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LABOUR IN COLONIAL MALAWI: A STUDY OF  
THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MALAWIAN  
WORKING CLASS, C. 1891-1961

By

Mapopa Obryne Japhet Chipeta

C

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of History

at

Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

October, 1986



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## Abstract

This study examines the process of working class formation in Malawi during the colonial period. The process of proletarianization is analysed within the context of capitalist accumulation during the colonial period. First, the study focuses on the growth and development of capitalism, and the coercive labour system which emerged in Malawi during the early decades of colonial rule. Second, the study analyses the composition and conditions of the Malawian wage labour force in the post Second World War period, during which the colonial economy underwent remarkable expansion.

The study also attempts to trace and examine the social struggles exhibited by the Malawian working class. Moreover, it also deals with the political tendencies of the Malawian wage labour force, and shows the role played by the working class in the nationalist political struggles. This study demonstrates that Malawian workers response, to the system of control imposed upon them under colonial capitalism took different forms, shifting between informal, collective and institutional modes of resistance, depending upon the social and political environment.

## Abbreviations

ALC	African Lakes Corporation
BCAC	British Central Africa Company
BCGA	British Cotton Growers Association
BEAC	Blantyre and East Africa Company
BNA	Blantyre Native Association
CAEU	Commercial African Employers Union
CAR	Central African Railways
CDC	Colonial Development Corporation
CDNA	Chiradzulu District Native Association
CGWU	Commercial and General Workers Union
CO	Colonial Office
DACA	Drivers Association of Central Africa
DC	District Commissioner
EAPH	East African Publishing House
HCWU	Hotel and Catering Workers Union
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
IJAHS	International Journal of African Historical Studies
ITC	Imperial Tobacco Company
JAHS	Journal of African History
JPS	Journal of Peasant Studies
JSAS	Journal of Southern African Studies
LGEU	Local Government Employees Union
MCL	Malawi Congress of Labour
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MNA	Mombera Native Association

NAC	Nyasaland African Congress
NADA	Nyasaland Drivers Association
NCL	National Council of Labour
NLA	Native Labour Association
NMWU	National Mine Workers Union
NNCSA	Nyasaland Native Civil Servants Association
NNNA	North Nyasa Native Association
NRAWU	Nyasaland Railways African Workers Union
NTUC	Nyasaland Trade Union Congress
NUPAW	National Union of Plantation and Agricultural Workers
OTL	Oral Traditions Labour
OUP	Oxford University Press
PC	Provincial Commissioner
PLO	Provincial Labour Officer
PWD	Public Works Department
RCNPNA	Representative Committee of the Northern Province Native Associations
RNLB	Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau
SHRC	Shire Highlands Railway Company
TAWU	Transport and Allied Workers Union
TZR	Trans-Zambezia Railways
WFTU	World Federation of Free Trade Unions
WNLA	Witwatersrand Native Labour Association
WNNA	West Nyasa Native Association
ZPNA	Zomba Province Native Association

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## INTRODUCTION

The literature on Malawi's socio-economic history, unlike that on Southern Africa in general, is very limited. There are a number of factors that account for this disparity. First, despite the fairly advanced and continuing theoretical debates in Southern African social studies, these have tended to concentrate on the development of the regional capitalist centres of South Africa, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), and the resultant marginalization of the adjoining areas and countries. In the same fashion Southern African labour history has generally been devoted to the development of the labour process in the mining industries which have dominated the regional economic system. As a direct consequence of this trend, the socio-economic histories of the peripheral countries, Malawi included, have largely been dominated by narratives of the extra-territorial labour migration.

All too often the student of Southern African labour history is intrigued by the remarkable struggles of Malawian migrant workers abroad. Yet, little scholarly attention has been given to the evolution of the colonial social formation that sustained the perennial outward flow of Malawian labour upon which the industries of southern

Africa thrived. There has been scanty attention given to the structural definition of the migrant labour force within the Malawian context and, worse still, only passing reference made to the existence of a wage labour force in the country.<sup>4</sup> Thus the economic marginalization of colonial Malawi into a regional periphery has also led to her historiographical underdevelopment.

This study breaks the established tradition. It will examine themes that have hitherto been ignored or glossed over in the literature on Malawi's socio-economic history. Primarily, this thesis is concerned with the process of proletarianization in Malawi during the colonial period. Proletarianization in this study will be understood as a process by which Africans were being separated from their means of production, so that they had to sell their labour power for wages in order to subsist. Thus all those who were involved in selling their labour power either on a regular or casual basis will be considered to belong to the same objective economic position: a working class in the making.<sup>5</sup> In the Malawian context this category would include all those who participated in wage employment at home and abroad. Therefore, in pursuance of its main objective this thesis will explore the rhythms of the process of capitalist accumulation, class formation and class struggles in

colonial Malawi. Thus the second objective is to provide a broader perspective that is both theoretically and empirically adequate to explain some of the major themes in Malawi's history. It is therefore hoped that this study will unravel new material on Malawi's history which will also throw some light on the continuing debates in Southern African social studies.

The thesis has, in varying degrees, drawn upon three types of historical data namely, archival records in Malawi, oral traditions and secondary material. Besides the joys, there are many sorrows in collecting evidence for this kind of study. Archival records, which form the major source for this study, face an unsurmountable barrier. A fire in the Nyasaland Government Secretariat in 1919 destroyed all secretariat records up to that date. Granted that these would have provided the main source material for the first three decades of colonial rule, their loss must obviously be counted as one of the greatest impediments to a detailed investigation of Malawi's early colonial history. The correspondence in the Public Record Office in Britain, most of which has been microfilmed and deposited at the University of Malawi Library, cannot make up for the details contained in the daily notes, observations and deliberations of people on the ground. Consequently, any discussion of Malawi's

labour history for the period 1891 to 1919 is bound to be lacking in details and precise statistical data.

Archival records in Malawi are also devoid of detailed and regular reports on the internal labour situation. While details on the volume of extra-territorial labour migration are readily available, those pertaining to the internal labour situation before 1928 are not. The first ever internal labour survey was carried out in 1928-1929 and a second was not conducted until 1950-1951. Between these two dates, very unreliable estimates of the size of the wage labour force were given with little consistency. Government inspection of the internal centres of employment were generally erratic and unsystematic. Instructions for district annual labour reports were not issued until 1931.<sup>7</sup> This means that references to labour conditions before that date were only sporadic and occasioned by particular events in specific employment centres. The second handicap of archival records therefore is that they do not exist as a coherent body of source material spanning the entire colonial period. This presents peculiar source problems for the researcher in tracing the significance and patterns of changes from one period to another.

Finally, the greatest weakness of archival sources is not merely the lack of reliable quantitative

data but the virtual absence of it. No official cost of living index was kept for the entire colonial period; there were no reports of industrial accidents for the period up to 1946, there were no details relating to sectoral distribution of employment until 1954, and there is no statistical data pertaining to the spatial distribution of labour between rural and urban employment centres. Even if the fixation with numbers is construed to be unhistorical and betrays a static conceptualization of social reality, some numbers are almost unavoidable if we are to understand the total dimensions of the colonial past. In the absence of any other sources of statistical details it was almost impossible to resist the temptations of relying on the available fragmentary data. Consequently the quantitative data utilized in this study must be viewed as tentative and assessed with caution. I have tried to use it as indicative rather than absolute.

With the hindsight drawn from archival sources, and 'scraps and crumbs' from secondary literature, it was possible to discern qualitative changes through the oral traditions collected from among the working people. First, historical consciousness is widely present with the result that the majority of workers were able to give a graphic picture of their personal experience and that of working people in general. This awareness may have been

provided by the transmission of traditions from generation to generation and worker to worker. Such depth of historical awareness and manner of transmission have yielded free texts and traditions which are varied, rich in detail and rarely standardized. These traditions are also rich on all the major themes of labour history, namely the system of labour recruitment, control and utilization, class consciousness, and class struggles. One major historical use of oral traditions is that they help to unravel many of the obscurities and generalisations that pervade archival and secondary sources.

Universal themes in Malawian workers' experiences are clearly delineated from the specific and local.

For example, without any provocation workers and peasants described the colonial economic system as one of ultra-exploitation, and usually refer to this period as the era of colonial slavery or "ukapolo wa atsamunda", 1891-1964. In terms of definitional specificity the period 1891 to 1945 is generally associated with forced labour, contract labour (chibaro) and compulsory labour, including conscription for the two world wars, while the period after 1945, is noted for intensified peasantization, and increased participation in wage labour because of growing destitution among Africans in the country. In the southern province and parts of the

central province, the dominant themes in traditions of the colonial period are land alienation, forced labour, the squatter system, and taxation and the abuses associated with all these institutions. In the popular traditions this is the era of thangata.<sup>11</sup>

In northern Malawi, among the Ngoni, for example, the early colonial period is recorded in the traditions as an era of their political and military emasculation with the resultant impoverishment. The tax protest of 1906-1907 is recorded in song, and the overthrow of Inkosi Chimtunga in 1915 for refusing to deploy Ngoni labour in the war, is remembered both through village names and songs.<sup>12</sup> Similarly the period 1946 to 1963 is associated with the disappearance of cattle or "inkomo ziquamuka",<sup>13</sup> because of government cattle destocking measures. Like the other events protest against these measures has been preserved through songs. These traditions of protest were carried by Malawian workers from rural areas to their new localities, the employment centres in Malawi and abroad. In time these protest traditions became intertwined and integrated in new forms of response to the system of colonial domination and exploitation.<sup>14</sup>

Through the collection of oral traditions and patiently listening to traditional music among workers it

becomes easier to appreciate forms of political and labor protest. Such an exercise proved rewarding. Vernacular terms and songs pertaining to colonial phenomena were collected but have not been extensively used in this study. However, the experience gained through this type of data provided crucial guide in determining the patterns of worker consciousness and political action. It was through a close scrutiny of this type of data that workers political behaviour in the crusade against colonial rule came to be comprehended.

Distinctively over 140 workers' biographies were collected, some of which are cited in this study. Questions designed to elicit information on various issues concerning working and living conditions in the country invariably brought answers about the cruelty and injustice of the colonial system. The crudity associated with taxation and contract labour became the widely acknowledged device that fed men into the wage labour market. In the peripheral areas of the north the question of taxation is combined with the absence of markets for agricultural produce to explain labour migration and its deleterious effects on the indigenous productive base. In the southern province and areas of the central province, among former squatters and workers of that background, the land question, the operations of the squatter system and



taxation brings out evictive answers about the advent and cruelty of the colonial order. The despotism of some landowners and government tax collectors is generally associated with excessive brutality. If the narrative in this study is permeated with some of these generalities it is because the writer wishes to capture the traditions as presented by the exploited masses themselves. It is the task of the labour historian to detail the workers' own struggles. That Malawian workers were aware of their individual and collective deprivation and exploitation is abundantly clear from the oral traditions: both rural and urban workers realised that to achieve a greater measure of equality Africans had to seek collective expression.

The amount of secondary literature on Malawi's labour history is meagre, almost non-existent. Nevertheless there are some important studies of Malawi's socio-economic history representative of the major trends in Malawian historiography. One of the first academic studies of Malawi social history with direct reference to labour was undertaken by Krishnamurthy, who sought to analyse colonial economic policy in the period 1890-<sup>15</sup> 1914. This pioneer work chronicles the evolution of government economic policy and charts the relationship between land and labour. The central argument of Krishnamurthy's study is that government economic policy

cannot be understood without reference to the forces which acted upon it. He goes on to identify these forces as missionaries, who were interested in the development of African commercial farming, the settlers, and big business interests represented in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia who wanted an ample supply of cheap labour. He also maintains that although the government wanted to maintain a fair balance of all these interests, European interests, particularly those of business in south Africa and Southern Rhodesia, dominated its policy.<sup>16</sup> Nothing is more unconvincing than these assertions. First, Krishnamurthy ignores the various fractions of capital operating within Malawi such as the British trading companies, settlers who were engaged in plantation production and trade and Indian merchants. The problem of labour control, the introduction of contract labour and compulsory labour and the legalization of the squatter system by the colonial administration are all posed as inconsequential in relation to government inability to control the exodus of Malawian labour to southern Africa. In fact the reader receives the impression that all these issues were not premised on the demands of local settler and corporate interests.

Krishnamurthy's assertion that the government wanted to maintain a fair balance of the interest in the

country is not convincing. It is important to stress that the appropriation of African lands, and the introduction of taxation and a host of other measures to facilitate colonial exploitation were not instituted to maintain a 'fair balance' within the colonial system, which in itself is based on unequal relations. The main problem with Krishnamurthy's work is that policy issues are posed largely in terms of personalities of colonial officials, rather than within the framework of colonial capitalist accumulation and the creation of relations of dominance and dependence within the colony itself. Policies and policy changes cannot be understood outside the context of the socio-economic system in which they are formulated. The various forms of accumulation and the resultant class formations must be delineated because it is these transformations that determine the parameters and limitations of policies and policy changes. Similarly, the persistence of labour emigration from Malawi to Southern Africa cannot be simply blamed on government's inability to control it. The nature of accumulation within the country must be analysed in order to determine the factors that induced people to leave their homes and sell their labour power abroad. Krishnamurthy's perspective has to be broadened to integrate the struggles waged by Africans which blunted the effectiveness of

colonial policies.

A major theme which pervades Malawi's history, but one which still remains elusive, is labour emigration from Malawi to other countries in Southern Africa. A number of scholars have tried to explain the persistence of this outward flow of Malawian labour during the colonial period.<sup>17</sup> Makambe, for instance, has argued that:

labour emigration as a movement amongst Nyasaland African societies had given rise to a situation whereby potential labour migrants significantly over-valued the importance of their chosen destination areas below the Zambezi, in terms of economic gains or other benefits of a specious nature, at the expense of the difficulties to be overcome.... The resilience of these migrant labourers, in the face of so many challenges served not only to bring out the determination with which they pursued the cause of migration but also demonstrates the fact that walale (Harare or Salisbury) had become as strong as a source of attraction amongst the Nyasaland African societies as it was amongst their Chewa Kinsmen of Northern Rhodesia up to the 1950s.<sup>18</sup>

Makambe's interpretation of labour migration is theoretically deficient. It simply does not explain why people left their homes and trekked hundreds of miles to seek work on the mines and farms in Southern Africa. While he notes the economic motivation of the migrants from Malawi he fails to link it to other factors which induced people to migrate. The question of labour control and utilization within Malawi, social and economic deprivation and the protest which these factors can

generate are never raised, let alone considered. The fact that migration persisted as it did in the face of the many odds which Makambe himself unravels is indicative of certain transformations within Malawi which propelled people out of their own homes.

A close scrutiny of the operations of the colonial system in Malawi would reveal the gross abuses, deprivations and many other pressures to which Malawians were subjected, pressures which transformed labour emigration from a purely economic enterprise into an avenue for social protest. The presence of large numbers of protest movements in South Africa and the Rhodesias, which were organised and run by Malawians, must not only be seen as a flow of ideas between countries but also as an overflow of protest from colonial Malawi into other countries. Van Onselen's seminal study of Rhodesian mine labour clearly brings out these aspects.<sup>19</sup> It would serve no useful purpose for this study to dwell at length on emigrant labour. However, it is important to stress the fact that the size of the Malawian labour force abroad was not a simple product of the attractions generated by the mines and cities of South Africa and the Rhodesias. The size of the wage labour force was a direct result of changes taking place within Malawi's political economy which were generated by specific forms of capital

accumulation and social struggles.

Furthermore, Makambe's asserts that:

Nyasaland labour migrants contributed to the overall state of stagnation and underdevelopment of their homeland by resorting to an extensive movement that discouraged the emergence of an embryonic indigenous bourgeoisie of the planter class consisting of African traditional landowners and that mission educated social stratum which may have desired to turn its attention to cash cropping, specializing in tea, coffee and tobacco growing and thus play an active role in modern capitalist forms of economic activity.<sup>20</sup>

This is like blaming the poor for poverty. What needs to be done is a close analysis of the entire mode of production and the possibilities open to the various strata of society before the conditions of poverty can be grasped. Factually, Makambe's conclusions are half truths, because the absence of a large strata of propertied Africans in Malawian society is not simply a by-product of labour migration but rather the nature of colonial capitalism. This study will demonstrate the various methods deployed by the colonial state designed to preempt the emergence of an indigenous propertied class. The control of marketing and credit facilities, crops to be grown and transportation were as effective tools for undermining possibilities of accumulation among Africans as was the introduction of taxation in accentuating the process of proletarianization which in turn led to increased labour emigration.

While Makambe explains Malawi's underdevelopment in terms of labour emigration, Vail sees international labour migration as a consequence of underdevelopment<sup>21</sup> largely brought about by the railways. Vail shows how government involvement in railway development deprived the colonial state of resources for investment in other sectors of the economy. This in turn led to the stagnation of settler and peasant agriculture. Consequently peasants were forced to migrate to other countries to sell their labour in order to earn the money with which to pay the taxes. From a narrative view point, his treatment of colonial underdevelopment is persuasive, but laced with slogans, which at times betrays a static conceptualization of social reality. It is unconvincing to pose the problem of underdevelopment as a process by which existing forms are atrophied in terms of technology and productivity as Vail portrays the "Creation<sup>22</sup> of Malawi's agriculture economy". The fundamental questions of patterns of rural accumulation and the resultant class formations which also served to accentuate the deprivation of an increasing number of people from their indigenous means of production are not raised. Yet all these issues are crucial to our understanding of the total structural dimensions of labour migration. There is hardly any mention of the emerging rural proletariat in

Vail's work. Plantations are frequently referred to but the labour process and the changes within these production regimes remain obscure. Thus despite his artistic handling of details, the analysis is limited by its conceptual and theoretical inadequacies.

Recently McCracken has, in a series of essays, tried to identify the process of peasantization in Malawi during the colonial period.<sup>23</sup> He deals at length with the competition between Africans and settlers for markets and other resources, and how the colonial state mediated between these competing interests. He argues that "to a significant extent the restrictive pricing and production policies of the Native Tobacco Board (the state) acted as a brake on the accumulation of capital by Africans".<sup>24</sup> He also goes on to indicate how "through the effort of settlers a share-cropping system based on visiting tenants prospered in the central province".<sup>25</sup> It is here that some analytical problems begin to appear. While he acknowledges the intense exploitation of African 'visiting tenants'<sup>26</sup> in his analysis, this is scarcely noted as one handicap to the prosperity of the peasantry. Moreover the labelling of African squatters on the estates in the central province as "visiting tenants"<sup>27</sup> is also erroneous and gives the impression of the existence of a "target peasantry". By drawing the unnecessary distinction



between squatters in the central province and those in the southern province, without paying particular attention to the specific objective conditions of these two groups, his analysis fails to capture the nature of colonial agrarian capitalism and the system of dominance and dependence it generated. McCracken's failure to delineate the stages the squatter system passed through belies this view.

29

Kandawire, like Krishnamurthy before him, takes policy as a departure point to explain the emergence of the squatter system in Southern Malawi during the colonial period. Time and space does not allow for a full discussion of the details and some of the historical misconceptions which bedevil Kandawire's study, if only because his work is sociological rather than historical. Central to his thesis, however, is that the squatter system emerged and evolved in Southern Malawi because of the contradictory land and development policies pursued by successive colonial administrators. He goes on to indicate that once the government had realised their earlier mistakes, they tried to solve the problem of squatters. This is where Kandawire's misconception about the squatter system and colonial capitalism become apparent. What he portrays as government attempts to resolve the squatter problem were in fact the mechanisms

through which the squatter system became entrenched. The legalization of the squatter system in 1904 can in no way be perceived as an attempt by the government to solve the problem of squatting as Kandawire's work seem to suggest.<sup>30</sup>

Kandawire also fails to link the persistence of the squatter system and its changing magnitude to the rhythms of colonial capitalist agriculture. While he rightly acknowledges that it was the character of colonial capitalism which provided the background to the crudity of the squatter system,<sup>31</sup> he thoroughly ignores the rôle of class struggles by squatters themselves and the transformation in colonial capitalism as major catalysts in the dissolution of the system. To Kandawire this only came about because the colonial government wanted to resolve the issues. The simple fact of the matter is that Africans did not recover their land because an impartial colonial government wanted to give it back to them. The dissolution of the squatter system came about because of intensified struggles by squatters. As this study will show, a thorough examination of the squatter system during the colonial period reveals that the system was riddled with a multiplicity of crises, most of which were precipitated by the struggles, covert and overt, waged by the squatters themselves. It needs to be stressed also

that colonial capitalism itself at times warranted the continued existence of the system while certain periods saw its demise as squatters were being gradually transformed into workers. These dimensions are totally missing from Kandawire's analysis. This clearly illustrates the limitations of policy centred studies, which concentrate on the intricacies of policy formulation and personalities of colonial officials. Such studies always idealize and overrate the achievements of colonial bureaucrats at the expense of the majority. The centrality of class struggles as a force of change is negated while the wisdom and sensitivity of colonial officials is elevated. Such a perspective has little analytical validity because it ignores the fundamental and more complex structural factors that conditioned the colonial system.

Finally, there is Pachai's study of land and politics which spans the entire colonial period and penetrates the post-colonial era, <sup>32</sup> and in detail chronicles land alienation, government land policies, the emergence of the squatter system and the African response. This detailed study maps out the relationship between land and labour, and the growth of the squatter system and its subsequent dissolution. The main theme of Pachai's work is the evolution of government land policies, enunciated by

colonial officials who were sandwiched between settler and corporate economic objectives on the one hand and African interests on the other. He does not link the problem of squatting to the ever changing demands of colonial capitalist agriculture in Malawi. By posing the squatter problem in isolation from the overall process of colonial capitalist accumulation and the system of labour control, one is given the impression that there were no structural forces which precipitated the growth and subsequent demise of the squatter system except policy initiatives by colonial officials. Thus despite its empirical strength Páchal's work does not offer a conceptual and theoretical framework that would explain some of the contradictions in the policies pursued by the colonial government.

Therefore, with a hindsight of the conceptual and interpretive inadequacies of the earlier studies on Malawi's socio-economic history, combined with the recent theoretical refinement in Southern African Social Studies, the student of Malawian history, and labour history in particular, is now better equipped to circumvent the trappings of formalistic and descriptive work. Perhaps it needs to be stated from the start that the task of the labour historian is to analyse the structures of domination and dependence which determined the pace of proletarianization. Consequently this study concentrates

on the wider social process that generate working class formation. It will focus on the development and structure of colonial capitalist production, the extent and tendencies of the pre-capitalist sector of the economy, and how the competition between these two determined and influenced the system of labour control and utilization. Finally the thesis will try to illuminate, in outline, the specific patterns of social struggles exhibited by the Malawian wage labor force during the colonial period.

### Footnotes

1. Some of the most influential studies in this field include, R. Palmer and N. Parsons (ed.) The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa, Heinemann, London, 1977; Ann Seidman and Neva Seidman Makgetla, Outposts of monopoly Capitalism: Southern Africa in the Global Economy, Lawrence Hill and Company, Westport, Connecticut, 1980; Duncan Clarke Contract Workers and Underdevelopment in Rhodesia, Mambo Press, Gwelo, 1974; Giovanni Arrighi, The Political Economy of Rhodesia, Mouton, The Hague, 1967, -- "Labour Supplies in Historical perspectives: A Study of the Proletarianization of the African peasantry in Rhodesia" in G. Arrighi and J. Saul (ed.) Essays on the Political Economy of Africa, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1973; H. Wolpe, "Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid," in Economy and Society, Vol. 1, 4, 1972; M. Legassick and H. Wolpe, "The Bantustans and Capital Accumulation in South Africa" ROAPE, no. 7, 1976; Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone, ed. Industrialization, and Change in South Africa: African Class formation, culture and consciousness 1870-1930, Longman, London, 1982; W. Beinhardt, The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860-1930, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982; Benard Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, Monthly Review Press, New York, N.Y., 1979; and Colin Bundy, The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry, Heinemann, London, 1979, and I.R. Phimister, "Peasant Production and Underdevelopment in Southern Rhodesia 1890-1914", African Affairs, vol. 73, 291, April 1974.
2. See for example, F. Wilson, Labour in the South African Gold mines 1911-1968, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972, -- Migrant Labour in South Africa, Johannesburg, 1972, C. Van Onselen, Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933, Pluto Press, London, 1976, -- New Babylon: Studies in Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914, vol. 1, Longmans, Harlow, Essex, 1982, -- New Nineveh: Studies in Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1896-1914, vol. 2, Longmans, Harlow, Essex, 1982; B. Bozzoli, ed. The Witwatersrand: Labour, Townships and Patterns of Protest, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1979; E. Webster ed. Essays on South African Labour History, Ravan

Press, Johannesburg, 1978; R.J. Gordon, Mines, Masters and Migrants: Life in a Namibian Compound, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1977; I.R. Phimister and C. Van Onselen, Studies in the History of African Mine Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe, Mambo Press, Sailsbury, 1978; P.S. Harris, Black Industrial Workers in Rhodesia, Mambo Press, Gwelo, 1974; Charles Perring, Black Mineworkers in Central Africa: Industrial Strategies and the evolution of an African proletariat in the Copperbelt 1911-1941, Heineman, London, 1979; J.L. Parpart, Labour and Capital on the African Copperbelt, Temple Press, Philadelphia, 1983; M. Buroway, The Colour of Class in Copper Mines, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1972; Alan H. Jeeves, Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy: The Struggle for the Gold Mines Labour Supply, 1890-1920, Queens University Press, Kingston, Ontario, 1985; F. Johnstone, Class Race and Gold, Kegan Paul, London, 1976; and Robert Davies, "The 1922 Strike on the Rand: White Labour and the Political Economy of South Africa" in P.C.W. Gut-Kind, R. Cohen and Jean Copans ed. African Labour History, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, 1978.

3. The most valuable sources on the struggles of Malawian workers abroad is C. Van Onselen: Chibaro, Pluto Press, London, 1976; Clements Kadalie, My Life and the I.C.U: The Autobiography of a Black Trade Unionist in South Africa, Humanities Press, New York, N.Y., 1970; see also F.E. Sanderson, "The development of Labour Migration from Nyasaland," J.A.H., vol. 2, 2, 1961, H.M. Tapela, "Labour Migration in Southern Africa and the case of underdevelopment in Nyasaland, 1891-1913," in Journal of Southern African Affairs, vol. 4, 1, 1979, I.R. Phimister. The Shamva Mine Strike of 1927: An Emerging African Proletariat in Rhodesian History, vol. 2, 1971; I.R. Phimister and C. Van Onselen, Studies in the History of African Mine Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe, Mambo Press, Gwelo, 1978.
4. See for example, Leroy Vail, "The State and the creation of colonial Malawi's Agriculture Economy", in R.I. Rotberg, ed. Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger in East Central Africa, Lexington Books, Lexington, Massachusetts, 1982, Martin Chanock, "The New Men Revisited: An Essay on the Development of Political consciousness in colonial Malawi" in R.J. Macdonald, ed., From Nyasaland to Malawi: Studies in Colonial History, E.A.P.H. Nairobi, 1975; Robin

Palmer, "White Farmers in Malawi Before and After the Depression" in African Affairs, vol. 84, 335, April 1985; B.S. Krishnamurthy, "Economic Policy, land and labour in Nyasaland, 1890-1914." in B. Pachai, ed., The Early History of Malawi, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1972.

5. This definitional framework has also been used in P.C.W. Gutkind, The Emergent African Urban Proletariat, Occasional Paper Series, no. 8, Centre for Developing - Area Studies, McGill University, Montreal, 1974. See also R. Cohen, "From Peasants to Workers in Africa" in P.C.W. Gutkind and I. Wallerstein, ed., The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa, Sage, London, 1976.
6. These will be cited as Malawi National Archives (hereafter MNA).
7. See MNA S2/23/25: Instructions on the question of Native Labour District Annual Reports, 1931. See also MNA NC1/14/2.
8. These oral traditions will be cited in this study as 'Oral Traditions Labour (or O.T.L.)', name of interviewer, and name of interviewee.
9. OTL, Chipeta with Jim Bwanali and Samson Galima, Gotha Estate Thyolo, 22/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Sub-chief Chimbeta and Councillors Chimbeta Village, Thyolo, 26/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Wincase Bandula Chinsambo Estate, Mulanje, 17/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Charles Matipwiri Ruw Estate, Mulanje, 16/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Mwendamnjila Jere, Khoti Jere and Gomezgani Banda, Ephingweni, Mmbelwa, Mzimba, 1/8/84.
10. Among peasants the dominant themes during this period are forced cultivation by-laws, including the compulsory bunding; cattle destocking, and the exploitative pricing policies of the marketing boards.
11. Thangata in this study will be understood as "forced labour" or work without real benefit. See also J.A. Kamchitete Kandawire, Thangata: Forced Labour or Reciprocal Assistance?
12. Inkosi Chimtunga's Kraal was renamed Edingeni or "a Kraal without the King". Its original name was Emtelela. There are numerous other place names, and



- Ingoma dance songs pertaining to the same theme and the First World War. Details on these events have been recorded on OTL, Chipeta with Sapulayi Jere Edingeni M'mbelwa, Mzimba, 2/8/84.
13. OTL, Chipeta with Mwendamnjila Jere, Khoti Jere and Gomezgani Banda, Ephingweni Village, M'mbelwa, Mzimba, 1/8/84.
  14. Van Onselen, had made reference to the contradictory role of ethnic dance as a mechanism for social control on the mines, and also as an avenue for fostering organization among workers. See Van Onselen, Chibaro, pp. 185-194; pp. 198-204. A close scrutiny of the songs accompanying the ethnic dances would reveal the element of protest embedded in these dances. In Malawi Nyau dance, Mganda or Malipenga, Ingoma, and Beni Songs are usually full of social commentary, (protest or praise); and such songs and dances are also used to communicate special messages among and between participants and the audience. It was through such type of activities that peasant forms of protest tended to cross-fertilize with labour protests in the various centres of employment.
  15. B.S. Krishnamurthy, "Economic policy; Land and Labour in Nyasaland, 1890-1914," in B. Pachai, ed. The Early History of Malawi, Northwestern Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1972, pp. 384-404.
  16. Ibid., pp. 398-399.
  17. As in footnote 3 above. See also, K.N. Mufuka, Missions and Politics in Malawi, The Limestone Press, Kingston, Ontario, 1977, pp. 41-66.
  18. E.P. Makambe, "Nyasaland African Labour Ulendos to Southern Rhodesia and the problem of African Highway men, 1903-23: A Study in the Limitations of early independent labour migration," African Affairs, vol. 79, no. 317, October, 1980, pp. 561-2
  19. See Van Onselen, Chibaro; Phimister and Van Onselen, Studies in the History of African Mine Labour, in Colonial Zimbabwe.
  20. See Makambe, "Nyasaland Labour Ulendos to Southern Rhodesia and the problem of African Highway men 1903-1923", p. 566.

21. See Leroy Vail, The Making of an 'Imperial' Slum: Nyasaland and her Railways 1895-1935 "in J.A.H., vol. 16, 1, 1975; -- Railway Development and Colonial Underdevelopment: The Case of Nyasaland" in R. Palmer and N. Parsons ed. The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa, Heinemann, London, 1977, -- "The State and the Creation of Colonial Malawi's Agricultural Economy" in R.I. Rotberg, ed. Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa, Lexington, Massachusetts, 1982.
22. Vail, "The State...."
23. See John McCracken, "Peasants, Planters and the Colonial State: The Case of Malawi, 1905-1940", in Journal of Eastern African Research and Development, vol. 12, 1982, -- "Planters, peasants and the colonial state: the impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province in Malawi", in Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 9, 2, April 1983, -- "Experts and Expertise in Colonial Malawi", in African Affairs, vol. 81, no. 322, January 1982.
24. McCracken, "Planters, peasants and the colonial state: the impact of the Native Tobacco Board." p. 183.
25. Ibid, p. 173. McCracken also over-estimates the contribution of remittances by migrant workers to the expansion of peasant tobacco production in the central province during the colonial period.
26. Ibid, p. 186, see also "peasants, planters and the colonial state", pp. 30-31.
27. Ibid, p. 185, A large number of the so-called visiting tenants on the estates in the southern province resided on these estates for generations.
28. McCracken however, rightly acknowledges the movement of squatters between the two areas, the Southern and the Central Province, but does not analyse the significance of this movement.
29. See J.A.K. Kandawire, "Thangata in precolonial and colonial systems of land tenure in Southern Malawi with special reference to Chingale" in Africa, vol. 47, 2, 1977, -- Thangata: Forced labour or Reciprocal Assistance? University of Malawi, Zomba, 1979. All reference in the subsequent paragraphs

will be to these two works.

30. See Kandawire, Thangata. One sub-heading in the chapter dealing with the emergence of the squatter system is entitled, "Attempts to Solve the Problem", pp. 15-22.
31. Kandawire, Thangata, p. 13
32. See B. Pachai, Land Policies in Malawi: An examination of the Colonial Legacy, in J.A.H., vol. 14, 4, 1973, -- "The issue of Thangata in the History of Nyasaland" in Journal of Social Sciences, vol. 3, 1974; -- Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875-1975, Limestone Press, Kingston, Ontario, 1978.

## CHAPTER ONE

THE COLONIAL ECONOMY 1891-1939

The colonization of Malawi, which began in 1891, came in the wake of the scramble for Africa. The literature on this scramble; and the British conquest and colonization of Malawi is too well known to be recounted. It need not be over-emphasised that the colonization of Malawi and the introduction of settler production was a result of the complex interplay of economic, political and social forces in the late nineteenth century. This chapter will outline the growth and structure of the colonial economy in the period 1891 to 1939 and will attempt to show the extent and tendencies of settler production, the penetration of international capital, and the demands of the two upon peasant production, which also influenced and conditioned the growth and development of the wage labour force during the colonial period.

Settler Production

At the time colonial rule began in 1891 a coffee culture had just been introduced into the country by the British missionaries. Harry Johnston, first commissioner and consul-general to Malawi, looked to settler coffee production as a viable economic cash crop for the country

thereby creating local sources for revenue to support the colonial administration.<sup>2</sup> Thus from the beginning of colonial rule it was decided that settler production would be the backbone of colonial economic development.

By 1892 the few European settlers who were already in the area, when British claims were declared over Malawi, had formed two umbrella organizations, the Shire Highlands Planters Association and the Nyasa Planters Association, to advance European interest in the country. The two associations later merged in 1895 to form the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce. By means of interviews, petition, protest and after 1907 through their unofficial representatives in the Legislative Council, the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce made representations to the colonial government where they received considerable sympathy. Through their representatives in the United Kingdom, the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce conveyed settler demands to the colonial office. In the first two decades of colonial rule, the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce was one of the most important channels through which settlers advanced their interests in the country.<sup>3</sup>

With the exception of a few large landowners like the Buchanan Brothers, Eugene C.A. Sharrer, A.L. Bruce, Harry, Edwin Petit, Hugh C. Marshall, and K.B.

Bradshaw, most settlers that came to Malawi were grossly undercapitalised and lacked the basic skills in tropical agriculture.<sup>4</sup> Consequently the capital deficient settlers came to rely on government support to run their enterprises. It was this basic weakness of the settlers that induced the colonial government to take an active role in the economy on their behalf. This weakness in settler enterprise also made it much easier for international capital to penetrate and dominate the colonial economy. The dominance of international and British capital in the colonial economy was a critical factor in the development of capitalism in colonial Malawi. With the support of the British government, British companies, at times, managed to manipulate the colonial government to practise primitive accumulation on their behalf.

As early as 1891, the settlers began to demand land, labour, and trade policies that would facilitate the profitable production of plantation crops and also to gain monopoly over the ivory and distributive trade. Both plantation production and monopoly over trade necessitated military and political subjugation of African peoples and the establishment of colonial authority. The first decade, 1891 to 1900, at the beginning of colonial rule, was dominated by a series of wars between the British and

African states that opposed colonial rule in the area.

The Yao states of Kazembe, Liwonde, Msamara, Matipwiri, Mponda, Kawinga and others that dominated the Shire Highlands were over run by the mid 1890s. Other Yao states like Makanjira and Jalasi took time to subdue.

Between 1895 and 1897, various Chewa states like Chibisa's, Mwase Kasungu, and Dzoolle, the Yao of Tambala and Odete; and the Ngoni states of Chiwere and Gomani were conquered for blockading labour supplies to the Shire Highlands.<sup>5</sup> In northern Malawi, Mlozi, Msalemu and

Kopakopa (all were in the Karonga area), were over-ran<sup>6</sup> for inhibiting European trading activities in the area.

Once the dominant African states in the area were defeated and their guns and ammunition confiscated, violent resistance to British dominance was difficult. What followed the wars of conquest was the direct administration of the conquered areas. The conquered areas were placed under the direct control of the District revenue collectors who also exercised political and judicial authority.

In 1891/1892 Johnston had began to divide the country into districts and posted revenue collectors to each of the administrative units as they came under British control. In areas where African capitulation was under the guise of 'treaties of protection', African

rulers maintained a semblance of authority, but only in a secondary position to the District revenue collector (hereafter District Commissioner).<sup>7</sup> But apart from laying the foundations for effective political control, and raising revenue through taxes, military conquest also made livestock and new lands available for alienation.<sup>8</sup>

Bridglal Pachai has done unsurpassed work in the study of land alienation in colonial Malawi.<sup>9</sup> He shows that between 1891 and 1894 Johnston allocated 3 3/4 million acres of land to European settlers and companies.<sup>10</sup> About 72% of the alienated land was held by 11 companies and estate holders whereas the remainder was allocated to missionaries and individual settlers.<sup>11</sup>

Beginning in 1894 all the unalienated land was acquired on behalf of the crown and placed under the custody of the colonial government. Newly arrived settlers and companies could make purchases or obtain leases from the government. By the second decade of colonial rule about 1/6 of the total land surface in the country was held by settlers and companies in freehold and leasehold. Apart from the 2.7 million acres of land nominally held by the British South African company in the northern province, most of the alienated land was located in the Shire Highlands (Southern province).<sup>12</sup> Thus through military conquest and political control the



colonial state expropriated the indigenous means of production on behalf of settlers and corporate enterprises which could not have been obtained in any other way.

In the meantime steps were taken to eradicate African entrepreneurs in the collection and ivory trade.

In 1891 a gun tax was imposed and by the mid 1890s more legislative measures were taken to restrict hunting and killing elephants. Licences were required to own a gun and to shoot elephants. All unlicensed guns were confiscated and unauthorized killing of elephants was subject to penal sanctions such as imprisonment and fines. In addition an export duty of 2/- per lb on ivory tusks or portions of them, below 15 lbs was levied by the colonial government.<sup>13</sup> Since the settlers controlled the circulation of the officially recognized currency, the regulations enacted by the colonial government undermined the growth and development of African entrepreneurs thereby giving enormous advantage to European settlers to monopolise the trade in ivory.

In 1898, the colonial government took over the trade in rubber. Acting Governor Manning allowed payment of hut tax in rubbers.<sup>14</sup> This meant that peasants in rubber-producing areas were attracted to paying their taxes in kind rather than in cash. Consequently the small but growing number of African entrepreneurs who depended

on the trade in rubber were gradually being squeezed out.

Thus by the turn of the nineteenth century nearly all the "collecting and hunting" occupations were firmly in the hands of European settlers and African business aspirants were being squashed.

15

The expansion in coffee production after 1891, prompted settlers to petition the colonial government for a railway because river transport and portage (tenga-tenga) were not dependable. The British government, to whom the matter was referred, claimed that it could not help because its resources had been drained by the Uganda Railway and the Anglo-Boer War. A local entrepreneur, Eugene Sharrer, rose to the occasion in partnership with private British interests and in 1895, the Shire Highlands Railway Company (SHRC) was formed to construct the railway between Blantyre and Nsanje. By May 1908, the Shire Highlands Railway had begun its operations. Between 1908 and 1915, Nsanje was connected to the Zambezi river by the Central African Railway (CAR). By 1935 the railway was further extended from Blantyre to Salima on the shores of Lake Malawi and a permanent bridge had been constructed over the Zambezi river. Thus by 1935 Malawi was linked to the port of Beira in Mozambique through a railway line owned by three companies, the Shire Highlands Railway Company (SHRC), the CAR and the Trans-Zambesia Railway

<sup>16</sup> (TRZ). Within Malawi the railway was primarily developed in the southern province precisely in the same areas where settlers and corporate enterprise was concentrated. As we will try to show later the colonial state paid heavily for the developments of this railway system.

Road construction was also designed to suit the demands of settler and corporate enterprise. Between 1895 and 1909 a trunk-road network had been developed in the Shire Highlands, linking areas of settler production to the rail-head at Limbe. Between 1920 and 1930, the road network in the southern province was expanded to meet the demands of the expanding colonial economy. In addition the central province, which was being opened up for settler production, was also linked with the southern parts of the country. Feeder roads were also developed and extended in both the central and the southern province.<sup>17</sup> As for the northern parts of the country

which were far from areas of settler enterprise, "road communications were initially, almost entirely, developed for administrative purposes"<sup>18</sup>, so that re-routing was necessary, in the 1950s, if areas of economic potential had to be exploited. This imbalanced development of the transport infrastructure, concentrated on settler dominated areas and neglecting the northern parts of the

country, not only contributed to the uneven development between the settler and peasant sectors, but was also instrumental in the unequal developments of the peasantry in the two parts of the country during the colonial period.

The completion of the Chirômo to Blantyre railway and the opening of the tobacco auction market in Limbe in 1908, prompted the settlers to press the government to take special measures to encourage settler production. The failure of coffee production, after a devastating drought and an outbreak of plant diseases and pest<sup>19</sup>, also induced the colonial government to take steps to support settler production. By 1909, the Agriculture Department had been established to assist settlers with crop and animal husbandry research. The Department of Agriculture conducted research in the Shire Highlands through experimental farms, provided seeds and seedlings and occasionally published articles of importance to settler agriculture. Through the Department of Agriculture, the colonial government determined what crops should be produced and where specific crops could be produced.

It was through the Department of Agriculture, though with limited success, that settlers tried to prevent African production of lucrative cash crops such as

cotton and flue-cured tobacco. In 1910, for instance, the colonial government was forced, by the settlers, to take measures to control African production of cotton on crown land. The cotton ordinance was enacted in 1910 to curb cotton production by Africans. Under the provisions of this ordinance the Agriculture Department could determine when and where, on crown land, cotton should be produced. Strict cultivation by-laws were enacted which specified cotton cultivation time and in some cases the sizes of fields on crown land. <sup>20</sup> In the Shire Highlands cotton production on crown land was not allowed in the period 1910 to 1923. African production of tea, sisal, tung and flue-cured tobacco was not allowed during the entire colonial period. <sup>21</sup>

Though the colonial government began to employ veterinarians after 1909, their activities were almost entirely concentrated on settler livestock. Between 1895 and 1940 when African livestock in the central and northern provinces were being attacked by periodic outbreaks of rinderpest, east coast fever, tsetse fly and numerous tickborne diseases, the colonial government took no serious effort to deal with the problem. But "where European property was in danger, and markets for meat existed, government assistance in combating disease was available". <sup>22</sup> This inequitable allocation of resources in

favour of settler agriculture constrained the expansion and development of peasant production during the colonial period.

Legislative measures were also taken to create a credit system that would buttress settler production. The Credit Trade Ordinance of 1912 made it illegal for commercial banks, Asians and Europeans to provide credit facilities above L 1 to Africans. In addition legal barriers were also instituted to bar Africans and Asians from owning any property and or to carry on business in European designated areas. Business partnership between Europeans, Asians and Africans were also prohibited.<sup>23</sup>

These measures had the effect of eradicating African and Asian competition from European designated areas, giving the exclusive legal rights to European merchants in the distributive trade in the main commercial centres.

Government licencing policy also gave exclusive rights to Europeans and Asians to purchase cash crops. Beginning in 1913 buyers of cash crops produced on crown land were required to obtain licences from the government at a pre-determined fee and specified rules. Buyers were required to pay 10/- for licences and pay market fee at the rate of 3 d per every 112 lbs of seed cotton bought.<sup>24</sup> The imposition of a trading licence and a market fee was yet another obstacle that blockaded prospective African

entrepreneurs to engage in the purchasing of cash crops.

By 1920 the trade in African grown foodstuffs was also severely curtailed. Under the provisions of the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance, 1920, the purchase or barter of foodstuffs grown on crown land could only be sanctioned under government provided licences for purposes of procuring food to feed labourers employed on work of importance or work of public interest. The unlicensed movement of foodstuffs grown on crown land, for purposes of trade, between districts was prohibited. These measures were specifically designed to eradicate African and Asian merchants from the lucrative trade in foodstuffs, thereby buttressing settler and corporate monopoly over the purchasing of produce from crown land. The licencing rules were obviously designed to favour settlers and companies that employed many workers on their plantations and other large commercial enterprises considered to be 'work of importance'. Thus by 1920 African entrepreneurs had been thoroughly squeezed out of most commercial avenues. These restrictive measures not only assisted settlers, most of whom combined agriculture production and trade, to accumulate, they also inhibited the development of an African mercantile class. The discriminatory and restrictive measures also tended to entrench and institutionalise the racial divisions

between Africans, Asians, and Europeans during the colonial period.

The tobacco boom immediately after the end of the war gave hopes to the settlers and the colonial government that settler production was on the road to success in the country. Large companies with vested interest in land embarked on programmes to encourage intending settlers to come to Malawi. The tobacco boom of 1919 to 1921 also attracted numerous settlers who hoped to make fortunes in tobacco production. Both the settlers and the colonial government were euphoric about the good prospects for settler production. It was reported from Mulanje district in 1919/1920, for example, that "the planters are nearly in every case making fortunes which exceed their most sanguine expectations".<sup>26</sup>

In the meantime land prices began to rise. Before the war land was being sold at between 10/- and L 1 per acre, but by 1919/1920 the prices had risen to between 30/- and L3 per acre. The colonial government also raised rent on leasehold land from 1/- per acre in 1914 to 2/- per acre in 1920 in the Southern province, whereas in the central province the land rent was pegged at 1/- per acre.<sup>27</sup> Gradually a point was reached in the 1920s, first in the southern province, when land prices and land rents could not match the productive capacity of the land.



By the early 1920s most of the virgin lands in the southern province, had been cultivated. It was then discovered by the planting community that the used lands were deficient in plant nutrients and organic matter. In addition, continuous monocropping not only led to declining soil fertility but it also created conducive conditions for infestation of pests and diseases. The extensive utilization of forests for wood fuel for curing tobacco with no replanting of trees, also accelerated soil erosion, which further accentuated the rapid decline in soil fertility. William Beinart has commented that "the slash and burn farming of the estate owners in Colonial<sup>28</sup> Malawi was among the worst" in southern Africa. The capital deficient settlers could not afford crop rotation, expensive fertilizers at L 25 to L30 per ton, nor the<sup>29</sup> capital cost of re-afforestation of the land. Consequently yields on settler plantation began to fall and with it the proportion of settler production also declined. When commodity prices collapsed in 1921/1922, coupled with an outbreak of tobacco leaf diseases and pests in cotton fields between 1921 and 1923, they caused many settlers to go under.

In the meantime the colonial government was forced, by the settlers, to ease off on land rent. Many settlers with land leased from the government were allowed

a grace period before they could start repaying the land rents. The settlers who could afford new land leases began to shift their enterprises to the central province. In addition, legislative measures were taken to curtail tobacco production on crown land so that the internal tobacco market could be exclusively retained for settler farmers. The Native Tobacco Ordinance was enacted in 1926 to regulate and control African production of tobacco on crown land. The Native Tobacco Board (NTB) was created in 1926, to implement the provisions of the Native Tobacco Ordinance. As it would be expected, membership to the NTB was exclusively European. The Native Tobacco Board was<sup>30</sup> dominated by settlers who operated large plantations.

Through the crown land grower registration system, the NTB could determine the number of African growers, the size of tobacco plots and also control the provision of marketing facilities. After 1926, the size of tobacco plots allowed per African grower on crown land was fixed at a maximum of one acre and the number of markets on crown land was drastically reduced. In central province the markets were reduced from 16 in 1925 to only<sup>31</sup> 3 by 1935. No markets were provided on crown land in the southern province. However, faced with a resilient peasant sector, settler attempts to gain monopoly over tobacco production could not achieve the desired results.

The collapse of tobacco prices in 1929 and the onset of the Depression in 1929, bankrupted many settler farmers. The future of settler production looked bleak. By 1930, land rents owed to the government had accumulated to a total of more than L 11,000.<sup>32</sup> Most settlers had exhausted their credit facilities at the commercial banks and many could not repay the loans. In the meantime the settlers appealed to the colonial government for financial support. Between 1929 and 1939, the colonial government advanced loans amounting to L 34,868 to a total of 138 settler farmers, especially those who had leased land from the government.<sup>33</sup> But attempts to establish a Land Bank, modelled on the Kenyan and Southern Rhodesian examples,<sup>34</sup> had failed.

By 1935 all the settler tobacco farms of Linthipe, Dedza and the Bwanje Valley had been declared bankrupt and closed. Throughout the central and southern province, settlers were abandoning the land and many leaving the country for Southern Rhodesia. It seems government assistance had come too late to rescue the settlers. Of the estimated 400 settler plantations in 1928 only 82 remained in operations by 1936 of which 50 were predominantly tobacco farms and the remainder produced tea, sisal and cotton.<sup>35</sup> At the same time most settler-owned tea estates began selling-out to the large

British companies.

Thus by the eve of the second world war, despite the overt state support, settler production had proved to be a dismal failure. The high rate of farm closure (over 218 estates were abandoned between 1918 and 1939) and bankruptcy is a clear indication of the inefficiency of settler production. It was ~~this~~ inefficiency and weakness in the settler sector that enabled the peasant sector to survive and at times to expand. It was also this weakness in settler capital that enabled British companies to penetrate and then dominate the colonial economy.

#### British and International Capital

Settlers and Africans were not the only ones who competed for resources in the country during the colonial period. A number of British and international companies also operated in Malawi during the colonial period. Besides the African Lakes Corporation (ALC), which preceded the beginning of colonial rule and about which much had been written <sup>36</sup>, other British companies such as the Blantyre and East African Company (BEAC), the British Central Africa Company (BCAC), H.J. Gardiner Company, Walker Brothers, the London and Blantyre Supply Company, the Imperial Tobacco Company (ITC) as well as the British Cotton Growers Association (BCGA) came to Malawi after

1891. Large international companies such as the Anglo-Dutch Unilever, J. Lyons, and Brook Bond also began their trading operations in the country during the early decades of colonial rule. In addition, just like in many colonies in Eastern and Southern Africa, Indian merchants also began to establish themselves in Malawi during the first decades of colonial rule.

The British companies and Indian merchants, initially almost entirely, engaged in the purchasing and exporting of agriculture commodities and the distribution of manufactured goods on the local market. In the period 1900 to 1909 for example, most British companies such as BEAC, BCAC, ALC, ITC and the BCGA concentrated on the buying of agricultural commodities from both settlers and peasants. During this period, some of the British companies particularly those with vested interest in land also directly encouraged settler production.<sup>37</sup> Between 1902 and 1910 for instance the ALC; and the BCGA loaned an estimated L 18,470 to settler farmers engaged in cotton production.<sup>38</sup> During the same period, the BEAC brought an American tobacco specialist to teach settlers tobacco growing and curing skills, whereas the ITC opened up the British market for Malawian tobacco by 1910.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, as will be shown further below, the BCAC was deeply involved in railway construction.

The intense competition in trade ultimately forced the British companies, notably the ALC, BCAC, BEAC and the ITC, into production of some agricultural commodities such as cotton, tobacco, sisal, rubber and tea. Agricultural commodities like tea, and sisal require processing on or near the plantation before they can be exported. Consequently, some British companies like BEAC and the ALC began the primary processing of their agricultural commodities. This gave rise to the establishment of processing units on the plantations, at least by the third decade of colonial rule.<sup>40</sup> The local processing of commodities like tea, sisal and later tobacco ultimately gave these British firms, control of the local market against foreign competitors. It would not be until the 1930s, however, that the British companies began to make heavy investments in the production and processing of tea, tung and sisal. In the meantime, with the support of the colonial office, the BCGA gained a monopoly of the purchasing of cotton produced on crown land.

Significantly, British private capital in Malawi, as in Southern Rhodesia was also involved in the development of the railway system. Leroy Vail has detailed the development of the railway system that linked Malawi with the port of Beira in Mozambique and has shown how the railways were instrumental in the underdevelopment

of the country during the colonial period.<sup>41</sup> Vail's argument is on the whole convincing. It need not be over-emphasised that through corporate and imperial manipulation, the people of Malawi paid heavily for the development of the privately owned railways. The colonial government was induced to act as guarantor for the interest on the capital invested by the Shire Highlands Railway Company SHRC (the SHRC was a subsidiary of the BCAC) and the Central African Railways (CAR). In addition the colonial government was granted loans by the British government to pay the SHRC and CAR as subsidy for constructing the railway line between Blantyre and Chindio in Mozambique. In the meantime the colonial government was assigned the obligations of meeting the debenture charges, for the capital raised, on behalf of the Trans-Zambesia Railway (TZR) to build the line between Donna Anna and Beira in Mozambique. Between 1920 and 1930, the colonial government paid a total of L 161,344 to the British Treasury as interest charges on the debentures on behalf of the TZR.<sup>42</sup>

In the period 1930 to 1935, the British government, in an effort to relieve unemployment in the British steel industry, decided to orchestrate the building of the railway bridge across the Zambezi river and also the extension of the railway from Blantyre to

Salima on the shores of Lake Malawi.<sup>43</sup> Once again the cost of both these projects was imposed on the colonial government in Malawi. By the mid 1930s the total debt which the colonial government had to service and repay had reached a "colossal sum of L 5.1 million".<sup>44</sup> The peculiarity of this arrangement was that the people of Malawi were not only being forced to pay heavily for the railway development and maintenance within Malawi, but in Mozambique as well: two of the railways, the CAR and TZR were located in Mozambique. With the full support of the colonial government, the railways that serviced Malawi gained a monopoly over the import and export traffic. This transport monopoly and the "colossal debt" imposed on the country were to be critical factors that constrained the colonial government's ability to practice primitive accumulation on behalf of the settlers. Instead the colonial government had become an instrument of accumulation for the British companies.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the obvious colonial state financial support for the corporate owned railways, the railways that served Malawi were in a state of perpetual inefficiency. The SHRC and CAR "set extremely high rates within Malawi to ensure that they would pay the dividends,<sup>46</sup> even in the worst economic situations". For example, in the 1930s when the settlers were facing their most serious



financial crisis, the rate for sending tea or tobacco from Luchenza in the Shire Highlands to the port of Beira, was 0.97 pence per lb.; whereas in Southern Rhodesia the cost was 0.17 pence per lb. for tobacco travelling a similar distance to Beira<sup>47</sup>. These high railway rates meant that settlers in Malawi could not effectively compete with producers in Southern Rhodesia or even Mozambique, on the regional and world market for bulk and lowly priced commodities such as beans, maize and the cheaper varieties of tobacco. It was only the very few prosperous settlers engaged in tea production who could withstand both the high railway rates and the domineering presence of British companies.

By the early 1930s, several British companies had begun to invest considerably in tea plantations in Malawi. Many of the British companies which moved into Malawi<sup>48</sup> such as Brook Bond, and J. Lyons and company, were seeking to diversify their Far Eastern interests at a time when "tea companies in South East Asia were faced with strong competition from other plantation crops, with an absence of suitable areas in which to expand, and with a growing shortage and increasing cost of labour. What attracted them to eastern Africa was of course the lower cost structure"<sup>49</sup>. It is significant also that during the late 1930s and indeed well into the 1940s, Malawi was to

be a leading tea producer in Africa. This was so because the international plantation companies found labour in Malawi cheaper than Kenya and Tanganyika, the other tea producing countries. Unlike in Kenya, where the international companies had to face a formidable settler community, Malawi was much easier to penetrate because settler capital was very weak indeed. Consequently, the British and international companies invested substantially in tea production in Malawi, at an earlier date, than they did in Kenya and Tanganyika<sup>50</sup>. This also demonstrates that international capital, once faced with competition, will migrate further into the periphery.

51

In 1933 the International Tea Agreement created a system of control of tea production among the major tea producing countries. International and British plantation companies, found tea production in Malawi a profitable industry. More international and British plantation companies embarked on a concerted effort to establish a foothold in the Malawian tea industry. These companies penetrated the tea industry in Malawi by buying the tea plantations from the under-capitalised settlers. J. Lyons and company, for instance bought several tea plantations in Mulanje and Thyolo. The Thyolo Highlands Tea Estates Ltd., for example, was a company formed in London in 1935 "for the purpose of acquiring estates in

Thyolo District".<sup>52</sup> However it would not be until 1952 that the remnants of settler tea plantation owners were finally wiped out by the competition of British companies.

By the late 1930s, the commanding sectors of the colonial economy, the plantations, the transport system (both railways and the Lake Steamer Service), the import and export trade, banking and the wholesale trade were controlled and dominated by British and international companies. Significantly, it is not a mere coincidence that in the period 1891 to 1939, no secondary manufacturing industries, worth noting, existed in

Malawi.<sup>53</sup> Just like in most other colonies in Africa with the exception of Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, metropolitan capital showed no interest in manufacturing in Malawi. The generally low wage economy and the low prices paid to peasant cash crop producers, meant that the demand for many consumer goods was very limited.<sup>54</sup>

British and international capital in Malawi, which was predominantly commercial, also tended to blockade any possibilities of local industrialization, because, as in most other colonies, commercial or merchant capital acted as agents of metropolitan industrial capital by linking up local markets for manufactured goods with metropolitan markets for raw materials. It was also in the interest of metropolitan capital to restrict

industrialization in order to avoid competition in trade for manufactured goods.<sup>55</sup> The conflict between Citrona Soap Company in Malawi and Lever Brothers, a subsidiary of the World giant, Unilever, will illustrate this process.

In 1929 when Citrona Soap Company started manufacturing soap in Malawi, Lever Brothers were the first to complain about the competition. In the meantime, the railways, which also felt that local production of soap would lead to a reduction in their import freight, drastically reduced the freight rates on imported soap, thereby enabling Lever Brothers to under-sell the Citrona Soap company. By 1935 the Citrona Soap Company had collapsed.<sup>56</sup> Lever Brothers took over the Citrona Soap Company and used it as a distributing agent in Malawi. This is a vivid illustration of a combined effort by British companies to thwart local industrialization. After all colonies were seen as necessary sources of raw materials and markets for metropolitan manufactured goods.<sup>57</sup> This was the essence of colonial civilization in the hey day of imperialism.

The weakness of settler capital in Malawi, in contrast to the situation in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia meant that there were no major obstacles to challenge the machinations and the manipulations of both metropolitan capital and the imperial government when it came to

resolving the conflict of interest between the metropole and the colonies. In the final analysis the weakness of settler capital, the unsatiable demands for raw materials and the need to control the local market, for manufactured goods, for metropolitan capital also tended to create possibilities for the continued survival and at times the expansion of the peasant sector.

### Peasant Production

Until fairly recently, there has been scanty attention devoted to the impact and growth of capitalism on the Malawian peasantry during the colonial period.<sup>58</sup>

It is only essential that a study of the development of the wage labour force during the colonial period must try to delineate the distinctive forms and levels of African response and integration into the colonial capitalist economy. In other words, it is necessary to show the tendencies of peasant production under conditions where capitalism was becoming increasingly dominant over the precapitalist modes of production.

Despite land ~~alienation~~ and the restrictive state policies towards African agriculture, peasant production showed remarkable resilience during the colonial period. Between 1904 and 1924, for example, peasant production accounted for less than half of the

Table I  
Agricultural Exports, 1900-1939<sup>1</sup>

	Coffee	Cotton	Tea	Tobacco	Rice
1900	1,000	-	-	-	450
1901	600	-	-	-	560
1902	565	-	-	-	660
1903	317	22	-	6.5	900
1904	485	130	-	8	885
1905	328	350	-	13	800
1906	598	238	-	26	560
1907	350	184	-	90	800
1908	205	343	-	189	560
1909	355	389	-	160	640
1910	425	785	10.8	260	730
1911	340	610	15.8	475	715
1912	151	1,470	19.2	770	785
1913	355	1,200	19.9	970	540
1914	88	1,300	30.6	1,002	750
1915	87	1,470	52.8	1,760	1,000
1916	45	1,650	75.1	1,540	650
1917	48	375	131.1	1,780	820
1918	59	1,210	192.0	2,050	115
1919	1	365	71	920	426
1920	85	300	322	2,650	-
1921	45	315	400	2,480	-
1922	47	375	-	1,850	-
1923	46	1,134	-	3,000	-
1924	23	1,367	500	-	-
1925	10	2,197	580	-	-
1926	-	2,197	-	-	-
1927	16	1,387	522	8,166	-
1928	-	2,660	-	-	-
1929	-	3,628	-	-	-
1930	-	5,554	970	-	-
1931	-	2,504	980	5,380	-
1932	-	2,755	1,345	8,800	-
1933	-	3,194	1,525	5,634	-
1934	-	5,786	2,225	6,794	-
1935	-	11,573	2,365	5,537	-
1936	-	7,583	4,246	7,359	-
1937	-	659	3,233	7,794	-
1938	-	7,316	5,429	6,732	-
1939	-	2,389	5,690	5,955	-

Table I.1  
 Settler Production of Tobacco and Cotton in Percentage Terms  
 of the Total Output For the Period 1915-1940

Year	Tobacco	Cotton
1915	94	89
1917	96	-
1920	89	84
1921	94	86
1922	94	88
1923	85	69
1924	86	65
1925	67	27
1926	59	26
1927	57	17
1928	63	7
1929	37	1
1930	41	2
1931	35	1
1932	32	2
1933	28	4
1934	26	7
1935	19	3
1936	16	4
1937	16	2
1938	-	2
1939	-	1
1940	20	-

Footnotes to Table I and I.1

(1.) Output for the period 1900-1920 is reported in metric tons and for 1920 to 1940, in short tons (i.e. 2000 lbs. = 1 short ton.)

Sources: Dequin, Horst, Agricultural Development in Malawi, Munich, 1971, pp. 77-78

B. Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, Kingston, 1978, pp. 204-205;  
Nyasaland Colonial Reports, 1922-1939.

cotton and tobacco crops. By 1929, 93 percent of the cotton and 63 percent of the tobacco was produced by peasants.<sup>59</sup> However, the appropriation of land by the colonial state on behalf of the settlers and corporate enterprise imposed limitations on the future expansion of African agriculture particularly in the Shire Highlands. Problems of land shortage only began to intensify as population increased and as more land came under cultivation for cash crops during the 1920s.

The expansion of the colonial economy led to the emergence of different forms of rural accumulation in the southern, central and northern parts of the country. A number of factors do account for the emergence of regional differences in the development of peasant production. The most important of these were, proximity to settler occupied areas, towns and commercial markets, the potential for cash crop production and the availability of transport. Between 1891 and 1920, for instance, the central and northern provinces were essentially labour emigration areas, at a time when the peasantry in the southern province were undergoing expanded commodity production as a result of the new economic opportunities emerging within the colonial economy. By the early 1920s the central province had also been drawn into the circuit of cash crop production while the northern province still



remained a 'labour reservoir' for the mining industries of southern Africa.

Within the southern and central provinces, there also emerged distinct patterns of socio-economic differentiation depending on each area's proximity to settler and corporate plantations, commodity markets and access to land suitable for cash crop production. For example, the alienation of land by the colonial state to settlers and corporate interests in many parts of both the southern and central provinces imposed severe limitations on the future expansion of African agriculture. The restriction of African agriculture on the crown land areas did not witness any significant changes in farming methods to replace the shifting and extensive cultivation systems. Consequently, in many crown land areas like Chiradzulu district and Molele in Thyolo district, land became short in supply as population grew rapidly because of immigration and as a more land came under cultivation for both cash and food crop production. <sup>60</sup> The growing land hunger was not only to force people into wage labour, but it also became a rallying point in the struggle against colonial rule.

Another important factor that affected peasant production was the general weakness of the settler

was faltering, the colonial government, at times in collaboration with metropolitan capital, found it necessary to encourage peasant cash crop production without necessarily upsetting the labour supply to settler enterprise. It was for this reason that between 1903 and 1910 the colonial government and the British Cotton Growers Association (BCGA) directly encouraged cash crop production in areas away from centres of settler and corporate plantations. But when the peasant sector effectively began to compete with settler and corporate enterprises measures were taken to control and regulate peasant production, by creating monopolistic control of commodity purchasing and credit facilities that favoured Europeans, as discussed above.

In many areas of the northern province, parts of the central province and the Upper Shire, which were not close to towns and markets, government attempts to induce peasant cash crop production were a failure. The long distances from areas of peasant production to markets meant heavy transport cost which only served to depress the already low prices for African produce. It is for this reason that government attempts to stimulate cotton and groundnuts production in the northern provinces, central province and Upper Shire in the period 1900 to 1920 could not succeed. This is an indication that

peasants were capable of appreciating the market conditions and could thus determine when to participate in cash crop production. Access to land for food production enabled peasants to withdraw from cash crop production when market conditions were unfavourable.

The collapse of commodity prices in 1921/1922 unloosened settler dominance over cotton and tobacco production. In the aftermath of the financial crisis the colonial government found it expedient to encourage peasant cash crop production while at the same time protecting settler producers. It was essential that the colonial state, which was burdened by the railway debt, should encourage peasant production, particularly at a time when settler production was in a crisis; because expanded peasant production provided the government with revenue while at the same time peasant production subsidized the settler sector. Thus beginning in 1923, the government in collaboration with metropolitan capital, actively promoted peasant cash crop production. The BCGA for example defrayed the cost of cotton seed and its distribution to peasants and the government provided extension services. In the central province, district administration officials actively encouraged peasant tobacco production, particularly the dark-fired variety, in collaboration with some settlers and the Imperial Tobacco

company who were also actively involved in the purchasing<sup>62</sup> of tobacco produced on crown land. However, once the settler farmers felt threatened with the expansion of tobacco production in crown land areas, the colonial government was forced to take measures to control peasant production. Both the settlers and the colonial government had realised, that despite the overwhelming odds which militated against African producers, peasants responded aggressively to the very limited opportunities open to them. It was essential that the colonial government, settlers and metropolitan firms should take measures to control and regulate peasant production in order to safeguard the supply of labour to settler and corporate enterprises.

By 1926 the Native Tobacco Board had been established to control and regulate peasant tobacco production. Between 1926 and 1939 the settler dominated Native Tobacco Board embarked on a systematic campaign to eradicate peasant tobacco production on crown land. Through the grower registration system, the NTB sought to limit the number of crown land producers. Strict regulations were enacted which put a limit on the size of plots allowed for tobacco production on crown land. Non adherence to the rules usually resulted in the uprooting of tobacco crops planted in excess of the prescribed

limit. The number of markets was also severely reduced. 63

However, faced with a resilient peasant sector, settler attempts to eliminate peasant production only registered limited success.

When the Depression struck, it undermined settler hegemony. In the aftermath of the Depression, the colonial government, in desperate need of revenue, saw the expansion of peasant cash crop production as a valuable alternative to increase revenue from taxes. The newly completed railway extension from Blantyre to Salima, and the Trans-Zambezi bridge, all of which were built by loans imposed on the colonial government, made it essential that peasant cash crop production should be expanded to provide the necessary freight if the railways were to be profitable. In addition, metropolitan companies, notably the Imperial Tobacco Company, had begun to complain about the decline in crown land tobacco production because of the NTB's restrictive policies. 64

It was the interplay of all these factors which finally forced the colonial government to embark on a 'grow more crops' campaign in 1934. Peasants were informed that whatever the price, increased production is to be aimed at as a duty. Several out-of-work European farmers were enlisted to encourage the growing of cotton and groundnuts. 65

The collapse of dark-fired tobacco prices in 1937 led to an outbreak of disturbances in many parts of the central province. In Lilongwe and Mchinji districts, for instance, peasants refused to sell their tobacco at the low prices. Many peasants burnt their tobacco and others threw it away. Some tobacco markets were set on fire. Numerous meetings were also held in rural areas, at which the NTB's policies and the abuses by the European tobacco buying firms were publicly denounced<sup>66</sup>. This was a vivid illustration that peasants were not only capable of articulating their grievances in militant terms, but that they could disrupt the local output and supply of commodities on which the colonial state and metropolitan trading firms were so much dependent.

The 1937 peasant disturbances in central province unloosened settler control of the NTB and undermined European monopoly over tobacco purchasing. In 1938 the colonial government began to reorganise the NTB. The colonial government had realised that it was essential to monitor peasant production, very closely, if the supply of commodities such as tobacco, on which both the colonial state and European trading firms depended, were not to be disrupted. Direct control and participation in the marketing of peasant produce was also a viable alternative for raising revenue which the colonial government

desperately needed. It was for these reasons that in 1938 the colonial government, through the NTB, took over the responsibility for purchasing of all tobacco grown on crown land.<sup>67</sup>

The changes in marketing, however, did little to improve the financial returns to peasant growers. In order to support the NTB's expanded bureaucracy, the prices paid to growers were kept at an artificially low level.<sup>68</sup> The 1937 tobacco hold-outs were followed by an outbreak of riots, in the 1938 marketing season, in Lilongwe district, during which peasants set fire to the homes of the NTB instructors and used sticks and stones to drive the NTB's staff from the villages.<sup>69</sup> It is an indication of the heightened level of consciousness among the peasantry when they begin to articulate their grievances in consistent and militant terms. Not only does this reflect an awareness of the ultra-exploitative relations in a colonial economy, but it is also an indication of the significant changes in the social conditions of production within the peasantry, whereby some individuals and groups increasingly come to rely on the commodity markets for their survival.

Significantly, the expansion of commodity production combined with colonial state tax demands was marked by changes in the usage of household labour, trends

towards the individualization of landownership, an expansion in surplus production and an increasing participation in wage employment. These changes in the organization of production generated further changes in social relationships as kinship and family patterns were being reshaped by the new land tenurial arrangements that were taking place. The expansion of the colonial economy also tended to entrench and in cases enhance the exaggeration of precapitalist social relations. The chiefs and elders reacted to the rising demands for labour for commodity production and taxation by extending the powers of institutions like Chuma (bride price) or Chikamwini (services rendered by a bridegroom to his in-laws) and Nomi (youth labour association in which youth of the same age group performed manual work as part of their initiation). To buttress this control of youth labour for commodity production, particularly in the cash crop producing areas like the lower Shire Valley, bride price was fixed at an exceptionally high rate ranging between 10/- and L 3. At the same time, the duration for Chikamwini labour was extended from one year to as many as four years; "a son-in-law was there to kill money for his in-laws".

In the northern province, where traditionally the payment of bride price took place in stages and



usually in cattle, it was now demanded in a single payment in cash to legalise marriage. More profound, though, was the generalization of polygamy both in the cash crop and the labour emigration areas. Wives were now increasingly regarded as a permanent source of labour. The more wives a man had the larger the area that would be cultivated for cash crops or food crops to sustain both the basic household requirements and the state tax demands. <sup>71</sup>

Correlations also developed between the monetized economy and the various traditional cultural institutions which facilitated the reproduction of authority and subordination. Nomi, for example, was now being looked at as an excellent agriculture institution, and its duration was redesigned to coincide with the agricultural season. Chiefly support for Nomi and the realization that the rural exploitation of youth labour facilitated the production of cotton and hence expedited tax payment also convinced the colonial administration to drop its earlier opposition to Nomi. <sup>72</sup> The Nyau societies, which traditionally had a ceremonial and ritual function, became an institution for controlling the movement of the youth so they could be available in the villages for cash crop production. The Nyau initiation rites were redesigned to coincide with the cotton and tobacco producing and harvesting season. The ritual

payment for performances at initiation ceremonies and funerals, which was traditionally made in kind, usually a fowl or a goat, was now being demanded in cash ranging between 10/- and L 3 per performance.<sup>73</sup> The higher prices were particularly directed at families who resisted sending their sons for initiation. The higher prices were also designed to induce the youth to stay in the villages for cash crop production, because wage labour on settler and corporate plantations which were very low (ranging between 4/- and 6/- per month) meant that one had to work several months to raise enough money for the initiation rituals. It was for these reasons that both missionaries and settlers were particularly opposed to the Nyau and Nomi institutions; because these were the cultural institutions that blocked labour supply to capitalist sectors of the economy.<sup>74</sup>

Important too was the marked tendency towards the individualization of land ownership. The tendency among some wealthy farmers was to "break away from the communal gardens to start their own plantations".<sup>75</sup> In the lower Shire for instance the Zunde institution, which was traditionally a public garden of a chief and worked by tributary labour, was extended to wealthy farmers as well. During the high point of cotton agriculture in the late 1920s and 1930s, there were an estimated 2,000 Zunde

holders with land holdings ranging between 3 acres and one hundred or more acres <sup>76</sup>. Much of the work on these farms was now done by hired labour. In the Shire Highlands and the central province there were also some Africans who had acquired land either on leasehold or freehold. Some of these African commercial farmers were former government employees or labour migrants who used their savings to hire labour <sup>77</sup> for cash crop production. This group of African accumulators was increasingly becoming articulate in advancing not only their own particular interests but Africans as a whole. These emerging African capitalists formed the vanguard of some of the Native Associations which were instrumental in the development of the struggle <sup>78</sup> against colonial rule.

In the northern province, which had none of the advantages available in the central and southern province, the expansion of the colonial economy combined with other colonial state demands tended to force many able-bodied men into migrant wage employment not only in Malawi but Southern Africa as whole. This labour migration had a contradictory impact: it was destroying the indigenous productive base while at the same time it was transforming and preserving the precapitalist sexual division of labour. As the withdrawal of male labour from the subsistence economy accelerated the role of women was

being increasingly relegated to that of reproducing and maintaining cheap labour for the capitalist economy.<sup>79</sup>

This process was also accompanied by a rapid decline in the agriculture activities and the disappearance of many traditional handicrafts. Many areas in this part of the country reverted to bush, which then became breeding ground for tsetse fly and other predatory animals. By the 1920s many areas of the northern province and parts of the central province had been severely damaged. Tsetse fly had eliminated cattle in Kasungu, Salima and Dowa areas. This ecological collapse in the northern province; and the increasing soil erosion and land shortage in the southern province, were to be the push factors for the expanded labour emigration from Malawi in the late 1920s and 1930s.<sup>80</sup>

On the other hand, however, by remitting part of their earnings to the families at home, a number of migrants began to accumulate wealth in their own hands. As the traditional handicrafts were being replaced by manufactured goods the need for money was also on the increase. Food was being sold for money not only to pay taxes but also to acquire basic household requirements. Consequently a number of exchanges in the local economy came to be mediated through cash; and opportunities had begun to arise for those with money to purchase the

surplus of others. Through such micro-trading activities some individuals and groups began to accumulate either as cattle holders, money lenders or hawker traders.

To be sure, during the first three decades of colonial rule African retail traders had been systematically squeezed out of the distributive trade by a network of discriminatory legislation which favoured Asian and European traders.

But despite the enormous restrictions placed on African retail traders, Africans gradually began to develop their own trading networks, away from centres of European and Asian enterprises. One such network was the co-operative societies which began to appear, first in northern Malawi during the 1920s, and the other was the hawker trader. The impetus to this trend was the lack of transport from areas of peasant production to commercial towns at a time of expanding peasant economic activities in the central and southern provinces.

As the monetization of the local economies accelerated, the volume of trading networks and commodities also increased gradually. Large numbers of itinerant traders operated roadside canteens selling manufactured merchandise or trading in foodstuffs during the produce buying season, particularly in the central province and the lower Shire Valley. In addition, there was

also a sizeable number of hawker traders who supplied food stuffs to market vendors in the towns of Blantyre, Limbe, Zomba, Mangochi and Lilongwe.<sup>84</sup> This period also witnessed an increased usage of bicycles and ox-drawn carriages which enabled the hawker trader to cover a wider area. Other African entrepreneurs operated bicycle repair shops, and in some cases tin-smithing. There were also some African entrepreneurs who specialised in transportation, operating dhows on Lake Malawi, engaged in carrying passengers and cargo. By the 1930s the number of Africans who owned retail stores was also on the increase, "making the competition in bazaar trade more acute and<sup>85</sup> keen as goods were being distributed over a wider area".

Thus the groundwork was being laid for the emergence of an indigenous merchant class whose interests tended to conflict with those of Asian and European traders.

It is observable therefore that the articulation of capitalism with the precapitalist modes of production in Malawi witnessed trends towards changes in land ownership patterns, modifications in the uses of household labour, increasing participation in wage labour both in crown land areas and in the capitalist sector, and the appropriation of surplus value. These changes in the organization of production, generated further changes in the social relationships which entailed not just

differentiation of income or landholding but also development of antagonistic relations between the various social groups that were emerging. An indigenous accumulating class was in the making, which had its basis in links between peasant commodity production, trade in the crown land areas and wage labour, both in Malawi and abroad. This group of Africans was composed of former labour migrants, mission graduates, government employees, chiefs and others who were straddled between wage employment, commodity production and trade. At the same time there was also a larger group of poorer peasants and yet another section which increasingly came to rely on wage labour for survival. It was this later category of people who were joining ranks of wage earners, the unemployed and underpaid within Malawi and abroad.

### Conclusion

This chapter has shown that in the period 1891 to 1938 the colonial state in Malawi, as elsewhere in Eastern and Southern Africa, acted as an instrument of primitive accumulation on behalf of the settlers and corporate interests. The colonial state had acted as an instrument of primitive accumulation by appropriating African lands, introducing taxation, building the railways and road network, and creating marketing and financial

infrastructures that were favourable to the settlers and corporate enterprise. But despite the overwhelming support given to the settlers and corporate enterprise, peasant production showed remarkable resilience. Proximity to centres of capitalist production had enabled the people of the southern and central provinces to respond aggressively to the few opportunities that were open to them in the colonial economy. In addition, the weakness of settler production also warranted for the continued existence and, at times, the expansion of peasant production; because peasant production not only provided revenue for the colonial state but it also subsidized the settler sector. This continued existence, and at times, the expansion of peasant commodity production was to have profound effects for labour recruitment; because the potential labour recruiting areas were also the major areas of peasant production. Thus the study of the development of the wage labour force that emerged in Malawi during the colonial period has to be situated within the context of the contradictory demands of settler production, British and international capital and peasant production.



## \* FOOTNOTES

1. For some clear expositions of the various theoretical interpretations of imperialism and colonialism see R.B. Sutcliffe and R. Owen eds., Studies in Theory of Imperialism, Longman, London, 1972; E.F. Penrose, eds., European Imperialism and the Partition of Africa, Frank Cass, London, 1975; R. Robinson and J. Gallagher, Africa and the Victorians: the Official Mind of Imperialism, MacMillan, London, 1974; W. Roger Louis, ed. Imperialism: The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy, New viewpoints, New York, 1976. For the literature on the British conquest and colonization of Malawi see, A.J. Hanna, The Beginnings of Nyasaland and North-Eastern Rhodesia 1859-95, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1956; H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa, Methuen, 1899; H.H. Johnston, The Story of My Life Chatto and Windus, 1923; Griff Jones, Britian and Nyasaland, Allen and Urwin, London, 1964; R.J. Macdonald, ed. From Nyasaland to Malawi: Studies in Colonial History, EAPH, Nairobi, 1975; B. Pachai, ed., The Early History of Malawi, Longman, London, 1972; R. Oliver, Sir Harry Johnston and the Scramble for Africa, London, 1957. Eric Stokes, "Malawi political systems and the Introduction of Colonial Rule, 1891-1896", in Eric Stokes and R. Brown, eds., The Zambesian Past: Studies in Central African History, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1966; and Isaac C. Lamba, "The British Image of the Slave Trade in the Malawi area 1859-1896: A study of the Strategies of Anti-Slavery Activities," MA History, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1975; H.L. Duff, Nyasaland under the Foreign Office, Negro University Press, New York, 1969.
2. When the protectorate was being established it depended on a subsidy from the British South Africa Company but after Johnston's assertion of Independence from the BSA, the Protectorates expenditure was met by grants-in-aid from the British Treasury. The Protectorate government was under constant pressure from the British Treasury to make itself self-sufficient. See, B.S. Krishnamurthy, "Economic Policy, Land and Labour in Nyasaland, 1890-1914" in Pachai ed., The Early History of Malawi, Longman, London, 1972, p.384.
3. See S.S. Myambo, "The Shire Highlands Plantations: A

Socioeconomic History of the plantation system of production in Malawi, 1891-1938", M.A. History, University of Malawi, Limbe, 1973 pp. 4-8. During the interwar years the European Community in the country was split by a multiplicity of problems. The fundamental divisions was between the settlers and managers or local directors of the large British owned companies. The Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce came to be dominated by the large British companies, such as BEAC, BCAC, ALC, ITC, H.J. Gardiner, Walker Brothers and Oceania Company. In 1924, the settlers formed their own Association, The Nyasa Planters Association, (NPA) but by 1929, the settlers association had disbanded. The NPA was formed specifically to advance the interest of small settlers in the face of an onslaught by the British and international companies, particularly in the tea industry. Attempts at unity between the two main European representative bodies were made in 1928 when a Convention of Associations was formed. However, because of the deep-rooted division between the two groups, the intended unity was not achieved. The Convention of Associations came to represent settler interest while the Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture articulated the interest of British and international companies. For details on conflicts and divisions within the European community in the country see, R. Palmer, "White Farmers in Malawi: Before and After the Depression" in African Affairs, vol. 84, no. 335, April 1985, pp. 215-221.

4. See S.S. Murray, A Handbook of Nyasaland, Zomba, 1922, p. 156.
5. There were too many other Chewa, Nyanja and Yao polities that resisted British authority and fought with the British before colonial authority was established. Most if not all the African states that were conquered by the British in the Lake Malawi area were deeply involved in trade; many contended, amongst themselves for the control over trade. As was the case in the 1890s, it was a beholden belief, among the apologists of imperialism, that the British fought and conquered African states because they wanted to put an end to slave trade. This assertion is made without exception. Certainly Goman, Mwase and Chibisa to name but a few were not conquered because of their slave trading activities but rather because they wanted to resist colonial domination. See also Eric Stokes, in E. Stokes and R. Brown,

eds., op. cit., pp. 371-372.

6. See M.E. McKinnon, "Commerce, Christianity, and the Gun Boat, An Historical Study of Malawi Lake and River Transport, 1850-1914", Ph.D. History, Michigan State University, 1977; See also H.W. MacMillan, "Notes on the origins of the Arab war", in B. Pachai, ed. The Early History of Malawi, Longman, London, 1972, pp. 263-282.
7. Initially the Revenue collector was also the District administrator. But after 1897, the official title of the District Revenue collector was changed to District Resident. In 1912 the new official title was changed once again to District Commissioner. See also C.A. Baker, Johnston's Administration, 1891-1897, Department of Antiquities, Zomba, 1970; J.A. Kamchitete Kandawire, Thangata: Forced Labour or Reciprocal Assistance?, University of Malawi, Zomba, 1979.
8. There is a large body of oral traditions at the Department of Antiquities which do bear testimony to the fact that livestock and other property (like ivory) owned by the defeated African rulers was confiscated. These oral traditions can be found in Department of Antiquities Oral Traditions, vol. I and vol. II, which this author is in the process of editing and indexing.
9. See B. Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875-1975, The Limestone Press, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, 1978. This is the most detailed study of the land question in Malawi. See in particular chapters three and chapter five.
10. Ibid., p.37.
11. Ibid., p. 83, By 1925, about 4 million acres of land had been alienated, see Nyasaland Blue Book, Zomba, 1925.
12. Ibid., p.83.
13. See Myambo, op. cit., pp. 34-35. The gun tax was fixed at L 1 per every gun each year. See also M.E. Vaughan, "Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi: A Study of Rural Communities in the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire from Mid-nineteenth century to 1915", Ph.D. University of London (SOAS) 1981.

- pp. 113-114. See also C.A. Baker, Johnston's Administration 1891-1897, Department of Antiquities, Zomba, 1970, p. 61.
14. See Myambo, op. cit., p. 35.
  15. There were only 120 acres of land under coffee in 1889/1890, mainly owned by Europeans associated with the Scottish missionaries in and around Blantyre. By 1896, close to 10,000 acres of land were under coffee cultivation on the settler plantations. See, C.A. Baker, "Nyasaland, The History of its export Trade", in Nyasaland Journal, vol. 15, no. 1, 1962. pp. 9-10. See also Robert Boeder, Alfred Sharpe of Nyasaland: Builder of Empire, Society of Malawi, 1980, pp. 121-122.
  16. See Leroy Vail, "The Making of an Imperial Slum: Nyasaland and its Railways, 1895-1935", in Journal of African History, vol. 16, 1975; pp. 89-112. Vail's study of railway development in Malawi is so far the most stimulating and most detailed.
  17. See, Baker, "Nyasaland: The history of its export trade", 7-8, and also J. Perry, "The Growth of the Transport Network of Malawi" in The Society of Malawi Journal, vol. 22, 2 July 1969. pp. 25-34. See also, W.H.J. Rangeley, "A Brief History of the Tobacco Industry in Nyasaland, Part I", in Nyasaland Journal, vol. 10, no. 1, 1957, p. 63-51.
  18. See R.E. Gregson, "Agricultural Change in the Henga Valley" in The Society of Malawi Journal, Vol. 23, No. 2, 1970, p. 42. See also the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland: Report on an Economic Survey of Nyasaland, Salisbury, 1958. (hereafter The Jack Report), 1958.
  19. See, Myambo, op. cit., p. 57. Palmer, "White Farmers in Malawi..." p. 24. The drought occurred in the 1900/1901 season.
  20. See P.T. Terry, "The Rise of the African cotton Industry in Nyasaland, 1902-1918", in Nyasaland Journal, vol. 15, 1, 1961, pp. 59-69.
  21. See in particular, R.W. Kettlewell, Agricultural Change in Malawi, 1945-1960. Food Research Institute, 5, 1960; Horst DeQuin, Agricultural Development in Malawi, Murrich, 1970; and also Martin,

- Chanock, "The political Economy of Independent Agriculture in Colonial Malawi: The Great War to the Depression", Journal of Social Sciences, vol. 1, 1972; and Martin Chanock, "The New Men Revisited: An Essay on the Development of Political Consciousness in Colonial Malawi" in Macdonald, ed., From Nyasaland to Malawi, EAPH, Nairobi, 1975.
22. John McCracken, "Experts and Expertise in Colonial Malawi" in African Affairs, vol. 81, no. 322, January 1982, p. 115. By 1957 for instance out of 67 dipping tanks in the country, 62 were located in the Southern province and five were in Dedza and Ntcheu districts. On the other hand over 2/3 of the entire cattle population was located in the northern province where no dipping tanks were provided. It would not be until after 1957 that such facilities were made available in Northern Malawi.
  23. For Myambo, op. cit., p. 54-56; see also Nyasaland Government Gazette, 28 February, 1913. The 1913 Township ordinance stated that "No Asiatic or Native shall acquire property either leasehold or freehold or carry on trade of his own account, either directly or indirectly or jointly or in partnership with a European in the Townships except in the Asiatic Ward".
  24. See Terry, in "The Rise of the African Cotton Industry in Nyasaland", pp. 66-67.
  25. See also Chanock, "The New Men Revisited", pp. 246-248. See also M. Gelfand, The Lakeside Pioneers: Socio-medical Study of Nyasaland, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p. 230.
  26. See MNASI/1040/19, Annual Report of Mulanje District for 1919/1920.
  27. See Palmer, "White Farmers...." in African Affairs, vol. 84, 335, April 1985, p. 231. See also, H.J. Lamport-Stokes, "Land Tenure in Malawi", in Society of Malawi Journal, vol. 23, 2, 1970, pp. 66-67.
  28. See W. Beinart, "Soil, Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development: A Southern African Exploration, 1900-1960" in Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 11, 1, October 1984, p. 160

29. Nyasaland Department of Agriculture Annual Report, Zomba, 1921, pp. 8-11; See also MNA SI/126A/29, History and Development of the tobacco industry in Nyasaland, 1931.
30. The NTB's Board of Directors was composed of the Director of Agriculture (Chairman), two settlers, W. Taite Bowie; and A.F. Barron and later in the 1930s, Inaco Conforzi also became Director. These settlers were the largest landowners, besides the British companies. These three directors were also the major proponents of tenancy production. They were opposed to tobacco production on crown land. See J. McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State: the impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province of Malawi" in Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 9, no. 2, April 1983. p. 176-183. It also needs to be emphasised that the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, which was dominated by Representatives of British and international companies, was opposed to the formation of the NTB, because the NTB was going to control crown land production. See MNA SI/414/20, Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce to Chief Secretary 16 May, 1924. A number of the foreign owned companies depended on purchasing and grading tobacco produced on crown land.
31. See John McCracken, Peasants, Planters and the Colonial State: The Case of Malawi, in Journal of Eastern African Research and Development, vol. 12, 1982. See also MNA SI/1322/25.
32. See MNA SI/953/28; MNA LAN 1/8/8; MNA LAN 1/9/2; MNA. See also MNA Historical Manuscript 4/1/1.
33. See MNA SI/953/28; MNA LAN 1/9/2; MNA SI/141/36 and MNA SI/575/28, Report on Nyasaland Government Advances to Planters, 1938. Between 1929 and 1931, L 14,824 worth of loans was granted to 51 settlers, and between 1935 and 1939, 77 loans totalling L 20,044 were granted to settlers.
34. See Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of the Committee appointed by His Excellency the Governor to Make Local Investigations and report upon the Desirability For the Establishment of a Land and Agriculture Bank, Zomba, 1936.
35. Reports of settler bankruptcy are numerous. See for

instance, the Nyasaland Times, 26 May 1931; See also MNA LAN 1/8/8 Secretary Dedza Settlers Association to Governor, 31 May 1934; MNA S1/19/32, Mlanje Planters Association to Chief Secretary, 22 January 1932. See also MNA A3/2/269 notes by Murray, 1936. Between 1921 and 1939 close to 218 estates covering an estimated 120,000 acres were abandoned by settlers. See also MNA S1/126A/1929; and MNA S1/19/32, Mlanje Planters Association to Chief Secretary, 22 January, 1932.

36. Almost every major text on Malawi discusses or mentions the African Lakes Corporation (ALC). See for example, B. Pachai, ed., The Early History of Malawi, Longman, London, 1972; B. Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875-1975, The Limestone Press, Kingston, 1978; R. Macdonald, ed., From Nyasaland to Malawi, EAOH, Nairobi, 1975.
37. The largest landholders in the country were the British Central Africa Company which owned 327,138 acres; the Blantyre and East African Company 167,000 acres; the AL Bruce Trust Company 159,890 acres. The African Lakes Corporation and the British South Africa Company who between them held close to 3 million acres of land. The large British companies also owned wholesale and retail stores, operated river and lake steamers and road transport service.
38. See Myambo, op. cit., p. 29.
39. See W.H.J. Rangely, A Brief History of the Tobacco Industry in Nyasaland; Part I, in The Nyasaland Journal, vol. 10, 1, 1957. pp. 63-85.
40. By 1909-1911 the BEAC had established "a small tea processing factory at Lauderdale estate" in Mlanje district. This was the first tea processing factory to be established in Malawi. See J.A. Hutson, "An outline of the Early History of the Tea Industry in Malawi" in The Society of Malawi Journal, vol. 13, 1978, p. 43.
41. See, Leroy Vail, "The Making of an Imperial Slum: Nyasaland and its Railways, 1895-1935", in J.A.H., vol. 16, 1, 1975, pp. 89-112; "Railway Developments and Colonial Underdevelopment: The Nyasaland Case"; in R. Palmer and N. Parsons, eds., The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa, London, 1977, The State and the Creation of Colonial Malawi's

- "Agricultural Economy," in R.I. Rotberg, ed., Imperialism, Colonialism, and Hunger: East and Central Africa, Lexington Books, Lexington, Massachusetts, 1982.
42. C0525/137; Governor Thomas to Lord Passfield, 30 January, 1930.
  43. These arguments have been well documented by Vail, op.cit. See also C.A. Crosby, "A History of the Nyasaland Railway, 1895-1935: A study in Colonial Economic Development", Ph.D. History, Syracuse University, 1974. pp. 317-325.
  44. See Vail, "The Making of an Imperial Slum", in J.A.H., vol. 16, 1, 1975. p. 110.
  45. Ibid., pp. 104-108. It may also be added that the three British Companies which owned the three railways, SHRC, CAR, and TZR had strong backing in British political circles. These companies had links with personalities like Lord Balfour, Sir Evans Smith, Sir Alfred Sharpe (former Governor of Malawi 1897-1910). Libert Oury and Lord Faringdon. See also R.B. Boeder, Alfred Sharpe of Nyasaland: Builder of Empire, Society of Malawi, Blantyre, 1980.
  46. See Vail, "The State and the Creation of Colonial Malawi's Agricultural Economy...", p. 56.
  47. See Palmer, "White Farmers in Malawi", op.cit., p. 230.
  48. J. Lyons and company first moved into Malawi in 1925 when they acquired the Lujeri Tea Estates in Mulanje. However, large scale British and international capital penetration in the tea industry began in the 1930. For details see R. Palmer, "The Nyasaland Tea Industry, in the era of International Tea Restrictions, 1933-1950", in J.A.H., vol 26, 2 & 3, 1985. pp. 215-239. See also, Nyasaland Annual Colonial Report, 1934, pp. 16-17.
  49. Palmer, "The Nyasaland Tea Industry in the Era of International Tea Restrictions, 1933-1950", p. 220.
  50. Ibid., p. 224-225. By 1940, there were close to 20,000 acres of tea in Malawi, where as Kenya had about 16,000 acres, and Tanganyika, 7,500 acres. In 1936, the Nyasaland Tea Industry represented a stated



capital investment of well over L 1,000,000. See also, Nyasaland Annual Colonial Report, 1935, p. 26.

51. Under the International Tea Restriction Agreement, which embraced India, Sri Lanka, the Dutch East Indies, Malawi, Kenya and Tanganyika, production quotas were imposed, first by acreage beginning in 1933, and then during the Second World War, a ceiling was established for each member country. Between 1933 and 1938 for instance Malawi was only allowed 17,700 acres for tea production. The International Tea Committee was established to co-ordinate the implementation of the curtail. See J.A. Hutson, "An outline of the early history of the Tea Industry in Malawi", in the Society of Malawi Journal, vol. 26, 1, 1978 and also, Palmer, "The Nyasaland Tea Industry", pp. 215-239. See also MNA 2/11/II/26/ See also, Nyasaland Annual Colonial Report, 1934, p. 16.
52. Palmer, Ibid., p. 219. Palmer's article on the Tea Industry provides the most valuable study of the Tea Industry in Malawi, and in particular the tendencies of international capital in the tea industry.
53. The 1938 Blue Book reported that the tobacco cigarette factory only produced 300 tons of manufactured tobacco and cigarettes a year, whereas the soap factory had a capacity of 150 tons a year.
54. By 1937, for instance, tea consumption in Malawi amounted to 28 short tons, whereas in East Africa, local consumption of tea amounted to 2 1/2 million lbs.
55. The best theoretical exposition of the role of merchant capital in the underdevelopment of the colonies and the third world is G. Kay, Development and Underdevelopment: A Marxist Critique, MacMillan, London, 1975.
56. See Leroy Vail, "Railway Development and Colonial Underdevelopment: The Nyasaland Case," in R. Palmer and N. Parson, eds., The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa, London, 1977. p. 385. It may also be added that railway rates were used to undermine the local tung industry in the 1930s. In 1931, for instance, when local planters had requested a quotation for the shipment of tung to UK, the Railways stated that they would increase the rates by

L 5 per ton for each L 10 per ton increase in London tung prices. What has to be emphasised here is that the railways and some of the major expatriate companies in Malawi such as the BCAC had very close links. The BCAC was the SHRC parent company. For more details on how international capital and the colonial office suppressed local industries in Malawi, see also Louis Nthenda "From trade to manufacture: Britain's Dilemma in the Face of colonial industrialization, 1931-1938" in Journal of Social Sciences, vol. 1, 1972, pp. 95-112. The examples on Malawi are on pp. 101-106.

57. For a detailed examination of similar themes and underdevelopment in the East African context, see E.A. Brett, Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa, Heinemann, London, 1978. See also Colin Leys, Underdevelopment in Kenya, Heinemann, London, 1975, particularly the first two chapters.
58. The pioneering work and probably the most stimulating studies of the Malawian peasantry are by M.L. Chanock, "Notes for an Agricultural History of Malawi" in Rural Africana: Land and Labour in Rural Malawi, no. 25, Part I, Spring 1973, Michigan State University, East Lansing, "The political Economy of independent Agriculture in colonial Malawi: The Great war to the Depression", in Journal of Social Sciences, vol. 1, 1972; "The New Men Revisited: An Essay on the Development of Political Consciousness in Colonial Malawi" in R.J. Macdonald, ed., op.cit.; "Agricultural Change and continuity in Malawi", in R. Palmer and N. Parsons eds., op.cit., The most recent studies are by John McCracken, "Peasants, Planters, and the colonial state: The case of Malawi, 1905-1940" in Journal of Eastern African Research and Development, vol. 12, 1982; "Planters, peasants and the colonial state: the impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province in Malawi", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 9, 2, April 1983.
59. See Table I.I. There are no statistical details for the volume and value of other commodities produced in the peasant sector in the period 1891 to 1938. It is therefore difficult to measure in more accurate terms the overall changes in peasant production in the period under consideration.
60. For details see B. Pachal, Land and Politics in Malawi 1875-1975, Limestone Press, Kingston, Ontario,

1978.

61. See also Megan Vaughan, "Food Production and Family Labour in Southern Malawi: The Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley in the Early Colonial period" in J.A.H., 23, 3, 1982. pp. 351-364.
62. Whereas the BCGA was granted a virtual monopoly for the purchasing of cotton produced on crown land, the colonial government could not grant a similar monopoly for tobacco purchasing to a local settler, Ron Wallace, who applied for it. It is highly probable that the presence of powerful British companies like the Imperial Tobacco Company, in the tobacco purchasing business may have forced the colonial administration to deny the tobacco purchasing monopoly to the local settler. This is yet another indication of the overwhelming power of metropolitan capital over the colonial government. See J. McCracken, "Planters, peasants and the colonial state: The impact of the Native Tobacco Board in Central Malawi", pp. 174-179.
63. See footnote 31 above.
64. See MNA S1/3437/34, in particular, the correspondence between the colonial office and the Governor, 28 January, 1937.
65. See MNA NS1/2/3, Circular letter by acting Chief Secretary to all Provincial and District Administration Officers; 6, June, 1934. See also McCracken, "Peasant, Planters, and the Colonial State: The Case of Malawi, 1905-1940". p. 30.
66. See MNA S1/437/34, Report by provincial commissioner north to chief secretary, 4, June 1937; see also MNA S1/275/39, Report by financial secretary on NTB, July 1939. The commonest abuses was for buyers to pay for less than the actual weight of tobacco they bought. See also MNA Com 7/2/3/1. See also Rangeley, "A Brief History of the Tobacco industry, part II" in The Nyasaland Journal, vol. 10, 2, 1957. p. 40.
67. See MNA S1/720/26, Minutes of the NTB, 10 August 1937, 27 November, 1937, 8 February 1938, 18 March 1938.
68. It may also be added that the profits of the NTB were used for maintaining the Agricultural Research

Station at Zomba; funds were also directed from the NTB to build European hospitals in Zomba and Lilongwe." See MNA Com 74/211, and MNA S1/275/39, Report by NTB Subcommittee to examine NTB's expenditure, 24 July, 1939. See also MNA S1/720 IV/26; MNA S1/275/32.

69. See MNA A6/1/37, Antill to Chief Secretary, 24 July, 1938. See also MNA S1/566/29.
70. See Elias C. Mandala, "Peasant Cotton Agriculture, Gender and Inter-generational Relationship: The Lower Tchiri (Shire) Valley of Malawi 1906-1940," in African Studies Review, vol. 25, 2/3, June 1982, p. 33. The preceding paragraph draws heavily from this work.
71. See R.E. Gregson, "Agricultural Change in the Henga Valley", in The Society of Malawi Journal, vol. 23, 2, 1970. Gregson has argued that the periods of intensified labour emigration also witnessed an increase in polygamous marriages as households struggled to maintain their productive capacity. See also Mandala, Ibid., p.32-33. For a stimulating study of the impact of labour migration and cash crop production on peasant societies see also Lionel Cliffe, "Labour Migration and Peasant Differentiation: Zambian experience", in Journal of Peasant Studies, vol. 5, 3, April 1978, pp. 330-342.
72. Mandala, "Peasant cotton Agriculture, Gender and Intergenerational Relationship", pp. 33-34.
73. See Ian Linden with Jane Linden, Catholics, Peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland, Heinemann, London, 1974. p. 131. The 1920s and 1930s were a period during which conflict between the Nyau Societies and the missionaries reached alarming proportions. The Nyau Secret Societies were also very critical of labour emigrants. See MNA NC1/21/2, Provincial Commissioner Lilongwe to Chief Secretary, 1 March, 1929; MNA NC1/14/2; See also Martin Chanock, "The New Men Revisited", p.243.
74. Ibid.
75. Terry, "The Rise of the African Cotton Industry in Nyasaland," p. 55.
76. See MNA S1/66A/37. See also Mandala, "Peasant Cotton

Agriculture, Gender, and Intergenerational Relationships." p.31.

77. See Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi 1875-1975, p. 51. See Agness Lonje, "Cash Crop Production in Zomba District to 1930. A historical overview", in Journal of Social Sciences, vol. 9, 1982, pp. 26-27. See also MNA S1/428/27, R.H. Murray, Report on Labour Question; and MNA S1/1879/24.
78. For details see, Jan Van Velsen, "Some Early Pressure Groups in Malawi", in Eric Stokes and Richard Brown, ed. The Zambesian Past, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1966. p. 376-412; Roger Tanqri, "Inter-War Native Associations and the Formation of the Nyasaland Congress", in Trans-African Journal of History, 1, 1, 1971, pp. 84-102; "Colonial and Settler Pressures and the African move to the politics of representation and union in Nyasaland," in J.A.H., 13, 2, 1972, pp. 291-304; and Martin Chanock, "The New Men Revisited" in Macdonald, ed., op.cit., pp. 234-253. To be sure the earliest attempt by African accumulators to organize materialized in 1909 when the Native Industrial Union was formed in the Southern province. The Native Industrial Union was intended to create a credit bank, to launch self-help projects for Africans and to act as a pressure group. In 1915, most of its members were involved in the Chilemwe Rising and after the rising was crushed, the Native Industrial Union also ceased to exist. See MNA S2/14/22.
79. This point has been illustrated elsewhere. See Lionel Cliffe, "Labour Migration and Peasant Differentiation: Zambian Experience" in Journal of Peasant Studies, vol. 5, 3, April 1978, pp. 342-344; "Rural Class Formation in East Africa" in Journal of Peasant Studies, vol. 4, 2, January 1977, pp. 195-207. See also Michael Painter, "Changing relations of production and Rural underdevelopment", in Journal of Anthropological Research, vol. 40, 2, Summer 1984, pp. 271-287.
80. For details on the impact of the Tsetse fly, and soil erosion in Malawi, see John McCrackers, "Experts and Expertise in Colonial Malawi", in African Affairs, vol. 81, 322, January 1982, pp. 105-116. This is the most informative study of the ecological changes in Malawi during the colonial period. See also MNA M2/23/3, Lamborn. "The Tsetse Fly Problem in

"Northern Province"; and MNA S1/1712/23, Annual Report for the northern province, 1922/1923.

81. As in footnote 79 above.
82. See footnotes 20, 23, 24 and 25 above.
83. African retail traders had humble beginnings. Many bought merchandise from Indian or European traders and then resold the goods from their houses. This practice was said to be popular by the 1920s. See MNA NC1/14/2, Report of the provincial commissioner, Northern province, 1929; MNA S1/1879/24.
84. There were an estimated 20,000 Africans associated with the fish trade during the late 1920s, supplying the commercial towns and African markets on the plantations. See MNA NC1/14/2. See also, Nyasaland Annual Colonial Report, 1930. pp. 23-25.
85. See MNA NC1/14/2, Report on trade, 1930.

## CHAPTER TWO

The Growth and Development of the Malawian  
Wage Labour Force, 1891-1939

During the period 1891 to 1939 a number of interrelated sectors of the colonial economy such as the plantations, commercial firms, the colonial government, the peasant sector and the mining industries of Southern Africa competed for Malawian labour. The plantations and commercial firms of the Shire Highlands could not obtain sufficient labour as long as the peasantry on crown land had access to commodity markets at a time of expanding commodity productions. The limitations of settler and expatriate production in Malawi made it difficult for the settlers and expatriate firms to compete for labour with the mining industries of southern Africa. This chapter examines the various strategies by which Malawian wage labour was procured and utilized, and how these strategies conditioned the growth and development of the wage labour force that emerged in Malawi during the colonial period.

By alienating African land, the colonial state had deprived some Africans of their means of livelihood, thereby laying the basis for the entry by Africans into wage employment. Direct taxation also forced Africans on to the labour market. Beginning in 1891 a poll tax on

adult males and hut tax upon women was introduced. Initially poll tax and hut taxes of 6/- each were levied and this could be paid in kind. By 1894, it became apparent to the government that this imposed too heavy a burden on the peasantry and the tax was reduced to 3/- . Chronic labour shortages on the plantations in the late 1890s led the government to raise the taxes in 1901 to 6/- per adult male and female, whether they occupied their own hut or not.

In 1901 a differential system of taxation was introduced by which persons who had worked for a European employer for a period of not less than one month were issued a 'Labour Certificate' and tax papers, which reduced the annual poll or hut tax by one half. The introduction of the tax differential system increased the labour supply to the plantations, although the planters demands were not totally satisfied. In 1902/1903 for example nearly 150,000 taxpayers in the country had an indication, through their Labour Certificates, of having worked for a European employer, while 13,000 did not, and by 1904/1905, 179,659 taxpayers paid at the lower rate of 3/- while 9,417 paid at the higher rate of 6/- .

By 1906, however, it was apparent that the system of tax differentials had its own shortcoming. African peasants avoided work on European plantations and



other enterprises by buying the Labour Certificates or tax papers from those who had worked for European employers and thus avoided tax also. In 1912/1913 another attempt was made to use taxation as a method to induce people to work on the plantations: taxes were raised from 3/- with Labour Certificates and without 6/- to 4/- and 8/-. The tax rates remained at this level till 1921 when a flat rate of 6/- per adult male and female was introduced regardless of employment.

Strict regulations and harsh measures such as arrest and imprisonment of tax defaulters, and even burning and demolishing of their huts were instituted. Men who tried to avoid paying taxes by going into hiding had their wives taken hostage, their houses demolished and their livestock confiscated by the government tax collectors. "Pregnant women and the old women were also arrested for not paying the taxes".<sup>4</sup> Taxation and the brutality accompanying it were a major source of discontent amongst Africans. The plural taxes were particularly unpopular with the patrilineal and polygamous Ngoni, who in 1907<sup>5</sup> openly protested to the government against taxation.

Apart from the dangers of taxation generating discontent among Africans, taxation also tended to push a significant number of people into commodity production,

particularly in those areas where markets for cash and food crops existed. In the southern province, for example, where markets existed for foodstuffs, many peasants with access to land tended to create independent sources of income by expanding their production, whereas in the northern province, which had none of these advantages, many people gravitated more strongly towards wage employment. The problem for European enterprises was that peasant production expanded more rapidly in the southern province, precisely in the same areas, where European enterprise had hoped to draw labour supplies.

Furthermore, when taxes were first introduced in 1891 neither Malawi nor the immediately adjacent territories constituted a well developed labour market. But by the late 1890s the demands for labour by the economies of south Africa and the Rhodesias began to have an impact in Malawi. For many Malawians, the stimulus of taxation precipitated a decision to seek work in the Rhodesias, and South Africa where wages tended to be higher than in Malawi. Thus while taxes were introduced to induce the local labour supply, a significant proportion of the labour that was generated moved further south. Therefore, in addition to land alienation and direct taxation, it became necessary to establish other legal and administrative mechanisms with which labour

could be mobilized and retained in the country.

### Contract Labour

Contract Labour was widely used and became institutionalised in Malawi during the colonial period. Contract Labour was employed by both government departments and commercial enterprises. By the early 1890s, as plantations began to expand, the local labour supply could not meet the demand<sup>8</sup> since there was little need by most Africans to sell their labour in order to survive. The settlers immediately began to urge the government to take measures to induce the labour supply. The settlers argued that Africans were unreliable because they worked "spasmodically and offered their labour when it was least wanted"<sup>9</sup>. The conventional attitude within the settler community was that Africans were naturally lazy and that what was needed were effective legislative measures to compel Africans to work. These justificatory notions of African inferiority and laziness were widely propagated during the first five decades of colonial rule.<sup>10</sup>

Beginning in 1891 legislative measures were taken which required Africans to enter into a written contract with their employers. Each contract had to be signed before a government official and upon payment of

1/- to the government by the employer for every African recruited. Professional labour recruiters were engaged by the plantation companies, commercial firms, and settlers. The labour recruiters had a free way to conduct their business and the methods used left much to be desired. Labour recruiters sometimes bribed chiefs and headmen in order to obtain recruits for whom there were no assured jobs.<sup>11</sup> Recruiting for contract labour was developing into a speculative business.

By 1894 the colonial government introduced Labour Passes and Certificates of Discharge to curb speculation by labour recruiters and also to curtail desertion by Africans. Africans leaving their home district for employment had to procure a labour pass to show that they were unemployed. No employer was allowed to engage any African who could not produce a certificate of discharge showing that the worker had been lawfully released by the former employer. The contract period was fixed at 6 months. However continuing labour shortages on the plantations finally forced the government to extend the contract period to 12 months by 1895.<sup>12</sup>

The District Commissioners, tax collectors and chiefs felt at liberty to direct tax defaulters and other 'socially undesirable' characters to a labour recruiter to be signed on for contract labour. The labour recruiter

paid the tax of the recruited African and, at the end of the contract, the worker was issued with a Labour Certificate showing the period of work and taxes paid.<sup>13</sup> Thus systematically government tax demands come to reinforce forced contract labour.

In 1899 the Companhia do Nyassa of Mozambique, granted a monopoly to Walker Brothers, a firm in Malawi over labour recruitment in north western Mozambique. Substantial numbers of Mozambicans were recruited for work on the plantations in Malawi beginning in 1899.<sup>14</sup> In addition use was made of Capitaos to tout Mozambicans for recruitment at the border points where Mozambicans entered Malawi. Other planters sent their capitaos to Mozambique to recruit labour, for which a commission was paid on every person brought to the plantation. The length of the contract for Mozambicans was usually 3 months, but occasionally this could be extended to 6 months.<sup>15</sup>

In 1900 the colonial government granted permission to the settler community to form a central labour recruiting agency. The British Central Africa Native Labour Bureau (hereafter NLB) was organised for the purpose of recruiting labour within the country and distributing the labour among the planting community in the Shire Highlands. The Governor issued instructions in

1900, that government officials should "use their moral influence" with Africans to assist the NLB in recruiting labour. <sup>16</sup> The District Commissioners, tax collectors and some chiefs were only too eager to do it. The askari were occasionally sent in the villages to raid for tax defaulters, and it was not unusual for such raids to result in the destruction of African property and foodstuffs. <sup>17</sup>

The conditions of work associated with recruited contract labour were equally appalling. In the oral traditions recruiting agents are spoken of as having 'sold' the recruited workers, because the workers were already indebted for advances made in respect of travelling costs and taxes before they started working. Consequently contract labour came to be widely associated with 'slavery'. The recruited workers travelling to the Shire Highlands had to sleep in the open and some were killed by predatory animals. Some people tried to desert but many also lost their lives, dying of dysentery and starvation. <sup>18</sup> Wages if paid were too low, ranging between 2/- and 5/- per 30 day work ticket. Women and children were least paid. In the 1890s, women and children earned between 2/- and 3/- per ticket. <sup>19</sup> It was also not uncommon for contract workers to receive their wages several weeks after the 30 day work ticket was completed.

Workers brought to the Shire Highlands were seldom provided with food rations, but even in the few cases where the rations were given the food was inadequate and of poor quality. Accommodation was rarely provided, and consequently African workers suffered frequent attacks of pneumonia. Dysentery also took its toll among recruited African workers. These ailments were further compounded by "defective nutrition".<sup>20</sup> African workers in the Shire Highlands were "a miserable sultry, half-starved lot of poor wretches".<sup>21</sup> The settlers in Malawi actually boasted in having "one of the cheapest and best labour supplies in the world."<sup>22</sup>

Criticism of the treatment of recruited African workers by some missionaries and chiefs soon found support among the church groups in Britain, who induced the Foreign Office to put pressure on the colonial government for moderation. In 1904, the Governor directed that government officials should not force tax defaulters into contract labour for private and commercial firms. In addition labour recruiting for employers on the Shire Highlands was prohibited in the northern parts of the country. The settlers and other employers in the country were allowed to recruit in the southern province without any permit.<sup>23</sup>

To the disenchantment of settlers in Malawi,

when the government stopped recruiting labour for them, permission was granted to the Rhodesian Native Labour Bureau (RNLB) and the Witwaterstand Native Labour Association (WNLA) to recruit labour in northern Malawi. Tax collectors, chiefs and headmen were instructed by the government to assist the RNLB and WNLA in recruiting labour.

24

It cannot be over-emphasised that the period after the failure of coffee prices in 1902/1903 was a difficult one for both the settlers and the colonial government. For some settlers engaged in commerce, labour migration to the mines was essential because the deferred pay of African workers made an important contribution to trade. To the government labour migration to the mines was a viable source of revenue not only for the taxes paid by the returning workers, but also for the commission which the government earned on each Malawian recruited. In the early 1900s, for example, the colonial government charged Rhodesian employers at 2/- for each recruited worker engaged for agricultural work, whereas 10/- was paid per African worker recruited for the mines. In addition 2/6 stamp duty on each pass issued was required for every African worker recruited in Malawi. Malawian labour was up for sale.

25

Perhaps working on the promise that the South



African market would be opened up for Malawian tobacco, the besieged planters and the mild sceptics within the settler community felt it necessary to moderate their opposition to labour emigration. It was also this same hope of a potential market that made the whole scheme of labour migration to South Africa and Southern Rhodesia look attractive. For the government, which was deeply involved in the railway, the prospects for secure markets abroad for agricultural commodities meant that the railway would pay for itself, and hence relieve the government of paying subsidies to the railway company. It was an enormous task, because all these demands and hopes were rather contradictory. The railway project itself needed as much labour as the cotton and tobacco plantations that were being opened up to take advantage of the promised market in South Africa. The government too needed as much labour to lay infrastructure, roads, bridges and administrative centres, that were required to enhance effective political control and to facilitate settler production. Not surprisingly perhaps, the demands of the mining industries, the colonial government and the settlers were pursued simultaneously, but at a very high cost to Africans. After 1904, the legal and administrative apparatus geared for labour mobilization was revamped to suit the new demands of the colonial

economy.

In 1906, the Native Labour Ordinance was enacted to reinforce the contract labour system. This ordinance bound the recruited worker to the employer. The Native Labour Ordinance, 1906, gave employers recourse to legal action in the event of breach of contract by African workers. Under the provisions of this ordinance desertion and other minor offences were subject to penal sanctions such as imprisonment with hard labour, punishment by flogging and fines. <sup>26</sup> In 1907, the government issued further regulations which required all employers of contract labour to insist on seeing the African workers' tax papers, which the employer was to sign after confirming that the papers bore the same name as the possessor. In addition poll and hut taxes were to be <sup>27</sup> collected as from 1 April each year. The settlers had been demanding this to secure large numbers of workers desperately needed during the harvesting period which ran from March to July on the Shire Highlands for crops such as cotton and tobacco.

In the meantime protest against labour emigration began to assume a heightened tempo. The BCGA, the large companies such as ALC, BEAC, BCAC, individual settlers engaged in planting, and missionaries were all united in petitioning the colonial office and the colonial

government to halt labour emigration. For the BCGA, the companies and settlers, the completion of the railway in 1908 and the promising prospects in cotton and tobacco prompted them to press the colonial government to take measures to retain labour in the country for settler production. The missionaries called attention to the 'evil social repercussions' of labour emigration, because it was believed that village life was deteriorating as a result of immoral habits acquired by migrants in South Africa and the Rhodesias.<sup>28</sup> But the missionaries like the settlers had an interest in maintaining a regular supply of labour, because several of the religious groups operated large estates. Thus the church and the settlers shared economic interests. When these economic interests were combined with the religious ideology, they served to motivate formidable protest against emigration.

The high incidence of venereal diseases, tuberculosis, pneumonia and the alarming death rate among Malawian workers in the Transvaal and Rhodesia finally forced the colonial office to demand that labour recruitment by the WNLA for the Transvaal mines should be terminated.<sup>29</sup> In addition the need to encourage settler production especially after the completion of the railway, also forced the colonial government to re-evaluate the situation.

All these factors, mounting missionary and settler pressure against labour emigration, high death rates among Malawian workers in the mines and the diseases that afflicted returning migrants, finally forced the colonial government to take steps to discourage labour emigration. By 1910 official recruiting by WNLA and RNLB was brought to a halt. Bowing to settler pressure, the colonial government enacted the Employment of Natives Ordinance in 1909, which prohibited recruiting for extra-protectorate employers, while at the same time restrictions on recruiting for jobs within the country were repealed. In addition, Malawians intending to migrate to other countries for work were required to obtain a labour pass from the government through the District Commissioners. The District Commissioners were instructed to give "friendly admonition and advice in loco parentis to dissuade Africans from emigrating. Finally labour passes were only to be issued once the District Commissioner had ascertained that the intending migrant had paid his taxes for the period he would be away and the family to be left behind was properly provided for.

To give effect to the new laws and regulations the government embarked on a new programme to consolidate authority and control over the African population. By 1910 a programme of concentration of huts into villages,

and the creation of village areas was introduced. Through this programme each village area was placed under a government appointed village headman who was responsible to the District Commissioner. In 1912 the District Administration (Native) Ordinance was enacted to streamline the administration of African areas. Under the provisions of this ordinance, the village areas created in 1910 were consolidated into administrative sections and each administrative section was placed under a government appointed principal headman. The principal headman and the village headmen were directly responsible to the District Commissioner. The duties of the principal headmen and village headmen were specified to include the exertion of 'influence' on the peasantry to pay taxes, reporting crime to the government, apprehending criminals and procuring labour for the government. On the alienated land such duties were de facto delegated to the settlers and companies. Thus by 1912 an intertwined legal and administrative apparatus had been erected through which African labour was mobilised.

Through the Labour Certificate System, the Native Labour Ordinance, 1906 and the village concentration programme, a coercive, brutal and exploitative labour system had been institutionalised. It was a system designed to assist settlers and corporate

enterprise at the expense of African workers regardless of the social cost it entailed. African labour was placed at the mercy of the settlers. African workers, who tried to desert or run away were convicted of criminal offences and subjected to penal sanctions. The headmen and the District Commissioners were instrumental in tracing and cracking down on deserters. On most plantations the capitao took on the role of askari in executing the provision of the 1906, Native Labour Ordinance. Flogging and caning of African workers accused of breaches of the Native Labour Ordinance were a common practice on the plantations. <sup>32</sup> Plantation owners, PWD Supervisors and many other employers took it upon themselves to become the law enforcement officers and administered penal punishment to African workers. The most vulnerable workers were those recruited from among the population resident on the alienated land; their lot consisted of frequent beatings, ill-treatment and harassment. This particular category of workers were in double jeopardy because they relied on the employers not only for the labour certificate but for residence on the land. Absence or desertion led to the forfeiture of the workers hut and the harassment of their families.

To the Africans the Labour Certificate and the 1906, Native Labour Ordinance were the epitome of colonial

abuse and oppression; the Labour Certificate was looked at as a badge of <sup>33</sup> Slavery. African dislike of and resentment towards the labour certificate was to be one of <sup>34</sup> the rallying points for the Chilembwe Rising of 1915.

In the meantime 'independent' labour migration to South Africa, Southern and Northern Rhodesia and elsewhere began to involve into a form of protest against the internal labour system.

On the other hand the value of the labour certificate and the other vestiges of labour control were not brought into question by the settlers. If a settler desired to retain a worker for prolonged service all he had to do was to refuse to sign the labour certificate to certify that the worker had been discharged. In addition some employers also extended the "regular ticket" period by cheating in marking the tickets. If a worker did not finish the days' task no credit was given for the work done. It was not uncommon for African workers to work several days to cover for a day lost. A complete ticket, which was reckoned at 30 working days, sometimes covered several months. If an African worker protested, some employers simply withheld the workers pay and labour <sup>35</sup> certificate. Thus to the settlers and corporate enterprises the labour certificate was a useful tool with which to extract and control African workers, because the

Labour Certificate restricted the African workers' freedom to leave the job and change employers. Above all the labour certificate also enabled the colonial government, and the employers, to trace and track down deserters thereby enforcing the employment contract.

By 1913-1914, the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce estimated that 127,000 workers were required annually, of whom 90,000 were needed on the plantations, 27,000 as porters or tenga-tenga, and 10,000 in the civil service, the railways, and commercial sector. To this number must be added about 40,000 Malawians employed abroad. Thus by the outbreak of the First World War, over 167,000 people or about 16.7 percent of the total population of 1,000,659 participated in wage employment: this was no doubt a heavy demand on the African population.

The pressures of the First World War further compounded the labour situation, as additional labour had to be secured for military forces and the carrier corps. The war conditions also tended to undermine the voices of critics of the local labour conditions both in Malawi and abroad. However, African protest against the appalling labour conditions in the country intensified until it erupted in the Chilembwe Rising in 1915.

To be sure the Chilembwe Rising was a



consequence of numerous grievances including African dislike of the labour certificate, labour abuses, taxation, land alienation, racial discrimination, and the discriminating commercial system. In short, the Chilembwe Rising was not just a labour protest but rather the first broad based and organised nationalist challenge to colonial rule. The Chilembwe Rising encompassed all strata of African society, the petit bourgeoisie, 37 peasants, chiefs, squatters, and workers in the country.

With the First World War raging in the northern part of the country, the colonial government could not tolerate African insubordination. The Chilembwe Rising was brutally crushed within a few weeks of January 1915. However, not all was lost because more than ever before, the abuses to which Malawian labour was being subjected were openly brought to the attention of the British government. The Commission of Inquiry into the Chilembwe Rising found overwhelming evidence about abuses of African labour. On one estate in Chiradzulu district, for example

It was impossible to discover, from the Labour Roll Books of the Estate, either the rate of pay of an individual native or the days on which he had worked or in some cases whether he had been paid or not. 38

It was also ascertained that the Labour Certificate system caused much hardships for Africans because employers abused the labour Certificate. For example, if an

employer wanted to extend the contract period of an unwilling African worker, all he had to do was to withhold the Labour Certificate.

In the meantime the demand for labour continued to rise. The large estate owners in the Shire Highlands were temporarily aided by the influx of Mozambicans who came to the estates in need of land. In addition, people who wanted to avoid conscription into the army also moved from crown land to the estates.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, however, desertions were on the increase. Many people who wanted to avoid conscription went to Southern and Northern Rhodesia, Congo, South Africa and others went as far as Angola.

The small plantation owners who found 'voluntary' contract labour difficult to procure, sought salvation in a dubious alternative. In an attempt to secure labour, some settlers began to issue Labour Certificates in advance to provide protection to prospective workers against the tax collectors and government military recruiting agents. Africans took advantage of the situation and used the pre-endorsed labour certificates to avoid both contract labour and military conscription.<sup>40</sup> It need not be emphasised here that during the war the labour supply situation in Malawi had become critical. This trend was to be aggravated by

the expansion in settler tobacco production immediately after the war.

The tobacco boom era of 1919-1921 was accompanied by a 'feverish competition for labour and wages tended to rise from the pre-war levels of 4/6 to 5/-<sup>41</sup> per ticket to 6/- and in some cases 8/- per ticket'. However, this increase in wages did little to alleviate the labour shortages. The abuses to which Malawian labour was being subjected continued unabated. Labour migration to the Rhodesias, South Africa, Congo and elsewhere gained an added importance; labour migration had become one avenue through which the local labour system could be avoided.<sup>42</sup> Thus by the end of the war it had become apparent to the colonial government and the settlers that the 'Labour Certificate System' and 'contract labour' were inefficient mechanisms with which to mobilize African labour.

Apart from the obvious inadequacies of the Labour Certificate System in inducing people to engage for contract labour, the labour certificates were also strongly resented by Africans. This had been clearly established by the Chilembwe Rising of 1915 and the findings of the inquiry which followed. In addition, there were others in the government who were also aware of the gross labour abuses associated with the labour

certificates, and wanted the system to be buried. Immediately after the end of the war, there were widespread rumours of potential political unrest in the country and the colonial government realised the urgent need to contain African discontent. It was only expedient that the labour certificate and the tax differential system should be abolished in 1920. 43

The settlers were unimpressed by government's decision to abolish the labour certificate system. The Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture for example, decided to seek redress from the Colonial Office. In 1921, the Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture sent a memorandum to the Colonial Office demanding that "the Governor be recalled because he has demonstrated his insensitivity to matters pertaining to labour supply in the interest of the community." 44

Between 1921 and 1923 the settlers in Malawi, agitated by the abolition of the Labour Certificate system and the financial crisis brought about by the collapse of commodity prices in 1921/22, during which wages were reduced from 8/- to 6/- per month, tried to be assertive in a bid to gain absolute control over African labour. The settlers demanded a system of documentation for all adult African labourers similar to the pass registration system in the Rhodesias and South Africa. 45 Under the

proposed registration system Africans were to carry papers which bore the particulars of the bearer, such as the name, occupation, address and whether employed or not. The proposed system of registration was designed to control the mobility of Africans between jobs and employers, and between areas of employment and crown land. Governor Smith was convinced by the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce and the various planters Associations that "under the existing system of control, it was impossible to trace deserter".<sup>46</sup> The proposed system of registration was submitted to the Colonial Office for approval in 1923.

The settlers bid for more power over the Africans in the country was a serious miscalculation. For one thing, the colonial office had to accommodate the demands of the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions dealing with Labour Law reforms in the colonies. In addition the imperial government was also aware of the fact that the Chitembwe Rising had recently been crushed and African resentment towards labour registration, labour abuses and indeed colonial rule as whole were major grievances which caused the Rising. Moreover the 'Labour Certificate' had just been abolished in 1920 and it was not expedient to re-introduce another labour registration system likely to arouse unrest among the African population. It was thus little wonder,

therefore, that the proposed system of registration for Africans in Malawi was rejected by the Colonial Office in 1924.<sup>47</sup>

With the intended labour registration system in limbo and the Labour Certificates abolished in 1920, the settlers in Malawi found labour difficult to obtain. African workers almost entirely refused to engage for contract labour. Settlers with the dubious distinction as 'bad employers' had a difficult task to obtain 'voluntary labour'. In the meantime labour emigration continued to expand. By the mid 1920s the system of contract labour within the country was in serious jeopardy of collapsing. It was reported in 1927 that "it is becoming difficult to obtain labourers under contract for the less popular kinds of work. There can be little doubt that the labour problem is becoming serious."<sup>48</sup>

In those places where voluntary contract labour was almost impossible to obtain for specific or small projects, both the government and the settler community<sup>49</sup> recruited casual labour (Ganyu), on a daily basis. Ganyu labour was widely used by the planting community during the planting and harvesting of crops such as cotton and tobacco. Ganyu labour was engaged on a 'verbal contract'<sup>50</sup> and worked on a 'task work' basis. The PWD also engaged Ganyu labour for temporary road repairs, sanitary work and

on some construction sites.

As 'contract labour' became increasingly difficult to obtain, Ganyu labour began to assume greater importance particularly after the labour certificates had been abolished in 1920. Ganyu labour was provided by people from crown land adjacent to the estates, women and children from the plantation compounds and squatters. Plantation Capitao's were occasionally deployed to raid squatter villages to procure labour. The planting community was not alone with this dubious practice of coercing Africans into wage labour; the record of the colonial government, particularly the PWD was equally questionable.<sup>51</sup>

The 1920s as has been noted in chapter one was a period of expanding peasant production and most Africans found no urgent need to seek wage employment. Voluntary labour being in inadequate supply in most rural areas, the PWD turned to the District Commissioners for assistance. The District Commissioners instructed the Chiefs and headmen to "encourage" the peasants to engage for contract and sometimes casual labour.<sup>52</sup> Occasionally when 'voluntary labour' was not sufficient the askari were commanded "to bring in every available man from the villages, not otherwise employed, to be signed on for a contract".<sup>53</sup> People were captured and literally dragged

into signing labour contracts with the PWD. This practice was one source of contention between the colonial government and the Mombera Native Association. In the eyes of Africans, contract labour was simply forced labour.<sup>54</sup> It is observable therefore that despite the abolition of the Labour Certificate system in 1920 the labour abuses that coloured the labour system in the country were as pervasive as ever during the late 1920s and indeed well into the 1930s.

In the meantime, employers who could not obtain adult male labour in sufficient numbers began to rely on children. Children were extensively employed on tea, tobacco and cotton plantations. The employment of children on the plantations, the tea processing factories and cotton ginneries was never brought into question by either the colonial government or the settlers. In as far as the settlers were concerned, "children were happier at work on the plantations than playing about the villages."<sup>55</sup> The Governor was also won over by the settlers and he asserted that, "I consider that it is much better that they (children) should be at work than loafing about their villages".<sup>56</sup> Obviously there were both political and economic motives behind all these assertions.

First, for the Governor, by granting tacit



approval to the settler community to engage child labour, settler pressure for other government action to induce Africans to work could be averted. As for the employers, by employing children, land and labour ratios could be kept at a higher level without raising the total labour costs.<sup>57</sup> Female and child labour was paid at a lower rate than adult male labour. In addition, female and child labour was easier to control than adult males. Plantations which employed children or women usually worked the children or the women for more than 9 hours each day. On some plantations in Mangochi and Thyolo districts, for example, children were seen at work from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. and sometimes until as late as 6 p.m.<sup>58</sup>

The presence of children and women on the plantations and in the tea processing factories is an indication of the level to which the supply of adult male labour had declined. Desperate employers in need of labour found it necessary to prey on the weaker members of society; children and women. But the number of children and women at work is also an indication of the extent to which some families had been proletarianized. In addition, it is also an indication of the low levels of household cash incomes. Thus women and children also came to be valued in terms of their contribution to the cash incomes of their families.<sup>59</sup>

The collapse of tobacco prices in 1928, and the onset of the great Depression, were accompanied by a general contraction in plantation production. Large numbers of workers were laid-off in the tea and tobacco enterprises. The employers, realising that labour was plentiful and jobs scarce, reduced wages by between 15% and 40%.<sup>60</sup> Some of the tobacco planters who were hit hardest by the Depression could not even afford to pay the workers. Living conditions on the plantations fell sharply. On most estates the provisions of rations ceased completely.

In the meantime sanitary conditions also deteriorated. It was reported in early 1929 that 90% of all African workers on plantations harboured one or more species of intestinal parasites, of which the hookworm had the most marked effect on the health of workers.<sup>61</sup> On the tea plantations, workers were afflicted by chronic leg ulcers, because they were not provided with protective clothing such as overalls and boots during the tea plucking season<sup>62</sup>, to prevent cuts, caused by scratching the legs against the tea bushes, developing into ulcers. The plantation owners took no steps to eradicate the problems. The few mission dispensaries near the estates could not cope with the problem.

At the same time, the shortage of accommodation

remained as acute as ever. The few houses that were provided were often overcrowded; twelve adults sleeping in one room of 12 feet by 9 feet.<sup>63</sup> As for labour recruited by the the PWD, it was reported in 1930 that "labourers obtained from far afield are not provided accommodation when they arrived or whilst employed, and they work here under the greatest discomfort".<sup>64</sup> The houses provided on the plantations were "far inferior to the daub and wattle houses found in the villages on crown land". It was reported in early 1930 that:

The 'bricklines' (houses) provided on the estates are too dirty inside, poorly ventilated and have a lot of bugs and fleas which make occupants feel very uncomfortable. Most of the house have not been cleaned or repaired for a long time. During the rainy season they leak very badly such that the occupant and his belongings get soaked even if the rainfall is mild.<sup>65</sup>

The obvious consequence of poor living conditions and overcrowding was the periodic outbreak of infectious and contagious diseases like measles. Attempts by the Medical Services Department to alert employers and the government, that inadequate feeding, poor accommodation and unsanitary conditions created inefficiency among African workers, met no success.<sup>66</sup>

All these factors, reduced wages, poor sanitation, overcrowded and dirty houses and the flogging

and caning of workers by employers tended to reinforce African resentment and fears of the labour system in Malawi. Soon a belief developed among Mozambicans that 'medicines and magic', had been planted in the brickline houses on the plantation compounds, which gave them bad dreams. Oral traditions on this point are most intriguing. A number of informants were quite clear that this was a subtle strategy used by Mozambican migrants to identify plantations with poor living conditions and to spread this information abroad.

Workers who lived in the plantation compounds were kept under the watchful eye of the compound <sup>68</sup> capitaos. The compound capitaos were also used for cracking down on deserters, absenteeism, loafers and the like. The presence of the compound capitao also made it difficult for workers to hold discussions to share their experiences. The shadow of the capitao always haunted the workers. Furthermore, workers who lived in plantation or company compounds were deliberately segmented, by the employers, on ethnic lines; each ethnic group or nationality was confined to a specific compound. Thus workers who wanted to by-pass the barriers erected by the employers found residence in the bricklines unattractive, but preferred to stay in their own temporary shelters <sup>69</sup> where the workers could enjoy a modicum of freedom.

The 'belief in magic and superstition' ascribed to Mozambicans, came to be understood differently by different people. For the settlers, the ascribed belief, only helped to prove their long held view that Africans were primitive, imbued in superstition and magic and did not appreciate the benevolence of the whiteman. This justificatory notion tended to reinforce the settlers' negligence to provide good and adequate accommodation for African workers. Governor Thomas was also won over by the settlers. The Governor wrote to the Colonial office in 1931, indicating that:

The Anguru (Mozambicans) are imbued with so deep a belief in magic and superstition that they flatly refuse to subject themselves to the medicine of former tenants, occupying the bricklines provided for them. They say it gives them bad dreams.<sup>70</sup>

To the indigenous Malawians, the belief, ascribed to Mozambicans was used as a weapon to demoralise Mozambican immigrant workers, because it was immigrant<sup>71</sup> labour that tended to reinforce the low wage economy.

A combination of the hostility by indigenous Malawians towards Mozambicans, reduced wages, and the poor living and working conditions forced the labour supply to dwindle rapidly. By 1931, the labour shortage was so acute that the small plantation owners appealed to the colonial government for "assistance to combat the serious

position which had arisen with regard to the supply of labour".<sup>72</sup> Settler production was in crisis. The

tobacco, sisal and cotton plantations were hit hardest by labour shortages. Desertion and absenteeism were also

reaching peak levels; the latter was ranging between 40% and 60% of the total labour force employed on some

enterprises.<sup>73</sup> The railway company had to rely on tax defaulters, provided by the government, for work on the

railway extension project between Blantyre and Salima.<sup>74</sup>

Labour emigration from Malawi to other parts of Southern Africa and East Africa was also in high tide; an

estimated 40,000 people were leaving the country annually.<sup>75</sup>

The colonial government was faced with a serious problem. In the one hand the government had to find a way

to assist the settlers to combat the serious labour supply problem. But at the same time the colonial government had

both, to accommodate the colonial office demands to bring legislation in line with the conventions of the ILO, and

avoid provoking criticism by the various lobby groups, both in Malawi and abroad.<sup>76</sup>

In addition the colonial government had to act cautiously to avoid political pressure from the settlers without at the same time

arousing unrest among the African population.<sup>77</sup>

In the midst of the financial crisis, brought

about by the Depression, the settlers in Malawi were as determined as ever to resist labour law reforms that were being suggested by both the ILO and the colonial Office. Towards the end of 1930 for example, a proposal by the colonial office to remove "the penal sanctions from the employment contract laws",<sup>78</sup> was flatly rejected in 1931 by the settlers. The two main representative bodies of the employing interests, the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce and the Convention of Associations were united. The Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, categorically stated that:

the removal of penal sanctions would undermine the employers ability to control labour and maintain discipline in curbing desertions and breaches of the employment contract. The absence of any penal sanctions would encourage natives to sign and make any agreement without having the slightest intention of carrying it out.<sup>79</sup>

The Governor, under the influence of the planting community also rejected the "abolition of penal sanctions and its replacement by a civil remedies code".<sup>80</sup>

The widely held view among the settlers in the country was that lack of desire by the Africans to work for European employers was endemic to the African. What was needed were strong and tough legislative measures as a shock therapy to dislodge the African from his "vices of laziness and idleness".<sup>81</sup>

In the same spirit of self interest the settlers and the other major employing interest in the country rejected law reforms to make provisions for Workmens Compensation in case of death or accident, medical care, housing regulations and food rations for workers. The settlers and corporate employers were in particular, opposed to the enactment of law that would make provisions for workmens compensation in case of accident or death of African workers, and the Governor supported their opposition arguing to the colonial office that

The enactment of a workmens compensation act would serve no useful purpose, and it would merely suggest to employers that government is suspicious of their good faith. Voluntary action as in the practice here is of value in maintaining cordial relations between government, the employer and the employed. Legal compulsion is not.<sup>82</sup>

This is yet another indication of the links between the colonial government and the settlers. The fact that the colonial government took steps to blockade law reforms that would have enhanced the interest of African workers is a clear indication of the leverage the settlers and the corporate employing interests had over the government. It must be little wonder that the colonial government took no steps to encourage employers of labour to improve the conditions of work.



The devastation of the Depression and its after shock drastically altered the labour situation in the country. The colonial government which was also in desperate need of revenue, began to look at organised export of Malawian labour as a viable source of income. After all, settler production had so far proved a failure. An equally important development was the expansion of the local tea industry, which was systematically being taken over by metropolitan capital. British plantation companies were diversifying into Eastern and Southern Africa, because of the intense competition in South East Asia and the Far East. Moreover, the tea industry required a more stabilized and permanent labour force than other plantation crops like tobacco and cotton. This transformation in the colonial economy required the government to balance its revenue needs and the demands of a relatively brisk industry which had a powerful lobby in Britain. The limited labour demands of the tea industry whose expansion was curtailed by the International Tea Restriction Agreement (1933), meant that the colonial government could pursue both objectives simultaneously without necessarily provoking pressure from the metrople.

By 1935, the colonial government in Malawi had begun negotiations with their counter parts in Northern

Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and the Union of South Africa about the possibilities of the mining companies remitting taxes on behalf of migrant workers from Malawi. The labour recruiting agents for the mining companies, who were also in desperate need for labour, in view of the expansion in the mining operations after the Depression, were only too eager to endorse the proposal.<sup>84</sup> But it would not be until 1937 that an agreement was finally concluded to allow for the repatriation of personal taxes for the recruited Malawian labour.

In the meantime the settlers and the missionaries, in Malawi, formed a formidable alliance designed to torpedo government organized labour emigration.<sup>85</sup> The missionaries, as usual, appealed to the moral consequences of labour emigration, whereas the settlers raised the alarm about the disastrous economic impact of uncontrolled labour migration. The missionaries argued that "the situation which had arisen in the country was such as to constitute a serious menace to the future of population and the country alike, and that this uncontrolled and growing emigration brought misery and poverty to hundreds and thousands of families and that the waste of life, happiness, health and wealth was colossal".<sup>86</sup> The settlers insisted that labour emigration should be stopped because it depleted "the labour

supply".<sup>87</sup> These divergent assertions had a central economic motive behind them. The missionaries like the settlers in Malawi operated economic enterprise which required a pool of cheap labour. At no time did the missionaries in the country seriously raise the question of wages, poor working, and living conditions on the plantations in Malawi. In this respect the missionaries<sup>88</sup> and the settlers were united in purpose and intention. Not surprising perhaps, the settlers with the full backing of the missionaries made one more desperate attempt to institutionalize a "system of registration to control the movement of labour similar to that in the Rhodesias, Kenya<sup>89</sup> and elsewhere".

The colonial government was no longer in favour of the system proposed by the settlers. The Governor and many others in the government were aware of the need to<sup>90</sup> avoid arousing discontent and unrest among Africans. It was also realised by the government that the system of internal labour registration would lead to gross abuses and wasteful use of labour. Moreover, the colonial government had also realised that officially sanctioned export of Malawian labour was a more viable source of revenue than the inefficient settler sector. An equally important consideration, was that African protest against the labour conditions within the country was increasingly

becoming vocal and strong, that it could not longer be ignored. In 1937 for instance, the Representative Committee of the Northern Province Native Associations (RCNPNA) sent a written memorandum to the government<sup>91</sup> protesting against the proposed system of registration.

The colonial office, on the other hand, had to accommodate the demands of the ILO Conventions, concerning colonial labour systems, and avoid criticism by other lobby groups such as the Fabian Colonial Bureau, which raised numerous questions on labour issues in the colonies.<sup>92</sup> Moreover an internal labour registration system in Malawi was likely to stem the flow of labour to the mines of Southern Africa, and this was an eventuality which the colonial office had all along tried to avoid. Not surprisingly perhaps, approval for the proposed system<sup>93</sup> of labour registration in Malawi was not given. Settler hegemony was undermined.

In 1937 the colonial government finally signed an inter-territorial labour agreement with the colonial governments of Northern Rhodesia, and Southern Rhodesia and the Union of South Africa. Once again the Labour Bureaux (RNLB, WNLA, and the Native Labour Association of Northern Rhodesia (NLA) were officially allowed to operate in the country. However recruitment of African workers in the Southern province for employment in other countries

was prohibited. In the Southern province, RNLB, WNLA and NLA were only allowed in Blantyre township. 94

The new interterritorial labour agreement and the critical labour situation within the country also forced the colonial government to take measures to keep all matters pertaining to labour within the country and abroad under constant review. In 1937, this changed approach witnessed the formation of the Labour Branch within the provincial administration section of the colonial government. The Labour Branch was charged with the responsibility of dealing with labour issues within the country and abroad. 95 But it would not be until the early 1940s that the impact of the Labour Branch would be felt. The despotic labour system would take time to dismantle.

The tendency of wages to rise from the Depression lows of 4/- per ticket to 5/- and in cases 7/- per ticket by 1938 96 did little to contain African dislike of the internal labour systems. The conditions on the plantations were deplorable as ever. On the tobacco plantations in the Mangochi area for instance, "housing and attention to labourers welfare was almost non-existent". 97 Because of the general malaise created by the internal labour conditions, labour emigration to Southern Africa and elsewhere gained an added importance.

RATES OF WAGES IN 1938  
(Exclusive of Rations)

Industry	Factories		Estate Labour	
	Skilled	Unskilled	Skilled	Unskilled
Tea	12/-	6/- per month	9/-	6/- per month
Tobacco	12/-	6/-	9/-	6/-
Cotton	12/-	6/-	--	6/-
Rubber	12/-	6/-	8/-	6/-
Sisal	12/-	6/-	--	7/-
Soap	10/-	6/-	--	--
Railways	28/8	9/6	--	--
Domestic Services				
Cooks & headchef	--	20/-	--	--
Other Servants	--	8/-	--	--
Civil Service				
Senior Grade Clerk	--	25/-	--	--
Census Clerks	--	20/-	--	--

Source: Annual Report of the Labour Branch,  
Government Printer, Bombay, 1938.

it had become a form of protest against the living and working conditions within the country. The volume of both authorized and unauthorized migration expanded. By 1938/1939 an estimated 169,000 Malawians were working abroad; this represented about 1/3 of the total adult male population of the country.<sup>98</sup> At the same time the flow of Mozambicans into Malawi had declined drastically.<sup>99</sup> The labour supply situation within the country was developing into a serious crisis for settlers and the colonial government, so that by the eve of the second world war the need for the much awaited reforms had become more urgent than ever. "So far the colonial government had failed to enforce satisfactory standards in rations, housing and medical facilities."<sup>100</sup>

As a general rule, wages and conditions of work in the country on the eve of the second world war, varied according to the location of the enterprises in proximity to immigrant labour routes and the internal sources of labour. The nearer to the areas of the sources of labour the enterprise was located, the lower also were the wages. Important too was the operational scale of the enterprise and the ruling world market prices of the dominant commodities produced on the plantations. The diversified plantations tended to be more viable and offered relatively higher wages than the monocrop enterprises.

African workers tried as far as possible to avoid the prospect of work on enterprises with lower wages, and tended to gravitate towards those areas where wages were higher.



## PART II

Compulsory Or Forced Labour

Compulsory labour was used by the colonial government and became institutionalised in Malawi during the colonial period. For many colonial administrations, labour coercion was considered to be an act of benevolence: a necessary measure, "if the natives were to shake off their lethargic habits and take a fair share in the development of their country".<sup>101</sup> Consequently African labour had to be procured through the use of force regardless of the social cost it entailed. Since voluntary labour was unavailable for many of the government projects such as road and bridge construction and transporting of government supplies between stations, compulsory labour increasingly became the most reliable means for securing labour.

In the first two decades of colonial rule, compulsory labour was composed of tax defaulters and or people who had not worked for a European employer for a period of not less than one month. Government tax collectors were given powers over the "maintenance and disposal of the labour supply"<sup>102</sup>, and it was not unusual for them to use dubious and crude methods to secure labour. The Askari were widely used to round up people

from the villages for work on government projects. 103  
People who refused to engage for work were subjected to 104  
severe hardships, in cases involving the loss of life.  
Chiefs were also often constantly harassed and pressed to  
force their people to work for the government.

People recruited for compulsory labour by the  
government were subjected to many abuses. Wages were  
seldom paid and more often than not, food and  
accommodation were not provided. Some people starved to  
death, and those who tried to desert were subjected to  
penal sanctions; their lot consisted of flogging and 105  
frequent beatings to compel them to work. Compulsory  
labour was to remain one of the most detested facets of  
colonial rule.

As the demand and competition for Malawian  
labour intensified during the second decade of colonial  
rule, the colonial administration found it essential to  
systematize the utilization of compulsory labour.  
Legislation was enacted to make provisions to enable  
chiefs and village headmen to utilize compulsory labour on  
community projects, such as rural roads, sanitation  
projects and others. Legally enforced compulsory labour  
was restricted to one month of unpaid labour per annum.  
In addition, district administrators were also empowered  
to recruit compulsory labour for essential public works

and services', and people recruited under compulsion were to be paid at the prevailing rates.<sup>107</sup> However by various dubious and crude methods, government officials extracted African labour without paying for it. It was not unusual for instance, for the period of compulsory labor to be extended to several months and wages paid for only one month.<sup>108</sup> The behaviour of some chiefs was no different. The one month unpaid labour was sometimes extended to suit their convenience.<sup>109</sup>

The outbreak of the first world war, in 1914 further compounded the labour situation in the country, as more and more people were required for the military forces and the carrier corps. During the first four months of the war, Africans who were engaged in the war effort either volunteered or were drafted under the compulsory labour regulations as provided for in the District Administration (Native) Ordinance of 1912.<sup>110</sup> However, as the demand for labour increased, the colonial government found it essential to have special legislation for military conscription. The Nyasaland Defence Ordinance was enacted in December, 1914 to legalise conscription for the war effort.

The demands for the carrier corps often came suddenly, and people were rounded up and forced into military service. Tax defaulters were arrested and

conscripted into the carrier corps as porters or tenga-tenga. Those who tried to run away were hunted down more enthusiastically than ever before. It was not unusual for the government recruiting agents to take wives as hostages to pressure the men into submission. Chiefs and headmen were often threatened with the removal from office unless they produced enough men to meet military labour requirements. To many Africans the government's recruiting tactics:

appeared more like the slave raiding which colonial rule was supposed to have ended. Led by local police, recruiters would enter villages at night, make their way from house to house, rouse the inhabitants and capture any adult males they found. The men were frequently bound with ropes or even wooden yokes and marched off to serve as tengatenga. 111

Women and children were also conscripted for the carrier corps. 112

As for wages, people conscripted as tax defaulters were given only a tax receipt as payment for their wages. Nearly all the tenga-tenga received the most meagre wages, if they were paid at all. After being discharged from military service, gratuities were not paid until after several years. 113

Some people tried to run away by going into hiding or by emigrating to other countries such as the Rhodesias, Zaire, South Africa and others went as far as

Angola. In many parts of the country chiefs, headmen and others who urged service in the war were denounced and threatened if they persisted in forcing people into military service. In some areas government recruiting agents were beaten. But such incidents provoked further repressive measures from the colonial authorities as people who protested were forcibly conscripted for the same reason.

The heightened African resentment towards conscription erupted into the Chilembwe Rising of 1915, which was ruthlessly crushed. Then followed the removal from office of Inkosi Chintunga, who had refused to force his people into military service. Both these events accentuated African opposition to colonial rule.

For those people conscripted for the war effort, particularly the tenga-tenga, the tour of duty lasted for six months, and in some cases up to one year. But the supply columns to the war front, "seemed like organised death marches." The tenga-tenga were treated little better than pack-ponies". They were compelled to march for six hours and sometimes seven hours a day carrying loads weighing 60 lbs. or more. Many tenga-tenga were beaten by their overseers in an attempt to drive them further and faster. As the supply lines grew longer, food rations for both the Askari and tenga-tenga were reduced, sometimes by

three quarters of the normal. In many instances the food issued to the tenga-tenga was rotten and inedible. Many askari and tenga-tenga went hungry and starved. To make matters worse, the tenga-tenga, were seldom provided with protective wear, not even blankets. In addition, virtually no medical attention was provided for the tenga-tenga either when they were being conscripted or during service. The treatment of the sick and wounded askari and tenga-tenga was hardly better. Medicines and materials<sup>117</sup> such as bandages were perpetually in short supply. All

these factors, poor feeding, inadequate protective clothing and deficient medical care combined with poor training for the askari, exacerbated the already high death rate. An estimated 5 percent of the over 200,000 tenga-tenga conscripted during the war had perished.<sup>118</sup>

In the meantime food and livestock were being commandeered from the villages to feed the military forces and carrier corps, and as a consequence most peasants in the villages were on the verge of starvation. By 1916/1917 the food shortage had reached famine proportions. In the northern districts slaughter cattle<sup>119</sup> had virtually been eliminated. This severe food shortage was further compounded by an outbreak of bubonic plague in northern Malawi, precisely in the districts<sup>120</sup> which were at the war front.

Undeterred by the presence of superior military force on the side of the colonial government, African protest began to take more covert and intricate forms. The Nyau Societies took on added importance as a mechanism for consolidating African protest against colonial rule and the imperialist war. In other parts of the country, spirit possession and spirit medium-ship became another vessel through which protest against military service was being mobilized. Labour emigration was also developing into a form of protest against the internal labour situation. Malawian society was in turmoil: "there was <sup>121</sup> terror everywhere and people did not feel safe". The shortcomings of colonial rule were everywhere apparent. The brutality and ultra-exploitation associated with the war was synonymous with Thangata: so the first world war came to be known as the war of Thangata (within the colonial context Thangata meant forced labour).

The last year of the war was the worst. Weakened by lack of food, Africans in the country were over-run by two devastating epidemics - Small-pox and Spanish Influenza. By 1919 these two epidemics <sup>122</sup> had decimated an estimated 50,000 people. Several hundreds had also perished because of famine. Thus a combination of the war casualties, famine, and epidemics had left a <sup>123</sup> major dent on the African population of the country.

In the meantime economic and social conditions within the country deteriorated rapidly. The ex-askari and carrier corps were hastily demobilised; many going away without receiving their gratuities. The shortage of commodities, brought about by the war, led to a rapid increase in prices. When another famine struck in 1919/1920, the prices of foodstuffs skyrocketed.<sup>124</sup> This economic malaise and the continued government tax demands forced many people to emigrate to the mining towns of southern Africa. But this was also a period when many Africans had hoped to rebuild their homes and families which had been ruined during the war. At the same time, the unsatiable demand for labour on the plantations went unabated. African societies in the country were under extreme pressure. Signs of unrest were everywhere evident. All these factors, disorderly demobilization, unpaid gratuities, soaring inflation, shortages, increased labour emigration and famine, aroused a state of hysteria,<sup>125</sup> which required cautious action by the colonial government. It may be for these reasons and the Chilembwe Rising that the notorious labour certificate system was abolished in 1920.

The tobacco boom which began immediately after the end of the war also fueled an increase in demand for labour. Wages on settler farms temporarily rose. The




colonial government, which could not afford the higher wages, found voluntary labour for the PWD projects almost impossible to obtain. Consequently the colonial administration increasingly came to rely on force to secure labour.<sup>126</sup>

It was not unusual for District Commissioner to press chiefs and headmen to force their people into compulsory labour for the government. The tactics used by both the government officials and some chiefs left much to be desired. People were literally "captured, tied with ropes and dragged to work".<sup>127</sup> People who tried to resist were frequently harassed and beaten. Those who tried to desert were convicted and subjected to penal sanctions like imprisonment for 3 months or fines of up to L 5.<sup>128</sup> The deployment of force to induce Africans to work had become a distinctive feature of the colonial labour system.

Despite the persistent demands by the ILO and the colonial office, for labour law reforms, to eradicate forced or compulsory labour, coupled with concerted criticisms of the labour conditions in the country by the Native Associations,<sup>129</sup> the colonial government remained as adamant as ever. The revenue deficient colonial government could not offer adequate wages and better conditions of work to attract voluntary labour hence the use of force had become a necessary prerequisite to secure

labour. It would not be until the early 1930s, during the Depression, that a surplus labour situation developed, and the colonial government found it possible to modify the laws for compulsory or forced labour.

In 1933 the Forced Labour Ordinance was enacted, for the first time, to regulate and control the deployment of forced labour. Under the provisions of this ordinance forced or compulsory labour was confined to 'essential public works and services and then only in return for remuneration'. The 'essential public works and services' came to include the transportation of government officials,  and supplies between stations. In addition the government could also legally call upon Africans to work during an emergency. The period of forced labour for communal projects was also restricted to 24 days each year for the unemployed adult males. 130

The labour surplus situation of the early 1930s however, proved to be temporary. By the mid 1930s labour had once again become short in supply, because of an expansion in peasant commodity production and an increase in labour emigration. The PWD had once again entered a phase of acute labour shortages. But with the Forced Labour Ordinance in place, the colonial administration could no longer deploy unrestrained force to secure labour. Consequently the district

administrators turned their attention on tax defaulters.

Tax defaulters were widely used on PWD projects during the 1930s. The methods used for cracking down the tax defaulters in the 1930s become reminiscent of the tactics deployed in the first two decades of colonial rule: wives of the tax defaulters were sometimes taken hostage by the government, "houses were demolished and in cases livestock confiscated in order to force Africans to be signed on or recruited on some of the unpopular kinds of work".<sup>131</sup> Tax defaulters were occasionally engaged in carrying heavy loads of timber weighing 90 lbs. per person to be transported from Mulanje to Zomba.<sup>132</sup> Africans forcibly recruited were seldom provided with adequate food and accommodation. Wages frequently amounted to a tax receipt.<sup>133</sup>

The abuses associated with Forced Labour provoked a storm of resistance towards the colonial establishment, as to raise the spectre of wide spread unrest. Rumours began to circulate in the Southern province in 1937/1938 of a second "Chilembwe Rising".<sup>134</sup>

Once again the colonial government was faced with a potential crisis. In an attempt to contain the wide spread discontent among Africans in the late 1930s, the colonial government decided to review the system of hut taxes. By 1939 taxation of females had been stopped,

thereby reducing the incidence of tax default on households and compulsory labor associated with default. But for many adult males, the continued demand for taxes by the colonial government and the consequences of default haunted them. The abuses that coloured the colonial labour system remained as pervasive as ever.

### Conclusion

Contract labour and compulsory or forced labour systems were both mechanisms of colonial capitalism during its formative stage. The limitations of settler production (chronic insolvency, inefficiency and the high railway rates) meant that the wages and conditions of work obtainable on settler and corporate enterprise could not in themselves constitute sufficient incentives to attract labour. Consequently the settlers, the expatriate enterprises and the colonial government came to rely on the use of coercive force to secure labour. The low level of skills required to perform tasks on settler enterprises, the PWD projects and other employers' meant that what was needed was a pool of cheap labour regardless of the high labour turnover. This tended to entrench and perpetuate the migratory labour system, thereby retarding the growth and development of a stabilized wage labour force.

FOOTNOTES

1. See, C.A. Baker, "Tax Collection in Malawi: An Administrative History, 1891-1972: in The International Journal of African Historical Studies, vol.8, 1, 1975. pp. 40-42.
2. Ibid. p.44.
3. See Colonial Report for British Central Africa Protectorate 1904-1905, p. 6.
4. Baker, "Tax Collection In Malawi", p. 51.
5. See Leroy Vail, "The State and the Creation of Colonial Malawi's Agricultural Economy", in R. Rotberg (ed.) Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa, Lexington Book, Lexington, 1983, p. 46.
6. See, R. Boeder, "Malawians Abroad: The history of Labour Emigration from Malawi to its Neighbours, 1890 to the present", Michigan State University, Ph.D. 1974; see also, C. van Onselen, Chibaro, pluto press, London, 1976, p. 219. In the late 1890s and early 1900s for example wages in Rhodesia averaged between 15/- and 22/6 per month whereas in Malawi, workers received 4/- to 5/- per month. In South Africa, manual workers on the mines earned around 45/- per month.
7. The term widely used in Malawi and Southern Africa for contract labour, is Chibaro - which is widely associated with "Forced Labour". See also C. Van Onselen, Chibaro, pluto press, London, 1976.
8. As early as the late 1880s, the Livingstonia missionaries had introduced recruited contract labour from the north to work on the coffee plantations in the Shire Highlands, because labour on the Shire Highlands was difficult to obtain.
9. See, The Central African Planter, Zomba, October, 1895.
10. See, for example, The Central African Planter, October, 1895 and The Central African Planter, January, 1896. In a preface, of a reprint in 1983, to The Central African Planter, 1895-1898, McCracken

has written that "a number of offensive passages, revealing only of the coarsely prejudiced minds of those who conceived them, are scattered throughout its passages. Running as a theme throughout these passages is a basic denial of African capabilities". Between 1898 and 1954, these same themes were raised frequently in the Central African Times, (1898-1908); and The Nyasaland Times (1911-1964)

11. B.S. Krishnamurthy, "Economic policy, land and labour in Nyasaland, 1890-1914," in B. Pachai (ed.) The Early History of Malawi, Longman, 1972, pp. 391-392.
12. Ibid, p. 392; see also The British Central Africa Gazette, Zomba, November 1894; The British Central Africa Gazette, October 1895; the length of the contract was changed again in 1906 to between 3 and 6 months to suit the demands of the new crops cotton and tobacco.
13. Ibid, p. 393; see also S.E. Sanderson, "Nyasaland Migrant Labour in British Central Africa 1890-1939"; S.S. Myambo, "The Shire Highlands Plantations: A Socio-economic History of the Plantation System of Production in Malawi 1891-1938", MA, University of Malawi, 1973, p. 19.
14. MNA S2/38/20; MNA S1/862/31.
15. J.A. Kamchitete Kandawire, Thangata: Forced Labour or Reciprocal Assistance, University of Malawi, 1979, p. 14.
16. See Krishnamurthy, "Economic Policy, Land and Labour in Nyasaland, 1890-1914", p. 392; see also Michael Gelfand Lakeside Pioneers, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1964, p. 213.
17. Some people who ran away into hiding, in the event of raids by the Askari, were killed by predatory animals or died of Starvation, see B. Pachai, "Christianity and Commerce in Malawi: Some Pre-colonial and Colonial Aspects" in B. Pachai, G.W. Smith and R.K. Tangri eds. Malawi Past and Present, University of Malawi, History Conference Papers, June 1967. pp. 38-39, see in particular the Chimbulanga expedition of 1901, and also the appendix to the chapter on pp. 240-241. It was also reported that "women and children have been ruthlessly shot by native police", for refusing to pay tax or work for Europeans. See

- J.L. Pretorius, "An introduction to the History of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in Malawi 1889-1914" in B. Pachai ed., The Early History of Malawi, Longman, London, 1972, p. 371.
18. OTL, Chipeta with Mwendominjila Jere, Kathebela Jere, and Khoti Jere, Ephingweni Village, Edingeni, Mzimba, 1 August, 1984.
  19. See Gelfand, op cit., p. 211. Wages for adult male contract workers in the 1890s ranged between 3/- and 5/- per month; women and children earned between 2/- and 3/- per month. A month was reckoned at 30 working days. This system of remuneration came to be called the Ticket System. The ticket was marked each day a worker completed a day's work. If a worker did not turn up for work, because of sickness, no pay was awarded. In addition workers were also provided with food rations which varied from one employer to the other. Food rations were also proportionately reduced in case of absence from work. The food rations was commonly known as posho. In some cases a cash allowance was paid to workers in place of food rations. Rations and wages tended to be lower on the plantations than in the transport companies.
  20. Ibid., p. 208.
  21. Ibid., p. 213. Michael Gelfand's Lakeside Pioneers so far provides the best account on working and living conditions in colonial Malawi between 1890 and 1920.
  22. Ibid., pp. 208
  23. See Myambo, "The Shire Highlands Plantation", pp. 18-19 and Krishnamurthy, "Economic Policy Land and Labour in Nyasaland", p. 394.
  24. The decision by the colonial government to permit, the RNLB and WNLA to recruit labour in Malawi was well supported by the Foreign Office. It cannot be over-emphasised here that the mining industries of Southern Africa had a powerful lobby in the United Kingdom. When it came to policy decisions by the British government, the interest of the mining industries were well represented and usually given priority over the needs of settlers in Malawi. See Myambo, op.cit, p. 14.



25. Boeder, "Malawians Abroad", p. 74.
26. The Native Labour Ordinance, 1906 also met the approval of the colonial office, see CO 525/68, CO to Sharpe, 11 May, 1906.
27. See Krishnamurthy, "Economic Policy, Land and Labour in Nyasaland", pp. 393-394.
28. Boeder, "Malawians Abroad", pp. 28-29
29. See Gelfand *op.cit*, pp. 219-221; see also Krishnamurthy in Pachai (ed.) *Ibid*, pp. 397-398. See also CO 525/42, Manning to CO 25, May, 1912.
30. Boeder, "Malawians Abroad", p. 84. In some cases this "friendly advice" amounted to compelling Africans not to emigrate to the mines.
31. Kandawire, *op.cit*, pp. 76-78.
32. See MNA-COM 6-2/1/2; also Meghan Vaughan, "Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi: A Study of Rural Communities in the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley from mid-nineteenth Century to 1915", Ph.D. (SOAS) University of London, 1981, pp. 171-173. The evidence for the abuses of African Labour on the plantations was also collaborated in the oral traditions collected as part of the research for this study. These Oral Traditions will be cited here as OTL (Oral Traditions - Labour). OTL, Chipeta, O.J.M. with Motiwa Suwedi, Landerdale Estate Mulanje, 18/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Sub-chief Chimbeta, Chimbeta Village, Thyolo 26/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Jim Bwanali, Gotha Estate, Thyolo, 22/6/84. OTL, Chipeta with Henderson John Masikini, Nchimā Estate, Thyolo, 28/6/84.
33. The Chichewa term for slavery is 'ukapolo'; this term was widely used by my informants to describe the labour conditions on the plantations and PWD projects; OTL, Chipeta with David Stefano, Kwetemule Village, Thyolo, 21/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Moses Nanyanga, Thyolo Highlands Tea Estate, Thyolo, 21/6/84; Chipeta with Samson Galima, Gotha Estate, Thyolo, 22/6/84; see also footnote 32 above.
34. During the colonial period, the Chilembwe Rising of 1915 was officially called, "The Native Rising". In this study the former designation will be used. See

also Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the native Rising 1915 (here after The Commission of Enquiry Report 1915). See also G. Shepperson and T. Price, Independent African, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1958.

35. MNA Com 6-2/1/2, Rev. Stephen M. Kundercha to The Commission of Enquiry into the 1915 Rising, also OTL, Chipeta with Wincase Bandulo, Chinsambo Estate, Mulanje, 18/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Suwangete M'male, Minimini Estate, Mulanje, 19/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Edward Kamutu, Kasembereka Estate, Thyolo, OTL, Chipeta with Sub-chief Chimbeta, Chimbeta Village, Thyolo, 26/6/84.
36. See MNA-S1/1926/18, Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, Estimated Labour Requirements, 1913-1914. The authenticity of these estimates must be viewed in light of the fact that by this time, 1913-1914, an estimated 40,000 acres of settler and company lands were under cotton, and tobacco cultivation.
37. For a detailed study of the 1915 Chilembwe Rising, see George Shepperson and Thomas Price, Independent African, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1958; R.I. Rotberg (ed.), Strike a Blow and Die, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1967; and J. Linden and Ian Linden, "Chiefs and Pastors in the Ncheu Rising of 1915:", in R.J. Macdonald (ed.), From Nyasaland to Malawi, East Africa Publishing House, Nairobi, 1975. pp. 169-188.
38. See, The Commission of Enquiry Report 1915.
39. The colonial government was forced by the settlers to suspend the application of the District Administration (Native) Ordinance 1912, to the private estates in the Shire Highlands (Conscription of Africans was conducted under the provisions of this ordinance). In addition Africans with an endorsed 'Labour Certificate' or proven to be engaged or employed by a European were exempted from military conscription.
40. See MNA 52/38/201.
41. See S.S. Murray, A Handbook of Nyasaland, Zomba, 1922. pp. 155-156.
42. In the period 1909-1937, the colonial government had

tried to halt labour migration to Southern Africa. Police border patrols were used, but only with very limited success. The use of 'Emigration permits' also did not achieve the desired results. Actually most people emigrated without the permits. The scale of this unauthorized emigration, (here after "independent" emigration) expanded greatly during the 1920s. For details on independent emigration see, Boeder, op.cit.; Vail in Rotberg (ed.) op.cit. pp. 45-69; Van Onselen, op.cit., pp. 103-106; E.P. Makamba, "Nyasaland African Labour 'ulendos' to Southern Rhodesia and the problem of African Highway men' 1903-1923: A study in the limitations of early Independent Labour migration" in African Affairs vol. 79, 317, October 1980; and K.N. Mufuka, Missions and Politics in Malawi, Limestone Press, Kingston, Ontario, 1977.

43. See, S.S. Murray, A Handbook of Nyasaland, Zomba, 1922, p. 182. See also Baker, in I.J.A.H.S., vol. 8, 1, 1975, p. 51. The Labour Certificate and Differential taxes were abolished under the Hut Tax (amendment) Ordinance 1920.
44. See MNA 51/104/21, Representations From The Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture on the subject of Repeal of export taxes and questions of Native Labour, 1921, to the colonial office, 14 January 1921.
45. The material on the correspondence between the colonial government of Rhodesia, South Africa, and Malawi, can be found on MNA S2/38/20 II. The first proposal for a system of documentation for Africans in Malawi modelled on the pass system was made by Governor Smith in 1921. See Smith to Colonial Office, 21 February 1921; MNA S2/38/20 II.
46. See MNA S1/2499/23, Smith to Colonial Office, 23 October, 1923.
47. The Secretary of State for the colonies stated that "I am by no means satisfied that a system of registration of Native Labourers, however much it may be to the convenience of the employers would be desirable in Nyasaland", see MNA S1/38/20 II Colonial Office to Smith 11 May, 1924.
48. See MNA S1/38/20. Direction of PWD to Chief Secretary, 18 October 1927.

49. See MNA S1/38/20 II.
50. On the plantations tasks varied from one employer to another. For tea pluckers for instance, many plantations fixed the daily task at 60 lbs of green tea, whereas other tea plantations demanded 80 lbs. of green tea. OTL, Chipeta with Henderson Masikimi, Nchima Estate, Thyolo, 28/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with M.M. Spurrier (manager), Ruw Estates, Mulange, 14/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with C. Finlay (manager) Lujeri Estates, 13/6/84.
51. As in footnote 33.
52. In 1927 the colonial government issued instructions to all government officers that "it must be impressed upon natives through the headmen that work on roads, railways and in factories is a vital part of production", see MNA S2/23/25, Instructions on the Question of Native labour, 15 January, 1927. However, when it became apparent to the colonial government that voluntary labour could not be obtained in sufficient quantities the governor requested for permission to use compulsory labour on some of the PWD projects. The request was turned down. See MNA S1/1550/25, Go to Governor Thoms, 7 August, 1928.
53. See MNA S1/862/31; MNA 2/38/20, DC of Thyolo to provincial commissioner (South), 20 March, 1928.
54. The term used by the Mombera Native Association in reference to contract labour recruited by PWD is Chibaro, see MNA S1/1356/24; see also J. VanVelsen, "Some Early Pressure Groups in Malawi," in E. Stokes and Richard Brown (eds.) The Zambesian Past, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1966, p. 387. The term Chibaro is generally associated with forced labour during the colonial period. OTL Chipeta with Jim Bwanali, Gotha Estate, Thyolo, 22/6/84; OTL Chipeta with Sub-chief Chimbeta, Thyolo, 26/6/84; OTL Chipeta with Motiwa Suwedi, Lauderdale, 16/6/84.
55. MNA S1/96/37, Convention of Associations Secretary to Chief Secretary, 20 October, 1930.
56. MNA S1/11/30, Despatch no. 29, Governor Thomas to Lord Passfield, 31, January 1931.

57. A similar observation has been made on the Tea Plantations in India. See R.R. Kar "Labour Pattern and Absenteeism: A Case Study in Tea Plantations in Assam, India", in Anthropos, 79, 1/3, 1984, pp. 13-22.
58. MNA S1/322/35, DCS' Report for Fort Johnston (now Mangoche) District, 1935, see also Thyolo Report for 1935.
59. Similar arguments have been developed in connection with the impact of the mining and settler farming in Southern Rhodesia, see C. Van Onselen, Chibaro, Pluto Press, London, 1976, pp. 124-126; see also George Chauncey "The Laws of Reproduction: Womens Labour in the Zambian Copper Belt, 1927-1953", in J.S.A.S., vol. 7, 2, April 1981. pp. 135-164.
60. See, MNA S1/428/28, Report on Manual Labour employed by government. See also Robin Palmer, "White Farmers in Malawi: Before and After the Depression" in African Affairs, vol. 84, 335, April 1985, pp. 234-235.
61. See MNA S1/428/29II, Report by Senior Sanitary Officer, 1931.
62. OTL, Chipeta with Wincase Bandula, Chinsambo Estate, Mulanje, 15/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Essau Kamutu, Kasembereka Estate, Thyolo 25/6/84. Both informants worked in plantation dispensaries in the 1930s.
63. MNA S1/201/28, Report by Senior Sanitary Inspector, 1928.
64. MNA S1/201/29, Report by D.C. Thyolo, 1929.
65. MNA S1/492/28, Report by Senior Sanitary Inspector, 1930. Most Plantation owners did not even provide any accommodation or housing for their employees. The usual practice was to allow workers to erect their own shelters on a specified site on the estates. These shelters were usually made of grass thatch and very temporary indeed. Workers usually called these shelters Chithando. Each nationality or ethnic group was confined to a specific area designated by the plantation owner or employer. Gradually these early Chithando locations developed into plantation compounds. The plantation compounds also came to be called Chithando.

66. There are numerous reports by the Medical Department on the conditions of living on the plantations. A proposal by the Medical Department for the establishment of a minimum ration scale was flatly rejected by the settlers in 1929. See, MNA S1/492/28.
67. This aspect of worker consciousness was confirmed by the majority of informants interviewed during the research period. See footnotes 33 and 62 above. The evidence for this was collaborated by informants in the oral interviews, e.g. OTL, Chipeta with Suwangeti M'male, Minimini Estate, Mulanje, 16/6/84, Suwangeti M'male was originally from Mozambique. He came to Minimini Estate around 1912-1913; OTL, Chipeta with S. Galima, Gotha Tea Estate, Thyolo, 11/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Moya Chitengu, Jojo Village, Mabuka, Mulanje, 16/6/84; OTL, Chipeta, with Jailosi Machika, Ruø Estate, Mulanje, 14/6/84.
68. The term Capitao has Portuguese origins. On the plantations a capitao had the duties of a plantation policeman, work supervisor, watchman and messenger.
69. As in footnote 67.
70. MNA S1/711/31, Governor Thomas to Co, 31 January 1931.
71. The literal translation of the Chichewa phrase used to describe the role of Mozambicans in the wage labour market would be "people who pampered the Europeans". OTL, Chipeta, with Jim Bwanali, Gotha Estate, Thyolo, 22/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Chilowe Mbewe, Nchima Estate, Thyolo, 28/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Charles Matipwiri, Ruø Estate, Mulanje 14/6/84.
72. See MNA S1/38, F. Handyman to Chief Secretary, 17 November 1931.
73. See MNA S1/428/30, Report on the Labour Conditions on the Estates.
74. C.A. Crosby, "A History of the Nyasaland Railways 1895-1935: A Study in Colonial Economic Development," Ph.D. History, Syracuse University, 1974.
75. See F.E. Sanderson, "Nyasaland Migrant Labour in

British Central Africa 1880-1939," M.A. Economic History, University of London, 1960. pp. 40-41. See also Boeder, op.cit

76. There is a large body of correspondence, between the colonial office and the Nyasaland government; in which the colonial office repeatedly urged the Nyasaland government to take measures to implement law reforms as stipulated in the ILO Geneva Conventions. See the correspondence and the Geneva Conventions on MNA S1/943/25; MNA S1/692II/29; MNA S1/692.29; MNA S1/862/31; for the role of humanitarian organizations in lobbying for African interest in Malawi. See, K. M. Mufuka, Missions and Politics in Malawi, Limestone Press, Kingston, Ontario, 1977.
77. There were rumours in the 1930s of a second "Chilembwe Rising" in Chiradzulu district. See MNA SOB/9/187, correspondence between Al Bruce Estate and Nyasaland Government.
78. For both the proposal by the colonial office for removal of penal sanctions see MNA S1/ 1132/30, Co. to Governor Thomas, 6 August 1930.
79. See MNA S1/1113/20, Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce to Chief Secretary, 5 December, 1930.
80. See MNA S1/1132/20, Governor Thomas to Colonial Office, 31, January, 1931. Governor Thomas actually withheld assent to the 'Employment of Natives Bill 1931', which made legal provisions for workmens compensation, medical care, and housing for African workers. This Bill was modelled on the Tanganyika, Native Employment Ordinance. That the Governor withheld assent to this Bill, see, Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1931. p. 57; - 1932, p. 28.
81. See Myambo, "The Shire Highlands plantations", p. 13
82. See MNA S1/1132.30, Governor Thomas to Co, 31, January 1931.
83. See R. Palmer, "The Nyasaland Tea Industry in the Era of International Tea Restrictions, 1933-1950 in J.A.H., vol. 26, 2-3, 1985, pp. 215-240. The Nyasaland Tea Industry had an "effective representation in London." p. 226.

84. See Boeder, op.cit., pp. 133-134.

85. A committee, composed of three settlers, Captain I.C. Ramsay, M.W.H. Timcke, Captain Evans, and Rev. W.P. Young (the principal of Overtoun Institute), chaired by Mr. A. Travers-Lacey, Director of Education, was formed at the request of Nyasa Planters Association. The committee was charged with the responsibility of examining the impact of labour migration on Africans and the conditions of work in the countries in which Malawian labour was employed.

86. See Report of the Committee on Emigrant, Zomba, 1935.

87. Ibid.

88. It need not be emphasized that one of the fundamental roles of missionaries was to facilitate both political domination and economic exploitation of African peoples. The religious preachings and teaching of the time emphasised obedience, docility, humility and acceptance of the established order. Africans were taught that christianity and idleness were incompatible. The protestant missionaries strongly emphasised strict adherence by their followers to sobriety, hard work and obedience. A good christian was one who abstained from alcohol. Those aspects of Africans culture considered detrimental to capitalism were attacked in the name of paganism. The Nyau Society was attacked because it kept people away from plantation wage labour. Polygamy was attacked because it restricted the mobility of female labour. The various missions that operated in the country were allowed to establish their bush schools on or near the estates. But the tolerance of religion was allowed in so far as it did not challenge white or settler dominance. The independent African churches were not allowed to operate on the settler estates, because African independent churches were believed to be disseminating ideologies detrimental to European hegemony. The European Missions were designed to be the "portal not to the church but to the consumer society; they produced expectations that fed villagers into the capitalist economy." See Linden with Linden, op.cit., p. 132. See also Mukuka, op.cit., pp. 17-23; Myambo, op.cit., p. 20-22; and for the role of religious ideology in capitalist economy, see also van Onselen, Chibaro. pp. 182-186.



89. See 'the Recommendations' in the Report of the Committee on Emigrant Labour, Zomba, 1935. By description the proposed system of labour registration was very similar to the notorious Kipande system in Kenya. Under the Kipande system it was compulsory for all adult male African workers in Kenya to wear a chain and a metal container around the neck. 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 employer, showing the employers name and signature, date and nature of employment, rate of wages last paid, rations and dates of discharge and conduct of worker. See Paul T. Zeleza, "Dependent Capitalism and The making of the Kenyan Working Class During the Colonial Period", Ph.D. History, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1982. p. 114. In addition to the labour registration similar to Kipande, the settlers in Malawi also proposed that all African adults should be registered so that their movements could be monitored easily. There was extensive correspondence between the Nyasaland Government and the Kenyan government, and between the Nyasaland government and the Rhodesian and South African government. The identity system proposed by the settler community was all but a duplicate copy of Kipande. For both, communication between the three colonial governments and description of the 'proposed identity system. See, MNA S1/943II/29.
90. In a despatch to the colonial office, the Acting Governor actually expressed his reservations about the proposed system of registration. He stated that "It will be a matter for further consideration whether, some less unpopular scheme can be evolved," see MNA S1/943II/29, Acting Governor Hall to colonial office, 11 May 1937. There were rumours in the 1930s in many parts of the southern province about an "uprising", see footnote 58 above. In addition there was an outbreak of riots in the central province in 1937 because of the collapse of tobacco prices (see chapter I). It was therefore essential that the colonial government had to be very cautious about what steps to take in dealing with Africans.
91. See MNA S1/943II/29, RCNPNA memorandum to Chief, Secretary, 20 March 1937.

92. See for example, The Fabian Colonial Bureau Research Series nos. 58, 59, 60 and 61.
93. MNA S1/943II/29, Colonial Office to Governor of Nyasaland, 20 July 1937.
94. See Nyasaland Annual Colonial Report 1937, p. 34. For details on the Labour Agreement see Boeder, op.cit., pp. 151-156.
95. See Nyasaland Annual Colonial Report, 1937, pp. 34-35.
96. See Annual Report of the Labour Branch of the Provincial Administration, 1938, p. 14. See also Table 2.1.
97. See MNA S1/322/35, Annual Report on South Nyasa District 1938.
98. See Sanderson, op.cit., pp. 40-41; Boeder, op.cit., pp. 158-159; see also MNA S1/250/37.
99. See MNA S1/96/37, Annual Report on Thyolo District 1938.
100. The first labour law reforms to be initiated by the labour branch were 'The Hours of Employment of Women Ordinance, 1938 and the Factories Ordinance; both of these Bills were enacted into law in 1939. The first ordinance prohibited the employment of women in factories at night, whereas the second, provided for safety and health measures for people employed in factories. See Annual Report from the Labour Branch 1939. pp. 12-14
101. See H.L. Duff, Nyasaland under the Foreign Office, Negro University Press, New York, 1969. p. 358. See also p. 357-363. Duff was an Acting Governor of Nyasaland in the early 1900s and his views clearly reflect the widely upheld belief in colonial circles: that it was the whiteman's mission to civilize the Africans.
102. Ibid, p. 350.
103. OTL, Chipeta with sub-chief Chimbeta and Councillors, Chimbeta Village, Thyolo, 26/6/84. OTL, Chipeta with Jim Bwanali, Gotha Estate Thyolo, 22/6/84. OTL, Chipeta Wincase Bandula, Chinsambo Estate, Mulanje,

15/6/84.

104. Cited in J.L. Pretorius.. "An introduction to the history of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in Malawi 1889-1914"; in B. Pachai ed. The Early History of Malawi, Longman, London, 1972: pp. 370-371.
105. As in footnote 103 above.
106. See Kandawire, Thangata: Forced Labour or Reciprocal Assistance, University of Malawi, Zomba, 1979, p. 79. See also MNA S2/1/24, The District Administration (Native) Ordinance, 1912.
107. See MNA S1/1550/25; MNA S1/692II/29.
108. OLT, Chipeta with Henderson Masikini, Nchima Estate, Thyolo, 28/6/84; Chipeta, with Sub-chief Kwetemule, Makwasa, Thyolo, 26/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Charles Matipwiri, Ruw Estate Mulanje, 16/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Yusuf Maulidi, Nasonia Estate, Thyolo, 23/6/84.
109. OTL, Chipeta, with Wincase Sandula, Chinsambo Estate; OTL, Chipeta, with Sub-chief Kwetemule, Makwasa, Thyolo, 26/6/84.
110. The subsequent paragraphs draw heavily from M.E. Page, "Malawians in the Great War and After, 1914-1925", Ph.D. History, Michigan State University, 1977; -- "The War of Thangata: Nyasaland and the East African Campaign, 1914-1918," in J.A.H. 19. 1, 1978, pp. 87-100; -- "The Great War and Chewa Society in Malawi", in Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 6, 2, April 1980 and C.A. Baker, "Civil Response to War: The Nyasaland Civil Service, 1914-1918, in Journal of African Studies, vol. 11, 1, Spring 1984.
111. Page, "The War of Thangata: Nyasaland and the East African Campaign, 1914-1918", p. 93.
112. G.W.T. Hodges, "African Manpower Statistics For the British Forces in East Africa, 1914-1918", in J.A.H., 19, 1, 1978, p. 107.
113. Between 1915 and 1916, wages for the Carrier Corps in some areas were temporarily raised to 10/- per month, whereas military personnel earned 21/4 per month. But by 1917, these wages had been reduced by unknown amounts. See, Page, "The War of Thangata", p. 91, p. 98.

114. OTL, Chipeta with Wincase Bandula, Chinsambo Estate, OTL, Chipeta with Jim Bwanali, Gotha Estates, see also Page, "The War of Thangata", pp. 89-90.
115. There was also widespread deception by the colonial government recruiters in order to entice people into the carrier corps and military service. This deception ultimately back fired and fueled alot of resentment and discontent among Africans. In the Southern Province for example, Africans were told that they were being recruited to pacify a tax rebellion by the Ngoni of Chimtunga. One suspects that the classical tactics of divide and rule were actively put to work during this period. However, once people realised that they were being enticed into an imperialist war or Nkondo Ya atsamunda resentment spread and so did desertions. See also, Page, "The War of Thangata", -- "The Great War and Chewa Society," George Shepperson, "The Military History of British Central Africa: A Review article", in The Rhodes Livingstone Journal, 26, December, 1959, pp. 23-33; see also H.W. Mhoni, "An Assessment of the Resistance and Banishment of Chimtunga Jere, 1914-1918", History Seminar, University of Malawi, 1973/1974; and OTL, Chipeta with Sapulayi Jere, Edingeni, Mimbelwa, 2/8/84.
116. Linden and Linden, Catholics, peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland, p. 107/
117. Page, "The War of Thangata", pp. 93-97.
118. Ibid, pp. 97-98; see also Hodges "African Manpower Statistics for the British Forces in East Africa", p. 109. The "Nyasaland KAR, which at its peak strength was 18,920, suffered 2,490 deaths or about 15% of its total strength. See Murray, A Handbook of Nyasaland, p. 271.
119. Linden and Linden, Catholics, peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland, p. 110 Baker, "Civil Response to War", pp. 24-30.
120. Gelfand, op.cit, p. 296.
121. Cited as in Page, "The War of Thangata", p. 93.
122. See G. Coleman, "The African population of Malawi: An Analysis of the census between 1901 and 1960" in

The Society of Malawi Journal, vol. 27, 1, 1974, p. 32. It may be added also that an estimated 2 percent of the entire adult male population perished during the war?

123. Population estimates in the period 1918 to 1920 do indicate a fall in the African population in Malawi from 1,227,422 in 1918 to 1,202,008 (a fall by 25,134). See Joel W. Gregory and Elias Mandala "Emigrant Labour From Malawi and Zambia, 1900-1945", paper presented to the Canadian Association of African Studies Conference, Montreal, May, 1985.
124. See MNA S1/489/20, Monthly Reports for Dowa, 1919/1920; MNA S1/525/2923, Annual Report, Central Province 1920/1921; See also Linden, op.cit., pp. 108-109.
125. The colonial authorities were overwhelmed by the intensity of the hysteria in which African societies had been plunged as a result of which, the colonial government was forced to perform an African "Fire Ritual" associated with major events in many African societies during the precolonial period. In precolonial Malawian societies fire rituals were symbolic of the end of one era and the beginning of another. The overwhelmed colonial administrators were forced to light-up fires on many mountain tops throughout the country in 1920, in an attempt to reassure Africans. For details see, S.S. Murray, A Handbook of Nyasaland, Zomba, 1922, pp. 271-278.
126. An attempt was made in 1921 to pass legislation to legalise conscription for work on road, bridges and other government projects. The settlers felt that this would deprive them of labour. The settlers forced the government to withdraw the bill. Consequently the government came to rely on the provisions of the District Administrators (Native) Ordinance, 1912. See Kandawire op.cit., pp. 79-80.
127. See MNA S2/38/20, L.S. Norman, Nkhonjeni Estate, to Assistant District Commissioner, Luchenza, 20 March, 1922.
128. See Sanderson, "Nyasaland Migrant Labour", p. 65
129. See Van Velsen, "Some Early Pressure Groups in Malawi", p. 386-393

130. The 1933 Forced Labour Ordinance derived from the Conventions and Recommendations of the ILO of 30 June, 1930. See, Colonial Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the people of Nyasaland, 1933, p. 48. The ILO Conventions can be found in MNA S1/629/29; and MNA S1/862/31. Under the ILO Conventions 'Forced Labour' was defined as all work or service which was exacted from any person under menace of any penalty and for which the said person had not offered himself voluntarily. See MNA S1/692/29. ILO Conventions: Forced Labour
131. See MNA S1/377/24; MNA S2/5/25; MNA S1/1365/24 and Van Velsen, op.cit., pp. 388-392.
132. See MNA S2/7/24; MNA S1/862/31.
133. OTL, Chipeta with E. Kabambe, Kasembereka Estate, Thyolo, 26/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Andrea Temosi, Tsazola Village, Mabuka, Mulanje, 17/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Rodrick Rajabu, Bondo Village, Mabuka, Mulanje, 18/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with David Stefane, Kwetemule Village, Changata, Thyolo, 21/6/84.
134. The 1937-38 unrest and rumours of a second Chilembwe Rising, was provoked by a number of factors such as the falling cotton and tobacco prices, restrictions imposed on independent growers and above all the hut tax abuses. See also MNA GOBG/187, correspondence between A.L. Bruce Estates and Chief Secretary, 1937-1939.

## CHAPTER TWO: PART III

Squatter Labour

Contract and compulsory labour were not the only systems for securing labour in Malawi during the colonial period. From the beginning of colonial rule settlers and expatriate companies had realised that the squatter system was one way of securing a pool of cheap labour thereby avoiding labour shortages. The growth of the squatter system accelerated in the early 1900s as competition for Malawian labour intensified. By the 1930s the squatter system had become the dominant mechanism for securing labour on settler and expatriate estates.

During the first decade of colonial rule squatters or residents were obliged to provide part-time labour to their landlords, either by working on the farms or transporting goods, for which they received wages. This system of labour coercion or 'forced labour' came to be popularly called thangata.<sup>1</sup> As we have tried to show in the preceding section, labour coercion became widespread and institutionalised in Malawi during the colonial period; but in terms of intensity and volume, labour coercion became more entrenched on the plantations. Consequently it was in this sector of the colonial economy that the term thangata came to be widely used. Thus on

the estates the term thangata encompassed both forced contract labour and labour tenancy.

Initially, the squatter community only comprised of indigenous Shire Highlands, but by the late 1890s unspecified number of Mozambicans fleeing from the Portuguese company rule came to Malawi and some were allowed to settle on the private estates in the Shire Highlands and the Lower Shire Valley.<sup>2</sup> This meant that more and more of settler and company land was being cultivated by squatters. Since squatters only provided part-time labour usually for one month, at least during the first decade of colonial rule, they tended to rely on their own production and thus gradually began to emerge as independent producers. Thus squatters were also beginning to pose a serious threat to settler production. Therefore, for settler production to survive and expand, it was essential to constrict and regulate independent squatter production and thereby begin gradually to transform squatters into wage labourers.

However, the intensified competition for Malawian labour which began in the late 1890's as a result of the rise of the mining industries of Southern Africa accentuated the pressures to legalise and institutionalise the squatter system. The under capitalised settlers and companies in Malawi were in danger of losing control over



the labour supply since they could not effectively compete with the mining industries of Southern Africa. The development of the squatter system underlines the fact that the undercapitalised settler and expatriate owned plantations could not operate fully fledged capitalist relations of production. Consequently, in addition to contract labour, settlers and expatriate companies in Malawi needed a semi-servile labour force based on quasi-feudal relations.

By 1904 legislation had been passed which legalised the squatter system. Under the provisions of the Lands (Native Locations) Ordinance of 1904, locations were to be created on private estates for the granting of allotments of 8 acres of land per every hut for which the landlords could levy an annual minimum rent of 4/- per hut on or before 31 March each year. For default the landlords were empowered to levy and raise money by the sale of the tenants crops or his goods and chattels or if a tenant remained in default for a period of one year he could forfeit his interest in land.

It is one thing to enact legislation and yet another to enforce it. For all that is known, the proposed locations on the private estates were never created; it must have dawned on the landlords that the more entrenched the squatter system became the higher the

probability of Africans regaining their land. In the meantime, however, since most landlords were in desperate need of labour, they began to induce African squatters to sign agreements either to be paying rent or to be employed by the landlord thereby earning a rebate on land rent. There were some landlords who simply demanded labour services in lieu of rent and there was also another group of landlords who openly encouraged share cropping or "Kaffir farming" in lieu of rent. For example, Bandanga estates and Nchima estates demanded no money rent, but required their squatters to engage for wage labour for a minimum period of three months each year.<sup>5</sup> The Zambezi Industrial Mission required 4/- yearly rent or one months unpaid labour. The BEAC and BCAC required squatters on their estates near Chiradzulu to pay 4/- annual rent or one month's work, but on their estates in Zomba and upper Shire the BEAC and BCAC allowed their tenants to grow at least one acre of tobacco or cotton each year. The ALC estates in Thyolo demanded 8/- annual rent or a months work.<sup>6</sup> The higher land rents tended to induce squatters to choose to work rather than pay cash, because money was generally difficult to raise granted that wages were very low. The multiplicity of the character of the conditions of tenure, for squatters, shows the complexities of the squatter system and the interpenetration of wage labour.

and labour tenancy. Both capitalist and precapitalist relations coexisted, and were sometimes combined within colonial capitalism in Malawi.

Initially only adult male squatters were required to work for the landlord, but when the government introduced plural taxation (hut, poll tax, and differential taxation) women were also drawn into the labour system. An intertwined set of relationships developed between the landlords and the colonial government. The landlord acted as tax collectors whereas the government reinforced labour coercion or thangata through tax demands and the labour certificates. Ideally squatters on the estates had to work one month in the wet season for taxes and another also in the wet season for the rebate on land rent. A month was reckoned at 30 days actual work but by various methods Africans were compelled to work considerably longer periods. For example, if a squatter did not complete the prescribed daily task no credit was given for the work done and more often than not, one had to work several days to make up for the day lost.<sup>8</sup>

If a landlord wanted to retain the services of the squatter beyond the one month for rent or rent rebate and the other for taxes and the Labour Certificate, all the landlord had to do was to withhold the Labour

Certificate and tax papers. It was not unusual for squatters to work for a total of six months each year to obtain an endorsed Labour Certificate, tax papers and earn the land rent rebate. Wages if paid were meager, and in cases wages were paid in kind either salt, cloth or tobacco leaves.<sup>9</sup> Since people without an endorsed Labour Certificate and tax papers were treated as tax defaulters, desertions proved to be a futile option for squatters. Africans resident on the estates had been put at the mercy of the settlers and expatriate companies with the full consent of the colonial government.

Conditions were particularly severe on the tobacco and cotton plantations. African residents were sometime abruptly called upon to report for work, especially during the planting or harvesting season even when such days were holidays. Non compliance with the call could result in the destruction of the tenants food crops or the systematic demolition of huts. Wives were at times held hostages to compel their husbands to turn up for work. Africans were also subjected to frequent beatings and harassment, by landlords, as a mechanism to compel them to work.<sup>10</sup> It is for this reason that the severity of thangata was most deeply felt in Zomba, Blantyre, Chiradzulu and Thyolo districts which were predominantly tobacco and cotton growing areas in the

first three decades of colonial rule.

The mobility of tenants and squatters was also severely restricted, and the matrilineal marriages were often a source of conflict between the landlords and their tenants. Departures by a male youth in the event of marriage or arrival of an individual for the same purpose could only be sanctioned by the landlord. Abrupt departures were sometimes regarded as desertions subject to eviction of close relatives.

Measures were also instituted to restrict squatters from rearing of livestock. Africans resident on the private estates were not allowed to keep livestock such as cattle, goats, sheep or pigs. The use of forest on private estates was also severely restricted. Africans were not allowed to hunt or collect firewood or cut poles from the estate lands. Some landlords actually charged a fee for any African resident who wanted to utilize the estate forest. What all these measures amounted to was the progressive narrowing of the productive base among the squatter population and the channelling of their labour power into the production of cash crops on settler and company plantations. In short, squatters were being converted into wage labourers without necessarily creating viable conditions for their reproduction as a working class.

One drastic outcome of the coercive labour system in the southern province of Malawi during the early decades of colonial rule, was a rapid decline in food production among squatters. There were serious food shortages of famine proportions reported in 1895, 1900, 1902, 1905, 1908 and 1911.<sup>11</sup> As nutritional standards deteriorated the people also became more vulnerable to diseases and epidemics such as measles and small pox, with frequent outbreaks in the southern province during this period. Outbreaks of small pox in 1899, 1900, 1904-1905, and 1908-1909 caused enormous hardships in the Shire Highlands.<sup>12</sup> As the living conditions for African squatters deteriorated there began a movement of squatters away from the private estates to crown land. Furthermore, some squatters were also induced to return to crown land by the new economic opportunities which were emerging there as a result of the expansion of commodity production, particularly cotton production. In short, there were a number of factors which accentuated the withdrawal of squatters from the private estates during this period, important among them were, squatter resistance to proletarianization because of the declining living conditions, and the expanding economic opportunities on crown land.

Once the settlers realised that the expansion of

commodity production on crown land threatened their control over the labour supply, they began to press the colonial government to take measures to curtail cotton production on crown land. By 1910, legislation had been enacted to control and regulate cotton production on crown land.<sup>13</sup>

A Native Foodstuffs Ordinance was also passed in 1912 to control the movement of food produced on crown land, thereby inhibiting the activities of African traders. These measures tended to induce Africans to return to the estates either as squatters or wage labourers. Furthermore, the withdrawal of most indigenous Shire Highlanders from the estates to crown land was also gradually leading to congestion on the land. This meant that the new immigrants from Mozambique had little choice but to settle on the private estates. The colonial government, which also wanted to preserve the unoccupied crown land with the hope of leasing it to the new settlers, began deliberately to encourage the settlement of Mozambicans on the private estates. The settlers who were in need of labour were only too eager to take advantage of the situation. By 1912, Governor Manning could report to the Colonial Office that:

The immigration of Anguru has solved this most serious problem and without the Anguru immigration, I am confident that the extension of the plantations in the Shire Highlands would not have been possible. No European would have ventured to have risked capital where labour

supply was existent when it was least required. The large majority of land owners have assured me that they are anxious to increase the number of Anguru on their estates for they consider these people as the backbone of our labour supply.<sup>14</sup>

The Mozambicans had fallen prey to a brutally exploitative production regime: the Shire Highlands plantations. To systematise the exploitation of Mozambicans the settlers and companies began to create villages based on ethnic affiliation.<sup>15</sup> This was intended to weaken the solidarity among the African population in their opposition to thangata. At the same time most settlers who were afraid of gradually losing the land to Africans did not sign any tenancy agreement with African squatters. This gave landlords the prerogative to eject Africans from the estates at any time. What the settlers and companies wanted was a servile squatter population.

In the meantime the settlers and expatriate companies began to standardize the conditions of residence for the squatters and tenants so that there was no inducement for African squatters or tenants to leave one estate for another. The responsibility for standardising the conditions of tenure on the estates fell on the individual district planters associations.<sup>16</sup> Measures to prevent Africans from rearing livestock were more forcefully implemented. Land for food production was also



severely limited, and heavier tasks of work were set for workers drawn from among squatters. This was also the period when settlers and companies were expanding their cotton and tobacco plantations: an estimated 36,000 acres of land on the estates were under cotton and tobacco cultivation by 1914-1915.<sup>17</sup> This meant that the demand for labour was on the increase.

The estates capitao were occasionally deployed to round up squatters for work. Frequently too children were also drawn into thangata labour. Cases of brutality and abuses of squatters and tenants were on the increase. Men who tried to desert or evade thangata labour had their food crops uprooted, houses demolished and wives taken hostages. Landlords also began to be more interventionist in the personal lives of squatters. It was not unusual, for instance, for landlords to preside over cases involving African squatters, and more often than not such dispensation of justice ended up in the administration of corporal punishment. Squatters who resisted or failed to comply with the demands of the landlord were guilty of misconduct and declared socially undesirables and ejected from the estates.<sup>18</sup>

Determined as ever, squatter protest against landlord despotism began to take more covert forms such as slowdown, shoddy workmanship, absenteeism and crop and

livestock sabotage. There is evidence to indicate that squatters deliberately ruined their landlords crops, particularly during the planting and harvesting season. Squatters also took the longest time, an average of 42 days, to complete the monthly ticket because of frequent absenteeism and slowdowns.<sup>19</sup> The existence and persistence of these forms of protest may be one clue to the rapid decline of settler cotton and tobacco production during the colonial period (see table 1.1 in chapter 1). It is an indication that settlers and corporate plantation owners had failed to achieve absolute control over the labour supply.

War conditions further accentuated African opposition to thangata, as more and more people who wanted to avoid military conscription began to migrate onto the estates where conditions were also becoming more severe. Popular opposition to thangata, conscription for the war, and other facets of colonial rule which facilitated the exploitation of Malawian labour finally galvanised the first nationalist crusade against British rule, which exploded into the Chilembwe Rising of 1915.<sup>20</sup> The Chilembwe Rising of 1915 had a wide popular base and had recruited among squatters and tenants, migrant workers, peasants and the emerging African petit-bourgeois. This broad based support for the Chilembwe Rising clearly

indicates that the colonial government and settler machinations to entrench divisions among the African population had failed to achieve the desired results. But in the midst of the war, the colonial authorities could not tolerate African insubordination. The Chilembwe Rising was ruthlessly crushed by the end of January 1915.

In the aftermath of the Chilembwe Rising and the Commission of Inquiry which followed, the colonial government could no longer ignore the deep rooted African opposition to settler despotism, land alienation and the widespread labour abuses that coloured the labour system in the country. In 1917, legislative measures were taken to abolish 'labour tenancy' and thangata. Under the provisions of the Native Rents (Private Estates) Ordinance 1917, Africans who had lived on the estates for more than 20 years were no longer required to pay land rent while those who had been on the estates for less than 20 years had to pay an annual land rent. There was to be no compulsion to induce residents or squatters to work for the landlord. <sup>21</sup> On paper this meant that the Africans had gradually begun to win back their rights in land, at least for those people who had been on the estates for more than 20 years. The long held suspicion by the landlords of 'gradually giving back the land to Africans' was beginning to materialize. This laid the basis for settler

opposition to the implementation of the ordinance. The period after 1917 was to witness a series of land commissions in an attempt to resolve the growing conflict over land between settlers and Africans.

The real problem with the 1917 Native Rents (Private Estates) Ordinance, however, was that the stated distinction between residents who had been on the estates for 20 years and those who had not was difficult to ascertain. Most estate owners had no records of the length of residence of the African population on the estates. Moreover the 1917 Ordinance did not guarantee that in the event of African residents failing to pay rents, the landlords would not induce Africans to render labour instead. All these obvious and unresolved ambiguities in the ordinance, meant that the landlords, who were always prone to labour shortages, would take advantage of the loopholes in the law to perpetuate thangata.

It need not be emphasised that the war conditions tended to reinforce the pressure for the continuation of thangata on the plantations. The increased demand for food and materials for the military forces and the carrier corps meant that the requirements for labour on the plantations was also on the increase. The settlers and expatriate companies were only too eager

to take advantage of the governments' demand for food for military forces and carrier corps to extend and intensify the thangata labour system.<sup>23</sup> Not surprising perhaps, there was no attempt by the colonial government to enforce the provisions of the Native Rents (private estates) Ordinance of 1917. Evidence of the intensification of thangata is not hard to find. It was reported from Mwanza district (formerly West Shire district) for instance, that the Africans resident on the estates were still compelled to work for the landlords for longer periods than before.<sup>24</sup> Oral traditions are unanimous that the abuses associated with squatting and conditions of tenure on certain estates went unabated in the aftermath of the 1917 Native Rents (private estates) Ordinance.<sup>25</sup>

There are a number of factors that account for the deteriorating conditions of squatters in the aftermath of the war. First, increased immigration from Mozambique into Malawi led to land congestion in crown land areas in the southern province. This meant that the land hungry immigrants and indigenous Malawians flocked to the private estates to gain access to the land. Before the war there were estimated 80,000 squatters in the southern province, but by the early 1920s, the total squatter population had risen to around 150,000.<sup>26</sup> The real problem however, lay

in the fact that this movement of people from crown land areas to the estates was occurring at a time when many settlers and expatriate companies were rapidly expanding and diversifying their cash crop production patterns to take advantage of the post-war boom in commodity prices. This meant that many settlers and expatriate companies were beginning to regard the squatter system as undesirable and some landlords were increasingly becoming attracted to making heavier labour demands from squatters. Consequently the plots for squatters' cultivation were severely limited.

Finally, the squatter system became less attractive to the settlers and companies after the government abolished the Labour Certificate and the differential taxation system in 1920. This had deprived settlers and companies of some of the major legal mechanisms which buttressed labour coercion and labour tenancy. As a result of all these factors, many settlers and companies increasingly began to rely on despotic measures, such as abrupt eviction, to oblige squatters to work for longer periods. By the early 1920s the work period for squatters on settler farms amounted to a minimum period of six months. It need not be stressed that on the majority of estates, squatters were only accepted as long as they were also employees of the

landlord.<sup>27</sup> The period 1918-1921, therefore, witnessed wholesale eviction of squatters who resisted to work for longer periods.<sup>28</sup> Thus there began once again a movement of squatters from the private estates to the over-crowded crown land areas in the southern province.

The early 1920s also witnessed an upsurge in African discontent about land shortages, the conditions of squatters on the private estate and other facets of colonial rule. The growing tide of African discontent found expression in the formation of Native Associations in many parts of the country.<sup>29</sup> These Native Associations were to play a central role in articulating African grievances, and as the 1920s progressed the Native Associations were also becoming increasingly vocal in championing African interests.

The collapse of commodity prices in the period 1921 to 1923 induced the settlers to extend the squatter system to the central province at least by the mid 1920s. The real problem however lay in the fact that this was also a period when peasant production was beginning to expand both in the Central and Southern province. Consequently it became essential for the settlers to press the government to take measures to curb independent cash crop production on crown land. Settler pressure on the colonial government resulted in a series of legislative

measures to eradicate African participation in the distributive trade, and more significantly in the creation of the Native Tobacco Board (NTB) in 1926.<sup>30</sup> The NTB was empowered to control and regulate tobacco production on crown land.

Between 1926 and 1938 the NTB embarked on an orchestrated programme to eradicate tobacco marketing facilities, to control the number of tobacco growers and the sizes of tobacco plots on crown land. As noted in chapter one above, after 1926 the sizes of tobacco plots on crown land was limited to a maximum of one acre per grower, and the number of markets in the central province had been reduced from 16 in 1926 to only 3 by 1934. In the southern province, no markets were provided on crown land. This was designed to induce the labour supply to the plantations: the employers were pushing for greater proletarianization.

Among the squatters these changes were not uniform, because settler and corporate plantations were developing at different rates. Those plantations owners who had the capital for expansion tended to favour the transformation of squatters into wage labourers while the undercapitalised enterprises continued to find that the squatter system worked to their economic advantages. Consequently, the short recovery in commodity prices



between 1924 and 1927, saw a rapid decline in the squatter system: the total squatter population was reduced from 155,286 in 1925 to about 130,000 by 1928.<sup>31</sup> It seems settlers and expatriate companies who were always fearful of giving back the land to Africans were determined to control the number of squatters on the estates and also to remove any hopes among squatters that they had any land rights.

The collapse of tobacco prices in 1928, further threatened the very existence of settler production. This also reinforced the pressures to entrench the squatter system because settler farmers and companies tended to encourage squatting and labour tenancy during period of low commodity prices, whereas periods of higher commodity prices were concomittant with the drive for greater proletarianization.<sup>32</sup> Not surprisingly perhaps, legislation was passed in September 1928 repealing the 1904 Native Locations Ordinance of 1904 and the Native Rents (private estates) Ordinance of 1917. Under the provisions of the Natives on Private Estates Ordinance, 1928, the landlords were required to grant each African resident family a site to build a house, sufficient land to grow food for subsistence and access to underdeveloped land for building materials for fuelwood. In return African residents were either to pay rent for a period of

five years after which the amount of land rent would be revised or to elect to work for wages for their landlords for a period of not less than six months each year in order to qualify for a rebate in rent. In the event of the landlord failing to offer work to the resident or 'tenant' who chose to work, the landlords were required to give the resident facilities to grow cash crops which, if bought by the landlord at the obtaining market prices, would earn a resident a rebate on land rent. This ordinance also made provisions for landlords to eject up to 1/10 of the squatter population every five years if and when deemed necessary.

The Natives on Private Estates Ordinance, 1928 virtually eliminated the privileges some Africans resident on the estates had gained in 1917. In as far as the squatter system was concerned, the settlers and companies had gained most of what they had strived for, namely a guaranteed cheap labour pool, almost under servile conditions, share cropping, and legal safeguards to control the number of squatters on the estates. This ordinance laid the basis for the heightened and intensified conflict between Africans and settlers and companies in the years ahead.

It was to be expected that as the Great Depression set in, after 1929, and the land pressure

intensified on crown land in the southern province,<sup>34</sup> the settlers and expatriate companies and land hungry Africans would, seek salvation in the squatter system. Unfortunately the impact of the Depression was so severe that most settlers actually abandoned the land and left the country altogether. In some areas like the Bwanje Valley, African squatters on abandoned estates actually regained the land. The real problem, however, remained in the Shire Highlands and on some estates in the central province. In these areas the expatriate companies and the large landholders were able to extend and expand the squatter system. The squatter population rose from 132,871 in 1931 to 173,000 by 1945, and squatters occupied 905,780 acres of land out of the 1,207 million acres held by settlers and companies.<sup>36</sup> During the period 1928 to 1940, share cropping became the dominant feature of the squatter systems,<sup>36</sup> and the possibility of settlers and companies giving back the land to Africans had become more apparent than ever before.

Land hungry peasants from the southern province were actively encouraged to flock to the private estates in the central province.<sup>37</sup> This category of squatters were among the most exploited Africans during this period. On the estates these squatters were allocated land specifically for cash crop production, received seeds,

farming implements and food on loan from the landlords, on promise of selling their entire crop to the landlord. Although by law the prices paid for the squatters' crops were to be the ruling market prices, landlords nearly always underpaid the squatters. The landlords also overcharged the squatters for the food and farming implements obtained on loan. It was "frequently asserted that the estate owner made a good profit on these advances when he purchased his tenants (squatters) tobacco." <sup>38</sup> It was also not unusual to keep the squatters waiting several <sup>39</sup> months for payment for their crops.

Most squatters during this period, 1928 to 1939, ended up in a circle of indebtedness. This chronic indebtedness also tended to force the squatters and their families to engage in wage labour on a casual basis to <sup>40</sup> earn a supplementary income. Thus both precapitalist and capitalist relations were still being combined within the squatter system during this period. As for the living conditions of squatters, it was reported that squatters lived in 'temporary grass shacks, lacking sanitation,' <sup>41</sup> inferior to the homes in the villages on crown land.

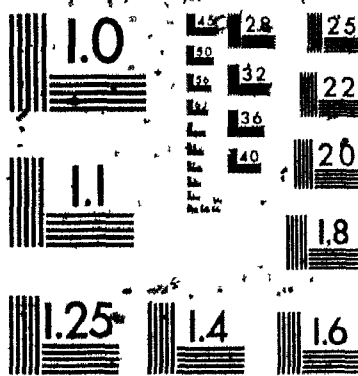
The wasteful usage of resources during this period need not be over-emphasised. It was stated that "tenant (squatters) growers on European estates used no fertilizers, not even compost manure, as many of them do

not earn enough money to afford the necessary fertilizers or apply any crop rotation. The owners are cropping their fields to extinction and spreading ruin." <sup>42</sup> This ecological decline was also accompanied by falling yields, and increasingly squatters found their continued stay on the estates economically unattractive. The squatter population was caught up in a precarious situation, because withdrawing from the estates to the over-crowded crown land areas in the southern province was an equally unattractive option, while staying on the estates did not offer any obvious social and economic gains. A few people escaped from such a predicament by migrating to the emerging towns within the country and further south to the mining centres of southern Africa in search of wage employment. This outward flow of manpower from the centres of settler and company agricultural production threatened the very hegemony of settlers. The growing social and economic crisis for squatters had sown the seeds of rural discontent <sup>43</sup> that ultimately undermined and buried colonial rule.

It is tempting to conclude therefore that the changing social and economic conditions of squatters were directly related to the overall economic interests of the settlers and expatriate companies. Periods of rapid expansion in settler agriculture were concomitant with the

tendency by settlers and expatriate firms to transform squatters into wage labourers whereas periods of contracting settler production saw the expansion of share-cropping. The squatter system and thangata (forced labour) evolved as an aspect of capitalism during the era of primitive capital accumulation by settlers and expatriate firms. As long as plantation owners or commercial enterprises could not afford to operate fully fledged capitalist relations of production they had to resort to other mechanisms to obtain labour for their labour intensive operations. Consequently the settlers and expatriate firms, through the manipulation of the colonial state apparatus and the use of the squatter system, managed to create a semi-servile labour force, almost feudal in nature. From the early 1890s, the settlers and expatriate firms had realized that the squatter system was one way of maintaining a pool of cheap labour in a regional labour market that was generally very competitive.

# 3



**MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART**  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS  
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a  
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

# FOOTNOTES

1. The original squatters on the alienated land were the indigenous Shire Highlanders. Under the terms of agreement between H. H. Johnston the settlers and companies, the Africans inhabiting the land were not to be disturbed (this came to be known as the non-disturbance clause). However, as early as 1891, once the settlers found voluntary contract labour difficult to obtain, they began to compel the Africans resident on the alienated land to work for them on pain of eviction. See also Kandawire, Thangata, p. 3, pp. 10-11; Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, pp. 101-103. Oral traditions are unanimous on the definition of thangata as forced labour during the colonial period. See OTL, Chipeta with sub-chief Chimbeta and councillors, Chimbeta Village, Thyolo, 26/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with sub-chief Kwetemule, Makwasa, Thyolo, 28/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Motiwa Suwedi, Lauderdale Estate, Mulanje, 18/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Wincase Bandula, Chinsambo Estate, Mulanje, 15/6/84.
2. It has become almost conventional to label all people who emigrated from Mozambique into Malawi as Lomwe, or Nguru. This need not be so: people who emigrated from Mozambique into Malawi were composed of various nationalities such as Lomwe, Sena, Yao, Chikunda and Nyanja or Man'ganja. This was widely attested to in the oral interviews conducted as part of the research for this study. Consequently in this study we will call all these emigrants as Mozambicans. See also E.C. Mandala, op.cit., Kandawire Ibid., p. 14, p. 25. The only detailed study to account for the large scale emigration of Mozambicans from their homeland into Malawi is Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "Tawani, Machemberoi: Forced cotton and rice growing on the Zambezi" in J.A.H., vol. 19, 2, 1978, pp. 239-263; and Colonialism and Capitalism in Mozambique, Heinemann, London, 1980, see especially chapter 4. The push factors would seem to have been the brutality associated with company rule in Mozambique.
3. See Kandawire, op.cit., p. 15.
4. Pachai, Land and Politics, p. 95
5. OTL, Chipeta, with E. Kabambe, Kasembereka Estate,



Thyolo, 26/6/84; OTL Chipeta with Benisi Eosiko, Thyolo Highlands Tea Estates, Thyolo, 21/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with S.R. Gatoma, Namingomba Estate, Thyolo, 29/6/84; OTL Chipeta, with Suwangeti M'male, Minimini Estate, Mulange, 16/6/84; Henderson John Masikini, Nchima Tea Estate, 28/6/84.

6. See Vaughan, "Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi", p. 169. See also MNA com-63-3/51 Memorandum of Agreement made and entered into between the BCAC Ltd. and the headmen and people residing on the lands belonging to the said company, 12 June 1912. In some cases, one month's work for the landlord earned the squatter, a landlord rebate and the annual government tax. As a general rule, it may be said that periods of high commodity prices were concomitant of increased labour demands from squatters while periods of falling commodity prices also witnessed the expansion of share cropping.
7. These have been discussed in chapter one above.
8. As in footnote 5 above. See also MNA com 6-2/1/2.
9. OTL, Chipeta, with David Stefano, Kwetemule Village Thyolo, 21/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Biswick Khulambe, Naming'ombwa Estate Thyolo, 29/6/84; OTL Chipeta with Essau Kamutu, Kasembereka Estate, Thyolo, 26/6/84. OTL Chipeta with Andrea Temosi, Tsazola Village, Mabuka, Mulange, 19/6/84; see also Vaughan, "Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi," p. 173; Pachai, Land and Politics, p. 102.
10. Evidence on this has been thoroughly documented for in Pachai, Ibid., p. 100-103. The severity of conditions for squatters during this period was largely due to the expansion in cotton production. An estimated 20,000 acres of land were under cotton, coffee and tobacco by 1908-1910.
11. See M.E. Vaughan, "Food Production and Family Labour in Southern Malawi. The Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley in the early colonial period" in J.A.H., vol. 23, 3, 1982, p. 359. It may be added that there were also food shortages of famine proportions in 1912, 1913/1914, 1916-1920, 1923-1924. The most severely affected people by these chronic food shortages were the squatters.
12. See Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers, pp. 290-291, and

Vaughan, "Food Production and Family Labour in Southern Malawi", p. 358. See also Nyasaland Annual Colonial Report for 1909-1910, p. 15. There was another severe outbreak of smallpox in 1916-1917.

13. These have been discussed in chapter one above.
14. See CO/525/44 Governor Manning to Colonial Office, 2 October, 1912. See also Thomas Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration into Nyasaland", 1892-1914, in Macdonald, ed., From Nyasaland to Malawi, pp. 108-123.
15. See MNA Blantyre District Notebook, Vol. II, 'Hut Tax Register for Blantyre and East Africa Company Estate Showing the tribal Organization of Villages on this estate'. It seems this practice was widespread on the estates of the Shire Highlands. There was frequent and almost unprovoked reference to this practice by landlords in the oral interviews as listed in footnotes 1, 5, and 9.
16. See Myambo, "The Shire Highlands Plantations", pp. 69-70.
17. See S.S. Murray, A Handbook of Nyasaland, Government printer, Zomba, 1932, pp. 256-258. See also Murray, A Handbook of Nyasaland, pp. 256-257.
18. See MNA COM-6-2/1/2.
19. The widespread sabotage tactics were; the breaking of the roots of tobacco seedlings during the planting season; unselective harvesting of bad and good leaf together, and deliberate spillage of cotton lint, etc. See OTL, Chipeta, with Suwangeti Mmale, Minimini, OTL, Chipeta with Moya Chitengu, Minimini, OTL, Chipeta with John Kusunga, Namingomba Tea Estate, 29/6/84; and OTL Chipeta with, Jailosi Machika, Ruu Estates, Mulanje, 15/6/84. See also MNA S1/428/27 the Labour Question.
20. For more details on the Chilembwe Rising, see George Shepperson and Thomas Price, Independent African; Rotberg, ed., Strike a Blow and Die, and Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Native Rising 1915, Zomba, 1916, see also MNA COM-6/3/3/1; MNA SOA 2/4/15; MNA COM-6-1/1/2; and MNA COM-6-1/1/1.
21. See Kandawire, op.cit., p. 17.

22. See for example, Nyasaland Government, Report of the Commission to Enquire into and Report upon Certain Matters Connected with the Occupation of Land in Nyasaland Protectorate, 1920. (hereafter, The Land Commission Report, 1921.); The East African Commission Report 1925; and The Nyasaland Protectorate Legislative Council. "The position of Natives on Private Estates: Proceedings of the Select Committee of the Whole Council Appointed to Consider and Report on What Legislation if any, is required to ensure the fullest possible agriculture development of the protectorate, 1933 and The land Commission Report, 1946.
  
23. The colonial government through the Agriculture Department, required that all the plantations plant 1/3 of their land, under cultivation, to maize, as part of the war effort. See, C.A. Baker, "Civil Response to War: The Nyasaland Civil Service, 1914-1918", in Journal of African Studies, vol. 11, 1, Spring 1984, p. 29.
  
24. MNA West Shire District Notebook, vol. II, 1913-1919. In a district labour census in 1918-1919 the majority of people in the West Shire district described themselves as labourers on the estates. The Zomba district report for 1922/1923 reported that all landlords in the district ignored the 1917 Ordinance, and still forced squatters to work. See MNA NS4/1/1.
  
25. In the oral traditions thangata labour is widely associated with extreme brutality and exploitation: "It was work without any benefit". In some cases some informants define conditions under thangata labour as synonymous with slavery. Ukapolo is the term widely used to describe thangata labour during the colonial period. See OTL, Chipeta with Jim Bwahali and Samson Galima, Gotha Estate Thyolo, 22/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with sub-chief Chimbeta and councillors, Chimbeta Village, 25/6/84, OTL Chipeta with Chalowe Mbewe, and others. Nchima Estate, 26/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Bitton Mahomed Chibwana, Sikoya Village, Chikumbu, Mulanje, 19/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Rodric Rajabu, Bondo, Village, Mabuka, Mulanje, 17/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Dawson Malukuta, Minimini Estate, Mulanje.
  
26. Estimates based on 1921 population census survey, see MNA S2/23/25. The immigration of Mozambicans into

southern Malawi continued until the mid 1940s. By 1945 about 379,638 people from Mozambique had settled in Southern Malawi. See Bruce Fetter, "Malawi; Everybody's Hinterland" in African Studies Review, vol. 25, 2/3, June/September, 1982, p.82, see also, G.Coleman, "The African Population of Malawi", pp. 37-39.

27. See also Pachai, Land and Politics, p. 109.
28. See MNA NS 3/1/1, Report by provincial commissioner, southern province, 1925/1926. Unfortunately the Report does not indicate the number of squatters who were evicted and those that remained on the estates.
29. See Pachai, Land and Politics, p.111; Van Velsen, "some Early pressure groups in Malawi", pp. 377-379; see also, Roger Tangri, "Inter-War Native Associations and the formation of the Nyasaland African Congress," in Trans-African Journal of History, 1, 1, 1971, pp. 84-102.
30. These have been discussed in chapter one above. See also Martin Chanock, "the New Men Revisited: An Essay on the development of political consciousness in colonial Malawi in R.J. Macdonald, ed. From Nyasaland to Malawi, pp. 246-247.
31. For the 1925 figures, see Kandawire, Thangata, p. 25. and for the 1928 estimates, see MNA SI/428/27, the Labour Question.
32. Studies of plantation Agriculture elsewhere do indicate a similar trend. See for example, George L. Beckford, Persistence Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 173-174. See also, R.M.A. Van Zwanenberg, Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya 1919-1939, EAPB, Nairobi, 1975, pp. 210-274.
33. See Kandawire, Thangata, p. 20-21; Pachai, Land and Politics, pp. 118-119. It was also during this period that the colonial government seriously began to contemplate acquiring land to resettle some of the squatters being ejected from the private estates.
34. By the late 1920s, some districts in the southern province notably Chiradzulu had a population density of about 239 persons to the square mile, Thyolo district had a population density of 194 people to

the square mile and Mulanje about 190 persons per square mile. See Fetter, "Malawi: Everybody's Hinterland," p. 86; See also MNA A/3/2/140.

35. See MNA S2/23/25; Nyasaland Government, The Nyasaland Protectorate Report on the Census of 1945, Zomba, 1946, p. 16. See also The Land Commission Report, 1946.
36. See McCracken, "Planter, peasant and the colonial state", p.180; See also Palmer, "White Farmers in Malawi", pp. 237-238. Palmer, however, is erroneous in dating the emergence of the share-cropping system in Malawi to the inter-war period. Share cropping had been part of the squatter system since the early 1900s.
37. An estimated 10,000-15,000 people moved from the Southern to the Central province, see MNA S1/250/37; MNA LAB4 II. McCracken calls this category of squatters as visiting tenants! This may be a very misleading classification because many of these so called "visiting tenants" actually resided on the private estates for long periods, in cases generations. This practice was not only confined to the central province; many estates in the southern province had several thousands of unregistered squatters. These squatters were usually the first to be evicted. The best source of information on this category of squatters in the southern province is on MNA S1/428/27, R.H. Murray's Report on the labour Question. See also MNA COM-7/2/3/1; and MNA COM-7/2/1/1.
38. Cited as in McCracken, "planters, peasants and the colonial state", p. 186, see also, Rangeley, "A brief history of the tobacco industry, part 2."
39. See MNA COM-7/2/2; and MNA GOB G/187.
40. See MNA COM-7/2 3/1; Evidence of T.W. Bradshaw, D.W. K. MacPherson, and R.M. Antill to the Tobacco commission. Some squatters also hired temporary or casual labour to work on their plots.
41. See MNA COM-7/2/3/1, Evidence of D.W.H. Watson to the tobacco commission, see also MNA S1/428/27, Murray's Report.
42. See MNA NN1/3/9, R.M. Antill, Report on the tobacco

industry, 7 July, 1938. See also MNA A6/1/45; and MNA NSB 3/2/1 - Reports on the dark-fired tobacco industry.

43. By the late 1930s, rural discontent was already mounting; incidents of conflict between land owners and squatters were on the increase. In 1937 for example, trouble broke out on the A.L. Bruce estates at Magomero, because squatters in search of a better price had sold their tobacco to another European, see MNA GOB 9/187. In the same year, the B.C.A.C. wanted to evict 1,200 squatters because of non payment of land rent. See Pachai, land and Politics, p. 131.

## CHAPTER TWO: PART IV

Urban Labour

The absence of any major industrial undertaking outside of agricultural processing in Malawi, in the period 1891-1939, precluded rapid urbanization like the one experienced in South Africa, Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia. However, as in many other colonies, in Malawi, the export based cashcrop economy gave rise to a few urban centres which were needed to service the export and import trade. These urban centres grew as administrative and commercial centres and centres of the transport and communication network geared to the needs of the export-oriented colonial economy. Consequently the core of the labour force in these colonial towns consisted of government employees, railway workers, employees in the commercial firms and mission stations. Thus until the late 1940s, urban centres in Malawi provided few employment opportunities, compared to urban centres elsewhere.

The settler and expatriate plantations remained the main centres of employment and it was in this sector, rather than in the urban centres, that the dominant patterns of labour relations were derived. As service centres, rather than industrial centres, the process of labour stabilization in the early colonial towns was

generally slow. The majority of African workers in these towns were considered to be temporary migrants for whom no effort was made to provide basic social infrastructure essential for a stabilized labour force. Consequently the reproduction of the labour force was carried out and borne by the rural peasant sector. This meant that women's agricultural production in the rural areas increasingly became a crucial factor for the expansion of colonial capitalism.

By producing food and supporting the family, women subsidized their husbands' cash incomes. This enabled the employers to pay low wages to the workers and maintain a cheap labour force in order to maximise profits. In addition, women's labour within the peasant sector was mobilized for cash crop production on which the colonial state depended very heavily. The expansion of commodity production in the peasant sector in the face of a rapid withdrawal of male labour also tended to create the basis for female participation in the local wage labour market on a seasonal basis. By 1927-1928, the rate of male absenteeism in rural areas ranged between 10<sup>2</sup> percent and 65 percent, and in cases up to 75 percent.

It was estimated that the household productive capacity<sup>3</sup> contracted by 30 percent when the husband was away. This meant that women were drawn into wage labour on a casual



basis in order to sustain the levels of subsistence in the face of growing poverty. Consequently women's participation in regular wage employment, particularly in urban areas remained fairly insignificant during this period. Of the 4,687 women reported to be on regular or permanent jobs in 1928, only 155 were skilled workers, as teachers and hospital nurses, and 294 were domestic servants employed in the urban areas of Limbe, Zomba, and Blantyre. The remainder of 4,228 were employed on the plantations.

In the period 1891 to 1939, the pattern of employment in the urban centres remained fairly unaltered. Mission education enabled a number of Malawians to find jobs in the government services and commercial firms. By 1905, most subordinate posts in the civil service, such as clerks, typist, telegraphist and mechanics had been filled by Malawians as were many similar jobs in the trading companies. Like in many other African colonies in Africa, in Malawi, Europeans occupied the most skilled jobs, Asians, the intermediary, and Africans were at the bottom. In the Nyasaland Railways for instance, all management post were held by Europeans, and nearly all the supervisory jobs were in Asian hands. The least paying jobs were done by Africans. This racial segmentation in occupation also reinforced the racial division within

colonial society and tended to pre-empt the possibility of solidarity within the wage labour force.

It was to be expected also that the residential distribution of population in the urban areas was to be determined by race. The small European population lived separately in well serviced neighbourhoods, and Asians were also confined to their own wards, usually around the trading centres. People of mixed race were usually grouped together with Asians. Africans lived in slums or shanty compounds. The racial divisions of colonial society were more rigidly institutionalised in the main urban areas of Blantyre, Limbe, Zomba, and Mangochi (formerly Fort Johnston) than in rural centres. But even in some rural towns like Livingstonia mission, at Khondowe, in northern Malawi, Europeans and Africans lived separately. This was also a general pattern followed by all missionaries: the paternalism associated with colonialism was also widely upheld by the colonial missionaries.

As early as 1899, Blantyre township with a total of 138 Europeans, 1,600 resident African workers and several dozens Asian workers and traders had been demarcated into racially exclusive residential areas. A similar urban residential policy was followed in Zomba and Mangochi townships. Since Africans were never regarded

as permanent residents of the urban centres during this period, sustained efforts were made by the colonial government authorities to control and regulate the influx of Africans into towns and to monitor their employment. The underlying motive was to ensure that Africans in towns were only there as temporary labourers. This was also an attempt by the colonial authorities to ensure that urban areas did not act as a haven for surplus labour while the plantations were plagued by chronic labour shortages.

Although such urban policies were largely founded on economic premises, prejudiced social ideologies, so widely propagated during the colonial period, also tended to reinforce the pressures for influx controls. Africans in urban areas were frequently treated disdainfully and held up to suspicion. As early as 1897; the European residents of Blantyre township for instance 'complained that the sanitary conditions of the township were poor, largely because there was little check on the great numbers of tenga-tenga that came and passed through the township, and the Africans living only a few miles outside the township.' The European residents of Blantyre also complained about "African drinking habits", while the colonial administration "feared that the consumption of spiritous liquor by a people unused to such strong alcohol might cause deleterious effects on the

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Africans." The prejudices and paternalism in these assumptions are obvious. But the control over the distribution of liquor was also designed to assist employers in maximising the efficiency of African labour: a sober labour force was what they needed. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that over and above the labour passes, and labour certificates introduced in 1894,<sup>10</sup> a Liquor Ordinance was passed in 1904 to prohibit the sale of alcoholic spirits to Africans.

All these regulations, the labour passes and labour certificates combined with the control of the distribution of alcohol were designed to monitor labour utilization, and the flow of labour between districts. The labour passes and labour certificates enabled the colonial authorities to eliminate the unemployed from the towns and channel them to settler farms and plantations. It may be for this reason also that in the southern province extra-territorial labour recruitment was only permitted in towns. It was a conscious effort by the colonial authorities to get rid of the 'unwanted Africans' from towns. However, the high demand for casual labour, from the transport and construction firms, during the early decades of colonial rule made it difficult for these regulations to be successfully enforced. The lack of housing, the need for cheap labour and the possibility of

labour shortages tended to undermine the effectiveness of urban influx regulations. Gradually African Squatter<sup>11</sup> locations began to emerge in and around the townships.

The policy of controlling the influx of Africans into the urban areas was vigorously enforced after 1908. The completion of the railway in 1908 meant that large numbers of tenga-tenga were laid off. This pushed an increasing number of people onto the urban labour market where jobs were no longer readily available. Second, the situation was further exacerbated by the suspension of labour recruitment for the mining industries, which meant that increasingly people who could not withstand the pressures in the rural economies, would migrate to towns within the country. Finally, as settlers and expatriate firms began to expand their plantations, an increasing number of squatters were being thrown off the land, and such people also began migrating to towns to swell the ranks of the unemployed and underpaid. All these factors presented serious problems for the colonial government.

Not surprisingly, legislation was passed in 1909 to buttress the labour pass and labour certificate system.

Beginning in 1909, all Africans on regular employment were mandatorily required to possess an Employment Book in which the possessor's character, period of service, cause for leaving the job, wages and address were recorded. By law

employers were not allowed to engage any African, for a permanent job who did not possess the Employment Book. In the case of a youth or an adult seeking appointment for the first time, an application had to be made for an Employment Book to the District Commissioner of the applicants' original abode before they could be employed.<sup>12</sup>

These regulations were designed to restrict the mobility of Africans between rural areas and urban areas. Since the colonial authorities controlled the distribution of Employment Books, they could effectively determine the mobility of Africans between town and countryside. These regulations also enabled the colonial authorities to ensure that the unemployed and unwanted Africans were easily identified and removed from the urban centres and re-directed to the crown land areas and settler farms where labour was required.

The abuses of labour associated with such a system of control needs no special emphasis. If an employer wanted to retain a worker for an indefinite period all they had to do was to withhold the endorsement of the Employment Book, which was necessary to show that the worker had been lawfully discharged. In this respect, the Employment Books and Labour Certificate tended to restrict the African workers freedom to leave their work and change employers. Since it was only non-African

employers who were legally allowed to sign or make endorsement in the Employment Books, and Labour Certificate, this meant that the movement of African workers in towns was effectively monitored by the authorities. The Asian and European employers were assured of a cheap labour force.

The most naked abuses of urban labour were experienced by domestic servants who by 1929 numbered 5735.<sup>13</sup> Some employers had the tendency of deploying a worker on numerous jobs simultaneously without corresponding adjustment in wages commensurate with the increased volume of work. It was a wide spread practice among certain employers, for instance, to engage an African worker as a watchman while at the same time utilizing the same worker as a kitchen servant or gardener during the day without corresponding increases in wages.<sup>14</sup> Non compliance by the workers could earn them a 'bad character' on grounds of insubordination.<sup>15</sup> In this respect Employment Books tended to entrench servile labour relations. In addition, Employment Books also led to the standardization of low wages, because it became almost impossible for a worker to bargain with a new employer for a wage that was higher than the wage rates recorded in the book.

This system of labour control also tended to

reinforce the structure of a low wage economy and deplorable living conditions. The conditions of urban workers began deteriorating rapidly during the first world war and after. As the supply of commodities dwindled during the war, consumer prices also began rising rapidly. Food prices rose almost three-fold between 1914 and 1920. In the towns of Zomba, Blantyre and Limbe, for example, chicken which cost six pence in 1914, sold for  $\frac{1}{6}$  in 1920; and maize grain which was sold at 1 d per 17 lb tin in 1914 could fetch up to 3 d for the same quantities in 1920. During the same period, the prices of merchandise in stores rose by some 250 percent.<sup>16</sup> Wages on the contrary rose only by 25 percent or less. Unskilled urban workers earned between 5/- and 6/- per month in 1920 which was only slightly higher than the pre-war levels of 4/- to 5/- per month.<sup>17</sup>

Housing for African workers was extremely in short supply. Many employers cared little about providing accommodation for their employees. Consequently overcrowding and destitution became very common; as many as ten or more people sharing one small room. Overcrowding of houses also led to a rapid decline in sanitary conditions. In the urban areas, no sanitary facilities were provided in African compounds. The result was that water supplies were polluted and parasitic



waterborne diseases became widespread. Health and sanitary survey in the towns of Zomba, Mangochi and Chiromo in 1919 showed that between 30 and 40 percent of African residents were infected with intestine parasites due to poor sanitation.<sup>18</sup>

Undeterred by these appalling living conditions and the elaborate structure of labour control, African workers' protest began to take covert forms. To obtain higher wages, workers traded in Employment Books of workers who earned more and used such books to find new jobs and new employers. The abuses associated with Employment Books also tended to induce forgery among African workers. There is evidence to suggest that some workers used forged Employment Books in order to change jobs or employers and earn higher wages.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the Native Associations also began to take a more active role in articulating African grievances and registering African resentment towards the labour control system.<sup>20</sup> It may be for all these reasons, Africans dislike and protest against the Employment Books, the ineffectiveness of the system, and the abuses associated with it, that the colonial government deleted the columns for 'character' and 'causes for the leaving job' from the Employment Books in 1925; much to the chagrin of the settlers and corporate employers.<sup>21</sup> The employers had been deprived of one of

the facets that buttressed the despotic labour control system.

In the meantime, however, the living conditions of urban workers continued to deteriorate. The cost of living continued to rise, such that by the late 1920s, most workers in the urban areas were finding it difficult to make ends meet. It was estimated that the minimum cost of living, in the towns of Blantyre, Zomba, Limbe and Lilongwe, was 7/6<sup>22</sup> per month, whereas the average minimum wages for the unskilled workers was between 5/- and 7/- per month in 1929. To make up for the shortfall in the wages, workers had other members of their families engage in casual wage labour or some petty trades. In the residential locations of Naperi in Blantyre, and Kawale in Lilongwe, for instance, a number of workers' wives were reported to be engaged in brewing beer for sale as a means of raising money to supplement their husbands' monthly income.<sup>23</sup> In addition it also became common practice among workers for two or more workers to pool part of their wages together each month and each member of the group would draw the total amount alternately.<sup>24</sup> All these were attempts by workers to sustain themselves against the many odds.

Pressure on household budgets was further accentuated during the Depression as wages were reduced by

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between 15 percent and 30 percent. Workers employed by Asians and missionaries were worse-off than the general run of workers because they received even lower wages than those in the government and the larger commercial companies. In addition, Asian employers rarely paid their employees in cash but usually encouraged the workers to obtain goods from stores on credit, and at the end of each month the store owner would simply deduct the wages due to the worker from the total debt. The workers often thus received no actual cash and would then go back to the employer for more merchandise on credit, becoming trapped in a circle of indebtedness. Mission employers, on the other hand, were quite irregular in paying wages to their employees. Wages would often not be paid until months had elapsed.<sup>26</sup> This also tended to force more and more workers to come to rely on the system of credit trade and debt with storeowners.

The collapse of settler agriculture during the depression also unleashed a movement of the unemployed from the rural areas to the towns. In addition, as land pressure and landlessness intensified in the southern province, people also began to flock to the urban areas of Blantyre, Limbe,<sup>27</sup> Zomba and Lilongwe, in search of economic opportunities. This increased rural to urban migration accentuated the housing shortages and tended to push up

the rents. By the early 1930s the demand for housing in the urban areas of Zomba, Lilongwe, Limbe and Blantyre, was far in excess of the supply. Consequently the available accommodation became over crowded. In the meantime the sanitary conditions in the overcrowded compounds deteriorated further. It was noted in 1932 by the sanitary inspector, for instance, that "it is not uncommon to find twelve native men living in one small room. Such small rooms are badly lighted, and usually without ventilation. In most cases, bathrooms and latrines are not provided, but even where they exist, they are, with few exceptions, communal, and as a result the trenches rapidly become over-full. The compounds housing African workers are of temporary nature and unfit for human habitation." <sup>28</sup> It was also stated by the director of medical services that "housing provided by government was so insanitary as to prevent any propaganda being carried out for better housing on the estates and plantations." <sup>29</sup>

In an attempt to alleviate the acute housing shortage and also to monitor the influx of Africans into towns the government launched a scheme to create "special villages" for housing domestic servants and casual workers in the towns of Zomba, Lilongwe, Limbe and Blantyre. <sup>30</sup> The intended "special villages" however, soon turned into

slums with unbearable living conditions. No water supplies and waste disposal facilities were provided. The uncontrolled waste dumps developed into breeding grounds for mosquitoes and flies which helped spread diseases in the community.<sup>31</sup> Diarrhoea and malaria were the commonest ailments, and outbreaks of other infectious diseases were also frequent.

At the same time little attention was paid by the colonial authorities to the provision of medical services or preventive medicine.<sup>32</sup> It has been estimated for instance that by the early 1930s only 4.1 pence per person was spent for medical care in Malawi, while the corresponding amounts for the Gold Coast was 3 shillings and 2 pence per person, 8 shillings and 9 pence per person in Tanganyika, and 1 shilling and 6.8 pence per person in Kenya.<sup>33</sup> The repeated calls made by the Medical Services department to improve the health of Africans in the country were ignored.

By the eve of the second world war it was evident that "wages paid to a large number of government servants were far too small to cover even what they had to spend on food for themselves alone, and the wages paid to a still greater number of workers did not suffice to cover the cost of feeding a man, his wife and family."<sup>34</sup> But despite such severe social and material conditions, a

small urban labour force was beginning to emerge. By 1928-1929 an estimated 12,028 skilled African workers including clerks and mechanics were at work, and in addition there were an estimated 5,735 domestic servants, most of whom were employed in Blantyre, Limbe, Zomba and Lilongwe.<sup>35</sup> Taking these figures as our guidelines, and piecing together fragmentary data, we can estimate that by the eve of the second world war, the urban population of Limbe-Blantyre was around 40,000; Zomba around 12,000 and Lilongwe somewhere between 12,000 and 16,000.<sup>36</sup>

Conclusion

In 1928 an estimated monthly average of 88,108<sup>37</sup> adults were in wage employment in Malawi and by 1930,<sup>38</sup> the estimated monthly average was down to 78,438 adults<sup>39</sup> and this had dropped to 72,5000 adults by 1938. These figures, however, exclude children, and juveniles who were extensively employed on the plantations, workers drawn from among the squatter population, casual workers, and people employed by African employers. It may therefore be highly probable that the number of people who participated in wage employment within Malawi was somewhere between 70,000 and 140,000 men, women and children in the late 1920s and 1930s. The greatest proportion of this labour force was engaged in the plantation and estate agricultural sector, with the rest in civil service, commerce and the transport sector.

Furthermore, over 169,000 Malawians were reported to be employed abroad by 1939. Thus if the number of people who participated in the internal wage labour market is combined with that employed abroad, it is possible that the entire wage labor force was somewhere between 240,000 and 350,000 men, women and children by 1939. This represented between 12 and 16 percent of the total population estimated at 1,676,000 by 1939. Thus

through the use of force, land alienation, taxation and the adoption of the squatter system the colonial state had directly assisted the settlers, expatriate companies and other employers in Malawi and abroad to create a cheap and sizeable labour force. Within Malawi, the wage labour force was subjected to grim and atrocious living and working conditions. The provision of pension schemes, annual holidays, sick leave pay, overtime pay and the shorter work day were yet to be introduced. As for housing and training facilities they perpetually remained in short supply.



### Footnotes

1. The literature on urbanization in Malawi during the colonial period is very scanty. The first research, to be commissioned by the colonial authorities, on the problems of urbanization was carried out by Dr. D.G. Bettison in 1957. The findings of this research have not been fully published. The findings of Dr. Bettison's research can be found on MNA C/15/10/A; and MNA C 37/8. D.G. Bettison, 'Migrancy and social structure in peri-urban communities in Nyasaland, 1958'. See also J. Ngoleka Mlia, "Malawi's new capital: A Regional Planning Perspective" in Pan-African Journal, vol. 8, 4, 1975. pp. 387-401; B. Pachai, "The Story of Malawi's Capital, old and new 1891-1969", in Society of Malawi Journal, 24, 1, January 1971. pp. 1-22. See also Fetter, "Malawi, Everybody's Hinterland". The earliest colonial urban centres were Blantyre, Limbe, Zomba, and Mangochi (Fort Johnston) which were founded in the early 1890s (except for Blantyre which was founded by 1875 as a mission station). To these centres must be added Nkhota-Kota, one of the largest precolonial towns in central Africa, Lilongwe which expanded in the late 1930s, Karonga, Salima and Chiromo. The absence of any detailed statistical data for these centres between 1891 and 1939, makes it difficult to assess the rate of growth and sizes of these towns.
2. For details on male absenteeism in rural Malawi see, Gregson, "Agricultural Change in the Henga Valley", pp. 42-49; Vail, "The State and the creation of Malawi's Agricultural Economy", pp. 68; G. Coleman, "International Labour Migration from Malawi 1875-1966", in Journal of Social Sciences, 2, 1972, pp. 31-46. The higher male absentee rates were common in the northern provinces but by 1930, 46 percent of the adult male population in Thyolo district were reported to be at work. The corresponding figures for Mulanje were 36.2 percent; 36.89 in Zomba, and 49 percent in Blantyre. These ratios do include people who were employed outside Malawi. See also Nyasaland protectorate report on Native Labour Census, 1930.
3. This estimate is based on a survey conducted in the central province by the provincial commissioner, see MNA-NC 1/14/2. Report on labour survey, 1930.

4. See MNA S1/428/27, The Labour Question, 1928/1929.
5. People of mixed race were usually grouped together with Asians. By the early 1940s, there were an estimated 2,000 of them.
6. The only exception to the rule in this case were the domestic servants employed by Europeans and Asians who were usually provided accommodation on the employers premises in specially built small compounds called the 'boys' quarters'. In 1934, an attempt was made to move the 'domestic servants' from the "boys quarters" and relocate them in special communal villages created for African workers in the urban areas of Zomba, Blantyre, Limbe, Lilongwe and Mangochi. See also MNA S1/709/24.
7. In Blantyre township, Europeans were forbidden to purchase or occupy any land in the Asian ward of the town, and vice versa. The first Asian settlement was located at Mudi while the one for Africans was located at Likhubula. See Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers. pp. 175-177. The principal of segregated residential areas was also adhered too in the small district centres and mission stations. Residential racial segregation was legalised after the Township Ordinance of 1913 was enacted.
8. See The Central African Planter, 1 September, 1897.
9. Gelfand, The Lakeside Pioneers, p. 175 and p. 183.
10. These have been discussed above.
11. The earliest urban squatter colonies would be, Ndirande, Chilomoni and Naperi in and around Blantyre and Limbe.
12. MNA S1/709/24, The Employment of Natives Ordinance, 1909.
13. MNA S1/428/27, Labour Survey 1928.
14. MNA S1/709/24, Report on Domestic Servants, 1928.
15. OTL, Chipeta with Jim Bwanali, Gotha Estate, OTL, Chipeta with Henderson Masikini. Employment Books were also widely used in the Civil Service, MNA S1/709/24.

16. See Lonje, "Cash Crop production in Zomba District to 1930", pp. 32-33. See also Linden and Linden, Catholic, Peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland, pp. 106-108; and Vail, "The State", pp. 56-57, Vail estimates that the prices of merchandise rose by about 250%. While the statistical data for this period is scanty, there are numerous pieces of evidence that do indicate that the cost of living was rising rapidly. Black marketeering was also on the increase. This also tended to raise the prices to much higher levels than on the open market. See MNA NNM1/44/6; MNA S1/543/20, District Report for Mombera, 1919/1920; and MNA S1/1249/22, Central province Report 1920/1921 and also MNA 1/14/2, Labour conditions, Central province 1920/1921. See also MNA S1/1347/19.
17. See MNA S2/38/20.
18. See MNA NC1/15/2, Report on Sanitary and Health Conditions, 1919.
19. See MNA S1/709/24; OTL, Chipeta with Chalowe Mbewe, Nchima Estates, OTL, Chipeta with sub-chief Chimbeta, Thyolo, sub Chimbeta worked as a store keeper for the ALC in 1928-1933 at Mulanje.
20. See Van Velsen, "Some Early Pressure Groups." pp. 386-392.
21. The settlers opposed the changes to the Employment Book through the Convention of Associations. The Convention of Association demanded, instead, that the government should compile a registry of all African domestic servants, to be kept by the police for purposes of cross-checking those employers with a criminal record. The proposal was rejected. See MNA S1/709/24.
22. These estimates are based on the 1928/1929 labour survey, see MNA S1/428/28, Report on the labour question. It was also noted that the minimum cost of living was about 1/6 per day or 45/- per month for the highly paid clerical workers. Probably this included rent. See also Nyasaland Colonial Report for 1929, p. 23.
23. See MNA NC 1/14/1; and MNA C 42/3, The Employee and his Diet.

24. See MNA, NC 1/15/1; and MNA C 42/3. This system enabled workers to buy foodstuff, maize grain, beans and dried vegetables in bulk, from rural areas, and thereby avoid the daily run to urban markets where food prices were higher. Some urban workers also opted for part time work on weekends to supplement their wages. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1930, p. 40.
25. See MNA LAB/11, 'Native Manual Labour employed by the government. See also MNA NSM 3/1/6; MNA NS 1/13/1, DC Mulanje to provincial commission, south, 28 February 1930.
26. See MNA LB 1/1/IV; see also MNA SMP/1428/II; and MNA C/14267. The Catholic White Fathers and the Dutch Reformed church were particularly noted for the low wages paid to their employers, poor housing and sanitary conditions. See MNA NC 1/14/2, DC's Report for Mchinji (formerly Fort Manning), 29 October, 1930. See also Mufuka, Missions and politics in Malawi, p. 107.
27. The absence of concrete statistical data for the growth of population in urban areas in the period 1891 to 1939, makes it difficult for a concise assessment of the changes in conditions in urban areas. However there is every indication that the urban population was rapidly increasing. By 1938, an estimated 4,000 people were in wage employment in Lilongwe township, while the population of Zomba township was over 12,000 people. Limbe and Blantyre were expanding faster than the former two towns because the latter were the nerve centre of the colonial economy.
28. See MNA S1/1492/28, Report by Senior Sanitary Inspector for 1931/1932.
29. See MNA S11492/28, Report by the Director of Medical Services, 14 November, 1935.
30. See Nyasaland protectorate Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of Nyasaland, 1936, p. 11.
31. See MNA S1/1492/28, Report by Senior Sanitary Inspector, April 1936. See also on the same file letter by Charles Matinga to chief secretary, 4

March, 1937.

32. The health of the African population in colonial Malawi was further compounded by the impact of the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis, (and other mining related diseases) and venereal diseases, brought into the country by returning labour migrants from South Africa, the Rhodesias, Zaire and Tanganyika. See Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Colonial Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of Nyasaland, 1938, p. 9.
33. See Cynthia Ann Crosby, "A History of the Nyasaland Railway, 1895-1935: A Study in Colonial Economic Development." Ph.D. History, Syracuse University, 1974. pp. 290-291.
34. See MNA LAB 11/3, Director of Medical Services to Chief Secretary, Memorandum on Native Manual Labour Employed by government, 1939.
35. These figures are based on R.H. Murray's Labour Survey conducted between 1927-1928. Murray also reported that about 14,000 unskilled adult males were engaged in jobs other than agriculture in the southern province. Murray however did not specify the spatial distribution of the wage labour force. But granted that the major commercial network was situated in and around Blantyre-Limbe, it would be safe to assume that probably 10,000 of the unskilled, and 9,000 of the skilled and around 3,000 of the domestic servants were located in Zomba, Blantyre and Limbe. For Murray's survey see MNA S1/428/27.
36. The population estimate for Lilongwe is based on the provincial commissioner's report of 1938, which stated that 4,000 people were in wage employment in the township. See MNA NC1/14/2. Operating on the assumption that the average household had 3-4 persons each, it can thus be estimated that the township had a population of between 12,000 and 16,000. It can also be estimated that Blantyre, and Limbe, each had between 7,000 and 10,000 employed persons.
37. According to the Labour Survey conducted in 1928, of the 88,048 people employed, 23,950 earned less than 6/- per month; 61,073 people earned between 6/- and 20/- per month, and 2,995 workers earned over 20/- per month. This may also be indicative of the fact that Malawian labour was probably one of the

cheapest. See MNA S1/428/27. R.H. Murray's report on the Labour Question.

38. Nyasaland protectorate, Report on Native Labour Census, August 1930.
39. MNA S1/566/29, Annual Employment Returns, 1938.
40. See Sanderson, "Nyasland Migrant Labour....", p. 151.

## CHAPTER III

The Growth and Expansion of the Wage Labour Force 1939-61PART I: The Colonial Economy: An Overview

The period 1939 to 1961 was generally characterised by expansionary trends in the colonial economy. Expansion in the agricultural sector was accompanied by an increase in commercial activities and the growth of secondary industries. The expansion of Malawi's economy between 1939 and 1961 was to a large extent conditioned, first by the wartime needs of the British economy, and second, by the post-war demands for reconstruction. The post-1939 expansionary trends witnessed the continued decline of settler production, the ascendancy of British and international capital, and the expansion in peasant production. The period 1939 to 1961 also saw an increase in direct government interventions in the economy. Numerous administrative structures were created designed to sustain the expansionary trends in the colonial economy.

The outbreak of the war naturally had a profound effect upon the demand for increased agricultural production. The colonial economies, as in peace time, were expected to play a complementary role to the British economy. But more than ever before, the wartime demands dictated the fortunes of the colonial economies. Both the

colonial government and the British companies needed no special persuasion to be convinced that increased agricultural production in Malawi would constitute an important contribution to the imperial war effort. The colonial government perceived Malawi's task on the war effort as "mainly agricultural, the aims being the production of sufficient food to ensure that the needs of the civil and military population were fully met, the maintenance or increase of the output of economic crops to provide essential supplies for Great Britain and the other empire countries".<sup>1</sup> These same principles provided the basis for the post-war colonial agricultural policy. In many ways the colonial government policy was not new. As noted in chapter one above, by the mid 1930s, the colonial government had already begun to encourage peasant cash crop production, much to the chagrin of the remaining settlers, while at the same time British and international capital began an onslaught on plantation agriculture. It needs to be emphasised however, that in economic terms the period after the depression in Malawi belonged to British and international companies and African peasant producers and not settlers. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia where the late 1930s and 1940s saw growing settler prosperity.<sup>2</sup>

The circumstances of the war combined with the



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effects of the International Tea Agreement acted as a spur to corporate investment in tea production. The fall of the Far East, the Dutch East Indies and Malaysia, into Japanese hands during the early years of the war meant that plantation production of tea, tung and sisal in Africa became more important to British wartime needs. Consequently the British and international companies continued to invest heavily in tea, tung and sisal production in Malawi.<sup>4</sup> This expansionary trend in the plantation sector was reinforced by the stabilization of the market.

The British government, through the colonial office, established a system of bulk buying and bulk selling of colonial produce during the war period.<sup>5</sup> This was clearly designed to synchronise Britain's wartime economic interests with those of colonial producers. Britain wanted to ensure the sufficient flow of agricultural commodities needed for the war effort and was ready to provide guaranteed markets for producers in the colonies and prices for most commodities tended to rise. By 1945, the volume of exports from Malawi had increased considerably and the value of the import and export trade rose by over 130 percent from L 1.5 million in 1939 to nearly L 3.5 million in 1945.<sup>6</sup>

The expansionary trend in the plantation sector

was reinforced in the post-war years by two key factors. First, the changing political circumstances in India and the Far East forced a number of British and international companies to switch part of their investments in plantations from that area into Africa. Malawi, with its low labour cost, proved more attractive to these companies than other countries, like Kenya and Rhodesia, where the costs were much higher. Second, the end of the war found Britain with a shattered and debt-ridden economy. The demands for reconstruction and debt payment forced Britain to rely heavily on the development of colonial resources. Consequently, as during the war period so too in the post-war period, the colonial economies were expected to play a more crucial role in the reconstruction of the British economy. In this context, the imperial state mobilised itself to maximise colonial production and together with the colonial government, laid the basis for the post-war expansion of capitalism in Malawi.

Institutional and administrative structures were created through the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts, of 1945, 1949 and 1950. The colonies were required to submit Ten year development plans. By early 1947, Malawi's development plan had been drafted and submitted to the Colonial Office. The Ten Year Development Plan ear-marked a total expenditure of L 6.5 million of which L

2 million was to be provided from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund (CD & WF). An assessment of the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund and Malawi's Ten Year Development Programme is beyond the scope of this study. It can only be noted here that the Ten Year Development Plan and the CD & WF put emphasis on the construction of road and communication infrastructure, medical services, education, public utilities, and agricultural extension.<sup>10</sup>

In an effort to meet some immediate economic needs, the British government created the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC) in 1947 and the Overseas Food Corporation (OFC) in 1948 both of which were to run commercial enterprises such as mining, manufacturing and processing industries, fisheries and agricultural projects in the colonial empire. To synchronise the operations of these institutions, the CDC and OFC, colonial governments were encouraged to form public corporations to work with the former. What did these new initiatives from the imperial government and colonial government amount to in Malawi?

In practical terms, it meant more Imperial government and colonial government intervention in the colonial economy, particularly in the agricultural sector. First the colonial government expropriated over 30,000

acres of African lands on behalf of the CDC, in the period 1947 to 1949, for rice, tung, and tobacco production in the northern province and central province, respectively. At the same time the CDC in combination with a South African firm, Ocean Products Limited, formed a fishing company in Malawi, Nyasaland Fisheries Limited, whose main concern was to extract oil from fish viscera in Lake Malawi to supply the British market.<sup>11</sup> Second, in 1949 the colonial government acquired over 16,000 acres of land in the central and northern province for grain production by a local statutory body, the Nyasaland Farming Corporation, which was formed for the sole purpose of increasing food production.<sup>12</sup> In addition the colonial government also established a large dairy farm near Blantyre township to supply milk products to the urban population. Finally, the colonial government embarked on a concerted effort to increase the amount of support for the plantation sector. A total of 21,500 acres of land were alienated in the central province to British Syndicates and some settler farmers.<sup>13</sup> Above all, of the total expenditure by the Agriculture Department of L 4.8 million between 1945 and 1950, over L 3.5 million was invested in the predominantly expatriate-owned tea industry to help improve the land, factory capacity and other capital works. In addition, over L 30,000 was

invested annually in tea and tung research during the same period.<sup>14</sup>

In the meantime, the collapse of the tobacco prices in the period 1930 to 1952 combined with the fall in tea prices in 1950-52, almost obliterated the tiny settler community which had remained in the country. The last of Malawi's individual tea plantation owners were wiped out by 1952, most, if not all selling out to the large expatriate-owned corporations.<sup>15</sup>

It was one of the major anomalies of the Central African Federation that it was established in 1953,<sup>16</sup> precisely at the time when settler economic power in Malawi became virtually insignificant and on the verge of extinction. The hope, by some settlers, that the Federation would provide their economic salvation proved elusive.<sup>17</sup>

In the final analysis it was the colonial government and not the Federal government that came to the rescue of the few dozens of settlers who remained in Malawi. After all there were still some people within the colonial government who believed in the potency of settler agriculture.<sup>18</sup>

A desperate attempt was made between 1955 and 1961, when the much awaited Land and Agriculture Loans Board was established, to rescue settler agriculture. Between 1955 and 1960 a total of 62 loans worth L 100,170

19  
were granted to settler farmers. It seems, however,  
that the rescue came too late to save the settlers.  
During the same period 1955 to 1960, 78 of the 158 settler  
20  
farmers went bankrupt and closed their operations. Thus  
despite the continued official support for settler  
farmers, by 1960 it had become more apparent than ever  
before that settler production was a total failure.

It is a great irony that while the war and post-war reconstruction proved to be a boom for settlers in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, in Malawi the period 1939 to 1961 saw the rapid demise of settler economic power and the ascendancy of the African or peasant producers and the British and international companies. By 1961, plantation production in colonial Malawi was virtually dominated by the expatriate-owned companies. These large companies combined tea, tung, rubber and tobacco production with other commercial enterprises, such as retail trading, transportation and the handling of agricultural produce on the local auction market.

Table 3.1

Agricultural Exports 1940-1962 (in short tons)

Year	Cotton	Tobacco	Tea	Maize	Pulses	G/Nuts	Tung	Rice
1940	3,435	7,517	6,400	na	na	na	na	na
1941	3,249	9,890	6,100	na	na	na	na	na
1942	8,615	11,397	7,800	5,000	na	na	na	na
1943	3,411	12,306	5,500	na	na	na	na	na
1944	5,409	9,851	6,240	na	na	na	na	2,038
1945	5,161	9,172	6,959	na	3,838	1,250	295	1,578
1946	5,740	5,808	7,000	12,801	1,132	2,191	276	2,263
1947	6,794	10,000	6,500	7,631	1,000	2,220	274	2,000
1948	7,700	14,250	7,500	7,000	na	2,240	300	2,240
1949	2,000	13,000	6,305	5,000	150	na	240	800
1950	9,400	14,500	7,500	10,000	na	100	300	1,500
1951	na	18,000	7,900	55,103	na	na	250	na
1952	7,966	8,000	na	50,691	na	4,837	807	3,009
1953	10,787	18,037	na	44,203	na	5,689	307	4,330
1954	na	5,650	na	54,345	na	7,327	na	na
1955	9,579	11,400	8,590	43,000	6,900	10,321	900	7,202
1956	3,435	17,250	10,325	33,577	7,942	9,772	867	4,173
1957	4,634	16,880	10,681	5,784	7,341	13,872	1,200	3,561
1958	6,121	19,545	10,700	12,822	6,035	12,785	878	4,480
1959	10,760	18,412	11,324	5,553	3,881	12,816	1,502	6,255
1960	13,566	17,315	12,366	16,613	6,320	20,698	1,191	7,145
1961	12,963	13,417	15,759	15,830	7,000	25,906	1,236	9,866
1962	19,030	18,023	14,654	475	na	36,125	1,532	5,072

Sources: Nyasaland Colonial Reports 1940-1962

### Peasant Production

The outbreak of the war further reinforced the colonial government's production drive which began in 1934. The 'Grow More Crops' campaign which began in 1934 was buttressed by an intensive 'more work' campaign which was launched in 1940.<sup>21</sup> Africans were obliged to produce more export crops, and foodstuffs for both civilian and military needs. To synchronise peasant production with wartime demands, the colonial government centralised the purchasing of all produce grown in trust land areas of the country. The Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance was passed into law early in 1940 to give effect to the new policy. Under the provisions of the Marketing Produce Ordinance of 1940, only licenced buyers were allowed to purchase foodstuffs produced by Africans on trust land, and only at the government specified and supervised markets. The purchasing of tobacco, for example, was solely conducted by the Native Tobacco Board (NTB), while cotton was only purchased by the BCGA, animal products by the Veterinary services department, and rice by the Nkhota-Kota produce and Trading Society.<sup>22</sup>

To induce increased peasant production and to increase the labour supply to the plantations during the war the hut tax was raised from 6/- per adult male in 1939.



to 7/- per adult male in 1942. In addition the NTB began to encourage the expansion of tobacco production on trust land actively. In 1942, the grower registration system which had been in force since 1926 was suspended and the number of markets was increased. Thus the centralization of produce purchasing on the local market combined with the stabilization of the international market through bulk purchasing meant that peasant producers had a steady market. The prices offered to peasant producers tended to be higher than the prices obtainable in the pre-war period but as in other colonies, the peasant producers in Malawi were paid below bulk purchase prices.<sup>23</sup> By 1945, despite some fluctuations, the aggregate volume of agricultural<sup>24</sup> exports from the peasant sector had increased.

Notwithstanding the enormous government financial support granted to the expatriate-owned plantations and settler farmers, the colonial government, for the first time, embarked on a planned and concerted effort to improve African agriculture during the post-war period. Immediately after the end of the war, plans were drawn up providing for improved agricultural extension services for African agriculture, measures for preventing soil erosion and improved land usage, land acquisition for the resettlement of squatters, and the improvement of the marketing system for agricultural produce from trust land

areas. There was a nexus of forces that determined the colonial government's changed approach to African agriculture.

First, the production drive which began in 1934, and intensified during the war was not accompanied by any dramatic changes in production techniques. In addition, the financial returns to peasant producers did not increase substantially to enable them to acquire artificial fertilisers to replenish the land,<sup>25</sup> so that by the end of the war the evidence of ecological decline was everywhere evident. The internal food situation was also beginning to deteriorate particularly in the southern province because of the "increasing pressure of a growing population upon land and dwindling soil fertility"<sup>26</sup> so that surpluses from subsistence farming were no longer reliable. It therefore became essential to acquire land from the British companies for the resettlement of Africans from the congested trust land areas and squatters from the estates,<sup>27</sup> and to improve land usage techniques if peasant production was to be expanded to meet both the internal food requirements and British needs. Paradoxically the colonial government's soil conservation drive, combined with cattle destocking in other areas, helped to reinforce the rural discontent which provided political support for the nationalist crusade against

28.  
colonial rule.

Second, in the wake of growing criticism by the various interested parties both within Malawi and abroad,<sup>29</sup> the colonial government wanted to improve African agriculture in order to alleviate the poverty which had developed from a long period of neglect. It was recognised that unless African agriculture was placed on a sound basis with improved farming methods, production in trust land areas would fall. Finally, there was mounting pressure from African commercial farmers, the Native Associations and chiefs, all of whom were persistently demanding 'improvement' in the social and economic conditions of Africans. In the 1930s and early 1940s the land shortage in the southern province was becoming increasingly critical. The war period also witnessed mounting squatter militancy in protest against land shortage. All these issues, growing poverty by Africans, landlessness and lack of government support for African agriculture were being effectively translated into major political issues championed by the Native Associations and after 1943 by the newly-formed Nyasaland African Congress<sup>30</sup> (NAC). The colonial government could thus no longer ignore the demands of Africans. Thus the interest of the imperial state and the colonial government to expand commodity productions; and the demands of Africans for

improvement in agriculture were well dovetailed to warrant a new initiative by the colonial government. But what did post war government initiate amount to?

Apart from the soil conservation and cattle destocking measures which began in 1946, finances for research and agricultural extension services for Africans were increased. The value of money allocated for research and agricultural extension services rose from a meagre L 5,000 spent annually in 1945 to L 100,000 by 1960, and the number of research personnel was increased from 6 to 36<sup>31</sup> during the same period. In addition the colonial government established farmer training schools and research stations geared towards African agriculture. Furthermore, to contain African discontent and also to encourage commodity production, the colonial government began to purchase land from British companies in 1948 to resettle African squatters. By 1961 over 500,000 acres of land had been acquired and over 42,000 families<sup>32</sup> resettled.

In the meantime to induce greater peasant production, and also to accelerate the labour supply to the plantations, and to boost internal revenue, the colonial government raised the hut and poll tax. The hut and poll tax was raised from 7/- per adult male in 1942 to 9/- per adult male in 1946 and then to 10/- per adult male

by 1947. The taxes were raised again from 10/- per adult male in 1947 to 12/6 per adult male by 1950; to 17/6 <sup>33</sup> per adult male in 1951, and to 30/- per adult male by 1958.

During the same period, 1945 to 1961, the colonial government took active steps to encourage the expansion of cooperative societies for the production of ghee, rice, and coffee. By 1960 there were over 87 registered cooperatives involved in the production and marketing of a wide range of commodities including rice, ghee, coffee and other produce. These cooperatives had a <sup>34</sup> total membership of over 120,000 people. Chiefs, former labour migrants, "progressive farmers" and former civil servants formed the vanguard of the cooperative movement. In time, however, these cooperatives came to be rallying points for political agitation against colonial rule. It was a major contradiction of colonial capitalism that it bred the very institutions that undermined colonial rule.

To synchronise and rationalise peasant production and the purchasing of agricultural commodities from trust land areas, numerous marketing structures were created. Following in the footsteps of the NTB, a Maize Control Board was established in 1946, the Cotton Marketing Board (CMB) was set up in 1947 and the Produce Marketing Board (PMB) in 1952. Later in 1956 all these Statutory Marketing Boards were merged into the

Agricultural Production and Marketing Board, which was given the legal monopoly for the purchasing of agricultural commodities from the trust land areas. <sup>35</sup>

These Boards, stated the Director of Agriculture, were powerful instruments of policy, not only because of their direct influence on market prices and on the extent and balance of crop production, but also because their surplus balances were used to promote development in rural areas. <sup>36</sup> But profits of the Marketing Boards were also used to finance government expenditure including projects that had no direct bearing on peasant production. <sup>37</sup>

The Marketing Boards were also used for manipulating peasant production by "restricting and withholding marketing facilities in certain areas." <sup>38</sup> Thus in those areas where plantation production was threatened by expanding peasant production, the Marketing Boards could impose production restrictions or withhold marketing facilities. Similarly by the use of Marketing Boards the colonial government could determine the specific agricultural commodity an area had to produce for the market. In such instances official policy was expressed in terms of "the need to encourage cash crop production to achieve a sound and more balanced agricultural economy." <sup>39</sup>

More often than not suitability of the area for cash crop production was based on considerations such as plantations

labour demands, securing food requirements and the need for more agricultural raw materials by the Imperial State, rather than any scientific principles of ecology or soil suitability.

To ensure increased commodity production in the trust land areas the colonial government began in 1948/1949, more openly, to propound the view that the foundation of a prosperous agricultural industry would eventually depend upon the individual "yeoman farmer" with a secure, heritable title over sufficient land to enable him to be efficient and enjoy an improved level of living.

It was believed that production in African land units could not be maintained, let alone increased, unless there was a long-term capital investment in land, and that could only be done if economic land holdings were created on the basis of individual tenure. This philosophy gave rise to the Master Farmer Scheme which was launched in 1949.

The political intentions of such schemes were obvious; to create a conservative land owning class of Africans. As was to be expected the "yeoman master farmer" scheme received the attention of the emerging African commercial farmers, who by 1948 had already begun organizing themselves into the Farmers Association.

Beginning in 1950, the colonial government paid out bonuses to the successful "progressive farmers".

subsidized their inputs such as fertilizers, seeds, livestock and farm costs; and land improvement programmes.<sup>42</sup> Later in 1957, the colonial government, at the insistence of the African commercial farmers, created the Nyasaland Africans Loans Board which was specifically intended to provide capital for African commercial farmers.<sup>43</sup> Thus the groundwork had been laid for the expansion of an African capitalist class.

By 1961 the concerted effort by the imperial state in conjunction with the colonial state to expand agricultural production had achieved favourable results. The total output of tobacco, cotton, rice, groundnuts, ghee and pulses increased remarkably.<sup>44</sup> In quantitative terms the total aggregate volume of agricultural exports rose from 16,000 tons in 1939 to over 100,000 tons by 1961.<sup>45</sup> But increased production also tended to reinforce the trends already underway in the preceding period, namely economic differentiation, increasing individualization of land, mounting land pressure in many parts of the country, declining soil fertility and soil erosion, and also the increasing incidence of landlessness. The cumulative impact of all these changes was the accelerated movement of poorer peasants onto the labour markets not only in Malawi but in Southern Africa as a whole.



The general expansion in peasant production was also matched by corresponding trends in commercial activities, as an increasing number of Africans entered the distributive trade, sometimes in collaboration with Asian merchants, or single-handedly. Some members of the emerging African merchant class had begun to establish themselves in the period 1891 to 1939, against the many barriers placed in their way by the colonial government and the settlers. Sizeable numbers of the ex-askari had also opened up in retail trade, running canteens, stores and groceries, thereby competing with Asian traders for the control of the rural markets. <sup>46</sup> This competition, between Africans and Asian traders, intensified in the 1950s as more and more Asians came to Malawi and opened up in the retail and wholesale trade. It would not be until national independence, in 1964, that the tide of the competition was reversed in favour of Africans.

### Secondary Industry

Whereas in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, the difficult conditions of the war had an immediate effect of stimulating the growth of secondary industries, in Malawi manufacturing industries began to emerge only after the war. There were a number of factors which precipitated the growth of the secondary industries in Malawi during the

post-war period. First, the need by the imperial state to increase dollar earnings, urgently needed for debt repayment, forced the British government to prevail on the colonies to cut down imports from America and the dollar areas. But since British industries could not supply all the needs of the colonial economies it became imperative to allow "reasonable industrialization of the colonial empire".<sup>47</sup> Second, it was also considered that the growth of secondary industry in the colonies would enable the revitalization of the British capital goods industry, thereby accelerating the resurgence of the British economy. Third, there was also the fear of the possibility of losing the colonial markets to other industrial powers, such as the USA, Japan and West Germany. Consequently, the imperial government found it essential to encourage British companies to invest in manufacturing industries in the colonies.<sup>48</sup>

As for Malawi, the restrictions on imports, necessitated by the need to preserve dollar earnings, meant subjecting the people to the constraints of rationing of some basic commodities, reminiscent of the war period. This, however, was already hampering the production drive, because the shortage of basic commodities, and other requirements imposed severe limitations on agriculture production. The shortage of

basic consumer goods was also a major disincentive to both workers and peasant producers.<sup>49</sup> Finally, the colonial government had also realised that "the only possible long term solution, to the problem of congestion on the land in the territory, was the development of secondary industries".<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the colonial government took active steps to encourage the growth of secondary industries, through the provision of infrastructure, such as water supplies, roads and electricity which helped to create a favourable environment for industrial undertakings.<sup>51</sup> Later in 1959, the colonial government established the Industrial Development and Loans Board (IDLB) to assist in the expansion and establishment of industries through the provision of loan finances. By 1953, a number of manufacturing industries were in operation producing items such as soap, twine, garments, cigarettes, edible oils, beer, beverages, furniture and timber products.<sup>52</sup>

The growth of secondary industries was reinforced by the establishment of the Central African Federation in 1953. It is in the secondary industrial sector that the Federation had an immediate impact. The creation of the Federation in 1953, meant that foreign suppliers were assured of a sizeable market. But at the same time, the possibility of the imposition of a tariff

system for the Federation area meant that foreign suppliers faced the unattractive option of losing the federal market. There is every indication that the imposition of a tariff system designed to protect domestic manufacturing industries attracted numerous foreign firms to establish branch plants in the Central African Federation.<sup>53</sup> Although the majority of such plants were located in Rhodesia, a few were attracted to Malawi because of the latter's lower cost of labour. It may also be emphasised that companies which had become uncompetitive on the world market were also attracted to invest in the Central African Federation. Not only were such firms assured of a protected market, free of competition, but the monopoly of the local market also enabled them to charge high local prices, which enabled them to enhance their profits and make-up for their losses incurred elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> Consequently as a result of all these factors, tariff barriers, assured and protected market, and the availability of cheap labour in Malawi, a number of British, South African and Rhodesian companies including multinationals operating from these countries,<sup>55</sup> came to establish branch plants in Malawi. By 1960/1961, a number of new industries had been established and old ones expanded. The new industries manufactured commodities such as cement, fishing nets, sweets and

biscuits, boats, confectionary products, shoe polish, blankets, nails, perfumes, soft drinks, new brands of cigarettes, ceramics, furniture, fabricated metal products and many other household items.

The post-war industrialization in Malawi took the form of import-substitution industries and in numerous instances were branch plants of parent companies in Britain, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia and elsewhere. The post-war colonial industrialization took the form of import-substitution mainly because the investment in manufacturing was dominated by foreign capital, particularly the multinational corporations.<sup>56</sup> The multinational corporations tend to be vertically integrated in terms of the production process; they use imported material inputs, usually from other subsidiaries, and establish branch plants in the capitalist peripheries, usually involved in the final stages of production. Multinational corporations also tend to export their profits to the shareholders abroad, thereby denying the country of essential capital for re-investment. In addition key decisions about management and wage policies are usually controlled by the parent companies' Boards of Directors abroad. These limitations also impinge on the development of industrial relations and the labour force generally. Local managers might not easily take decisions

for major capital outlays, if such projects had no immediate bearing on profit margins. Moreover, shareholders are usually interested in profit margins, and do resent capital projects that dig deep into their profits without assured immediate gains. In this way social infrastructure programmes are rarely on top of the agenda for the Board of Directors.

It needs to be underlined also that the bulk of the new manufacturing industries were situated in the towns of Blantyre, Limbe and Lilongwe, where as the factories processing agricultural commodities were located in rural areas. This meant that post-war labour relations were not only to be derived from the labour control system on the plantations but urban areas as well. The concentration of the new manufacturing industries in the towns was to give a decisive role to the urban labour force in shaping the labour relations in the country.

Three general points emerge from the foregoing discussion. First, the expansion of the colonial economy in the period 1939 to 1961 not only meant that more people engaged for wage employment, but also that the competition for labour between the various sectors of the economy was intensified. Both the plantations and industries increased their demands for labour but so too did the peasant sector. Second, the dominance of perennial crops,

tea and tung, in the plantation sector which required a permanent labour, and the growth of manufacturing industries were important conditioning factors which began to modify the migratory labour economy. The need for a more skilled and settled labour force had become a central feature of both agricultural and urban labour. Finally, in political and economic terms, the demise of the settlers and the ascendancy of the British and international companies in the colonial economy meant that the focus of the struggle had shifted from the one between settlers and Africans to that between international capital and Africans. These transformations were to have a profound impact on the development of the class struggles in the country during the period 1939 to 1961.

## PART II: The Expansion of the Wage Labour Force

The outbreak of the second world war compounded the labour situation, because apart from the demands for increased production, more and more people were required for the military forces. But with rumours of a second 'Chilembwe Rising' very much alive in 1939<sup>57</sup>, the colonial government had to be careful in order to avoid arousing African unrest as a result of the increased demands for labour, and cash crop production. The peasant revolts in the central province in 1937 and 1938 also added to the

anxieties which the colonial authorities had to contend with. Not surprisingly perhaps, the colonial government had to act very cautiously during the war, particularly in the face of growing discontent amongst the African population.

To underline the gradual capitulation of the colonial state, taxation on women was abolished in 1939, thereby reducing the incidence of tax default, and the abuses associated with default.<sup>58</sup> Second, to secure the needed manpower for the military forces and agricultural production, the colonial government increasingly began to rely on the moral influence of the chiefs over the people. The chiefs were called upon to persuade Africans to join the army or to engage for wage labour on the plantations, because both military service and increased production were an important contribution to the war.<sup>59</sup> Finally, to persuade Africans to join the military services, a poll tax exemption was granted to those who served in the army during the war period. The exemption from taxation, and the propaganda promises of a better and prosperous future, better paying jobs and funds for business ventures were most effective and widespread devices which the colonial authorities used to secure labour for military service.<sup>60</sup> This is in contrast to the conditions during the first world war in Malawi; and the



situation in Kenya, Northern Rhodesia and Tanganyika during the second world war. In the latter three countries outright compulsion for both military service and agricultural production became a dominant feature of the labour system during the war period.<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, unlike in East Africa, in Malawi conscription for the war was fairly limited; it was also punctuated by frequent bans or suspensions. In October 1940, for instance, military conscription was temporarily suspended until the middle of 1941 when it was resumed. Recruitment was suspended again in November 1942, and the ban remained effective until September 1943, when it was<sup>62</sup> lifted. In the meantime no special measures were taken to curb emigration, so that labour could be secured for increased production on the plantations. Independent labour emigration to Southern Africa continued unabated. In fact at the end of 1942 the inter-territorial Labour Agreement of 1937, which governed labour recruitment in Malawi was renewed; and recruiting agents from South Africa, and the Rhodesias continued to operate in the<sup>63</sup> country. This illustrates the fact that the employing interest in Malawi did not have total sway over the colonial government and the African population.

By April 1944 military conscription and recruitment had been brought to a halt. In all about

30,000 Malawians had served in military services during the war; the peak total of those in services was about 22,000 people. Thus by the end of the war the proportion and significance of compulsory or forced labour began to decline very rapidly.

In the meantime, during the war period, numerous administrative and legislative measures were established, all designed to reform the labour system. In 1939 legislation was passed to prohibit the employment of children under the age of 14; and women in factories at night, and also to make provisions for improved health and safety measures for all people employed in factories.

In 1940, the labour branch which had been created in 1937 was upgraded into a full department. By 1944, a series of ordinances such as the Native Labour Ordinance, the Minimum Wages Ordinance; and in 1946 the Workmens Compensation Ordinance were enacted. The Native Labour Ordinance was designed to regulate the provisions of rations, housing and medical care for workers, the Minimum Wages Ordinance was intended to provide for a prescribed minimum wage, and the Workmens Compensation Ordinance made provisions for compensation in case of injury or death of a worker. But what accounts for all these reforms, especially in view of the fact that this was during the war period?

The period immediately preceding the war had witnessed mounting African protest, mainly through the Native Associations, against the deplorable living and working conditions and the low wage economy.<sup>37</sup> Many of the criticisms could no longer be ignored by the colonial governments, particularly in view of the anxieties caused by the war. These internal pressures were buttressed by the increased demands for reform from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Colonial Office. The latter was particularly concerned with the growing criticism, both in Britain and abroad, of labour conditions in the colonies especially in the wake of labour unrest and riots in Northern Rhodesia in 1935, the widespread labour unrest and riots in the West Indies in 1937, the riots in West Africa in 1938, and labour unrest in Zanzibar in 1938.<sup>68</sup> It was this growing militancy of

workers in the colonies that finally induced the imperial state to press the colonial governments for reforms. Thus the late 1930s were a critical period for both the imperial government and colonial governments; all were aware of the growing unrest among workers in the colonies.

Attempts to curtail labour emigration had totally failed. Besides the fact that labour emigration had become a lucrative source of revenue for the colonial state, the colonial government was also convinced that

the tide of the exodus (labour emigration) could not be stemmed, until such time as Nyasaland can offer its workers a financial return more comparable to that obtained in Southern Africa, and some of the amenities and attractions which the worker enjoys in those countries.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, it was gradually being realised by the colonial government, and some employing interests, particularly in the tea industry, that the migratory labour system was inefficient, and that:

The shortage of labour was making plainer every year, that the establishment of a stabilized and contented labour force on the estates was essential to estate management and increased production. Such a labour force required adequate housing for the worker and his family, of a permanent nature and suitable design, with proper sanitation and water supplies if the health and efficiency of the worker was to be ensured.<sup>70</sup>

Thus both internal and external pressures tended to reinforce the need for changes in labour conditions. But what in effect did all the changes outlined above amount to?

First, it meant that overt labour coercion and labour abuses were gradually being eliminated and replaced by other, more subtle labour control mechanisms. The use of taxation, for instance, to induce Africans to join the wage labour market gained an added importance during the war and after. There were still some sectors among the employing interest who believed that labour shortages were caused by "insufficient taxation".<sup>71</sup> Such sentiments

found some sympathy in official circles in Malawi. There were others in the colonial government who believed that:

The limited cash requirements of African workers means that the usual economic incentives do not operate fully in Nyasaland. Moreover the native places a high value on his leisure, he is inclined to work spasmodically when it suits him and for limited purposes of his own.<sup>72</sup>

Thus higher taxes, as note above, were considered as part of the remedy to induce Africans to engage in wage employment. Fines for default were also raised proportionately, to include taxes due in addition to a 100 percent surcharge thereof as fine. After 1951, the fine was reduced to 50 percent surcharge of the total taxes due, and by 1958 the fine was fixed at 10/-.<sup>73</sup>

In line with the tax increases, the colonial government delegated more authority to the "Native Authorities", who were required to provide detailed information on the particulars of individuals in the villages and their tax records. In addition, a fraction of the poll tax revenue were used to finance the Native Authorities or district council expenditure. Thus, more than ever before, chiefs and headmen were now given an extra incentive to influence the peasantry to pay their taxes promptly.<sup>74</sup>

The problem with taxation, however, was that while it was designed to increase the labour supply within

Table 3.2

Commencing Minimum Wages Per 30 Day  
Ticket in Rhodesia, 1942-1950

Unskilled Farm Labour			Unskilled Mine Labour		
1942	16/11		1942	1943	1944
1943	17/6	Gold	25/1	25/10	26/10
1944	17/5	Chrome	27/-	28/4	28/3
1945	18/6	Asbestos	25/1	26/2	26/7
1946	20/- to 25/-	Coal	62/4	62/1	58/4
1948	25/- to 27/6				
1950	30/- to 37/6				

Commencing Minimum Wages Per 30 Day  
Ticket in South Africa, 1942-1948

Unskilled Farm Labour		Unskilled Mine Labour	
1942	25/- to 30/-		
1944	30/- to 45/-		
1948	40/- to 60/-	65/- to 80/-	

Source: Department of Labour Annual Reports, 1942-1950,  
Reports by Nyasaland Labour Officers, Salisbury  
and Johannesburg.

the country, taxation also tended to propel a significant number of people into commodity production. In addition, the stimulus of taxation combined with other pressures on the rural economy precipitated a decision, by many Malawians, to emigrate to Southern Africa where wages tended to be higher than in Malawi (see table 3.2). It must be little wonder therefore that as commodity production expanded in the countryside, and the rates of taxation increased, the flow of labour from Malawi to Southern Africa also accelerated. The annual rate of emigration rose from an average of 35,000 emigrants in the period 1940 to 1945 to 42,000 in the period 1945-1950, and then rose to an annual average of 55,000 emigrants in the 1950 to 1955 period. In the period 1955 to 1960 between 72,000 and 74,000 Malawians were leaving the country annually to seek jobs in Southern Africa and elsewhere.<sup>75</sup> This increased labour emigration from Malawi to Southern Africa and elsewhere is as much of a commentary on the impact of increased taxation as it is on the changing economic conditions in the countryside in Malawi. When the incidence of increased labour emigration is combined with the impact of expanded peasant commodity production, as outlined above, it becomes apparent that the competition for Malawian labour showed no signs of letting up. Consequently some employers found it essential to

rely on the 'squatter system' as a viable source of labour. It will later become clear, however, that the 'squatter system' had outlived its days.

The Demise of the Squatter System and the  
Recomposition of the Wage Labour Force

The Second World War provided an opportunity for both the expatriate-owned plantations and settlers to extend and intensify the squatter system, and thangata labour. Paradoxically, the increased demand for export crops meant that the demand for labour from the squatters by the settlers and expatriate plantations owners became even higher. At the same time, however, more and more settler and company lands were being converted to the production of tea, tung, sisal, tobacco and other plantation crops. In short, increased demand for agricultural commodity production meant the elimination of the squatter system and the greater proletarianization of squatter labour. More and more settler farms and plantations were attracted to the ideal of relying on casual and permanent wage labour rather than labour tenancy.

The chronic problem of labour shortages, however, induced some plantation owners to cling to the squatter system, because the squatter system was one way of securing a pool of cheap labour. In addition, this tendency was



reinforced by some people who wanted to avoid conscription during the war, by emigrating to the estates as squatters. <sup>76</sup> The real problem, however, lay in the fact that it was during the war period that many estate owners were expanding their own production to take advantage of the greater demand generated by the war. Thus by the early 1940s land owners were more and more disposed to making heavier labour demands on the squatters, and the minimum work period was fixed at 6 months each year, for which meagre wages were earned. Furthermore, measures to reduce the size of plots for independent squatter production were also more enthusiastically enforced. In many instances more repressive tactics were used to oblige squatters to work longer periods. Steps were taken to ensure that squatters did not expand their plots, as any crops planted without the prior consent of the landlord were uprooted. Squatters who refused to work for landlords had their houses demolished and, in some cases, wives taken hostage. The rearing of livestock such as cattle, goats, and sheep was strictly prohibited. Non-compliance with these measures resulted in the abrupt <sup>77</sup> eviction of insubordinate squatters. Thus by the early 1940s, the predicament of squatters had become particularly precarious.

For most squatters, particularly in the Shire

Highlands, migration to trust land areas was in itself an unattractive alternative because of the growing land pressure, whereas the continued stay on the estates only subjected the squatters to social humiliation and regimentation<sup>78</sup> without any assured economic gains. This predicament ultimately gave impetus to squatter militancy in resisting the demands of land owners. Towards the end of 1943, there was a series of incidents on numerous estates in Blantyre district, when several hundreds of squatters refused to be evicted. In 1945, about 1,250 squatters served with eviction notices refused to evacuate<sup>79</sup> two estates in Thyolo district. Squatters were resisting proletarianization.

This growing unrest on the estates was also reinforced by the discontent in the trust land areas in the southern province, because of land pressure. Thus the two issues, thangata labour and land hunger were rapidly being politicized, by the Native Associations, chiefs and from 1943, the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC). All these issues, land shortages, and thangata labour, coupled with soil conservation and destocking measures created major rallying points for the radicalization of the Malawian peasantry in the crusade against colonial rule. The disturbances on the estates in the Shire highlands combined with growing African discontent about land hunger

finally forced the colonial government to take measures to accelerate the dissolution of the squatter system. By the end of 1947 plans were underway to acquire some 550,000 acres of land, from the British companies and some settlers, <sup>80</sup> to resettle squatters in the Southern province. The settlers and companies were being deprived of the source of cheap labour.

In the meantime, by 1949, the recession in commodity prices combined with the perennial problem of labour shortages, forced the planting community to revamp the squatter system. First, in 1950, steps were taken to restrict cash-crop production, particularly tobacco, on trust land by re-introducing the grower registration <sup>81</sup> system. This was designed to push Africans back to the estates where opportunities for cash crop production were available. Second, taxes were raised in 1950, and again in 1951, probably in an attempt to induce the flow of labour to the plantations. Finally, by legislative measures in 1952 annual rents payable by squatters <sup>82</sup> were set at three times the prevailing minimum wages. The prevailing minimum wages in 1952 was 17/6 per month, and this meant that the annual rent amounted to 52/6. This was designed to induce squatters to work for the landlords and thereby earn a rebate in rent rather than pay the sum of 52/6. -

While all these measures were surely designed to improve the labour supply to the plantations, both the colonial government and the employing interest found, to their despair, that the greater proportion of the labour which was generated migrated to southern Africa and elsewhere. It needs to be underlined also that all these measures, increased taxation, grower registration and the higher rents, tended to fuel opposition to the colonial establishment. A combination of increased rents on the estates, poll tax increases, restrictions on trust land tobacco production coupled with the exploitative tendencies of the marketing Boards, and the soil conservation and destocking measures helped to accelerate the expansion of the popular base in the crusade against colonial rule. Finally, all these pressures served to galvanize African opposition to the impending imposition of the Central African Federation.

Initially, squatter response to all these pressures took muted forms, such as refusal to pay the rent, and to work for the landlords, tax default, and the unauthorized cultivation, and cutting of trees on the private estates. A more profound response was a violent eruption which began on the estates in Thyolo on 18 August 1953. What began as a small incident, following the seizure of two Africans by a European estate owner, for

allegedly 'stealing oranges' at Luchenza near Thyolo, spread to encompass the entire Shire Highlands by August 19. There were numerous work stoppages, and in some cases, European property was destroyed; telephone wires were cut, and roads were destroyed. In the central and northern provinces, NAC supporters actively encouraged workers to go on strike, and peasants to defy government cultivation by-laws, openly default in tax payment and to depose chiefs perceived to be colonial government supporters. The colonial government was forced to withdraw government officers from many parts of the country, and native administration in the countryside virtually ceased to operate.

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The colonial authorities were faced with a growing challenge and took brutal measures through intensive police action with reinforcement brought into the country from the Rhodesias.

Eleven Africans were killed, and hundreds injured, by police action. Just like the Chilembwe Rising of 1915, popular opposition to despotism was once again suppressed. The significance of the 1953 riots, however, remained in the links they had helped to forge between peasants, squatters, workers and the NAC leadership in the struggle against colonial domination. It is significant that, as with the Chilembwe Rising, so

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too with the 1953 riots, it was squatters and workers who formed the vanguard of the movement. The 1953 riots were also significant in another respect; they helped to reinforce the squatter resettlement programme which began in 1948, thereby hastening the demise of thangata labour.

The growing political radicalization of the countryside combined with the squatter resettlement programme meant that the squatter system was no longer viable as a labour system. The plantation owners had to be cautious, in their labour demands from squatters, for fear of arousing further unrest. This meant that increasingly, plantation owners and settler farmers, began to rely on casual and permanent wage labour. The expansion of tea, tung, and sisal production during this period also tended to reinforce the need for a regular and permanent labour force. Thus both economic and political conditions were conducive to warrant the dissolution of the squatter system. By 1953, of the total 49,000 families reported to be resident on the estates in 1948, only 24,000 families remained, and this was reduced to only 9,000 families by 1961.<sup>87</sup>

#### The Composition of the Wage Labour Force

The absence of any detailed statistical data for the period 1939 to 1961 makes it difficult to delineate

Table 3.3

Yearly Peak Levels of Employment 1950-1960  
(as of 31 March each year)

	African	Non-African	Total Regular	Casual Labour	Total All Employees
1950	102,760	na			
1951	119,449	na		12,634	na
1952	102,449	na		15,972	na
1953	86,693	na		20,972	na
1954	134,000	4,330	= 138,330	21,316	159,646
1955	146,000	4,650	= 150,650	22,234	172,884
1956	164,300	5,030	= 169,530	21,469	190,999
1957	174,900	5,610	= 180,510	21,234	201,744
1958	177,600	6,610	= 183,760	36,915	220,681
1959	179,200	6,300	= 185,500	26,005	211,505
1960	182,800	6,460	= 189,260	31,900	221,160

Source: Department of Labour Annual Reports, 1950-1960

the structural transformation that was taking place within the wage labour force precisely, particularly in the agricultural sector. Such data as does exist is scanty, and most of it covers the period 1950 to 1961. Consequently, what is presented in tables 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 is only indicative of a general trend rather than an accurate picture of the changes in the wage labour force.

By the early 1950s it is apparent that the expansion in plantation agriculture and secondary industry had led to a corresponding increase in the number of people who participated in wage employment. An estimated 72,000 people were reported to be in regular employment in 1938 in Malawi, but by 1950, an estimated 102,740 people were on regularly paid jobs, and this rose to 189,260 people by 1960 (see table 3.3). It needs to be noted also that these figures exclude Malawians employed abroad, who<sup>87</sup> by 1960, numbered over 260,000. Furthermore, as can be observed from table 3.3, there was also a significant number of people who participated in wage employment on a casual daily basis. This means that by 1960, an estimated 489,300 people participated in the wage labour market of whom 229,300 did so within Malawi. It needs to be emphasised, however, that these estimates are based on voluntary returns by employers, and therefore do not precisely represent the size of the wage labour force



Table 3.4

## Sectoral Distribution of Monthly Average Employment (Africans), 1954-1960

Industry	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960
Agr., Forest, Fishing	48,000	53,000	62,000	63,000	61,400	60,800	59,900
Mining & Quarrying	400	450	450	450	450	450	450
Manufacturing	13,000	13,700	13,800	13,900	14,000	14,000	14,200
Construction	19,000	21,000	25,000	26,000	26,000	24,000	22,000
Electricity & Water	1,000	1,000	1,300	1,300	1,400	1,400	1,400
Commerce	10,950	11,000	11,100	11,900	12,900	13,100	12,900
Transp. & Comm.	3,300	3,300	4,200	4,800	5,200	5,500	5,900
Domestic Service	11,500	11,600	11,900	11,400	10,700	10,100	9,400
Other	21,800	22,700	23,900	24,500	24,900	25,300	24,800
Total	129,550	138,950	154,250	157,250	156,950	154,750	150,950

## Non-Africans

	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960
Agr., Forest & Fishing	330	340	360	390	410	410	400
Mining & Quarrying	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Manufacturing	460	480	540	630	640	660	680
Construction	350	370	400	430	470	480	460
Electricity & Water	20	20	40	60	70	80	100
Commerce	1,270	1,410	1,520	1,730	1,900	1,870	1,820
Transp. & Comm.	380	420	470	530	620	610	610
Other	1,510	1,550	1,650	1,720	1,990	2,070	2,120
Total	4,330	4,600	4,990	5,500	6,160	6,170	6,180

Source: Nyasaland Labour Department Annual Report, 1961-1962

1. The data tabulated in these tables is based on the returns of the Federal Central Statistical Office, Salisbury, and does not tally with the annual employment returns of the Nyasaland Labour Department. This data therefore needs to be viewed with caution as it is only indicative of the general trends.

during the colonial period. In addition, the Labour department did not collect returns from employers with less than five employees. Thus it may be possible that a sizeable number of people who participated in wage employment remained unaccounted for.<sup>88</sup> It would therefore be realistic to postulate that, at least by 1960, the total number of Malawians who participated in wage employment, locally and abroad, was anywhere between 480,000 and 600,000 of whom over 250,000 did so within Malawi.<sup>89</sup>

The most significant feature of the wage labour force which was emerging in Malawi, as can be discerned from table 3.4 is that by the mid 1950s a greater proportion of those employed were engaged in the non-agricultural sector. This means that labour relations were no longer to be derived entirely from the labour control systems on the plantations. The rapidly expanding urban wage labour force was to become a major factor in shaping labour relations in the country.

As can be observed from table 3.5, young persons, juveniles and children, formed a sizeable component of the regular wage labour force. The majority of young persons were engaged in tea, tung and tobacco plantations. Juveniles and children, however, were not restricted to agricultural activities alone.<sup>90</sup> They were

TABLE 3.5

## Composition of Regular Employees By Sex and Age

	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956
Adult Males	82,479	92,189	82,400	70,639	63,641	89,243	84,321
Adult Females	5,428	6,182	1,635	1,007	1,272	1,371	2,159
Young Persons	14,853	20,651	18,300	15,047	13,978	17,623	15,963
Sub-Total	102,760	119,449	102,335	86,693	78,891	108,437	102,443

Source: Department of Labour Annual Reports, 1950-1956

also employed in urban areas. There are numerous indications of employment of children, and abuses of child labour in the non-agricultural sector, particularly in the urban areas of Limbe, Blantyre and Lilongwe. It was in the agricultural sector, however, that this trend became particularly conspicuous. <sup>91</sup>

There were a nexus of forces that propelled juveniles and children into wage employment on the plantations. First, as the competition for Malawian labour intensified, and wages rose, plantation operators and settler farmers found an alternative source of cheap labour in juveniles and children, particularly in the face of the demise of the squatter system. <sup>92</sup> Finally, as the cost of living continued to rise, parents too needed supplementary income to maintain their families, hence the drawing of juveniles and children into wage labour.

The abuses of child labour in the agricultural sector cannot be over-emphasised. While by law children under the age of 14 years were not to be employed in factories, and at night, many tea plantations engaged children for work in tea processing factories. In addition, children employed on field work were obliged to work long hours; on many tea, tung and tobacco plantations, children were seen at work for more than 8 hours a day. <sup>93</sup> Indeed the abuse of child labour was so

widespread that it became a major concern to many interests in the country both official and non-official. For some officials, particularly, in the Education department, it was clear, "that efforts to improve education in the country were being undermined by the practice of employing child labour. The existing regulations were not being enforced".<sup>94</sup>

Another observable feature of the labour force during this period, 1939 to 1961, was the rising importance of casual labour or Ganyu as Malawians would call it. This may be a wider indication of the intensification of the process of proletarianization particularly in the southern province. Nothing is more supportive of this observation than the fact that, for the first time during the colonial period, a greater proportion of the wage labour force employed on the plantation originated from the Shire Highlands. In 1941 for instance, 53 percent of the wage labour force in Mulanje district, were migrant workers from Mozambique, whereas in Thyolo and Blantyre districts migrant workers from Mozambique, and the central and northern province<sup>95</sup> comprised 48 percent of the total wage labour force.

But by 1951-1952 over 80 percent of the wage labour in these districts originated from the Shire Highlands, whereas the remainder consisted of migrant workers from

the central and northern province (2 percent),<sup>96</sup> and those from Mozambique, (18 percent).

As table 3.3 indicates, casual labour or Ganyu labour formed a significant proportion of the wage labour force during the period 1950 to 1960. Ganyu labour predominantly composed of women, and young persons; female labour featured prominently.<sup>97</sup> The relatively small number of women in regular paid jobs (see table 3.5) meant that, as before, women in Malawi continued to bear the burden of peasant production, and the reproduction and maintenance of labour in the countryside. The increased male emigration from Malawi to Southern Africa, and the increase in the number of males in wage employment in Malawi (see table 3.5) is a clear indication that the exploitation and marginalization of women in the colonial economy had intensified.

To maintain the levels of subsistence in the countryside women increasingly participated in wage labour on a casual daily basis or ganyu. Ganyu labour was widely employed on the plantations during the peak periods of harvesting and processing of tea, sisal, tung and tobacco.<sup>98</sup> A sizeable proportion of Ganyu labour was also employed in the non-agricultural sector, since ganyu labour was not provided with accommodation or daily rations, most employers found ganyu labour cheaper than

chithando or compound labour. Consequently most plantation operators increasingly began to rely on ganyu labour. This may help to explain the decline in absolute terms, of regular employees on the plantations (see table 3.4) at a time when tea, tung and sisal acreage had almost doubled from the pre- 1939 levels.<sup>99</sup> Thus increasingly ganyu labour began to assume the role originally played by squatter labour.

The general expansion of the processing of agricultural commodities, tea, tung, and sisal on the plantations also precipitated the growth of a core of skilled workers, such as technicians, drivers, mechanics and clerks.<sup>100</sup> The emergence of a stabilized labour force on the plantations had not only become a permanent feature of the agricultural labour force, but also a major impetus in the shaping of labour relations on the plantations and the rural areas.

#### Wages, Working and Living Conditions on the Plantations

Despite the acknowledgement by the colonial government, and even by some employers, of the need for a stabilized labour force and increased productivity, there is little indication that the wage structure changed much for the better during the period under consideration. After all, these were still same employers who clung to

the myth that Africans were merely target workers, so that raising wages would "remove the incentive to earn more money by regular attendance, and better work, and thus have the effect of accentuating the low standard of work performed by natives in Nyasaland".<sup>101</sup> With such arguments and rationalisation of a low wage economy current in the 1940s it must be little wonder that wages on the plantations were still based on the needs of a single man without a family.

By 1940, unskilled workers on tea plantations earned between 6/- and 9/- per month, whereas factory hands and skilled artisans earned between 9/- and 40/- a month. The tobacco farms paid between 5/- and 9/- per month for unskilled labour and in numerous cases squatters and regular employees were treated alike. The average wage received by unskilled workers on the plantations, including rations or cash in lieu, was between 9/- and 10/5d per month; the lower wages being more prevalent on tobacco farms while the higher wages were obtained on the tea plantations. By 1945, the commencing wage for unskilled labour on the plantations was between 7/- and 9/- per month.<sup>102</sup>

While these wage rates of the 1940s do represent a rise from the 1938/1939 levels, it seems highly probable that the wage increases did little to keep pace with the



soaring cost of living. It was estimated for instance, that the cost of basic foodstuffs in 1945 had risen almost three fold from the pre-war levels, whereas the cost of merchandise in stores had risen 100 percent,<sup>103</sup> and these estimates did not take into account the 'black market' prices which were in fact much higher than the official prices. This would mean that rural workers were actually spending much more than ever to provide food and clothing for themselves and their families. It must come as no surprise that by 1945, "it was apparent that the labourer employed on the plantations could not ably feed nor clothe his family and himself."<sup>104</sup>

For the first time, in 1946, the colonial government prescribed a minimum wage, set at 10/- per month, for the southern province. By 1950, the minimum wage for the plantations and rural areas was pegged at 12/6 per month. In addition to these cash wages employers were also required to provide daily rations or a cash payment if a worker so wished.<sup>105</sup> If a worker opted for cash in lieu of rations 2/- per week of 6 working days was paid. However by general agreement amongst the plantation owners deductions were made in the case of a workers' absence from work. For example, if a worker was absent for one day out of 6, a deduction of 50 percent was made from the weekly rations and he received only 1/- per week;

and if a worker did not turn up for work on two days out of 6, a deduction of 75 percent was made and he received only 6d per week. If a worker was absent for more than two days during the week he received no cash in lieu of rations.<sup>106</sup> But by law a worker was entitled to be fed on any day he was recorded to be employed.

By the early 1950s the estimated cost of feeding a worker on a tea plantation was between 8/- and 10/- per month while the corresponding amount on a tobacco farm was about 5/2d per month.<sup>107</sup> The planting community, feeling that high prices were cutting deeper into their profit margins, demanded a standardization of wages through the establishment of a consolidated minimum wage, thereby eliminating the legal obligation on the employer to provide rations. The recession in the agricultural commodity prices between 1950 and 1952 was a contributory factor that forced plantation owners to press for the standardization of wages. By July 1953, the colonial government had yielded and legislation was passed which abolished mandatory provision of rations to workers, and the minimum wage was set at 17/6.<sup>108</sup> The minimum wage represented a real fall in actual earning by plantation workers; cash wages and rations amounted to between 20/- and 22/6 in 1951-1952. This is yet another indication of the deficiency of the minimum wage policy pursued by the

colonial government. This fall in earnings on the plantations combined with increased taxation and the rising cost of living only helped to precipitate the tension in the rural areas, which finally exploded into the riots which began in August 1953. <sup>109</sup>

Thanks to the strikes of 1953, the political riots and the persistent labour shortages on the plantations, the statutory minimum wage was raised. By the end of 1953, the minimum wage was set at 23/- and by 1955 this rose to 30/-. The tendency of the minimum wage to rise continued and by 1958, it was pegged at 37/6 per month. A relentless wave of strikes, in the period 1959-1961, pushed up the wage minima to 50/- per month by January 1961. <sup>110</sup>

It is difficult to make a precise assessment of the impact of the minimum wage policy on rural workers in the period 1953 to 1961. For one thing, the basis for calculating the statutory minimum wage for rural workers is not clear. The colonial government did not keep a cost of living index for the rural as well as urban areas. This means that the minimum wages were not based on any realistic considerations. But it is clear that whatever criterion was used the belief that rural workers, supplemented their wages with food grown in their gardens, <sup>111</sup> must have played a part. This belief

however was based on force assumptions, because there were many workers on the plantations who had no access to land for food production. This is yet another deficiency in the minimum wage policy, and it is an indication that the statutory minimum wage policy was not only theoretical but also based on unrealistic premises.

Thus while the proclamation of a statutory minimum wage marked a departure from previous wage policy, the minimum wage was based on unrealistic assumptions. The tendency, therefore, was for some employers to take wage minima as guidelines for fixing what they considered to be maximum wages. Even worse, it seems that government took no concerted effort to enforce the statutory minimum wages; the labour department was flooded with numerous complaints of under-payment and non-payment of wages. In numerous cases undue delay occurred between completion of a ticket and the payment of wages.

The problem of over-time pay remained as elusive as ever. According to the arrangements in the tea industry, for example, African workers were paid for "over-task" work, that is work done once the daily task was completed. For the tea pluckers the final weighing of the day was normally between 3:30 and 5:00 p.m., and thus even if a worker completed the daily task they could not leave as the tickets would only be marked after the

weighing-time. By fixing a rigid final weighing-time the employers managed to induce the workers to go on plucking and earn over-time pay for "over-task" work. The average pay for daily task work in Thyolo district was .37 pence per lb. of tea picked while the rate of "over-task" work was .14 pence per lb. In Mulanje district the rate of pay for the daily task work was .33 pence per lb of tea picked while the corresponding amount for "over-task" work was .10 pence per lb.<sup>113</sup> With "over-tasks" work paid at a much lower rate than daily task work, plantation owners found it beneficial to induce workers to engage for overtime work because overtime labour was much cheaper than regular time labour. Overtime pay remained one of the most contentious issues between the management and workers on the plantations, but the colonial government took no steps to rectify the situation. Again that also shows the inadequacy of colonial wage policy.

There are numerous indications that the economic conditions of rural workers continued to deteriorate during the period under review. It was reported by the district Labour Office for the Mulanje and Thyolo area in 1955, that "the cost of most basic requirements such as foodstuffs and clothing had risen so much that they are beyond the abilities of many agricultural workers to obtain".<sup>114</sup> The prices of basic foodstuffs such as fish,

meat, rice and maize meal had risen almost five fold from the 1945 levels. In addition the prices of merchandise in rural stores tended to be much higher than in towns. A part from the obvious transport cost, many rural store owners obtained their merchandise from retailers in towns which meant that they had to resell their goods at much higher prices, sometimes twice as high.<sup>115</sup> This alone tended to offset the impact of the lower cost of food in rural areas.

As the cost of living continued to rise, many households were finding it more difficult to maintain themselves. Consequently many households found it essential to have many members of their families participate in casual labour, or Ganyu. This is one indication of the precarious predicament of rural workers, and it may be one explanation for the presence of substantial numbers of juveniles and children in wage employment in the period under review. The rising cost of living was surely a major factor that contributed to the intensified proletarianization of the rural labor force.

The relationship between workers on the plantations and the peasantry on trust land also gained a new dimension. Chinjira, for instance, which is a relationship between two women formed independently of their respective families involving social, economic and

ritual obligations associated with kinship ties, came to play an important role in the manner in which women on the plantations compounds related to women on trust land. As food became more expensive, women on the plantation compounds used their Chinjira partners on trust land to gain access to foodstuffs through a process of gift exchange. Thus more generally Chinjira developed as a mechanism for supplementing the plantation workers household income in line with their changing economic conditions. All these were attempts by the rural proletariat to survive in the face of growing economic hardships. This was also a theme constantly recalled in the oral evidence.

It was to be expected also that as the cost of living soared demands for higher wages, particularly among the skilled workers, would be on the increase. Frequently workers demands were broadened to include the need for improved housing and better employee-employer relations. Occasionally worker demands for higher wages on the plantations were manifested through work stoppages, walkouts and organised strike action. This new dimension in labour protests was to become a critical factor in shaping labour relations on the plantations.

The difficult economic conditions of rural or agricultural workers was only part of the total malaise of

their entire social and material environment. Although some plantation owners began to make an effort to improve housing, provide recreation facilities and other social amenities for the workers, "many employers of labour had much to make up before conditions could approach even a fairly satisfactory standard."

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A few large plantation owners continued to expand their compounds by constructing more permanent structures, and some plantation owners also began to recruit compound inspectors with the hope of improving the sanitation and health standards in the compounds. But without adequate financial provisions there was little the compound inspectors could achieve. Little attention was paid to the spacing, siting of the houses, provisions of waste disposal facilities, clean water supplies, bathrooms

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and latrines or even kitchens. The housing shortage on the plantations remained acute as before. Consequently the existing houses were generally overcrowded. In this respect bachelor housing on many plantations was the most glaring example of the serious shortage of accommodation. As many as 10 to 12 adult males could be jammed into one small room. Above all bachelor quarters were rarely cleaned or attended to.

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In 1948 out of a total labour force of 48,697 people employed by the tea industry only 17,914 were said



to be housed in employers 'labour lines'. The total capacity of such 'labour lines' was said to be 10,145 persons or 56.6 percent of those employed and said to be housed.<sup>120</sup> This means that the existing houses were heavily over crowded. The deleterious consequences of overcrowding need not be over emphasised. Measles, flu and other infectious and contagious diseases remained a serious problem on the plantations, but "little attention was paid to preventive health measures on the estates."<sup>121</sup>

The plantation workers were locked in a vicious circle of low wages and appalling living conditions: there is no indication of change for the better by the early 1950s. Housing shortages remained as acute as before.

The Labour Advisor stated in 1950 that

"Owing to insufficient attention given to this matter there is now a considerable backlog to be made up. The housing problem will however have to be faced..... Too often work on African housing is postponed in favour of building new factories or the extension of existing factories, opening up of new land for cultivation or the construction of European Housing. It is however a short-sighted policy which relegates the welfare of the African worker to the position of a poor relation."<sup>122</sup>

By 1953 only 9,942 units of accommodation, of which 8,664 were for married persons and 1,278 were for bachelors were available for an entire labour force of 50,223 engaged on the plantations.<sup>123</sup> It does not require any special imagination to see that under such conditions,

over crowding of houses with all its attendant problems remained the order of the day.

Commenting on the housing conditions on some of the plantations in 1958, the Labour Officer for Mulanje and Thyolo districts noted that:

housing for a large proportion of workers at the estate of I. Conforzi Ltd. is the worst I have ever seen. Many workers are housed in wattle and daub huts in an appalling state of repair. Walls have large holes in them. In some cases thatch is so thin that during a shower of rain all occupants are bound to be soaked. Without exception no estate in Cholo and Mulanje area provides housing or conditions comparable to those on the tea estates in Kericho, Kenya. Whatever houses are provided show little imagination or consideration for the possible demands of the African worker in the future.<sup>124</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that housing conditions on the plantations changed for the better between 1958 and 1960.

In principle most plantations maintained dispensaries for the treatment of wounds and simple ailments but the efficiency of such facilities was far short of the desired objective. The wide prevalence of leg ulcers is not only a testimony to the poor treatment provided at plantation dispensaries but it is also an indication of the poor protective clothing provided on the plantations. More generally, infections and other contagious diseases were also noticeable on some plantations; ailments which the plantation owners made

little effort to contain.

There was little organised welfare work on most estates. On a few plantations junior elementary schools were conducted for children of workers. Such schooling was occasionally conducted in the afternoon, that is after the children had worked during the morning hours. Some plantations also had established food markets on or near the compounds, and a few had Asian stores sited on or near the compounds, from which the workers could obtain merchandise. The only form of popular entertainment on the plantation was beer drinking, and dancing. There were also periodic cinema shows on some estates and gramophone music was available in some compounds. But such instances were rare.

Beginning in the late 1940s "western movies" featured prominently on tobacco estates in the central province in addition to gramophone music. Gradually singing by workers in tobacco grading sheds was becoming popular. While the ultimate objective of "western movies", gramophone music and singing in the grading sheds was to provide a form of entertainment, such activities were also serving useful functions for plantation owners. The western movies were intended to provide an alternative form of entertainment in the compounds in place of beer drinking which was likely to have adverse effect on the

efficiency of African workers. Dancing in the compounds, and singing in tobacco grading sheds, had the effect of diverting the workers' mind from serious issues of low wages, poor living and working conditions. 126

The picture which emerges with regard to the economic and social conditions of workers on the plantations is one that shows no remarkable change from the preceding period. In justifying the negligence of living conditions of African workers, employers held the view that:

the Nyasaland African is a person who does not appreciate good housing and who does not value anything which is given to him for nothing. 127

It was a view intended to legitimise the employers' irresponsibility in not providing better housing and social amenities for the African workers. But such myths fooled no one. It was constantly shown that plantations which showed little or no interest in the well-being of the workers also experienced chronic labour shortages. Poor housing and low wages also contributed to the inefficiency of the labour force. Plantations that provided little or no accommodation for workers were prone to high absenteeism, in cases reaching 48% of the total labour force. 128

But despite such revolting conditions gradually a stabilized and permanent labour force began to emerge.

Bafuli Mikoyi, for example, had served for 42 years by 1954 for the Bandanga Tea Estates. He was born in Mozambique and came to Thyolo with his father, were given land and encouraged to settle at Bandanga. Bafuli Mikoyi started work as a 'hoeing boy' and in 1912 he became a carpenter trainee (apprentice). In 1914 he was given work in the tea factory as an 'engineboy' and had continued in that capacity ever since with no break in his service. By 1954 he had been promoted to reach the rank of head mechanic.

Amon Tchuchu who came from Mozambique started work at Lujeri in 1925 as a general labourer. In 1954 he was promoted to capitao, a position in which he served till 1964. His son Stuart Tchuchu was born in 1933 at Lujeri. Stuart went to a plantation school for six years, between 1939 and 1945. During those years, he also worked as a ganyu labourer on the plantation. In 1950 he started full-time work as a factory hand in the tea collection section, a position he held for 8 years. In 1958 he was promoted to be a Storekeeper (engineering) - a capacity in which he served till 1964, when he was once again shifted into the garage to train as a tractor driver - a position which he still held at the time this information was recorded.

Sirwangete M'male, who originally came from

Mozambique, started work around 1913 as a cultivator in the tea fields. He then served in different roles as tea plucker, pruner, and at times as factory hand. In 1970 he was promoted to become a watchman, a job which he currently holds. Suwangete Mmale had two sons and a brother who also worked at Minimini Tea Estates. 131

Dawson Malukuta, born at Namwela Village in 1925, started work at Thornwood estate in 1941 as a tea factory hand. Between 1945 and 1948 he worked as a tea nursery hand. In 1948 Dawson was transferred to Limbuli estate where he also worked as a factory hand. In 1951 he left work at Limbuli and joined the Chinsambo estate (also in Mulanje district) where he worked till 1955 as an 'engineboy'. Between 1955 and 1964, Dawson Malukuta worked as an 'engineboy' at Glenorchy tea factory in Mulanje district. Once again he changed employers in 1964 and came to Minimini where he was working as an assistant mechanic in 1984. 132

Motiwa Suwedi started work at Lauderdale estate in Mulanje district in 1914 as a factory hand. In 1925 Motiwa was promoted to the post of field capitao a position he held till 1954 when he was again elevated to become head capitao, until he retired in 1977. Motiwa's son, Binali, aged 35 years, also works at Lauderdale Estates as a tea plucker. 133

Wincase Bandula, started work as a cultivator at Chinsambo estate in 1912. He had attended a mission school at Swazi close to Chinsambo estates before 1912. During his school years, Wincase Bandula engaged for ganyu labour on the plantations, and attended school in the afternoons. Between 1912 and 1933 he worked in various capacities on the plantation until he was promoted to temporary capitao and posted to the plantation dispensary in 1933, which had just opened. In 1939 he had gained the rank of head field capitao in charge of tea pluckers and pruners, a position which he held until 1966 when he retired. Between 1933 and 1939, Wincase Bandula's two brothers Rodney and Bestin, also became employed at Chinsambo as tea pluckers. Wincase Bandula's son, Gwadila, born in 1948 also joined the labour force at Chinsambo in 1960.

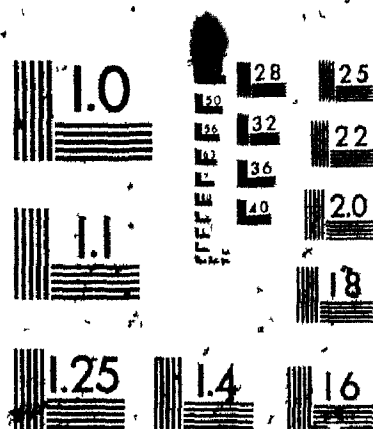
Another worker, John Kalenga, was born in 1943, at Minimini Estate. In 1952, he was employed on the plantation as a cultivator until 1959, when he was promoted to become a factory hand. In 1970 John Kalenga was back on the tea fields as a tea plucker, a position which he still holds. Two of his sons also worked at Minimini estate at the time this information was recorded.

These few and brief biographies of plantation workers do clearly demonstrate that by the 1950s in the

interaction between the squatter system and the migrant labour system a rural proletariat had emerged. The Malawian rural proletariat, was a cheap labour force subjected to depressing working and living conditions. While minimum wages had risen in absolute terms from the 1939 levels, the wage increases had done little to keep pace with the soaring cost of living. The eight hour day, pension schemes, higher rates of overtime pay, sick leave pay and annual holidays were yet to be provided. Thus despite the repeated calls by the government and some employers for improved working conditions, little had changed for the better.



# 4



**MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART**  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS  
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a  
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

### Footnotes

1. In addition to agricultural production the Nyasaland government made a financial contribution worth L752,000, to the British government. See, Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1946, pp. 3-4 and p. 6.
2. For details see, for example, Paul Mosley The Settler Economies, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983; Nicola Swainson, The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya, Heinemann, London, 1980. See also R. Hodder-Williams, White Farmers in Rhodesia 1890-1965, MacMillan Press, London, 1983.
3. Referred to in chapter one above.
4. The tung acreage for example increased almost five fold from 2,068 acres in 1938 to about 10,132 acres by 1945.
5. For details see C. Lebuscher, Bulk Buying in the Colonies, OUP, London, 1953.
6. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report for 1946, p. 5..
7. See Arthur Westrop, Green Gold, p. 227, as cited in Palmer; "The Nyasaland Tea Industry"; see also, J.A. Hutson, "An Outline of the early history of tea Industry in Malawi".
8. This subject has been thoroughly dealt with by, among others, D.J. Morgan, and George Padmore, that it needs no special emphasis in this present study. See the five volumes by D.J. Morgan, The Official History of Colonial Development, Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1980, volume 1 - 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. See also Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Tanzania publishing House, Dar es Salaam, 1976, and George Padmore, Africa: Britain's Third Empire, Negro University Press, New York, 1969, pp. 155-173.
9. Under the colonial development and welfare acts of

1945, a sum of L120 million was to be provided to the colonies over a ten year period, 1946-1956. See Morgan, Ibid, volume 1, chapter 15.

10. Under the Ten Year Development Plan launched in 1947 in Malawi, L 1.5 million was earmarked for education services; public health- L 1 million; L 150,000 for urban housing for Africans; L 199,000 for rural water supplies; L 950,000 on communications (roads), L 300,000 for airports; L 175,000 postal, telegraphs, and telephones; L 400,000 - agriculture; L 68,000 for up-grading African livestock; L 58,000 for afforestation; L 27,000 for geological survey; L 15,000 for hydrological survey; L 200,000 for new government buildings. See also Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report 1947, pp. 12-13.
11. See Nyasaland, Colonial Annual Report 1949, pp. 7-9.
12. Ibid., p. 32.
13. Ibid., p. 7.
14. See R.W. Kettlewell, Agricultural Change in Nyasaland 1945-1960, Food Research Institute Studies, Hague, 1965, pp. 263-264.
15. See Rangeley, "A Brief History of the Tobacco Industry Part II", p. 46; see also Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1951, p. 5; and Hutson, "An Outline of the Early History of the tea industry in Malawi." pp. 46-47.
16. The literature on the Central African Federation is well known to be recounted here. For a detailed and concise exposition on the Central African Federation, see Colin Leys and Cranford Pratt, ed. A New Deal in Central Africa, F.A. Paeger, New York, 1960; L.H. Gann, The Birth of a Plural Society, Manchester University Press, 1958; C.E. Lucas Phillips, The Vision Splendid, Heinemann, London, 1960; B. Pachai, Malawi; the History of a Nation, Longmans, London, 1973; E. Clegg: Race and Politics: Partnership in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, OUP, London, 1960; T.R.M. Creighton, The Anatomy of Partnership, Faber and Faber, London, 1960; Colin Leys, European Politics in Southern Rhodesia, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1959; A.J. Willis, Introduction to the History of Central Africa, OUP, London, 1964; P.E.N. Tindall, A History of Central

Africa, F.A. Praeger, New York, New York, 1967 and James Barker, Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion, OUP, London, 1967, see also Mufuka, Mission and Politics.

17. The settlers in Malawi had hoped that once federation was established they would gain access to the Land Bank in Southern Rhodesia. They did not. Attempts to make settler or European agriculture in Malawi a Federal government responsibility also failed. It was only in the field of health and education that settlers (European and Asians) benefited from the Federation. See Leys and Pratt, ed. op.cit, pp. 89-92.
18. See for instance MNA/Department of Agriculture, Memorandum on the agricultural and economic future of Nyasaland and future flue cured tobacco production in Nyasaland and European Agriculture, 19 March 1959. It was stated in this memorandum that "The Economy of this country must rest upon a solid foundation of European initiative and enterprise", p. 2.
19. The breakdown of the loans was as follows, 1955: 6 loans worthy L 11,700; 1956 - 13 loans worth L 16,950, 1957 - 12 loans worthy L 23,000; 1958 - 12 loans L 18,285; 1959 - 19 loans totalling L 30,235; 1960, 21 loans totalling L 35,669. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Reports, 1955-1960.
20. See Memorandum on the Agricultural and Economic future of Nyasaland, March 1959.
21. See MNA 1A/293/AGR33/VI; and MNA 1A/291/AGR33/IV.
22. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1946, p. 4. The Nkhota-Kota produce and Trading Society Ltd. was owned by Africans.
23. Infact, cash incomes for tobacco and cotton growers in Malawi declined sharply between 1942 and 1945. For example while the average cash income for tobacco growers was L 3-8- in 1942, it fell to L 3-8 pence; and for cotton growers, the average cash income fell from L 1-5 - 7d to L 1-3-4d. This is a clear illustration that whereas auction floor and bulk purchasing prices may have been high during the war, prices paid to African producers were in most cases much lower than the bulk purchase prices. See also Nyasaland Department of Labour Annual Report, 1949,

- p. 4; and 1945; p. 5. See McCracken, "Planters, Peasants, and the Colonial State," pp. 186-191.
24. See chart 3.1. There were other agricultural commodities which have not been included in the chart; such commodities include wheat, about 600 tons were being produced by 1945; beans of which about 3,800 tons were exported in 1945. It needs to be emphasised also that cotton, maize, rice, groundnuts, wheat, soya beans, and other pulses were mostly produced by African producers. In addition over 80 percent of the tobacco crop was produced by African growers. The plantations also produced sisal and rubber in addition to tung and tea.
  25. See footnote 22 above.
  26. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1948, p. 5.
  27. The original plan was for the colonial government to purchase 550,000 acres from the companies, for the resettlement of squatters from the estates. see ibid, p. 5.
  28. This theme has also been dealt with by Roger Tangri, "From the politics of union to mass nationalism: The Nyasaland African Congress, 1944-1959". pp. 254-281; "Interwar Native Associations and the Formation of the Nyasaland African Congress". -- "Political Change in Colonial Malawi. A Bibliographical Essay" in African Studies Bulletin, vol. XI, 3, December 1968, pp. 272-277. The Nyasaland Colonial Annual Reports for 1947-1949 also allude to the growing discontent of African peasants, with regard to the destocking and soil conservation measures. The events of the late 1940s and early 1950s clearly indicated growing rural unrest.
  29. The Bell Report of 1938, was one of the most revealing of growing poverty among Africans. The Bell Report painted a picture of lassitude and extreme poverty in African communities.
  30. See Roger Tangri, "from the politics of union to mass nationalism", pp. 254-281.
  31. See Kettlewell, op.cit., pp. 238-240.
  32. Ibid, p. 250. In 1946 there were an estimated 49,000 families of Africans squatting on the private

estates, and the total population of squatters was hovering in the range of 173,000 people.

33. See Nyasaland Annual Colonial Reports, 1945, p. 7; -- 1947, p. 7; -- 1950, p. 5; -- 1951, p. 6; 1958, p. 43. The surcharge on bicycle licenses was also raised from 2/- in 1940 to 10/- by 1961.
34. See Kettlewell, op.cit., p. 248, see MNA-SMP 18718; MNA/MB/18709.
35. See Nyasaland Colonial Report, 1956, p. 1, p. 55.
36. See Nyasaland Colonial Reports, 1955, p. 1.
37. Between 1945 and 1960, over L 2.5 million was commandeered by the government, from the marketing boards to finance expenditure including the construction of a European hospital in Lilongwe, a research station geared to settler agriculture (this was located in Zomba), and subsidies for European plantations. See McGracken, "Planters, Peasants, and the Colonial State", p. 181; and Kettlewell, op.cit., p. 248. Moreover there was a wide gap between prices paid to growers and prices obtained at the auction floors.
38. Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1957, p. 4. See also MNA 3-15-3R/9725/34-39; and MNA 2-30-8R/3498/10061.
39. Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1957, p. 4.
40. See Kettlewell, op.cit., 243. The 'Yeomen Master Farmer Schemes' were a widespread phenomena in the 1950s in most other colonies in Eastern and Southern Africa: See Bernart, "Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development: A Southern Africa Exploratin, 1900-1960", pp. 76-80.
41. See MNA 17B/42, African Farmers Association. There was the Mulanje Foodstuffs Growers Association, and Mombera Daries Co-op Society.
42. The Nyasaland Colonial Reports, 1949-1961 make repeated references to these schemes. See also MNA - Agri. 17V/42.
43. See MNA - Agri 17B/42. By 1960, a total of 479 loans worth L 28,000 had been granted to African farmers;

- 57 loans worthy L 4,150 were granted in 1958, 208 loans worth L 11,850 were made in 1959, and 214 loans worth L 12,000 were provided in 1960. See also Nyasaland Colonial Reports, 1958-1960.
44. See table 3.1
45. Estimates based on 1961 export returns. See Nyasaland Colonial Report, 1962, p. 68
46. See MNA-12/04: African Traders; see also Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1947, p. 5. By the late 1950s, an estimated 8,000 Africans were engaged, in the retail trade, operating stores and canteens, and many more were engaged in the hawker trade.
47. See MNA LAB/18: Secondary industry, C.O. to governor, 20 November, 1943; The objectives of the general policy of reasonable industrialization as summarized in Colonial Office despatch of 20 November 1943, Cmd 18658/43. G.L.M. Clauson to F.H. Sandford, were (1) to diversify employment in areas which would otherwise provide only a few extractive or primary industries (2) to reduce the undue dependence of colonial territories on world markets for primary products (3) By producing locally what can be economically produced on the spot, to conserve overseas purchasing power for goods which cannot be produced.
48. For details see Morgan, op.cit., vol. 2, see also P.S. Gupta, Imperialism and the British Labour Movements, 1914-1964, MacMillan Press, London, 1975. See also padmore, op.cit., pp. 162-173.
49. The shortage of fertilizer and pesticides was a major hindrance to the increased production of tea and cotton, particularly during the war period and up to the late 1940s. In addition low productivity was blamed on labor shortages because of lack of incentives. See Nyasaland Annual Colonial Reports, 1946, p. 4, p. 22 - 1947, p. 4 and see also Palmer, "The Nyasaland Tea Industry". p. 234
50. See MNA SMP/14278, Governor Colby to Colonial Office, 9 July, 1948.
51. It is also possible that the wartime measures which continued to the late 1940s of imposing import restrictions and surcharges on certain selected

- manufactured products may have induced some local suppliers to move into manufacturing. The best example under this category would be the London and Blantyre supply company which operated local wholesale and retail stores, which by 1946-47 had also started manufacturing garments and furniture in Lilongwe and Blantyre.
52. See MNA LAB/18: Secondary Industry.
  53. See, Leys and Pratt, A New Deal in Central Africa, pp. 76-77; and Ann Seidman and Neva Seidman Makgetla, Outposts of Monopoly Capitalism: Southern African in the Changing Global Economy. Zed Press, London, 1980, pp. 334-338.
  54. Seidman and Makgetla, Outposts of Monopoly Capitalism, p. 335.
  55. Examples under this category would be the Rhodesia Portland Cement Company a subsidiary of the U.S.A. Portland Cement Company; there was also the Nyasaland and Rhodesia Tobacco Company, the Ndola Sweet Factory (from Zambia), the United Tobacco Company, and the Nyasaland Clothing Factory (jointly owned by Rhodesian and South Africa interests) and the Nyasaland Knitting Company.
  56. The literature on Multinational and Transnational Corporation is vast. See for instance, Seidman and Makgetla, Op.cit; P. Evans, Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State and Local Capital in Brazil, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1979; A.M. Ragman, Inside the Multinationals: The economics of Internal Markets, Columbia University Press, New York, N.Y., 1981; R. Murray, (ed.), Multinationals Beyond the Market: Intra-Firm Trade and the Control of Transfer Pricing, Hannish Press, London, 1981; and A.M. Ragman and L. Eden, ed., Multinationals and Transfer Pricing, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1985, and Felix Green, The Enemy, Vintage Books, New York, N.Y. 1971.
  57. That the government took rumours of a second 'Chilembwe Rising' seriously is supported by the fact that when the war broke out, the Governor made sure that the Manager of A.L. Bruce Estates at Magomero, the centre of the 1915 Chilembwe Rising, was transferred to Nairobi or anywhere. The Manager, Kincaid-Smith, was indeed transferred. Kincaid-Smith



- was widely reputed for non-payment of wages, just like Mr. A.L. Livingstone, the manager at the time of the Chilembwe Rising in 1915. See MNA GOB/G.187, Correspondence, between A.L. Bruce Estates and Government, 1939.
58. Taxation on women was abolished in November 1939, and the taxation age for males was raised from 16 years to 18 years. See Baker, "Tax Collection in Malawi", pp. 56-57.
  59. A 'more work' campaign was launched in 1940, see MNA-LAB 11/4; Report on Labour conditions, 1940-1942.
  60. OTL, Chipeta with sub-chief Chimbeta, Thyolo.
  61. See Robin Palmer, "Land Alienation and Agricultural Conflict in Colonial Zambia" in Rotberg, ed. Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger, pp. 103-4; and Paul Zeleza, "Dependent Capitalism and the making of the Kenyan Working Class During the Colonial Period," Ph.D. Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1982, pp. 189-191. See also Palmer, "The Nyasaland Tea Industry", p. 235.
  62. By the end of 1942, only 10,000 Malawians were serving in military units in East Africa.
  63. The inter-territorial Labour Agreement between the three Central African territories was renewed again in 1949 and 1956. In the meantime, the colonial government also renewed its agreements with the union of South Africa, and Wavela continued to operate in Malawi. More of the emigrant workers from Malawi during the period 1937-1960, went to the employment centres of South Africa as independents. See MNA LAB 7/13, Labour Migration Policy, 1944.
  64. See MNA-LAB 11/4: Report on Labour conditions 1940-1945. It was only a formality that the Forced Labour Ordinance was abolished in 1950.
  65. The Employment of women, young person and children Ordinance and the Factories Ordinance were enacted at the end of 1938, and became law in 1939. Both these Ordinances drew largely on similar legislation already in force in Northern Rhodesia. See MNA LAB 8/31.
  66. See MNA LB 8/31. In addition to all these measures,

a Central Labour Advisory Board was created in 1940, to be followed later by Provincial Labour Advisory Boards and Minimum Wages Advisory Boards. Penal Sanctions for breach of a labour contract were finally abolished in 1947.

67. - This aspect will be developed in the final chapter.

68. Each of these events was followed by circular despatches from the colonial office to the colonies urging for improvement in labour conditions. The circular despatch of 9 November, 1935, urged for the "need for regular inspection of places of employment in order to provide means of ensuring that the conditions under which labour is employed are reasonable..... There should be arrangements for ensuring that conditions of employment are such that complaints are unlikely to arise; and this means that they ought to come under continuous and not merely under occasional review." The Circular Despatch of 24 August, 1937, drew attention to the need for Labour Departments in the colonies "to keep under review the formation of Trade Unions in the colonies, questions relating to housing conditions, especially of plantations, transportation of workers who come from a distance and the provisions of facilities for the education of children of workers employed on estates". On 15 December, 1939, the colonial office drew attention to "the importance of colonial governments ensuring that everything possible is done to minimise the risk of industrial disturbances during the war period and the period succeeding the termination of the war". These circular despatches can be found on MNA LB 10/5, 1935-1941. According to George Padmore, the "West Indian Labour unrest and Riots of 1937, the unrest and riots on the Copper Belt in 1935, and the riots in West Africa and East Africa were the real driving force behind the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts of 1940, and 1945. See Padmore, op.cit., pp. 155-162.

69. See MNA LAB 7/13, These very same concern had been a theme constantly harped on by colonial government officials from the early decades of colonial rule. See for example, MNA S1/1040/19, DC Mulanje to chief secretary, Annual report for 1918/1919. In the post 1939 period, there were many people in the colonial government who held the same view. See for instance, Nyasaland, Labour Department Annual Reports, 1942, p.6; -- 1948, p.5, -- 1954, p. 4.

70. See MNA LAB 11/4, Report on labour conditions, Commissioner for Labour to Chief Secretary 4 March 1941. This theme was repeated almost word for word in 1950. See Labour Department Annual Report, 1950, p. 7. Between 1946 and 1952, the tea industry was losing between 1 million lbs. and 3 million lbs. of tea annually because of labour shortages. See Palmer, "The Nyasaland Tea Industry", p. 235.
71. See MNA MP/8918, Investigation into the shortage of labour in the Mulanje and Thyolo District, conducted by the Labour Advisor, E.H. Hoole, 1948-1951.
72. See MNA MP/13895, public works Department: Labour Difficulties 1945 - 1951. See also MNA SMP/14248II, Shortage of Labour for local requirements 1951-56. The same conviction was repeated almost word for word in 1955. See for instance Nyasaland Annual Colonial Report, 1955, p. 26; -- 1958, p. 25.
73. See Nyasaland Annual Colonial Reports, 1946, p.7; -- 1947, p. 26; -- 1951, p. 33 and 1958, p. 43.
74. Ibid.
75. See MNA LAB 7/13: Labour Migration Policy. See also Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1960. p.33. The increase in labour emigration was generally due to increased taxation, combined with the soil conservation measures. The greater proportion of Malawi's emigrant labour went to the Rhodesias and South Africa. At the same time however there were also numerous thousands of Malawians working in Tanganyika, Zaire, Mozambique, South West Africa and Swaziland.
76. The number of squatters reached the peak level of 173,000 people (or an estimated 49,000 families) by 1945.
77. OTL, Chipeta with Jim Bwanali, Gotha Estate, Thyolo; OTL, Chipeta with John Masikini, Nchima Estate; OTL, Chipeta with Rodrick Rajabu, Minimini Estate, Mulanje, and OTL, Chipeta with Benisi Fosiko, Thyolo Highlands Tea Estates, Thyolo. See also in Sidney Abraham's Land Commission Report, 1946; pp. 6-7 (hereafter The Land Commision Report 1946).
78. Land Commission Report, 1946, p.17, evidence of E.C.

Barnes and evidence of Chief Somba.

79. In both these incidents, the estate managers wanted to forcefully evict the squatters; by demolishing the squatters huts where upon squatters turned on company property. In the event, the estate managers appealed for assistance from the District Commissioners for arbitration, and upon investigation, the squatters were allowed to remain on the estates. See MNA NSE 2/1/1-8, Annual Reports of Cholo District 1940-1948; and MNA NSE 1/8, Annual Report of Blantyre District 1945.
80. For details see Pachai, Land and Politics, see also Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1947, p. 6, and Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1948, p. 5.
81. Markets were also withdrawn in some areas of the southern and central province. See also McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State", pp. 188-189; see also Nyasaland Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1951, p. 12.
82. See Nyasaland Labour Department Annual Report, 1952, Africans on private estates ordinance, p. 15.
83. It is widely acknowledged that a wide gap existed between the prices paid to growers and prices obtained at the auction floors; peasant discontent as a result of low prices was also a recognised problem by the colonial government. See MNA 3-15-3R/9725/34049. Report on the working party on cotton and tobacco bonuses, Zomba, 1958.
84. See Tangri, "From Politics of Union to Mass Nationalism", pp. 270-272. The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was inaugurated on 3 September, 1953. The estate owner was Mr. Tennett a European, widely known for his high-handed treatment of Africans. It maybe possible that the stealing of oranges was a premeditated provocative action by Africans at Luchenza, because later Tennett was accused of Chifwamba - (the precise translation of this term would be terrorism rather than man eating as other writers seem to imply) - the translation of the term derives from the oral traditions conducted as part of the research for this study; for example, OTL, Chipeta with Jim Bwanali, Gotha Estate Thyolo; OTL, Chipeta with Samson Galima Glotha Estate Thyolo.

85. See MNA NSM 1/3/14II Annual Reports of the provincial commissioner, 1953-1954; see also Tangri, "From Politics of Union to Mass Nationalism", p. 271.
86. The official figure for the number of Africans killed is on the low side. Evidence currently unveiled by the Department of Antiquities seems to indicate that there were many more people who were killed by police action. Furthermore, while official accounts claim that order was restored in two months there are numerous reports of hostile action by Africans in the countryside during the first half of 1954. This may also be an indication of the widespread discontent with colonial rule than a mere dislike of the Federation as other writers unwittingly suggest.
87. MNA LAB/4(11), see also Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1962, p. 61. It is also highly probable that around 375,000 Malawians were employed abroad by 1960, see Robert Boeder, "Malawian Labour Emigration" African Insight, vol. 14, 1, 1984, p. 25.
88. In 1950 for instance 1,129 employers submitted their employment rolls, whereas in 1953 only 890 employers did so. In 1957 1,152 employers furnished employment returns to the Labour Department, whereas only 899 employers submitted their employment returns in 1958. Such discrepancies may help explain the fluctuations in the employment levels on tables 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5.
89. See also footnote 87 above.
90. A juvenile was defined as anybody between the age of puberty and the tax paying age of 18 years.
91. In the urban areas the children were mostly employed in tobacco packaging and grading factories, and brickfields.
92. The Department of Labour Annual Reports for the period 1942-1960 make repeated reference to the integration of children and juveniles in the wage labour force. See also MNA LB8/311.
93. See MNA LAB 11/4, Annual Report by D.C. Mulanje, 1945; -- Annual Report by D.C. Cholo, 1947.
94. See MNA LBI/1IV, Director of Education to Chief Secretary, 9 November 1948.

95. See MNA LAB 11/4, Annual Reports for Mulanje district and Cholo district for 1961.
96. See MNA MP 18918, Investigation into Shortage of Labour, 1948-1951.
97. In 1956, for instance, of the 21,469, casual workers, about 13,779 were adult females, 6,031 adult males and 2,314 were young persons (juveniles and children).
98. Some tung plantations contracted workers wives on the plantations for the shelling and husking of tung nuts. The women would do such contract work in the compound.
99. In 1938, there were only 2,000 acres under tung, and about 15,500 acres under tea production, but by 1960 there were 18,000 acres under tung and 30,000 acres under tea in Malawi.
100. There is no specific data on the number of skilled workers in the agriculture sector, although many plantations employed sizeable numbers of mechanics, technicians, drivers and clerks.
101. See MNA LAB 11/3II, Convention of Associations to Commissioner of Labour, 6 November, 1941. See also Nyasaland Labour Department Annual Report 1942, p. 6.
102. See Nyasaland Department of Labour Annual Reports, 1942, p. 4, -- 1944, pp. 3-4, -- 1945, p. 6.
103. See MNA LAB 11/4, Conditions of Labour on the Estates, 1944-1946; see also Nyasaland, Department of Labour Annual Report, 1945; p. 4; and MNA MP/12104.
104. See MNA LAB 11/4, Conditions of Labour on the estates 1944-1946.
105. This was provided for under the Minimum Wages Ordinance passed in 1944, discussed above. See MNA LAB 11/3II Minimum Wage Policy, 1942-47.
106. See MNA MP/18918, Labour Survey Report, 1948-1952.
107. MNA MP 14, Minimum Wages Advisory Board Southern

108. See Nyasaland, Department of Labour Annual Report, 1953, p. 10. The Native Labour (amendment) Ordinance, no. 27, 1953: Some employers fearful of losing their labour supply, still provided rations, but many tobacco estates ceased to provide the rations.
109. See footnote 84 above. We will develop this aspect of labour protest in the final chapter.
110. See table 3.7, Minimum Wage Orders 1946-1961.
111. See MNA LAB 11/3II: 'Minimum Wage Policy, 1942-1947'. It was asserted by the Labour Department in 1945, that "the official estimated income required by the average African family is L 5. No provision is made in this figure for expenditure on food which so far as the majority of the population is concerned is grown at home". The irony of this assumption is that the Labour Department deliberately glossed over a known fact: that there were many workers on the plantations that had no access to land for food production.
112. There are thousands of reported complaints by African workers of being paid below the statutory minimum wage. In 1950-1953, an estimated 18,000 cases of under-payment were recorded. See MNA LAB 17/2/C: Monthly Reports of provincial Labour Officers 1948-1954; MNA LAB C/4/5, Reports on Labour Conditions and Labour Registers 1947-1956, MNA LAB 17/2/A, Monthly Reports of Labour Officers 1956-1962 and MNA LAB 108/A, Complaints from Employees 1953-1959.
113. This paragraph has drawn from the findings of E.H. Hoole, the Labour Adviser, during his investigation on the causes of Labour Shortages on the plantations in the Southern province, in the period 1948-1952. See MNA MF/18918: Labour Survey Report. 1951-1952.
114. MNA/LAB 11/8/3I, Report of the District Labour Officer, Mulanje, 1955. The Director of Agriculture also noted in 1955, that while the minimum wage has risen from 10/- per month in 1939 to 30/- by 1955, "it has done little than keep pace with the increase in the cost of living". See Nyasaland, Department Agriculture, Outline of Agrarian Problems and Policy in Nyasaland, 1955, p. 6.

115. See MNA MP/12104, Wages and conditions of Labour on the estates. MNA LAB 11/8/31, Report of the Provincial Labour Officer, 1955-1956.
116. OTL, Chipeta with Mama Chalowe Mbewe, Nchima Estate, Thyolo, 26/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with sub-chief Kwetemule and councillors, Makwasa, Thyolo; OTL, Chipeta with Charles Matipwiri, Ruw Estates, Mulanje, 15/6/84; Chipeta with J. Bonongwe, Nasonia Estate Thyolo, 24/6/84. See also P. Ligoya, "Chinjira between women in Thyolo District," Department of Sociology Seminar, University of Malawi, 1981; and Megan Vaughan, "Which family? Problems in the reconstruction of the History of the Family as an Economic and Cultural unit" in J.A.H., 24, 2, 1983. pp. 282-283.
117. See MNA C5/1, Wages and conditions of employment on the estates; and MNA MP/8918: Labour Survey Report, 1948-1952.
118. MNA LB.
119. MNA C5/1; See also MNA MP/8918, Labour Survey Report.
120. MNA C5/1.
121. MNA MP/8918.
122. See Nyasaland Department of Labour Annual Report, 1950, pp. 7-8.
123. See MNA LAB 11/8/31, Report on the Labour conditions on the estates 1952/1953, Provincial Labour Officer South.
124. MNA C5/1, Monthly Report, 1 July, 1958; and see also MNA MP 11/7, Monthly Reports, 1958-1960.
125. Most plantation managers confined the beer drinking sessions to Saturday afternoons only. No beer drinking was allowed on Sundays on most plantation compounds. There were two types of dances, traditional dances and "modern dances," the latter was rare while the former were quite popular (the commonest traditional dances were Chopi, Masewe and Mazoma). "The modern gramophone music" was popular among the clerical and technical staff. A post-1960 development has been the establishment of sports, particularly soccer. One plantation could boast of



12 soccer teams in 1984. According to two plantation managers, the management increasingly began to appreciate the need for sports and entertainment in order to build a stabilised labour force. OTL, Chipeta with C. Findlay, Lujeri Estate, Mulanje; OTL, Chipeta with Spurrier Ruu Estate, Mulanje. Finally the tobacco estates which featured western movies were reputed to be famous among juvenile workers. Surely cheap entertainment was also used to capture cheap juvenile and child labour.

126. In 1945 for instance the labour department reported that "Amongst improvements which have already been made is the provision of music and the encouragement of singing in some tobacco factories. The innovation has proved popular and the tasks are cheerfully and smoothly done". See Nyasaland Labour Department Annual Report, 1945, p. 3. Similar conclusions have been drawn in relation to the role of entertainment in defusing class consciousness among workers in the mining industry in Zimbabwe during the colonial period. See Van Onselen, op.cit., pp. 186-194.
127. See MNA SMP/4248II, Shortage of labour for local requirements, 1956. See also MNA LB 4/2/1. Labour conditions in industries.
128. See MNA SMP/2585, Labour shortages on tea estates, 1958-1960; MNA MP VIII/35, Housing African Employers 1948-1959; provincial labour officer to Commission for labour, 19 October, 1958; and MNA SMP 28953, Labour Difficulties in Mzuzu 1955-1957. The average absenteeism on many plantations was about 30 percent.
129. MNA LB 11/3/8, Factory Manager, Bandanga Tea Estates Limited to Commissioner for Labour, 13 May, 1954. The Factory Manager requested the commissioner for labour if some news items could be made on Bafuli Mikoyi or some other official award.
130. OTL, Chipeta with Stuart Tchuchu, Lujeri Tea Estates, Mulanje, 14/6/84. A total of 140 biographies of workers in the tea plantations were collected as part of the research for this study. The ones presented here are only representative of a larger and complex process.
131. OTL, Chipeta with Suwangeti M'male, Minimini Estate, Mulanje, 16/6/84.

132. OTL, Chipeta with Dawson Malukuta, Minimini Estate Mulanje, 16/6/84. The term "engine boy" was widely used during the colonial period to classify people who were training as mechanics through apprenticeship.
133. OTL, Chipeta with Motiwa Suwedi, Lauderdale Estate, Mulanje, 18/6/84.
134. OTL, Chipeta with Wincase Bandula, Chinsambo Tea Estate, Mulanje, 15/6/84.
135. OTL, Chipeta with John Kalenga, Minimini Estate, 16/6/84.

## CHAPTER 3: PART III

Urban Labour 1939-1961

The growth and the expansion of the wage labour force in the period 1939 to 1961 was nowhere more apparent than in the non-agricultural sector of the economy. The expansion of commerce and the growth of secondary industries meant that an increasing number of people were engaged, for employment for prolonged periods. Industrialization also precipitated urbanization as more people flocked to towns in search of employment opportunities while conditions in the rural areas deteriorated.

Africans flocked to urban centres because of the deteriorating conditions in the rural areas, and the incidence of landlessness particularly in the southern province. This meant that the youth increasingly came to form the larger segment of the dispossessed population which migrated to towns in search of economic opportunities. Thus Africans who migrated to towns were not essentially attracted to the urban areas by the prospects of higher wages and 'modernity', for after all, the living conditions in the colonial towns in Malawi were very depressing. Significantly, elementary school leavers formed a noticeable component of the new migrants in the

urban centres.<sup>1</sup> This process tended to reinforce the low wage economy, particularly among the clerical workers, as the supply of labour in this category tended to exceed the demand.

Predictable the rate of urbanization was highest in Blantyre, where most of the industries and commercial activities were located. By 1960 an estimated 26,000<sup>2</sup> people were reported to be working on formal jobs in the Blantyre urban area. But as before, the pattern of employment was largely determined by race. European and Asian workers monopolised the most skilled and artisanal jobs whereas the majority of Africans occupied the semi-skilled and unskilled jobs. To be sure, in comparison with other countries in southern Africa, the European and Asian component within the labour force in Malawi was small. But as can be discerned from table 3.4, their numerical strength showed an upward tendency.<sup>3</sup> This was to become a critical factor in shaping race relations in the country, particularly, granted that Europeans and Asians monopolised the most skilled and highest paying jobs.

The increase in the number of Asians and Europeans in employment arose largely from the growth of commerce and secondary industries. The growth of secondary industries led to greater demand for the highly

skilled manpower. The shortage of skilled manpower, particularly in the managerial, supervisory, and technical professions in the manufacturing sector, commercial firms and some government departments saw a number of firms import immigrant workers from Europe, India and Southern Rhodesia.<sup>4</sup> Significantly, the great proportion of Asian workers were brought into the country by relatives or friends, and the majority of them were employed in Asian owned businesses and firms.<sup>5</sup> This tended to reinforce racial solidarity thereby inhibiting Afro-Asian class consciousness.

Most of the European immigrant workers generally occupied supervisory and managerial positions, both in the civil service and the private sector. This, when combined with the racial identification of European workers with the colonial ruling classes, further reinforced their alienation from African and Asian workers. These divisions within the labour force were also buttressed by the employment structure which existed in the country. It was reported in 1959, for instance that

the civil service is officially divided into a senior and junior service, and these two are largely divided into European and African service. No proper place is provided for the locally appointed officer and by the use of junior division (for Africans) and senior service (for Europeans) a firm barrier appears to be placed between the junior and senior services. This division does not make for harmonious relations within the service.<sup>6</sup>

This, clearly shows that the employment pattern was also reinforced by the legal structures which governed employment in the country. All these factors tended to undermine the solidarity within the wage labour force.

Ironically while so many hundreds of skilled workers were being brought into the country from abroad, some African workers, such as mechanics, machine operators, and book-keepers were finding it difficult to obtain jobs. Even worse still; the colonial government made no effort to improve technical and managerial education for Africans, despite the fact that imported Asian and European labour was more expensive than African labour. The young school leavers were particularly bitter at the way the colonial government neglected them in as far as the provision of vocational and specialized training was concerned. To many Malawian workers, the recruitment of Asian and European immigrant labour was seen as a major hindrance to their advancement. This, frustration among Malawian workers, was to find its expression through nationalist politics; for many workers their class struggles became an integral part of the crusade against colonial rule.

Another significant feature of the urban labour force in the period 1939 to 1961, was the noticeable presence of juveniles and children in the regular wage

labour force. Juveniles and children were employed in tobacco packaging factories, brick fields, and Asian owned stores. On many brick fields and in the tobacco grading factories, a large proportion of the labour force was made up of juveniles and children. In 1955, at one cigarette factory in Limbe of a total labour force of 76 Africans, 64 were reported to be juveniles and children under the age of 14 years. At the Imperial Tobacco Company tobacco grading factory in Limbe, of 1,290 African<sup>9</sup> workers, 780 were reported to be juveniles and children. On many of the brick fields in and around the urban areas of Blantyre, Limbe, Lilongwe and Zomba, children made up over 50 percent of the labour force. In 1958, the provincial labour officer for the southern province noted that:

Large numbers of juveniles and children are being employed within townships. The brick fields, tobacco packing factories and Asiatic store owners are the worst offenders as far as the employment of children in the townships is concerned. Legislation limiting and controlling the employment of juveniles and children is long overdue.<sup>10</sup>

It can hardly be emphasised that the presence of juveniles and children in the urban labour force may also be a clear testimony to the deteriorating living conditions in the countryside. In addition, the presence of children in the urban labour force is yet another

indication that household incomes were low and parents increasingly came to value their children in terms of the financial contribution the children could make to the family's income.

In as far as the employers of labour were concerned, the presence of large numbers of juveniles in the wage labour force was largely due to the shortage of adult male labour. There was more hard-nosed economic interests to this assertion than any empirical truth. Juvenile and child labour was cheaper than adult male labour. Juveniles and children earned 75 percent and 50 percent respectively, of the adult male wages. This meant that juveniles and children were an alternative source of cheap labour for employers in search of profit. Above all children were much easier to control and manipulate than adult workers. Not surprisingly, perhaps, children employed on the brick fields, in the tobacco grading factories and the Asian store owners were kept at work for long hours.<sup>11</sup> Children employed in the tobacco grading factories, brick fields and Asian stores were irregularly paid, and in some cases not paid at all. Consequently, many juveniles and children in towns became destitute; the fact that "several young persons were appearing in court<sup>12</sup> on theft charges" bears witness to this.

The most significant feature of the urban labour



force in the period 1939 to 1960, was the growing presence of a semi-skilled and skilled component of African workers engaged in the manufacturing industries. In addition there was also a noticeable expansion of the wage labour force engaged in specialised fields like transportation, communication, electricity and water, and construction. As can be seen from table 3.4, by 1960, the secondary manufacturing industries employed 14,200<sup>13</sup>, while other specialised sectors, such as transportation engaged 5,900 African workers and electricity and water about 1,400 African workers. This may be one indication that gradually a stabilized labour force was beginning to emerge in the urban areas, especially in the towns of Limbe, Blantyre and Lilongwe where secondary industries were located.

While the pattern of employment in the urban centres changed remarkably from the pre-1939 pattern, the spatial distribution of the population in towns remained unaltered. As before 1939, so too in the period 1939 to 1960, the spatial location of the urban population was determined by race. Predictably Europeans occupied their own segregated residential areas which were always well serviced with running water, sewerage facilities and electricity. Commercial concerns, in the towns of Blantyre, Limbe and Lilongwe, which had a sizeable Asian

or Indian component in their labour force, like the railways, had special "Indian Quarters."<sup>14</sup> The majority<sup>15</sup> of Indians, however, lived in "cramped quarters" attached to their trading stores. African workers on the other hand continued to live in slums on the outskirts of the urban areas. Finally, Europeans, as well as Asians, each had their own separate schools and hospitals which were not accessible to Africans. Notwithstanding the predominance of racial ideologies in the colonial social formation, urban policies which promoted segregated residential areas also tended to pre-empt the possibilities of class solidarity across racial boundaries.

With such an urban and employment structure, working and living conditions for African workers remained as atrocious as ever. The majority of employers had yet to abandon their despotic tendencies. For instance, according to the arrangements made by the owners of the tobacco grading factories, the Nyasaland Tobacco Graders Association, the names of all dismissed employees within the tobacco industry had to be circulated among all member employers.<sup>16</sup> This meant that once dismissed a worker would have difficult time to find another job. According to the rules established by the Management of Nyasaland Transport Company, an absence of 30 minutes from duty by

Table 3.6

Industrial Accidents and Workmen's Compensation, 1946-1962<sup>1</sup>

Year	Nature of Accident Nos.				Total Accidents Reported	Total Amount of Compensation
	Fatal	Permanent Incapacity	Temporary Incapacity	Not Classified		
1946		3			3	
1947		3			12	8
1948	1	8	26		35	9
1949	9	13	24		46	231
1950					47	441
1951	10	21	38	14	83	490
1952	31	22	57	8	118	1,260
1953	15	24	75	56	170	1,538
1954	30	29	56	58	173	3,030
1955	14	40	60	61	175	4,011
1956	23	58	58	19	158	3,894
1957	36	6	87	49	232	5,436
1958	31	68	73	94	266	7,179
1959	17	66	102	52	237	5,374
1960	24	96	114	48	282	5,477
1961	25	103	115	38	282	5,992
1962	40	80	61	231	412	8,017

Sources: Department of Labour Annual Reports, 1946-1962

1. It seems the colonial government did not keep records of industrial accidents between 1891 and 1945.

an African worker forfeited the days pay.<sup>17</sup>

In the meantime the unpopular Employment Books were still in use, although the mandatory requirements imposed on all African regular employees to possess them was removed and new Employment Books were to be issued in 1958. The new Employment Books were to contain such details as the skills attained by the worker, the period of service and wages earned at the last date of employment.<sup>18</sup>

Once the workers' previous wage had been marked in the Employment Book he could not easily negotiate a higher wage. In this way Employment Books were used for standardization of wages. Non-possession of the Employment Book meant that a worker would have difficulty to prove his ability in terms of skills and experience to a prospective employer. Furthermore, apart from the apprentice training schemes in the railways and the public works department (PWD), most commercial concerns did not provide training facilities for their employees. Thus, in addition to severe working conditions, African workers had also no viable access to training facilities to improve their skills and thereby enhance their earning capacity.<sup>19</sup>

Except for the central government, the majority of employers such as municipalities, public utilities bodies, and the commercial concerns made no provisions for

sick leave pay, paid annual holidays, and pension, or gratuities. To be sure, for the first time during the colonial period, a number of legislative measures were passed to establish safety standards, work periods, and compensation for injury or death of a worker. A Factory Ordinance had been passed in 1938 and became law in 1939, stipulating the required minimum safety standards, equipment, installation procedures and operational regulations. But as it turned out the laws were not enforced; for one thing, the colonial government lacked the manpower and the technical know-how to enforce the legislation. Consequently, safety standards varied greatly between industries in the same sector and from one sector to the other. As a general rule, the safety standards in most factories has much to be desired, and many factory owners made no effort to improve the situation. The high number of factory or industrial accidents as shown in table 3.6 may well be an indication of poor safety standards coupled with non enforcement of the law.

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Admittedly, the Workmens Compensation Ordinance was passed into law in 1946, with additional amendment enacted in 1954. The amounts of compensation to be paid in case of injury, total incapacitation, or death of a worker were then established. However, numerous accidents

went unreported. Even when reports were made a long time elapsed before effective action was taken to secure compensation. <sup>21</sup> As can be seen from table 3.6, the amount of compensation were clearly not high enough to reflect, in any manner the 'objective value' of the worker or the worker's family loss of earning capacity.

The work period remained long as before and overtime pay regulations were yet to be enforced. By law the daily work period was set at 8 hours each day, but in practice a 10 to 12 hour day was the norm for most African workers engaged in the private sector. In the meantime no overtime pay was awarded to most of the overworked workers. By law overtime was to be paid at the rate of 1 1/2 times the normal rate of pay; but many employers in the tobacco and construction industries only paid lip service to the law. <sup>22</sup> With such all round depressing working conditions it must come as no surprise that the low wage economy still persisted.

#### Wages and Living Conditions

Despite the fact that more and more people were employed and many stayed at their jobs for prolonged periods than before, there seem to be no indication that wages and conditions of living improved appreciably during the period under review. In the meantime, during the war,

Table 3.7

## Minimum Wage Orders 1946-1961

Year	Blantyre-Limbe	Zomba and Lilongwe	Rural Areas
1946	10/-	10/-	10/-(SP)
1948	12/6	11/-	10/-
1950	15/-	12/6	10/-
1952	17/6	15/-	12/6
1953	25/-	23/-	17/6
1954	40/-	30/-	23/-
1955	40/-	35/-	30/-
1957	60/-	55/-	35/-
1959	62/6	52/6	37/6
1960	75/-	62/-	42/6
1961	90/-	75/-	50/-

Source: Department of Labour Annual Reports  
1946-1961

1. For the first time in 1957, the minimum wage order was extended to cover Salima township in the Central Provinces probably because of the presence of several hundreds of railway workers in the township. The minimum wage the was pegged at 40/- per month.

wages did not keep pace with the soaring cost of living, and the housing problem remained unresolved. The severe shortages of merchandise meant that black marketeering mushroomed, thereby causing unmeasurable hardships for urban workers.

By 1941, the basic commencing wage for unskilled urban workers was almost the same as in 1938/1939. The commencing wage for a 30 day ticket for the unskilled labour was 6/- per month or 8/- per month, including rations or cash in lieu. Unskilled workers employed by the government earned an inclusive wage of 10/-, whereas clerks were signed on at 12/- per month.<sup>23</sup> By 1944, unskilled workers in urban areas earned an inclusive wage of between 11/- and 12/- per month, inclusive. While the tendency had been for wages for unskilled workers to rise the average value of the monthly income in 1945, was<sup>24</sup> "still much the same as before the outbreak of the war". At the same time it was reported in 1945, that "the prices of foodstuffs has risen so much that no low wage earner could exist on his wages alone, and so he has to turn to other ways of supplementing his income, of which brewing<sup>25</sup> beer is the simplest."

To compound the situation, the housing shortage became even more acute as people flocked to towns while conditions in the rural areas deteriorated, and the status



of squatters on the estates became unbearable. While the colonial government acknowledged the housing shortage, no concrete steps were taken to alleviate the plight of urban workers. The majority of commercial employers simply ignored the problem: the war, of course, provided a ready made excuse.

The housing shortage was a boon for landlords, and increasingly urban workers came to spend more on house rent. A single room in and around Blantyre could cost as high as 5/- per month. <sup>26</sup> Consequently most workers had to share rooms, and over crowding became an epidemic problem, as workers struggled to make ends meet. All these factors, low wages and the high cost of living tended to force African workers to come to rely on credit trade and debt with Asian store owners, which in turn led to chronic indebtedness, such that this problem was <sup>27</sup> causing concern among the authorities in urban areas. Thus by the end of the war, the social and economic hardships among African workers showed no signs of easing up.

At least on paper, as far as the colonial government was concerned, some progress was made. For the first time during the colonial period, the colonial government introduced a minimum wage policy and wage regulating measures. Minimum wage legislation was passed

in 1944, and the Minimum Wages Advisory Board was established in 1946, followed later in 1947 by the formation of provincial Minimum Wages Boards. All these boards were set up with the objective of devising wage minima for both the agricultural sector and the secondary industrial sector in the urban centres. Later in 1958, these measures were reinforced by the establishment of the Central Wages Advisory Board, which was charged with the responsibility of making recommendations to the government on the rates of pay and conditions of employment and the setting up of wage councils in the various industries.

Initially, beginning in 1946, when the first Minimum Wage order was issued, the Statutory Minimum Wage was restricted to the southern province. But by 1949-1950, both the central and northern provinces had been included in the minimum wage order. The prescribed minimum wage rates (see table 3.7) differed from town to town and between towns and the rural areas. As shown in table 3.7, while the minimum wage showed an upward trend, the rate of increase was much higher in towns than it was in rural areas. This, it will be shown in the next chapter, may be a precise commentary on the organizational level of the labour force both on the plantations and the urban areas during the period under review.

While the wage minima had risen substantially in absolute terms from the 1939 levels, these increases may be deceptive after all. For one thing, the formula on which the calculation of Minimum Wage was based is not known. The colonial government did not maintain any cost of living index nor was any Poverty Datum Line (PDL) and Effective Minimum Line (EML) ever known in the period up to 1958.<sup>29</sup> The colonial government, including the various Minimum Wages Boards, used to base their minimum wage estimates on the cost of basic foodstuffs; other items such as housing rent, fuel and clothing were not systematically taken into consideration.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the government used to base their estimates of prices for basic foodstuffs on the officially controlled prices, and not on the prevailing market prices; some basic commodities which were in short supply were sold on the 'black market' at twice the official prices. It is, therefore, highly probable that the prescribed minimum wage did not, in any realistic terms, correspond to the actual cost of living.

Finally, it was one thing to institute minimum wage orders and yet another to implement them. The Labour Department clearly admitted that it was almost impossible to enforce the minimum wage orders and that many employers were obtaining labours at much lower rates of pay.<sup>31</sup> The

Labour Department was generally understaffed and therefore handicapped, to ensure that the minimum wage orders were being adhered to.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, there were many urban employers who treated the statutory minimum wages as maximum rates for their employees. Even worse still, some employers rarely paid workers in cash. Asian storeowners, for instance, clung to their old devious system whereby employees were given credit far in excess of their monthly wages. In numerous instances such employees were in fact 'mortgaged' for several months on end. 'Seldom did African tailors working for Indians receive any cash wages, because the money is usually bespoke, the only cash such tailors receive is posho money or advances in pay to purchase food'.<sup>33</sup> More generally wages received by African workers employed by storeowners, brick makers and similar petty traders, were much lower than the statutory minimum wage.

The findings of David Bettison's research conducted in the Limbe and Blantyre urban areas in the period 1957 to 1958,<sup>34</sup> can be used to illuminate the deficiencies of the minimum wage policy pursued by the colonial government. According to the findings of David Bettison, the cost of living in the Limbe-Blantyre urban area at the Poverty Datum Line Standard (PDL) was £3.11 - 11d per month for a single man. The corresponding amount

for a married couple with children varied between L 5-19-7d and L 11-5-11d per month. The food component in the PDL amounts ranged between 63.6 percent and 69.9 percent. As can be seen from table 3.7, the statutory prescribed minimum wage for 1957 in Blantyre urban area was 60/- per month, which was far short of the PDL amount for a single man. Furthermore, Bettison's research also revealed that 62 percent of Africans employed in the Limbe-Blantyre urban area received less than L 3 in cash per month; again this was far short of the PDL amount. The wage minima prescribed between 1958 and 1960 were still lower than what Bettison had ascertained to be the PDL cost of living in 1957-1958. This further underlines the glaring inadequacy of the colonial government's minimum wage policy. This should go a long way to dispel any notions that the economic conditions of urban workers had improved during the era of Minimum Wage Policy. Not only were the prescribed minimum wages insufficient to maintain a married person with a family, the wage minima were also inadequate to meet the basic needs of a single person. This means that the costs of reproducing and maintaining the labour force were largely born by the peasant sector: the migratory labour system persisted.

There are numerous indications of persistent economic hardships with all the attendant social problems

in the urban areas.. For example, it was reported in Lilongwe in 1958, that "in the urban area, the labourer can not ably feed nor clothe his family and himself on his wages at the existing rates".<sup>36</sup> Too frequently therefore many African workers lived on credit trade and debt granted by Asian storeowners, with an interest as high as 50 percent charged on the debt.<sup>37</sup> Consequently many urban workers were thus trapped into chronic indebtedness. The credit trade combined with chronic indebtedness became one of the sources of friction between Asian storeowners and Africans in urban areas. The level of misery and destitution among African urbanites is also borne out by the unprecedented numbers of beggars (or Amasikini as Malawians would call them) in and around the urban areas of Blantyre and Limbe.

In the face of overwhelming economic and social problems, some workers resorted to petty, and in some cases illicit trades: the brewing of prohibited liquor - kachasu, and "beer brewing by the labourers wives became widespread as a means of enabling the family's budget to balance."<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the system, whereby a group of two or more workers pooled part of their wages every month and each of them drawing the total sum, in turn expanded among urban workers. All these were attempts by the urban working class to maintain themselves in the face

Table 3.8

## Sectoral and Ethnic Distribution of the Wage Bill, 1961

Industry	Africans		Europeans		Other Races		All Races	
	Total earnings	Approximate average per head	Total earnings	Approximate average per head	Total earnings	Approximate average per head	Total earnings	Approximate average per head
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Agriculture & Forestry	136,588	2.8	33,849	106.1	2,483	47.8	172,920	3.5
Mining & Quarrying	2,513	4.6	363	90.8	71	23.7	2,947	5.4
MANUFACTURING								
Food, Drink & Tobacco	33,778	4.2	19,187	98.9	4,630	57.2	57,595	6.9
Textiles, Cloth	4,278	3.5	1,628	90.4	975	48.8	6,881	5.5
Wood & Furniture	4,488	6.0	1,179	90.7	331	41.4	5,998	7.8
Paper Products								
Printing, etc	2,941	10.1	3,670	104.9	329	41.1	6,940	20.7
Chemical Products	2,280	6.7	784	112.0	573	61.7	3,637	10.3
Non-metallic								
Mineral Products	5,099	1.7	3,528	98.0	300	60.0	8,927	6.3
Metal Industries	10,973	7.2	8,444	72.8	6,855	51.5	26,272	14.7
Other	290	1.6	970	121.3	90	10.0	1,350	14.8
TOTAL MANUFACT.	64,127	4.7	39,390	92.2	14,083	52.7	117,600	8.2
CONSTRUCTION	78,159	4.2	31,447	96.5	1,850	47.4	111,456	5.9
ELECTRICITY, WATER, ETC.	9,813	6.3	11,871	122.4	561	62.3	22,245	13.4
COMMERCE & FIN.	50,403	4.2	53,401	84.2	15,929	34.8	119,733	9.1
TRANS. & COMM.								
Rail	21,061	9.1	16,214	108.1	7,109	56.9	44,384	17.2
Road	12,781	6.4	8,842	86.7	2,475	31.7	24,098	11.0
Other	17,896	9.4	19,578	114.5	712	48.8	39,206	17.9
TOTAL TRANS.	52,738	8.3	44,634	105.5	10,316	47.3	107,688	15.5
SERVICES								
Private Domestic	31,240	1.9	149,512	93.3	9,232	52.8	377,926	10.8
Other	187,942	7.5						
TOTAL SERVICES	219,182	6.1	149,512	93.3	9,232	52.8	377,926	10.8
GRAND TOTAL	613,523	4.5	364,467	95.1	54,525	44.7	1,032,515	7.4

Source: Department of Labour Annual Report, 1961

of growing economic hardships. As we will try to show later, the wave of strikes that reached their climax during the emergency of 1959 to 1960, were a clear commentary not only on the growing social and economic misery of the urban labour force but also a genuine expression of political struggles.

It seems, however, that Asian and European workers were spared such economic hardships. In Malawi, like other colonies in Eastern and Southern Africa, the wage structure also reflected the racial divisions in the society. Europeans earned the highest salaries, Asians were in the middle and Africans were at the bottom of the wage scale. Differential wage rates based on racial lines were as old as the colony itself. At no time did the colonial government seriously raise the issue of equal pay for equal work. After all there were still some people in the official circles who believed that the time had not yet come for equal pay for equal work, as "Europeans had a sense of responsibility not yet developed by Africans as a whole."<sup>39</sup> Consequently African demands for equal pay for equal work met with formidable opposition from both the colonial government and private employers.

As can be seen from table 3.8. overall, Europeans earned about 21 times as much as African workers, and Asian workers received about ten times as



much as the African worker. It was in the agriculture sector, however, that wage differentials between African workers and those of other races were the greatest. As can be observed from table 3.8, on average European workers in the agricultural sector earned about 37 times as much as the African workers, and Asian workers earned 16 times as much as the African worker. At the same time the wage differential between European workers and Asians was on the whole much smaller. On average European workers earned about twice as much as Asian employees.

It is also observable from table 3.8 that sectoral wage differentiation was highest among African workers. Finally, the disproportionate share of the wage bill earned by European and Asian workers is a clear indication of the commanding position occupied by the two racial groups in the colonial social formation. Thus the wage structure also militated against any possibilities of inter-racial working class solidarity. In the final analysis, and in as far as African workers were concerned, the European workers and the majority of Asian workers were widely identified with the colonial ruling circles. Thus for African workers, their struggles were an integral part of the national political struggles.

### Housing and Social Services

The low wage economy and the deplorable working conditions were only part of the overall depressing environment for the urban labour force. The provision of adequate housing and social services remained as elusive as before. To underline the deficiency of the colonial governments efforts in resolving the housing problem "a token sum of L 150,000"<sup>41</sup> was earmarked for urban housing for Africans under the Ten Year Development Plan which was launched in 1947. This was a mere gesture, given the size of the housing deficiency: government attempts to improve and expand housing facilities for Africans were bound to have an insignificant impact.

In the meantime, many employers simply ignored the problem. No effort was made to pay housing allowance or improve housing conditions of African workers while the old structures fell into disrepair. The most glaring deficiency of the housing problem can be demonstrated by the situation in the Nyasaland Railways, one of the oldest and largest employers in the country. In the main railways compound at Mpingwe in Limbe, most houses provided for African workers were of a temporary nature and in a state of disrepair. A worker named Nateni, one of the several residents of a house at the Mpingwe compound, was killed by a falling house during the night of 11 April.

1948. In the investigation which followed, the Railways inspector of works revealed that "these houses fall quite frequently during the rains, perhaps five or six fall every year including kitchens." <sup>42</sup> Thus it may be possible that many more workers might have been injured or hurt during such incidents and their cases went unreported. Nateni's case also goes some way to demonstrate that living conditions for African workers were not only hazardous to the workers' health but their lives as well.

Perhaps stirred-up by Nateni's case and its ripple effect on the labour force generally, the Railways and a few large employers like the Imperial Tobacco Company among others, began to take steps to improve the housing of their employers. <sup>43</sup> However a large number of employers in the urban areas showed little or no interest in the living conditions of African workers. By 1955, for instance, the provincial labour office could report that:

In the Blantyre-Limbe area, the number of employees housed by employers is surprisingly low and it is unlikely that any attempt will be made by commercial employers to house their labour. <sup>44</sup>

But by law, employers were required to provide housing or <sup>45</sup> housing allowance to African workers. A survey of 137 employers in 1955, in the Limbe-Blantyre area showed that only 30 of the employers sampled provided housing or <sup>46</sup> housing allowance for African workers. This clearly

shows the magnitude of the problem and the degree to which the law was flouted.

The inspection conducted by the Labour Department in 1955-1956 revealed that housing conditions for the majority of workers were "horrible".<sup>47</sup> Housing shortage led to overcrowding which accentuated the rise of infectious and contagious diseases. Many large companies, like the Imperial Tobacco Company, provided barrack-like accommodation for single men, each room being occupied by more than 10 men. The bachelor quarters were usually neglected and dirty, and few latrines and bathrooms were provided.<sup>48</sup>

The H.J. Downs compound in Limbe, in 1956, for instance, had 200 daub and wattle houses, huddled together with no set plan. An estimated 700 people lived in the compound. The houses were small and low, but with veranda which some of the occupants had enclosed with screens adjoining as bathrooms. The compound had no sanitary facilities for waste disposal. No clean water supplies were provided nor were latrines.<sup>49</sup> At Thondwe Quarry near Limbe, 289 persons were crowded in 25 temporary huts, and no basic sanitary facilities were provided. The health hazards in such living conditions are more than obvious. When one tobacco company carried out medical screening among its workers in 1956, the results showed that 60

percent of their labour force suffered from bilharzia, while 15 percent had venereal diseases.<sup>50</sup>

A survey of the Railway compounds in 1958 also revealed that housing conditions for railway workers in outer stations were generally appalling. Most houses provided for African workers were of a temporary nature and in a state of disrepair. In numerous cases utilities such as kitchens, bathrooms and latrines were either inadequate or not provided at all. At the railway compound at Balaka, in 1958, for instance, there were only two pit-latrines for more than 67 men and another two for 56 women. Without counting children there were approximately 70 families for four latrines.<sup>51</sup> It does not require special imagination to see that such living conditions were detrimental to the health standards of African workers. Since the sanitary facilities were being over-used, they rapidly became overfull with all the attendant problems of bad odours and flies spreading infectious diseases.

The government made no effort to urge employers of labour to improve the living conditions of African workers. The colonial government itself was a major culprit. The sanitary inspector commented in 1958 that "temporary housing provided by the Public Works Department for their employees is one of Nyasaland's scandals."<sup>52</sup>

Such structures were made of a congerie of materials, such as, metal sheets, cardboard, daub, grass and timber, and all were crowded together with no set plan. No sanitary facilities were provided nor was water. Thus by 1960 the housing problem had yet to be resolved.

In the meantime, those workers for whom employers were unable to provide housing, made their own arrangements with friends or relatives. But, "in many cases they built their own huts".<sup>53</sup> The development of shanty compounds had been unleashed, with all its attendant problems. In the mushrooming shanty compounds conditions of hygiene deteriorated further as the number of residents increased.<sup>54</sup> Houses were over crowded and the available utilities were stretched beyond capacity. A serious problem in the shanty compounds was the lack of clean water supplies, drainage and waste disposal facilities, which in turn led to a rapid increase in water borne diseases such as bilharzia and intestinal parasites. The waste dumping areas and pot holes, turned breeding grounds of malaria and diarrhoea which took their toll on the community.

The colonial government and the municipal authorities took no steps to alleviate the plight of shanty dwellers. The shanty compounds of Limbe, Blantyre, Zomba and Lilongwe were like forgotten colonies of

unwanted people in the urban areas. In the meantime those shanties located illegally on freehold land were an open source of conflict between the landowners, the squatters and the government. Eviction orders issued to squatters by the landowners went ignored, and increasingly the landowners began to press the municipal authorities to take measures to rectify the situation. 55

The housing shortage for African workers also acted as a spur for the unscrupulous landlords to raise the rents. Consequently, many workers came to spend an increasing proportion of their wages on rents. As rents soared the already hard pressed household budgets came under unbearable stress, and a sizeable number of workers began to search for accommodation further away from the town centres. Near the built-up areas of Limbe and Blantyre for example, a single room would cost as much as 10/- to 12/- per month whereas in the settlements in the outlying areas similar accommodation would cost only 5/- to 8/- per month. 56

Consequently many of the lowly paid workers were attracted to living in the so-called peri-urban areas where rents were cheaper, but even there workers had to share "cramped quarters" with other families. 57 By 1960-1961, an estimated 10 percent of the labour force employed in the Limbe-Blantyre urban area had to walk or bicycle between 5 and 10 miles or more each day

58  
to work. This is a clear pointer to the severity of the housing shortage: there was "a desperate need" in Nyasaland for African housing in urban areas.<sup>59</sup>

As for social services and recreational facilities the weight of evidence seem to indicate that little had changed for the better. To be sure, a few commercial concerns, such as the Railways and the Imperial Tobacco Company (ITC), provided clinics in addition to recreational facilities such as cinema shows, football fields, and beer halls, with gramophone music. The colonial government also tried to do something. A few community centres were established in Zomba and Blantyre, at least by 1951, where entertainment in the form of music and games were organised and some classes on 'social issues' were organised.<sup>60</sup> But in Lilongwe and many other smaller towns, no recreation centres existed. The provision of medical facilities also remained deficient both in rural areas and urban areas.<sup>61</sup> Consequently most urban workers had to rely on Mission hospitals and clinics, where a fee was charged for services. This also tended to put an additional burden on the hard pressed household cash incomes.

Thus despite the fact that more and more people engaged for wage labour for longer periods, the Malawian wage labour force remained as cheap as ever. It was a



labour force subjected to low wages and poor working conditions. While the government was committed in rhetoric to the improvement of the social and economic conditions of the Africans labour force, little concrete action was taken to alleviate the plight of workers. But poor housing, lack of social services and low wages were also conducive to low productivity. David Bettison estimated, in 1958, that between 30 and 40 percent of the labour employed in industry and government departments in the Limbe and Blantyre areas was wasted because of inadequate housing, unhygienic living conditions, and low wages.<sup>62</sup> It was also widely acknowledged that "the poor diet of the African worker was a further obstacle to obtaining an efficient labour force".<sup>63</sup> The capitalist enterprises in need of higher profits were at a cross-road, because to improve the social and economic conditions of workers required immediate investment in social infrastructure which would in turn encourage efficiency and higher productivity amongst the labour force. But it was an expenditure which the commercial companies were not prepared to incur because it would cut deeper into their profit margins. Consequently a vicious circle of low wages and depressing living conditions and labour wastage was set in motion.

The depressing economic conditions of urban

workers were also to witness unprecedented worker demands for higher wages and better working conditions. These worker demands, as it will be shown in the next chapter, were to find their expression in the form of strikes, walkouts and work stoppages. But urbanization and industrialization also created conducive conditions for organization among workers, and in the final analysis urban workers realized the need to combine to advance their cause.

### Conclusion

The period 1939 to 1961, in Malawi witnessed unprecedented expansion in the fields of both capitalist agricultural and industrial production as a result of changed conditions of accumulation in the colonial economy. The expansion of the economy as a whole meant that more than ever before, an increasing number of people participated in wage employment. The growth of the manufacturing sector, meant that the stabilization of a sizeable proportion of the working class had become imperative. All these transformations in production relations necessitated changes in government policies: the formation and growing importance of the Labour Department being the most significant development in as far as labour relations were concerned. But despite the creation of the Labour Department and the formulation of new labour policies, it has been shown that both rural and urban workers in their different settings continued to experience social and economic hardships. Since more and more people were actually entering the wage labour market, because of the deteriorating conditions in the rural areas, we cannot escape the conclusion that many African workers were subjected to persistent poverty which in turn intensified the struggle between labour and capital during

this period.

Footnotes

1. It was reported in 1944 for instance, that employers have remarked that there is a considerable number of young men seeking employment as clerks. See Nyasaland Department of Labour Annual Report, 1941, p. 3.
2. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1960. p.168. To this number, must be added an estimated 10,000 or so 'domestic servants, and other workers in the informal sector. The total number of people working in Lilongwe was estimated to be above 8,000, and Zomba about 5,000. The other towns that had sizeable numbers of people in wage employment would be Salima, Nkhota-Kota, Mangochi, Chiromo and Mzuzu.
3. In 1945, the total European population was 1,948 and by 1960 there were an estimated 9,500 Europeans in Malawi. On the other hand in 1945, there were 2,804 Asiatics and by 1960, there were 13,200 Asiatics of whom 1,800 were reported to be people of either Asian and African parentage or African and European parentage.
4. Other firms, particularly those involved in the construction sector, also contemplated importing labour from Sudan and Seychelles. See MNA SMP 126904, Importation of skilled non European labourers.
5. The other main employers of Indian and Asian labour were the Nyasaland Railways and the African Lakes Corporation (ALC).
6. See Nyasaland Government; The Interim Report on Salaries in the Civil Service in Nyasaland 1959, p. 6
7. By 1951-53. The provincial labour officer, southern province reported that mechanics, drivers and clerks were finding it difficult to obtain employment. At the same time however some employers were reported to be importing mechanics and machine operators from Southern Rhodesia. See MNA LAB 11/3/8. See also Nyasaland Department of Labour Annual Report, 1953, p. 11; -- 1958 p. 11; -- 1959, p. 10.
8. After the end of the war, the colonial government had organised training programmes for the ex-askari in

various skills such as carpentry, brick laying, driving and shoe-repairing. However, because of lack of instructors the whole programme proved a failure. Only 987 men, out of 20,000 ex-askari applied for training, and only 70 percent of those admitted for training continued with their courses. By 1948/1949, however the training programme had largely been abandoned. The only success of the programme was with driver training. With the collapse of the ex-askari training, the colonial government did not venture into vocational training until 1958, when a small vocational school was opened. This meant that between 1945 and 1960, the large numbers of demobilized ex-askari and school leavers joined the ranks of the underpaid, unemployed and disenchanted prone to militancy and nationalist agitation.

9. See MNA LB4/2/1, Report on labour conditions in the Tobacco Grading factories 1955/1956. The cigarette factory referred to was owned by N. Yiannakhis. The other delinquent employers were the United Tobacco Company; Nthonidwe Tobacco Company and the John Gallagher Tobacco Company. See also MNA LB 11/2/1.
10. See MNA LB 11/2/III, Report on labour conditions in industries 1956. Actually, the laws prohibiting the employment of children were already on the books. What was lacking was government ability to enforce the law. This problem however continued till much later. See for example Nyasaland Department of Labour Annual report, 1958, pp. 13-14. See also, MNA LAB 41/48/1: Nyasaland Brick Makers Association, correspondence with Labour Commissioner, 5 May 1958.
11. Children and juveniles were in many cases kept at work for over 10 hours. See MNA LB11/2/1 and MNA LB4/2/1. There are numerous reports on these files about the abuse of child labour in urban areas.
12. See MNA LAB 11/3/8, Provincial labour Officer (south), Report for 1956/1957.
13. In 1938, there were only 195 Africans reported to be employed in the manufacturing sector. See Nyasaland Blue Book, 1938, p. 11.
14. The Indian Quarters for the Railways were located in Limbe near the Railways headquarters. This neighbourhood was occupied by Indians who held supervisory positions in the Railways. People of

mixed race who occupied senior position in the railways also lived in this area. The colonial government also followed a similar housing policy for Indians.

15. The problem of overcrowded accommodation for Indian workers goes back to the 1920s and early 1930s. Many Indian employees slept inside the stores where they worked. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1931, p. 14. The phrase "cramped quarters" is repeated in almost all the Nyasaland Colonial Annual Reports in the 1950s, perhaps to indicate that nothing had changed. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, p. 92; -- 1957, p. 103; -- 1958, p. 104.
16. See MNA LB4/2/1, Labour Conditions in the Tobacco Grading Factories.
17. See MNA TUC 29, Nyasaland African Motor Transport Workers Association to Commissioner for Labour, 26, October, 1947.
18. Legislation for the New Employment Books was passed in 1954, but the New Employment Books were not issued until 1958. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1955, p. 8 and see also Department of Labour Annual Report, 1958, pp. 5-6.
19. A government vocational training school did not become operational until 1958. Up until then the only facilities for formal technical training were in the Mission Schools. Similarly Trades Testing did not begin until 1958, so that the Employment Book which were introduced then were designed to take into account the new skills' grading system. See MNA LAB 126B Trades Testing Scheme, 1957-1958.
20. See MNA TUC29, Nyasaland African Motor Transport Workers Association to Commissioner for Labour, 26 October, 1947.
21. Many 'minor' accidents among field workers in the tea and tobacco industries went unreported as were numerous such accidents in the tobacco factories brick fields and garages. In addition, each year large numbers of compensation cases remained unresolved. For example, in 1960, a total of 110 cases were left unresolved in 1961 it was 125 and in 1962 it was 176. See Nyasaland Department of Labour Annual Report, 1961-62, p. 43. See also MNA LAB

XVI/1: Survey of Labour conditions in the motor trading industry.

22. There were numerous disputes about non-payment of overtime during the period under-review and the labour department also acknowledged their inability to enforce the law. See MNA MP V/84: 'Disputes; MNA MP 11/7 Monthly Reports' Provincial Labour Offices Lilongwe, 1956-1961; and MNA-MP 17/2/C Monthly Reports, provincial labour officer, Blantyre, 1954-1960.
23. See MNA LAB 11/3: 'Native Manual Labour Employed by Government: Revision of Wages and Posho, 1940-1941. See also Nyasaland, Department of Labour Annual Report, 1941, p. 5.
24. See MNA LAB 11/3, 'Revision of wages for unskilled workers, 1944/1945; and MNA SMP/14267, Annual Report of the Labour Advisory Board, 1955. See also MNA LAB 14/7 and MNA LAB 21/1.
25. See Nyasaland, Department of Labour, Annual Report, 1945, p. 4 and see also MNA LAB 11/4.
26. MNA LAB 11/4, Report on labour conditions by District Commissioner, Blantyre, 1944.
27. The problem of chronic indebtedness was also serious among policemen in the urban areas. See MNA LAB 11/1. Report on the labour conditions, D.C. Blantyre 1944/1945.
28. This was provided for under the provisions of 'the Regulation of Minimum Wages and Conditions of Employment Ordinance, 1958'. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1958, p. 34.
29. There were two main justificatory reasons for the absence of the cost of living index, viz:- (1) the colonial government claimed that adequate statistical machinery was not available for the compilation of price indices. (2) The government also believed that the African worker was often self-sufficient as regards basic foodstuffs. This second assumption was very unrealistic because many African workers had no access to land for food production. Nevertheless, the colonial government repeated these two justificatory reasons without any modification in each and every Annual Report between 1949 and 1961.



See for instance Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1949 p. 18; -- 1956, p. 26; -- 1958, p. 31.

30. The only raw data quoted in all official documents on the cost of living for African workers was the cost of basic foodstuffs. A close scrutiny of the prices quoted in the Annual Report shows that the food prices had risen almost six to seven fold between 1939 and 1960. For instance beans which fetched 1d per lb. in 1939, cost 6d per lb. in 1960; rice which cost 1 1/2 pence per lb in 1939 was sold at 8 pence per lb in 1960; fish which were sold 2 for 3 pence in 1939, fetched 1/- each in 1960; meat which cost 6 d per lb. in 1939, was sold at 2/- per lb. in 1960; and maize flour which sold at 1/2 pence per lb. in 1939 was sold at 2 d per lb. in 1960.
31. See MNA LB 11/2/1, Provincial Labour Officer South to Commissioner for Labour, 5 May, 1958; and MNA LB 11/3/8, Monthly Report of Provincial labour Officer South, 19 August 1952.
32. For example there was no provincial labour office in the Northern province, and most of the District labour Offices throughout the country were manned by labour assistants who usually did not have the means or transport to tour centres of employment. In many instances such assistants waited for African workers to come and register their grievances before any action was taken. Labour Registers were irregularly checked. These were also the main complaints raised by the unions, see for example, MNA LAB 41/13/1, Hotel and Catering Workers Union, to Provincial Labour Officer South, 20 January, 1960; MNA LAB/TUC/41/25/1, Nyasaland Trades Union Congress to Commissioner for Labour, 5 July, 1960; MNA LAB TUC 29 NAMTWU to Commissioner for labour, 9 September, 1950.
33. See MNA MP 11/7, Provincial Labour Office Lilongwe, monthly reports, 1 July 1956; MNA LB 1/1IV; and MNA LB 11/3/8II. Report of the Provincial Labour Officer South, 15 November 1950. See also MNA LAB/C/5/1: Report on Wages and Conditions of Employment on Estates and Industry, 1950.
34. See MNA LAB C 15/10/A. Blantyre-Limbe and peri urban area - Bettison's socio economic survey 1957-1958. This was the first and the only research that tried to establish a Poverty Datum Line cost of living for urban workers during the colonial period. The

- paragraph which follows draws from the findings of this research.
35. In a published article, Bettison indicates that the PDL cost of living for a singleman in Blantyre/Limbe area was L 3-5s - 10d. See D.G. Bettison, "The Poverty Datum Line in Central Africa" in Rhodes-Livingstone Journal, no. 27, 1960, pp. 7-40. In this study we will use Bettison's unpublished Research findings which were submitted in a Report to the Colonial government in Malawi in 1958. But inspite of Bettison's findings the government still prescribed a wage minimum in 1960 which was less than the 1958 PDL.
  36. See MNA LB 11/3/800, Report of the provincial labour officer, Lilongwe, May 1958.
  37. See MNA LB 1/1/IV. See also MNA MP 14267.
  38. See MNA LB 11/3/811, Report of the provincial labour officer May 1958. See also MNA MP/V1/35. Wages and conditions of employment in the tobacco industry, Monthly Reports, 1952-1960. See also Nyasaland Department of labour Annual Report, 1952, p. 12.
  39. See MNA LAB TUC 29. Minutes of a Meeting between Mr. E.W. Barthop and the executive of the Nyasaland African Motor Transport Workers Union, 11 May, 1950. Mr. E.W. Barthop, Labour Advisor, to the Secretary of State for the colonies was responding to Union demands for equal pay, for equal work. This is yet another indication of the pervasive paternalistic attitude widely perpetrated in colonial official circles. This same attitude became the mainstay of the philosophy articulated by many employers of labour including missionaries.
  40. In 1938, the average wage earned by Europeans in agriculture and commerce ranged between L 35 and L 45 per month, and by 1961, the average wage earned by Europeans in Agriculture was L 106 per month. During the same period the average wage earned by Asians had risen from between L 10 and L 15 to about L 44 month in 1961.
  41. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1947, p. 12.
  42. See MNA MP 37/1, Housing General: Inquest No. 6 of 1948: Deceased Nateni. Evidence of the Railways

Inspector of works to the Provincial Labour Officer (South). It seems the labour department was also shaken by the Nateni case, because after 1948, inspection of housing conditions for African workers became more frequent and regular.

43. The pace of the housing programme even by these large companies seems to have been very slow indeed. Between 1948 and 1960, the reports by the labour department are replete with references to the Railways model compound at Mpingwe near Limbe and the Imperial Tobacco Company Compound at Chiwembe in Limbe. These model compounds were not completed and occupied till later in 1959-1960. Nevertheless the colonial authorities kept on praising the two companies for exemplary housing for African workers. See for instance, Nyasaland Department of Labour Annual Report, 1948, p. 7; -- 1953, p. 8; and Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1956. p. 92, -- 1958, p. 104.
44. See MNA LB 11/3/8, Report of the provincial labour officer south, 1955.
45. Legislation requiring employers to provide accommodation to African workers had been on the statute books since 1909 (the Employment of Natives Ordinance 1909, was the first of this kind of legislation. In 1944, this same obligation was reinstated under the Native Labour Ordinance of 1944, with additional amendments in 1949 and 1954.
46. MNA MP/37/8, African housing in urban and peri urban areas, 1954-1960.
47. MNA MP/VII/35; Housing African Employers, see also MNA MP V/84.
48. MNA MP/VII/35, Provincial Labour Officer (Blantyre), Annual Report 1955.
49. MNA LB4/211, and MNA MP C/5/1.
50. The company was the United Tobacco Company of South Africa. See MNA LB 11/3/8.
51. MNA MP/VII/35.
52. MNA SMP 28953, Labour difficulties in Mzuzu, 1957/1958.

53. See Nyasaland Department of Labour Annual Report, 1955, p. 18.
54. In Blantyre one of the oldest shanty compounds was Ndirande; others were Chilobwe, Chimwankhunda, Zingwangwa, Makheta, Chilomoni and Bangwe. In Lilongwe there was Michesi, Kawale, and Thope-Maula.
55. See MNA, MPV/84, Disputes. There are also references to the growing "Squatter" problems in urban areas in the Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1956, p. 92; -- 1957, p. 103; -- 1958, p. 105.
56. See MNA MP XVI/II; wages and housing conditions in the Motor Trading Industry, 1958/1959; see also MNA MP 37/1.
57. Nyasaland Times, 24 March, 1961.
58. See MNA MP 37/8, African Housing in urban and peri urban areas.
59. Nyasaland Times, 24 March, 1961. It needs to be stated also that all the government had done in the meantime was to provide plots for an "own built" housing schemes. Granted the fact that the majority of African workers earned less than L 3 a month, it is even doubtful if such a scheme was practical under the circumstances. All these are clear manifestations of a failed policy and inadequate planning.
60. The typical lessons conducted at the colonial community centres concentrated on issues like hygiene, sanitation and health. The main purpose was of course to socialize African urbanities into "modernity"- where such "modernity" amounted to the transformation of African culture to suit the demands of colonial capitalism; particularly that of reproducing cheap labour.
61. It has been asserted that health services for Africans had improved during the Federation period, 1953-1963; see for instance Pratt and Leys op.cit., p. 87. While it is true that Federal expenditure on health services in Malawi had increased it is also equally true that the greatest component of the expenditure was directed at Europeans and Asians in

the country. See Mufuka, op.cit., pp. 166-167. In many parts of the country including urban areas of Blantyre, Lilongwe and Salima little had changed in as far as the provision of medical facilities for Africans was concerned.

62. See MNA LAB C 15/10/A, "Blantyre-Limbe Socio.Economic Survey, 1957-1958. In a further survey by the labour department of 37 firms in the Blantyre-Limbe area it was discovered, for example, that absenteeism rate was about 1 percent in firms that provided housing or housing allowances for their workers and between 3 and 25 percent for those that didn't. In addition it was also ascertained that the labour turnover was highest, ranging between 10 and 25 percent, among the firms that paid lower wages and showed little concern for the labour force. See MNA LAB MP 16/1, wages and conditions of employment in industry - Limbe/Blantyre, 1960.
63. See Nyasaland, Colonial Annual Report, 1955, p. 20.

## CHAPTER IV

Workers Response, Labour Forces and Organization:  
Towards Trade Unionism, 1891-1961

This study has so far shown how, through the use of coercive force, political and economic strategies, Malawian labour was procured, organised and retained. It has been indicated that the colonial state and employing interests commanded immense power over Malawian workers. But despite the overwhelming power which the colonial state and employers jointly wielded, they could not completely subdue Malawian workers. Malawian workers demonstrated remarkable ingenuity in not only resisting but also confronting the coercive colonial labour system. The workers response to the colonial system was predicated on a number of inter-related conditioning factors, such as the imposition of colonial rule coupled with land alienation; the system of labour recruitment and utilization; the experience of labour conditions in the various centres of employment and the composition of the wage labour force itself. This chapter will try to illuminate the specific patterns and character of Malawian workers response to their changing social and material conditions during the period 1891 to 1961.

The earliest forms of labour protest in Malawi during the colonial period can be traced back to the

numerous wars of resistance and revolts against the British during the first decades of colonial rule. The wars between the British and the Ngoni in 1896, and the British and the Chewa of Mwase Kasungu in 1896, for example, were a direct consequence of the refusal by the African states to deploy African labour on the Shire Highland plantations. Similarly, the wars between the British and the various Yao polities during the first decade of colonial rule were a direct result of European encroachment on African land and labour. This goes some way to show that African resistance against the imposition of colonial rule had multiple dimensions: it encompassed elements of labour protest as well as Africans' desire to maintain their sovereignty.<sup>1</sup> But as colonial authority became entrenched and capitalism contended for dominance over the precapitalist social formations, the patterns and character of workers response also began to take different forms such as the avoidance of certain forms of employment, desertions (spontaneous and organised), absenteeism, and later overt combination to confront management and employers.

During the early decades of colonial rule workers, who were forcibly recruited into wage employment, frequently resorted to desertions as a strategy for registering their protest against labour coercion and

labour conditions in the various centres of employment. Desertions occurred at two levels, during the process of recruitment and also after workers had been incorporated into the wage labour force. Malawian workers deserted employers who offered low wages, poor working and living conditions, both in the private firms as well as government departments. The PWD, railways and numerous plantation owners frequently complained of desertions and the resultant labour shortages. Squatters also migrated from one estate to another or from estates to crown land in protest against the labour conditions. Thus desertions became not only a strategy for avoiding wage labour but also evolved as a form of protest.

The effectiveness of desertion as a form of labour protest largely depended on a number of factors including the continued ability of the peasant sector to reabsorb the deserters, the ability of the colonial state to crack down on deserters, and other options available to the deserters. To be sure, the Labour Certificate system and Employment Books, 'the ticket system' and the 'daily task work' were all attempts by the colonial state to curb desertions during the early decades of colonial rule. The fact that desertions continued unabated is a clear indication of the limitations of the colonial state's powers to subordinate Africans, and also the continued



resilience of the peasant sector.

Significantly, the development of a regional labour market which encompassed South Africa, the Rhodesias, Zaire, Mozambique, Malawi and Tanganyika enabled Malawian workers to withdraw from the local labour system in the face of colonial state harassment and unbearable working and living conditions. Malawian workers who deserted and wanted to avoid harassment by the colonial authorities and chiefs, usually migrated to other countries. Oral traditions in Malawi are replete with references to incidents whereby people who deserted from local employers instantly left the country and went to Southern Africa or East Africa. During the First World War Malawians who deserted from the army went as far as Angola and Botswana in order to avoid punishment by the colonial state.<sup>2</sup> In this way desertions as a form of labour protest against the local labour system tended to fuel and buttress ex-territorial labour migration.

Admittedly, desertion and then emigration were undertaken individually or collectively, but it became apparent by the second decade of colonial rule that both desertions and labour emigration had become intertwined strategies of avoiding the local labour system. It is clear from the oral traditions that many Mozambicans who came to work in Malawi also used Malawi as a staging post

to move on further into Southern Africa through what van Onselen described as the "stop-go labour routes".<sup>3</sup> Certain areas such as the Mangochi and Mulanje districts were chosen for entry into Malawi while the districts to the southwest were used for desertion and exit. Similarly, people who came from Northern Malawi to work on the Shire Highlands, used the employment centres in the Southern province as staging post for the southward trek. For this 'stop-go labour process' to persist as it did, in the face of state opposition, and the overwhelming hazards on the way to South Africa and the Rhodesias it required coordination and organization among African workers. Over the years desertion from local employment and labour emigration southwards cross-fertilized and in time evolved into a form of combination to protest and avoid the local labour system.

It has been shown elsewhere that Malawian workers faced formidable odds both on the way southwards and in the various centres of employment in Southern Africa.<sup>4</sup> Many Malawians lost their lives on the way, while many more never secured permanent jobs in the mines or farms in Southern Africa. The fact that so many thousands of Malawians continued trekking to the south in the face of such precarious conditions should go some way to dispel any notions that Malawians who emigrated were motivated by

sheer economic adventurism. There was a high element of protest which propelled men to risk their own lives in the course of migrating southwards. To many Malawians the coercive labour system in Malawi was unbearable, and desertion, then emigration became one way of protesting.

To be sure, Malawian workers also demonstrated a remarkable zeal in understanding the way in which the colonial labour market operated. For example, it was widely acknowledged by the colonial authorities that "the native knowing the recruitment regulations would give his employers a firmer hold over him refuses to appear before the collector for that purpose".<sup>5</sup> Similarly Malawian workers who wanted to avoid forced labour, traded in labour certificates and tax papers, thereby securing protection against harassment by the askari. By the third decade of colonial rule it had become apparent to the colonial authorities that contract labour was not only disliked by Africans but that the labour system in the country was being rendered inadequate by the workers protest. Indeed by the 1920s the labour situation had become critical so that many employers could not obtain labour.

Attempts in the 1920s by the colonial government to popularize agricultural labour through education in schools produced no evident success. The PWD introduced

schemes to provide permanent camps for labour employed on road work, the scheme proved a failure. It was reported in 1927, that:

It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain labour for the less popular kinds of work under the PWD such as road construction. There can be little doubt that the labour problem is becoming serious.<sup>6</sup>

In the meantime attempts by certain employers to prosecute workers for breach of the labour contracts also failed to achieve the desired objective, because employers who prosecuted workers were labelled as 'bad employers' who had to be avoided. Consequently the prosecution of workers by employers led to even more acute labour shortages. By the early 1930s the colonial government had to admit that "the majority of planters rarely have occasion to bring a case of (breach of contract) before the magistrate"<sup>7</sup> for fear of damaging their reputation with the workers. That workers' actions such as desertion, avoidance of 'bad employers' and forging of the Employment Books were an effective form of protest was acknowledged by the colonial authorities. The district Commissioner at Thyolo noted in 1938, that:

The natives fully realise their value and have undoubtedly got the planter in the palm of their hands. They will make and sign any agreement without having the slightest intention of carrying it out. They will give wrong names and villages to their employers in the majority of cases; in consequence it is almost impossible to

trace deserters.<sup>8</sup>

This is as vivid illustration of Malawian workers ability to combine and render the coercive labour system inadequate. For desertion to be effective it required a certain degree of coordination and cooperation among workers not only in identifying targets for desertion but also to develop tactics for frustrating the authorities' attempts to crack-down on deserters. This is also an indication that Malawian workers knew how to work the system to their advantage. For those employers who could not offer better working and living conditions and higher wages desertion and labour shortages would remain a chronic problem.

It is contended here that for the avoidance of 'bad employers' to be effective, it required a high degree of communication and coordination among workers. Initially the choice of employers was indeed done on an individual basis but as the labour market evolved it increasingly became a collective enterprise. This is why when northerners began switching their labour from the Shire Highlands to Southern Africa, supplies from the north first became sporadic in the late 1890s, and by the first decade of the 1900s the labour supply from the north had almost dried up. A similar pattern emerges within the southern province. Plantations in Thyolo, Mulanje and

Blantyre who paid higher wages had little difficulty in obtaining labour, while those in Mangochi, close to sources of labour, suffered chronic labour shortages. This shows that African workers clearly understood the labour market and acted collectively to advance their interests. It is tempting to observe here that in this particular respect the avoidance of bad employers was also a form of combination.

Not only were workers' covert actions an effective form of protest, but such actions also influenced the functioning of the local labour system. Increasingly, through actions like desertions and avoidance of 'bad employers', Malawian workers did influence the terms and conditions of their incorporation into the wage labour force. By the 1930s, not only had some employers begun to shorten the daily working hours, others had also started to reduce the level of tasks for workers. It was noted for instance that "employers have found out that the reduction has been forced upon them by the apparent inability by workers to finish the larger tasks and the risk of losing their men if they are pressed".<sup>9</sup>

As long as the peasant sector could absorb and maintain those who withdrew from the wage labour market, more coherent and overt challenges to employers or

management could be postponed. This, however, is not to suggest that overt forms of protest did not take place. Indeed walkouts, slowdowns, absenteeism and strikes did occur as forms of labour protest alongside desertions from the beginning of the colonial economy. There are numerous indications that strikes and walkouts did take place as far back as the 1890s. In the early 1890s for example teachers at Bandawe Mission went on strike, and in 1897 mail carriers at a postal station in the Shire Highlands went on a one day strike demanding higher pay.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, agricultural workers sometimes used the strike weapon to register their discontent with labour conditions. In January 1933, for example, the District Commissioner at Ntcheu reported that there were two strikes by plantation workers in the area. Upon investigation, the District Commissioner instructed the plantation owners that the ringleaders be dismissed.<sup>11</sup> In 1935, workers at two tobacco plantations in Mangochi walked-off their job when their employers refused to honour their demands for higher wages and improved working conditions.<sup>12</sup>

Squatters also demonstrated spirited capability in openly challenging settlers over labour conditions. Initially, as we have indicated above, squatters opted for withdrawal from the estates to crown land. But as

conditions on crown land began to deteriorate, squatters increasingly resorted to more overt actions to defy demands of the settlers. Squatters illegally occupied and cultivated European owned land, and in many cases squatters refused to work on settler farms. Frequently, squatters openly defied eviction orders and in such cases they also resorted to militant actions to defend their interests. That agricultural labour, and squatters could articulate their cause in militant terms is born out by their active participation in the Chilembwe Rising of 1915. The Chilembwe Rising, and its subsequent brutal suppression by the colonial government, became the symbol of African resistance and heroism. The Chilembwe rising was to be a major source of inspiration for nationalist militancy of the 1940s and 1950s.

Thus, while labour protests on the plantations took covert forms during the early decades, overt labour protest were also gradually becoming a feature of the struggles between labour and capitals. Covert forms of protest, however, were to remain the dominant form of labour response among the majority of unskilled workers both on the plantations and urban areas. It would be among the small core of semi-skilled and skilled workers that new forms of organizations began to emerge that were to address a wide variety of issues ranging from purely



labour matters to those that concerned other sections of society.

In the absence of any workers organizations, the most protracted labour protests were articulated by political organizations, particularly the Native Associations, which began to emerge by the second decade of colonial rule. Significantly these political organizations were formed by mission and government employees and rural accumulators. It was through the North Nyasa Native Association (NNNA), the West Nyasa Native (WNNA) Association, the Mombera Native Association (MNA), the Chiradzulu District Native Association (CDNA), the Blantyre Native Association (BNA) and Central Province Native Association, that the most sustained campaigns against labour conditions were made.<sup>13</sup> The Native Associations attacked government use of forced labour for the PWD projects, the Squatter System, low wages and the poor conditions of employment in the country. The North Nyasa Native Association made repeated protests to the colonial government about the conditions of the ex-askari and the treatment of war widows. The Mombera Native Association frequently took the government to task, during the interwar period, over the use of force by government officials in procuring labour for the Public Works Department.<sup>14</sup> The Native Associations in the

Southern province more often than not protested against the conditions of squatters, and the low wage economy. In as far as the West Nyasa Native Association was concerned, "the wages of a workers, should be the first charge and the rewards of capital should always be second"<sup>15</sup>

By 1923-1924, African Civil Servants had formed the Nyasaland Native Civil Servants Association (NNCSA).<sup>16</sup> The NNCSA was only open to the clerical and skilled workers, but left out the greater majority of unskilled workers in the civil service. In the prescribed environment in which it operated, the NNCSA could not transcend the narrow and particularistic interest of the 'elite' workers, and therefore failed to become a broad based workers organization. It may be for this reason that the NNCSA came to be overshadowed by the various political bodies including the Representative Committee of the Northern Province Associations (RCNPNA), which commanded a wider following and enjoyed more prestige.

Like the Native Associations, the NNCSA's protest were in the form of petitions and memoranda. Through these the NNCSA raised a number of issues of particular concern to African civil servants such as wages, housing and conditions of employment, in the civil service.<sup>17</sup> It seems, however, that the Nyasaland Native Civil Servants Association was shortlived, because by the

early 1930s it had almost ceased functioning.

In the meantime a number of organizations were formed by workers in the Railways and commercial companies in Blantyre and Limbe. The organizations like the Railways Social and Recreation Association and the Lilongwe African Welfare Association were not open to the unskilled workers, so that they tended to be more of welfare organizations than broad based trade unions. Like the Nyasaland Native Civil Servants Association the Railways Social and Recreation Association made their protests in the form of petition and memoranda. Attempts by the Railways Social and Recreation Association to gain recognition from the railways management failed to materialize.<sup>18</sup> Consequently the organization became emasculated, and tended to concentrate on social issues outside labour relations.

It was through the Native Associations, spearheaded by the Representative Committee of the Northern Province Native Associations, that the most sustained labour protests continued to be made during the 1930s and early 1940s. The Native Associations took a firm stand on a number of issues affecting workers. For example, during the depression of the early 1930s, the Blantyre Native Association petitioned the colonial government for better education to enable Africans to take

over the posts held by Europeans.<sup>19</sup> In the period 1931 to 1937, when the settlers were urging the colonial government to introduce a system of labour legislation, the Representative Committee of the Northern Province Native Associations protested against the proposed system of labour legislation similar to the pass system of South Africa. In a memoranda presented to the Chief Secretary in 1937, the Committee noted that:

The idea of Registration of all Africans on the pretence of identifying them is uncalled for, and would be unnecessary interference with the liberty of their movement. Registration elsewhere has not fostered good feelings between the rulers and the ruled; on the contrary it has created a criminal sense and manufactured criminals, a fact which is embarrassing the union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia at present. To the evils now attributed to Natives would be minimised if employers treat their labour with consideration both as regards pay and treatment.<sup>20</sup>

Numerous petitions were also presented to the government regarding conditions of both urban as well as rural workers. In 1938 for instance, the Zomba Native Association protested to the government against "the Stationing of Nyasa Soldiers in almost every British possession on the continent simply because they are the only cheap people in Africa."<sup>21</sup>

But what accounts for the failure of the early workers organizations to develop and evolve into fully fledged trade unions? The failure had much to do with the

composition and organization of the labour force and above all, the prescribed environment in which Africans had to operate. The dominance of seasonal agriculture within the entire political economy meant that a stabilized labour force could not develop. The short work cycle on most of the early plantations was not conducive to labour stabilization, which in turn would create the necessary conditions for organised labour. Moreover, the generally low wage plantation economy meant that workers were always on the move in search of better employment and higher wages, hence the high labour turnover, another factor which is not conducive to workers organizations.

The fundamental task of colonial capitalism during its formative stages was the need to mobilize cheap labour and maximise returns, hence the entrenchment of the migratory labour system. In the initial phase of the development of the colonial economy a migrant labour system was established to smash the bargaining power of the indigenous Shire Highlands. Because of the limitations of plantation production which needed cheap and exploitable labour a coercive labour system was established, in which explicit worker combination was not tolerated. Despotic legislation such as the Natives on Private Estates Ordinance of 1904, the Native Labour Ordinance of 1906, and the Employment of Natives Ordinance of 1909 were

enacted to curtail the bargaining power of African workers and thereby put brakes on the workers' ability to openly combine. The legalisation of violence on workers like public caning or flogging for breach of the employment contract, further institutionalized fear among the labour force to confront the employers.

Important too was the overall attitude of employers towards organised labour. From the start employers of labour and the government did not hesitate to victimise strike leaders and organizers, because organised labour was seen as a direct threat to the whole colonial order and a detestable machination of agitators bent on destabilizing development. Strike leaders or those seen to engage in organizing workers faced dismissal, as was the case with the Ntcheu strike leaders cited above. In some cases, organizers were kept under constant police surveillance. A.I. Lawrence, a leader of the Railways Social and Recreation Association, for example, had all his activities personal and public, those conducted in Malawi and abroad, thoroughly investigated and kept on file by the government.<sup>22</sup> This meant that the danger of harassment always haunted workers in their attempts to organise. It may be for this reason that labour protest among urban workers took a moderate and gradualist pattern.

On the plantations, workers were deliberately divided by employers on the basis of ethnic affiliation. Work teams were formed of exclusive ethnic groups, while in the compounds people of different ethnic backgrounds were not allowed to live together.<sup>23</sup> The compound watchmen and the field capitao were used for controlling labour both at the work place and in the compounds. All these factors militated against more direct worker expression of discontent and the development of solidarity across ethnic lines.

The low wages for the majority of workers also made it impossible for many workers to pay membership fees to any organization because the overriding concern was to secure food and clothing. This in turn limited the workers' ability to sustain their organizations because the absence of steady financial contributions over a protracted period of time made it difficult for an organization to build a viable fund. It is for this reason that no lasting organization emerged among plantation workers during this period. Working class struggles in this sector of the economy would continue to take covert forms.

Finally, labour legislation tolerating the existence of trade unions, had yet to be passed. After all, there were many among the employers of labour who

firmly believed that organized labour was a major threat to colonial development. In as far as some employers were concerned, Africans "neither need nor desire trade unions and other adjuncts of labour".<sup>24</sup> With no small audacity, some employers openly argued that:

The educational attainment and absence of a sense of responsibility of Nyasaland natives are such as to make legislation on the subject (trade unions) value less as it might have a provocative effect..... That in the present stage of development, trade union legislation is beyond the comprehension of natives of the protectorate is undisputable fact.<sup>25</sup>

With such hostility towards legislation tolerating trade unions, it is no surprise that workers organizations were suppressed. It may be for the same reason that early workers organizations were only confined to a few skilled and semi-skilled workers who could easily be kept in check by employers and the colonial authorities. In such a restrictive environment workers were induced to channel their protest through political bodies like the Native Associations.

It is not a mere coincidence that the Native Associations took a central role in articulating workers interest. Most, if not all, Native Associations were organised and run by workers. Consequently, workers interest took top position on the Associations Agenda. Some of the most active Native Association, such as the Zomba province Native Association, the Blantyre Native



Association and the Representative Committee of the Northern Province Native Associations, were all based in the urban areas of Zomba and Blantyre, and organized and managed by African civil servants. It is significant also that the early workers organizations, the Nyasaland Native Civil Servants Association, the Railways Social and Recreation Association, and the African Drivers Association were formed by some of the people who founded and ran the Native Associations. It was also in the towns of Zomba, Blantyre and Limbe, among urban workers, that the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC), the first national political movement was born in 1943. The main founding members, James Sangala, Charles Matinga, A.I. Lawrence, Charles Mlanga, Lawrence Makata and Levi Mumba<sup>26</sup> were all workers and the most ardent organizations of the early political bodies (like Native Associations), and the workers organizations which were suppressed. Thus, all considered, in the prescribed environment of a colonial political economy, the weight of evidence seems to indicate that African political and labour protest became intertwined: the working class struggles and political struggles under colonial capitalism were developing as two sides of one coin.

Table 4  
Strike Data, 1946-1961

Year	Number of Strikes	Workers Involved	Man-Days Lost
1946	2	n/a	n/a
1947	4	820	n/a
1948	4	1,724	n/a
1949	9	n/a	n/a
1950	4	n/a	n/a
1951	3	n/a	n/a
1952	6	1,109	n/a
1953	15	5,316 <sup>1</sup>	n/a
1954	11	n/a	n/a
1955	9	n/a	n/a
1956	14	447	1,901
1957	20	1,701	7,694
1958	15	2,127	10,846
1959	9	1,283 <sup>1</sup>	10,673
1960	81	23,929	175,860
1961	47	7,182	14,403

Sources: MNA LAB 16/3, Strikes and labour Disputes 1948-1953; MNA LAB 12/6/11/1, Reports on labour Disturbances, 1959-1960; MNA LAB 7/2, Minor strikes and disputes; MNA LAB 12/6/3, Reports and Memoranda on labour disturbances and strikes; MNA LAB 12/6/11/4, Reports and Memoranda on strikes and disturbances 1960; MNA LAB C12/6/6, Labour disputes and strikes on Nyasaland Railways; MNA LAB 62/05/05, Labour disputes and strikes in the PWD; MNA LAB 62/05/06, minor strikes; MNA LAB 62/05/02, Strikes and disputes 1958-1960; MNA LAB 41/30/3, Strikes and riots. See also Department of Labour Annual Reports, 1946-1961.

1. These figures are only estimates based on fragmentary data. The intensity of strike action in these two years seem to have been much higher than was actually reported.

Table 4.1

## Registered Trade Unions

	Name	Date of Registration
(i)	Transport & Allied Workers' Union	11th Apr., 1949
(ii)	Nyasaland Railways Asian Union	1st Jun., 1950
(iii)	Commercial & General Workers' Union	22nd Sept., 1952
(iv)	Nyasaland Railways African Workers Union	4th Sept., 1954
(v)	National Union of Plantation & Agricultural Workers	5th Jul., 1960
(vi)	Local Government Employees Union	3rd Oct., 1960
(vii)	Hotels & Catering Workers' Union	13th Oct., 1960
(viii)	Nyasaland Electric Supply Commission African Staff Assoc.	21st Oct., 1960
(ix)	National Mine Workers' Union	5th Nov., 1960
(x)	Printers, Journalists & Newspaper Workers' Union	6th Mar., 1961
(xi)	National Union of Posts & Telecommunications Workers	28th Jul., 1961
(xii)	Building & Construction Workers' Union	1st Aug., 1961
(xiii)	National Union of Health & General Hospital Workers	29th Sept., 1961
(xiv)	Nyasaland Government Employees Association	22nd Nov., 1961

Source: Department of Labour Annual Report, 1961

### Towards Trade Unionism

We, therefore, being afraid of capitalist exploitation thought of forming up a trade union in order to understand our economic emancipation as we are aware that our fate is in our own hands.. With the rapidly rising cost of living it is impossible to live in urban areas when you are underpaid.<sup>27</sup>

The tempo of African labour and political protest began to take a more concerted and militant tone during the second world war and after. This new trend was directly related to the rapidly rising cost of living and the changing status of squatters. Apart from the fact that prolonged participation in wage employment had delinked some people from the land, mounting pressure on the land in the Southern Province made a return to the land an untenable alternative. Consequently a sizeable number of people increasingly came to rely on wage labour for survival. At the same time, however, for the land hungry and squatters who were being evicted from the land migration to the urban areas did not provide any assured economic and social advantages. Thus many people were caught up in a precarious predicament. It was out of this predicament that worker and squatter militancy developed.

Towards the end of 1943, for example, there were serious confrontations between squatters and landowners on numerous estates in Blantyre district owing to the refusal by squatters to obey eviction orders. Upon investigation

by the authorities, it was ascertained that there was evidence of political activism among squatters.<sup>28</sup>

In the meantime, the NAC like the Native Associations before it, also became the main organizational framework through which rural and urban workers articulated their grievances. At its first general conference in October 1944, for instance, the NAC resolved that:

As prices of all commodities have gone up and the cost of living is heavy on all communities, and as the low wages paid to African unskilled labour is driving people out of the country to the detriment of morality, increase in tuberculosis and venereal diseases and the break up of family life, this congress requests government to call on the Wages Board to fix economic rates of pay to fall in line with those in adjoining countries.<sup>29</sup>

As for squatters, the NAC remained the central organization which gave squatter militancy an organizational and ideological base. In August 1945 for example, the NAC was widely involved in influencing over 1,200 squatters to defy eviction orders from estate managers in Thyolo district.<sup>30</sup> Thus as the social and material conditions continued to deteriorate, workers and squatters increasingly found their organizational potential through political bodies, particularly the NAC. This is also an indication that workers and squatters were an integral part of the social forces that gave a social

dimension to nationalist political struggles.

Significantly, however, as the cost of living soared worker demands for higher wages and improved working conditions were also on the increase and expressed through strikes and work stoppages. It was actually acknowledged by the labour department in 1945, "that several cases of work stoppages or threatened strike action had occurred during the course of the year";<sup>31</sup> the cause of which were demands for higher pay. In February 1946 for example, the general manager of the Nyasaland Railways was informed, by the drivers and firemen, that unless they were immediately granted a 100 percent wage increase they would all go on strike in five days time. The general manager of the railways requested the labour commissioner to mediate. Upon promise that their demands were receiving consideration, the workers postponed the strike.<sup>32</sup> In April 1946, about 250 tea factory workers at Mboma estate in Thyolo district went on strike to press their demands for overtime pay, shorter working hours, and rest on Sundays and public holidays. The management, feeling that they could not meet the worker's demands for overtime pay, decided to shorten the work day and to have the factory closed on Sundays and holidays.<sup>33</sup>

In the meantime, the Nyasaland African Congress stepped up its protest against the low wage economy and

the deplorable living conditions. At an extra-ordinary meeting convened by Congress in May 1946, to consider the question of minimum wages for unskilled workers and domestic servants in urban areas, a resolution was passed to the effect that "domestic servants in Nyasaland are insufficiently paid".<sup>34</sup> In addition the employers of labour were called upon to double the rates of pay for the unskilled workers and domestic servants. It seems also that the Nyasaland African Congress was instrumental in the formation of several new workers organizations, foremost among them was the Nyasaland African drivers Association (NADA) which was founded in 1946 in Blantyre by Lawrence Makata, Sidney Somanje, Lali Lubani, Lawrence Mapemba, James Mpunga, Amin Suliman, and Willard Kampaka. All these people were also prominent members of the Nyasaland African Congress. Immediately upon its formation, NADA affiliated with the Nyasaland African Congress.<sup>35</sup>

It was among railway workers, however, that worker militancy took unprecedented levels. On 6 February 1947, for example the general manager of the railways received a written threat of a strike by all the 6,000 African railway workers unless wages were raised by 50 percent. The salient causes of the threatened strike were the differential wage system between African workers, and

Asian and European workers, low overtime pay, abuses of African workers by Asian and European supervisors and colour bar. In an attempt to avert the strike the general manager of the railways requested the Labour Commissioner to mediate. In an interview between the Labour Commissioner and a few hand-picked African workers' representatives and the general manager, the authorities failed to obtain assurances from the workers that a strike would be postponed without a redress of the workers' grievances. Having failed to obtain concessions from the so-called workers representatives, a general meeting was convened on 8 February, which was attended by over 600 African workers, the general manager and the Labour Commissioner. During the course of the deliberations, African speakers repeatedly denounced the conduct of Asian and European supervisors who abused African workers: "cases had occurred, where Indian foremen had slapped Africans while at work. If the Africans resented this, the Indian foremen promptly telephoned the police and had the African arrested for truculence and assault."<sup>36</sup> African workers criticized the "railways overtime pay system, pay policy and demanded improved working conditions. "A member of the African staff upheld the common view among rank and file: that Africans wanted equal pay for equal work, and he was applauded."<sup>37</sup> The



general manager was finally induced to promise that their grievances would receive sympathetic consideration, and announced that their wage demands were already being reviewed by the Board of Directors in London. The workers agreed to postpone strike action pending the reply to the general managers representation to his board.

Following upon the dispute in the railways, the Blantyre Night Soil Squad also went on a one day strike in May 1947, to press their demands for higher wages and better conditions of employment.<sup>38</sup> Towards the end of May 1947, African tailors working for Asian store owners in Lilongwe township went on strike to demand higher wages and shorter working hours.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, on 6 October 1947, the entire African staff employed in the engineering and electrical department of the I. Conforzi Tea and Tobacco factories downed their tools, to protest against poor relations between European supervisors and African workers, and to press demands for higher pay. The strike was instigated by the changes in the method of wage payment from a 30 day ticket system to a calendar month pay system. The workers were under the impression that the change would not lead to any reduction in the total wages earned. When the September pay was made on 6 October, the workers refused to receive it on grounds that it was insufficient. Upon investigation by the District

Commissioner, it transpired that actually for a long period workers had been demanding a wage increase, which the management was not prepared to give.

The Assistant District Commissioner tried to mediate, but this failed and the strikers marched en masse to the DC's office at Thyolo Boma on 7 October, demanding that the government order I. Conforzi to pay the workers their proper wages. When I. Conforzi and the DC threatened the workers with dismissal if they incited on their demands, they all chose to quit their jobs rather than submit. Commenting on the strike, the DC at Thyolo, noted that:

In retrospect it is apparent that the strike was well organised and disciplined by leaders who possessed determination.... Another beneficial result is that the management of I. Conforzi are now likely to pay serious consideration to the improvement of relations between their European and African employees.<sup>40</sup>

In the meantime a number of estates in the Shire Highlands were reporting considerable labour unrest which in many cases had resulted in squatters refusing to work, and to disobey cultivation by-laws, and the subsequent eviction orders. According to police reports, this "trouble was being fostered by local congress agents and other dissident elements, the same elements who threaten strike action in urban areas."<sup>41</sup>

One other alarming development, in as far as the

colonial government was concerned, was the formation of the Drivers Association of Central Africa (DACA) in October 1947, of which the Nyasaland African Drivers Association was a founding member. DACA grouped the Drivers Associations of Malawi, Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia, and according to its constitution, DACA would work for the unity and cooperation among workers in the three countries to improve their economic and welfare conditions. The political overtones of DACA's founding conference were more than apparent. Delegate after delegate denounced the colour bar system, the differential wage rates between Africans and other races, and the exploitation and degradation associated with the migratory labour system. The conference unanimously agreed "to try and stop all this".<sup>42</sup> This was more than the colonial authorities could tolerate. The colonial government in Malawi was worried as ever of the influence of radical ideas among workers in the Rhodesias and South Africa spilling over into Malawi, whereas in Southern Africa as a whole the agitation by Malawians was a major source of concern. The formation of DACA must surely have bothered authorities in all the three countries. In the labour commissioners' assessment, "the situation required careful watching if labour troubles are to be avoided in this country".<sup>43</sup> Not surprisingly perhaps DACA was immediately

driven underground before its strengths could be tested.<sup>44</sup>

All these factors, surging worker militancy, growing internationalism among workers and the increasing tempo of the activities of the Nyasaland African Congress, must have induced the colonial government to accept the need for trade unions, but along apolitical lines. The Governor minuted to the chief secretary that:

The union must come and it is better that it should rest on genuine basis of a workers' movement with government encouragement than that leadership should be left to doubtful organizations such as the African Congress. The recent trouble with the railways has pointed out the difficulties of negotiations with the masses rather than the recognised union representatives.<sup>45</sup>

By the end of 1947, the Trade Union and Trades Dispute Ordinance, first passed in 1944 and later amended by a bill, became law.<sup>46</sup> This ordinance legalised the existence of trade unions, but it would not be until 1949 that the first trade union was registered. Nevertheless, the combined forces of the colonial government and the private employers which militated against open worker combination were beginning to crack. Thus, while the colonial state all along strove to create a condition of powerlessness for African workers, on whom the colonial economic system depended, the process of proletarianization also created consciousness and solidarity within the labour force which in turn led to

actions in defence of class interests. Indeed, as Gutkind has argued, the processes of proletarianization are also those in which the migrant worker tends to reject the view that deprivation is linked to forces like God and fate; rather the migrant tends to see that his deprivation is linked to the economic and political power of other groupings in society such as classes.<sup>47</sup> It was out of this basic contradiction, within colonial capitalism, that Malawian workers were drawing their strength which was forcing the colonial state to change policies. But did the enactment of legislation tolerating trade unions necessarily lead to unhampered growth of the labour movement? Was the colonial government itself an impartial actor?

Organised and militant labour remained a source of fear for both the colonial administration and private employers during the colonial period. Strike action and organizations by African workers was widely associated with political radicalism, and detestable machinations of political agitators bent on destabilizing colonial economic development. As far as the colonial government was concerned the ideal was to encourage workers' organizations along apolitical lines. Consequently, the Trade Unions and Trades Dispute Ordinance, was tailored to achieve these objectives.

By the provisions of the Trade Unions and Trade Dispute Ordinance, registration of trade unions became compulsory. The Registrar of trade unions could withhold, suspend or cancel the registration of a union if the organization was proven to be used for unlawful purposes: 'unlawful purposes' was usually a euphemism for political agitation. The Registrar was empowered to check union records, membership list, finances, including re-auditing and any other documents like the constitution considered essential to union affairs.<sup>48</sup> In as far as organization of strikes was concerned, the picketing of homes of strike breakers was prohibited, and, the number of people legally allowed to mount pickets was limited "in such a manner considered not to cause intimidation".<sup>49</sup> This gave the government the prerogative to determine the size of picket lines. To underline the colonial government's determination to control the trade unions, the labour department took it as their ordained responsibility to approve union constitutions and rules before registration could be granted. Throughout the colonial period, the labour department made it a point that their official representatives attended all union meetings to ensure that workers organizations were not used for other purposes except narrowly defined economic issues. Finally, union organizers were kept under close and perpetual police

surveillance. All too often police detectives were sent to report on the details of any gatherings or meetings conducted by African workers.<sup>50</sup> This meant that the fear of police harassment haunted many union organizer or leaders, which in turn scared away some potential members.

Undeterred by the restrictive legislation, African workers showed remarkable resilience and determination. A series of wildcat strikes that shook the PWD in 1948 may well be a testimony to this. For example, on 1 June 1948, over 170 workers at the PWD depot in Thyolo went on strike to demand pay increase. The strike ended when the PWD agreed to award the pay increase, and the three ring-leaders were fired. On 3 August 1948, over 400 artisans and unskilled workers at the Blantyre PWD depot went on strike to press their demand for higher pay. The strike ended on assurance that wage increases would be awarded to both unskilled and skilled workers. Over 200 artisans and unskilled workers at the Zomba Public Work Department workshop went on a one day strike on 13 August 1948, demanding higher pay. The strike ended when a wage increase was awarded. Similarly, about 300 tea factory workers went on strike at Lujeri estates in Mulanje district, on 1 October 1948, demanding an increase in Sunday overtime pay rates from 1/- to 2/- per 8 1/2 hours. The strike ended when management decided to close the

factory on Sundays and public holidays.<sup>51</sup>

During the same period, the police reported growing agitation among domestic servants in the urban areas of Zomba, Blantyre, Limbe and Lilongwe. For instance, at a meeting convened by a Mr. Juma Kawinga on 16 September, 1948, and attended by 50 domestic servants working for Europeans in Zomba, it was resolved to "call for a strike on 1 October 1948, unless the wages were doubled." At a general meeting of domestic servants held on 6 October 1948 in Blantyre, the workers agreed to declare a dispute and request the labour department to mediate, in resolving their demands for shorter working hours and increase in wages. The meeting was attended by over 70 domestic servants.<sup>52</sup> This clearly shows that workers' individual helplessness was maturing into collective action and the burden of deprivation and exploitation was turning into a source of organised militancy. Workers were increasingly beginning to appreciate the power of the strike weapon and combination to advance their interests. The patterns of leadership and organization which developed in the Native Associations and through the NAC, were being integrated into the workers' organizations as spontaneity was giving way to organization. A number of organizations surfaced between 1947 and 1948, encompassing a spectrum of workers,



particularly in the urban areas of Blantyre, Limbe, Zomba and Lilongwe. The new organisations included the Nyasaland Transport Company Drivers Association (NTCDA), the Zomba African Tailors Association (ZATA), the Indian Employees Association, the Nyasaland General Workers Union, and the Blantyre Domestic Servants Association.<sup>53</sup> These workers organizations first emerged among the semi-skilled and skilled workers.

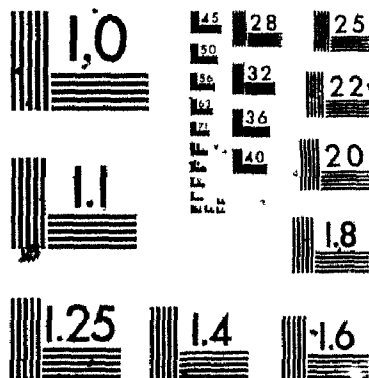
In the wake of the rapid increase in the number of workers organizations; and the tendency towards militancy of Malawian workers, the colonial government found it essential to take measures to contain the labour movement before it became too big and menacing. In the words of the Labour Advisor:

Our aim must be to persuade and to prove to the workers that it is not necessary to have strikes and threats of strikes in order to achieve improvements in conditions of work; this necessitates machinery for negotiation and easy contact between employers and employees so that grievances may be aired and discussions take place in a calm and friendly manner and not in the heated atmosphere created by a strike.<sup>54</sup>

To give effect to the new objectives, beginning in 1949, the Labour department embarked on a concerted effort to encourage the formation of "works committees". These "works committees" were composed of joint employer and employee membership. According to the labour Commissioner, the main objectives of the works committee

were to (a) provide a recognised means of consultation between management and employees (b) to give employees a wider interest and a greater responsibility for the conditions under which their work is performed (c) prevent friction and misunderstanding (d) provide a means for the presentation of grievances and complaints by employees.<sup>55</sup> The striking feature of these works committee was that workers representatives including unionised workers, were expected to attend the meetings and participate as individuals, and not as representatives of a union or a workers association. The major employers of labour like the railways, tobacco grading companies and the PWD, among others, were encouraged to form works committees. In some cases, employers saw the 'works committees' as an opportunity to preempt the development of solidarity among the labour force. Employers like the Imperial Tobacco Company, appointed the workers' representative on the works committee on the basis of ethnic affiliation.<sup>56</sup> Many other employers simply hand-picked the workers representatives. In addition the meetings of the works committees were chaired by the management. This meant that the hand-picked workers' representatives were not only subservient to the management but that the committees themselves only served the purposes of the employers and the labour department.

# 5



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART  
 NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS  
 STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a  
 (ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

To complement the works committee, the colonial government passed legislation in 1949, for the establishment of the standing Labour Advisory Boards. The Boards like the works committees had joint employers and employee membership. The Boards, however, were to be chaired by a government official. The boards were established to keep all labour matters such as wage rates, conditions of employment, relations between employers and employees, and labour legislation under constant review, and then to advise or make recommendations on all these issues to the government.<sup>58</sup> The workers representatives were appointed by the government, and were required to attend Board meetings as independents. The workers' representative could not divulge any aspect of the Board's proceedings to a workers organization, without prior consent of the chairman of the Board. This also indicates that the hand-picked worker's representatives were largely intended to secure government intentions rather than the workers they were supposed to represent. Thus both the works committees and the Standing Labour Advisory Boards were all designed to suppress the rapid development of the trade union movement by usurping the functions of unions.

In the meantime, applications for registration by the Zomba African Tailors Association (ZATA), and the Nyasaland General Workers Union were rejected in 1949

because their constitution and rules did not meet the requirements of the Ordinance. A draft constitution prepared by the Labour Department on behalf of ZATA was flatly rejected by workers.<sup>59</sup> Many other workers organizations were either denied registration or were scared away by the host of registration procedures and the government's interventionist policy. It had taken two years for the Nyasaland African Motor Transport workers union (formerly NADA) to become registered in 1949; the period between 1947 and 1949 was occupied by the wrangling between the union and the labour department over the unions' relationship with the Nyasaland African Congress, the constitution and union rules.<sup>60</sup> As for those workers organizations which were forced to go underground, their adherents were to find their expression through political struggles.

Employers also made it very difficult for workers to organize trade unions on the companies premises. The collection of subscriptions was prohibited anywhere near the work place; regardless of the time. The planting community openly discouraged their skilled workers and clerks to organize or join any organizations which were perceived to be prejudicial to the employers interest. The most formidable weapon the employers used was, of course, the victimization of suspected union

activists. For example, in 1949, the police in Limbe reported growing dissatisfaction among African workers who belonged to the Railways Social and Recreation Association alleged that the chairman of the Association was an agitator. In response the railways management demoted the chairman of the Association and immediately transferred him from the Limbe depot to Monkey-Bay in Mangochi district. Similarly, when African drivers and mechanics at Mboma estate in Thyolo district were reported to be organizing a union, two workers considered to be ring-leaders were dismissed in 1949.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, threats of dismissal or demotion must have haunted many potential union leaders and members. Thus in addition to perpetual police surveillance, workers were also subjected to immense pressure by employers.

Determined as ever, Malawian workers showed remarkable resilience and strength in resisting the colonial state's attempts to frustrate their organizational efforts. The mood of militancy and defiance among Malawian workers, was witnessed by the increase in strike action during 1949, as can be seen in table 4. Significantly, the 1949 strikes involved fairly large numbers and affected both the colonial administration and the private sector. On 8 May, for instance, an estimated 700 workers at a tea estate in

Mulanje district went on strike to protest against labour abuses by a European supervisor, and to press their demands for increased pay. The strike was called by the estate's tea factory workers, and widely supported by field workers. The strike ended the next day when management agreed to negotiate. On 17 October 1949, 200 workers at the PWD workshop in Zomba went on strike to protest against harassment and harsh treatment by a European supervisor. The strike ended when the Director of Public Works agreed to discuss the grievances with the workers representatives. On 6 December, 1949, 400 workers at the PWD depot in Blantyre struck to protest against poor supervision by European workers, and to demand overtime pay. The strike ended when overtime pay was awarded and the provincial engineer agreed to discuss the other grievances. Similarly, 50 workers at an engineering firm owned by Gilbert-Ash, in Blantyre went on strike to demand a day-off each week. The strike ended when management agreed to grant the workers demand.<sup>62</sup>

By June 1950, the provincial labour officer in Blantyre could report that :

There is a strong unhealthy undercurrent among labour in the Limbe-Blantyre area. But many employers of Labour do not wish to inform the labour department of labour unrest because they feel that conditions of employment of native labour is a personal affair.<sup>63</sup>

During the same period, reports by police indicated growing unrest among plantation workers and squatters on the estates in Chiradzulu, Zomba, Thyolo, Blantyre and Mulanje district. Thus, while the number of officially reported strikes during this period, 1949 to 1951, is fairly small, there is every indication that the intensity of labour protests was on the increase.

This growing worker militancy was fuelled by several factors. First, worker militancy in urban areas was a direct consequence of the rapidly deteriorating social and material conditions of urban workers which was brought about by the rapid increase in the cost of living. Second, among squatters in the southern province, there was growing unrest because of the slow pace of the squatter resettlement programme which had begun in 1948. Third, the discussions of the establishment of the Central African Federation, further fuelled the growing animosity between Malawians and the colonial establishment. To the urban workers, particularly among the semi-skilled and skilled workers such as drivers, mechanics, locomotive drivers, and clerks, the imposition of the Federation meant that "Europeans would be brought into the country to take-over the jobs presently held by Africans, as was the case in Southern Rhodesia."<sup>64</sup> Among squatters and the peasantry, Federation meant more European settlement, and



more land alienation; In the rural areas the colonial government was already facing stiff opposition against the compulsory soil conservation and destocking measures. The increase in poll tax in 1950 and 1951, and the hikes in land rent for squatters<sup>65</sup> only added fuel to a volatile situation. All these factors, the rapidly rising cost of living with its attendant social problems, the land question among squatters, and the pending imposition of the Federation gave an added impetus to political and working class struggle. The need for organization among workers struck with urgency.

Indicative of the workers determination, several workers organizations resurfaced and numerous new ones emerged between 1950 and 1952. These organizations included the Nyasaland General Workers Union, the Zomba Tailors, Shop Assistants and Domestic Workers Union, the Clerical Workers Union, the Nyasaland Teachers Association, the Nyasaland Asian Teachers Union, The Lilongwe African Tailors Association and the Commercial African Employees Union.<sup>66</sup> During the same period, the NAMTWU which was initially confined to the transport industry, opened up its membership to workers from other transport-related industries. From a small paid-up membership of 110 in 1950, NAMTWU registered 732 members by 1952.<sup>67</sup> These numbers are probably on the conservative

side, because they merely reflected the size of union membership around the Blantyre-Limbe area. NAMTWU had branches in Zomba, Thyolo, Mangochi and Lilongwe whose membership was not included in the above figures. It is therefore probable that the Union's membership and influence were greater than these figures seem to indicate.

It needs to be emphasised also that in terms of organizational and political orientation, nearly all these workers organizations had close affinity with the Nyasaland African Congress. In terms of composition, particularly in urban areas, there were no clear distinction between the rank and file of the congress and that of workers organizations. Members of the latter were nearly always also adherents of the former. Clerical and skilled workers formed the core of the workers organizations and the NAC, whereas the semi-skilled and unskilled made up the rank and file. This meant that there were no clear cut dividing lines between nationalist struggles and working class struggles. It is an indication that Malawian workers were not only aware of their exploitable class position but also the unequal political relations under colonial capitalism. Thus as the social and material basis of the colonial social formation began to adversely affect all stratas of African society the tempo and rhythm of both political and working class struggles

began to take more concerted and militant overtones. Among the squatters, the unemployed and the bulk of the unorganised labour the trend towards militancy and politicisation reached unprecedented levels.

Police reported growing unrest and increased political activism among urban workers during this period. On the plantations, there were widespread signs of agitation among squatters and workers. Clashes between estates managers and squatters became more frequent and the mood of defiance was everywhere apparent. For example, a large number of squatters are reported to have clashed with the manager of the Imperial Tobacco Company at the Ndakota and Chimwenya estates in September and October 1952. The manager of the British Central Africa Company in Thyolo ran into near riot when he tried to forcibly evict squatters who had refused to vacate the estates.<sup>68</sup> This trouble and unrest was allegedly caused by 'dissident elements and congress agents'. All these factors, political activism among workers, the mushrooming organizations and the growing militancy among squatters, must have been very disturbing to the colonial authorities.

Not surprisingly perhaps, almost all the new organizations were denied registration. Only one small union, the Commercial African Employers Union (CAEU), with

an initial membership of 46 clerical workers, and whose constitution was largely tailored by the labour department, was registered between 1950 and 1952. According to the constitution of CAEU, in 1952, the aim of the union was "to secure the settlement of disputes between members and employers, and to keep harmony between employers and employees."<sup>69</sup> Most of the organizations which rejected the labour department's tailored constitutions were refused registration and forced underground, and many of their adherents were to find their expression through the Nyasaland African Congress, and other avenues of protest. This gave more impetus to political struggles. It would be among the non-unionised workers, at least until the mid 1950s, that the tendency towards militancy became overtly conspicuous.

Admittedly, factional political orientation also began to appear within the two African unions by 1952. In NAMTUU for example, a militant faction led by Suzgo Elisha Msiska, began to advocate a more aggressive stand both in industrial relations and nationalist politics as early as 1951. Suzgo Msiska and others had called for an aggressive membership recruitment drive in 1952, and wanted the union to cover all workers in the transport and allied industries.<sup>70</sup> From the union records it seems the militant faction was gaining influence during this

period.

To forestall the influence of the militant elements among labour, and to preempt the workers recourse to the strike weapon, the colonial government hurriedly passed legislation, the Trade Disputes (Arbitration and Settlement) Ordinance, in December 1952. This Ordinance outlawed strikes and lock-outs in essential services sector. Strikes and lock-outs in other branches of the economy were prohibited before or during the process of arbitration.<sup>71</sup> This was clearly an attempt by the colonial authorities to force workers into submission to the bureaucratic procedures and employer manipulation. Prolonged arbitration proceedings could easily wear down the workers resolve to force concession from management.

At the same time, employers stepped up their campaign to discredit organised labour. The leaders of the newly-formed Commercial African Employees Union, for instance, were branded as communists by the settler owned Nyasaland Times.<sup>72</sup> Many workers suspected of belonging to unions, were either dismissed or threatened with dismissal for the same reasons.<sup>73</sup> Above all many employers simply refused to negotiate with unions or even to recognise any workers organizations. The various employers organizations, such as the Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, the Nyasaland Employers

Association, and the Asian Chamber of Commerce, openly discouraged their members from negotiating and recognising the unions. This was also a well calculated strategy designed to undermine the credibility of unions.

The most telling commentary on Malawian workers defiance of the colonial government and employers' attempt to contain worker militancy, was the increase in the number of strike outbreaks that were to reach peak levels in 1960. As can be seen from table 4, the number of strikes showed an upward tendency between 1952 and 1960, despite the year to year fluctuations. Most of these strikes occurred in urban areas, and many involved fairly large numbers of workers, sometimes several hundreds. There is evidence to indicate that the data tabulated in table 4 may be an underestimation of the frequency and extent of strike outbreaks especially among rural workers. Given their isolation from centres of the colonial administration, the planting community were not prone to publicize labour unrest as frequently as employers in urban areas. For example, of the 15 officially reported strikes in 1953, only 4 are reported to have occurred in rural areas, among agricultural workers. Yet there is ample evidence to indicate that there were numerous work stoppages and strikes on the plantations in 1953, which involved large numbers of squatters and workers.

It is not possible to detail the numerous strikes and work stoppages that erupted on the plantations, factories, commercial firms and government departments before the outbreak of riots in August 1953. It is in terms of their content and extent that the 1953 strikes, and other forms of labour protest became very significant. A few examples of the content and extent of strike action and other forms of labour protest during this period should demonstrate the point. In February 1953, 150 construction workers in Blantyre went on strike to press their demands, that two workers dismissed for union activism be reinstated and that wages should be raised. The employers succumbed, and the two dismissed employees were reinstated and wages were raised. An estimated 800 workers of a tobacco grading firm in Limbe went on strike in May 1953 to press their demands for higher wages. The strike lasted for two days, and finally the employers awarded a wage increase. In June, 1,800 workers at the Imperial Tobacco Company, packaging factory in Limbe downed tools, to protest the dismissal of an African supervisor who was fired because he was alleged to be an agitator. The worker was reinstated, and work resumed. 74

On the estates and plantations, political radicalization of squatters and rural workers became the

major impetus to labour protest. Incidents of crop sabotage, slow-downs, and absenteeism became more numerous and frequent on the estates. In addition, strike outbreaks among farm workers were also on the increase. A series of sporadic strikes occurred on the estates in the Shire Highlands in 1953. There was a major strike on a tobacco estate in Thyolo in March 1953, which involved nearly 200 farm workers. The employers had to dismiss 30 workers considered to be ring-leaders before work resumed. An estimated 170 maize farm workers went on strike towards the end of March to press their demands for higher wages. The strike lasted for five days, and a wage increase was granted.<sup>75</sup>

The most disruptive forms of protest occurred among squatters during this period. Most squatters openly refused to pay land rent, and the majority disobeyed eviction orders. The incidence of trespass, and destruction of estates forest became widespread, and clashes between squatters and estate owners and managers were on the increase, until finally riots erupted on one plantation at Luchenza near Thyolo. On 19 August 1952, over 1000 armed squatters, workers and peasants, over-ran the Tennett estates at Luchenza, whose owner was widely disliked for his harshness and eviction of Africans from the estates.<sup>76</sup> One African was killed and several dozens



wounded when police opened fire to disperse the crowd. By 20 August, the entire Shire Highlands was engulfed by widespread riots, looting and work stoppages. On the estates workers went on short strikes, and in towns union leaders called on workers to strike. To underline the active role of organised labour in the events of August 1953, the president of the Commercial African Employers Union, Lawrence Mapemba, and an executive member of the NAMTWO Hartwell Solomon, were arrested and charged with sedition.<sup>77</sup>

In the meantime, small groups of squatters, workers and NAC activists moved about the countryside, coordinating militant action against the colonial state. To slow down police deployment, roads were destroyed, barricades erected, and telephone wires were cut. Chiefs considered to be sympathetic to the colonial government were deposed and their courts and other buildings ransacked. On the plantations, tea bushes, sisal and tung trees were cut and burnt, and machinery wrecked. In many parts of the central and northern provinces, the peasant response was unmistakable. Agricultural extension workers, tax collectors, marketing boards agents, and other colonial government officials were beaten, harassed, molested and forced to withdraw from the rural areas: the administration of the countryside almost

ceased.<sup>78</sup>

The colonial government response was predictable. Police reinforcements were brought in from the neighbouring territories, and intensive police action followed. Eleven Africans were killed and several hundreds were injured by police firing on the crowds.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, skirmishes between government agents and Africans continued for several months. It was apparent that the colonial order was heading for a final round.

The trend of events during this period, particularly among labour, must have been very disturbing to the colonial administrators. The growth of political activism among workers and the increased incidence of strike out-breaks, inspite of the restrictive legislation passed in 1952, clearly underlined the gravity of the situation. Workers had openly demonstrated their defiance of the colonial order. Indicative of workers rejection of the formalistic approaches to labour protests is the fact that none of the disputes that caused the 1953 strikes were ever referred to an arbitration board. The political overtones of some of the strikes was also apparent. This is precisely what the colonial authorities had been trying to avoid. Consequently it became essential for the colonial government to step up its level of intervention in workers organizations so as to foster the development

of moderate and non-political trade unions.

In the period after 1953, the labour department stepped up its campaign among workers and employers to setup works committees, staff councils, joint industrial councils and wages councils in the civil service, the colonial development corporation, the construction industry, the tobacco industry, the railways and many other private industries.<sup>80</sup> These councils were futile forums for advancing the workers interests, because they were dominated by management and employers; more often than not the council rules and recommendations were drafted by management. The trade unionists managed to see through all this, and were openly opposed to the Advisory Boards, works councils, wages councils and works committees because "all the so-called African representatives on these bodies were made to be yes men".<sup>81</sup> "What we require are proper trade union organizations"<sup>82</sup>, became the universal call among unionised workers.

It also became the main pre-occupation of the labour department to organize and conduct courses for trade union leaders and workers representatives on the various industrial councils and the staff associations. It was through such courses that strike action by workers were deplored, while the virtues of negotiations were

emphasised. These training courses were instrumental in the dissemination of the ideology of economistic and apolitical trade unionism. In one pamphlet distributed by the labour department it was stated that "trade unions are not organizations with political aims. Trade unions are formed to regulate relations between workers and their employers, and to ensure harmony between workers and employers".<sup>83</sup>

In as far as the moulding of a moderate union leadership was concerned, the labour department found ready assistance from the metropolitan labour movement. Indicative of the global dimensions of imperialism, it became the duty of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), rather than the British Trade Union Congress, to foster the development of 'responsible' trade unionism. The ICFTU in collaboration with the labour department secured scholarships for training Malawian union leaders to study trade unionism in Britain and Belgium. The ICFTU also ascribed itself the key role of "protecting" the unions in Malawi against ideologies perceived to be detrimental to the colonial order.<sup>84</sup> The ICFTU jealously guarded its paternalistic relations with the trade unions in Malawi, and was openly against any encroachment by organizations based in eastern Europe such as the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). The

ICFTU, for example, took steps to discourage the local union leaders to develop any ties with labour movements based in eastern Europe.<sup>85</sup> Initially the ICFTU used scholarships and training to create its own adherents among the local union leaders: those that the labour department found moderate and acceptable were hand-picked and secured scholarships to study trade unionisms, and to attend ICFTU sponsored conferences abroad. Everything was used, propaganda, material and financial aid, to foster the development of moderate unions.<sup>86</sup> Later in 1960 the ICFTU, with the full support of the Labour Department, went as far as to entice J. Ngwiri, Secretary-general of the Nyasaland Trade Union Congress to become their field representative.<sup>87</sup> After becoming the local representative of the ICFTU, Ngwiri went as far as to call for moderation among workers, "in order to create a conducive atmosphere to attract foreign investment".<sup>88</sup>

To synchronise the activities of both the colonial government and the metropolitan labour movement, a specialist labour officer (industrial relations) was appointed in December 1957. It was the responsibility of the industrial relations officer to advise both employers and workers on all aspects of industrial relations, and also to advise trade unions on matters of administration and financial control. It was through the Industrial

Relations Officer, that the colonial government effectively tried to discourage would-be trade unionists from organizing trade unions. It became the main preoccupation of the industrial relations officer to organize and run local training courses for trade union officials in "basic principles of trade unionism", through which it was designed to foster "the growth of the movement on a basis unbiased by matters other than industrial affairs".<sup>89</sup> Those union leaders who became converts were rewarded with scholarships for training abroad, and in some cases an attachment for short periods to the metropolitan trade unions.<sup>90</sup> Indicative of the crippling impact of such a policy by the colonial government, was the fact that "many individuals who received such training did not return to the trade union movement after their courses".<sup>91</sup> This also raised growing suspicion among some union leaders and the rank and file, about the intentions of both the colonial government and the metropolitan labour movements.

The most vivid illustrations of the impact of state intervention on the labour movement during this period is the apparent retarded numerical increase in the number of registered trade unions. Virtually no new unions were registered between 1954 and 1960. It is evident from the records that the government through the

industrial Relations Officer actively interfered in the running of individual union affairs. The labour department had openly engineered the removal from office of union leaders found to be too militant, like Lawrence Mapemba, Chairman of CAEU, and promoted and encouraged those that were moderate.<sup>92</sup> In this respect government intervention also tended to instigate and fuel the growing ideological factionalism between the militants and moderates within the union leadership.

Apart from the obvious external pressures on the labour movement, the trade unions were also not financially viable. The unions operated on tiny budgets which made it difficult for them to maintain full time officials who could devote their energies to the organizing and running of union affairs. Low wages made it difficult for many workers to maintain their membership subscription; food and clothing being the most pressing needs. Consequently, unions suffered chronic financial shortages which in turn led to poor organization and this also made communication between the branches and headquarters difficult. But in addition to insolvency and poor communication the early unions had not developed structures and a coherent ideology to withstand the pressures workers were subjected to.

There were others in the labour movement also

who were moderated because they essentially saw the trade unions as cooperative "Savings Societies," for the benefit of union members.<sup>93</sup> There was yet another faction among union leaders, at least until the mid 1950's, which was reportedly involved in "petty trading and were themselves employers of labour",<sup>94</sup> so that their moderation was in part a reflection of their basic economic interests which were also in full contradiction with their role in union affairs. All these factors, tended to militate against the growth and expansion of the labour movement in Malawi during this period.

Ironically while some elements of organised labour demonstrated reactionary tendencies, the majority of the rank and file and the bulk of non-unionised workers continued to show unabated militancy and greater politicization. As can be observed from table 4, the increase in strike action between 1956 and 1960 clearly points to the surging militancy among workers. It may have to be repeated that there is evidence to indicate that the data tabulated in table 4 is an under estimation of the frequency and extent of strike outbreaks during this period. For one thing, strikes among farm workers and those that occurred in rural areas like northern Malawi were rarely reported. The fact that the Labour department acknowledged "the growing reliance, by African workers, on



strike action"<sup>95</sup> rather than arbitration to obtain concessions from employers and management, is a clear testimony to the surging militancy among the rank and file of the labour force. Significantly, most of these strikes were called by the bulk of the non-unionised workers, to press demands for higher wages, better housing and improved working conditions. In addition, other strikes were called to protest against the summary dismissal of workers, and to press demands that such workers should be reinstated. For instance of the 14 strikes and work stoppages in 1956, 4 were called to protest the summary dismissal of workers and to demand their reinstatement, whereas in 1957, out of the 20 strikes, 5 were called to protest workers victimization<sup>96</sup> and the rest were for wage demands, and improved housing and better working conditions.

It is evident from the records that the success rate of strike action was remarkably high; in over 75 percent of the strikes workers obtained concessions from management.<sup>97</sup> This was more significant, and clearly shows the growing solidarity among the labour force, despite the determined efforts by both the colonial government and employers to suppress strike action. The success rate may also be indicative of the existence of covert forms of organizations which fostered solidarity

among workers in the face of government and employer hostility towards organised labour. Unionised labour was, therefore, faced with a growing challenge. On the one hand the moderate leadership had to demonstrate to the rank and file that higher wages and improved conditions of employment could be obtained through mere negotiations, while on the other hand many employers continued to show hostility towards organised labour, and most employers had yet to recognise the unions. It was out of this basic contradiction that gradually, at least, by 1956, the militant and radical faction began to regain their hold over the labour movement.

The new phase in trade unionism, which also showed workers rejection of particularistic and non-political trade unionism, witnessed the formation of the Nyasaland Trade Union Congress (NTUC) in July 1956. The NTUC's main objective was to coordinate and synchronise the activities and policies of the individual unions in the country. The NTUC as a central labour organization dealt with issues such as wage demands, negotiating machinery between workers and employers, working conditions and labour legislation. The NTUC demanded not only consultation by government in the formulation of labour laws but it also pressed for more African representation in the legislative council where the labour laws were

formulated.<sup>98</sup>

To underline the complete rejection of responsible and apolitical trade unionism, the NTUC like its member unions, became affiliated to the Nyasaland African Congress. This was a mere formality because all along the nationalist movement had been championed by workers, both unionised and non-unionised. There were many in the union movement, among the leadership and rank and file that played the same roles in the nationalist movement as they did in the unions. Kelvin F. Nyirenda, for example, who worked for a commercial firm, Gill Brothers, in Lilongwe, had for a long time been an organising secretary of the Nyasaland African Congress and vice-president of the Commercial African Employees Union between 1956 and 1958. Kelvin, later in 1959, became the Secretary-general of the Nyasaland Trade Union Congress.<sup>99</sup> There was J.J. Mwale, a mechanic in the Nyasaland Transport company, and an executive member of the NAMTWU, who since the early 1950s had been widely associated with nationalist politics in Lilongwe and the central province.<sup>100</sup> H.F. Faramenya, an organizing secretary of the Nyasaland African Railway Workers Union, in Blantyre, was also reported to be an ardent activist of the Nyasaland African Congress.<sup>101</sup> This, however, is not to suggest that the trade unions were a mere appendage of the

nationalist movement, but rather to indicate the multi-faceted dimensions of both the working class and political struggles during the colonial period. It needs to be emphasised also that neither were trade unions nor the nationalist movement homogeneous organizations, both showed divergent tendencies of militancy and moderation. There was a faction in the labour movement, and the NAC which aspired for formalistic and a constitutionalist approach to both labour protest and politics while at the same time there was also a bigger faction in both movements which articulated a more aggressive stance and never hesitated to use the strike weapon to advance the political struggle.

It has been shown in the preceding chapters that the 1950's also saw accelerated transformation in the social and material conditions of the colonial social formation. Let it be repeated that there was increased destitution among workers because of the rapid increase in the cost of living, glaring inadequacy in housing and other social amenities for both rural and urban labour, and at the same time the number of unemployed people was also on the increase.<sup>102</sup> Finally, the question of colour bar and segregation remained as critical as ever, and became more sensitised by the imposition of the Federation. It was the interplay of all these factors that fuelled

worker militancy, and it was from the same pressures that in part, the nationalist movement drew its momentum. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the tempo and rhythm of the two movements showed a direct correlation, and the period after 1957 belonged to the militant phase: this was equally disturbing to the colonial authorities.

Indicative of government suspicion about the growing influence of the militant faction, legislation was hurriedly passed in 1957. The Trade Unions and Trade Disputes (Amendment) Ordinance, which empowered the Registrar of Trade Unions to decline to register a union if he was satisfied that "the union is used for unlawful purposes". The Registrar was also empowered to demand detailed union accounts, membership list, minutes of meetings and any other documents considered essential to union management.<sup>103</sup> This was clearly designed to empower the colonial government to censor union activities, and thereby limit union links with organizations perceived to be detrimental to the colonial order.

It is evident from the records, however, that despite concerted efforts by the colonial government to cripple the radical elements in the labour movement, the trend towards militancy was gathering momentum among the workers, both unionised and non-unionised. By the end of 1957, the militant faction within organised labour was

regaining control and for the first time, the two African unions, NAMTWU and CAEU, embarked on a large scale membership drive. NAMTWU, changed its constitution, and for the first time made provisions to accommodate members from other transport-related sectors, while CAEU, changed their constitution to cater for all workers in the commercial and manufacturing sector. The name of the later union was also changed to Commercial and General Workers Union (here after CGWU). Membership of the NAMTWU and CGWU rose sharply. CGWU paid-up membership rose from 150 in 1957 to 1,470 by 1958, divided into six branches in Blantyre, Zomba, Lilongwe, Mzuzu, Thyolo and Salima. During the same period NAMTWU could register an increase in membership from 350 in 1957, to an estimated 997 members by 1958, and the membership of the Nyasaland Railways African Workers Union (NRAWU), had risen from 1,000 in 1957 to an estimated 2,108 members. These numbers are probably on the conservative side because they only indicate paid-up members and not the overall union membership. The NRAWU, for example, claimed a potential membership of 3,500 by 1958, while labour department records indicate 2,108 members.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, the unions also withheld details of their membership from the authorities in order to avoid drawing the attention of the colonial police who constantly kept union leaders under

surveillance. It is therefore more than likely that the membership figures do not reflect the precise strength and influence of organised labour during this period.

There were two other events which in many ways influenced the growth and development of the labour movement during this period. First, a number of Malawian workers, with organizational experience in trade unionism, had been expelled from neighbouring countries for political agitation. Some of these workers, of whom Aleke Banda and B.R. Banda were destined to occupy a prominent role in the labour movement in Malawi, resettled in the urban areas of Blantyre, Zomba and Lilongwe.<sup>105</sup> Aleke Banda was widely associated with the Nyasaland African Congress Journal, Tsopano, published by Malawian workers in Rhodesia, and B.R. Banda was a trade unionist among railway workers in Bulawayo. Aleke Banda, in 1958 became chief of the NTUC information department, and later in 1959, he launched the NTUC's bulletin, Mtendere pa Nchito (Freedom for the Worker).<sup>106</sup> B.R. Banda became the publicity secretary of NAMTWU, in 1959, and later, he occupied the same position in the National Council of Labour (NCL) which emerged in 1960.<sup>107</sup> Aleke Banda's trade unions' publicity campaign captured the hearts and minds of many workers, and the unions in the country were to experience unprecedented growth and expansion during his

brief stay at the NTUC headquarters. B.R. Banda, with his vigorous attack on the low wage economy in the country combined with his call for worker militancy was to find a ready ear among workers, and the NAMTWW, was to become the moving force behind the labour movement in the period after 1958. If anything the Bandas' organizational abilities infused unprecedented agility in the trade union movement in the country during this period.

Second, the return of Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda in July 1958, his vehement denunciation of the Federation, his devastating attacks on colonial government policy and his patriotic call for Mtendere or freedom had an electrifying impact on the fabric of Malawian society.<sup>108</sup> Among peasants, squatters and workers, Dr. Banda's patriotic call for Mtendere only gave further impetus to their surging militancy, and the political radicalization of both the rural and urban proletariat reached new heights. To those not yet confident that the colonial order could be confronted in full force, Dr. Banda's patriotic rallying cry for Mtendere was more than liberating. Within a short-time numerous workers organizations resurfaced, such as the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, Kandodo Staff Association, Textile and Garment Workers Union, Fishing Industrial Workers Union, Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union,



Nyasaland National Teachers Association, Dowa Tailors, Shop Assistant and Domestic Servants Union, and Ncheu Tailors Shop Assistant and Domestic Workers Union.<sup>109</sup> This was more than the colonial authorities could tolerate, and none of these organizations would ever obtain registration.

To stop the proliferation of the trade unions, legislation was enacted in 1958 which raised the minimum number of people required to form a trade union from 7 to 15. Under the provisions of the Trade Union Ordinance 1958, the Registrar of Trade Unions could withhold approval of an application for registration of a union for up to one year. The Registrar of Trade Unions could also cancel or suspend a union's registration or a leader on mere proof of infringement or breach of union rules and regulations. In addition staff associations were legitimized, thereby preempting the importance of trade unions in representing the workers interests. Finally, the new legislation stipulated that union officials should restrict their activities solely to one union and that they should be actually employed in the industry with which their union was concerned.<sup>110</sup> This was clearly designed to undermine the development of inter-union solidarity thereby restricting trade unionism to particularistic economic matters. The interesting aspect of the Trade

Union Ordinance 1958, was that it was to "be brought into effect on a date to be decided upon by the Governor",<sup>111</sup> and that date would come in March 1959.

The Nyasaland African Congress political campaign, championed by Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda and his lieutenants had stirred African society into action. There were wide-spread demonstrations and disturbances throughout the country. In the countryside, tax collectors, agricultural extension workers, marketing boards agents and others perceived to be sympathetic to the colonial establishment were specifically targeted for harassment, and many had to be withdrawn. On the plantations squatters forcibly asserted their land rights. In urban areas, organised demonstrations and abrupt work stoppages were on the increase. "Incidents and disorders occurred with mounting frequency".<sup>112</sup> By the end of February 1959, the northern province had almost fallen out of colonial control. There was widespread arson, road blocking, destruction of bridges and telephone lines, and the violation of the agricultural by-laws.

Faced with widespread militancy, and in desperation the government declared the State of Emergency on 3 March 1959, and proceeded to arrest hundreds of people, including all prominent members of the Nyasaland African Congress, all office bearers of NTUC, [REDACTED] U,

NAMTWU and CGWU.<sup>113</sup> On 4 March 1959, the government brought into law the restrictive Trade Union Ordinance, passed at the end of 1958. All these measures provoked further violent resistance and opposition to the colonial establishment. In the countryside government buildings were burnt, bridges and roads destroyed and telephone wires cut down. In the urban areas and on the plantations there were a series of work boycotts.<sup>114</sup> The colonial government response was almost predictable: punitive operations were undertaken by the police and the army to force the African population into submission. In the process over 51 people were killed and hundreds were injured by police and the army firing into the crowds.<sup>115</sup>

The Labour Movement and Working Class Struggles  
During the Emergency and After

The State of Emergency, which lasted from 3 March 1959 to 16 June 1960 marked a watershed in the development of the labour movement and class struggles in Malawi during the colonial period. In the face of the growing government hostility towards the labour movement, workers faced formidable barriers in their efforts to organize. But despite the colonial state's punitive measures, Malawian workers displayed remarkable resilience and strength, and by July 1959 the militant faction in the

rank and file of organised labour had began to regroup and temporarily controlled the NTUC headquarters. To overcome government propaganda against agitation and activism, and the resultant paralysis imposed on the labour movement, the NTUC embarked on a concerted campaign both overt and covert, to popularize trade unionism. For the first time during the colonial period, a workers newsletter, Mtendere pa Nchito: (Freedom for the worker) was launched in August, 1959. Mtendere pa Nchito, carried articles in Chichewa and English, on a wide range of issues affecting workers and society as a whole; and to many workers cracking under the aegis of the State of Emergency, the impact of the newsletter was very liberating.

It was the NAMTWU and CGWU however which had the most spectacular influence on Malawian workers during this period. Significantly, a new breed of young, militant and articulate cadres had taken over the leadership of the two unions in 1959. Suzgo Elisha Msiska, who became general-secretary of NAMTWU, and later president of the National Council of Labour (NCL) steered the labour movement in the country with remarkable ability unsurpassed in his time. He was instrumental in consolidating the position of NAMTWU and NCL, and above all he popularized the strike weapon to force concessions from the employers and management. From the rhetoric, however, it seems that

Suzgo Msiska, was motivated more by nationalistic sentiments than by any clearly defined left-wing ideologies. He was a vigorous critic of the low wage economy based on colour bar, and vehemently denounced racism and imperialism.<sup>116</sup> Changa-changa Msiska, organizing secretary of NAMTWU, and later general secretary of NCL, and B.R. Banda publicity secretary of NAMTWU, were probably among the most effective organizers of trade unions during this period. It was the two, Msiska and Banda, that launched NAMTWU's newsletter, Magalimoto (Transport) in November, 1959.<sup>117</sup> Magalimoto was to become one of the most widely circulated workers newsletters during the colonial period. Magalimoto, which published articles in both Chichewa and English, covered a wide range of topics such as the problems of unemployment, ~~low~~ wages, and working and living conditions. Through the 'Workers Column' in Magalimoto, workers expressed and exchanged views with each other and the union leadership on union affairs and other social subjects. Through Magalimoto, trade unionism acquired new meaning and a broadened perspective. The new approach to trade unionism was lucidly expressed in a lengthy article on Trade Unions and their role in society in Magalimoto of 9 January 1960 in which NAMTWU stated that:

A trade union is a continuous, permanent organization created by workers to protect.

themselves at their work, to improve the conditions of their work through collective action, to seek to better the lives and to provide a means of expression for workers' views on the problems of society.... The Trade Union Movement in Africa is indissolubly linked up with the struggle for the political freedom and independence of our continent, and the union believes in the principle and policies of the Malawi Congress Party.<sup>118</sup>

The spirit of defiance and militancy was nowhere more apparent than when NAMTWU by a unanimous vote taken in January, 1960 decided to affiliate to the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) (successor to NAC), and adopted a motto, "Sitidzafooka aii" (the struggle continues). The name of the union was also changed to Transport and Allied Workers Union (hereafter TAWU). In the period 1960-1961, TAWU was to be a pivotal union in the growth and expansion of the labour movement in the country. TAWU launched a vociferous campaign against the low wage economy and the deplorable living and working conditions in the country. For example, it was a declared aim of TAWU to "work to eliminate the migratory labour system, because the system existed to provide employers with cheap labour" and that the exploitation of workers could only be stopped through action by a "United Labour Movement".<sup>119</sup>

This militant mood in TAWU found ready support from CGWU. According to Chakufwa Chihana, publicity secretary of CGWU, who was an articulate theoretician with a remarkable ability in understanding the operations of a

colonial economy; a trade union movement was "a class brotherhood, and the true picture of power and maturity of the working class, a gathering that would provide a formula for the machinery to disarm our usual enemies, the capitalist".<sup>120</sup> Through their newsletter, Wa Nchito (The Worker's Voice), published in Chichewa and English, CGWU, provided a more analytical exposition of colonial capitalism. Labour migration, unemployment, the housing problem which was like an "epidemic disease" and poor working conditions were all understood to be an inherent problem of capitalism because "employers were not prepared to spare a little of their huge profits on the welfare of the African worker".<sup>121</sup> The stated long term policy of the CGWU was that it would "work to support the principle that our country's natural resources and means of production should be developed primarily for the satisfaction of the needs of the majority rather than a privileged few", and that, "the development of the economy, provision of housing, education, health and general welfare of the workers should be the responsibility of the state".<sup>122</sup> The union of course, meant an independent African government and not the colonial government.

The growing politicization of the labour movement and the widely upheld call by Suzgo Msiska for

"strike for more money in the pay packet and better conditions of work"<sup>123</sup> was more than some elements in the NTUC executive could accept. Consequently a split developed within the NTUC between the militant with leftist tendencies and the moderates. The former were composed of the leaders of TAWU and CGWU, whereas the latter were predominantly leaders of NRAWU and the National Union of Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (NUPAW). The moderates were criticized for indecisive leadership and their inability to broaden the scope of the labour movement.<sup>124</sup> There was also muted criticism of the NTUC's all-round relations with the ICFTU. There were many among TAWU's leaders who felt that the ICFTU exercised too much control over the NTUC's leadership, and began to question the real intentions of the ICFTU.<sup>125</sup> By June 1960, Suzgo Elisha Msiska, Changa-changa Msiska, B.R. Banda, K.M. Golowa and Chakufwa Chihana and others had launched a separate central labour organization, the National Council of Labour (NCL). Between June 1960, and July 1961, the NCL was to be the central organization for the more militant unions both old and new.<sup>126</sup>

The NCL which emerged during the Emergency enjoyed a spectacular though short-lived history. For the NCL trade unionism meant not just representing the



particular economic and social interest of workers but rather giving the workers interests a broader social expression and political force. In its constitution the NCL clearly stated that its main objective were to "serve as the vigorous labour vanguard for removing all forms of economic exploitation in the country; to support national action to prevent economic and political oppression, and to work for the emancipation of workers from capitalist exploitation". In the period 1960-1961 the NCL exerted spectacular influence on its member unions and actively assisted in organizing the waves of strikes that rocked the country in 1960 and 1961. The NCL officials travelled widely throughout the country and assisted local union officials in negotiating wage demands and improved working conditions. The NCL also directly assisted in the organization of unions among hotel workers, tailors, shop assistants and domestic servants in Dowa, Salima, Ntcheu, Thyolo, and Mzimba.

Through its Newsletter, Umodzi pa Nchito (workers unite), the NCL popularised trade unionism nationwide and cultivated militancy in the labour movement. The NCL openly advocated strike action to advance the workers interests, a call which was well received by individual unions. Worker militancy was fostered through the open and total support the NCL gave

to striking workers. In the period 1960-1961, over 110 strikes occurred many of which were supported and directed by TAWU and the NCL. As can be seen from table 4.1, a total of 77 strikes resulting in the loss of 175,860 man-days occurred in 1960. Over 74% of the man-days lost in 1960 were due to union organised strikes. This is a clear indication that union organization was beginning to play a decisive role in working class struggles, and substantial gains were made in wages and conditions of employment particularly among commercial and transport workers. It was for this reason that the need for organization among workers struck with urgency, and between 1960 and 1961, new unions mushroomed while membership also swelled considerably. For the first time agricultural workers also felt the need to combine in order to confront the employers and management. Much credit was due to the NCL's organizational ability in rallying workers to combine.<sup>127</sup>

Out of the 77 officially reported strikes and work stoppages which occurred in 1960, 15 took place in the retail and wholesale trade sector, 24 in agricultural production units, 9 in construction industry, 7 in the tobacco factories, 10 in transport and allied industries, 5 in government departments, and the rest were in the service industry, among hotel workers and in the public

utilities organizations. Furthermore of the 77 strikes and work stoppages, 30 strikes were for wage demands, 9 for improved working conditions, 6 were for arbitrary dismissal of workers, 12 were political sympathy strikes and numerous others were for demands for over-time pay, better housing and demands for union recognition. It is not possible to discuss the organizational strategies utilized by workers, and the government's and employer's response to the strikes that occurred between 1960 and 1961. However a brief summary would suffice to demonstrate the organizational patterns among workers and the colonial state reaction.

On 3 June 1960, workers in the Nyasaland Transport Company (NCL) went on strike. The strike arose out of a dispute first declared at the end of 1959, due to non recognition of TAWU by the NTC, victimization and intimidation of union officials, demands for pensions and gratuities, night allowances, higher wages, and shorter working hours. In January 1960 the Governor appointed a Board of Inquiry to investigate the workers' grievances. The findings of the Board of Inquiry were submitted in May. No action was taken to redress the grievances by the company after the report was published nor was any effective action taken by the government.<sup>128</sup> In the last week of May, TAWU demanded to know what action NTC was

prepared to take, but the company declined to negotiate with the union. On May 28th TAWU gave notice of strike to begin on June 3rd. In the meantime, the TAWU newsletter, 'Magalimoto' carried articles addressed to the workers and the public about the pending strike.<sup>129</sup> Leaflets were also widely distributed among workers and members of the public in Lilongwe, Blantyre and Limbe, explaining the cause of the strike and calling on workers in transport-related industries to strike in sympathy.

The strike began at the NTC headquarters in Blantyre on June 3rd and spread to Lilongwe and Mzimba in the same day. By June 4th the strike had expanded to several haulage companies. During the strike, TAWU's executives travelled widely between Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzimba giving encouragement to workers on strike and those that were initially unsympathetic to the strike. In addition union organizing officials worked tirelessly in the compounds to mobilize support among workers in transport related industries. By the fourth day of the strike the passenger bus service in the country was almost brought to a standstill. The colonial government had to intervene. But TAWU had refused to negotiate with the NTC without conditions. Under pressure from the government officials, including intimidation of possible arrest of TAWU officials, the union agreed to resume work if the

company would negotiate.<sup>13</sup>

TAWU called for the resumption of work on June 10th and during the first day of negotiation, night allowances were introduced effective June 1st 1960, and in the subsequent negotiations, wage increases of 12 1/2% and above were gained, new work schedules were established and a joint wage council was established in the transport industry. TAWU was also recognised as the sole union in the industry. The strike which began on June 3rd ended on June 10th, and at the peak over 600 workers were involved, and about 3,042 man-days were lost in the NTC alone.<sup>131</sup>

On June 29th 1960, workers on the I. Conforzi Estates in Thyolo went on strike.<sup>132</sup> TAWU, having made request for general recognition, then presented separate demands for higher wages, improvement in conditions of employment of the company's drivers, mechanics, and assistants, and the reinstatement of workers arbitrarily dismissed for their trade union activities. On July 5th, about 2,000 tea workers downed tools and by July 12th sympathetic strikes involving large numbers of farm workers, and tea and tobacco factories workers, had brought the entire establishment to a standstill. About 5,167 workers were involved. On July 12th 1960, 167 workers considered to be ring-leaders and agitators were dismissed, and I. Conforzi issued them eviction notices

from the compounds. The dismissed, who were mostly drivers and mechanics, did not accept the dismissal while the strike was in progress, and refused to vacate the compounds.

I. Conforzi obtained a high court injunction to evict the dismissed workers on 13 July 1960, and Thursday 14 July, two men were forcefully evicted, one of whom, Yusufu a union leader, was arrested and taken to Thyolo police station for refusing to leave the compound. Later in the same day a crowd of over 300 workers started to march towards the police station, but were stopped by the police and asked to disperse. The workers refused to disperse, but instead demanded the release of the arrested union leader, Yusufu. The police read the 'Riot Act' to the workers, and ordered them to disband. Upon the workers refusal to leave, the police used tear gas and a baton-charge to disperse the workers. On Friday, 14 July, Yusufu was charged, in a magistrate court, of criminal trespass and sentenced to a prison term of two months with hard labour.<sup>133</sup>

In the meantime, undeterred by government action, the NCL and TAWU officials worked jointly to co-ordinate the strike, rally the reluctant and organize sympathy strikes among tea factory and field workers, and the I. Conforzi Chiperoni blanket factory workers. In

addition, with the assistance of the NCL and TAWU's national executive, the local TAWU branch managed to mount effective pickets. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this strike is that squatters and peasants displayed remarkable solidarity with the striking workers. Peasants and squatters provided food for the striking workers, which enabled workers to maintain their families during the course of the strike. The system of communication between the squatters, peasants and workers was so smooth, particularly after the sympathy strikes began to cripple the I. Conforzi establishment, that the owners believed that the whole strike was politically inspired.<sup>134</sup>

To break the strike I. Conforzi with the support of the colonial government, embarked on a systematic dismissal of workers, especially those suspected of trade union activism or sympathetic to trade unionism. Over 300 workers mostly the semi-skilled and skilled workers were dismissed and new ones hired to replace them. The dismissed workers were immediately evicted from the compounds and the police were ordered to arrest those that tried to resist. By 18 August the workers had been forced into submission and ordered back to work.<sup>135</sup> The workers had suffered a crushing defeat, because none of their demands had been redressed. Nevertheless, in the face of naked intimidation from the employer through the summary

dismissal, backed by police harassment and arrests, the workers demonstrated remarkable solidarity to keep the strike effective till 18 August 1960. The seeds of militancy had been sown and it was this militancy and fledgling solidarity that would lead to unprecedented expansion of trade unionism in the months ahead.

The struggles being waged by TAWU also acted as a source of inspiration among other workers, unionised and non-unionised. The power of the strike weapon had an electrifying impact among rural and urban workers, and workers increasingly began to appreciate the need for unity in their ranks. Indicative of the surging militancy among workers, the CGWU called a strike in July 1960 which involved over 1,600 workers employed by Asians in Lilongwe, to press demands for higher wages. The strike was caused by the failure on the part of the Asian Chamber of Commerce to fulfill an agreement signed with the CGWU, recognising the union as the sole representative of the workers, and agreeing to a minimum wage increase for all employees from 42/5 per month to 72/6 per month in the urban area of Lilongwe, and 62/6 for workers in all other areas in the central province. In early July, the CGWU national executive was informed of the negligence by the Asian Chamber of Commerce in not fulfilling their commitment. To press for an immediate redress, the CGWU



demanding that the wages be paid at the agreed level. In the meantime, some employers began to assert that the Indian Chamber of Commerce did not represent their interest and were therefore not bound by the agreement. The CGWU had issued a one week strike notice on 7 July, and the strike began on 14 July.<sup>136</sup>

During the strike, pickets were mounted at all the Asian stores. The CGWU officials including the national president and general-secretary were on hand throughout the duration of the strike. In addition there were concerted efforts to persuade the reluctant workers to join the strike, and by the third day employers could no longer ignore the effect of the strike. But instead of negotiating with the union, the Asian community called for police protection under the pretext that the picketing workers were intimidating them and those workers who had broken the picket lines. The police were deployed in full force, and were used to disperse the striking workers from the picket lines. However, the employers and government attempts to undermine worker determination did not achieve the desired results. The Union was quick to publicise the employers and government action by declaring, through a press release that "the hiring of forces of law as strike-breakers is in our view intimidation of the worst type and a negation of

democratic trade union rights".<sup>137</sup> By the fourth day of the strike, the Asian Chamber of Commerce succumbed and agreed to implement the agreement in full. The strike had lasted four days.

An outstanding example of total defiance among workers was nowhere more apparent than in the railways. Under the provisions of the Trades Disputes Arbitration and Settlement Ordinance of 1952, the railways were a scheduled essential service sector, and strikes or lock-outs were prohibited. But on 8 November, 1960, the entire railway system in the country was brought to a standstill. The strike was caused by dissatisfaction generated by the wage increases awarded to skilled and semi-skilled workers in October 1960. The higher wages introduced in October did not apply to the majority of the semi-skilled and the unskilled workers. Consequently, to press demands for higher wages, the semi-skilled and unskilled workers with the full backing of the skilled workers called for a strike without prior notification to the management and the labour department. To by-pass the possibilities of bureaucratic negotiating proceedings through the union and management, the rank and file among the unionised and non-unionised workers adamantly refused to hold any discussions with management and union leaders. Attempts by the labour department to induce union members to

nominate new union leaders to represent the workers in the negotiations with management were flatly rejected by workers.<sup>138</sup> It seems the union leaders were operating behind the scene to maintain the momentum of the strike and gain concessions from management at the earliest time.<sup>139</sup>

Faced with a stalemate, the government finally intervened and appointed an arbitrator to settle the dispute. A resumption of work in the railway was only achieved when NRAWU leaders were shown a government gazette notice on 23 November 1960, appointing a sole arbitrator to investigate the dispute and make recommendations. The strike lasted 14 days and involved 4,000 workers, which resulted in the loss of 56,000 man-days. By 28 November 1960, wage increases of between 15 and 25 percent were awarded to African railway workers.<sup>140</sup> The significance of the railways strike lies in the fact that workers had clearly shown their understanding of the problems and trappings of bureaucratic negotiating proceedings and acted collectively to force the authorities to succumb and make concessions. It appears that the experience of TAWU with the Nyasaland Transport Company must have acted as a warning to the workers not to rely on formalistic approaches when demanding concessions from management. The fact that the strike involved a

fairly large number of workers and lasted for 14 days, without any signs of faltering determination among the rank and file is a clear indication of the growing solidarity and consciousness among the labour force. It was this solidarity among workers in urban areas that was to become a source of inspiration for rural workers. Organised strike action began to engulf rural areas as well.

For example, on 3 November 1960, 57 workers belonging to the unregistered Kasungu Shop Assistants and Tailors Union went on strike demanding wage increases of up to 50 percent and a free Saturday afternoon. On 4 November, the Asian employers offered a 10 percent wage increase and a free Saturday afternoon; an offer which the workers turned down. Later in the same day, the Asian employers dismissed all the workers, and asked the District Commissioner for police assistance to evict the workers from the employers' compounds. The police arrested 40 strikers and transported them to Lilongwe for trial. In the court proceedings, the workers were fined 5/- each for illegal assembly and released on condition that they would keep the peace;<sup>141</sup> the implications being that they should not indulge in strike action and union activities. This was yet another indication of government intervention to muffle workers' organizations. This, however, did not

achieve the desired results; workers would continue to struggle to advance their interest.

On 22 December 1960, the shop assistants, tailors and domestic servants in Dowa, Salima and Ntcheu went on strike to press their demands for higher wages and better conditions of employment. With the assistance of the NCL and the CGWU executives, and organizers, the shop assistants, tailors, and domestic servants managed to conduct a well-organised strike involving over 300 workers. At Salima, Dowa, Chipoka, Khombedza, Chitalo, Maganga and Nsipe trading centres, the striking workers successfully picketed Asian businesses and managed to organize an effective boycott by customers of stores owned by recalcitrant employers who refused to negotiate. In the course of the strike the NCL and CGWU officials held periodic meetings with the workers to give them encouragement and map out the strategies of the strike and the negotiating position should chances occur. In addition the NCL also provided funds for the support of workers on strike. The strike ended on 14 January 1961, when the employers agreed to negotiate for conditions of employment and awarded a 20 percent wage increase.<sup>142</sup>

In the meantime, urban workers also showed no signs of capitulating to the machinations of employers or

the colonial government. The mood of militancy of 1960 flowed into 1961. In January 1961, for instance, CGWU called for a strike by domestic workers within the Lilongwe urban area. The CGWU had been, for a long time, endeavouring to obtain through negotiation, wage increases, and improvement in the conditions of service for domestic workers. Between October 1960 and December 1960, the union addressed circular letters to households employing domestic servants to allow their employees to attend union meetings, and also to take steps to improve conditions of work and wages. Most employers did not respond, while some employers indicated that they did not recognise the union.<sup>143</sup>

On 11 January 1961, the union finally issued a circular letter announcing that a strike would commence on 16 January. In the meantime some employers are reported to have threatened their employees with dismissal if they participated in the strike. Consequently, when the strike began, only 240 of the 458 domestic workers came out on strike.<sup>144</sup> During the course of the strike CGWU representatives endeavoured to meet all the employers, but only 4 prominent employers agreed to meet union representatives. To complicate matters further, a number of striking workers were dismissed and others suspended, while those who took part in the strike were subjected to

harassment and intimidation by employers. Recalcitrant employers also called on the police to apprehend striking workers and union organizers. During the first two days of the strike 18 strikers and union organizers were arrested.<sup>145</sup>

In an attempt to rally the workers and mobilize solidarity among them, the CGWU made calls both through the local press and by word of mouth to the workers. On January 17, 1961, Chakufwa Chihana, publicity secretary of the CGWU, declared that "as workers we fear less for we know we have nothing to lose but chains of imperialism coupled with colonial suppression and exploitation."<sup>146</sup> Chihana himself and other workers were arrested, the next day, 18 January, whilst endeavouring to expand the strike to Lilongwe Hotel. Chihana was charged with trespass and fined L50 or 15 months imprisonment.<sup>147</sup> By 19 January, the workers had been forced into submission and the strike was brought to an abrupt end. This is another indication of the determination by both the colonial government and the employers to muffle the workers' organizations. The workers had an uphill battle.

But government and employers action to muffle workers organizations did not deter workers to struggle for their interests. The concentration of strike action as a means to press demands and obtain concessions from

employers shifted from urban areas to rural areas particularly among the agricultural workers. The years after 1960 were the most critical for plantation owners. In the first two weeks of January 1961, for example, 12 strikes occurred in the Mulanje and Thyolo districts, resulting in the loss of 7,178 man-days.<sup>148</sup>

The NCL, devoted as ever to intensifying the workers' struggles stepped up its propaganda campaign to rally the workers. On 28 February 1961, for instance, the NCL declared that:

It has been said from time to time by the workers unions in this country urging government to collect its guts together and look into the housing shortage which is terribly alarming all over the country.... Instead of doing something about the shortage of housing in the country, the government has embarked on a policy of building skyscrapers for the police and employing more and more mobile units and regular police forces, ready to provoke the free people, and declaring a State of Emergency when people demand their lot and liberty..... State of Emergency or no State of Emergency, we have got to pursue our way..... If our workers are mishandled during the negotiations now in progress with the capitalists and the colonial government still pays a deaf ear to our claim for better housing for the workers in the territory a general strike is just imminent. And we will control this historical general strike from the hovels we live in. <sup>149</sup>

On 3 March 1961, the second anniversary of the declaration of the State of Emergency, the NCL issued a press release calling on the workers in the country that:

The hectic industrial situation in the country must go on seriously this year until the workers



get their lot. But this is just a prelude to many events coming to a head; we mean to create an industrial pandemonium if the employers cannot pay the workers sufficiently. We have assured the workers every support they need.<sup>150</sup>

It was such backing and encouragement from the NCL which acted as a spur to worker militancy and the rapid increase in union membership and the resurgence of numerous organizations among rural and urban workers.

By 1961, the CGWU, the largest registered union in the country could claim an increase in membership from 1,470 in 1958 to 26,000 members. TAWU's membership had risen from 997 in 1958 to 4,667 members by 1961, whereas NRAWU's membership almost doubled during the same period from 2,108 to 4,800.<sup>151</sup> This increase in union membership was all the more impressive in the face of government and employers attempts to stifle workers' organizations, through arrests, imprisonment and intimidation of union leaders and members of the rank and file.

Significantly, the emergence of workers' organizations among rural workers is a clear indication of the radicalization of the rural labour force, no doubt as a result of the protracted strikes of the late 1950s and the period 1960-1961, and the resultant wage gains and improvement in working conditions. Thus increasingly rural and urban workers came to appreciate the need for organization. But the 1960-61 strikes were significant in

other respects. First the strikes involved large numbers of people; many had several hundreds, and a number of such strikes lasted longer. Second, although the majority of strikes occurred in the urban areas, others took place in rural areas among small groups of workers in commerce and other sectors of the economy. Finally, although most strikes were organised by non-unionised workers, for the first time union organizations began to play a decisive role in working class struggles.

The NCL was instrumental in fostering unity among workers and workers' organizations. At the zenith of its power the NCL had a total of 72 organizers scattered throughout the country.<sup>152</sup> It was through such a network of organizers that the NCL managed to accelerate the expansion of the labour movement. Many of the NCL's experienced organizers moved from one centre to another to help in union organization. E. Ndaú for example, was the organizing secretary for the Salima Tailors, Shop Assistants and Domestic Servants Union in 1960, which was affiliated to the NCL. By April 1961, Ndaú was reported to be at Mzimba township, where he had become an organizing secretary for the Mzimba Tailors, Shop Assistants and Domestic Servants Union, which was also affiliated to the National Council of Labour.<sup>152</sup> There was also A.J.M. Banda organizing secretary of JAWU at

Mzimba in 1961 who around mid-1960 was in Lilongwe as local organiser of TAWU and NCL.<sup>153</sup> Thus through a network of organizers the NCL had managed to broaden the base and scope of the labour movement, and increasingly trade unionism began to acquire a wider social and economic expression in the colonial social formation. The fact that the NCL came into being during the Emergency is a clear indication of the heightened level of politicization and radicalization of the labour force, which in turn gave the labour movement a political force in the struggle for independence. The open identification of the labour movement with nationalist party politics clearly bears witness to workers' political consciousness and participation.

The growing militancy and political activism among the labour force was already becoming a cause of concern to the colonial administrators. In an attempt to try and check the growing politicization and militancy among the labour force, the government found it essential to register a number of workers' organizations. This would not only enable the government to control the workers' activities, but it would also enable the industrial relations officer to influence the affairs of the unions.<sup>154</sup> This may be one explanation for the rapid increase in the number of registered unions. Between 1960

and 1961, 10 new unions were registered, the highest ever in a one year period (see table 4.1). It must also come as no surprise that the government stepped up its training programmes for trade union leaders. The Industrial Relations Officer organised numerous local training courses for trade unionists, and those union leaders that became his converts were secured scholarships for training in trade unionism abroad, at Ruskin College in Britain, the ICFTU Kampala Labour College, and many other similar institutions.<sup>155</sup> During the same period the ICFTU, perhaps wary of having the NTUC eclipsed by the NCL stepped up financial assistance to the former. By 1961, the NTUC was receiving an annual grant of L 1,520. In addition the ICFTU bought two cars for the NTUC in May 1961, to facilitate organizational work.<sup>156</sup> Studies on ICFTU activities elsewhere during this period have indicated that "actions of the ICFTU were initiated by American union leaders and the administration who came to see their task among African trade unions as the erection of a bastion against communist infiltration."<sup>157</sup> Surely attempts by TAWU to develop relations with the Prague based WFTU, must have been one impetus to the increased ICFTU activities in the country.<sup>158</sup> All these were attempts by the ICFTU and the colonial government to de-radicalize the labour movement.

However, faced with a resilient and determined labour force, ICFTU and government attempts to muffle and de-radicalize the labour movement did not achieve the desired results, at least in the short run. Upon their registration nearly all the new unions affiliated to the militant NCL, and the Malawi Congress Party. The increase in union-organised strikes during this period is also a clear commentary on workers rejection of moderation. Perhaps not less disturbing to the colonial authorities was the fact that the moderate NTUC and the militant NCL merged in 1961 to form the Malawi Congress of Labour (MCL). The formation of the MCL actually represented a victory for the militant unions and the NCL, because the MCL adopted the NCL constitution and policies. In fact, all the key leadership post in the MCL were taken up by former leaders of the NCL. Changa-changa Msiska, former general secretary of NCL, was elected to the same job, and Suzgo Elisha Msiska president of the NCL also occupied the same post in the MCL.<sup>159</sup>

There were a number of reasons for the merger of the NTUC and NCL. First, the NTUC's influence among workers was at its lowest, largely because none of its affiliates had the membership and strength comparable to those under the NCL, despite the former's beefed-up financial position. Second, the NTUC had failed to obtain

the MCP's recognition early in February 1961, and as a result of which the former became isolated and almost on the verge of extinction.<sup>160</sup> It may also be possible that there was a covert campaign launched by both the MCP and the NCL to ostracize the NTUC, because of the latter's moderate posture and the all-embracing relations with the ICFTU.<sup>161</sup> Consequently, the NTUC found it essential to compromise and accept the constitution and policies of the NCL and the subsequent formation of the Malawi Congress of Labour by June 1961.

### Conclusion

From the early years of colonial rule, Malawian workers were adept at understanding the labour market and did influence the terms of their integration into the wage labour force. The outward flow of Malawian labour within the regional economic system as van Onselen has argued should thus be seen as "a creative and sophisticated worker response to the emerging capitalist system in Southern Africa. The speed and manner in which Africans chose to vote with their feet was the most basic response of all in a labour coercive economy."<sup>162</sup> Because of the labour abuses which characterised the early decades of colonial rule, labour protest in the various centres within the country took covert forms, which in themselves were equally effective. But as the colonial economy expanded and commodity relations became dominant, new forms of labour protest and organizations began to emerge, at least by the third decade of colonial rule.

It has been demonstrated that initially it was amongst the small skilled labour that the new forms of labour protest and organization took root. Strike action as a form of labour protest occurred among both unskilled and skilled workers, but it was particularly among the latter that the strike weapon was widely used. Workers

associations and trade unions first emerged among urban skilled and semi-skilled workers, and it was this category of workers that came to play a decisive organizational role among the working class.

Finally, we have also tried to show workers political consciousness and political participation, thereby indicating the complex dimensions of working class struggles during the colonial period. The climax of this process was reached in the period 1959 to 1961 when numerous strikes erupted and several workers' organizations emerged in both rural and urban areas. On paper and at least in terms of the size of membership, the Malawian labour movement emerged out of the Emergency more powerful than ever before. The period 1959 to 1961, therefore, marked a watershed in the development of the Malawian working class, because for the first time organised labour began to take centre stage in working class struggles.



### Footnotes

1. See also I.R. Phimister and C. Van Onselen, Studies in the History of African Mine Labour, in Colonial Zimbabwe, Mambo Press, Harare, 1978, pp. 26-29; and Robin Cohen, "Resistance and Hidden Forms of Consciousness Amongst African Workers", Review of African Political Economy, no. 19, pp. 14-15.
2. OTL; Chipeta with K. Mwendamumfila Jere, Gomezgani Banda, Winston Khoti Jere, Ephingweni Village, Mzimba, 1 August, 1984; OTL, Chipeta with Jim Bwanali, Gotha Estates, Thyolo. The war period, 1914-1918 also witnessed an influx of migrant workers on the Rhodesian mines, see Van Onselen, op.cit., p. 118.
3. See Van Onselen, op.cit., pp. 230-231.
4. The main dangers which Malawians migrating south faced on the way were predatory animals, 'The man eating lions on the Fort Jameson-Felra routes'; and the prospect of being captured for forced labour by the Portuguese. For details see Van Onselen, op.cit., pp. 121-122; E.P. Makhambe, "Nyasaland African Labour: Ulendos to Southern Rhodesia and the problem of African Highway Men". Boeder, "Malawians Abroad". For West African examples of migration as revolt or protest, see A.I. Asiwaju: "Migrations as Revolt: The example of Ivory Coast and the Upper Volta before 1945" in J.A.H. 17, 4, 1976, pp. 577-594.
5. See British Central African Gazette, 11 June, 1898.
6. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1927, p. 21. In 1928, it was reported that "A greater emphasis is now being given to agricultural work in schools" - See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1928, p. 21.
7. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1930, p. 45.
8. See MNA S1/96/37, Annual Report, Choto District, 1938.
9. See MNA S1/322/35, Report of D.C. South Nyasa District, 1938. It seems also that the employers particularly on the plantations had been forced to shorten the work-day for fear of losing their labour

supply. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, labour on some plantations only worked 6 hours each day. See MNA NS1/13/1, District Reports, Southern Province, 1927-1930.

10. See Van Velsen, "Some Early Pressure Groups", p. 410; and C.A. Baker, "The Postal Service in Malawi Before 1900" in Society of Malawi Journal, 24, 1, July, 1971.
11. MNA NC1/42, Report by D.C. Ntcheu, 14 January 1933.
12. MNA S1/322/38, Report by D.C. Fort Johnston (Mangochi), 5-12 - 1935. Reports on labour conditions in the remote areas of the country in the period 1891-1930 are very scanty. One reason for this is that the Secretariat in Zomba only issued instruction for periodic reports on labour in 1931. Consequently, a detailed assessment of overt forms of labour protests for the period 1891-1930 is not possible.
13. For details, see Van Velsen, "Some Early Pressure Groups". pp. 376-411.
14. The correspondence between the Mombera Native Association and the colonial government on forced labour or chibaro can be found on MNA S1/1365/24, MNA S2/5/25. See also Van Velsen, "Some Early Pressure Groups", pp. 386-393.
15. See MNA NC 1/3/4. Because of this radicalism in WNNA, the provincial Commissioner, Northern Province felt that "its existence as a recognised association may be imperilled, unless a more moderate tone and more balanced reasoning is discernible in its minutes", see MNA S1/2065/19, P.C. North to WNNA, 9 February 1929, see also Communication of 1 May 1929. This clearly shows Government suspicion and hostility towards African organizations. It may be for the same reasons that the Native Associations were almost disbanded in the early 1930s.
16. See MNA NC1/3/2. The initial membership of the NNCSA is not known, but from the records it is clear that the association was confined to the clerical and skilled workers, a constituency which was very small at the time.
17. Some of the memoranda can be found on MNA NC1/3/2;

- MNA S1/566/29. However between 1930 and 1947, there are virtually no records of the NNCSA. It seems the fate that befell many of the Native Associations also over-ran the NNCSA. During the 1930s, the colonial government showed open hostility to the African Associations. See Tangri, "Inter-war Native Associations and the formation of the Nyasaland African Congress", pp. 92-93. There was also the Lilongwe African Welfare Association, see MNA S1/262B/37.
18. The Railways Management declined to recognise the African Railways Social and Recreational Association. It is not known when this association was formed; but by 1934 it was already in existence, and its leader Isaac M. Lawrence had already become a subject of consultation between the Chief Commissioner of police and the Chief Secretary. See MNA S2/28/34, Chief Commissioner of police to Chief Secretary, 28 July 1934; details on I.M. Lawrence.
  19. See MNA S1/3263/23, petition by Blantyre Civil Servants sent through the Blantyre Native Association, 23-5-1930. Perhaps the most vivid indication of growing dissatisfaction among the semi-skilled workers in the urban areas during the Depression was demonstrated by an anonymous letter sent to the Provincial Commissioner, South, in 1931, which warned that "there is a meeting exactly the same as John Chilembwe. There are some natives who want to steal guns and petrol. The petrol, to pour on houses and set fire while owner is asleep.... All the capitaos will gather together and make war." See MNA S2/25/19.
  20. See MNA S1/943II/20, Secretary RCNPNA to chief Secretary, 11 March, 1937.
  21. See MNA COM 3/1, Memorandum by Zomba Province Association, 21 May, 1938.
  22. See MNA S2/28/34, Chief of Police to Chief Secretary, 28 July, 1934. See also MNA S1/629/30, and MNA S1/2065/19, for details on leaders of WNNa.
  23. OTL, Chipeta, with Frank Kamalo, Lujenda Estates, Thyolo 24/6/84; OTL, Chipeta with Suwangeti Mmale, Lauderdale Estate, Mulanje; OTL, Chipeta with Charles Matipwiri Ruu Estates, Mulanje; OTL, Chipeta with Samson Galima, Gotha, Thyolo; OTL, Chipeta with

Chalowe Mbewe, Nchima.

24. See The Nyasaland Times, 30 June, 1938.
25. See MNA S1/96/37, Convention of Association to Labour Commissioner, 11 September 1942. See also Nyasaland Government Report of the Committee appointed by His Excellency the Governor to Consider Existing and Draft Labour Legislation 1943. According to M.P. Barrow, member of the Legislative Council, and a leading planter, "The introduction of Trade Unions to Africans who do not need it, who do not want it and who could not use it is going to add one more handicap to the post-war advancement of Nyasaland... That there is as yet no place for Trade Unionism in the life of the African, we are firmly convinced." See The Nyasaland Times 23 March 1944.
26. Levi Zilio Mumba for example was a founding member of the North Nyasa Native Association and the Mombera Native Association. Mumba was also founding member of the Nyasaland Native Civil Servants Association, and founding member and chairman of the RCNPNA, and Secretary of the Lilongwe African Social Welfare Association. Charles Matinga was a leading member of the Zomba province Native Association and a founding member of the NNCSA. I.M. Lawrence, founder and leader of the Railways Social and Recreational Association, and an active member of the Blantyre Native Association. See MNA NAT 12/13; MNA S2/25/29; MNA S1/262B/37, MNA S2/28/34. See also Van Velsen, "Some Early Pressure Groups", and Tangri "Inter-War Native Associations and the formation of the Nyasaland African Congress". Other prominent NAC members were, Lawrence Mapemba, Lali Lubani, James Mpunga, Hartwell Solomon, and Sidney Somanje.
27. See MNA LAB/TUC/29, Speech by Hartwell Solomon, Secretary of the Nyasaland African Motor Transport Workers Union (NAMTWU) at the inaugural meeting of the union 8/10/49.
28. See MNA NS1/3/2, Report of D.C. Blantyre 1943. See also Land Commission Report, 1946. pp. 14-15.
29. See MNA LAB 11/3II, Minutes and Resolutions of the first general conference of the NAC, 19-22 October 1944. It is possible that the NAC was being used as a front for labour protests.

30. See MNA NS1/3/2, 'Report of the DC Thyolo 1945.'
31. MNA LB 11/2/1, Labour conditions in industrial areas, 1948.
32. MNA MP 14275; Labour Disputes in Nyasaland.
33. MNA MP 14275, Strike at Mboma Estate, Thyolo, 9 April 1946.
34. MNA LB1/iIV, Minutes of the NAC extra-ordinary meeting, 9 May 1946. The NAC went as far as to recommend rates of pay for domestic servants. For example a weekly allowance of 5/- was recommended for cooks and houseboys and 2/6 per week was recommended for other categories of domestic servants. See also Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1946, p. 6; and The Nyasaland Times, 11 May 1946
35. The interesting aspect of the formation of NADA is that the founding meetings were clandestinely organised at Lawrence Makata's house, as social gatherings. It was also at Makata's house that some NAC planning meetings were conducted during this period. See MNA LAB/TUC 29. Nyasaland African Drivers Association. According to NADA's first constitution, the aim of the association was to maintain the relationship between the working men on one hand and between working men and employers on the other hand; provision of benefit to members, rates of wages, conditions of employment and fostering the best interests of the members in their respective undertakings.
36. See MNA MP 14275, Report on threatened strike at the Nyasaland Railways Limbe Depot; 10 February, 1947. This paragraph draws heavily from this report.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., Report on Strike by Blantyre Night Soil Squad, 8 May, 1947.
39. MNA MP 14267, Report on Labour conditions in the central province, 1947.
40. MNA MP 14275, Report on Strike at I. Conforzi Ltd. by D.C. Thyolo, 7 October, 1947. The striking workers were fired because the D.C. and Inaco Conforzi feared that the strike would be extended to other

estates in the area.

41. This was the official explanation, of course, for labour problems. This clearly shows official hostility towards strike action, and it is also an indication that colonial authorities were unwilling to acknowledge the genuine demands by workers and squatters. See MNA LAB c/12/6, Reports on Labour disturbances, 1947-1953.
42. MNA LAB/TUC/29, Minutes of DACA Conference held in Salisbury, 16 October, 1947. The NADA delegation was led by Lawrence Mapemba and Willard Kamphaka, whereas the delegation from Northern Rhodesia was led by John Bell Zuze and P. Silali. A constitution was also agreed upon, and it was written in Chichewa, Shona and English. The delegates from Southern Rhodesia and Malawi were particularly critical of the migratory labour system, and vowed to "try and work together as brothers". Since their attendance at this conference, both Mapemba and Kamphaka were kept under constant watch by the authorities. See MNA LAB 13/2/2 Police and C.I.D. Reports.
43. See MNA LAB/TUC/29, Labour Commissioner's comments on the minutes of DACA, Salisbury Conference. 5 November, 1947. For a long time many employers in Malawi had been worrying about the Rhodesian and South African influence. This was vividly expressed by the general manager of the Nyasaland railways who wrote to the Labour Commissioner in 1945, that the repercussions of the Railways strike in Southern Rhodesia were likely to be felt in Nyasaland, and urged the government for the "immediate formation of some mechanism for the control of industrial wages. See MNA LAB 11/3II, General Manager Nyasaland Railways to Labour Commissioner, 6 November, 1945. See also MNA MP 14274: Report on the Strike in the Rhodesian Railways by Nyasaland Government labour Officer, Salisbury, 1945. The Nyasaland government representative in Salisbury feared that since many Malawian workers were involved in the strike, it was more than likely that workers in Malawi will be influenced by the events in the Rhodesias.
44. One indication of DACA's disappearance from the public scene is the absence of any correspondence material on union files for the period after 1949. It may be possible that contacts were maintained through other channels to avoid drawing the attention

- of the colonial authorities.
45. MNA MP/14267, Minutes of the Governor to the Chief Secretary, 26 October 1947.
  46. See MNA LAB 4/2/1, The Trade Union and Trade Disputes Ordinance, 1944. This Ordinance largely drew from similar legislation in force in Kenya and Jamaica.
  47. See Peter C.W. Gutkind, The Emergent African Urban Proletariat, occasional paper series, no. 8, Centre for Developing Area Studies, McGill University, Montreal, 1974, p. 34.
  48. See MNA LAB 4/2/1, The Trade Union and Trade Disputes Ordinance 1944, as amended in 1947.
  49. Ibid.
  50. There are numerous C.I.D. reports on the various union organisers and leaders during this period. See MNA LB 13/2/2. C.I.D. Reports 1947-1960.
  51. See MNA LAB/C/12/6; Labour Disturbances 1948. See also Department of Labour Annual Report, 1948, pp. 14-14.
  52. See MNA LAB C/12/6, Labour Disturbances. Police detectives were sent to attend all the two meetings in Blantyre and Zomba. Chief Commissioner of Police to Labour Commissioner, 17/9/48, and 7/10/48.
  53. A list of some of these organizations can be found on MNA LB 2/1/1, and MNA LB 2/2/1. See also MNA LAB 41/6/3, MNA LAB 41/6/1.
  54. See MNA LAB 11/14: Trade Union Policy 1948. See also Labour Department Annual Report 1948, p. 16.
  55. See MNA LAB/P1/P.W.D.: Objectives of Works Committees; see also MNA LAB 41/116/4, Industrial Relations: Works Committees 1950-1959.
  56. See MNA LAB 11/3/8, Annual Report of the Provincial labour Officer, South, 1950.
  57. The labour department could report in 1950 that "There is no doubt that this form of joint consultation is well suited to the present development of the Nyasa worker..., and should go a long way to smoothing any difficulties as may

arise". See Department of Labour Annual Report, 1950., p. 6.

58.. See Department of Labour Annual Report, 1949. p. 12; The Wages and Conditions of Employment Ordinance.

59. See MNA LAB 41/6/3, Correspondence between ZATA and Labour Commissioner, 1949. See also MNA LAB 62/01.08, Trade Unions, 1948-1962.

60. The Labour Commissioner was particularly suspicious of some of the union leaders who were also active NAC members. In addition there were suspicions at the time of the specific ideological orientation of some of the leaders of this union. At one of the union's general conference of 8 October 1949, the Secretary of the union, Hartwell Solomon, gave a speech, laced with radical jargon. Solomon stated that "the primary necessity of human life has been transformed into Slavery, into a curse to which even death sometimes seems preferable. This is how Karl Marx described the Slavish degraded position of the toiler under capitalism. He works that he may keep alive. He does not count the labour itself as part of life. It is a commodity, therefore it is not the aim of his activity: what he produces himself is wages. In capitalist countries wage labour is by its very nature wage slavery. While the Roman Slave was fettered in chains, the wage worker, as Karl Marx expressed it, is bound to his owner by invisible threads. The inexorable laws of the capitalist mode of production tie the worker securely to the chariot of capital. Under capitalism the vast masses of the proletariat are forced to work by the gaunt of hunger. Hunger is the all powerful slave drive. We, therefore, being afraid of capitalist exploitation thought of forming up a trade union in order to understand our economic emancipation as we are aware that our fate is in our own hands. With the rapidly rising cost of living it is impossible to live in urban areas when you are under-paid". The statement was read in both English and Chichewa. See MNA LAB/TUC/29, speech by Hartwell Solomon, 8 October 1949. From then onwards, Solomon became an object of close scrutiny by the authorities and every opportunity was taken to discredit him. For example, when Solomon was sued in November 1950, for an over due debt worth L 120, payable to Amin Kaisi, the provincial labour officer was the first to point out that: "It is not surprising Hartwell Solomon seems



no longer to be agitating to become the ardent Trade unionist that he was a year ago: a profit of L 120 scarcely agrees with the Karl Marx doctrine he propounded at the general meeting of 8, October, 1949". See MNA LAB 11/3/8, Provincial labour officer south to Labour Commissioner, 30 November 1950.

61. See MNA LAB 13/2/2, Report of Chief Commissioner of Police to Labour Commissioner, 15 November 1949. See also MNA LAB c/12/6, Report by D.C. Thyolo, 18 September, 1949.
62. Reports on the above strikes can be found on MNA MP 14275, and MNA LAB 16/3, Strikes and Labour Disputes 1948-1955.
63. Ibid., Report of the Provincial Labour Officer South, 2 June, 1950.
64. See MNA LAB 11/3/8II, Annual Report of the Provincial Labour Officer, South, 1952.
65. These aspects have been discussed in Chapter 3 above.
66. For a detailed list of some of these organisations see, MNA LAB 41/6/3; MNA LAB 62/01/08, unregistered Trade Unions 1948-1962 and MNA LAB TU/24; MNA LAB 41/27/1 and MNA LAB 41/53/1.
67. See Department of Labour Annual Report, 1952, p. 27.
68. See MNA MP v/84: Disputes, Imperial Tobacco Company estates 1950-1955; and MNA-Mp VII/35, Labour disturbances at the B.C.A.C. estates, Thyolo, 19 October, 1952. In urban areas there were also numerous signs of unrest among workers. For example, an anonymous letter warned the depot manager of the Central African Transport Company, that if a worker by the name of Ndovi was dismissed all the company African workers would go on strike. See MNA LAB 13/2/2, Chief Commissioner of police to Labour Commissioner, 19 August, 1952.
69. See MNA LAB: TUC/B4: Commercial African Employees Union constitution.
70. See MNA LAB: TUC/29, Minutes of General Conference, 9 June, 1952.
71. See Department of Labour Annual Report, 1952, p. 9.

72. The term communism was widely used as a euphemism for subversion. See The Nyasaland Times, 16 February, 1953, and The Nyasaland Times, 20 August, 1954.
73. There are numerous complaints on files of workers dismissed for no apparent reason. These can be found on MNA LAB 21/1; MNA LAB 21/1/11; MNA LAB 21.1.1111.
74. Reports on the above strikes can be found on MNA LAB 16/3, MNA LAB 41/30/3, MNA MP 13895; and Department of Labour Annual Report, 1953, pp. 17-18.
75. Ibid.
76. OTL, Chipeta with Jim Bwahali, Gotha Estate, Thyolo, OTL, Chipeta with Samson Gatoma, and Charles Kusunga, Namingomba, Thyolo, 28/6/84, OTL, Chipeta with Henderson Masikini, Nchima Estate, Thyolo, OTL, Chipeta with Essau Kamutu, Kasembereka Estates, Thyolo.
77. See MNA LAB: TU/B4, and MNA LAB 12/2/2. For a long time the colonial authorities had suspected Lawrence Mapemba and Hartwell Solomon of radical ideas. See also footnote 42 and 59 above. The strikes and work stoppages which occurred between August and September 1953, were not adequately covered; all of them were simply noted as political disturbances. For details on the 1953 riots, see Report of the Commission of Inquiry 1953. See also The Nyasaland Times 5 October, 1953; The Nyasaland Times, 10 September, 1953, The Nyasaland Times, 14 September, 1953 and Annual Report of the Provincial Commissioners 1953. At the time Mapemba was also Secretary for the Supreme Council of Action, set up to direct anti-federation actions.
78. Ibid. See also Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1953, pp. 5-6, and Tangri, "From the politics of Union to Mass Nationalism": pp. 266-267, and pp. 270-271.
79. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1953, p. 5. See also Report of the Commission of Inquiry, 1953.
80. The works committees, staff councils and joint industrial councils were all racially segregated.
81. See MNA LAB: G/B/6: Minutes of the general

conference of the Nyasaland Railway African Workers Union, 19 February, 1952.

82. See MNA LAB:TUC 29/II, NAMTWU memorandum to Edgar Parry, Deputy Labour Advisor to Secretary of State for the colonies, 11 March, 1956. See also MNA LAB:TU/B4, Minutes of General Conference of Commercial African Employees Union, 16 February, 1957.
83. The first local workshop organised by the labour department for trade unionists was held in June 1954. The workshop dealt with subjects such as the administration of trade unions, negotiations arbitration and settlement of disputes. See MNA LAB:TR/K/5 Local Training for Trade Union Leaders, 1954, 'Trade Unionism', see also Labour Department pamphlets on Trade Unions on MNA LAB 62/01/19.
84. The ICFTU's influence on Trade Unions in Malawi dates back to November 1951, when the former's delegation visited the country and interviewed the chairman of NAMTWU, and leaders of the Nyasaland Railway Asian Workers Union. However it was only after 1954, that the ICFTU began to make inroads into the Malawian labour movement by offering scholarships for training for union leaders.
85. A case had occurred in 1959-1960, when the Industrial Relations Officer had informed the ICFTU that NAMTWU had applied for affiliation with the Prague based WFTU. The ICFTU immediately raised the issue with the Nyasaland Trade Union Congress (NTUC). The NTUC in turn tried to persuade NAMTWU to withdraw its application with the WFTU. The NAMTWU did not withdraw the application. It seems, however, this was to be one reason why the NAMTWU would later break-off from NTUC to form the National Council of Labour.
86. In 1957 for example, the ICFTU awarded two scholarships, one for the General-Secretary of the NTUC, and the other for the General-Secretary of the NAMTWU, for training in Trade Unionism in the United Kingdom and Belgium. At the same time, the ICFTU in collaboration with the Democratic Youth Movement of Japan, awarded two other scholarships to the Secretary of the Nyasaland Railway African Workers Union, and the General Secretary of the Commercial African Employees Union, to study trade unionism in Japan for 6 months. See MNA LAB-TR/K/2. Trade Union

Leaders Training Overseas. See also Department of Labour Annual Report, 1957, p. 18.

87. See MNA LAB: TUC 41/25/1.
88. See MNA LAB TUC 41/25/1, Press statement by ICFTU field representative, to NTUC general conference, 4 May 1961. Another former trainee of the ICFTU, Chiza Mkandawire, upon return from training in UK on 6 September 1961, appealed to his fellow workers that "if we have worked for the capitalist in this country since 1891, why can't we do the same for our own black government?" See MNA LAB 41/24/4.
89. See Msimbi, 28 May 1959, Msimbi was a government monthly periodical. Other publications on trade unionism produced by the government can be found on MNA LAB 52/01/19.
90. For example, some union officials had attachment courses with the British TUC, the Israel Trade Union Movement, and in Belgium and Federal Republic of Germany. See Department of Labour Annual Reports, 1961, pp. 32-33; -- 1961, p. 33. There was also the famous ICFTU Kampala Labour College, in Uganda which was widely used for training Union Leaders.
91. See MNA LAB TR/K/2: Trade Union Training Overseas. See also Department of Labour Annual Reports, 1961, p. 33.
92. Lawrence Mapemba was censured from the CAEU, because of his involvement in the 1953 riots-during which he was charged with sedition and later acquitted. See MNA LAB TU/B4, minutes of CAEU, meeting, 20/10/53. See also Nyasaland Times, 10/9/53; 14/9/53, 5/10/53, 8/10/53; 20/10/53 and 27/11/53.
93. See MNA LAB TUC 29, Minutes of NAMTWU Zomba Branch, 9 September 1953.
94. See MNA LAB 41/27/1, Report by Provincial Labour Officer South, 9 November, 1952. The Secretary of NAMTWU, P. Chiwambo, who was in office between 1951 and 1953, operated a grocery store near Blantyre, and Amin Sullivan an executive member of NAMTWU, dealt in the brick business.
95. MNA LAB 16/311 Labour Disputes, Quarterly Reports, July 1956.

96. See Department of Labour Annual Report, 1956, p. 66, -- 1957, pp. 62-63. In one case 200 workers went on strike to resist the introduction of identity cards.
97. This estimation is based on the strike reports and summary reports on files and the Department of Labour Annual Reports for 1956-1958.
98. See MNA LAB 41/25/1; The constitution and objectives of NTUC, 1956-1960. See also MNA LAB 41/25/2A. NTUC's correspondence.
99. MNA LAB: TUC 41/25/1.
100. MNA LAB/C1/40/1.
101. MNA LAB G/B/6, NRAWU; and MNA LAB CI/40/1.
102. There is virtually no report between 1940 and 1961, that does not acknowledge the rising cost of living and its attendant hardships for workers. See Department of Labour Annual Reports, 1942-1961. On the other hand the magnitude of the level of unemployment can be gauged from the employment returns in the Blantyre urban area. In 1960 for example 12,741 people registered as job seekers in the Blantyre municipal area, whereas only 5,055 vacancies were notified. In 1961, 15,619 people registered as job seekers and only 7,043 vacancies were reported, and in 1962, 18,734 people sought jobs in the town, whereas only 8,890 vacancies were available. The returns for other towns, Zomba, Lilongwe, Mangochi and Mzuzu are not available, so that these figures may not be a precise representation of the unemployment situation. The labour department, however, actually acknowledged the unemployment problem. See Department of Labour Annual Reports, 1958, p. 11 -- 1959, p. 10; -- 1960, p. 13; -- 1961, p. 15.
103. See MNA LAB C41/121/1: Trade Union Policy 1957-1962, The Trade Unions and Trade Disputes (Amendment) Ordinance 1957. To keep the NTUC under close scrutiny, the colonial government demanded that the NTUC should be registered. See MNA LAB 41/25/2A.
104. See MNA LAB 9/B/6, NRAWU; minutes of general conference, 17 February 1958, and see also Department of Labour Annual Report, 1958, p. 61.

105. See MNA LAB 41/24/4, and MNA LAB 3/26 National Council of Labour. Many others like Dunduzu Chisiza, Yatuta Chisiza and Matupi Mkandawire were deported to rural areas where, covertly, they worked with local NAC officials to organise and mobilise political support for the independence struggle.
106. MNA LAB 41/24/2, The first issue of Mtendere pa Nchito was published in August 1959. Aleke Banda's stay at the NTUC's headquarters was shortlived, because by July 1960, Aleke had become a Secretary of MCP.
107. See MNA LAB 41/1/2B TAWU; and MNA LAB 3/26, the National Council of Labour.
108. See Tangri "From the Politics of Union to Mass Nationalism," p. 280; Bwalo la Nyasaland, 7 July 1958, in which it was reported that Dr. Banda had come to break "their stupid Federation". See also Griff Jones, Britain and Nyasaland, London, 1964. pp. 235-240. Dr. Banda's political disposition towards organised labour at this point is not known. For one thing, it seems he never made any public statement about trade unions and or strike action.
109. Some of these organizations are listed in MNA LAB 41/16/3; MNA LAB 41.37/3; MNA LAB 41/59/2A; MNA LAB 41/26/2B and MNA LAB 41/59/3A.
110. See MNA LAB C41/121/1/1, Trade Union Policy. The Trade Unions Ordinance, 1958.
111. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1958, p. 36.
112. Jones, op.cit., p. 238.
113. A total of 1,329 Malawians were arrested and detained. Among those arrested were numerous members of the rank and file of unions, NAC, and the cooperatives. For details on the State of Emergency, see Report of the Nyasaland Commission of Enquiry, 1959 (hereafter The Delvin Report). Among the trade unionists arrested were K. F. Nyirenda, W.B. Chisiza, H.F. Faramenya, J.J. Mwale, A.C. Phiri, S. Nkholokosa, J.D. Phoya, Lali Lubani, Lawrence Makata, Mansford B. Mussa, W.J. Mbekeani, Chiza Mkandawire, M.J. Mzembe. See MNA LAB C1/40/1.

114. See Department of Labour Annual Report, 1959, p. 15. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1959, p. 154-155. The number of workers in these work boycotts is not known, but on the plantations where a sizeable number of workers were drawn from among squatters, the labour situation became particularly precarious for most plantation owners.
115. See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Report, 1959, p. 155. For more details see The Delvin Report.
116. See MNA LAB C/41/1, TAWU confidential files; MNA LAB 41/22/1 TAWU, MNA LAB 41/1/2B TAWU minutes. During many union business discussions Suzgo Elisha Msiska is noted for always being the first to propose 'strike action'. In his correspondence with employers, Suzgo Msiska's language was very blunt and forthright. He simply demanded that the employer "redress worker demands or a strike will follow". See in particular TAWU's correspondence on MNA LAB 41/1/2B. Suzgo Msiska joined NAMTWU (or TAWU) in the early 1950s, and became General-Secretary on 26 November 1959, remained in office till 1963. He was the longest serving union general secretary. From July 1960 to June 1961, Suzgo combined his two offices, general secretary of TAWU and president of NCL. Suzgo Msiska remained a subject of police investigation during his term in office. At one point, the police suspected that Suzgo had left for Moscow via Dar es Salaam. See MNA LAB C/41/1, Chief Commissioner of police to Labour Commissioner, 6 February 1961.
117. In addition to the newsletter, Changa changa and Banda also organised social gatherings such as beauty contest and dances to get members together. This enabled them to by-pass the restrictions imposed by the Emergency. See MNA LAB 111/2 TAWU.
118. See MNA LAB 12/6/A, Minutes of TAWU meeting, 8 January 1960 and Magalimoto, 9 January 1960.
119. Ibid., It was TAWU which actually gave birth to the National Council of Labour (NCL). See MNA LAB: 41/22/1. TAWU almost automatically supported any action taken by the NCL.
120. See MNA LAB 41/4/2A, Chihana's address to the general conference of CGWU, 21 April 1961. Chihana joined CGWU around 1958. In 1960 he became deputy general

- secretary. He was 21 years old at the time.
121. MNA LAB 41/4/2A, Minutes and resolutions of the CGWU general conference of 21 April 1961. See also address by C.G. Kumwenda, branch chairman Lilongwe.
  122. See MNA LAB 41/4/2B, CGWU's constitution and policy, 1960.
  123. See MNA LAB 41/1/1, Suzgo Msiska's address to TAWU general conference, 8 January 1960.
  124. In a veiled attack on the moderate NTUC leadership which appeared in Umodzi pa Nchito, of 28 November, 1960. Changa-changa Msiska and B.R. Banda gravely attacked the NTU for its lavish tendencies and inept leadership. Some of NTUC's executives were known for their incompetent financial management. See also Bwalo La Nyasaland 17 January 1961.
  125. This came out in a letter of 27 July 1960, which C.C. Msiska, general secretary of NCL wrote to the NTUC executive, stating the causes of the split in the central labour organization. See MNA LAB 41/22/2B, see also footnote 85 above.
  126. Some of the NCL's affiliates, who also adopted the motto: Sitidzafooka aii: the Struggle continues, were the Hotel and Catering Workers Union (HCWU), the National Mine Workers Union (NMWU), Local government Employees Union (LGEU), and the Printers, journalists and Newspapers Workers Union. The CGWU was the largest NCL affiliate. Initially the Nyasaland Railway African workers union sided with the NTUC, but by November 1960, the railway workers had become affiliated to the NCL. There were also numerous unregistered NCL affiliates by early 1961. See MNA LAB 3/26. List of NCL affiliated unions.
  127. At the zenith of its power, the NCL affiliate unions had a potential membership of 45,000 workers, whereas the NTUC could only claim between 4,000 and 5,000 members. See MNA LAB 41/22/2B, and MNA LAB 41/24/4; and MNA LAB 3/26, NCL membership, 1960-1961.
  128. See MNA LAB 12/6/11/1: Reports and Memorandum on Labour Disturbances, Strikes and Riots: NTC Ltd. vs TAWU, June 1960. This strike was widely publicised in Central Africa. Rhodesian papers carried several articles on this strike, see for example, The Central



African Examiner, Salisbury, 18 June 1960, The African Mails Salisbury, 16 June 1960.

129. See Magalimoto, 28 May 1960, Magalimoto 2 June 1960, and Magalimoto, 6 June 1960.
130. The provincial labour officer (central), on 7 June 1960, warned Suzgo Msiska and Changa-changa Msiska, that they could be sued, and the union deregistered for violation of the Trade Union Ordinance of 1957, as passenger bus service and haulage contractors were scheduled essential services. On 8 June 1960, another veiled warning was issued to TAWU by the labour commissioner that if the striking workers ever mounted pickets, they would be arrested and charged with breach of the Emergency regulation. See MNA LAB 12/6/11/1. Provincial Officer to TAWU, 7 June, 1960, and Labour Commissioner to TAWU 8 June, 1960.
131. MNA LAB 12/6/11/1. Report on strike in NTC Ltd., 17 June 1960.
132. This strike was widely covered by local papers. See The Nyasaland Times, 28 June 1960; The Nyasaland Times, 12 July 1960, and Bwalo la Nyasaland, 5 July, 1960. The subsequent paragraphs draw from these papers. See also MNA MP 2/4/8, Report on Strike at Inaco Conforzi Estates by labour officer, Thyolo, 18 August 1960.
133. The Nyasaland Times, 17 July 1960.
134. Bwalo la Nyasaland 15 July 1960. TAWU also claimed that the national executive leaders, Suzgo Msiska and B.R. Banda were constantly harassed by the police each time they tried to visit Thyolo, during the strike period. Msiska, it was said, had been detained by the police for one day at Thyolo police station on 14 July 1960. Upon his release Msiska vowed to continue the strike, and declared that the NCL headquarters would be moved to Thyolo to ensure that workers are adequately organised. See MNA LAB 41/1/2B, NCL press statement, 15 July, 1960.
135. See MNA MP 2/4/8, Labour Officer's Reports 18 August 1960.
136. See MNA MP 11/7, Monthly Report of Provincial labour Officer Lilongwe 18 July 1960.

137. See MNA LAB 41/4/2B, CGWU Press Release, 16 July, 1960.
138. See MNA LAB 12/6/11/1, Report on the strike in Nyasaland Railways, 24 November 1960. See also Department of Labour Annual Report, 1960, p. 64.
139. One indication of union leader's complicity was that they did not call for a resumption of work for the unionised workers; and at the annual general conference held in December 1960 all the old union leaders were re-elected. This shows that the rank and file still had confidence in their leaders. See MNA LAB g/B/6II, Annual General Conference 28 December 1960.
140. See Department of Labour Annual Report, 1960, p. 20.
141. The workers were holding a union meeting at the time of their arrest, see MNA MP 11/7, Provincial Labour Officers (PLO), Lilongwe, Monthly Report, November 1960.
142. This strike was coordinated by Suzgo Msiska and B.R. Banda who are reported to have frequented the various strike centres and provided financial assistance to the striking workers. The striking workers belonged to the Dowa and Salima Tailors, Shop Assistants, and Domestic Servants Union, and the Ncheu Tailors, Shop Assistants and Domestic Workers Union. Both of these unions affiliated to the NCL. See MNA LAB 3/26 NCL, and MNA MP 11/7 PLO, monthly Report, 14 January 1961. See also MNA LAB C41/104B.
143. See MNA LAB: TL/B/4; CGWU Circular letters to Employers in Lilongwe, 30 October, 1960, 11 December, and 11 January 1961. See also MNA MP 2/4/8. Strike by Domestic Servants Lilongwe. See also Department of Labour Annual Report, 1961, p. 34.
144. MNA MP 11/7, PLO Report on Strike by Domestic Servants Lilongwe, 19 January 1961.
145. MNA MP 2/4/8, Strike by Domestic Servants. See also Department of Labour Annual Report, 1961, pp. 34-35.
146. MNA MP 2/4/8, CGWU Press Release, 17 January 1961. See also Bwalo la Nyasaland, 17 January 1961.
147. See MNA MP 11/7, Report on Strike by Domestic

- Servants Lilongwe, 19 January 1961. The Union paid the fine on behalf of Chihana.
148. See MNA MP 17/2/C, Monthly Report of Labour Officer, Thyolo, January 1961. Piecing together the fragmentary data from the district reports it seems a total of 47 strikes and work stoppages occurred between January and September 1961. Most of these strikes took place on the plantations among farm workers. See also reports on MNA LAB C/41/104A; MNA LAB C/40/1; MNA LAB C41/104B. MNA LAB 41/10/11; and MNA MP 3/4; and MNA LAB 12/6/2: Report on strikes and riots 2/3/60 -- 22/6/61.
  149. This statement was drafted by B.R. Banda who was publicity and information secretary of the NCL. The statement was issued as a show of solidarity with the National Mine Workers Union (NMWU) which had declared its intention to call a strike at the Chingalume Cement Works, and in all quarries in the country. Banda was reputed for his uncompromising language. See MNA LAB 3/26 NCL. Press Releases. See also The Nyasaland Times, 28 February 1961.
  150. See MNA LAB 41/15/1; and MNA LAB 3/26, NCL Press Release of 3 March 1961. This statement was again issued in support of the NMWU and CGWU, who at the time were engaged in heated negotiations for higher wages with employers. The ALC and BCAC were singled out for special attention because they paid below the prescribed minimum wages. This statement was also drafted by B.R. Banda.
  151. These figures are derived from union records on membership, and were generally supported by the press. See MNA LAB 3/26/11; MNA LAB 41/24/4; and MNA LAB 41/1/2B, and the Nyasaland Times, 11 June, 1961. On the other hand the Labour Dept. claimed that TAWU had 4,167 members; CAWU 5,373; NRAWU 3,428; LGEU 400, HCWU 74; NMWU 1,00; and NUPAW, 1729 and the Nyasaland Electric Supply Commission African Staff Association had 437 members in 1961. See Department of Labour Annual Report, 1961, p. 14.
  152. See MNA LAB C41/104B, Report by Labour Officer, Mzimba, 15 April 1961.
  153. AUM Banda was not engaged in the transport industry at the time, but hired out to Asians to do Sundry jobs. Banda was also reputed to have been a district

- secretary of the NAC in 1957-1958, and the MCP in 1961. See MNA LAB 41/1/1. Report on TAWU by provincial labour officer north, 1961.
154. In a minute, dated 17/2/61, to the Labour Commissioner, the Industrial Relations Officer noted that Unions like TAWU were getting too militant and had to be controlled. It was also intimated that TAWU's registration should be cancelled for the same reason. The Industrial Relations Officer suggested that government should encourage the setting up wages councils as a check on the unhealthy growth of Trade Unions. See MNA LAB C41/121/1/1: Trade Union Policy, Industrial Relations Officers to Labour Commissioner. 17 February, 1961.
  155. In 1960 alone, 41 union leaders passed through government organised training programmes in trade unionism. Out of this number, 6 union leaders were secured scholarships through the ICFTU for training in trade unionism abroad, at the famous ICFTU Kampala Labour college, Ruskin College, Oxford, and in Belgium. In 1961, 40 union leaders attended local courses, while 8 senior union officials were secured scholarships for training in trade unionism abroad in Britain, Canada, West Germany, Austria, Israel and Uganda, under the auspices of the ICFTU. In 1962, 10 senior trade union leaders went abroad for training. The majority of these ICFTU trainees never went back to the trade unions. For example, Mangwazu, a secretary of the Nyasaland Government Employees Association, had been secured a scholarship for training in trade unionism by the ICFTU, at Ruskin College. Upon his return he was appointed deputy to the Industrial Relations Officer. John Ngwiri, general secretary of NUPAW was sponsored by the ICFTU and the Catholic Church to study industrial relations at St. Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia, Canada. Upon his return to Malawi, Ngwiri became the field representative of the ICFTU in the country. See MNA LAB TR/K2, Trade Union training overseas.
  156. See MNA LAB 41/24/4, Report on NTUC, 1961.
  157. N.S.K. Tumbo, "Towards NUTA: the search for permanent unity in Tanganyika's Trade Union Movement", in N.S.K. Tumbo, J.M. Matiko, A.P. Mahiga, Piurs Msekwa and Helge Kjekhus (ed.), Labour in Tanzania, T.P.H. Dar es Salaam, 1977, pp. 4-5. Similar observations have been made by Zeleza,

- "Dependent Capitalism and the making of the Kenyan Working Class during the colonial period", pp. 564-584. That connections with the ICFTU did reinforce a conservative character of unions has also been shown by Robin Cohen, Labour and politics in Nigeria 1945-1971, Heinemann, London, 1974.
158. The WFTU in 1961, had offered TAWU 6 scholarships tenable in China, Asia and other East European countries, an annual grant of L 1,000 and a car. The labour department strongly advised TAWU against accepting this offer. See MNA LAB c40/1, Industrial Relations Officer to TAWU, 6 February 1961.
  159. See MNA LAB 41/67/2A, MCL Constitution and Office bearers; MNA LAB 41/67/4; and MNA LAB 41/67/1.
  160. For membership strength of the two central labour organizations see footnote 127 above. NTUC's membership claims are rather dubious, because its biggest affiliate union in 1961 was NUPAW which had a membership of 1,729, then there was the Building and Construction workers union with 79; Nyasaland Government Employees Association - 400; National Union of Health and General Hospital Workers 112. Thus total membership of all these union is less than 3,000. See also Department of Labour Annual Report, 1961, p. 94. At the time the MCL was formed, it could claim a total membership of 50,000 through its affiliated unions. See The Nyasaland Times, 11 June 1961.
  161. See Bwalo la Nyasaland, 17 January, 1961. In which the NTUC is described as "dead and lavish", and is attacked for financial mismanagement. This paper usually mirrored MCP opinion. In Umodzi pa Nchito of 10 January, 1961, the NCL alleged that the NTUC was "working in league with imperialist overseas." The NCL at the time enjoyed overwhelming support from MCP.
  162. See Van Onselen, op.cit., 243.

## CONCLUSION

The process of working class formation in Malawi during the colonial period has largely been periodized into two major phases. First was the period 1891 to the second world war during which the indigenous systems of production were being violently restructured to meet the demands of capitalist production. The colonial state expropriated a sizeable proportion of African lands and livestock on behalf of European settlers, companies and missionaries. This phase was also characterised by a coercive system of labour control, in which Africans were forced to engage for wage labour, and worked under semi-servile conditions of squatting or under deplorable conditions in urban areas. But alongside the process of settler and corporate accumulation during this period, an indigenous capitalist class began to emerge in crown land or trust land areas. This also tended to reinforce the trend towards the dispossession of an increasing number of Africans from their means of production, principally land, and thereby forcing them to sell their labour power in order to subsist.

It has been demonstrated, moreover, that the dominance of the squatter system, in which both capitalist and precapitalist relations coexisted, tended to limit the extent and intensity of proletarianization. But depending

upon the commodity market conditions, the peasant sector and the squatter system were both subjected to a contradictory process of dissolution and preservation during this era. Periods of high commodity prices witnessed greater proletarianization, and hence the dissolution of the pre-capitalist economy, while periods of lower commodity prices tended to accentuate the squatter system. Nevertheless, the limited scale of the internal capitalist production, combined with the severity of the internal labour system, taxation and other state demands tended to push a sizeable proportion of Malawians onto the regional labour market as international migrant workers. To a large extent, therefore, the reproduction of the wage labour force during this period was subsidized by the peasant sector. But despite the gross abuses which characterised this phase a small urbanised proletariat had begun to emerge in which clerical and semi-skilled workers came to play a decisive organizational role in working class struggles. It was also this strata of the emergent wage labour force that was to give an organizational force to the nationalist struggles. It needs to be emphasised, however, that among the majority of the unskilled workers and squatters, labour protest predominantly took covert forms, and large scale desertions during this period.

The changed conditions of accumulation brought

about by the second world war, and the post-war period also led to fundamental structural transformations in Malawi's political economy. It has been shown in chapter three that agricultural production underwent remarkable expansion during this period, and that for the first time the roots of import-substitution industrialization were being laid. This period, 1939 to 1961, also witnessed unprecedented expansion in commodity production in trust land or African areas, which in turn accentuated the process of individualization of land tenure and the incidence of landlessness among Africans. The cumulative effect of all these changes was a very substantial expansion of the wage labour force not only in European plantations and urban areas, but also in African trust land areas. The increased demand for labour by all sectors of the economy had multiple effects. First, the squatter system began to decline in importance as plantation operators began to expand their enterprises by the use of wage labour. Second, the growth of the import-substitution industries tended to reinforce the need for labour stabilization. Thus while this period also witnessed unprecedented labour migrancy, as argued in chapter three, important shifts were also underway in the internal composition of the wage labour force as a number of sectors began to stabilize their labour force because of the new demand for skilled



labour.

The tendency towards labour stabilization, however, was not accompanied by improved working and living conditions. The increased incidence of landlessness in trust land areas tended to increase the labour supply as more and more people left the rural areas to chase the few job opportunities in urban areas. This in turn led to the beginnings of unemployment which in turn had the effect of depressing the wage rates. Thus African workers were increasingly being pauperised. It has been demonstrated in chapter three that the adoption of some seemingly enlightened labour legislation by the colonial state did little to alleviate the plight of the Malawian working class. Moreover it has been argued, throughout this study, that labour legislation was always introduced when the capitalist economy sought new labour supplies or when existing supplies were threatened. Significantly, however, the changing profitability of the capitalist economy determined the limits of much of this labour legislation, and consequently the law was implemented in such a way that it always gave priority to the interest of employers rather than employees. This clearly shows that the realities of labour conditions and legislation, as Van Onselen has argued, does flow from the profitability constraints of an economy at a particular

stage of development and not simply from the interplay of institutional politics or the enlightened consciousness of administrative officials.<sup>1</sup>

The changes in the composition of the labour force were also accompanied by further transformations in the patterns of working class struggles. New forms of workers' organizations began to emerge, and the trade unions, one of the major exponents of working class ideology, began to assume a crucial role in working class struggles. Important too was the growing reliance of the working class on strike action to advance their cause. This was a marked departure from the earlier forms of labour protest characterised by large scale desertions.

Throughout this study has been demonstrated that Malawian workers' class interest and actions during the colonial period were not merely confined to narrow economic activities; working class struggles during the colonial period had multiple dimensions. One important trend of the late 1930s, through the 1940s and 1950s was the growing politicization of the working class generally. Increasingly squatters and workers came to form the vanguard of the nationalist movement in the crusade against colonial rule. It has been argued in chapter four that the growing destitution and pauperization among the working class gave an impetus to the drive towards

unionization and that these very social forces powered the nationalist struggle. Clearly therefore the particular economic and political conjuncture at any given moment determines the consciousness of the working class: the social and material conditions of the 1940s and 1950s precipitated worker militancy and political activism. Consequently the colonial state found it essential to establish a new structural arrangement, to enable capital to achieve direct control over the labour force and, therefore, dominate the working class. This new structural arrangement and its ideological manifestations were exhibited to the labour force as representing a harmony of interests.<sup>2</sup>

Thus beginning in the late 1940s, as chapter four shows, the colonial state, through various legal and other mechanisms, and in conjunction with the metropolitan labour movement, especially the ICFTU, tried to incorporate the Malawian trade union movement into a network of collaborative arrangement with capital through the institutionalization of industrial relations procedures of collective bargaining. We have also tried to show the various levels of the relationship between the metropolitan labour movement and the Malawian trade unions, and how the paternalistic posture of the former was detrimental to the latter. This, it may be noted

raises critical questions as to the viability of solidarity between workers in the metropole and those in the periphery.

But despite the combined onslaught of the colonial state and capital to stifle working class organizations and political activism, labour protest continued to take unprecedented militancy as witnessed by the events of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Faced with growing political unrest, in the late 1950s, the colonial government was forced to declare a state of emergency in 1959. To the despair of the colonial authorities, worker and squatter militancy peaked to an all time high in the period 1959-1961. The waves of strikes which engulfed the country in 1959-61 was unprecedented in the entire colonial period. It is significant also that the labour movement and the nationalist struggles, which the State of Emergency was designed to contain, actually gathered such momentum during this period that it ultimately ended colonial domination.

Footnotes

1. C. Van Onselen, "Black workers in Central African Industry: A critical essay on the Historiography and Sociology of Rhodesia", in I.R. Phimister and C. Van Onselen, Studies in the History of Mine Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe, Mambo Press, Gwelo, 1978, p. 98.
2. See also Gutkind, The Emergent African Urban Proletariat, p. 23.

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(ii) Malawi National Archives, Zomba

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Deposits of the Department of Medical and Sanitary Services

Deposits of the Department of Education

Deposits of the Department of Agriculture

Deposits of the Registrar General

District Notebooks

Historical Manuscripts collection containing Official Records of:

Nyasaland Planters Association

Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce

Nyasaland Convention of Association

Nyasaland Tea Association

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Nyasaland Tobacco Exporters Association

The African Lakes Corporation

The Shire Highlands Railway Company

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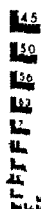
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