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E. AFRICA

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KENYA

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FROM
COLONIAL OFFICE

DATE

5th August 1925.

FOR CIRCULATION
Mr.
Mr.
Mr.
Asst. U.S. of S.

THE LABOUR QUESTION IN KENYA.

Memo dated 18/6/25 prepared by Joint E.A. Board and submitted at Meeting at C.O. 31st July.

Perm. U.S. of S.
Part U.S. of S.
Secretary of State.

Previous Paper

60 35840
60 33941

MINUTES

(Comm. of the Kenya P.P. -
No. 35891)

This will be used for
reference

Per
6. 8. 25

Per by

Subsequent Paper
41236

PUBLIC RECORDS OFFICE LONDON

THE LABOUR QUESTION IN KENYA.

1. The difficulty, which invariably attends the recommendation on this side of a definite policy where there has been no certain expression of opinion on the subject from the colony concerned, is accentuated in the present case by the circumstance that there is at the moment a committee on Finance & Economics sitting in Kenya which has the question of how best to promote and regulate the supply of labour to the farms and plantations of the settlers under consideration. This committee is about to report, and to do more than specify in general terms, certain conditions which tend to hamper the flow of labour, and point out the remedies which have been suggested as likely to improve these conditions would be at least inexpedient. Any recommendations which we may make must therefore be taken to be subject to the findings of this committee which has had the advantage of hearing a considerable amount of evidence before it reached its conclusions.

2. COMPULSORY LABOUR.

Although it is clearly laid down in the Report of the East Africa Commission (p. 37 para. 1.) "that there is nothing ethically wrong in compulsory labour for works of public utility", whilst we agree with this pronouncement yet we consider that it is a method of obtaining labour which should be avoided if possible.

One strong reason for wishing to avoid it is that there are so many people in England who are concerned with what they believe to be the welfare of the native, but who know nothing of local conditions, that a method is bound to produce an outcry here, with the result that any

and every form of compulsory labour will be stopped, and the position made more acute than it is at present.

We have had experience of this in the past.

Where we are of opinion that the application of compulsive labour would have beneficial effects is in the case of the native who will neither work for himself in his Reserve, or come out to work for wages.

This individual requires drastic treatment, and we would include with him the native who by reason of newly acquired wealth, sits and drinks beer whilst his "wives" slave for him.

This latter individual not only tends to make the male worker of little or no value, but eliminates a large number of them, and moreover also tends to jeopardise the coming generations, which is what it is sought to avoid doing.

We understand that the late Sir Robert Coryndon strongly advocated this form of compulsion.

We also hear that the result of compulsion on the part of the Government has been to drive out more labour for the private individual.

LABOUR BUREAU:-

There appear to be three alternatives in this direction:-

1. The continuance of the present "system" of private recruiting.
2. A Government Bureau, which would be entirely official.
3. A Bureau composed of both Government and non-Government members, or a joint organization.

To take these in more detail, we consider in the light of past experience that (1) has proved unsatisfactory in that/

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that it only leads to competition between the individual
recruiters, with consequently increased cost to the employer
of labour.

(2) We do not advocate this as it amounts to a
monopoly on the part of the Government, which may under certain
conditions react very badly on the employer.

(3) A Bureau composed of official and non-official
members appears to us much more likely to meet the case than
either of the other two systems.

It would of course have to have the whole-hearted
backing of the Governor, supported by his subordinates, who
in their turn would have to deal with the Chiefs, which may
necessitate the restoration to them of some portion of the
authority they exercised in the earlier days.

We quite appreciate the difficulty of differentiating
between various plantations, but whichever system is adopted
this difficulty will always be there.

4. IMPROVEMENT OF HEALTH CONDITIONS IN NATIVE RESERVES.

We look on this as an object before Government the
consummation of which every section of the Community must
desire to see accelerated.

That the native population should have remained
stationary, even if it has not declined cannot be described
as a satisfactory result of our administration. While we are
well aware of the many difficulties we would point to, to the
recommendation of the Stokes-Phillips Committee and also of the
Convention in March 1919.

We feel that along this Avenue lies perhaps the most
promising eventual solution of a full supply of willing labour,
but it is of course, one which will take many years before the
man-power of the country will be materially increased.

FREE CIRCULATION OF LABOUR.

We are of opinion that restrictions on the free
movement

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movement of labour from one district to another or from one territory to another of the lands under our administration should only be imposed where there is some very definite reason. Further that no obstacle or discouragement should ever be offered by officials to natives ready to seek employment in new districts, unless such restrictions have been definitely imposed. Indeed we feel that for Government work it might even be desirable that labour should be definitely encouraged to move from districts in other territories, even if distant, where there may be a surplus.

OFFICIAL ATTITUDE.

One of the greatest obstacles to labour supply and labour efficiency is the antagonism between certain officials and settlers. There are D.Cs and A.D.Cs. who do not want native labourers to leave their districts and besides placing hindrances in the way of their doing so, imbue the natives with the idea that by staying in the reserve they are acting in accordance with the wishes of the Government, whether they have anything to do or not. It is pleasanter to the majority of people to rest in approved passivity rather than to be reproached for seeking work.

A boy who would be willing enough to come on to a white man's farm where he knows he will be decently treated, will give up the idea when he finds difficulties are put in his way by another white man. Again, in the white settled areas there is often friction because the official resents the settler exercising any authority over his boys. He forgets that the work on a farm or plantation must be carried on, and that reference to him of trivial matters means interruption of operations, and an irritating delay. Especially is this the case where a D.C. may go to some remote and insignificant job day after day and let the waiting settler attend upon his convenience.

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The assumption by the official that he is the next friend and the settler the next enemy of the native is again a source of annoyance to the latter, which is not dissipated by the too common launching of a summons on the story of a boy who unless coerced will not trouble to attend for its disproof. That there are faults on the other side, such as neglect to comply with regulations and uncounded complaints, must at once be admitted.

The result is distrust, and conflict among the whites which is disastrous to their influence over their employees, and to the interests of the native himself. The object both official and settler should have in view is co-ordinated effort, so that production should increase in any given district. The effect where this exists, as it often does, is at once apparent - not only in material prosperity, but in the relations which subsist between settlers and officials. The recent Cooke enquiry, whatever the merits of the case may be, illustrates the unfortunate spirit which in other districts animates the two parties. The defects in the Master & Servant and Native Authority Ordinance do not tend to make matters easier. The remedy would appear to lie in the creation of a different atmosphere by letting the Civil servants of East Africa understand that they are not there to march out to help their fellow whites, and that the Government is desirous that they should be impartial administrators not zealous protagonists of one section only, and will judge of their capabilities by their success in running the machinery of administration smoothly and efficiently, without any taint of partisanship. The amendment of the two ordinances above referred to would help to remove causes of friction. The careful selection of suitable settlers as resident magistrates may also do something to remove grievances, but a change in the attitude of the official to the settler and the /

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acquisition by both of a consciousness that they should be mutually helpful would do more than ordinances or organizations to solve the problem of the labour supply.

In conclusion we would like to make it very clear that these are merely our opinions as asked for; but that we have no information as to whether they coincide with the views of the Convention of Associations or not.

We desire therefore that they be not put forward as other than our private and personal opinions unless we get a direct lead from Nairobi or hear the final decision (on these points) of the Economic Commission.

(Signed) CRANWORTH
W. CROWDY.