

UGANDA—A Survey

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UGANDA LIES ASTRIDE THE EQUATOR in the heart of tropical Africa. The country is hemmed in by the Republic of the Sudan in the North, the Belgian Congo in the West, by Tanganyika in the South and Kenya in the East. Lake Victoria Nyanza, the biggest lake in Africa and the second biggest in the world, is in Uganda. The fabulous Ruwenzori range of mountains are on the Western frontier and the immortal Nile rises at the Rippon Falls. Owing to its beauty Uganda is often called the Pearl of Africa.

The population of Uganda numbers over five and a quarter million of whom almost all are Africans. There are 48,000 Asians and 6,000 Whites.

The country came under the control of British imperialism during the latter part of the 19th century. Its conquest followed the usual sequence of missionaries, traders and army.

When the imperialists first came to Uganda they found a highly developed empire ruled over by the Kabaka of Uganda, Mutesa I. The empire over which Mutesa I ruled was a feudal one in its social and economic structure. The Kabaka ruled with the help of a Lukiko or Parliament consisting of his major chiefs. The premier of Saza chiefs stood closest to the councils of the Kabaka and in his name ruled over vast counties. The Saza chiefs in turn appointed subordinate or Gombolola chiefs to look after village affairs.

After a series of wars conducted in the name of religion the British took control of the whole country and entered into treaty relationship with the Kabaka and other rulers who had formerly been part of the Kabaka's empire. This treaty is known as the 1900 Agreement.

The British carved up the country into four provinces: the Buganda province, the Western, Northern and Eastern Provinces. In terms of the 1900 Agreement the government of the Province of Buganda was shared between the Kabaka and the British Government. Wide powers were left in the hands of the Kabaka and his feudal Lukiko but, of course, the usual 'safeguards' left final control firmly in the hands of the Uganda Protectorate Government headed by the British Governor.

BREAK-UP OF FEUDALISM

The Uganda Agreement of 1900 laid the basis for the break-up of the feudal economy that had existed prior to the imperialist control of the

country. The principle of individual freehold tenure of land was introduced for the first time. Initially freehold rights were granted to a few landowners—usually drawn from the privileged feudal classes. Today the number is very large, with over 50,000 independent landowners each owning his land freehold. More than one-third of Uganda's 94,000 square miles is held in this way.

The simultaneous introduction of cash crops such as cotton and coffee ushered in a tremendous agrarian revolution in Uganda which transformed the whole economy. Today Uganda is one of the great producers of cotton and coffee in the world. The wealth created by the cultivation and export of these products is based largely on land owned by these independent farmers.

Only one-third of the land was made available for freehold. There are also a number of plantations in the hands of settlers. But the rest of the land remained in the hands of feudal barons who maintained the old relationship between themselves and the 'Abakopi' or peasant serfs.

Thus we find side by side with the modern capitalist economy of independent landlords and farmers, the feudal traditional landlords who dominated the Lukiko and the Kabaka.

TOWARDS SELF-GOVERNMENT

As the economic strength of the cotton and coffee farmers grew, so they made increasing demands for more power in the government. These demands were most vociferous in the province of Buganda which was the most highly developed area economically. The demands were directed against the government of the Kabaka and his Lukiko as an immediate target. But implicit in the struggle of the cotton and coffee farmers was the question of British control of Uganda.

In 1948 the first two important parties independent of traditional ties were formed, the BATAKA ASSOCIATION which represented the interests of the peasants, and the UGANDA FARMERS UNION representing the interests of the farmers.

The activities of these organisations culminated in the powerful revolt of 1949 against the government of the province of Buganda which was only put down with the help of British forces. Although the revolt appeared to have failed numerous concessions were made to the farmers. The Lukiko was enlarged to include representation for groups other than the traditional chiefs. Greater economic opportunities were also conceded by the British Government, which further increased the power of the cotton and coffee farmers. Following the 1949 revolt there began a coalescence of feudal and farming interests especially in the province of Buganda. The Kabaka began to represent not only

traditional feudal interests but those of the Buganda bourgeoisie. It is therefore not surprising that the next crisis in Uganda in 1953 was between the people of Buganda and the British Government. The person banished for putting forward the demands of the Buganda people was the Kabaka himself! The British-supported ruler had become a rebel four years after the 1949 revolt.

The crisis of 1953, when the people of Uganda engaged in great struggles, culminated in the British government withdrawing the order of exile on the Kabaka of Buganda. A fresh agreement was signed in 1955 to replace the original 1900 Agreement. The 1955 Agreement now in force defined the position of the Kabaka and further strengthened the position of the Buganda bourgeoisie.

BOURGEOIS LEADERSHIP

The national struggle against British imperialism in Uganda is taking place under the leadership of the powerful African bourgeoisie, which is utilising the struggle for the furtherance of its own interests. Because the Buganda province is the most developed, events seem to be centred on the problems of Buganda and nothing much is heard of the rest of the country. The truth is that only a little over one million Africans are in Buganda province. The rest of the people live in the other three provinces that form the Uganda protectorate. By placing the Buganda bourgeoisie in a more privileged position than the rest of the people, the British Government is fostering divisions among the Africans of Uganda which are making it difficult to build a united movement.

A fresh struggle is on today in Uganda. Leaders have been banished and organisations proscribed in the Economic Boycott campaign being waged in Buganda. The campaign is directed against Asian and European traders. These are the chief competitors of the Buganda bourgeoisie.

The proletariat in Uganda is still relatively small. It is estimated that the total of wage-earners is about 300,000. The true proletariat—the industrial working class—is much smaller. Up to about the end of the second world war economic development was based on agriculture. Since then, industries have now sprung up. These are centred on fishing, cement, mining and textiles. The symbol of the new industrial trend in Uganda is the huge £22 million Owen Falls hydro-electric scheme. This scheme is designed to utilise the rapids, near the point where the river Nile has its source, for the production of cheap electric power.

TOWARDS NATIONAL UNITY

Many of the organisations that have been associated with the national struggle in Uganda have failed to see the perspective of the struggle in Uganda as a whole. Dominated as they were largely by the Buganda traditional elements or the bourgeoisie, they have been unable to unite the entire people of Uganda in a national movement against imperialism. The absence of an all-in national movement organised on a Uganda-wide basis enables the imperialists to utilise the divisions in Uganda society, play the other tribes against the Buganda, the Buganda against the Asians, and so on.

What Uganda appears to need is a mass national democratic and progressive organisation capable of uniting all classes and groups in the country. Such a united democratic national organisation, to be effective, must put forward the real demands of all the people of Uganda. The historic stage in Uganda is still that of bourgeois democratic revolution. But this revolution requires the mobilisation of all progressive elements in Uganda.

The *Uganda National Congress* whose membership is to be found largely in the new industrial centres seems to be aiming at an organisation such as we describe. It was founded in 1952 and held its first meeting on April 6th, 1952. The meeting was held to coincide with the massive protests in South Africa which marked the beginning of the historic campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws. It must be admitted, however, that the Congress is fighting heavy odds as compared with the organisations which have the direct support of the Buganda bourgeoisie. It has not yet gained mass support.

It would greatly assist the work of the National Liberation movement in Uganda if the 300,000 or so wage-earners were organised in Trade Unions. A tremendous advance would also follow the formation of a Communist Party, however small.