

1924

KENYA

C. O.
55867
28 NOV 24

FROM

DATE

NORTON GRIFFITHS AND CO.

17th November 1924.

FOR CIRCULATION

SHORTAGE OF LABOUR FOR RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION.

Copy of letter sent by Mr J.H. Gailey to Lord Delamere - forwarded at direction of Sir J. Norton-Griffiths. Letter refers to rapidly decreasing labour supply during last twelve months.

Perm. U.S. of S.

Part. U.S. of S.

Secretary of State.

Previous Paper

MINUTES

*Copy of letter handed to Secy.
for obvious in conf. despatch
Wed 28/11/24 at once*

*Mr
R. Brett*

copy copy meter to En. conf. com. 14 Dec 24

Subsequent Paper

*See Lior 825 24
125
Lior. 8252/25*

To ensure security with the Ministry

39 302

NORTON GRIFFITHS & CO. LTD

TELEGRAMS:
JONORGRIF, LONDON
TELEPHONES:
VICTORIA 7542 & 8128

3, CENTRAL BUILDINGS,

WESTMINSTER, S.W.1.

17th November 1924.

C. O.
55867
28 NOV 24

The Parliamentary Private Secretary to the
Secretary of State for the Colonies,
The Colonial Office,
DOWNING STREET. S.W. 1.

Sir,

I am directed by Sir John
Norton-Griffiths to forward you the
enclosed copy of a letter written by
Major Gailey, Managing Director of
Messrs. Griffiths & Company Limited,
Nairobi, to Lord Delamere.

It is thought that the
matter may be of interest to the Minister.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

Handwritten signature

ENCLOSURE

10th October 1924.

The Lord Delamere,
N A I R O B I,
British East Africa.

I am sorry I missed you in Nairobi. I hear you have gone up country and as I am leaving for Eldoret on Saturday I shall probably not see you before then.

I do not know if it is generally realised but in my opinion the situation regarding labour is rapidly becoming desperate and if something is not done soon we shall be in the same position as Uganda - without any labour at all.

When I left for England at the end of May it would have been hardly an exaggeration to say that the labour in this Colony was unlimited. I came back early in September and I find that there is literally no labour to be obtained from Kavirondo and several other districts.

A year ago we had no difficulty in keeping up a labour strength on the Uasin Gishu Railway of from 15 to 17 thousand men. Now we cannot get five to six hundred we want to finish off the work by the end of the year. I spent five days in Kisumu trying to get the recruiters worked up to make a special effort and the officials to encourage voluntary labour for three months only, which they promised to do and so far as my information goes to date the result was 15 men.

I have made exhaustive enquiries from all sources and there is now no doubt whatever in my mind that acting on hints, if not definite instructions, from some higher authority some of the district officers are telling the natives that as soon as they have paid their Hut Tax they have no further obligations to work for anyone.

This being the case, and I am quite confident that it is, it will only be a matter of months - not years - judging by the change I have found in the last four months, before we find ourselves practically without labour in this Colony as Uganda where most of the Planters have given up the fight and thrown their hand in.

While we still have some of the older officials such as Messrs. Hope, Campbell, Crewe Read, Rupert Hempstead and a few others who have always tried to help the settlers, still among us we may get a little assistance from them, but as soon as they retire and only the new school is left our case will be hopeless unless something can be done to check this pernicious influence.

I have interviewed Mr. Fraill, Senior Commissioner, Mr. Deck, Chief Labour Inspector, Mr. Felling and Major Dutton on the subject, all of whom admitted that my solution of the present difficulties had something in it. Major Dutton said that he would be accompanying His Excellency to Eldoret at the end of this month and asked me to prepare a statement showing figures of the falling off in labour for the railway and giving my reasons.

It is not that Railway Work on the Uasin Gishu line is unpopular - many of the natives like it - The Kisii in particular. One of the reasons given was that they knew that the work would only last two or three months and they might then be switched off to the Thika Line, to which they objected. The Planters are all finding the same difficulty.

I also know well that at this time of the year labour has always been a little more difficult to obtain than at other times. They are harvesting and most of them have paid

paid their hut tax. This would account for a normal falling off, but not for almost total disappearance.

For a long time I have known that we must face increased wages, more generous rations and better housing for the native but I can assure you that the present situation has been the shock of my life and it is a situation compared with which the Exchange and Indian Questions are merely trivial incidents in the history of our Colony.

I am not trying to raise a scare on account of Labour for future railways. However, they are constructed I do not intend to take any further active part in Railway work, but I am trying to raise a very serious scare among everyone who has the interest of the Colony at heart as you and I and many others have. Our one hope that we may evade the fate of Uganda lies with the men of influence we have in Kenya, who have always worked and will continue to work in its interests.

J.H. GAILEY.

You would like to glance
 at this before the S. of S.
 has a talk with you
 about it

Will you return to
 me fairly soon. This

Alfred

W. S. S. S. S.

See my notes
 below.

God 1874

W. Bottomley.

Mr. Edgcumbe

1. I am not sure - from previous experience - that Major Galley is an accurate reporter; and as Messrs Griffiths are already behind time with the completion of the Uasin Gishu Railway they have a direct pecuniary interest in proving labour difficulties.
2. In Uganda, owing to cotton prosperity, the labour problem is certainly acute. The planters, in co-operation, are, like the Government, recruiting raw natives in the West Nile District. But I have heard of no planters going under on this account.
3. Until the Uganda position became acute I had expected that in Kenya there would always be room for a good deal of development of native cultivation side by side with the supply of labour, so long as European settlement did not greatly increase. Lately I have had doubts, but according to press reports Mr. Ormsby Gore is satisfied that the two are not incompatible.
4. About 80,000 natives so far form the labour supply - a figure apparently large enough to make it possible to find a few thousand extra for railway construction without undue effort but one sisal company has represented to us that railway construction does make things hard for them.
5. If the question of building the Kenya section of the new railway by departmental construction

construction is settled in the affirmative (we are waiting for a telegram from the Governor) Major Galle's suggestion that natives will not work on the completion of the Uasin Gishu because they fear that at the end they will be drafted on to the Thika extension 200 miles away should lose its force, as there would be employment for them on the new line, a continuation of the Uasin Gishu line.

6. We can fall back on the power of compulsory labour, but that will not make us popular with the settlers.

7. I think a copy of the letter should go to the Governor confidentially for his observations and that we should then wait for Mr. Ormsby Gore's return.

W.C.A. 25.11.24.

27th November, 1924

Dear Sir,

I am desired by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 17th November under cover of which you transmitted a copy of a communication written by the Managing Director of your Company to Lord Delamere.

Yours faithfully,

H. Lark, Esq.

N. 5586 7/24 Kenya

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Jud

DEC 11 1924

Ans'd 8/25/25

DRAFT.

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11 Dec 1924

*Kenya
Conf!*

Sir,

McCollynam
MINUTE.

I have to transmit to you a copy of a letter from Messrs Norton Griffiths & Co Ltd, enclosing a copy of a letter from Major Guiley, Managing Director of Messrs Griffiths & Company Limited, Nairobi,

Mr. Brett Nov 24

Mr. Mackenzie

Mr. Bolton 12/12/24

Sir J. Shuckburgh.

Sir C. Davis.

Sir G. Griphale.

Sir J. Masterton Smith.

Lord Arnold.

Mr. Thomas.

17 Nov

Handwritten mark

To Lord Delamere,
on the subject of the
shortage of labour
for Railway construction.

I shall be glad
to receive your observations
on Major Bailey's letter.

Yrs

(Signed) L. S. AMERY