,150 | 2,150 | Open | 2,866 | 2,394 | 1,608 |
| 3-11-58 | National East Africa Seamen's Union | 420 | 420 | Open | 962 | 986 | 117 |
| 2-12-58 | Asian Postal Union (Kenya) | 372 | 311 | Asian | 178 | 598 | 333 |
| 16- 1-59 | The Kenya Timber and Furniture Workers' Union | *1,247 | 1,247 | Open | 742 | 786 | 54 |
| 17- 8-59 | Kenya Civil Servants' Union | 15,727 | 15,727 | Open | 10,081 | 9,598 | 2,120 |
| 24- 4-59 | Municipal Asian Staff Association, Kisumu | 25 | 25 | Asian | 14 | 1 | 65 |
| 14- 5-59 | Kenya National Union of Teachers | 13,041 | 9,005 | Open | 5,363 | 5,856 | 572 |
| 7-10-59 | Kenya Engineering Workers' Union | 5,481 | 5,481 | Open | 1,904 | 1,874 | 238 |
| 3- 3-60 | Kenya Motor Engineering and Allied Workers' Union | 2,405 | 2,405 | Open | 3,409 | 3,350 | 529 |
| 24- 8-60 | Kenya Shoe and Leather Workers' Union | 1,984 | 1,984 | Open | 3,064 | 3,029 | 280 |
| 12- 9-60 | Electricity Supply Personnel Association | 184 | 184 | Open | 525 | 296 | 1,111 |
| 29-11-60 | Kenya Union of Sugar Plantation Workers | *987 | 987 | Open | 418 | 299 | 376 |
| 30- 5-61 | Nairobi County Council Staff Association | 68 | 68 | Open | 46 | 191 | Nil |
| 23- 6-61 | The Tobacco Workers' Union - (Kenya) | 973 | 973 | Open | 726 | 728 | 202 |
| 7- 9-61 | Kenya Quarry and Mine Workers' Union | *1,550 | 15 | Open | 34 | 32 | 14 |
| 13- 9-61 | The Airline Officers' Association (Nairobi Area Group) | 18 | 18 | Open | 86 | 69 | 125 |
| 9-11-61 | Eldoret Local Government Service Association | 30 | 30 | Open | 46 | 19 | 121 |
| 24-11-61 | Senior Civil Servants' Association of Kenya | 1,726 | 1,726 | Open | 1,853 | 2,042 | 3,856 |
| 8-12-61 | Air Ministry Civilian Employees Association, Royal Air Force, Eastleigh | 108 | 108 | Open | 20 | 15 | 92 |
| 8-12-61 | East African Airways European Staff Association | 135 | 135 | European | 78 | 61 | 522 |
| 1- 8-62 | Kenya Union of Journalists | 94 | 94 | Open | 59 | 2 | 158 |
| 5- 9-62 | Common Services African Civil Servants Union (Kenya) | 550 | 548 | Open | 99 | 40 | 50 |
| 11-10-62 | Kenya African Customs Workers' Union | 252 | 252 | African | 127 | 106 | 66 |
| 14- 2-63 | Nairobi City Council African Staff Association | 72 | 10 | African | 8 | 7 | 3 |
| 22- 8-63 | Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers' Union | tt | tt | Open | tt | tt | tt |
| Deferred | The Fire Brigades Union of Kenya (Probationary) | 12 | 12 | Open | 12 | 7 | 5 |
| Deferred | The Broadcasting Workers' Union (Kenya) (Probationary) | 136 | 136 | Open | 111 | Nil | 111 |
| 19- 9-63 | Kenya African Game Hunting and Safari Workers' Union | 342 | 342 | Open | 140 | 125 | 15 |
| | | 163,656 | 155,926 | | 94,731 | 96,190 | 34,218 |

*Information as at 31st December 1962. t-Information as at 31st December 1961. tt-Figures not available.

Source: Registrar General's Annual Report, 1963.

Agricultural Workers' Union (KPAWU) was formed. The only other agricultural union, the Kenya Union of Sugar Plantation Workers formed in 1960, remained separate. Although the above table does not indicate details of the KPAWU's membership and finances, if the combined membership figures for GAWU and TPWU in 1962 are anything to go by, then KPAWU did not have less than 18,000 members by 1963.⁷⁸ The trade union movement had come a long way; even were we to exclude the membership of the KPAWU we would still find that more than 30% of all workers in recorded employment in Kenya in 1963 were unionised compared to less than 5% in 1955.⁷⁹

Not only did the unions increase their membership, their financial stability also improved substantially as demonstrated in table 6.3.

The dramatic improvements in the financial position of the unions did not merely represent a corresponding increase in membership but also reflected changes in methods of collecting dues. So long as the state and employers were not favourably disposed towards trade unions, the collection of union dues was entirely dependent on members' willingness and ability to pay. Lack of employer recognition and victimisation of union officials made it very difficult to collect dues through shop stewards. Consequently, in the early 1950s it was common practice for unions to use paid women collectors, a system which had many shortcomings. According to the KFRTU:

⁷⁸In 1960 GAWU had 10,000 members and TPWU 18,052. See Registrar General's Annual Report, 1960. See also CA KFL File 703.

⁷⁹The KFL's own estimates indicate that by December 1962 49% of the workers were organised in unions. See Mak/B/1/6.

TABLE 6.3 INCOME, EXPENDITURE AND ASSETS OF SELECT TRADE UNIONS, 1955, 1959, 1961 AND 1963.

| Name of Union | 1955 | | | 1959 | | | 1961 | | | 1963 | | |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | Inc. | Exp. | Ass. | Inc. | Exp. | Ass. | Inc. To Nearest £ | Exp. | Ass. | Inc. | Exp. | Ass. |
| T.A.W.U. | 500 | 421 | 82 | 1480 | 1274 | 241 | 3339 | 3164 | 479 | 4159 | 4331 | 316 |
| D.H.W.U. | 428 | 417 | 47 | 1143 | 1054 | 213 | 5066 | 4491 | 780 | 6491 | 6058 | 432 |
| K.D.C.W.U. | 164 | 154 | 42 | 1645 | 1100 | 660 | 5388 | 4522 | 948 | 7519 | 6520 | 1353 |
| K.L.G.W.U. | 676 | 694 | 200 | 1935 | 1778 | 785 | 3370 | 2903 | 1423 | 4014 | 4186 | 1298 |
| R.A.U. | 839 | 660 | 324 | 859 | 881 | 270 | 859 | 881 | 270 | 8973 | 8179 | 2397 |
| D.W.U. | 448 | 222 | 273 | 2275 | 2652 | n.a. | 3399 | 2825 | 1508 | 7643 | 7823 | 761 |

Source: Registrar General's Annual Reports, 1955, 1959, 1961 and 1963.

In all cases up to 80% of the dues collected went to pay these collectors' wages. In a few cases where the collectors had failed to bring in an income above their wages the unions had been faced with the problem of finding other money so as to pay the wages.⁸⁰

The scope for corruption under this arrangement is evident. But even this avenue of collecting dues was closed during the emergency. "Allegations have been made", the KFRTU wrote regretfully, "that these collectors use their position as an opportunity to collect funds for Mau Mau. The government has therefore decided not to allow any more of these collectors."⁸¹ Thus, in the mid-1950s unions found themselves in a severe financial crisis, thereby reinforcing pressures for an accommodation with the state and employers.

From the late 1950s a growing number of employers either introduced check-off or made it easier for unions to collect dues on their premises. Practically all the unions listed in Table 6.3 had by 1961 negotiated check-off with the relevant employers for all or some of their members.⁸²

With improved financial security, unions could be organised more efficiently. For sure, corruption continued and so did clientelism and patronage and, with a bigger purse available, it was probably more tempting and rewarding to those who were in a position to indulge in

⁸⁰ KFRTU Annual Report, 1955.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² CA KFL File 449.

such practices.⁸³ That granted, however, unions could now afford to have permanent officials solely devoted to union work. Moreover, although contacts between branches and their head offices still left a lot to be desired, the situation was far better than in the days when some unions could hardly afford to buy stationery and communicate with each other.

Nowhere was this enhanced organisational capacity among unions more in evidence than at the KFL. Symbolic of the federation's improved position was the construction and opening of its then fairly imposing and spacious Solidarity Building headquarters. The KFL successfully solicited and received funds from a number of international trade union organisations and with these funds it was able to launch a major drive to organise workers who were not yet unionised. In 1959 the federation launched a well-publicised recruitment campaign called 'Operation Expansion'. In that year alone the KFL was apparently responsible for the formation of 6 out of the 11 unions formed, including the 3 agricultural unions.⁸⁴ Usually the KFL would send not only financial aid but also second members of its own executive committee or appoint others who, almost invariably, stayed on to become leaders of the new unions.

In this way the KFL managed to increase the number of its affiliates from 8 in 1955 to 17 in 1958 and 28 in 1961. KFL leaders felt that they had to take such an active organisational role because few others

⁸³The Coffee Plantation Workers' Union, for example, was notorious for mismanagement. In 1960 the general secretary of the union and a few others faced charges of theft; it was alleged that the union had spent Shs. 150,000/- in one year and was Shs. 30,000/- in debt. See LDAR, 1961, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁴See LDAR, 1959, p. 13; and KFL 1960 Annual Conference Report.

could do it, especially in an era when Africanisation was removing many able people into supervisory positions and also especially now that so many industrial unions had to be set up where previously a few general unions could or had sufficed. With the FKE's support the KFL managed to get the government to waive the requirement that union officers should be employed in the industry to which their union was attached.

Further indications of the growing trend towards centralisation in the trade union movement can be seen in the growing number of non-racial unions. In 1955, despite many non-racial union constitutions, virtually all the major unions were racially exclusive. By 1963 the situation had completely changed.⁸⁵ The streamlining of unions along industrial

⁸⁵ In 1963 39 out of the 52 registered unions were open to all races; 3 continued to cater exclusively for Africans, 5 for Asian and 4 for Europeans. Ironically, it was in the Nairobi Municipality and the railways, both of them among the oldest employers in the colony, that exclusive racial unions continued to exist. For the railways there can be little doubt that its policy of strict occupational and racial differentiation at work and in residential estates discouraged the formation of collective non-racial unions. The railways had traditionally been one of the most paternalistic employers and over the years it had managed to develop quite effective strategies of co-optation and a fairly advanced system of industrial relations geared to prevent the growth of meaningful solidarity between workers of the different races as well as to ensure perennial cleavages between the leadership and membership in individual unions. See Report on the State of Industrial Relations in the East African Railways and Harbours Administration, Nairobi, 1960; East African Railways and Harbours, Industrial Relations Machinery 1962; for detailed studies of railway workers in Kenya, see R.D. Grillo, African Railwaymen, Solidarity and Opposition in an East African Labour Force, OUP, London, 1973, and Race, Class and Militancy: An African Trade Union, 1939-65, Chandler, New York, 1974. See also K.M. Arap Korir, 'The Capital-Labour Contradiction on the Railway in Kenya During the Decline of Classical Colonialism', (mimeo). It is significant to note that while the Railway African Union was concerned about bread and butter issues and the state of management-employee relations, in the early 1960s the EAR & H Asian Union (together with the EA High Commission Asian Staff Association and the Asian Postal Union) was petitioning the government to offer its members pension and job security

non-racial lines did not by any means indicate that racial and occupational divisions in employment had become unimportant, rather it showed that internal and external pressures had increased for labour to enhance the effectiveness of its collective organisation by at least removing some of the more obvious signs of its internal divisions.

Centralisation of trade unionism was geared to facilitate the articulation of organised labour with state policy and capital. Incorporation of the union movement, however, was fraught with many contradictions and limitations, if for no other reason than that incorporation by itself could not eliminate class conflict over the labour process and distribution. In fact the more the state succeeded in incorporating trade unions and legitimating state policy through the latter's participation in framing and administering it, the more risks there were that in due course this would undermine the very legitimacy of trade unions among workers.

To begin with, the trend towards the centralisation and incorporation of the trade union movement in Kenya encouraged the formation of unions from the top down as we have seen in the case of the KFL's recruitment and organisation campaigns. Such a process of creating unions contributed to the growth of alienation between union leaders and their rank and file members and, therefore, the stifling of the latter's active participation in union affairs. As Kubai warned during his brief tenure as the KFL's Director of Organisation after his release from

guarantees similar to those offered to British civil servants working in Kenya. The Asian unions wanted to protect themselves against possible victimisation after Independence. See 'A Tragedy': A History of Forgotten Men, *op. cit.*

detention, "the system of remitting funds from KFL to unions makes them lazy and expectant".⁸⁶ On another occasion, he noted that "the policy of interfering in the appointment of union leaders undermines these leaders by divorcing them from their members".⁸⁷ Kubai's was not an isolated voice, for complaints were heard from an increasing number of unions that KFL branches or officials were interfering with their work.

What gave these criticisms particular force, and why the KFL did not generally heed them, was because the federation's membership recruitment drive was aimed at more than increasing the numbers of unionised workers in order to confront the government and employers with greater strength. The drive was also an integral part of a struggle between the KFL and rival trade union federations which rose intermittently from 1959 to 1965 when the government forcibly disbanded the KFL and its then rival Kenya African Workers Congress (KAWC) to form the Central Organisation of Trade Unions (COTU). Factionalism, therefore, was another manifestation of the increasing conflicts and contradictions within the labour movement as a result of its growing integration into the corporatist structures of the state.

Factionalism took many forms; individual struggles for leadership, formation of splinter groups and separatist unions, and mobilisation campaigns to destabilise the unions of rival factions. The immediate causes of factionalism were also many; activation of occupational differentiation among union members by union leaders and management; politicisation

⁸⁶CA KFL File 49.

⁸⁷CA KFL File 167.

of ethnicity by union leaders keen to maintain their positions during a period of severe unemployment and fierce competition for jobs as detained and repatriated Kikuyu, Embu and Meru workers returned to the employment centres seeking their old jobs back or new ones; ideological cleavages over the direction of trade union development and relations with the state, employers and international labour organisations; struggles for power amongst those who were prone to use the trade union movement as a spring board to politics; and the infusion of political factionalism into trade union ranks either directly or indirectly by the parties and politicians involved.⁸⁸ At the turn of the sixties factionalism was also fueled by conflicts between the new breed of trade unionists fearful of the retiring old guard of radical trade unionists and nationalists like Kubai and Singh.⁸⁹

Factionalism in the Kenyan labour movement was, of course, as old as the movement itself, but in the 1950s and 1960s it assumed an unparalleled intensity. The locus of explanation for this lies in the conjunctural responses of organised labour to the spasmodic events of decolonisation and the contradictions inherent in the process of incorporating trade unions into a collaborative network with capital and the state, for, after all, trade unions are

⁸⁸For a detailed discussion see R. Sandbrook, op. cit., Chapters 4 and 5.

⁸⁹See Tom Mboya, Freedom and After, Andre Deutsch, London, 1963, Chapter 4.

working class organisations which, however, reformist, are the vehicle through which class struggle is waged, day-by-day and year-by-year ... through the mobilisation of opposition within union organisations at the policy or union elections level, or through the expression of unofficial strikes on a large scale trade unions ... attempt to renegotiate their place in the corporatist political structures. Thus, what characterises the development of corporatist structures, no less than their persistence ... is their instability.⁹⁰

The formation of the KTUC in 1959 foreshadowed the nature of things to come in the next few years. From then on one of the principal expressions of factionalism would be the formation of rival trade union organisations. KTUC and KFL leaders were mutually suspicious and contemptuous of each other's motives and practices. A lot has been written on this mutual recrimination, posturing and propaganda, and on the personal backgrounds, predilections and idiosyncracies and opportunism among the main protagonists in the conflict which obviously shaped the direction the factional struggles took.⁹¹ But here we are mostly interested in the effects this factionalism had on the development of trade unionism in Kenya.

Although the KTUC was to have a short chequered history, its impact was to be more lasting, for in the attempt to meet the KTUC challenge the KFL adopted measures whose consequences went further than the mere destruction of the KTUC; in the process the internal organisational structures of the KFL itself and the whole trade union movement were

⁹⁰ Leo Panitch, op. cit., pp. 43-5.

⁹¹ See Mboya, op. cit.; Lubembe, op. cit.; Sandbrook, op. cit.; Dayton and Savage, op. cit. See also Oginga Odinga. Not Yet Uhuru. An Autobiography. Heinemann, London, 1967. Also see F.J. Odit-Mafuta 'Ideology and the Struggle Within the Kenya Trade Unions', USSC.

altered.

The KFL's response to the KTUC challenge included a major organisational drive that we have already referred to and an extensive educational propaganda programme.⁹² The KFL also tried to weaken the KTUC at its very base by breaking the Building and Construction Workers Union (BCWU) which was the nucleus of the KTUC. This was achieved when the quarry and mine workers, who constituted the core of the BCWU formed the Kenya Quarry and Mine Workers Union in 1961. In addition, the KFL resorted to a policy of isolating and expelling or purging KTUC sympathisers and other 'confused' elements within its affiliated unions by arranging and financing 're-organisation' conferences for the 'contaminated' unions where KFL-sponsored candidates won easily since "prior support from the majority of union leaders" was always secured "before they came to the conferences".⁹³

These tactics reinforced tendencies to centralise trade union decision-making within the KFL and instigated or exacerbated factionalism within individual unions. It is not coincidental, therefore, that during the period that the KTUC and the KFL were locked in bitter struggle to undermine each other's base, rivalries in the major unions like RAU,

⁹² See Lubembe's vivid account of these propaganda campaigns which even involved the showing of films to remote rural workers. Lubembe, *ibid.*, pp. 116-121.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 128. The only other union which was affiliated to the KTUC was the Printing and Kindred Trade Union, whose leader Wilson Makuna returned to the KFL-fold only a few months after the KTUC's formation. Originally the KTUC had hoped to have 6 affiliates, its failure to achieve this was a clear indication of the KFL's strategy to isolate it. Nevertheless, individual leaders from other unions did join the KTUC and even held office. Most of them, however, were eventually dismissed from their unions.

CPWU, SPWU, TAWU, DWU and KDCWU reached levels hitherto unheard of.⁹⁴

As long as the KTUC and its affiliates or sympathisers continued to function legally, however, the KFL could not destroy them entirely, all it could do was to weaken them or hope that they would atrophy on their own. Consequently, the KFL sought to enlist the support of the state in its battle against the KTUC. The KFL prevailed upon the government to refuse the KTUC registration and to ensure that "relevant clauses of the law are amended to prevent not only the formation of any other centre outside the KFL",⁹⁵ but also the formation of breakaway unions, for "without such control the result would be a free for all among existing unions, all competing to recruit wherever and whoever they wished".⁹⁶ As a result of KFL pressures the KTUC was subsequently refused registration and it was disbanded shortly afterwards. The government also refused the registration of two major breakaway unions although they had more members than their erstwhile registered unions.⁹⁷

The government was clearly more sympathetic to the KFL than to its rivals and breakaway unions. But the more the KFL and its affiliated unions called upon the state to regulate these factional struggles the

⁹⁴In 1962, for example, the RAU decided to expel members associated with the KTUC. See DN 12-7-62. Sandbrook, op. cit., and Grillo op. cit. have dealt at some length with the factional struggles in some of these unions.

⁹⁵KFL letter - the ICFTU 20-9-62, CA KFL File 64. Makerere University, Kampala, Dec. 18-20, 1974, Mimeo.

⁹⁶KFL Proposals on the Amendment of Trade Union Ordinance, 1952, KNA Labour 11/339.

⁹⁷See Sandbrook, op. cit., p. 103 and footnote 16, p. 207.

TABLE 6.4 STOPPAGES OF WORK ACCORDING TO SECTOR, 1953-63.

| | 1953 | | | 1955 | | | 1957 | | | 1959 | | | 1961 | | | 1962 | | | 1963 | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|------------|-----------|----------------|------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------|
| | No. of Workers | | Days | No. of Workers | | Days | No. of Workers | | Days | No. of Workers | | Days | No. of Workers | | Days | No. of Workers | | Days | No. of Workers | | Days | |
| | No. | Involved | Lost | No. | Involved | Lost | No. | Involved | Lost | No. | Involved | Lost | No. | Involved | Lost | No. | Involved | Lost | No. | Involved | Lost | |
| PRIVATE INDUSTRY | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Agriculture | 13 | 1,187 | 1,133 | 9 | 786 | 682 | 22 | 3,149 | 2,618 | 19 | 6,323 | 13,042 | 67 | 10,690 | 38,241 | 78 | 73,327 | 266, | 81 | 23,820 | 62,602 | |
| Mining & Quarrying | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 1,530 | 7,511 | 5 | 2,232 | 71,445 | 6 | 484 | 4,864 | 1 | 42 | 42 | 5 | 391 | 2,170 | |
| Building & Construction | 2 | 151 | 12 | 7 | 527 | 524 | 13 | 1,717 | 1,908 | - | - | - | 20 | 2,660 | 25,120 | 5 | 366 | 366 | 6 | 664 | 1,555 | |
| Manufacturing | 11 | 1,078 | 1,079 | 3 | 71 | 46 | 10 | 649 | 282 | 16 | 3,078 | 16,727 | 39 | 8,207 | 40,170 | 99 | 11,886 | 58,995 | 66 | 8,337 | 37,324 | |
| Electric Supply and Generation | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | 100 | 79 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 44 | 38 | |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 13,756 | 10,742 | 3 | 857 | 7,112 | 7 | 1,320 | 3,268 | 9 | 1,902 | 5,784 | 9 | 2,151 | 13,890 | |
| Docks | - | - | - | 1 | 14,400 | 78,000 | - | - | - | 2 | 5,002 | 5,787 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Commerce | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 40 | 14,033 | 103,973 | |
| Miscellaneous | 3 | 66 | 28 | 9 | 1,712 | 2,521 | 12 | 706 | 466 | 16 | 956 | 1,110 | 26 | 2,716 | 7,291 | 68 | 8,485 | 26,499 | 14 | 1,212 | 2,987 | |
| Total | 29 | 2,482 | 2,252 | 29 | | | | | | 61 | 18,448 | 115,223 | 165 | 26,077 | 118,954 | 260 | 96,008 | 358,397 | 222 | 50,652 | 24,539 | |
| PUBLIC SERVICES | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Kenya Govt. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 100 | 100 |
| Local Govt. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 4 | 2,281 | 8,443 |
| E.A. Common Services | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 3 | 1,395 | 2,267 |
| Total | 10 | 739 | 422 | 6 | 356 | 97 | 3 | 202 | 69 | 6 | 23,766 | 318,750 | 2 | 600 | 1,500 | 25 | 36,425 | 387,402 | 8 | 3,776 | 10,810 | |
| TOTAL | | | | | | | | | | | | 431, | | | | | 132, | 745, | | | 235, | |
| All Employment | 39 | 3,221 | 2,674 | 35 | 17,852 | 81,870 | 67 | 21,809 | 23,657 | 67 | 42,214 | 973 | 167 | 26,677 | 120,454 | 285 | 433 | 799 | 230 | 54,428 | 349 | |

Source: Labour Department Annual Reports, 1953-63.

more reason the state had to enhance its supervisory and arbitrary powers over the trade union movement as a whole. The KFL itself was further enmeshed in the legal apparatus of the state, which engendered more pressures from the rank and file union members for the unions to remain on course. Factionalism within the leadership was thereby increased and not diminished.

During this period pressures from the rank and file were in fact as militant as they were pervasive. It is a telling commentary on the effectiveness of the new industrial relations system that between 1960 and 1963, the very period that this system was being consolidated, strikes and other forms of protest broke out in a wave reminiscent of the war period and the late 1940s. It is clear from Table 6.4 above that the number of strikes, workers involved and man-days lost increased dramatically from 1958. The four years between 1960 and 1963 witnessed twice as many strikes as the entire period between 1951 and 1959. There can be little doubt that under the repressive emergency regulations strikes and other overt forms of labour protest were very risky undertakings. In 1954 the Labour Department could boast:

Before Operation Anvil ... workers were being intimidated, and extremely effective boycotts were in force on such matters as smoking, the use of public transport and the entering of Asian-owned hotels and eating places. After 'Anvil' the boycotts were forgotten.⁹⁸

⁹⁸LDAR, 1954, p. 4.

As already noted, there was indeed a general reluctance by the KFRTU and other unions to support, let alone, instigate strikes.

This does not mean, of course, that labour protest was non-existent during the emergency. Far from it. Working class responses take many forms and in Kenya, in the absence of effective leadership and organisation and in the presence of a repressive state under the emergency, workers resorted to the more disorganized, covert and silent forms of labour protest. As mentioned earlier, there was the resurgence of fairly widespread desertions as a result of the reversion to enforced proletarianisation and efforts to reinstitute kipande in an attempt to criminalise worker mobility and reduce the rate of desertion. Incidents of sabotage and theft of machinery, animals and crops on settler farms and plantations were also widespread.⁹⁹ The inclusion of a clause in the Industrial Relations Charter, 1962, requiring unions to discourage their members from "negligence of duty, careless operation, damage to property, interference with or direct disturbance to normal work, insubordination and abusive or intemperate language",¹⁰⁰ shows clearly that acts of sabotage, go-slows and deliberate absenteeism were common in industry as well. The quotation also points to the existence of work culture in industry involving jokes and linguistic codes exclusive to the workers aimed at insulating themselves against their employers and at mobilising

⁹⁹See, for instance, J. Kariuki, *op. cit.*; J. Spencer, 'KAU and Mau Mau: Some Connections', in Kenya Historical Review, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1977 (special issue on 'some perspectives on the Mau Mau movement'); and F. Furedi, 'The Social Composition of the Mau Mau Movement in the White Highlands', Journal of Peasant Studies, I, 1973-4.

¹⁰⁰Industrial Relations Charter, Nairobi, October 1962.

against them as well when the occasion arose. Another manifestation of psychological resistance but social quiescence by workers was noted by the Labour Department in 1955:

From the records of sales kept by local authority beer shops, it is evident that beer-drinking among urban Africans is on the increase. Cases of drunkenness often leading to absence from work, have also been more frequent.¹⁰¹

These 'covert' manifestations of labour protest formed part of the everyday forms of consciousness and action by workers which the employers could detect but not control. It is important to emphasise such forms of protest for, as van Onslen has observed,

worker ideologies and organisations should be viewed essentially as the high water marks of protest: they should not be allowed to dominate our understanding of the way in which the economic system worked, or the African (workers) responses to it. At least as important, if not more so, were the less dramatic, silent and often unorganised responses, and it is this latter set of responses, which occurred on a day-to-day basis that reveal most about the functioning of the system, and forward the woof and warp of workers consciousness. Likewise it was the unarticulated, unorganised protest and resistance which the employers and the state found most difficult to detect or suppress.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ LDAR, 1955, p. 24.

¹⁰² C. van Onslen, Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933, Pluto Press, London, 1976, p. 227.

More recently, Cohen has argued that we should avoid falling into the trap of romanticising "everyday events that by their very nature cannot but be often disconnected, spontaneous, individualistic and with short-term effect". The hidden forms of labour protest should be seen as belonging to "a lower level of consciousness ... though any incremental process cannot be viewed deterministically".¹⁰³ In short, covert forms of labour protest "represent a latent and subterranean reservoir of consciousness".¹⁰⁴

The proliferation of strikes and other overt forms of labour protest from the late 1950s was partly conditioned by the relaxation of emergency regulations and the very process of liberalising labour control that the development of collective bargaining machinery entailed. It was a sign of the times that strikes in agriculture increasingly became as frequent as in the other industries and public services. In fact, as Table 6.4 above shows, between 1961 and 1963 agricultural strikes accounted for about a third of the total number of strikes, and in 1962 alone over half of all the workers involved in strikes were from the agricultural history. It is significant that one of the strikes which could have devastated the economy in 1962 was mainly over the question

¹⁰³ Robin Cohen, 'Resistance and Hidden Forms of Consciousness Among Workers', in Review of African Political Economy, No. 19, Sept.-Dec., 1980, p. 21.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

of union recognition.¹⁰⁵ Strikes over recognition disputes also occurred in industries other than agriculture. In such cases the KFL gave its active support to the unions concerned.¹⁰⁶ According to figures prepared by the Labour Department in 1962,

24% of the strikes covered claims such as trade union recognition, implementation of agreements and alleged victimisation; 30% were called in sympathy with trade union members who had been subjected to disciplinary action by their employers (generally dismissal); 15% in support of claims of improved terms and conditions of service; 11% with a view to enforcing demands for the re-instatement of workers whose employment had been terminated; 10% in protest against alleged excessive tasks or long hours of work; and 10% in support of demands for the removal of certain supervisors or managerial staff.¹⁰⁷

Needless to say, in each particular strike all or a combination of these factors were involved. That there were so many strikes protesting

¹⁰⁵It concerned a dispute over the recognition of the Sisal and Coffee Plantation Workers' Union. The Sisal and Coffee Growers' Association refused to recognise this union despite recommendations from the FKE on the grounds that the new union represented industries that were too diverse to be handled by one union and therefore breached the principle of separate unions for separate industries agreed upon by the FKE and the KFL in 1957. What the KCGA feared was that if the SCPWU was recognised the sisal industry could be played off against the more vulnerable coffee industry. The KFL, as it always did on matters involving recognition, stood firmly behind the SCPWU. In the end the KCGA backed down. See DN 15, 18, 19, 20 June and 20 July, 1962. Also see CA KFL File 703.

¹⁰⁶See the strikes at Midco Textiles, Kenya Textile Mills and Kenya Knitting and Weaving Works in July 1962. DN 12-7-62.

¹⁰⁷LDAR, 1962, p. 11.

dismissal of other workers and demanding their reinstatement was not really surprising in view of the massive increase in unemployment. The workers were trying to protect their jobs through solidarity.¹⁰⁸ It was also a mark of the Kenyan working class's growing self-assertion that so many strikes were called over demands for the removal of supervisors. Buoyed by the prospects of approaching independence workers were less tolerant of racial abuse and degrading treatment from management.¹⁰⁹ Strikes over the traditional demands like wages, working hours and the

¹⁰⁸For examples of strikes called because of dismissals of other workers see DN 11-1-62; 7-6-62; 19-6-62; 3-7-62; 4-7-62; 21-7-62; 16-1-63. One of the few attempts at inter-territorial strikes, however, involving the railway workers of the three East African territories in January 1960 failed to materialise and left behind it a wave of mutual recrimination. The Tanganyika Railway African Union, which went ahead with the strike for nearly five months, accused its Kenyan counterpart of betrayal. See DN 15 January, 1960; 3, 10, February 1960 and 2 May 1960. The formation of inter-territorial unions was prohibited by law, even within the East African High Commission services. That did not, of course, prevent workers and unions in each country to be influenced by events and developments taking place in the other territories, especially among dock and rail workers, given their joint administration and the very nature of their jobs.

¹⁰⁹This comes out clearly in a number of inquiries appointed by the government to look into industrial disputes. See, for instance, Report of a Board of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into a Trade Dispute at the Athi River Premises of the Kenya Meat Commission, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1960; Report of Board of Inquiry Into the Causes and Circumstances of the Strike in Milling Industry, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1961; Report of Board of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Relations Between the Kenya Motor Engineering and Allied Workers' Union and the Motor Trades and Allied Industries Employers Association, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1962; Report of the Board of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Relations Between the Food Processing Employers Association and the Kenya Distributive and Commercial Workers' Union, and into the Joint Consultative and Negotiating Machinery and Certain Disputed Matters in the Food Processing Industry, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1963. In the agricultural industry the headmen whom workers demanded to see removed also tended to be those who had been loyal to the government during the emergency. See DN 4-5-60.

depressed living and working conditions and specific grievances peculiar to each industry were as important as ever. What is remarkable about the strike wave from the late 1950s, however, is the fact that so many of the strikes were over matters like dismissals, and demands for removal of supervisors and managers which management considered 'non-bargainable' and lay outside the scope of FKE-KFL collective bargaining procedures. Thus workers were, in effect, rejecting their incorporation into a system of 'peaceful' industrial relations being embraced by the KFL.

Although it is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the number of strikes which were 'unofficial', reading through the newspaper reports of the time, records of the KFL and other unions, one is left with a distinct impression that a large percentage of the strikes were 'wild cat'. There were many instances where union leaders were not even informed until strikes had already begun.¹¹⁰ In turn, some KFL-affiliated unions "called strikes without consulting the KFL and the KFL had to rely for its information about strikes upon the press".¹¹¹ The KFL did not take kindly to such a state of affairs. On one occasion it charged that "with the exception of one or two of the strikes so far taken the rest were premature", and went on to warn that it

would give support only to those strikes which were called in accordance with its advice and with utilisation of the machinery created for the purpose of handling disputes and workers grievances ...

¹¹⁰See DN 4-5-60; 19-6-62; 21-7-62.

¹¹¹DN 7-6-62. The statement was made by P. Kibisu KFL ag, Gen. Sec.

The labour movement stands to defeat its own objectives of trade union freedom and responsibility if in the interests of rebuilding our country more responsible attitudes are not developed towards the use of strikes ... Learning from the lessons of others our government is likely to impose restrictions upon our activities.¹¹²

To such warnings some trade unionists would retort: "we do not want the KFL devils!"¹¹³

The KFL and the unions realised that they could not continue urging moderation without undermining their own base. With so much labour militancy the unions were under great pressure to re-assert their autonomy from the corporatist structures of collective bargaining. "There was", the Labour Department reported in 1962, "a marked reluctance by trade unions to use facilities provided under the trade disputes legislation ... The unions appeared to prefer trials of strength with the employers".¹¹⁴

Workers militancy temporarily led to the radicalisation of both the industrial and political programmes of the KFL. In a memorandum despatched to the constitutional conference in London in 1962, the KFL stated that it believed in, among other things,

¹¹²KFL Circular to all General Secretaries of affiliated unions 5-6-62. CA KFL File 185. Also see DN 7-6-62 and 12-6-63.

¹¹³DN 2-6-62; and 14-6-62.

¹¹⁴LDAR, 1962, p. 11.

socialism and that a socialist economy should be introduced forthwith. This must include socialised medicine, old age security, unemployment compensation ... We demand that immediate action be taken by this government to socialise the farming and agricultural industry by introducing state controlled cooperative farming ... a crash industrialisation programme be launched. There must be cultural revolution in order to have a solidified united nation regardless of tribe, race, creed, colour or religion.¹¹⁵

Only two years before, the KFL had categorically opposed nationalisation and stated that "any future government must accord maximum security and safeguards to foreign investors".¹¹⁶ Although the KFL's statement on socialism was more of a declaratory polemic against militants in the trade union movement like the KTUC than a programmatic commitment to the introduction of such a system, it shows that the KFL was trying to retain organisational control over the trade union movement by responding to popular feelings expressed by workers.

The KFL also tried to distance itself politically from both the government and KANU to show that it had not been 'pocketed' by either. The KFL began to reaffirm its right to speak up on political issues. It attacked the restrictions imposed on it in 1956 as "unwarranted and deliberate interference with the freedom of expression and association

¹¹⁵KFL Memorandum to R. Maudling, Secretary of State for the Colonies 14-2-62. CA KFL File 40.

¹¹⁶KFL: "This is our stand", 1960.

of the people constituting the labour movement in Kenya".¹¹⁷ In February 1962 the KFL went so far as to demand participation in the Lancaster House Constitutional Conference, a request which was rejected.¹¹⁸ Undeterred, the KFL continued to send representations to the government on such matters as the slow pace of Africanisation and the need, therefore, for a crash programme of Africanisation.¹¹⁹

Strong attacks by the KFL on KANU, including on Kenyatta himself, became more frequent as well. As independence approached the KFL became more worried that trade unions "in an independent Kenya will be engulfed by government control as they are in Ghana and Tanganyika".¹²⁰

¹¹⁷The KFL contrasted its situation to that which prevailed in Britain "where the labour movement not only takes an active part in politics but actively and financially supports the Labour Party and constantly makes pronouncements on such highly political matters as disarmament, world peace or international relations and so on". KFL 1960 Annual Conference.

¹¹⁸CA KFL File 185.

¹¹⁹KFL: This is our stand, 1960. See also Memorandum to Hon. Minister of State for Constitutional Affairs and Administration. 29-5-62. CA KFL File 185.

¹²⁰CA KFL File 53. The attack on Kenyatta was rather ironical, for apart from accusing him of "personal ambitions that tend towards dictatorship", he was attacked for allegedly saying that "imperialist money was being used to corrupt the people of Kenya". The trade unionists argued that foreign capital was necessary to alleviate unemployment. See DN 16-8-62. Kenyatta's response was that he had been misquoted and misunderstood. DN 17-8-62. Odinga, who liked to portray himself as a radical, was at one time viciously attacked by the KFL for dismissing workers at Ramogi Press where he was Managing Director for having gone on strike. They accused Odinga of hypocrisy. See KFL Press Release 11-7-61. CA KFL File 152. Also see report by A.A. Oguna, Provincial Secretary. CA KFL File 100.

The federation warned that any political party which dared to follow such a policy would lose support from workers and provoke "revolutionary actions in defence of democracy".¹²¹ So concerned was the KFL about this potential threat against its independence that it asked both the British and Kenyan Governments to entrench trade union rights in the constitution, failing which a nation-wide general strike would be called. The strike was called off when the government promised that trade union rights, including the right to strike, would be protected after independence.¹²² Although a general strike never materialised a number of strikes were called in Mombasa to protest interference of political parties in union affairs.¹²³ Militants within the KFL and those of the KTUC even toyed with the idea of forming an independent Labour Party.¹²⁴

¹²¹KFL Press Statement 29-1-63. CA KFL File 610. Also see CA KFL File 97 and 169.

¹²²See meeting between the KFL and the Colonial Secretary. CA KFL File 40. Also see DN 24-2-63. General strike threats had been made before but none had actually materialised. DN 23-6-62 and 20-6-62.

¹²³DN 9-7-62. Mombasa was Denis Akumu's stronghold. Akumu who was general secretary of the powerful Dock Workers' Union had personal political ambitions and did not see eye to eye with Mboya.

¹²⁴It is rather interesting to note that in 1960 the KFL had sought affiliation with KANU but was barred by the government. In the next three years relations between the two deteriorated as KANU tried to assert its authority over the KFL and the latter tried to protect its autonomy. The trade unionists were wary of what was happening in Tanganyika, Ghana and other African countries where governments had 'pocketed' trade unions and "turned them governmental departments answerable to the country's President or Prime Minister ... If we have demanded our independence from the colonialists why should we ourselves practise dictatorship of the same nature ..." See CA KFL File 97. Also see File 50. It is this attempt to prevent integration into party structures that partly explains why the KFL leaders did not respond

In February 1963 the KFL's executive committee decided that it would sponsor its own independent labour candidates in the forthcoming general elections.

Hardly had the KFL's new found fire made itself felt when it was extinguished by a hurricane of threats from employers, the government and KANU itself. Many employers threatened unions with withdrawal of recognition. They also sponsored moderates and encouraged the formation of splinter groups within unions noted for militancy. As for the strikes themselves, employers responded in a variety of ways; some dismissed the striking workers, others resorted to the use of casual labour, a few threatened to close down their businesses, many called upon the police to come and break strikes and some even sponsored moderates and encouraged the formation of splinter groups within unions.¹²⁵ With unemployment running so high employers had considerable leverage. It is indeed striking that workers in Kenya displayed so much militancy when faced with such great odds.

For its part, the government issued public condemnations of strikes and endless appeals to workers to show restraint, have the 'national' interest at heart and put the country first. Numerous boards of inquiry

favourably when KANU called for general strikes in 1960 and 1961. Neither strike materialised. See DN 14, 15, 16 June 1960 and 21, 25, 31 January, 1961. For details on the restriction of trade union rights in Tanzania from the early sixties to the late seventies in return for 'industrial democracy' and other workers' privileges, see Dudley Jackson, "The Disappearance of Strikes in Tanzania: Incomes Policy and Industrial Democracy", Journal of Modern African Studies, June 1979.

¹²⁵See DN 9, 13 January, 16 April 1960; 22 January, 14 June, 12 July, 1962, and 5 February 1963, for some cases where these tactics are exhibited. Also see CA KFL File 171.

were also appointed to avert or settle strike disputes. Force, too, was frequently used; police units, including the General Service Unit (GSU), which had a reputation for brutality, were despatched to break picket lines and many strikers ended up with serious injuries or in jail. Occasionally, trade union leaders were arrested, or the Registrar of Trade Unions used his powers to inspect union books and finances in order to harass the unions and lay criminal charges against militant union officers.¹²⁶ What the unions feared most, however, was that the government could ban strikes and impose compulsory arbitration. The government never let the unions forget that it could wield this stick:

If the employers or trade unions are too greedy, or too selfish or too disregarding of the public and economic need, or if industrial strife puts the government's development plans in jeopardy, then the government would be forced to think again and, albeit reluctantly, ban strikes and resort to compulsory arbitration.¹²⁷

The leading African politicians were also adamantly against the strike wave. In a statement signed by KANU cabinet ministers including Kenyatta, they stated:

¹²⁶For example the Local Government Workers Union was constantly harassed in Nairobi for calling one strike after another. DN 2-8-62.

¹²⁷DN 19-6-62. Also see DN 2-1-62; 2, 14 June, 1, 10, 11, 19 July for warnings from politicians to trade unions to stop the strike wave.

The current wave of strikes must concern all those who have the interest of Kenya at heart. The task of economic recovery and the job of creating employment for the unemployed is so urgent and acute that it requires national resolve on the part of all our peoples if it is to be effectively and quickly dealt with. The workers may have legitimate grievances, but this must not be allowed to mar the national interest. They must be resolved by peaceful means, especially at this time.¹²⁸

KANU's response to the KFL's assertion of independence, particularly the plans to form a political party and field candidates in the forthcoming elections, was even harsher. "Any attempt", Mboya warned, "to convert trade unions into political parties would inevitably expose them to normal party politics and rivalries and being victimised by any party when it comes to power".¹²⁹ The threats worked; in a joint statement with Mboya's Labour Ministry, the KFL declared that it would not sponsor its own candidates, but would be prepared to support any labour candidates sponsored by a political party.¹³⁰

The KFL had proved incapable of withstanding the combined pressure of the employers, government and KANU. The KFL's capitulation, however, was also influenced, if only to a smaller extent, by the fact that during this period, with independence only a matter of months away, the government did try to give reassurances on some of the sticky issues raised by

¹²⁸DN 13-6-62.

¹²⁹KANU Press Release. CA KFL File 196. But Mboya stressed that any trade unionists who wanted to enter politics as individuals were free to do so. DN 12-2-63.

¹³⁰DN 1-3-63.

the KFL. The new incoming African ministers, whatever their other predilections, generally showed more sensitivity, at least initially and if only to shore up their nationalist credentials, to African problems, including labour grievances, than did their European predecessors. It must have been reassuring to many trade unionists to hear Labour Ministers of the three East African territories, for example, emphatically condemning the colonial system of low wages and exploitative and repressive working conditions, while holding out prospects of better things to come in the near future.¹³¹ What these ministers offered were promises peculiarly fitting during a fleeting historic moment of euphoric expectations about independence and the future that it would bring. More important, these promises were falling on ears of KFL members who were already converted to the gospel of consolidating national independence and of development as an all-embracing joint effort between labour, capital and the state. By June 1963 the KFL was swearing its "dedication to close mutual cooperation with the State" through the adoption of "industrial efficiency and productivity", "realistic wage demands", and cooperation "with the newly appointed Kenyan supervisors".¹³² If not on the other

¹³¹See Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Labour in Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika, Kampala 20-8-62. CA KFL File 169. Such was the mood of the times that people widely expected that to mark Independence they would be given at least a month's salary as a 'uhuru bonus'. Many were bitterly disappointed when nothing of the sort was done and there were even rumblings that there should be strikes to force employers to pay the bonuses, after all, some employers usually gave Christmas bonuses. Independence, everybody felt, certainly was more important than Christmas. See Reporter 2, 9 and 16 November, 1963.

¹³²KFL Press Statement, 4-6-63. CA KFL File 171.

side already, the trade union movement was at least gingerly crossing its Rubicon towards an era based on 'economistic unionism' overlaid by a 'productionist orientation'.

In 1964 the KFL agreed to sign a Tripartite Agreement on Measures for the Immediate Relief of Unemployment with the FKE and the government in which unions agreed to a ban on strikes and a wage freeze for one year in exchange for unemployment relief measures; the unions were promised that 10% more jobs would be created. The KFL agreed to these conditions not only because unemployment was such a pressing problem, but also because the union leaders were assured that "no union member would be permitted to opt out of his 'check-off' agreement during the life of the pact, and that the authority of existing union leaders would be assisted by the official discouragement of 'splinter unions'."¹³³ In fact a few months after signing the Tripartite Agreement legislation was passed under the Trade Union (Amendment) Act enshrining the provisions expressed in the Agreement into law so that it now became virtually impossible for a separatist faction opposed to the KFL to gain recognition.¹³⁴

Despite the fact that the KFL had such extensive support from the state, or in fact because of it, the trade union movement became once again rocked by fierce factional struggles whose ultimate outcome was to weaken the trade union movement even further. As the KFL was signing the Tripartite Agreement, militant trade unionists grouped together and

¹³³See Sandbrook, *op. cit.*, p. 166. Also see, 'Agreement on Measures for the Immediate Relief of Unemployment', appended to *Ministry of Labour Annual Report*, 1964, pp. 37-9.

¹³⁴Sandbrook, *ibid.*, pp. 44, 90.

formed the Kenya Federation of Progressive Trade Unions (KFPTU), later rechristened in 1965 as the Kenya African Workers' Congress (KAWC). The KAWC was opposed to the Tripartite Agreement and espoused radical policies like disaffiliation from the ICFTU, and other economic and political programmes associated with Odinga's faction in KANU. To some extent, the KFL-KAWC struggle was shaped by the schism in KANU between Odinga's so-called radical faction and Mboya's moderate faction.¹³⁵

The KFL-KAWC struggle made the earlier struggle between the KFL and the KTUC pale in comparison. In the words of Amsden:

unlike the KTUC which inflicted the loss of only one constituent union on the KFL, the KAWC created dissension and bitter power struggles all along the industry-wide front and down to the shop floor ... The tragic climax of the conflict at the waterfront came on August 30, 1965, when three workers were killed and over 100 injured at a Mombasa Branch meeting of the Kenya Distributive and Commercial Workers' Union. The Government quickly stepped in.¹³⁶

The KFL and KAWC were forcefully disbanded and COTU formed, and the state increased its regulatory powers over trade unions. Indeed, trade unions were soon deprived of the right to strike. Certainly their political power was to be lost for years to come. But that phase lies outside the scope of this study.

¹³⁵See Odinga, *op. cit.*, and Mboya, *op. cit.* The KAWC was founded by Denis Akumu and Ochofa Mak'Anyengo, who was General Secretary of the Kenya Petroleum Oil Workers' Union, when they were both expelled from the KFL in March 1964.

¹³⁶Amsden, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111.

Conclusion

The Kenyan trade union movement had found itself caught in the turbulent storms of the emergency and decolonisation, and emerged weak despite the formidable bureaucratic union structures that had arisen. In this chapter we have tried to show that the process behind the bureaucratisation and de-radicalisation of the KFL was complex; internal weaknesses within the trade union movement itself, which were accentuated by harsh emergency conditions, made it possible for the advanced fractions of capital, backed by the state, to co-opt the trade union movement into a collaborative system of industrial relations. The nationalists brought their own pressures to bear, so that by the time of independence, organised labour in Kenya had 'abdicated' class struggle in favour of collective bargaining. Grass roots militancy was far from stifled, however. Indeed, on the eve of independence Kenya witnessed an outbreak of a wave of strikes that was reminiscent of the late forties. This militancy did help to prevent the trade union movement from becoming totally overwhelmed by the combined onslaught of pressures and co-optative strategies from the colonial state, the big industrial employers, and the nationalist parties, especially KANU. Thus, in the end the flame of trade union 'economistic' militancy was left burning, while that of organised labour as a vanguard for a socialist revolution was all but extinguished, at least for the foreseeable future.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE KENYA LABOUR MOVEMENT

This chapter traces the development of a key aspect of the history of the Kenyan labour movement - its relationship with international labour organisations and the role that these played in shaping the organisational structures and ideological orientation of Kenyan trade unionism. This is a subject that has so far only received scant attention.

From the mid-1930s to the early 1950s the role and influence of the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) was predominant, but from the early 1950s the American dominated International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) first rivalled and then eclipsed the TUC. Within this latter phase, from the late-1950s to the mid-1960s, American dominance was unsuccessfully challenged by the pan-African ambitions of the All African Trade Union Federation (AATUF). These changes reflected not only the changing shape of the world's and Africa's political relations, but also internal developments within Kenyan nationalism; and it will be seen that these two spheres, internal and external, were intimately interrelated.

It is hoped that this chapter will demonstrate that relations between the Kenyan labour movement and other labour movements had a longer history than is often presented by many writers, who have tended to refer to the second phase when the ICFTU influence was at its height. Further, during each phase the conditioning factors were inevitably

complex and contradictory and cannot be reduced either to the individual predilections of particular trade union leaders in Kenya, although, of course, it was amongst the leadership and not the rank and file that these battles were fought, or the mere offer of financial inducements by the international labour movements. In short, 'internal' and 'external' forces were interpenetrated; the former were externalised and reflected in the shifting trends of international labour alliances, while, simultaneously, the latter were internalised and reinforced internal developments within the Kenyan labour movement.

RELATIONS WITH THE BRITISH TRADES UNION CONGRESS

In the days when the socialist movement was growing to maturity British Imperialism was at its zenith ... What to do about imperialism could never, therefore, be a mere academic question for British socialists. This country's trade, her communications, her military strategy, her very economic structure had all been shaped around her imperial reality ... To understand the reactions of British socialists to such a problem, one must understand British socialism itself. Two major streams of thought have mingled in the making of its ethos. The first, of ancient lineage, is that radical or humanitarian sentiment which has always provided the rebellious leaven in the solidity of British political life ... This radicalism derived as much from a religious conscience as from any political creed; indeed it ante-dated political parties as we know them today ... The second stream of thought is more recent, more directly political, more materialist in its expression. It grew out of the horrors of the nineteenth century industrial revolution and their economic analysis by Karl Marx and his disciples ... So it was that in the socialist attitude towards problems at home, a dual attitude emerged. There were those who accepted responsibility to succor and reform, and those who despised

reform and sought only to overthrow. The duality sometimes revealed itself even in the same person.¹

Here Rita Hinden ably captures the contradictory premises of the policies and attitudes of the British socialist movement, of which the trade union movement was an integral part, towards the colonial empire, its peoples and their struggles. It was a contradiction which plagued the TUC in its dealings with colonial trade unions from the beginning and became sharper as the latter, not only grew in size and strength and ideological maturity, but as they also increasingly challenged the repressive labour and trade union policies of colonial governments and questioned the nature of colonialism itself and the assumptions behind it.

An interesting comparison can be made between the role of the British and French trade union movements in their respective colonial empires. Unions in French colonial Africa were developed as organic extensions of metropolitan unions and their national federations. Perhaps this was a reflection and product of the highly centralised administrative structures and integrative policies of French colonialism itself, on the one hand, and the aggressive policies of the French Communist Party and some left-wing dominated trade unions, on the other, in contrast to the famed

¹Rita Hinden, 'Socialism and the Colonial World', in Arthur Creech Jones, New Fabian Colonial Essays, The Hogarth Press, London, pp. 9-12. For a more detailed analysis of the attitudes and policies of the British Labour movement towards the colonial world, see P.S. Gupta, Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964, Macmillan, London, 1975. Also see David Goldsworthy, Colonial Issues in British Politics, 1945-1961, OUP, Oxford, 1961.

'pragmatism' of British colonial thought and practice, that abiding faith in 'the man on the spot'.² It might be added that unlike the situation in France where there were three rival national trade union organisations, all competing for both membership and influence with the government, the monopoly position occupied by the TUC in Britain made it easier as well as tempting for the British labour movement to become closely involved in the formulation of colonial labour policy. In fact from early days the TUC became an important participant in the development of colonial labour policy so that, unlike the French unions, it was not easy for the TUC to establish formal links with trade unions in British colonial Africa without compromising its relationships with the Colonial Office.³

It was in 1937 that the TUC's advisory role to the Colonial Office became formalised, indeed, institutionalised, with the setting up of the Colonial Advisory Committee on which the TUC was represented. The committee was formed with the purpose of investigating the conditions of the principal races of the Colonial Empire, the principal object being to see how far the TUC can contribute towards raising their standards of life and generally improving their conditions.⁴ By this time the TUC

²See Ioan Davies, African Trade Unions, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966, Chapter 2, and J. Meynaud and A.S. Bey, Trade Unionism in Africa, Methuen, London, 1967.

³For an account of French labour policy in its formative stages, see Elliot Berg, 'French West Africa', in W. Glenson (ed.), Labour and Economic Development, New York, 1959. For a fuller account of labour conditions and practices in French colonies, see Jean Suret-Canale, French Colonialism in Tropical Africa, 1900-1945, C. Hurst, London, 1974.

⁴See Colonial Advisory Committee, Memorandum for Inaugural Meeting, 22nd December, 1937, TUC Library, HD 6866K.

leadership had become convinced that attempts to resolve specific colonial labour problems were hardly satisfactory and that there was a need to adopt a more regular and comprehensive approach.⁵ That the committee did provide the TUC with a forum through which it could air its views, and occasionally influence changes in colonial policies, need not be questioned. In its meetings the committee dealt with a very wide range of critical issues facing the colonies, such as labour and trade union legislation, working conditions and, last but not least, ways and means of helping colonial trade unions.⁶

The formation of the Colonial Advisory Committee was the culmination of a process began in the 1920s to systematise colonial labour policy. During the Labour Governments of 1924 and 1929 the TUC and the Labour Party conducted a series of British Commonwealth Labour Conferences attended by trade union and political leaders from the empire, but those from African colonies, however, were excluded. In 1930 two key developments took place. First, the Colonial Office Labour Committee, drawn from officials of the Colonial Office itself and the Ministry of Labour, was set up to consider "the basic formulation of colonial labour policy, the drafting of model laws and the effects on dependencies of some of the international labour conventions".⁷ Second, the Passfield

⁵Ibid.

⁶Minutes of the Colonial Advisory Committee, 1937-47, TUC Library, HD 6866K.

⁷See B.C. Roberts, Labour in the Tropical Territories of the Commonwealth, G. Bell and London School of Economics, London, 1964, p. 176.

Memorandum was issued in which, for the first time, it was stated that trade unions in the colonies were to be encouraged, but with an important condition that was to hang around the necks of colonial trade unions like a rock in the decades to come: these unions were to be subject to compulsory registration. This was a major departure from the practice in Britain itself where, although machinery for registration of trade unions were provided under the United Kingdom Trade Union Act of 1871, it was not compulsory to register. The practical effect of registration was that when a union was registered it was required to submit its accounts, membership and rules every year to the Registrar of Trade Unions. Compulsory registration meant that colonial trade unions and their activities would be under the close scrutiny of colonial governments. This was justified in Lord Passfield's words, on the grounds that there was

a danger that, without sympathetic supervision and guidance, organisations of labourers without experience of combination for any social or economic purpose may fall under the domination of disaffected persons, by whom their activities may be diverted to improper and mischievous ends.⁸

The West Indian Royal Commission reinforced the arguments for compulsory registration of colonial trade unions.⁹

⁸Walter Bowen, Colonial Trade Unions, Fabian Publications Ltd., London, Research Series No. 167, p. 4.

⁹Report of the West Indian Royal Commission, pp. 199, 438.

The British labour movement not only failed to challenge this pillar of colonial trade union legislation but it also tended to use similar arguments that colonial trade unions needed close guidance. As one group put it:

Trade unionism is a comparatively new factor in colonial life. Like most youthful movements, it is lively, somewhat unrestrained, in need of mature guidance ... Compulsory registration is provided for in colonial Trade Union laws. At first sight this might seem undue interference with Trade Union organisation. But it is a fact that many Trade Unions are inexperienced. For the protection of the members and the good name of trade unionism safeguards must be taken to ensure the financial integrity of the union administration and the democratic control of union policy.¹⁰

Such attitudes, which bordered on paternalism, were a product of the TUC's collaboration with the Colonial Office, in itself a reflection of the socialist movement's dual approach to colonial questions, and they ensured that TUC relations with colonial trade unions would have their fair share of strains and occasional ruptures.

It would be incorrect, of course, to assume that the TUC was simply an extension of official colonial labour policy, for the TUC was neither a homogeneous entity nor totally impervious to the suffering and struggles of colonial peoples. Not only was the TUC by its very nature as a labour movement aware of British capitalist exploitation and opposed to it, there were also many within its ranks who saw their role as that of a

¹⁰ Labour in the Colonies: Some current problems, reports submitted to the Labour Committee of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, V. Gollancz Ltd. and Fabian Society, London, 1942, pp. 6-7.

'pressure group' in Britain on behalf of colonial workers. Thus, alongside paternalism, TUC relations with colonial trade unions and workers were also characterised by occasional acts of genuine solidarity from time to time and sometimes even simultaneously, depending on the general state of relations between the imperial centre and the colonial peripheries and on the particular issues at stake at any given time. What needs to be done, therefore, is to periodise the relations between the TUC and colonial trade unions and see which tendencies are dominant during the various periods.

During the inter-war period the TUC, alongside organisations like the Fabian Colonial Bureau, the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, missionary societies and colonial and settler critics in Britain, periodically complained to the Colonial Office about the deplorable labour conditions in East Africa and Kenya in particular.¹¹ But preliminary contacts with the burgeoning trade union movement in Kenya were not established until 1937 and, significantly, the initiative came from the Labour Trade Union of East Africa, established two years earlier, and not from the TUC. The LTUEA asked the TUC to approach the Colonial Office to intervene and seek an amendment to the Kenya Trade Union Ordinance, 1937, which was unduly restrictive. The TUC complied with the request and made representations to the Colonial Office which, according to Singh, had some effect, for

¹¹See Anthony Clayton and Donald C. Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895-1963, Frank Cass, London, 1974, p. 126.

when in 1940 the Government of Kenya sought financial help under the provisions of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, 1940, it was pointed out to it that under the Act financial aid could be given only to those colonies which had given reasonable facilities for the activity of trade unions and that Kenya's trade union legislation needed amendments, in order to ensure that a trade union or of its officials would not be liable to suing in any court of law for any act committed by or on behalf of the trade union in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute. The Kenya government took the hint, and in the last week of January, 1941, published a bill to amend the Trade Unions Ordinance, 1937.¹²

But this is to anticipate developments during the Second World War.

It can be concluded that before the Second World War relations between the Kenyan labour movement and the TUC did not extend beyond occasional correspondence, especially during their respective annual conferences, and requests from the LTUEA to the TUC to make representations to the Colonial Office on matters concerning labour legislation.¹³ Regular and formal contacts had as yet to be established. It is suggestive that the closest contacts that British unions had with trade unions in English-speaking Africa were with European unions in South Africa, and Southern and Northern Rhodesia.¹⁴ To most British trade unionists at this time there were hardly any trade unions in the rest of Africa worth much attention. Thanks to firmly repressive labour

¹²See Makhan Singh, History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1969, p. 104.

¹³See Makhan Singh Records classified as Mak B/1/4-7 held at the Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi.

¹⁴See D.I. Davies, 'The Politics of the TUC's Colonial Policy', Political Quarterly, Vol. 35, No. 1, 1964, p. 25.

policies and restrictive trade union legislation, there were indeed very few unions in British colonial Africa which were registered, which was a pre-condition for trade unions to function. By ignoring the many unions which were then in existence, but not registered, in some of the British colonies in Africa, the British labour movement was inadvertently siding with the policies of the colonial governments.

The TUC's relative negligence of colonial labour movements in African colonies before the Second World War can also be partly explained by the fact that the TUC virtually faced no external competition to its influence in the colonies. The contacts which the Kenyan labour movement, for instance, maintained with the outside world, apart from those with the TUC, did not go beyond occasional correspondence, mostly carried on by Makhan Singh in his unrelenting efforts to inform the outside world about labour conditions and the existence of a trade union movement in East Africa, as well as to express solidarity with the outside labour movements.¹⁵ Only once does it seem that the LTUEA was invited to send a delegation to a conference abroad. That was the International Conference on Problems of Democracy, Peace and Humanity which was scheduled to be held on September 30th and October 1st, 1939, in Brussels, Belgium,

¹⁵ Among whom the LTUEA carried on some correspondence were the South African Trades Labour Council and the Indian National Congress. The LTUEA also frequently sent messages to other trade unions, for example, at its Annual Conference in July 1938 the LTUEA passed a resolution expressing solidarity with "the Spanish and Chinese people fighting against their enemies of trade unionism, democracy and peace". See Mak B/1/4-7.

but was cancelled when the war broke out.¹⁶

The outbreak of the Second World War brought profound changes in colonial political economies which laid the roots for the formulation and implementation of new post-war colonial policies. During the war colonial workers, as shown in the case of Kenya in Chapter 3, displayed ever increasing organised militancy and the development of trade unions was given a decisive boost. Faced with such developments in the colonies, the British labour movement began moving towards establishing direct and stronger links with colonial trade unions.

The Fabian Colonial Bureau in a 1942 publication captured the spirit of the new times, the heightened concern for colonial workers in the British labour movement, when it stated:

The fact that labour in the colonies might have problems of its own to solve is only beginning to be realised. Until recently the aspirations of colonial workers were not taken very seriously. ... The average British worker is rightly horrified when he learns of the disadvantages under which his colonial brother lives and works, but even then it is little appreciated that our relatively high standard of living is maintained, in part, by the low standards obtaining in other lands, especially in colonial territories. The large body of poorly-paid colonial labour also constitutes a threat, conversely, to the higher standards at home, and forms an infectious centre of discontent and poverty. This is particularly true of colonies which are passing a minor industrial

¹⁶Ibid. Singh on behalf of the LTUEA wrote Jomo Kenyatta who was then in London and asked him whether he could attend the Conference as a representative of the union together with Krishna Menon, an Indian activist. The war, however, brought to an end this correspondence between Kenyatta and Singh until they were to meet again almost a decade later. See Singh to Kenyatta 19-8-39 and Kenyatta - General Secretary, LTUEA, 26-8-39. Ibid.

revolution of their own, a process which is being hastened by war demands for certain materials and the growth of local industries owing to shortage of imports. Workers in the colonies are turning more and more from purely agricultural tasks to the mine and factory, but there is no reason why the miseries of nineteenth century Britain should be reproduced. Labour legislation and labour organisation could help to prevent that. History has shown that conservatism and the self-interest of employers have always tried to hinder the development of such legislation ... The beginnings of Trade Unionism in the colonies brings all these questions before us with a new urgency.¹⁷

Apart from publicising the conditions and causes of colonial workers in general and ensuring that colonial trade union legislation was not unnecessarily repressive, in 1942, the Fabian Colonial Bureau suggested two other major proposals, which were to become the linchpin of TUC-colonial labour relations, for extending British assistance to colonial trade unions.

One proposal has been to grant scholarships to colonial Trade Unions to study in Great Britain. Another has been to loan experienced British Trade Unionists to colonial movements, to help and guide them in their early stages.¹⁸

It was conceded, however, that "measures of this nature will generally

¹⁷Labour in the Colonies ..., pp. 3-4.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 13-14 and also see pp. 17-21 for details on how they proposed to go about recruiting the trade union advisers and the kind of training facilities that would be provided to colonial trade unionists.

not be practicable in time of war".¹⁹ These proposals, therefore, were more of blueprints for future action than for immediate implementation.

Consequently, despite the heightened concern for colonial workers in the British labour movement during the Second World War, little was done during the war itself to cement the links between the TUC and Kenyan trade unions. TUC assistance to the Kenyan labour movement during the war years consisted of criticisms against the coercive emergency labour legislation enacted by the Kenyan government in order to ensure adequate labour supplies both for the military and public works programmes, and for private agriculture and industry. For sure, in 1941 the Kenyan government amended its Trade Unions Ordinance of 1937, but it would seem that this was because the government was anxious to get loans under the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act and not as a result of TUC pressures as such. It has to be borne in mind that the settlers increased their power in Kenya during the war and that the power of the Kenyan government vis-a-vis the British government also increased, so that the impact of 'pressure groups' in Britain, like the TUC, on Kenya through the Colonial Office was reduced. This is not to say that the Kenyan government was not sensitive to criticisms of the labour situation in the country made by the TUC and by some Labour members of parliament and missionary and humanitarian groups in Britain.²⁰ Rather, it is to suggest that the war situation was in itself a factor which blunted the possibility of

¹⁹Ibid., p. 14. Also see pp. 20-21. Some trade union advisers, however, went to the colonies during the war.

²⁰See Correspondence found at CO 533 38091.

practical effects of criticisms on the recruitment, organisation and working conditions of Kenyan workers apart, perhaps, from the wording and timing of the enactment of certain legislation.

After the war the stage was set for the TUC to implement those proposals first enunciated in 1942. First, colonial trade unions had grown in number and strength and the British and colonial governments, in response, had adopted the policy of controlling their development less by outright proscription and more by legal mechanisms, and by encouraging the growth of economistic and apolitical trade unionism.²¹ The role of TUC-sponsored trade union advisers was seen by both the British and colonial governments as crucial in fostering the development of this brand of 'responsible' trade unionism. Second, in the immediate aftermath of the war, a new situation on the international labour scene emerged when the World Federation of Trade Unions (W.F.T.U.) was formed, which shook the TUC out of any lingering complacency in its dealings with trade unions in British colonial Africa. The WFTU included within its ranks not only trade unions from the capitalist countries of the West and Japan, but also trade unions from the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, as well as trade unions from some colonial and ex-colonial territories. As Woddis puts it, the WFTU's

²¹ See, for example, Orde Browne, Labour Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in his report on Labour Conditions in East Africa, 1946, and R.E. Luyt, who was once trade union adviser in Northern Rhodesia and later became Labour Commissioner in Kenya, Trade Unionism in African Colonies, 1949.

declared policy was, from the very outset, one of moral and material help to colonial workers and opposition to every form of imperialist oppression. The existence of the WFTU, its constant protests against the violation of Trade Union rights in the colonies, its continual publicising through its journal, World Trade Union Movement, of the activities of the imperialists in the colonies and its consistent championing of the cause of the colonial people by its interventions at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and at the United Nations Economic and Social Council, proved a major obstacle to the imperialist powers. In the light of these developments they were compelled to seek new methods of rule. First, they strove to disrupt and destroy the WFTU ... Secondly, they had to find new methods of dealing with the growing trade union movement within the colonial territories.²²

Post-war relations between the TUC and colonial trade unions, therefore, consisted, from the TUC's point of view, of responding to developments in the colonies among the colonial workers themselves and to the challenge posed by the WFTU and later the ICFTU and American labour organisations. With a Labour government in power in Britain at this time, the TUC increasingly channelled this response through government agencies like the Colonial Office. In other words, the TUC was further integrated into the machinery of colonial labour policy formulation. But the more the TUC came to be identified with the labour policies of the British government, albeit a Labour one, the less was the TUC's credibility within the colonies and on the international scene, for after all, this was a period of mounting nationalist militancy in the colonies and almost

²²See Jack Woddis, The Mask is Off! An Examination of the Activities of Trade Union Advisers in the British Colonies, Thames Publications, London, n.d.

universal anti-colonial sentiments in many parts of the world.

The sharpening contradictions which bedevilled the TUC in its relations with colonial labour movements can be seen in the careers of the colonial trade union advisers themselves. In Chapter four we examined the career of James Patrick in Kenya where we saw that as a salaried official of the Labour Department he was seen by some of the more radical trade unionists as a mouthpiece of government policy. In fact it is interesting to note that Patrick's role was specifically attacked at the TUC 1952 Annual Conference. One delegate rose up and said:

I wish to contest the claim that the work of these so-called trade union advisers in the British colonies in Africa is really designed to build up independent trade unions as we know them in Great Britain ... I have in my possession indisputable evidence that the trade union advisers are working hand in glove with reactionary governments like that of Kenya, which only permit government controlled trade unions and forbid any independent trade union activity. This pamphlet I hold in my hand is entitled "What is a Trade Union?" and is ostensibly written for the guidance of African workers ... Just imagine this gospel being preached to African workers whose annual income per head is only £ 6 per head in contrast to £ 206 per head for white workers ... I submit that the policy of having such trade union advisers in Africa is in direct opposition to the common interests of both African and British workers, and it is clear that the African workers can have no confidence in these advisers.²³

Characteristically, however, the TUC leadership defended the role of these advisers. The TUC general secretary responded by saying that attacks on the system of trade union advisers were misdirected and based

²³TUC Annual Report, 1952, pp. 351-2.

on

a false conception of what it is possible to do in the colonies ... We are in constant touch with these boys ... I am not concerned so much with what is said from that rostrum as with what is said by our own boys in the colonies. I will judge from them whether the services of these trade union officers are appreciated or not. In the vast majority of cases these people are nominees of unions affiliated to Congress, and they are experienced people. Contrary to what the speaker has said I am going to pay my tribute to the magnificent job which is being done by them.²⁴

This exchange fully captures the contradictory tendencies within the TUC between the paternalism of the leadership and the radicalism of the rank and file delegates.

Jack Woddis, in a blistering critique of trade union advisers in the British colonies published in the early 1950s, also singled out Patrick's pamphlets on trade unionism and his activities for attack.²⁵ Woddis disclosed that

these advisers, safe right-wing Trade Union officers or, more often, Ministry of Labour officials with no trade union background at all, now operate in fifteen colonies where their combined staffs total more than 400. Only 25 of these have previous Trade Union experience. This considerable Government apparatus, to which full support is given by the General Council of the TUC, has been built up during the past ten years and is still being developed.²⁶

²⁴Ibid., p. 352.

²⁵Woddis, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

²⁶Ibid., p. 9.

The real role of these trade union advisers, Woddis maintained, was

To spread ideas of class collaboration; to prevent strikes; to safeguard profits; to help Government frame anti-Trade Union legislation; to prevent Trade Union participating in the struggle for national independence; to prevent Trade Unions from taking an interest in political questions; to isolate colonial Trade Unions from militant Trade Unions in other lands, and especially the WFTU; to denounce militant Trade Unionists and expose them to Government persecution; to win colonial workers for the American war policy.²⁷

The TUC's cautiousness was clearly demonstrated in its reaction to the Trade Union Ordinance, 1952, which Patrick had had a hand in drafting, when it was tabled before the Kenya Legislative Council. In response to requests from Kenyan trade unionists concerning the aforementioned bill, the TUC sent a deputation to the Colonial Secretary and lodged a number of criticisms, the principal one of which was that the conditions for the registration and recognition of trade unions were too stringent. In its 1952 Annual Report the TUC claimed rather glibly:

These criticisms were forwarded by the Minister to the Government of Kenya and a revised Bill (passed on April 2, 1952), met practically every point of objection raised by the deputation. The Ordinance is now one which will give the workers in Kenya the opportunity to develop bona fide trade unions.²⁸
(italics mine)

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

²⁸ TUC Annual Report, 1952, p. 213.

To judge from the actual reality and the views of Kenyan trade unionists, the truth of the matter was quite the contrary.

In the years immediately following the war differences between the TUC and the Kenyan trade union movement increasingly centred on the latter's desires to exercise its autonomy and have relations with trade union organisations other than the TUC. As the 'Cold War' got hotter, so did the position of the TUC in its relations with the colonial trade union movements become more complicated and contradictory. Following the sweeping victory of the Labour Party in the 1945 General Elections, for example, there was a ringing endorsement by the TUC, at its first post-war annual conference, that colonial trade unions should enjoy "the same rights and privileges as British trade unions".²⁹ But two years later Arthur Deakin of the TUC, then President of the WFTU, vetoed a Soviet proposal to set up a fund to assist colonial unions, and in the following year the TUC delegation turned down proposals that colonial workers should enjoy working conditions equal to those in metropolitan countries.³⁰

But even in these early years of the Cold War the TUC leadership was not entirely oblivious to the potential challenge posed by the ICFTU itself and American labour organisations to the influence of the TUC in the colonies. Accordingly, while the Free World Labour Conference was in progress to set up the ICFTU, the TUC convened an extraordinary meeting of colonial delegates. Sir Vincent Tewson, the TUC General Secretary,

²⁹TUC Annual Report, 1946, p. 211.

³⁰See D.I. Davies, op. cit., p. 30.

strongly cautioned against expecting too much from the ICFTU. He stated:

We have experience of these bodies, and it must not be misunderstood if we point out that the new International is a young body which will have to be built by hard work. The expectations we have from it must be dependent not only on its spirit and fervour but also on its erecting effective machinery to carry out essential tasks.³¹

It was a mark of the times that he was forced to defend the TUC's policies towards the colonial trade unions. He urged the need for restraint on the grounds that unless they were all able "to secure economic stability in what is a very grave crisis, it is not only a question of what will happen to Great Britain but what will happen to the whole sterling area".³² He did not hesitate to add that the TUC had had such a long experience that it was probably the only organisation that could provide these colonial unions with a well tested model to follow, a mirror of their own future:

We have in Britain laboriously built up over 150 years our Trade Union Movement. We have secured reform after reform until finally we have obtained from a friendly Government a social security scheme ... I don't want to discourage anybody, but we shall gain nothing by failing to look at

³¹Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting with Colonial Delegates Attending the Free World Labour Conference, Colonial Advisory Committee, 13-12-49. TUC Library. HD 6866K.

³²Ibid.

things in perspective. In the early history of the Trade Union Movement in this country we experienced repression, anti-trade union legislation and so on. Gradually we've had to fight these things down in a democratic way until our movement stands as it does today.³³

This speech was certainly a recipe for moderation, an attempt to dampen the militancy engulfing the labour movements of the colonial world, and a plea for colonial trade unions to close ranks with the TUC which was finding itself on the defensive as it increasingly became identified with British colonial labour policy.

The EATUC had been invited to this conference by the TUC but had declined to attend mainly because of suspicions about the motives behind the formation of the ICFTU. Interestingly enough, when an invitation was received from the WFTU to attend its Milan Congress just a little later, the EATUC considered sending representatives. In the end none went, which was a triumph for those who advocated strict neutrality between the two internationals.³⁴ But the TUC obviously did not see it in that way. As a reprisal for the snub, it ceased answering any correspondence from the EATUC, while, in contrast, "trade union literature and communications ... continued coming from the WFTU", despite a similar refusal to attend its Congress.³⁵ From then on the EATUC found itself branded with the communist tag, which was another way of saying

³³Ibid.

³⁴Singh, op. cit., p. 206.

³⁵Ibid., p. 245.

it was a subversive organisation.

The seriousness of these charges was soon brought home to the EATUC. During his East African tour, Edgar Parry, the Assistant Labour Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and a former district organiser of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers in Britain with experience as trade union adviser in Sierra Leone,³⁶ told the EATUC in no uncertain terms that they would be in serious trouble unless they stopped flirting with the WFTU and made their attitude to the ICFTU more forthcoming. He warned ominously that the Kenyan Government would be monitoring their responses to the ICFTU.³⁷ Singh, who was widely known as a self-confessed communist, issued a strong press statement challenging the various allegations against the EATUC. He denied that it was a communist or communist-influenced body. The only test for the members and officials of the congress, he asserted, was

that they serve the interests of the workers, and not of the employers, to the best of their capacity ... In spite of the recognition by the British TUC and WFTU the EATUC is not affiliated to the WFTU or any other international organisation. It is not under the discipline of any organisation, whether the British TUC or the WFTU.³⁸

Not surprisingly, no newspaper would publish this rebuttal. The smear-campaign against the EATUC in official and settler circles was

³⁶Woddis, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

³⁷Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 224.

more a reflection of the paranoia of colonial capitalist society than an indication of the real measure of WFTU's penetration and communist influence among trade unionists in the country, for with the exception of Singh there were hardly any trade unionists in Kenya with more than a faint acquaintance with Marxist-Leninist ideas. Rather, a number of them espoused radical and populist tendencies. It seems reasonable to assume that the punitive attitude of the TUC towards the EATUC, in 1949 and 1950, deprived the latter of a valuable ally and gave a cloak of respectability or credence to the communist charges against the EATUC which were clearly being used by the colonial government and the settlers as a convenient weapon with which to harass, undermine and possibly proscribe trade union activities in the country.

Patrick, the TUC-sponsored trade union adviser in Kenya, in fact tried indefatigably to undermine the position of pro-WFTU leaders like Singh within the Kenyan trade union movement. Not only were such leaders arrested after the 1950 Nairobi General Strike, the Kenyan Government, with the blessings of Patrick, also moved to eradicate any sources of WFTU influence in the country when it banned all WFTU publications in 1951. According to Singh, this was done to forestall not only "reorganisation and increased activity of trade unions in Kenya but also ... the active solidarity the World Federation was showing with the cause of trade union movements and liberation struggles in the colonies".³⁹ Other colonial governments also undertook similar efforts to break contacts between colonial trade unions and the WFTU. Colonial

³⁹Ibid., p. 296.

trade unionists were prevented by various means from attending WFTU conferences like the Third World Trade Union Conference held in Vienna, October 10-21, 1953, and "in the West Indies, WFTU representatives, themselves natives of the West Indies, [were] prevented from visiting Trinidad, British Guiana and Barbados to discuss trade union problems with the workers".⁴⁰

Although the TUC almost certainly collaborated with the ICFTU in a world-wide campaign to undermine the influence of the WFTU, relations between the ICFTU and the TUC were far from smooth. From the early 1950s the ICFTU began making serious inroads in British colonies including Kenya, at the TUC's expense. From the very beginning Kenya was earmarked by the ICFTU as an important centre for its operations in East and Central Africa. Faced with the ICFTU challenge the TUC tried to consolidate its relations with the Kenyan trade union movement. Moreover, the 1950s began with militant trade unionists like Singh, who tended to be suspicious of the TUC's intentions, safely behind bars. Thus for the first time the TUC began offering the Kenyan trade union movement material help in the form of office equipment and stationery.⁴¹ Kenyan trade unions also received modest grants from the TUC's Colonial

⁴⁰Woddis, op. cit., p. 39f.

⁴¹KFL General Secretary Annual Report, 1960. Also see KFL Newsletters Nos. 1-19.

Fund,⁴² which had been established in the late 1940s,⁴³ and by 1951 stood at £36,900.⁴⁴ Moreover, the TUC's colonial training programme was expanded, thus in 1953 books, periodicals and pamphlets on trade union subjects were sent to Kenya and 37 other colonial trade union centres.⁴⁵ In 1955 Mboya, with TUC support, took up a scholarship offered by the Workers' Travel Association, at Ruskin College, Oxford.⁴⁶ Seven years earlier, Meshack Ndisi, the general secretary of TAWU, had also gone to Ruskin on a scholarship secured by Patrick.⁴⁷ The fact that Mboya did not return from Oxford and sink into the relative obscurity of

⁴²KFL General Secretary Annual Report, 1960. The TUC gave £750 to the Railway African Union and the Dockworkers Union, see TUC Annual Report, 1956, p. 220.

⁴³Minutes of the Colonial Advisory Committee, 8-5-47. TUC Library, HD 6866K.

⁴⁴D.I. Davies, op. cit., p. 25.

⁴⁵TUC Annual Report, 1943, p. 248.

⁴⁶Tom Mboya, Freedom and After, Andre Deutsch, London, 1963, p. 56. Davies contends that "when Mboya visited Ruskin College, Oxford, his most fruitful contacts were not with British trade unionists but with Fabians, academics and West Indians. On his way home he spent two months in the United States, expanding his trade union contacts and arranging educational programmes and financial aid in which the British had shown so little interest." I. Davies, op. cit., p. 195. Mboya's own account generally agrees with this outline. He was clearly not impressed by the attitudes of British trade unionists and this probably accounts for his rapid drift towards American labour after this period.

⁴⁷Ndisi resigned as General Secretary of TAWU in March, 1950, only three months after his return from Ruskin, ostensibly over policy differences with his colleagues whom he accused of being supporters of the WFTU. See East African Standard, 6-3-50. A few months after, he announced that he would form a rival union along 'British lines'. Within a year, however, he was established as a member of the Labour Department later rising to the rank of Assistant Industrial Relations Officer under Patrick, who by the way left the country in 1954.

an administrative post in the Labour Department as Ndisi did, was as much an indication of the times as a reflection of Mboya's greater resourcefulness and dynamism.⁴⁸ If Ndisi was a product of Kenya trade unionism in the 1940s and the cautious attitudes of the TUC at that time, Mboya exhibited the confidence of the era of militant nationalism and the cosmopolitan brashness nurtured by wider horizons opened up by the ascendancy of American and ICFTU influence.

The 1950s in Kenya were defined by the Mau Mau struggle as much as anything else. It was Mau Mau, therefore, which presented the TUC with its greatest challenge in Kenya. It brought out, clearly, the inherent contradictions of the TUC position, that is, its involvement in the formulation of colonial policies, on the one hand, and its efforts to establish direct contacts with colonial trade unions, on the other.

The TUC, like the British socialist movement as a whole, had never been particularly fond of Kenyan settlers who, many on the left in Britain tended to blame for the outbreak of Mau Mau. When the State of Emergency was declared in Kenya the TUC spoke out against the way in which the situation was being handled by the Kenyan Government as well as the Conservative Government in London, which had come to power following Labour's defeat in the 1951 election. In 1953, the TUC informed the Colonial Office that it deplored

⁴⁸ Mboya, of course, returned from his studies to launch a hectic trade union and political career. He was certainly the most formidable trade union leader since Singh and until independence. He was also a charismatic politician, but views that he was not a 'radical' nationalist even by the Kenyan standards of the time are more than borne out by the evidence.

the serious position which has developed in Kenya as a result of the vicious activities of Mau Mau. It is recognised that the basic problem is not merely to put down terrorism, but to develop conditions which will enable people of all races to work together in close harmony and so develop the country's social, economic, and political conditions along lines which will benefit the population as a whole.⁴⁹

More specifically, the TUC made representations over the arrest of trade union officials which, in its judgement, resulted in the arrested officials being screened more quickly. And in March 1956 the TUC General Secretary himself flew to Kenya in order to try to prevent the government from de-registering the KFL.⁵⁰

Such acts of solidarity, however, were more than undermined by the tendency of the Sir Vincent Tewson himself to be "swayed by the Colonial Office view of Mau Mau and its allegations of trade union complicity in the insurrection. He and others at the TUC accepted the premise that the war had to be won since Mau Mau, in their view, represented a retreat to barbarism".⁵¹ It was such convictions which led the TUC's General Council to offer the smug regret that it "realised that the State of Emergency would create difficulties for the trade unions"⁵² at the same time as

⁴⁹TUC Annual Report, 1953, p. 213.

⁵⁰The visit attracted a lot of public interest in Kenya, especially of course among trade unionists and government officials, and was widely reported in the press. See East African Standard, 18-20th March, 1956. Also see TUC Annual Report, 1956; and Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1956.

⁵¹Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 390.

⁵²TUC Annual Report, 1953, p. 213.

the Council was making representations to the Colonial Office deploring some aspects of the Emergency. This would also explain why a motion at the TUC Annual Conference of 1953 which called upon the

Government to end immediately the present reign of terror and repression and set about the task of giving to the people of Kenya the opportunity of setting up their own government on similar lines to other members of the Commonwealth with the view to their ultimate right of self-determination and complete independence as in the case of India,

was soundly defeated.⁵³ And in the following year the TUC complacently congratulated itself that as a result of its representations over the arrest of trade union officials

there is much better understanding by the local Government in Kenya, and trade union officials have been given permits to go on tour into the country districts to meet their branch officials. Such organising tours have stimulated the interest of the African worker in trade unionism.⁵⁴

To say that this was an overstatement would itself be making an understatement. The following lament by one delegate at the TUC Annual Conference in 1955 was more apt:

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 464-5.

⁵⁴ TUC Annual Report, 1954, p. 228.

The General Council refer to 42 trade union officials under arrest [in Kenya]. Fifteen of them were released after the intervention of the General Council and 27 of them were alleged to be closely associated with Mau Mau, whatever that may mean ... It is a tragedy that the General Council did not demand the release of all trade union officials under detention ... it falls far short of what we are entitled to expect in British trade union solidarity with the Africans in Kenya. We should declare our support for every form of struggle against the European robbery of African land in Kenya and for higher standards for the people ... Our attention should be towards ending the war and a round table conference with the recognised leaders of the resistance movement in order to reach a peaceful settlement at the earliest possible moment.⁵⁵

That this was a minority voice within the TUC cannot be much in doubt. As late as 1956 the TUC was still endorsing the Kenyan Government's denials, couched in legal niceties, that detainees were not being used as forced labour, despite evidence to the contrary offered by the KFL and discussed at the ICFTU Congress of 1955.⁵⁶

With such limitations, it becomes easier to understand why Kenyan trade unionists increasingly became suspicious of the TUC, particularly in the face of the anti-colonial postures of the ICFTU. As Lubembe put it after attending one of the ICFTU's conferences:

I am extremely unhappy with the way the British delegation had led themselves during the proceedings of the Conference. It appears that the

⁵⁵TUC Annual Report, 1955, p. 474.

⁵⁶TUC Annual Report, 1956, p. 220. Also see G.E. Lynd, The Politics of African Trade Unionism, Praeger, New York, 1967, p. 66.

British TUC leaders who were sent to the Conference still live in the 1920s. They regard some people as their ex-colonies and this makes their position more unpopular in the African circle.⁵⁷

Questions of ideology aside, there were also other structural factors involved which were both a source and product of the strained relationship between the TUC and the KFL: the TUC model of trade unionism lost much of its appeal, although, of course, not from lack of trying. Indeed, as Mboya stated:

For a long time the British TUC had been keen that our trade union movement should follow the pattern set by the British trade union movement and reflect the same attitudes and the same approach.⁵⁸

From the mid-1950s when the KFL entered into close working relationship with the FKE, and it was agreed by the two parties that the emerging collective bargaining system in the country should be based on industrial unionism and not the 'chaos' of British industrial relations where craft, general and industrial unions co-existed somewhat uneasily, the appeal of British trade unionism was steadily declining for the new breed of Kenyan trade unionists. It has to be remembered that many of these unionists had risen to positions of influence during the harshest days of the emergency and, therefore, had little experience of, or interest in, the powerful omnibus unions of the Kenya of the 1940s.

⁵⁷ KFL Press Release 23-7-62. COTU Archives (CA) KFL File 270.

⁵⁸ Mboya, op. cit., p. 199.

Furthermore, the TUC's advocacy of building trade unions from the bottom up rattled some Kenyan trade unionists. The TUC feared dominance of trade unions by 'crooks' or 'unscrupulous politicians',⁵⁹ especially as the influence of American unions, with their long and unenviable record of corruption and infiltration by gangsters, grew in Kenya, and as decolonisation led to the intensification of jockeying for political positions among the nationalist leaders. Mboya, himself a trade unionist with burning political ambitions, flatly rejected the TUC's position. According to him, these fears were unfounded and smacked of paternalism. The TUC position was simply "impossible to adopt in Africa. The whole emphasis has to be given from the top. The members expect the top leaders to think out the problems and devise the answers."⁶⁰ The TUC's advice that union dues should be collected by the unions themselves "so that members were kept regularly in touch with the union and expressed their consciousness of the union by this payment" was similarly rejected:

We had problems of organisation not known in Britain ... we became convinced we would have to move to the American and Canadian system of a 'check-off' payment of union dues, with employers deducting the dues before paying wages.⁶¹

⁵⁹D.I. Davies, op. cit., p. 28.

⁶⁰Mboya, op. cit., p. 199.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 190-1.

These differences reflected a basic divergence of what trade unionism was all about. To some trade union leaders in Kenya like Mboya,

In traditional British thinking, a trade union movement is only formed to fight for better conditions for its members - especially higher wages, better housing, social security and the like. In the new thinking in Africa, the trade union movement should itself be involved in an economic interest, running its own cooperatives and even running large companies and banks.⁶²

It was from the Scandinavian and particularly Israeli labour movements that the KFL sought and from which it drew inspiration on how to establish this new pattern of trade unionism. The TUC eventually came around to sympathising with this view. In 1963 the TUC made a contribution of £ 2,000 to finance a number of scholarships to the Afro-Asian institute ran by Histadrut in Israel.⁶³ One delegate at the TUC annual conference for that year underlined the motives behind this contribution and its justification when he said:

Israel is a country which started from scratch and has acquired a lot of experience in development. It is obviously able to offer some experience to people from underdeveloped countries ... it is an international duty to give help to young nations who are now free from alien political domination and are struggling to achieve economic progress. They can't wait the passage of time. Israel herself shares these problems and has an unusual skill in providing solutions along

⁶²Ibid., p. 200.

⁶³TUC Annual Report, 1963, pp. 228-9.

Socialist lines. May I make my last point. Israel is a small country but her contribution to social and economic progress could be great, not only to Africa, Asia and Latin America but also in the Middle East.⁶⁴

The repudiation of the British model of trade unionism and the adoption of models from elsewhere, blending them with local experience, underscores the point that the TUC's influence in Kenya waned dramatically from the mid-1950s. In a sense, the Kenyan labour movement, or rather the dominant section of the Kenyan trade union leadership, was renouncing the tenets of socialism as understood in the British socialist movement. "African socialism", Mboya wrote,

has an entirely different history from European socialism. European Socialism was born of the agrarian and industrial revolutions, which divided society into the landed and the capitalist on the one side and the landless and the industrial proletariat on the other. There is no division into such classes in Africa, where states came to nationhood through the pressure of mass movements and where governments consist of the leaders of the workers and peasants, rather than the nobility who have ruled in Europe. So there is no need in Africa to argue over ideologies, or to define your actions in terms of doctrinaire theories. There is no need to quarrel, as the British Labour Party did over their famous Clause Four, about basic doctrine. African socialism consists in practice, not in theory, and one cannot argue its merits in terms of Communism or British or Italian Socialism.⁶⁵

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 362.

⁶⁵Mboya, op. cit., pp. 167-8.

There is no space here to offer a detailed critique of the ideology of African socialism. As the above passage shows, as a concept African socialism cannot explain the development of African society without degenerating into ahistorical obscurantism; indeed, it resurrects a mythical and idyllic African past, glosses over the profound impact of colonial capitalist penetration on African social formations, grossly over-simplifies the processes of nationalist struggles and decolonisation, and celebrates the multifaceted bankruptcy of the African middle classes so eloquently portrayed by Fanon's devastating critique in 1961 and many others since then.⁶⁶ As developments since the 1960s have shown African socialism as a guide to action has sunk into a morass of confusion and ignoble failure. All that it has to show for its record are dictatorships wallowed in greed and corruption, coups and counter-coups, poverty and squalor, famines and refugees. But it would be missing the point if we, with the advantage of hindsight, were to dismiss the powerful ideological pull that African Socialism had on many in the labour movements in Africa, including Kenya. It provided them with an ideological construct with which to explain and justify their growing assertion of aloofness from movements like the TUC. "There is a growing tendency", the TUC noted with regret in 1959, "for African trade unions to be subordinated to the aims of political Pan-Africanism, to the detriment of genuine trade union activity".⁶⁷ The KFL would have begged to differ with

⁶⁶Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, Grove Press, New York, 1963.

⁶⁷TUC Annual Report, 1959, p. 209.

such a characterisation of their activities.

Thus the TUC's influence in Kenya was eclipsed as a result of the growing ability by the dominant section of the Kenyan trade union leadership to articulate a distinctive ideology of 'socialism', as well as their increasing involvement in the intricate world of Pan-Africanist trade unionism. The TUC's own internal contradictions in its dealings with colonial labour movements were, of course, also partly responsible for the decline of TUC influence, as were the calculated and aggressive tactics of the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO.

TUC complaints against the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO were not new. In 1952, for instance, the TUC Report stated:

The ICFTU leaders, and especially the American trade union leaders in that body, are working unashamedly as the representatives of big business, and the American State Department. Their activity in France, for example, amply bears this out.⁶⁸

The TUC-ICFTU conflict over Africa soon started in earnest. By 1959 when the influence of the AFL-CIO in the ICFTU had risen to virtual control of the organisation,⁶⁹ the TUC noted sourly:

The General Council have become increasingly disturbed at the differences of approach as between a

⁶⁸TUC Annual Report, 1952, p. 353.

⁶⁹See Don Thomson and Rodney Larson, Where Were You Brother? An Account of Trade Union Imperialism, War on Want, London, 1978, pp. 20-1.

number of organisations, including the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO on the task of assisting African trade unions. In the General Council's view these differences can lead to a lack of co-ordination and sometimes to misdirected efforts, with the result that even those slender resources which are at the disposal of the older Trade Union Movements of the world for this purpose are not used with full effectiveness.⁷⁰

It is not surprising, therefore, that the TUC was opposed to the setting up of an African wing of the ICFTU when the idea was mooted, ostensibly because this would detract from "genuine trade union activity".⁷¹ The fact that from the mid-1950s the ICFTU's representative in Nairobi began assuming greater influence with the Kenyan trade unionists than the TUC-nominated and government-employed trade union adviser is ample testimony to the fact that there had been an important shift in the external linkages of the Kenyan labour movement. Thus from the mid-1950s the influence of the TUC in Kenya waned significantly and the battle for the soul of the Kenyan trade union movement, as it were, would be between the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO, on the one hand, and Pan-African trade unionism, on the other.

⁷⁰TUC Annual Report, 1959, p. 209.

⁷¹D.I. Davies, op. cit., p. 31.

THE RISE OF AFL-CIO AND ICFTU INFLUENCE

The ICFTU was born out of the fractious split in the ranks of the WFTU at the end of 1949. The latter, the first trade union international to include workers from both the advanced industrialised countries and the colonial and peripheral countries, had only been created four years earlier amidst the euphoria of Allied and Soviet victory over the fascist powers. It was now rent apart by the winds of the cold war which were sweeping the world as the new superpowers, the USA and the USSR, struggled to expand and consolidate their respective hegemonies. The ICFTU was therefore one of the offsprings of the new world order, a telling commentary on the decline of the old colonial powers of Europe. The streamlined WFTU which was kicked out of Paris, then again from Vienna, and finally settled in Prague where it has remained ever since, was destined to become Soviet dominated, while the ICFTU gradually fell under American control.⁷²

The TUC had played a key role in the formation of WFTU. In contrast the American Federation of Labour (AFL) had opposed its creation from the very beginning. George Meany, one of the AFL's leaders who

⁷²See Roy Godson, The Kremlin and Labour: A Study in National Security Policy, Crane, New York, 1977, p. 34 argues that "by virtue of the fact that they are well informed and have the votes, the funds, and have leverage in the international Communist movement, the Soviets have almost always managed to retain control. When necessary, recalcitrant officials have been removed and the WFTU has always fallen into line with basic Soviet policy on issues where initially there was disagreement, such as the Marshall Plan, the "expulsion" of the Chinese, and the European Economic Community". Also see Roy Godson, American Labour and European Politics, the AFL as a Transnational Force, Crane, New York, 1976, on how American labour manipulated European labour movements after the 2nd World War.

became President of the AFL-CIO after its merger in 1955, contemptuously dismissed the WFTU, in a phrase that characterised the attitudes and signalled the policies which the American labour movement would pursue in years to come both inside and outside the ICFTU. The WFTU was, in his view, "an odd combination of British Imperialism and Soviet Communism".⁷³

The virulent anti-communism of the American labour movement both at home and abroad after the Second World War represented a conjuncture of forces tending towards the thwarting of American labour radicalisation. The peculiarity of the American proletariat has been brilliantly analysed by Mike Davis who argues that

in spite of the periodic intensity of the economic class struggle and the episodic appearance of 'new lefts' in every generation since the Civil War, the rule of capital has remained more powerfully installed and less politically contested than in any other advanced capitalist social formation.⁷⁴

In fact unlike the working classes of Western Europe, the American

⁷³ Meany went on to say: "Fifteen of the 35 countries represented are British dominions and colonies, seven of which have no bona fide labour movements. The British government had recruited leaders and flown them to the London Conference to bolster up British representation. Under the weighted voting system the Soviets will still have 27 million votes, the British only 6 million." See Thomson and Larson, *op. cit.*, p. 13. The American CIO, the United Mine Workers and the Railway Brotherhood of America were represented at the ICFTU inaugural conference despite the AFL's boycott.

⁷⁴ See Mike Davies, "Why the US Working Class is Different", *New Left Review*, No. 123, p. 6. For a general and straightforward overview of the history of American labour also see Thomas R. Brooks, *Toil and Trouble, A History of American Labour*, Dell, New York, 1971.

working class's lack of

a rich panoply of collective institutions or any totalising agent of class consciousness (that is, a class party), has been increasingly integrated into American capitalism through the negatives of its internal stratification, its privatisation in consumption, and its disorganisation vis-a-vis political and trade union bureaucracies.⁷⁵

In the face of the immense socio-political hegemony of the American bourgeoisie, the American proletariat was debilitated by profound ethno-racial-religious polarizations, which were reinforced by continual European immigration and internal migration, and thus led to the constant recomposition of the working class. In short, the increasing proletarianisation of the American social structure was not

matched by an equal tendency toward the homogenisation of the working class as a cultural or political collectivity. Stratifications rooted in differential positions in the social labour process have been reinforced by deep-seated ethnic, religious, racial, and sexual antagonisms within the working class. In different periods these divisions have fused together as definite intra-class hierarchies (for example, 'native + skilled + Protestant' versus 'immigrant + unskilled + Catholic) representing unequal access to employment, consumption, legal rights, and trade union organisation. The real political power of the working class within American 'democracy' has always been greatly diluted by the effective disenfranchisement of large sectors of labour: blacks, immigrants, women, migrant workers, among others.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Davies, ibid., p. 7.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

Such internal contradictions, coupled by fratricidal struggles between the AFL and the CIO, and the cumulative impact of historic defeats suffered by the American working class, led to the radical disjuncture between the elemental trade union militancy of many American workers and their apparent political quiescence at home and subservience to the goals of American imperialism abroad.⁷⁷

Thus, although neither the AFL nor the CIO enjoyed the kind of relationship with the Democratic Party that the TUC had with the Labour Party, in its international relations the American labour movement was no less conditioned by the exigencies of American foreign policy. It is even tempting to argue that the very lack of an independent labour or socialist party in the USA made the integration of unions into the post-war 'cold war' consensus of American foreign policy all the easier.⁷⁸ By the time of the outbreak of the Second World War the AFL had already long since degenerated into a conservative monolith of business unionism and class collaboration and was bitterly opposed to the relative radicalism of the CIO. Meanwhile, the CIO, which was "born out of the New Deal and upsurge of mass organising and sometimes revolutionary socialist movement in the thirties",⁷⁹ was itself edging towards a political alliance with the Democrats, although "the real institutional coalescence of the two only permanently took hold in 1944 with the launching of the Political

⁷⁷ Davies analyses some of these 'historic defeats' and their subsequent impact on the struggles of American labour, Ibid.

⁷⁸ Several attempts to form large socialist or labour parties always floundered. Davies, ibid.; also see T.R. Brooks, op. cit.

⁷⁹ Thomson and Larson, op. cit., p. 6.

Action Committee (PAC) as the CIO's new campaign apparatus".⁸⁰ From the late 1930s, moreover, the CIO fell victim to "renewed employer terrorism" and an anti-radical backlash fanned by the media and the AFL which accused the CIO of being communist-dominated. This had the effect of exacerbating factional cleavages within the CIO and the ensuing "running battles between Trotskyists and 'Stalinists' further diluted its strength in the late thirties and forties".⁸¹

During the war a number of major developments took place which were to have far-reaching effects on the international relations of American labour. First, the savage 'civil wars' within the CIO and between the latter and the AFL continued and laid the ground for 'cold war' bloodletting within the labour movement itself. The failure of the communists to influence wartime labour militancy as a result of their "virtually uncritical adulation of Roosevelt and Murray (a leader of the CIO) in the fall of 1941"⁸² following the German invasion of the Soviet Union, "opened the way for anti-communist forces within the CIO to manipulate the rank and file unrest to their own factional advantage".⁸³

Second, partly as a result of this factionalism, partly out of labour's desire to play an important role in the organisation of the wartime economy, and partly because of the Roosevelt administration's

⁸⁰See Mike Davies, "The Barren Marriage of American Labor and the Democratic Party", New Left Review, No. 124, p. 69.

⁸¹Thomson and Larson, op. cit., p. 7.

⁸²Davies, "The Barren Marriage of the CIO ...", p. 61.

⁸³Ibid., p. 67.

efforts "to shore up the position of the labour bureaucracy in the face of internal union decomposition and consequent loss of control over the work force",⁸⁴ in an attempt to safeguard the labour vote, the American unions became more bureaucratized and rank and file activism was thereby further dissipated. Consequently, unlike the TUC, there would be "no fights over foreign policy on the convention floors" of practically all unions.⁸⁵ Union leaders would, therefore, have a free reign to conduct reactionary international policies in collusion with the interests of American imperialism.

Thirdly, the rise of wartime nationalism created the basis for a new cultural cohesion within the post-war American working class:

The significance of the new nationalism which had been incubated in the thirties and fanned to a fever pitch by the war mobilization was that it was broadly inclusive of the white working class (blacks, Mexicans, and especially Japanese-Americans need not apply) and, moreover, was propped-up by powerful material supports. The latter included the job-generating capacities of the permanent arms economy, and, in a more general sense, the new structural position of the American working class within a post-war world economy dominated by US capital.⁸⁶

Finally, Davis has emphasised that

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 64.

⁸⁵Roy Godson, "The KFL and Foreign Policy Making Process from the end of World War II to the Merger", Labour History, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 335.

⁸⁶Davies, "The Barren Marriage of the CIO ...", pp. 74-5.

frequently overlooked in analyses of the postwar working class was the electrifying impact of the Red Army's entry into Eastern Europe upon the Slavs and Hungarians who composed perhaps half of the CIO membership. The left wing ethnic organisations which had played such a heroic role in the early organisation of the CIO, and which had been one of the most important sources of socialist influence on the industrial working class, either collapsed or were marginalised by a huge recrudescence of right-wing, anticommunist nationalism in each community.⁸⁷

American labour, therefore, emerged from the Second World War with its organisational base of industrial unionism virtually ossified into a bureaucratic mould, and was ideologically predisposed to embrace the global anticommunist crusade of American imperialism.

After the war Europe was shattered and exhausted, while the USA was left triumphant, the new centre of the capitalist world, its industries brimming with overproduction. In 1947 the Marshall Plan was devised to enable European economies to absorb American surplus production and to help them in their long-term reconstruction programmes. It was in the same year that the CIA was formed out of the wartime Office of Strategic Services. The orientation of American labour relations, first in Europe, then later in the Third World, was to be heavily influenced by these two

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 75. For a simplistic and rather apologetic view of the anticommunist fervour of American labour see Carl Gersham, The Foreign Policy of American Labour, The Washington Papers, Sage, Beverly Hills, 1975, where it is argued that American labour's policy has "at heart ... a commitment to democracy as the essential framework of trade unionism. Labor's position is that free trade unionism cannot exist in the absence of democracy and that it is the best defense against tyranny. This commitment to democracy accounts for American labour's opposition to dictatorship, whatever its ideological complexion: Communism, Nazism, fascism, phalangism, Peronism, Arab Socialism, Castroism, or Maoism.", p. 2.

developments: the establishment of the Marshall Plan and the CIA.

The Soviet bloc and West European communist unions were opposed to the Marshall Plan. In France, for instance, there was a wave of strikes in 1947 led by communist unions refusing to handle US Marshall Aid consignments.⁸⁸ Consequently the USA sought to undermine these unions and the WFTU. The CIA channelled large amounts of money to the AFL which, in turn, used those funds to reorganise and harness European trade union support for the Marshall Plan. Everything was used, propoganda, material and financial aid, to prop up the positions of anti-communist and pro-American trade unionists. Similar strategies were to be used in the Third World shortly after. European governments tolerated these AFL and CIA machinations, if only because they were dependent on Marshall aid and they themselves were worried about communist takeovers.⁸⁹

Apart from Marshall Plan and other political considerations, American labour's antipathy towards the WFTU was partly determined by the opposition of International Trade Secretariats against subordination to

⁸⁸ Thomson and Larson, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Also see Roy Godson, American Labour and European Politics, Chapters 1, 2, and 5.

⁸⁹ Godson, *ibid.* Although Godson concedes that political and not economic or trade union considerations, were paramount in the formulation of post-war American labour's policies, he challenges the view that the AFL was subordinated to the foreign policies objectives of the American government, on the grounds that the AFL had its own independent foreign policy decision process. His argument leaves a lot to be desired; the fact that the AFL had its own foreign policy decision making machinery does not necessarily mean the AFL's policies and practices abroad did not serve the interests of the American government. For the view that the AFL worked with and for American intelligence in post-war Europe and served the interests of American foreign policy, see George Morris, CIA and American Labor: The Subversion of the AFL-CIO's Foreign Policy, International Publishers, New York, 1967; and Ronald Radosh, American Labor and U.S. Foreign Policy, New York, 1969.

the WFTU. These secretariats

were proud of their traditional independence, but the WFTU was determined to convert them into departments of the organisation. Crucial in this row, which gave the Western delegates a trade union reason for departing was the particularly fierce opposition to amalgamation that came from the Trade Secretariats with a large US membership like the International Metal Workers Federation and the International Transport Workers Federation.⁹⁰

Within the ICFTU itself intense rivalry between American unions and the TUC soon developed. The AFL initially boycotted the ICFTU for two years in protest over the election of the TUC secretary general, Sir Vincent Tewson, as President. The AFL was not impressed by what it considered the TUC's lukewarm opposition to communism. Matters eventually came to a head when in 1953

Meany set out to do battle with Tewson at the ICFTU Stockholm Congress. He attacked almost every major point made by Tewson who was calling for a cooling down of anti-Soviet feelings. Tewson did not bother to run for re-election. Meany pushed through changes in the ICFTU structure increasing the powers of newcomers like the Israeli Confederation of Labour, Histadrut.⁹¹

The divisions between the British and American labour movements were deepened when American labour leaders decided to take their anti-communist crusade to the colonial world. The British were resentful of

⁹⁰ Thomson and Larson, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

any significant inroads into their colonies by others who might upstage them. Coupled with their deeply ingrained Fabian spirit, this explains why they deplored the importation of cold war politics into areas under their paternalistic suzerainty. The British government itself was sufficiently concerned to complain that:

Americans are not interested in the creation of genuine African trade unions as we know them. America has no Labour Party ... As a result, the American trade union leaders such as Meany, Reuther, and Dubinsky can afford directly and openly to execute governmental and particularly State Department and CIA policy.⁹²

The Americans, on the other hand, were determined to establish contacts with colonial trade union leaders, which might pay political dividends in the future since many of these leaders were also important nationalist figures. "The obscure trade unionist of today", wrote George Cabot Lodge, one of the directors of the CIA-supported Fund for International Social and Economic Education, "may well be the president or prime minister of tomorrow. In many countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, trade unions are almost the only organised force in direct contact with the people and they are frequently among the most important influences on the people."⁹³

⁹²See Dan Schechter, Michael Ansara, and David Kolodney, "The CIA as an Equal Opportunity Employer" in E. Ray, W. Schaap, K. van Meter and L. Wolf, eds., Dirty Work: The CIA in Africa, Zed Press, London, 1980, p. 60. This was purportedly an annexe to a 1959 British Cabinet paper which the British government circulated in Africa. Also see Thomson and Larson, ibid., p. 21.

⁹³Dan Schechter et al., ibid., pp. 59-60.

In the end the TUC would be handicapped by its own familiarity in the colonies. The low key approach of the TUC could not match the grander designs of the AFL-CIO; indeed, the fact that the latter could drum up more cash for international work in one year than the TUC could in a decade, gave the American labour movement a decisive advantage. Thus, when the new TUC general secretary, George Woodcock, refused to give any of the congress's money into the ICFTU Solidarity Fund for the 1961-63 period because, he alleged, most of it was being wasted and misused for bribery and other dubious purposes in the Third World, the AFL-CIO quickly stepped in to fill the coffers of the ICFTU.⁹⁴

The policies of the AFL-CIO, and increasingly those of the ICFTU, as the influence of American unions in the confederation rose at the expense of the TUC, were geared at promoting the American model of industrial trade unionism in order to facilitate the expansion and consolidation of American economic and political interests, all in the name of stemming the tide of 'communist expansionism'. Four broad strategies were adopted to win the hearts and minds of African trade unions; first, there was massive use of propaganda, second, political support for national liberation struggles, third, the colonial trade unions were provided with substantial material and financial aid, and, finally, the development of powerful national trade union bureaucracies was actively encouraged. With its relatively higher level of economic development, and existence of the largest proletariat in East Africa, Kenya was earmarked by the

⁹⁴The fund was set up in 1957 specifically for the ICFTU's recruitment and other campaigns in the Third World. During the 1960s the annual cash flow into the Fund sometimes exceeded \$2 million per year. Thomson and Larson, op. cit., p. 21.

AFL-CIO and the ICFTU as a centre from which they could launch their operations in the region. The combined effect of AFL-CIO and ICFTU activities and internal developments within the Kenyan labour movement itself was the explosive factionalism that not only rocked Kenyan trade unions, but continental trade union solidarity as well from the mid-1950s to the 1960s.

With AFL-CIO backing, the ICFTU set up a number of newsletters and magazines, in which the two organisations incessantly professed their anti-colonial policies and championed their solidarity with the African peoples in their struggles for independence and development. Articles by African trade unionists themselves attacking colonialism and the depressed working conditions in their countries and celebrating workers' and nationalist struggles, were also a staple feature of these publications. Mboya valued any opportunity that he could get to publicise the plight of Kenyan workers under the emergency and made use of the ICFTU publications.⁹⁵ At ICFTU conferences American delegates always reminded their colonial counterparts, as W.F. Schnitzler, secretary-treasurer of the

⁹⁵ Apart from its international magazine, Free Labour World, the ICFTU had regional publications like African Labour News, African Survey, ICFTU Kampala Labour College's News Bulletin, and Africa Bulletin. One of Mboya's articles was "No Conflict of Loyalty", Free Labour World, Vol. 19, May 1960. Peter Kibisu wrote "Labour Stands Guard for Freedoms", in Africa Bulletin, No. 24. Mboya and one or two other Kenyan trade unionists also had their pieces published in AFL/CIO International Free Trade Union News. See, for instance, Mboya, "Kenya Labour's Uphill Fight", in AFL/CIO International Free Trade Union News, Vol. 12, No. 2, February, 1957; "The Trade Union Outlook in Kenya", Ibid., Vol. 51, September, 1954; A.A. Ochwada, "Union Hurdles in Kenya", Idem., Vol. 13, No. 3, March, 1959. The US Department of Labour through its Labour Developments Abroad, also carried news and articles about trade union developments in Kenya.

AFL-CIO, put it at the ICFTU's first African Regional Conference held in Accra, Ghana, in January, 1957:

we will ... exercise our fullest influence with redoubled vigour to have our country stop appeasing colonial interests. We are determined that our country should, instead, live up to its anti-colonial traditions. We of American labour realise that today, more than ever before in history, the struggle for genuine national independence has become a simultaneous struggle for such basic human rights as: freedom of the press, speech, and conscience. Colonial regimes - whether they be of the Soviet Communist type or the old style brand - always seek to curtail or destroy those freedoms because they are dangerous to the privileged interests.⁹⁶

Or as an important ICFTU policy statement proclaimed:

the ICFTU has thrown its weight behind the demand of the African peoples for self-determination, national independence. In so doing the ICFTU has carried on the long-established anti-imperialist traditions of the labour movement in all countries ... ICFTU policy in regard to Africa was once again defined at its fifth World Congress held in Tunis in 1957, which reaffirmed the faith and objectives of the ICFTU as a world organisation of free labour in which all workers are linked together in the struggle for Bread, Peace and Freedom.⁹⁷

⁹⁶Address by Treasurer-Secretary W.F. Schnitzler, AFL-CIO, to the ICFTU Regional Conference, Ambassador Hotel, Accra, 14 January, 1957. The greater part of the speech is devoted to condemning communism. TUC Library, HD 6866K.

⁹⁷See AFRO Faces the Future, Free Trade Unions in Africa, 4th African Regional Conference of the ICFTU, Addis Ababa, April, 1964, p. 78.

In its anti-colonialist campaign the ICFTU called attention to the liberation struggle in Algeria and Portuguese oppression in Angola and Mozambique. South Africa was singled out for particular retribution. The ICFTU even tried to organise a boycott of South Africa, and her expulsion from the ILO and the UN, none of which were heeded, however. But the ICFTU did manage to get direct colonial representation on the ILO.⁹⁸

Such acts in support of African nationalist struggles as well as the more propagandistic anti-colonial postures of the ICFTU struck a chord among many African trade unionists. This was certainly more than they had come to expect from the TUC. It is indeed ironical that, despite the Gomerist tradition of non-political unionism, the Americans were insisting that political involvement by African trade unions was inevitable, while the TUC "in a stand rather different from that practiced in the British Isles argued that African unions must be insulated from politics".⁹⁹ Underlying this apparent contradiction lay the fact that Americans on the whole had little to lose and much to gain from supporting political struggles in the colonial world. As Vice President Nixon reported to the Foreign Relations Committee following his 1957 African tour:

⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 75-79.

⁹⁹Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 379. By 1958 the AFL-CIO was openly describing the TUC labour officers in the colonies as 'saboteurs' of colonial trade union development because they acted as 'informers' of the colonial governments. See D.I. Davies, op. cit., p. 33. Also see 'Trade Unions and Politics', in African Labour, No. 1, January, 1958, pp. 11-16.

American interests in the future are so great as to justify us not hesitating even to assist the departure of the colonial powers from Africa. If we can win native opinion in this process, the future of America in Africa will be assured.¹⁰⁰

It was therefore

of vital importance that the American government should closely follow what goes on in the trade union sphere and that American consular and diplomatic representatives should get to know the trade union leaders of these countries intimately.¹⁰¹

Nixon was, of course, merely restating long-standing American ideas about decolonisation and American desires to see the colonial world opened up to American capital.¹⁰² This required a comprehensive offensive, involving diplomatic, political and clandestine activities by the American government itself and its agencies, like the CIA, investment by private business interests, educational and cultural exchange programmes by American educational institutions, and the like. American labour was to play its role by establishing links with colonial labour movements, for which sufficient funds would be made available. By the early 1960s the American government was spending over \$13 million annually on international labour affairs, and had "forty-eight labour attaches in

¹⁰⁰Dan Schechter, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁰¹Barry Cohen, "The CIA and African Trade Unions", in E. Ray et al., Dirty Work: The CIA in Africa, p. 71.

¹⁰²Discussed earlier in chapter 4.

developing countries supported by a host of trade union advisers. For its own part, the AFL-CIO devoted 8 percent of its budget in 1960-1 to international activities, and other sums were spent indirectly and by individual unions."¹⁰³

Many trade unionists in Africa, including some in Kenya, were only too aware of American imperialist ambitions and, in fact, the question of affiliation to the American-dominated ICFTU "produced perhaps the angriest of all divisions in the Pan-African front".¹⁰⁴ Yet it was the firm belief of the KFL leadership that the ICFTU had played a useful role in Kenya and offered invaluable help to the Kenyan labour movement. To quote Mboya:

During the dark days of the Emergency when many of our people were killed and many rotted behind bars, the only voice raised against the British government was that of the ICFTU.¹⁰⁵

But what really accounts for the close relationship between the KFL and the ICFTU, and the KFL's staunch defense of the ICFTU in the face of mounting internal and continental hostility towards the role of the confederation and American labour?

¹⁰³I. Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 202. Also see R.S. Nyameko, "US Labour Conspiracy in Africa", African Communist, 1st Quarterly, London, 1978.

¹⁰⁴See Colin Legum, Pan Africanism: A Short Political Guide, Praeger, New York, 1965, p. 21.

¹⁰⁵See African Labour News, 30th October, 1962.

The first direct contacts between Kenyan trade unions and the ICFTU can be traced back to November 1951 when a five man ICFTU delegation was sent to Kenya on a fact finding tour. The delegation's report to the ICFTU headquarters was significant because it offered what was to become a staple of the confederation's criticisms against the Kenyan government which endeared it to Kenyan trade unionists. The report vehemently attacked the system of low wages, the depressed working conditions, and the excessive profits which many large firms in the country made as a result of extremely lax taxation requirements. But they reserved their strongest criticisms for the anti-trade union attitudes and policies of the government and the employers:

That a powerful employer should negotiate with his workers as equals is nothing short of a revolutionary conception in East Africa. The African has for so long been regarded as a chattel that it will take years of struggle before the conception of unionism, implying equality of the worker, is accepted by the bulk of employers ... One of the greatest threats to the trade union movement in East Africa is the attitude held by many government officials that the African is not ready for trade unionism. The mistakes and shortcomings of the trade union movement have strengthened this attitude.¹⁰⁶

Predictably, the report did not spare the 'subversive' role that communism was playing in East Africa. It attributed, in the words of the East African Standard,

¹⁰⁶East African Standard, 6-11-51.

abortive general strikes to infiltration of communist influence into local movements, asserts that vast quantities of subversive literature are being poured out in the area and that activities of the opposing WFTU have been greatly accelerated in East Africa.¹⁰⁷

In this struggle against the twin yokes of colonial oppression and communist subversion, the report concluded, "there can be no question of the side which the ICFTU must take".

Within a year of this visit the KFRTU became affiliated to the ICFTU, thus reversing the earlier policy of strict neutrality between the trade union internationals, the WFTU and the ICFTU.¹⁰⁸ The decision to affiliate to the ICFTU was momentous, one which would have far-reaching repercussions for the growth of the Kenyan labour movement, not only in its organisational aspects, but also in terms of ideological directions. There were three main reasons why the KFRTU became affiliated to the ICFTU at this historical juncture. First, militant trade unionists had been incarcerated after the 1950 Nairobi General Strike and immediately preceding and following the declaration of the state of emergency in 1952. Internal union opposition to international affiliation had therefore been removed. Second, the trade unionists who remained behind and those who emerged to take the place of their erstwhile colleagues now in jail were genuinely desperate for external support. Since affiliation to the WFTU was simply out of the question, if only because the Kenyan government would not even allow WFTU

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Singh, op. cit., p. 316.

publications into the country after 1951, the ICFTU became the only organisation which, in the view of the embattled Kenyan trade unionists, was "in a position to compel respect from the British authorities",¹⁰⁹ and thus provide them with a protective international umbrella. Finally, it was the Kenyan government itself, in fact, through the Labour Department, which prevailed on the KFRTU to demonstrate a more favourable attitude to the ICFTU as a sign that it had shed its 'communist-leanings' and abandoned the crass militancy of the late 1940s.¹¹⁰

Over the years other factors entered into the picture and came to dominate and determine the way in which ICFTU-KFL relations developed. Important among them was the growth of KFL dependence on ICFTU and American financial support. Given their perennial shortage of funds, a problem which was made worse by the emergency conditions, many Kenyan trade unionists were only too glad to receive ICFTU and American money. Starting from a trickle in the early 1950s, by 1959 the ICFTU was donating £750 a month to the KFL,¹¹⁰ and £1,000 a month in the early 1960s.¹¹¹ In 1962 alone the KFL received \$44,000 from the ICFTU, a fairly large sum by the Kenyan standards of the time.¹¹²

The AFL-CIO also made its own direct grants to the KFL. Mboya came back from his first American tour in 1956 with \$35,000 from the

¹⁰⁹I. Davies, op. cit., p. 194.

¹¹⁰Singh, op. cit., p. 237.

¹¹¹Dan Schechter, op. cit., p. 59.

¹¹²Minutes of the 19th Meeting of the ICFTU International Solidarity Fund, Geneva, 17-19 June, 1963, CA KFL File 296.

AFL-CIO.¹¹³ In the late 1950s the AFL-CIO gave \$56,000 towards the building costs of the KFL headquarters, Solidarity Building.¹¹⁴ In the early part of 1961 the AFL-CIO donated 28,000/- to the KFL,¹¹⁵ and in 1962 the former contributed 49,000/- towards the cost of Kenya Labour Day festivities organised by the KFL and which cost 70,000/-, altogether.¹¹⁶ In the following year the AFL-CIO gave the KFL another 78,037/-.¹¹⁷ Additional funds to Kenyan unions also came from individual American unions and International Trade Secretariats, such as the International Transport Workers Federation which gave 5,400/- to the Railway African Union,¹¹⁸ the Plantation Workers' International Federation which helped in funding the creation of agricultural unions in Kenya in the late 1950s,¹¹⁹ and the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union in Philadelphia which sent aid to the Kenya Tailors and Textile Workers' Union.¹²⁰

¹¹³Labour Department Annual Report, 1956, p. 14.

¹¹⁴See Clement Lubembe, The Inside Labour Movement in Kenya, Equatorial Publishers, Nairobi, 1968, p. 89. The Israeli labour federation, Histadrut, contributed to the furnishing of the library, the German D.G.B. furnished the Council Chambers and the TUC furnished the education section. See KFL 1960 Annual Conference Report.

¹¹⁵Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 436.

¹¹⁶See CA KFL 185.

¹¹⁷See CA KFL 49.

¹¹⁸Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 418.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 426f.

¹²⁰AFL-CIO - KFL 2-12-62, CA KFL File 610. Also see File 306.

Finally, funds were channelled to Kenya through CIA-supported organisations like the Fund for International Social and Economic Education which contributed more than \$25,000 to the KFL's coffers in the early 1960s.¹²¹ If we included gifts of office equipment, stationery and the like, we cannot escape the conclusion that the material and financial aid that the KFL received from the ICFTU and American unions and other American sources was very large.¹²² The British TUC was quite unable to compete at these levels, even had it wished to do so.

To what uses were these funds put and with what impact? In a number of cases the funds significantly contributed to the foundation and organisation of trade unions as in the case of the agricultural unions. The funds also enabled the KFL to build an effective organisation which could now afford to pay and keep a permanent staff who derived their income solely from their work as trade unionists. In short, these funds provided the KFL with much-needed shelter from chronic shortages of funds so that the federation could, if it wanted, afford to devote itself to mobilising and unionising the tens of thousands of unorganised workers in the country. Unfortunately, on the whole, these funds also inevitably encouraged tendencies towards the bureaucratisation and deradicalisation of the KFL.

¹²¹Dan Schechter, op. cit., p. 59.

¹²²It is reasonable to assume that records of all grants given to the KFL by the Americans were not kept in full, so that the amount of financial aid that KFL leaders received from the Americans was probably much higher than we have tried to indicate in this chapter.

The ICFTU and American funds facilitated the creation of a fairly large KFL bureaucracy which gradually became divorced from grass roots activism. As Kubai stated so articulately:

I pointed out that it was due to KFL reliance on regular remittances from abroad that made the union weak. Corrupt and inefficient many of the leaders had no contact with the branches. They were not dependent on the efficient working of union branches because they received their cheques from the ICFTU. The KFL wasn't receiving money from the unions which were supposed to be affiliated to it, and since it was dependent on funds from foreign sources, it didn't care ... The KFL by aligning itself with the ICFTU is trying to prove to African countries that it has given up the militant leadership of the past and is content to become an international beggar.¹²³

For voicing such criticisms the KFL dismissed Kubai as director of organisation, partly at the insistence of the ICFTU which had threatened that unless Kubai was removed "it would be difficult for the KFL to get more funds from the ICFTU".¹²⁴ Kubai's dismissal was not an isolated case. Singh and many others were struck by the same fate.¹²⁵

¹²³Open Letter: F. Kubai - KFL President, 26-9-62, "My Expulsion from KFL". CA KFL File 255.

¹²⁴Ibid. Kubai's second open letter dated 30-9-62 requested that the question of affiliation to the ICFTU should be put on referendum to all KFL members and workers in the country. The KFL's reasons for dismissing Kubai were that he was engaged in divisive activities since his return, showed sympathy for the KTUC, failed to explain his perpetual absenteeism, and did not work according to KFL principles. See CA KFL File 322.

¹²⁵The story of Makhan Singh is indeed a sad one. When he came out of detention in October 1961 after nearly 11½ years, he was feted by workers and met by prominent nationalist leaders like Kenyatta Odinga, Mboya, Masinde Muliro and others. Singh was overwhelmed and

The ICFTU kept a close watch on internal developments within the Kenyan trade union movement and the latter's international dealings.¹²⁶ In fact, the KFL used a great portion of its funds from the ICFTU and the American unions to fight and undermine dissidents from within and rivals from without, like the KTUC and later the KFPTU before it changed its name to KAWC, all of which were staunchly opposed to the KFL's

declared: "I was a communist. I've always been, and will continue to be a communist." See Colonial Times, 26-10-61. For a time it seemed that he would be able to return to active trade unionism. He was appointed as one of the KFL's representatives to the conference that produced the Industrial Relations Charter. He also rejoined his old Printing and Kindred Trades Union and was soon elected Assistant General Secretary. Before long, however, his star began to wane. In December he was dismissed from the union on the grounds that he was a "works manager" and not a worker. See Mak/B/1/6. His old political and trade union colleagues also began ignoring him, and he came under strong attack from the leaders of the Asian community. See Mak/A/16. The papers started writing about him as the "forgotten" man of Kenya. See, 'A Man In the Shadows', Daily Nation, 22-6-63; also see Drum Magazine, Dec. 1964. His repeated requests to KANU to let him contest one of the seats in the General Elections were ignored. By the time of Kenya's independence Singh had virtually sunk into oblivion. "Dear Comrade", Kubai wrote him a few days before the independence celebration, "here are 2 uhuru invitation cards for you and me. Things have been going the wrong way so that some of the freedom fighters find themselves forgotten. But we have played our part - history will always tell who is who." It is an indication of how disregarded he became that the Labour Department could find nothing for him other than membership on the Labour Advisory Board which only met twice a year, and his application to teach trade union history in educational institutions on a freelance basis was rejected on the grounds that he was not a qualified teacher. See Mak/A/17-18. He spent his last years writing a book, arranging his massive notes, a broken man. More than anything else his eventual fate symbolised the marginality of radicalism in a country dominated by varieties of obscurantist ideologies. The fact that he was an Indian only made matters worse.

¹²⁶ There were even proposals by the ICFTU that it should inspect KFL books. See CA KFL File 112. The ICFTU also wanted to be informed about any international visits made by KFL leaders. When a group of Kenyan trade unionists visited Hungary in October, 1962, the ICFTU demanded to know who had authorised such a visit. The KFL denied any knowledge of the trip. See ICFTU - KFL 27-10-62 and KFL - ICFTU - 5-11-62, CA KFL File 578.

affiliation to the ICFTU and the latter's interference in Kenyan trade union affairs. As the following passage shows, the beneficiaries of ICFTU and American aid proved to be good pupils, for by the early sixties they were using anti-communist rhetoric with a flourish to justify their efforts to sabotage their factional rivals:

It was at the end of 1960 when the KFL realised that Communism had gone very deep into the trade union movement ... We decided to clear our own house first and this we did by dismissing Messrs. Mutiso and Gachaga at the Executive Committee meeting held 1-1-61 ... In February we started a programme with unions by then most affected, i.e., RAU, PWU, SPWU, TAWU. With ICFTU money we managed to remove the communist supporters from the offices in the respective unions. This we did by requesting unions to hold conferences with our assistance and also to assist the loyal union officers to campaign and obtain necessary support before the conferences ... and the result of the elections at their conferences proved that the assistance was not wasted, for the Communist supporters were automatically removed from their respective offices. With ICFTU money we managed to organise the union of Quarry and Mine Workers Union and to replace the Building and Construction Workers Union. This made Mr. Ochwada to lose many followers and made it difficult for him to have a strong union ... we managed at last to remove RAU from the hands of Mr. Ohanga, the right hand man of Mr. Ochwada, and we rebuilt the union again. Today the union has one of our loyal and strong man as their General Secretary Bro. Walter N. Attenyo who is the Assistant Secretary General of the KFL and Director of Education. Our enemy the TUC is no longer a major threat in our trade union movement.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ KFL General Review of the Past Activities and Estimates for 1962 Organisation Programme, by James Karebe, Treasurer, CA KFL File 64.

This shows the extent to which Kenyan trade union leaders were locked in fierce factional struggles over the question of international affiliation, which only served to sap the energies of the labour movement as a whole. The ICFTU and American unions, through their activities and infusion of huge sums of money, not only accentuated this factionalism, but also bankrolled it.

The bureaucratisation and de-radicalisation of the Kenyan labour movement was reinforced by the type of training programmes which were sponsored by the ICFTU and AFL-CIO. After financial aid and the KFL's growing dependence on it, the training programmes constituted another critical pillar in the emerging KFL-ICFTU collaborative network. A number of key Kenyan trade unionists were flown to the USA for training. One need only mention a few; Peter Kibisu who became acting general secretary when Mboya became Minister of Labour in 1962, was sponsored by the AFL-CIO to study at Harvard University's Graduate School for Business Administration;¹²⁸ Ochola Mak' Anyengo, general secretary of Kenya Petroleum and Oil Workers' Union got a two year grant from the AFL-CIO to study at the University of Chicago;¹²⁹ Arthur Ochwada, who was general secretary of the East African Building and Construction Workers' Union before he broke ranks with the KFL to form the KTUC, also received a scholarship to go to Harvard in 1959;¹³⁰ and Clement Lubembe, who became

¹²⁸CA KFL File 77.

¹²⁹KFL 1960 Annual Conference Report.

¹³⁰Ibid. Also see Lubembe, op. cit., p. 195f.

KFL general secretary in 1963 was sent to participate in the Foreign Leader Programme of the Office of Cultural Exchange of the US Department of State in 1962.¹³¹ Many more received scholarships from the International Trade Secretariats and individual US unions.¹³²

Other Kenyan trade unionists found their way to the Afro-Asian Institute for Cooperation and Trade Unionism in Israel which was financed "by the Histadrut with a generous scholarship contribution from the AFL-CIO".¹³³ After 1964, when the African-American Labour Centre was set up in the United States, the number of trade unionists from Kenya and the rest of Africa who were sponsored to go to the USA increased substantially.¹³⁴ Then there was, of course, the famous airlift programme in the late 1950s and early 1960s, perhaps one of the most spectacular feats in crash-education in Kenyan history, in which thousands of young men and women were flown to American colleges and universities. The role of American labour in the operation of this programme cannot be over-emphasised.¹³⁵ These young men and women were to constitute a

¹³¹ CA KFL File 49.

¹³² See, for instance, scholarships given by the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union to the Kenya Tailors and Textile Workers' Union. CA KFL File 306.

¹³³ See M.E. Kreinin, Israel and Africa: A Study in Technical Cooperation, Praeger, New York, 1965, p. 127.

¹³⁴ For more details on the training programmes, funding and aims of the AALC, see B. Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-79; and Thomson and Larson, *op. cit.* Also see "The AFL-CIO Goes on Safari", in Counter-Spy, Washington, D.C., Spring/Summer, 1975, which deals with the activities of the centre.

¹³⁵ Mboya, *op. cit.*, chapter seven. For further details see M.I. Smith, "The East African Airlift of 1959, 1960 and 1961", Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse, 1965/66.

significant proportion of Kenya's bureaucratic and professional classes after independence.

But the ICFTU and AFL-CIO training programmes did not stop there. Other programmes were launched locally. The ICFTU began its educational programme in Kenya in 1955 when two series of six-week courses were held for 180 students in collaboration with the KFL. This was the first extension into East Africa of ICFTU work already started in West Africa a couple of years earlier.¹³⁶ In 1958 the ICFTU set up a Labour College in Kampala, which marked the culmination of the confederation's educational efforts on the continent.¹³⁷ By 1960 Kenya had twelve students passing through the college. Instructors from the college also run courses in Nairobi and Mombasa between September, 1958 and June, 1960, which were attended by many Kenyan union branch officials.¹³⁸ For its part the AFL-CIO, in conjunction with the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, sponsored the formation of the Institute of Tailoring and Cutting in Nairobi in 1963 by the Kenya Tailors and Textile Workers' Union.¹³⁹

Participants in both the external and local training programmes tended to be recruited from the KFL itself and the senior leaders of the large trade unions. In the short-term, this created organisational difficulties for the unions concerned, but more important, the organisational

¹³⁶See AFRO Faces the Future, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-29.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸KFL 1960 Annual Conference Report.

¹³⁹African Labour News, 25 September, 1963. Also see CA KFL File 306.

gulf between the KFL and its smaller affiliates was widened, thereby accelerating the tendency towards the centralisation of decision making within the KFL and the larger and more strategically placed unions. The issue of scholarships also became a further source of factionalism as the various factions within the leadership used the scholarships to build patronage networks and to shore up their respective positions. All this pales into insignificance, however, when we consider the impact of these training programmes on the dissemination of 'productionist' and 'economistic' notions of trade unionism which, in turn, were based on the adoption of industrial unionism as the basis of trade union organisation by the Kenyan labour movement.

It hardly needs to be stressed that in their studies, both at home and abroad, the Kenyan trade unionists were subjected to a fair amount of anti-communist and anti-socialist teachings. To quote a talk given by R.M. Mwilu, then Principal of the ICFTU Kampala Labour College:

Trade union functions in Africa cannot be based on the Marxian theory of class struggle. Similarly, it would be extreme shortsightedness if East Africa were to order its affairs according to a formula laid down over a hundred years ago by a socialist philosopher, who hardly knew anything about Africa and who possibly did not hear anything about Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar ... Within [the] philosophy [of African Socialism] the fight against capitalism per se [as preached by Marx] becomes inadequate and almost irrelevant. The role of trade unions becomes that of adjusting the working community to address themselves to the fight for national sovereignty, within which the members can be proud of their nationhood.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ News Bulletin, No. 9 September/October, 1964. Courses at the College were divided into three parts. Part 1 dealt with a) the history

To a large extent ICFTU teachings were merely reinforcing the obscurantist tendencies inherent in the ideology of African Socialism to which many Kenyan trade unionists subscribed. In other words, it was the high level of ideological compatibility between African Socialism and the anti-revolutionary predilections of the ICFTU and American labour which facilitated and sustained the KFL-ICFTU relationship.

Like the KFL, the ICFTU recognised the underdeveloped nature of African economies. Apart from some contentious ecological and demographic factors it tended to offer as explanations,¹⁴¹ the ICFTU's catalogue of the obstacles to economic development and large-scale industrialisation in African countries did not depart in any fundamental way from that presented by movements like the KFL. It was noted that infrastructural services were poorly developed, internal sources of capital

and philosophy of trade unionism, b) the quality of trade union leadership, c) trade union structure, d) trade union finances, e) organising, f) industrial relations and labour law, g) routine union administration, h) collective bargaining. Part 2 dealt with a) basic economics, b) Africa's economic and social problems, c) labour economics, d) trade union statistics. Part 3 finally dealt with international and public relations, such as the role of Africa in world affairs, East - West relations, the role of the UN, Afro-Asian solidarity, the OAU, and so on. See R.M. Mwilu, The Role of ICFTU African Labour College in Labour Education, Kampala. Research conducted on former students of the college showed that two years after graduation almost one third had moved into management or government jobs, 58% rose to higher union jobs and only 9% retained the same union jobs as they did before their training. This would seem to confirm that the college pursued the policy of training an elite corps of trade unionists. See I. Davis, op. cit., p. 211.

¹⁴¹ It was argued, for instance, that one of the major causes of Africa's 'economic retardation' was the isolation of the continent from world commerce until the late 19th Century. This was because "Africa was difficult of access and was infested with virulent tropical diseases", and, moreover, Africa's population was "relatively sparse because of climate and diseases". See Report of the First African Regional Trade Union Conference of the ICFTU, Accra, 14-19, January, 1957, pp. 102-4.

were either lacking or insufficient, and agricultural production, especially from the subsistence sector, was low, indeed, the money economy needed massive expansion before there could ever really be any development.¹⁴² The general social consequences arising from this, it was noted, were grim: the living and working conditions for the workers were deplorable; diseases and malnutrition were rife; wages were so low that workers could literally not afford to maintain their families. By maintaining low wage economies, the colonial governments and employers were, unwittingly or not, ensuring the continuance of low productivity, thereby curtailing the growth of large consumer markets and all that this entailed in terms of the development of manufacturing industries, and inhibiting the flow of large amounts of foreign capital. All this was compounded by the degradation of racial discrimination and the colour bar in the settler colonies like Kenya. Finally, these economies were more integrated with the metropolitan centres than with each other to their considerable detriment.¹⁴³

It was perhaps in the solutions it offered to these problems of Third World underdevelopment that the ICFTU's role as the front for the preservation of the world capitalist system becomes very evident. Using arguments that would later become a common feature of prescriptions by the World Bank, the EEC-ACP Conventions and North-South Dialogue conferences, the ICFTU recommended, first, expanding and improving international trade, and, second, increasing aid and investment in the underdeveloped

¹⁴²Ibid., pp. 100-123.

¹⁴³Ibid., pp. 132-149.

countries. In November 1962 the ICFTU's African Survey published a piece entitled 'Trade Unions and the Developing Countries' in which the pressing reasons for restructuring international trade were laid out:

It is of urgent necessity for international agreements to be concluded in order to stabilise the primary commodity markets, and for steps to be taken on the international level to soften the undesirable effects of price fluctuations and of the volume of primary commodity exports on the economies of the producing countries. It would be of importance to provide for systems compensation or insurance to guarantee a minimum revenue in the case of falling prices for primary commodities. It is evident nevertheless that such agreements and such measures will not resolve the fundamental problem of the under-developed producing countries of primary commodities: that of industrialisation. The process of technological innovation has the consequence of reducing, relatively speaking, the utilisation of primary commodities ... From this arises the absolute necessity for the producing countries of primary commodities, to become industrialised if they do not want to condemn themselves to perpetual under-development. This will come about unless certain preconditions are filled. The most important are, in addition to sustained effort on the part of the developing countries themselves, firstly that the industrial countries must gradually abolish trading restrictions ... and secondly, that the rich countries must considerably increase their direct aid to these countries.¹⁴⁴

The ICFTU recommended that the developed countries should at least devote one per cent of their national revenue for aid to underdeveloped countries. In its Report of the First African Regional Trade Union

¹⁴⁴See, "Trade Unions and The Developing Countries", African Survey, November, 1962, pp. 3-4.

Conference, the ICFTU emphasised that the capital needed for the development programmes in Africa should no longer be restricted to the colonial powers, but had to be internationalised and multilateralised:

The contribution of metropolitan powers to the economic development of their dependent African territories has been noted. But the possibilities of action in this field are limited by the financial resources of the metropolitan countries ... on the other hand, having achieved independence from the former metropolitan countries, the African countries will doubtless be very wary of falling into economic dependence upon some other country or countries. If assistance from abroad is to enable them to achieve the economic aims of recipient countries, its amount will have to be increased; if it is to be in accord with their political aspirations, it should be to a large extent international in character.¹⁴⁵

Without sufficient protection, however, it was emphasised that foreign capital would not be forthcoming. Thus, while it was

clearly inadmissible that foreign companies should make huge profits, out of proportion to the capital invested or to the total wages bill paid, and that they should be allowed to withdraw a very high proportion of these huge profits from the country, as is sometimes the case in Africa,

it would equally be a grave mistake to forget that

¹⁴⁵ Report of the First African Regional Trade Union Conference, p. 119. Also see "Full Text of Statement Submitted by the ICFTU to Conference of Independent African States", Accra, April, 1958, in African Labour News, July, 1958, pp. 23-27.

foreign investors expect to get returns on their capital, as indeed any capitalist does. To curtail excessively the profits of existing foreign companies may discourage other foreign capitalists from investing in the country concerned.¹⁴⁶

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the KFL leaders subscribed to essentially the same views about the underdevelopment of their country and the need to attract and protect foreign capital. As Mboya asserted:

Every African leader agrees there should be stability and foreign capital should be encouraged and offered normal protection. But it has become obvious in Kenya that many people try to exploit this reasonable demand, and use it as a political weapon and not as an economic argument.¹⁴⁷

Thus the ICFTU, much like the dominant wing of the KFL, implicitly assumed that there would be no structural class division, no antagonistic class relations in post-colonial society, between a bourgeois class and a working class, and explicitly maintained that economic growth, and not the social relations arising from the production process itself and the social division of labour, would be the crucial factor in the development of such a society. The ICFTU derived its tenets from post-war 'developmentalist' prescriptions of Western liberalism, while the KFL leaders were inspired by the credo of nationalism in its peculiar African socialist garb. These two ideologies were to be mediated through the

¹⁴⁶Report of the First African ..., *ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁴⁷Mboya, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

development of industrial unionism as the organisational mode of the Kenyan labour movement.

It followed from this pre-occupation with economic growth and national development that trade unions had to be structured in such a way that they would not only be responsible to the needs of their members but also to those of the national economy as a whole. The ICFTU was of the view that since the African labour movements had been part of the anti-colonial nationalist struggles, they should also be part of post-colonial struggles for nation building and development. As Omer Becu, ICFTU general secretary, put it in 1963:

The trade unions of the developing countries have mostly grown in the particular circumstances of the struggles for national emancipation and, together with the politically organised progressive forces in their countries, they have waged, or are still waging, with the active support of the ICFTU a successful fight to do away with colonial domination and exploitation ... It would clearly be illogical to consider that such co-operation should disappear on the achievement of national independence when equally vital tasks confront the new nation. The labour movement must be one of the forces working for national cohesion and development.¹⁴⁸

Mboya could have made this speech. Thus, like the Mboyas, the ICFTU encouraged or hailed labour's political struggles against colonial rule, but urged labour's political accommodation with nationalist parties and leaders, if not labour's actual abdication of autonomy after independence.

¹⁴⁸ See, "Labour's Tasks in Emergent Nations", in African Survey, July-September, 1963, p. 4.

This was a fine recipe for American-style conservative business unionism.

Consequently, the ICFTU, like the nationalist leaders and the so-called African socialists, envisaged a productionist role for unions after the attainment of independence. "The functions of trade unions", according to Mwilu,

could be grouped into four. The first, he said, was business unionism which functions as a pressure group and is concerned with exerting pressure on the leadership to "deliver the goods" through the machinery of collective bargaining. He emphasised that in East Africa business unionism would continue as long as private ownership existed. The second type of unionism was friendly or uplift unionism attempting to elevate the moral and intellectual life of the worker ... in East Africa friendly unionism was greatly needed. The third type of unionism, he said, was the revolutionary one, which stirs class consciousness and hopes to speed up activities by provoking strikes, agitation and sabotage. He urged East Africans to discourage revolutionary unionism. The fourth type of unionism, he went on, was the predatory one subscribing to no economic philosophy except the insatiable thirst for more.¹⁴⁹

In its own recommendations the ICFTU strongly came out against 'craft' and 'general' unions and argued in favour of industrial unions.¹⁵⁰

It has been argued that Jim Bury, a Canadian trade unionist and the first ICFTU representative to East Africa, was instrumental in convincing

¹⁴⁹See, "African Unions not based on class struggle idea", in News Bulletin, No. 9, September-October, 1964.

¹⁵⁰See, "What is the Ideal Union Structure for Africa", African Labour News, No. 1, January, 1958.

the KFL leadership to adopt industrial unionism.¹⁵¹ We may conclude that the adoption of industrial unionism by Kenyan trade unionists from the mid-1950s not only arose out of pressures from the Kenyan government and the FKE, both of whom were resolutely against the resurrection of the powerful general unions of the 1940s, but was also to a large extent encouraged by ICFTU advisers, training programmes and, of course, financial help. In other words, internal pressures and the overriding concern by Kenyan trade unionists during the Emergency not to give the government and employers excuses for making their already difficult lives even more unbearable, coupled with ICFTU advice and money, made 'economistic' industrial unionism attractive. Industrial unionism based on a tripartite system of collective bargaining involving the unions, government and employers came to be seen by both the ICFTU and the KFL as the best form of industrial relations which was capable of articulating the interests of Kenyan workers as well as mobilise them so that they could participate in the momentous task of economic development. The question of fundamental change in the basis of Kenya's political economy was hardly ever raised, indeed, it was regarded as irrelevant or, worse still, part of the machinations of 'communist subversives'.

In conclusion, it can be argued that apart from ICFTU cash grants and provision of scholarships and training facilities, the ICFTU-KFL relationship was made possible by the remarkable ideological congruity between the two movements in their analyses of African underdevelopment and how to overcome it. It was cemented by the KFL's adoption of a model

¹⁵¹ See Mboya, *op. cit.*, p. 189; and Richard Sandbrook, Proletarians and African Capitalism, CUP, London, 1975, p. 33.

of industrial unionism and collective bargaining based on assumptions that the interests of labour were essentially compatible with those of the nationalist leadership. Both the model and the assumptions behind it owed a lot to the extensive American labour offensive after the Second World War, and recalled the American labour movement's own failure to develop an independent Labour Party and construct a durable and broad socialist ideology, which then resulted in the incorporation of the AFL-CIO into the Democratic coalition and subservice to the goals of American imperialism. It was, in turn, the KFL's seemingly warm embrace of the ICFTU and American labour which laid the KFL open to fierce opposition both in Kenya and on the continent generally.

THE IMPACT OF PAN-AFRICAN TRADE UNIONISM

It is tempting to suggest that the splits and subsequent struggles within the KFL and between the latter and other African labour movements over the question of international affiliation had less to do with fundamental differences over modes of trade union organisation than with divergent conceptions of non-alignment and Pan-Africanism. Despite differences in size, strength and other peculiarities determined by local factors, the trade union movement in Kenya shared one central characteristic with many trade union movements in Africa: they were all born and bred under the conditions of British colonialism. It is rather ironical that the trade union movements which were most vociferous in their attacks against the KFL, like the Ghana TUC, were not very different from the KFL in structure and organisation. In fact at the height of the

storm over the question of international affiliation in the early 1960s, the Ghana TUC was more firmly integrated into the party apparatuses of Nkrumah's Convention Peoples Party (CPP) than the KPL into those of Kenyatta's KANU. The CPP was certainly no more proletarian in composition and revolutionary in ideology than KANU at that particular point in time.¹⁵² This does not mean, of course, that the protagonists in the conflict did not sometimes try to present their divergent positions over affiliation as reflecting fundamental differences in trade union practices.

It would seem that the origins of Pan-African trade unionism actually point to the determinant role of political and ideological considerations in the development of the movement. According to Legum, it was Sekou Toure of Guinea who first launched the movement towards non-aligned Pan-African trade unionism. "Long resentful of the importation of Europe's labour divisions into Africa", Sekou Toure "led the Guinea and Senegal trade unions into a new affiliation, the Confederation General des Travailleurs d'Afrique (CGTA) which broke its French and its WFTU affiliations".¹⁵³ Soon the movement spread to the whole of French West Africa and UGTAN (Union Generales des Travailleurs d'Afrique Noire) was formed free of all metropolitan or international affiliation. Meanwhile, in the North African and Middle Eastern countries, the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (ICATU) was also formed in March 1956

¹⁵²See Richard Jeffries, Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi, CUP, London, 1978, especially Chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁵³Colin Legum, op. cit., p. 81.

along similar lines. It was based and controlled in Nasser's Egypt.¹⁵⁴ Weakened by the disaffiliation of all these unions, from which the WFTU had virtually derived all of its African support, the federation "ceased to canvas for new members in the continent".¹⁵⁵

Dislodging the ICFTU was to prove much more difficult. The WFTU African offensive, long expected and exaggerated by the ICFTU and American unions in order to justify their own machinations on the continent, failed to materialise for a number of reasons. First of all, unlike the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO, it was almost impossible for the WFTU to operate effectively behind colonial barriers because the colonial governments would not let it. As Roy Godson notes, traditionally the WFTU was able to develop close relationship with Third World labour movements "only where the governments of the day enjoy a good relationship with the Soviet Union, as the Ghanaian government did in the early 1960s".¹⁵⁶ Secondly, again unlike the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO, the WFTU had insufficient funds with which to reward and support anti-Western and pro-WFTU African trade unionists. Windmuller indicates that the WFTU's International Solidarity Fund spent \$1.3 million during a 40 month period between January 1, 1962 and June 30, 1965.¹⁵⁷ Thirdly, the WFTU, also

¹⁵⁴For a more detailed study of WFTU's policies towards an African union see W.A. Belling, "WFTU and Decolonisation: A Tunisian Case Study", Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1964.

¹⁵⁵Legum, op. cit., p. 82.

¹⁵⁶Roy Godson, The Kremlin and Labor, p. 60. Also see R. Legrold, Soviet Policy in West Africa, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1970.

¹⁵⁷J.P. Windmuller, Labor Internationals, New York School of Industrial and Labour Relations, Cornell University, 1969, pp. 35-6. Out of this annual budget of approximately \$325,000 a year, 60% went to the Third World.

"unlike the ICFTU, was reluctant from its inception to sponsor regional organisations, perhaps because ... it feared losing control".¹⁵⁸

Underlying the shortage of funds and reluctance to sponsor regional organisations were important ideological factors within the Soviet bloc itself. To begin with, the WFTU offensive was on a low level of Soviet foreign policy priorities because of Soviet pre-occupation with developments in Europe and the Cold War. Moreover, in Soviet analyses the economies of Africa were colonial appendages supplying the West with raw materials so that they had "little industry, and a very small, weak, and poorly organised proletariat".¹⁵⁹ Initially, too, there were Soviet suspicions of nationalism and its 'bourgeois nationalist leadership'. It was only later that these doubts were qualified by the belief that the anti-colonialism expressed by the nationalist movements was a stepping stone to the foundation of socialist societies through 'non-capitalist' paths of development. In this, lay an attempt to accommodate the geo-political objectives of the Soviet state and the ideological underpinnings of its communist system.¹⁶⁰ One tactical consequence of this was that for the non-communist world "Soviet trade union policy ... vacillated between advocacy of 'leftist' dual unionism (forming Communist unions to

¹⁵⁸ Godson, The Kremlin and Labor, p. 36.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁶⁰ See David Morrison, The USSR and Africa, 1945-1963, OUP, London, 1964; Christopher Stevens, The Soviet Union and Black Africa, Holmes and Meier, New York, 1976; and Helen D. Cohn, Soviet Policy Toward Black Africa - The Focus of National Integration, Praeger, New York, 1972.

challenge the existing moderate ones) and 'united labour' alliances".¹⁶¹ Another problem which considerably complicated the work of the WFTU, especially in the late 1950s and early 1960s, was the Sino-Soviet split. The split injected the problem of polycentrism and the need for readjustments in international communist labour tactics. At WFTU congresses the Chinese increasingly challenged the USSR's foreign policies and Moscow's claims to pre-eminence as the ideological centre of the Communist world, and they tried to isolate the Russians by cashing in on Afro-Asian solidarity generated by the Bandung Spirit of 1955.¹⁶²

Faced with none of these political, financial, and ideological obstacles which confronted the WFTU, the real challenge to the ICFTU in Africa came from Ghana, the first independent country in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the bearer of the mantle of radical Pan-Africanism. It was at the All-African People's Conference held in Accra and chaired by Mboya that the idea of creating a pan-African trade union federation was called

¹⁶¹ See Alexander Dallin, "The Soviet Union's Political Activity", in Zbigniew Brzezinski, ed., Africa and The Communist World, Stanford University Press, 1963, p. 28. Godson gives the examples of Iraq and Syria where the Soviets advised the Communist Parties to dissolve their small trade union apparatuses and merge with the main central labour organisations. This was at a time when the Soviets enjoyed favourable relations with the two governments and did not want to see the situation compromised by 'irresponsible' acts of the local communist parties. Kremlin and Labor, p. 59.

¹⁶² See G.E. Lichtblau, "The Communist and Labour Offensive in Former Colonial Territories", in Industrial and Labour Relations Review, Vol. 15, No. 3, April, 1962, pp. 392-4. Also see his other article, "Current Trends on the International Labour Scene", Year Book of World Affairs, Vol. 17, 1963.

for and unanimously endorsed.¹⁶³ Nkrumah and his lieutenants envisaged the union as a "dynamic and positive instrument in the realisation of a United States of Africa".¹⁶⁴ "There is a constant endeavour", Nkrumah said on one occasion, almost echoing Sekou Toure,

to use the African trade union movement as a protagonist in the Cold War conflict and some of the leaders through flattery and the acceptance of financial assistance for their unions, have allowed themselves to be suborned ... The African trade union movement must promote the independence and welfare of the African worker; it cannot run the risk of subordinating the safety of African independence and the needs of African development to other non-African influences.¹⁶⁵

Heeding these calls the Ghana TUC (GTUC) disaffiliated from the ICFTU in 1959 and thus began a new chapter in the history of African trade unionism.

The reactions of the WFTU and the ICFTU to Ghana's attempts to rally African trade unions behind a non-aligned pan-African trade union front was as different as it was revealing. The WFTU, despite initial

¹⁶³ See Opaku Agyemau, "Kwame Nkrumah and Tom Mboya: Non-Alignment and Pan-African Trade Unionism", Presence Africaine, 103, p. 59. On the whole, however, Agyemau tends to offer anti-Mboya assertions than clear analysis of what the issues involved were from both Mboya's and Nkrumah's perspectives.

¹⁶⁴ Kwame Nkrumah, Speech at the Opening of the Hall of Trade Unions, Accra, July, 1960, quoted in D. Nelkin, "Labour a Stumbling Block to Pan-Africanism", in W. Belling, ed., The Role of Labour in African Nation Building, Praeger, New York, 1968, p. 122.

¹⁶⁵ Nkrumah, Africa Must Unite, Heinemann, London, 1963, pp. 127-8.

reservations,¹⁶⁶ welcomed the move because it had nothing to lose. On the contrary, it stood to gain, for neutralism, if carried to its logical conclusion, could only hurt the West more, as it was the West which enjoyed close ties with African countries and labour movements. The ICFTU, on the other hand, was openly hostile to the idea of independent pan-African trade unionism. At first it employed diversionary tactics and stepped up its propaganda campaign and aid to its African affiliates. An important step was taken at the second ICFTU African Regional Trade Union Conference held in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1959 when it was decided to set up the African Regional Organisation (AFRO) as a confederation of ICFTU African affiliates. The ICFTU hoped that through such a regional and African-run machinery it would be able to reduce its visibility as well as blunt the pan-Africanist labour offensive.¹⁶⁷

The formation of AFRO in 1960 simply encouraged the advocates of independent Pan-African trade unionism to go ahead with their plans. A number of preparatory conferences were held, but there was always one stumbling bloc - the radicals demanded that in order to become and remain a member of the proposed All African Trade Union Federation (AATUF) a national trade union centre had to sever links with any international trade union organisation, whereas the moderates were against disaffiliation. The KFL sent representatives to these conferences where it tended

¹⁶⁶See A. Dallin, op. cit., pp. 28-29; also see World Marxist Review, December, 1961.

¹⁶⁷See D. Nelkin, op. cit., p. 125. Also see W. Ananaba, The Trade Union Movement in Africa, Promise and Performance, C. Hurst, London, 1979, pp. 120-24.

to side with the moderates.¹⁶⁸

It is interesting to note, however, that at the founding conference of the AATUF in Casablanca in May 1961, the KFL leaders in attendance declared that they had come "fully convinced that Africa need not and cannot import a blueprint of the institutions of the West or East", and they fully pledged their support for the formation of the AATUF.¹⁶⁹ Mboya even presided over the committee on the AATUF charter. The proposed charter contained familiar rhetoric about the need to forge an alliance between peasants and workers in their "implacable struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism, feudalism and reaction", and all the injunctions against "interference of governments and political parties in trade union affairs", particularly "limitation of trade union methods of action, and above all the right to strike". The charter also re-affirmed that African trade unions had historic responsibilities to participate fully "in the building of the new Africa".¹⁷⁰ The delegates agreed easily on all these points, but when it came to the question of

¹⁶⁸When Jesse Gechaga, for example, voted for a resolution calling for total disaffiliation at an AATUF preparatory conference in Accra where he had gone to represent the KFL, the KFL dismissed him from the federation on his return home. See Daily Nation 2-1-61.

¹⁶⁹Speech by Tom Mboya at the AATUF founding conference. The ICFTU and the WFTU were both represented at the conference, and they each emphasised their solidarity with African peoples against "colonial oppression, racial discrimination, humiliation of human beings", in the words of the ICFTU delegate, and "imperialistic policy and objectives ... and so-called free-capitalist development", in the words of the WFTU delegate. SEE CA KFL File 64.

¹⁷⁰AATUF Charter, see CA KFL File 51.

international affiliation the old disagreements resurfaced. The AATUF charter came out strongly against international affiliation and gave its members ten months to disaffiliate from international trade union organisations, which practically meant the ICFTU, for there were only two WFTU affiliates in Africa at the time, in the Sudan and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) as compared to the ICFTU's twenty-three. Those who failed to disaffiliate, the AATUF warned, would "be smashed and denounced as traitors to the African cause".¹⁷¹

Hardly had the KFL leaders who had attended the Casablanca conference reported the results of the conference to their colleagues in Kenya when they began attacking the 'undemocratic' manner in which the conference had been held, and declared that they were not bound by the decisions of the conference unless "the autonomy of our trade unions must be guaranteed and respected".¹⁷² The AATUF accused the KFL and Mboya especially of shameless hypocrisy, saying one thing "at the conference and another when he returned to Kenya".¹⁷³

It is reasonable to assume that the KFL made conciliatory statements at Casablanca because the conference was heavily weighted in favour of the radicals and the KFL wanted to mollify its critics. The KTUC was represented by Jesse Gechaga and Aggrey Minya at the same conference

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² "Mboya Lashes at Casablanca Talks Fiasco", Daily Nation, 3-6-61.

¹⁷³ See note in CA KFL File 118. The ICFTU delegation also issued a report after the conference which also condemned "the undemocratic and non-representative character of the conference ..." See Ananaba, op. cit., p. 127.

and it is more than likely that the KFL's six-man delegation which included Mboya himself, Lubembe and Akumu, did not want to be outmanoeuvred by the KTUC. The leaders of the KTUC were determined to use the AATUF for all that it was worth in their struggle against the KFL. Long before the Casablanca conference was held, the KTUC often argued that the KFL, by refusing to disaffiliate from the ICFTU as demanded by the AATUF preparatory committee, was proving that it was composed of "imperialist stooges".¹⁷⁴ The KFL, in turn, attacked the KTUC for importing Ghana's "black colonialism to Kenya - colonialism at its worst".¹⁷⁵ Mboya was acutely aware that the issue of international affiliation was being used by his political opponents both at home and abroad to discredit him.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, this was also the time that the KFL was coming under increasing fire from the rank and file for adopting moderate and collaborationist policies with the FKE and the government, and it did not help matters to have its leaders portrayed as 'imperialist stooges' at the same time.

¹⁷⁴See Daily Nation 2-1-61.

¹⁷⁵"Ghana's Black Imperialism Under Fire by KFL Vice-President", Daily Nation, 4-1-61.

¹⁷⁶Mboya, op. cit., pp. 250-1. KADU circulated an allegedly secret British Cabinet paper containing statements by Vice-President Nixon after his African tour in 1957 to the effect that: "American Industrialists and the ICFTU give almost unconditional support to Tom Mboya and it seems clear that they have reached some private arrangement with Mboya - not only politically, but probably personally and financially as well." Mboya denounced the document as a communist propaganda campaign against him. See Daily Nation 2-2-61.

The KFL's repudiation of the Casablanca conference and the AATUF can be explained in terms of three factors; first, pressure from the ICFTU, second, the KFL's and KANU's interpretations of non-alignment and Pan-Africanism which, in turn, affected the KFL's perceptions of the AATUF's as well as Ghana's policies and intentions.

The ICFTU was so concerned by the stand taken by the KFL at the Casablanca conference that shortly after the conference was over it sent an urgent cable to Mboya for him to clarify his and the KFL's position.¹⁷⁷ In a sense, therefore, the KFL had to choose between the AATUF and the ICFTU and the KFL chose in favour of the latter. The KFL leadership felt that they had too much to lose financially and materially by forsaking the ICFTU and little to gain by adhering to the AATUF's uncompromising position against international affiliation.

The 'sponsors' of the AATUF belonged to the Casablanca bloc which included Ghana, Egypt, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. For them non-alignment meant taking a principled stand against what they identified as the root causes of world tension: colonialism and imperialism. This made them more partial to the East than the West. They called it 'positive neutralism'. On Pan-Africanism they advocated a continental approach, greater African self-reliance and the adoption of concrete steps to foster and institutionalise it. On the other hand, to the moderates, grouped in the so-called Monrovia bloc, non-alignment meant judging each case on its own merits without taking automatic or permanent sides with either the Western or Eastern blocs. As for Pan-Africanism,

¹⁷⁷ ICFTU - KFL Cable Message 13-6-61. CA KFL File 64.

they argued in favour of setting up regional organisations as a stepping stone to the more ambitious goal of a United States of Africa.¹⁷⁸

KANU's and the KFL's sympathies were clearly with the latter. "It is an ever-present truth", wrote Mboya, who was an eloquent spokesman for both KANU and the KFL,

that no African state is going to exist in isolation from the rest of the world. This is not what neutralism means. African states are members of the Commonwealth ... and Britain is in the Western bloc, yet who would say that these leaders or countries are compromising their neutralist principles ... The ICFTU has taken Africa's stand against the French in Algeria, against the French atomic tests in the Sahara, against the British in Kenya, Nyasaland and the Rhodesias, and against South Africa.¹⁷⁹

It is tempting to see the conflict between KANU and the KFL, on the one hand, and the CPP and the GTUC and AATUF, on the other, as a reflection of the different political status of the two countries during this period; Ghana was an independent country, immensely conscious of her historic importance as the first independent sub-Saharan African state, and was struggling to evolve a distinctive foreign policy in a world divided into two great geo-political blocs, while Kenya was still a colony where the nationalist movement was pre-eminently concerned with

¹⁷⁸For a general survey of the various tendencies within the Pan-Africanist movement see Legum, *op. cit.*; also see Zdenek Cervenka, The Organisation of African Unity and Its Charter, Academia, Praha, 1968.

¹⁷⁹Mboya, *op. cit.*, p. 251. Also see p. 116. See also This Is Our Stand: KFL Policy Statement, 1960.

achieving independence.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the KFL leaders felt that the call for disaffiliation had little to do with genuine trade union matters but was simply an attempt to introduce the emerging political splits at the Pan-African level into the trade union sphere. To them the question of affiliation, by itself, certainly did not warrant such a vicious split within African trade union ranks.¹⁸⁰ They believed that each trade union centre had the right to decide on what was best for it and not to be dictated to by others.¹⁸¹ The KFL leaders went as far as to argue that African trade unions were still in their formative stages so that subjecting them to a highly centralised Pan-African trade union federation, which at the same time prohibited fraternal links with other trade union internationals, would only succeed in stunting their growth.¹⁸²

The KFL leaders were further convinced that the affiliation controversy was being used by Ghana as a ploy to control their movement as part of Nkrumah's bid to unite Africa under his rule. They saw little in the Ghanaian model of trade unionism to reassure them that the GTUC, through the AATUF, was pursuing genuine trade union goals. They noted wryly that the GTUC had been reduced to a mere organ of the CPP, and the

¹⁸⁰Mboya, *ibid.*, pp. 247-54. Also see Legum, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹⁸¹As Mboya put it: "Due to diverse origins of African trade unions, arising from their colonial backgrounds and the diversity of African social, economic and political problems, plus the differences in emphasis on the development and consolidation of our economies we cannot, even in Africa, expect to evolve uniform trade union structures even if the inspirations, aspirations and doctrines are the same." Daily Nation, 3-6-61.

¹⁸²This Is Our Stand: KFL Policy Statement, 1960.

right to strike had been made illegal under the 1958 Ghana Industrial Relations Act. As we noted in the last chapter, this was a spectre which they dreaded in Kenya. When a seventeen-day strike broke out in Ghana in September, 1961, the KFL used the opportunity to attack the Nkrumah government's harsh suppression of workers' rights and the Ghana TUC's failure to come out in full support of the striking Sekondi-Takoradi workers.¹⁸³

There is ample evidence to show that the Ghanaian government tried to use the AATUF as a vehicle of its foreign policy objectives. Immediately following Nkrumah's overthrowal, B.A. Bentum, a former General Secretary of the Ghana Agricultural Workers' Union and Minister of Forestry in Nkrumah's government, published a blistering exposition of Tettegah's and Nkrumah's cynical manipulation of the AATUF. In a secret letter from Tettegah to Nkrumah, we read:

Although the AATUF on the surface must appear to be an international organisation subservient to no single government, my election as Secretary General enables Ghana to manipulate the whole organisation by subtle means. I am no independent Secretary General but a mere instrument of the Convention People's Party and the Osagyefo's African policy.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³Lubembe wrote an 'Open Letter' to the Moroccan President of the AATUF, M. ben Seddik, in which he attacked Nkrumah's handling of the strike and asked Seddik "to visit Ghana and see by yourself what the TUC of Ghana is doing about this. We can't sit down quietly when our fellow workers are being exploited by their own government." 22-9-61, CA KFL File 118. Jeffries, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5, argues that although the striking workers were defeated, their strike represented a rejection of "CPP Socialism" by the most militant and advanced section of the Ghanaian working class.

¹⁸⁴B.A. Bentum, Trade Unions in Chains, Accra, 1966, p. 27f.

Accordingly, the Ghanaian government not only funded the AATUF quite handsomely, but also provided about £30,000 a year for Tettegah's clandestine operations in Africa.¹⁸⁵ Large amounts of funds for the AATUF were also provided by the WFTU and the Soviet Union's AUCCTU (All Union Central Council of Trade Unions) thus proving, in Bentum's views, that the AATUF's professed non-alignment was a 'facade'.¹⁸⁶ Bentum further showed that labour attaches at Ghana's diplomatic missions in various African countries were used as part of the government of Ghana's clandestine network to assist the work of the AATUF.¹⁸⁷

Critics of Ghana's foreign policies and involvement in Pan-African trade unionism like Bentum and others since then,¹⁸⁸ as well as the KFL to some extent, tended to overstate their case; whatever the cynical

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 29, 34.

¹⁸⁶In 1965, for example, the AATUF budget totalled £ G246,540, of which only £ G54,000 was made up of contributions from AATUF affiliates. The AATUF was left to find the rest. "Tettegah was given a mandate by the (AATUF) Bureau to try and obtain the £G192,540 from friendly Socialist Governments and friendly Socialist Organisations." Ibid., p. 33. See also pp. 52-59 where Bentum examines in greater detail the 'farce' behind the AATUF's non-alignment. Also see Tettegah's disclosures after Nkrumah's fall in 1966, "A Lieutenant Who Split Africa's Labour Front", News Bulletin, No. 20, July-August 1966.

¹⁸⁷Bentum, ibid., pp. 35, 38. The AATUF also planned to establish its own labour college and launch a journal, but Nkrumah fell before these projects could be implemented. The AATUF also tried to take the ICFTU Kampala Labour College when Obote declared his intention to close it in 1965. It is interesting to note that there were disagreements within the AATUF over the proposed Labour College's curriculum. Tettegah wanted the one which had been drawn to be revised because it was Chinese-influenced. See "AATUF in Difficulties?", News Bulletin, No. 15, September-October, 1965.

¹⁸⁸Such as Ananaba, op. cit.; and Lynd, op. cit.

manipulations, Ghana's intervention in African trade union affairs was certainly less pervasive than that of the ICFTU and AFL-CIO. By supporting the ICFTU against the AATUF the KFL and movements like it were hardly choosing the side of the angels. And despite all its limitations, Ghana's version of non-alignment and Pan-Africanism under Nkrumah was based on principles that provided a more difficult breeding ground for 'neo-colonialism' than was the case with the prescriptions of the Mboyas.

It was only a few days after the KFL had publicly denounced the Casablanca conference that Tettegah issued his famous threat against those national trade union centres which refused to disaffiliate from international trade union organisations: "We shall isolate them, enter their countries and form AATUF centres there. It is as simple as that - total war!"¹⁸⁹ Mboya reacted angrily. "A declaration of total war", he warned, "in trade union affairs means disruption of political relationships between the countries concerned".¹⁹⁰ The KFL had some cause for worry; if the AATUF threat was carried out and the KTUC was given financial and material support, the latter would be in a much better position to challenge the KFL.

It is not very clear how much financial aid the KTUC actually received from the AATUF. But whatever the amount, this aid was probably insignificant when compared to what the KFL got from the ICFTU and American

¹⁸⁹Ananaba, *ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁹⁰Mboya, *op. cit.*, p. 254. The AATUF President, however, assured Mboya that Tettegah's threat had not been authorised by the AATUF's Provisional Secretariat. But the KFL remained unconvinced and took the threat seriously. See KFL Press Statement 18-8-61, CA KFL File 118.

sources. We may conclude that at least until the KAWC was formed in 1964, when we have concrete evidence that it received aid from the AATUF, Tettegah's threat was no more than that of a barking but toothless bulldog. There is reason to believe, however, that the KTUC got some funds from Odinga who, in turn, got most of his funds from Eastern Europe. Like the Kenyan trade union movement itself, KANU was factionalised into a 'radical' Odinga camp and a 'moderate' Mboya camp, which were dependent on 'red' and 'imperialist' money, respectively. The radicals argued that, "capitalist money was more dangerous than communist money because it perpetuated imperialism",¹⁹¹ whereas the moderates professed their abhorrence for money whose purpose, in their opinion, was to introduce 'communist totalitarianism' as in the East.¹⁹² It is hard to escape the conclusion that radicals in KANU turned East simply because the moderates were so heavily financed by the West. But the more the KTUC got Odinga's 'Eastern' funds and aid from the AATUF, the more the KFL sought and justified its receipt of American and ICFTU money. Thus, in the end external funding of the various factions within the nationalist and labour movements in Kenya only helped to widen and institutionalise factionalism.

As the KFL intensified its efforts to destroy the KTUC internally, externally it joined forces with other pro-Western labour movements and

¹⁹¹Daily Nation 6-1-62. Also see Oginga Odinga, Not Yet Uhuru, An Autobiography, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1971, chapter 14. For more details see J.N. Orwenyo, "The Soviet Union and Communism as factors among Kenyan Intelligentsia in Kenya's Internal Problems, 1957-1966", Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown, 1973.

¹⁹²Daily Nation 25-7-62. Also see KFL - ICFTU 11-3-61, CA KFL File 64.

the ICFTU to form a rival pan-African trade union organisation. AFRO was no longer sufficient to counter the AATUF. Mboya, Ahmed Tlili of Tunisia and Lawrence Borha of Nigeria, were the key architects of the proposed new confederation. In June 1961 they held an exploratory meeting with African delegates attending an ILO conference, where it was agreed that a founding conference of the proposed African Trade Union Confederation should be held in Dakar, Senegal, in August.¹⁹³ The conference was not convened in August, however, but some trade unionists from a number of African countries gathered in Nairobi in October to attend the Kenya Labour Day celebrations hosted by the KFL, during which they took the opportunity to plan for the inaugural conference of the ATUC. They hoped that the proposed confederation would reflect more faithfully the goals of what they called "a free, united, and vigilant trade union movement based on tolerance and mutual respect and firm adherence to the principles of freedom and democracy".¹⁹⁴

What all these fine phrases really meant became amply clear at the ATUC founding conference in Dakar in January, 1962, which was attended by 41 labour organisations from 26 African countries. The most critical section of the ATUC charter dealt with the question of international affiliation. The charter stated unequivocally that "national labour organisations belonging to the ATUC may freely decide on their individual relationships with outside associations".¹⁹⁵ "Those African trade union stooges",

¹⁹³Ananaba, op. cit., 132.

¹⁹⁴AFRO Faces the Future, p. 55.

¹⁹⁵ATUC Charter, CA KFL File 90. Also see Daily Nation 15-1-62.

the Ghana TUC proclaimed of the founders of the ATUC, "who are today playing the perfidious role by conniving with forces of neo-colonialism in Africa through the ICFTU should know that the enlightened mass of African workers can no longer be fooled".¹⁹⁶

The formation of the ATUC signified an open split in the African trade union movement. The ATUC's effectiveness was hampered, however, by serious internal difficulties. Apart from their common opposition to the AATUF, there was little else that the ATUC members agreed on. They could not agree, for example, on the number of trade union centres that were to exist at the national level. The ATUC actually failed to come up with a full-time committed leadership since all its officers held major positions in their national unions.¹⁹⁷ Such difficulties can partly be attributed to the fact that the ATUC was an uneasy coalition of affiliates of the ICFTU, IFCTU (International Federation of Christian Trade Unions),¹⁹⁸ the Pan-African Congress of Believing Workers and several unaffiliated organisations.

¹⁹⁶ Press Statement issued by Executive Board of GTUC 12-1-62, CA KFL File 50.

¹⁹⁷ Of the 41 ATUC affiliates, 21 were ICFTU affiliates, 12 IFCTU affiliates, and the rest were independents or affiliates of the Pan-African Congress of Believing Workers. On this and other problems which faced the ATUC, see D. Nelkin, op. cit., p. 126f.

¹⁹⁸ The IFCTU's title was changed in 1968 to World Confederation of Labor. For further details on the IFCTU, see Thomson and Larson, op. cit., pp. 79-87.

The ATUC's difficulties were more than compensated for by the ICFTU's own increased direct support for its affiliates, including the KFL.¹⁹⁹ The KFL's opposition to the AATUF became more hostile. When the AATUF planned to send emissaries to a number of African countries, including Kenya, to "examine the 'plight' of trade unions", the KFL declared that the emissaries would not be received.²⁰⁰ In January, 1963, the KFL refused to attend a conference called for trade unions of East, Central and Southern Africa scheduled to be held in Lusaka because the KFL was suspicious that the funds to hold the conference had come from the AATUF.²⁰¹

It was a mark of the KFL's adamant refusal to toe the AATUF's line on international affiliation that during this period the KFL strengthened its ties with the Israeli labour federation, Histadrut. The Casablanca countries and the affiliates of the AATUF, some of whom like the GTUC had earlier on been attracted by the Histadrut model of trade unionism, had severed all official contacts with Histadrut and Israel itself.²⁰²

The KFL was drawn to Histadrut primarily because the latter offered an attractive model; it was centrally organised in structure, it was not 'revolutionary' in orientation, that is, it was not formed as "an

¹⁹⁹ See, for example, AFRO East, Central and Southern Africa, Area Division Conference, 19-21 October, 1962. CA KFL File 60. Also see ICFTU - KFL correspondence in CA KFL File 578.

²⁰⁰ "The KFL to Stand 'No Nonsense' From Union Visitors", Daily Nation, 3-8-62.

²⁰¹ CA KFL File 140.

²⁰² See Kreinin, op. cit., p. 127.

instrument in a class struggle, rather, [it] started as a constructive tool of economic and social progress",²⁰³ and, as a result, it maintained a vast network of social services and held or supervised economic enterprises. The KFL was particularly impressed by the Histadrut's far-flung cooperative movement in agriculture, transport, building and construction, and consumer industries. James Karebe, President of the LGWU, after his study tour of Israel in 1961 enthused:

The trade union movement of Israel isn't mere trade unionism. It has extended its activities for members to cover many benefits to workers to the extent that no trade union in any other country in the world could compete with the Histadrut.²⁰⁴

After his visit to Israel in 1962 Mboya was similarly thrilled with what he saw and wrote:

Any African who tours Israel cannot fail to be impressed by the achievements made in such a short time from such poor soil and so few natural resources. We all tend to come away most excited and eager to return to our own countries and repeat all these experiments.²⁰⁵

²⁰³Ibid., p. 120.

²⁰⁴KFL Press Statement, 6-11-61. CA KFL File 214.

²⁰⁵Mboya, op. cit., p. 172. Also see, "Histadrut - A New Word in the Kenya Vocabulary", East African Trade and Industry, Vol. 8, No. 96, February, 1962.

Thereupon, the KFL and Histadrut signed an agreement in which the latter undertook, first, to continue giving scholarships to the KFL for its members to study in Israel, second, to train "Kenyan youths in the Pioneer Youth Movement within the framework of the KFL", and, finally, to cooperate with the KFL "in the establishment of joint economic enterprises in Kenya following the general pattern of Histadrut enterprises in Israel". In order to implement these projects they agreed to form a joint development company which would run cooperative stores, a construction company and other enterprises to be determined at a future date.²⁰⁶ Histadrut offered to finance these businesses at the initial stage but after some time workers would "be allowed to buy shares and the master plan w[ould] be implemented".²⁰⁷ It is interesting to note that African businessmen were strongly opposed to the KFL's plans to set up cooperative shops and other businesses because they feared that such enterprises would "in the long run, ruin the African traders and shopkeepers".²⁰⁸ The KFL had to reassure them that "the cooperatives are not intended to and will not displace any African or other trader".²⁰⁹ Despite repeated assurances that the consumer cooperatives and the construction company would start soon,²¹⁰

²⁰⁶Aide Memoire on Talks Between Tom Mboya and Aharon Becker, Sec. General, Histadrut, 28-1-62. CA KFL File 133. Also see "KFL and Israelis to Work Jointly", Daily Nation, 31-1-62.

²⁰⁷KFL Press Statement: Meeting of KFL-Histadrut Cooperatives Project, 7-4-62. CA KFL File 49.

²⁰⁸"KFL Attacked Over Plans for Co-op Shops", Daily Nation 27-8-62.

²⁰⁹"Kibisu Allays Fears on Co-Ops", Daily Nation 1-9-62.

²¹⁰See, for instance, Daily Nation, 12-7-62; 13-8-62.

progress was held back because of KFL factional infighting, which finally forced the Histadrut to reconsider its position,²¹¹ so that ultimately none of these projects actually got off the ground.²¹²

It is possible that the KFL entered into such relations with the Histadrut in an attempt to distance itself, at least in the eyes of the Kenyan public, from too close an identification with the ICFTU and AFL-CIO, without at the same time forsaking or endangering its beneficial relationship with these two organisations. In Kenya, as in many other African countries, Israel's image in the public opinion was that of a small, but militarily gallant and economically advanced country untainted by the stigma of colonialism and imperialism. We have already noted how the British TUC and the AFL-CIO channelled funds to the Histadrut's Afro-Asian Institute in a conscious attempt to use Histadrut to influence African trade union movements and keep them within the Western fold. As for Israel herself, she encouraged contacts with African trade union movements in order to break out of her political isolation in the Middle East. Trade, commercial and cultural considerations were also involved.²¹³ To the supporters of the AATUF, among whom were the Egyptians and Algerians, the KFL's growing links with Histadrut simply provided further confirmation that KFL leaders were irredeemable 'imperialist stooges'.

²¹¹See note by H.P. Oduol, Chairman KFL - Histadrut Project, undated, complaining about Histadrut's change of attitude. CA KFL File 133.

²¹²Sandbrook, op. cit., p. 177.

²¹³See Kreinin, op. cit., Chapters 1, 2, 12 and 13.

There are a number of indications that this constant barrage of criticism from inside and outside the country against the KFL's ICFTU connection did lead to occasional attempts on the part of the KFL leadership to make some token gestures to improve its image among the radicals. For instance, while attending an ICFTU congress in July, 1962, Lubembe suggested that the KFL might quit the ICFTU; his remarks were provoked by the presence of delegates representing the TUC of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.²¹⁴ In the same month the KFL Executive Committee unanimously endorsed a proposal by one member "that from now on KFL should send its officials to Eastern countries" as well as the West.²¹⁵ In May 1963 the KLF even sent a two-man delegation to Cuba at the invitation of the Cuban trade union movement. "This is to prove", the KFL stated in a press release, "to those who have deliberately accused the KFL of being pro-West just because it happened to affiliate to the ICFTU that our affiliation to the ICFTU can't stop us to cooperate with other trade union movements in the world".²¹⁶

These gestures to lessen identification with the ICFTU and AFL-CIO were partly made possible by the virtual collapse of the KTUC by late 1962,²¹⁷ which consequently deprived the AATUF of an organisational

²¹⁴Daily Nation 19-7-62.

²¹⁵Minutes of KFL Executive Committee meeting, 17-7-62. CA KFL File 211. Also see, "KFL Will Not Ban 'Red' Study Offers", Daily Nation, 18-2-62.

²¹⁶KFL Press Statement, 3-5-63. CA KFL File 171.

²¹⁷Thus when the KTUC declared 'war' on the KFL in July, 1962, by threatening that the KFL would be "dealt with by the progressive forces of this country, ruthlessly and even physically if need be", the KFL dismissed it as a "stunt by which the KTUC hopes to get money from Ghana", Daily Nation, 25-7-62; also see 21-8-62.

base within Kenya from which to launch an effective offensive against the KFL. The picture changed, however, when the KFPTU, later renamed KAWC, was formed in May 1964. Unlike its predecessor, KAWC was much better organised and attracted widespread support. Moreover, Odinga's faction within KANU gave it more support than it had ever given the KTUC.²¹⁸ Like the KTUC, KAWC became affiliated to the AATUF and seized upon the issue of the KFL's affiliation to the ICFTU as one of the bases of the ideological cleavages between the two federations. The AATUF did not hesitate to come to KAWC's aid in order to undermine the KFL. In contrast to the earlier years the AATUF was in a much better position to undertake such an offensive and help the KAWC.

Shortly after the KFPTU was formed, Nkrumah had authorised £62,000 to be channelled to the KFPTU through the Ghana High Commission in Nairobi. In addition, Tettegah offered the new union 50 motorcycles, 6 typewriters, 4 duplicating machines, and rent paid in advance for 8 offices at £120 per month each.²¹⁹ Needless to say, the KFL was receiving much more than this from its ICFTU and American friends. Nevertheless, the AATUF funds did help to make the KFPTU or KAWC a more formidable opponent of the KFL than the KTUC ever was.

The situation under which the KFL-KAWC struggle was being fought had changed in one fundamental aspect; Kenya was now an independent country. Key figures in the Kenyatta government like Mboya saw AATUF aid to KAWC as constituting intervention by Ghana in Kenya's internal affairs. But

²¹⁸Odinga, op. cit., pp. 305-10.

²¹⁹Bentum, op. cit., pp. 49-52.

the once unassailable position of the ICFTU and AFL-CIO in Kenya also began to crumble; Kenyatta himself saw Western aid to the KFL as a threat to him because it bolstered Mboya's trade union power-base. This was a time, it must be noted, when Kenyatta was more suspicious of Mboya's political intentions than of Odinga's. Consequently, criticisms of the AFL-CIO and the ICFTU were voiced more frequently in official circles, including government owned publications.²²⁰ In short, the Kenyatta government, like all post-independent African governments, was intolerant of powerful autonomous organisations which could challenge the central authority of the ruling party, especially if those organisations were also dependent on foreign financial support.

The Americans supported the clamp-down on the KFL by the Kenyatta government and it is interesting to note that they partly orchestrated the withdrawal of American labour's financial support for the KFL. The Americans appreciated the fact that Kenya was now an independent country, and overt support of the KFL no longer constituted helping a movement that was opposed to British interests, but one that could challenge the authority of an indigenous government. This ultimately could jeopardise American interests in the country. Thus,

by 1964 ... American investments, which would reach \$100 million by 1967, were becoming significant, and some of the Kenyan union demands (over wages, etc.) began to lose their charm. But even more

²²⁰ See, for instance, "ICFTU: the Facts About Dollar Trade Unionism", Pan-Africa, No. 27, 27 April, 1964; and "Exposure ICFTU: Confessions of an American Agent", Pan-Africa, No. 28, May, 1964, both quoted in Agyemau, op. cit., p. 80.

important 1964 also brought dangers of "political instability" serious enough to make radio communications with the Nairobi Embassy eighth highest on the State Department roster for that year. Zanzibar revolted and Tanzania's Nyerere was nearly overthrown. Rebellion was spreading throughout North-East Congo, and Kenya lay astride the natural supply route ... Mboya had long been supported as a force to the right of Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta, but an accommodation with Kenyatta was now seen as necessary, particularly to insure that he did not support the Congolese rebels, and more generally to get him to close ranks against the agitating Kenyan left ... In June 1964, U.S. Ambassador to Kenya William Attwood met with Kenyatta and agreed that Western labor groups would also stop subsidising Mboya and the KFL; and for balance, Kenyatta assured him that Russian and Chinese aid to the leftist leader, Vice-President Odinga would also end.²²¹

Conclusion

This shows that apart from trade union considerations per se, the question of labour alliances between successive Kenyan trade union federations and the British TUC, then the AFL-CIO and the ICFTU, and, finally, the AATUF and ATUC, often involved complex economic, political and ideological questions. In this chapter we have tried to show that the foreign policies of both the British TUC and the AFL-CIO were not only conditioned by the internal contradictions of these movements

²²¹Dan Schechter, et al., op. cit., p. 61. The AFL-CIO itself broke away from the ICFTU, partly because of the latter's insufficient anti-communist fervour, and, more important, perhaps, because the ICFTU had considered admitting the American United Auto Workers which had been expelled from the AFL-CIO by Meany after the CIO old guard had "opened up a civil war" in an attempt to recapture some of their lost power. See Thomson and Larson, op. cit., pp. 23-25.

themselves, but were also determined by the colonial and imperial policies, respectively, of the British and American states. This raises serious questions about the possibilities of international solidarity between workers in the metropolitan centres and the colonial and post-colonial peripheries.

We have also shown that political divisions were at the root of the splits in Pan-African trade unionism. In the end the issue of international affiliation exacerbated factionalism within the Kenyan labour movement and thus contributed to the bloody confrontations between the KFL and KAWC which gave the Kenyatta government a convenient opportunity to disband the two federations forcibly and form COTU, an organisation which was to become more bureaucratised and more firmly controlled by the state than had been any trade union federation in colonial Kenya. In short, the destiny of Kenyan trade unionism, both structurally and ideologically, was fatally interlocked with international and Pan-African trade unionism, themselves products of the post-war new international division of labour.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the study the development of the Kenyan working class has been analysed in the context of the changing conditions of accumulation. It has been argued that the development of capitalism in Kenya involved a process in which indigenous modes of production articulated with the imposed capitalist mode. By using this approach it has been possible to avoid sterilised debates such as those between some dependency writers and their critics who have been arguing about whether the incorporation of the colonial world into the world capitalist system led to underdevelopment or not, a question usually posed, despite their opposing stagnationist and expansionist frameworks, largely in terms of the quantity of units produced, that is the amount of surplus extracted, appropriated, or drained from the peripheries to the metropolises.

Moreover, by emphasising the articulation of modes of production and the complex class structures which emerged, that salient half-truth of Kenyan history, namely, that developments in the country, especially those undertaken by the colonial state, only served the settlers, has been challenged. It has been argued that alongside processes of settler and metropolitan accumulation in Kenya we should also focus on African accumulation in the reserves and how this helped to limit or circumscribe the exploitative capacity of the metropole, while simultaneously reinforcing the trend towards the dispossession of increasing numbers of producers from their various means of production, thereby forcing them to sell their labour power in order to subsist. In short, we must analyse all fractions of capital, settler, metropolitan, and indigenous, the

competition between them, and their overall impact not only in mediating the structures of external dependency, but also in reproducing exploitative class relations within Kenya itself.

The development of capitalism in Kenya and the process of working class formation during the colonial period has been periodised into four major phases. First, there was what we have termed the era of primitive colonial accumulation during which the capitalist mode of production was being introduced, a process that was accompanied by brutal violence as significant portions of indigenous modes of production, principally land and livestock, were expropriated by the colonial state on behalf of the settlers and other capitalist interests. Not surprisingly, this was a phase characterised by a coercive system of labour control, in which Africans were forced to work, or worked under the semi-servile conditions of squatting, or became grossly underpaid migrant labourers in the growing colonial towns. Clearly, workers had to have their wages subsidised by production in the pre-capitalist spheres, usually undertaken by women, especially in the case of the urban migrant workers. The peculiar position of squatters shows that the pervasiveness of labour migrancy in Kenya during this period has tended to be exaggerated, that is to say, among squatters capitalist production and pre-capitalist reproduction were often combined within the same capitalist estate and did not necessarily involve a physical slide from the capitalist estates to the enclaves of rural pre-capitalist production.

Second, the Second World War period marked a transitional phase from the era of primitive accumulation to the post-war phase during which there was a fundamentally new international division of labour, and an

accelerated momentum towards decolonisation as a result of nationalist pressures and other conjunctural factors tending towards the restructuring of external dependency and internal class forces in the colonial world. The burden of Chapter Three, therefore, has been to try and show the specific features of this wartime transitional phase both in terms of the conditions of accumulation generated by the war and the forms of labour organisation and working class struggles. It has been argued that there was a remarkable expansion in agricultural production, and that the roots of import-substitution industrialisation were firmly laid. Consequently, there was not only an absolute numerical expansion in the size of the labour force, but there were also the beginnings of important shifts in its internal composition as squatter labour began to decline decisively in importance, while the urban proletariat grew in size and influence. This shift was reflected in the changing patterns of working class organisation and forms of struggle. Trade unions began to grow in earnest and organised labour protest in the form of strikes began to supplant the mass desertions of the earlier decades.

The growth of working class militancy probably reached its peak in the immediate post-war period, which is the subject of Chapter Four. It has been demonstrated that during this period there were far-reaching transformations in the global and local political economies, essentially in terms of new patterns of investment, and international political realignments, which led to changes in the respective positions and relations between imperial and colonial states, as well as expansion of the productive forces in various parts of the colonial and semi-colonial world and the increasing socialisation of labour in those colonies. In

Kenya settler and corporate plantation agriculture made significant advances, the trend towards import-substitution industrialisation became more pronounced, and so did the processes of commodity production and individualisation of land tenure among Africans in reserves. The combined effects of all these forces not only led to a very substantial expansion of the working class, but also its stabilisation, which vastly improved its capacities for collective organisation.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly, however, that stabilisation was not premised on the adoption of higher wages and the provision of better working and living conditions as some writers have tended to emphasise. On the contrary, the rising levels of landlessness in the reserves, the beginnings of mass unemployment as too many evicted squatters and others chased too few jobs made migration to and from work an expensive luxury for many workers. Moreover, land concentration and individualisation of title in the reserves meant that the capacities of workers' families and kinship groups to subsidise the workers' low wages was rapidly declining, for, after all, the workers were increasingly being drawn from the landless classes. Thus, stabilisation and pauperisation of the Kenyan working class were not antithetical to each other as it has so often been assumed; they were interconnected. Hence, the stunning drive towards collective working class organisation and labour militancy which culminated in the outbreak of strikes in Mombasa in 1947 and in Nairobi and its environs in 1950. Two years later, the state of emergency was declared and the Mau Mau struggle broke out. Squatters, the unemployed, and other important segments of the working class were to be its vanguard.

Thus, working class consciousness and action should not be viewed in a deterministic way as lying at the end of a tunnel of proletarianisation as has been the tendency in much writing on African labour history, both 'conventional' and 'radical'. It would, of course, also be wrong to assume that militancy is a permanent feature of working class life. To do so would represent a relapse into idealism and a serious failure to conceptualise the possibility of historic defeats that working class often suffer after which there tend to be moments of labour quiescence, or at least a disjuncture between elemental trade union militancy and revolutionary politics. The Kenyan working class, we concluded in Chapter Five, suffered such a historic defeat at the turn of the fifties. While this defeat should be attributed in the main to harsh colonial state policies and employers' 'terrorism', especially the settlers, the full nature of this defeat cannot be understood if we do not analyse the internal differentiation of the working class itself.

It is, therefore, less than useful to regard a working class as homogeneous and to ignore its internal structure as the editors of African Labour History urge us to do when they argue that in analysing African labour we should not focus on "its internal divisions (be they ethnic, linguistic, religious, or cultural), but its homogeneity when called upon to express itself".¹ That is a portrayal of an imaginary, lifeless, and ahistorical working class. The point is, 'when called upon' during the emergency the Kenyan working class did not act

¹P.C.W. Gutkind, R. Cohen and J. Copans, eds., African Labour History, Sage, London, 1978, pp. 16-17.

homogeneously because of a conjuncture of colonial state policy and the interests of capital to deradicalise labour, as well as the internal polarisations of the working class itself along racial, ethnic, sexual, and occupational lines. This is not to make invidious distinctions within the working class, rather it is an attempt to understand its internal composition and, therefore, all the determinations of working class consciousness and action.

The fourth phase in the development of Kenyan capitalism during the colonial period spanned the emergency and decolonisation decade between 1952 and 1963. Thus, in Chapter Five an attempt has been made to examine the recomposition of the Kenyan working class during the emergency as a result of specific changes in the structure of capital, the re-assertion of imperial state control, and the consolidation of the indigenous bourgeois forces, all of which were conditioned by the peculiar circumstances and contradictions that together represented the process of decolonisation in Kenya. The effects of the internal restructuring of the Kenyan working class during the emergency are followed up in Chapter Six where it is shown that the trade union movement was gradually enmeshed into a network of collaborative arrangements with the colonial state and capital, through the adoption of industrial relations procedures of collective bargaining. This, however, did not by any means 'freeze' working class protest as shown by the outbreak in the early sixties of the biggest wave of strikes since the late forties. But the conjunction of approaching independence, nationalist ideologies, and bureaucratised trade union apparatuses, meant that the workers' renewed militancy was not translated into a sustained and coherent political

programme for fundamental change in Kenya's political economy.

The events of the early sixties clearly show that workers' class interests and action are not merely restricted to the activities of trade unions. Moreover, this shows that the 'new industrial relations system' which was being introduced in the country should not be idealised as is so often the case. As Braverman's incisive study has so eloquently shown, the much touted 'scientific management' of modern industry simply represents more sophisticated versions of Taylorist principles designed for capital to achieve direct control over the labour-process and, therefore, to dominate workers more thoroughly. Consequently, the degradation of work and workers is not diminished, rather it is intensified.² Carchedi has added the point that the reproduction of antagonistic social classes under the conditions of the so-called modern industrial relations system goes on unabated, however much bourgeois ideologues might try to camouflage it.³ This is one area to which more attention should be given in African labour studies.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, we tried to examine the complex relations between the Kenyan labour movement and other labour movements, especially the British TUC, the ICFTU and AFL-CIO, and Pan-African trade unions like the AATUF and ATUC, including the Ghana TUC. From that analysis serious questions are raised as to the possibilities and limits of solidarity among workers, not only between those in the

²Harry Braverman, Labour and Monopoly Capital, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1974.

³G. Carchedi, "Reproduction of Social Classes at the level of Production Relations", Economy and Society, Vol. 4, no. 4, 1975.

metropolises and the peripheries, but also among those in the peripheries themselves. The obstacles to forging international workers solidarity, in an age when capitalism itself has become internationalised, should be taken seriously and examined more thoroughly. It is rather ironical that workers are imbued with national and other ideological chauvinisms precisely at a time when such factors inform the activities of multi-nationals less and less. Perhaps, this is one of the undesirable off-springs of capitalism's tendency for generating uneven development which has now become truly global.

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