

# BEYOND THE BEND IN THE RIVER

**African Labor in Eastern  
Zaire, 1865-1940**

David Northrup



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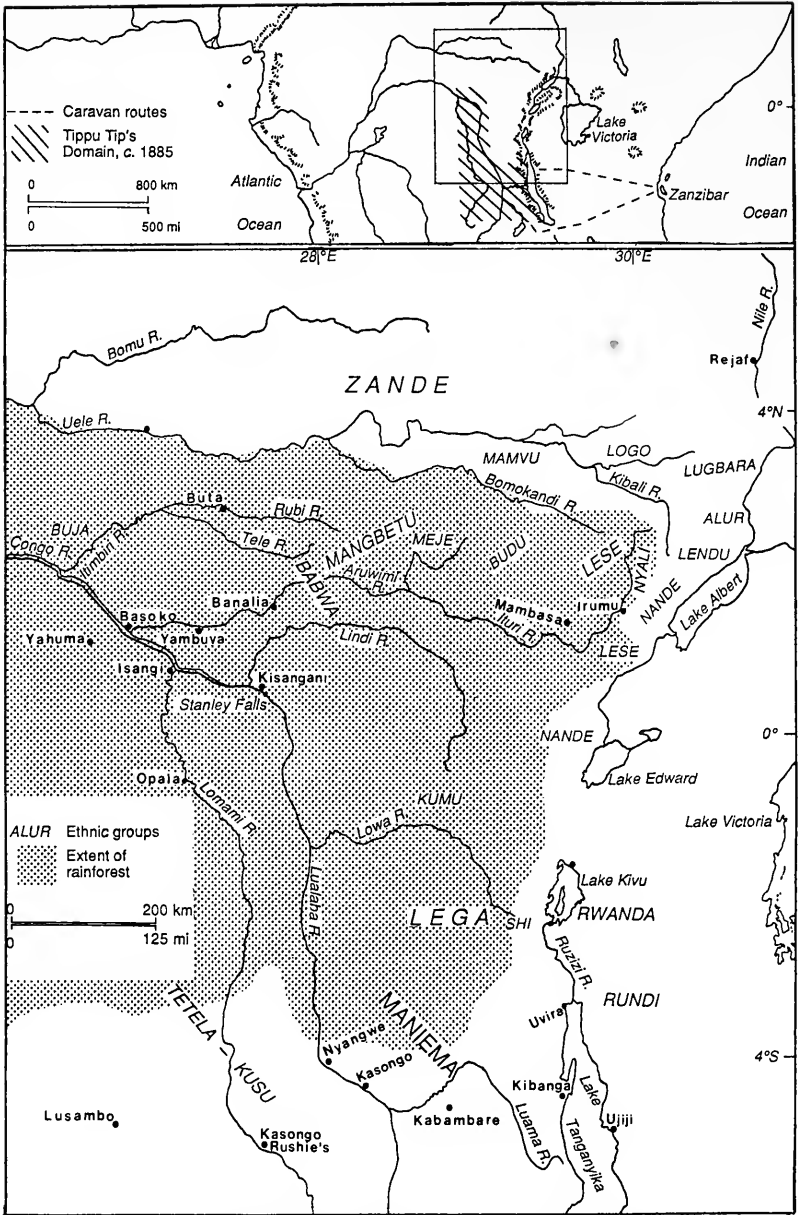
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**BEYOND THE BEND IN THE RIVER**



Map 1. Equatorial Africa in the Late Nineteenth Century

**BEYOND THE BEND IN THE RIVER:**  
AFRICAN LABOR IN EASTERN ZAIRE, 1865-1940

by  
David Northrup

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In memory of  
Rita Headrick,  
1942-1988,  
friend and historian.

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## Abbreviations

AA	Archives Africaines, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brussels
ABIR	Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company
AIM	African Inland Mission Archives, Wheaton, Illinois
AIMO	Affaires Indigènes et Main d'Oeuvre
APB	Archives, Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique (Pères Blancs), Rome
ARSC	Académie Royale des Sciences Coloniales
ARSOM	Académie Royale des Sciences d'OutreMer
B-Ag	Archives, Division Régionale de l'Agriculture, Bukavu
BACB	<i>Bulletin Agricole du Congo Belge</i>
BOEIC	<i>Bulletin Officiel de l'Etat Indépendent du Congo</i>
CD	Commissaire de District/District Commissioner
CEC	Centre Extracoutumier
CFL	Compagnie des Chemins de Fer Supérieur aux Grands Lacs Africains
CRA	<i>Compte Rendu Analytique</i>
EIC	Etat Indépendent du Congo/Congo Free State
FO	Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office
GG	Gouverneur Général/Governor General
HCB	Huileries du Congo Belge
IRCB	Institut Royal Colonial Belge
ISP	Institut Supérieur Pédagogique
K-Ag	Archives, Division Régionale de l'Agriculture, Kisangani
KAT	Archives, Département de l'Administration du Territoire, Kisangani
KI	District du Kibali-Ituri
MGL	Minière des Grands Lacs

MKM	Archives, Société des Mines d'Or de Kilo-Moto, Brussels
MRA	Archives, Musée Royal de l'Armée, Brussels
MRAC	Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, Section Historique
PC	Province de Costermansville
PO	Province Orientale
PP	<i>Parliamentary Papers</i> , Great Britain
PS	Province de Stanleyville
RA	Rapport Annuel
RACB	<i>Rapport Annuel sur l'Administration du Congo Belge</i>
RAPB	Rapport Annuel, Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique (Pères Blancs)
RAPO	Rapport Annuel, Province Orientale
RIM	Régie Industrielle des Mines de Kilo-Moto
Sokimo	Société des Mines d'Or de Kilo-Moto
SKU	Archives de la Sous Région du Sud-Kivu, Uvira, Zaïre
UMHK	Union Minière du Haut-Katanga
Unatra	Union Nationale des Transporteurs Fleuviaux

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Unless otherwise noted, all translations, computations, and maps are by the author.



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Eastern Zaïre lies at the very center of Africa, astride the equator midway between the Atlantic and Indian oceans, equidistant from Cape Town and Cairo. The difficulties of traversing the great distances that separate it from the African coasts delayed its encounters with the commercial and political forces of the outside world until the mid-nineteenth century. The difficulties of reconstructing the details of those encounters similarly have retarded the writing of its history. *Beyond the Bend in the River* is the first attempt to chronicle the history of eastern Zaïre during the three-quarters of a century that followed the breaching of its isolation, a period dominated by a variety of efforts to capture the productive force of its people.<sup>1</sup>

From the 1860s the region was gradually brought into the profitable commercial empire of the Zanzibar trader, Tippu Tip. That domain was absorbed into the new Congo Free State of King Leopold II of Belgium in two stages: by legal annexation in 1887, when Tippu Tip consented to become the Free State's governor of the region, and by Belgian military conquest in 1892-94, which overthrew Zanzibari power and brought the region under the Free State's direct control. For the first third of the twentieth century the territory formed the populous and productive Eastern Province (Province Orientale) of Leopold's Congo and of its successor from 1908, the Belgian Congo. Today it encompasses the important Kivu and Upper Zaïre provinces of the Republic of Zaïre. Comprising nearly a third of the total area of Africa's second largest country, eastern Zaïre can justify being studied as an entity on its size alone. Its more than 760,000 square kilometers

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<sup>1</sup>The only other monographic study of this area is of a more limited time period: P. Ceulemans, *La question arabe et le Congo (1883-1892)* (Brussels: ARSC, 1959).

make it larger than most present-day African nations, including three out of the four it borders. It is also larger than most European nations: France and England would fit comfortably inside eastern Zaïre with room to spare for Belgium.

Furthermore, the population of eastern Zaïre is comparable to those of most other African states, though far lower than Western European states in recent centuries. France alone has been more populous since the sixth century and England since the sixteenth. The region is not underpopulated, however, compared to heavily forested regions in other parts of the world, especially in light of the population explosion that has taken place in Western states in the past two centuries. Thus eastern Zaïre's population of some 3.5 million in the late 1930s was similar to that of Scandinavia (excluding Finland), a region of comparable area, in 1750 or to that of the United States at the time of its independence in 1776.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the democratic appeal of writing history based on units of comparable area and population, historians have almost universally sought to justify their choice of topics on other grounds. My own choice is no exception. The initial reason for choosing to study eastern Zaïre was thematic: the historical compression of labor recruitment in the region seemed to make it an ideal place in which to examine the early stages of labor mobilization. The abrupt rupture of eastern Zaïrians' isolation and their successive submission to the brutal slavery of the Zanzibari period, the scandalous forced labor of the Congo Free State, and the paternalistic labor practices of the Belgian Congo make the early phases of labor mobilization clearer than in those areas of the world where these events were spread out over centuries or millennia.

It should be understood that this is a study of labor in the sense of employment not in the sense of work. Work is as old as mankind, at least once it became necessary to earn a living by the sweat of one's brow. Eastern Zaïre, for all its isolation and lush vegetation, was no Eden. Despite the popular images of Africa as a place of primitive indolence, hard work has been a necessary component of survival there from earliest times. But before the mid-nineteenth century all but a small part of such work in eastern Zaïre took place in the context

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<sup>2</sup>Figures based on Colin McEvedy and Richard Jones, *Atlas of World Population History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), pp.41-60, 247-49, 286-90.

of and on behalf of the family and the community of which one was a member, not for employers whose interests and status put them in a separate social category. This communal character of pre-colonial African labor must not be romanticized; there existed many opportunities for ruling castes (where they existed) to exploit the services of their subjects and, most commonly, for men to exploit the labor of women.<sup>3</sup> But for males at least traditional life in most of eastern Zaïre involved far more work with others than work for others. In the space of the few decades covered by this study that proposition reversed itself. As the region passed from being one of the more isolated spots in the world to an arena in which several outside groups vied to control and profit from African labor.

Slavery was eastern Zaïre's first form of "employment"; the direct and brutal mobilization of a slave labor force by the Zanzibari began the region's labor history. Before long, this slave-labor system became the basis for the European colonial labor system. In starting a labor history with slavery, this study concurs with Anthony Hopkins' judgment of fifteen years ago that "the decline of internal slavery and the rise of a free (wage) labour force...is certain to become one of the central themes in the as yet unwritten labour history of Africa" and that this event "deserves a great deal more attention from historians than it has received so far."<sup>4</sup> Eastern Zaïre differs from Hopkins' West Africa in the degree of its pre-colonial economic development and in the absence of the rather easy transition from slavery to wage

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<sup>3</sup>See Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983) and Edna G. Bay, ed., *Women and Work in Africa* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982).

<sup>4</sup>A.G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p.225. Similarly, Herbert S. Klein and Stanley L. Engerman believe "one of the most fundamental changes in the world in the nineteenth century was the transition from slavery to free labor in the Americas"; "The Transition from Slave to Free Labor: Notes on a Comparative Economic Model," in Manuel Moreno Fraginals, Frank Moya Pons, and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *Between Slavery and Freedom: The Spanish-Speaking Caribbean in the Nineteenth Century*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985), p.255. Other African studies are Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925* (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1980), Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), chapters 9-10, and the contributors to Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts, eds., *The End of Slavery in Africa*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

labor that Hopkins found in West Africa.<sup>5</sup>

The successor to slavery in eastern Zaïre was in fact a series of forced-labor systems of expanding size and generally decreasing severity, but it is important to understand that forced labor was not a necessary intermediate stage between slavery and free market labor. Most residents of eastern Zaïre had never been slaves and those who had been did not need to be coerced to unlearn that system. Forced labor was not an alternative to slavery, but a continuation of that process of mobilizing laborers against their wills in a different form. In Michael Mason's vivid if contentious words: forced labor and wage labor were "the twin forms of labor exploitation wrenched from the dying body of slavery."<sup>6</sup> Like the post-emancipation "apprenticeships" in the British Empire and in Portuguese Africa which were meant to ease the transition for the slave-owners not the slaves, forced labor in eastern Zaïre existed for the convenience and the benefit of the employers.

There is no theoretical reason why a system of wage labor regulated by supply and demand could not have followed slavery in eastern Zaïre, as it followed the truncated "apprenticeship" program in parts of the British Caribbean.<sup>7</sup> That it did not was due to conditions

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<sup>5</sup>Hopkins, *Economic History*, p.227. Not all agree with Hopkins that the transition in West Africa was so easy. Cf. Denise Bouche, *Les villages de liberté en Afrique noire française 1887-1910* (Paris: Mouton & Cie, 1968) and more recently Gerald M. McSheffrey, "Slavery, Indentured Servitude, Legitimate Trade and the Impact of Abolition in the Gold Coast, 1874-1901: A Reappraisal," *Journal of African History*, 24 (1983): 349-68. Outside West Africa the difficulty rather than the ease of transition from slave to free-market labor has been most commonly emphasized. See François Renault, *Lavigerie, l'esclavage africain et l'Europe* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1971); idem, *Libération d'esclaves et nouvelle servitude: les rachats de captifs africains pour le compte des colonies françaises après l'abolition de l'esclavage* (Abidjan: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1976); Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters*.

<sup>6</sup>Michael Mason, "Working on the Railroad: Forced Labor in Northern Nigeria, 1907-1912," in Peter C. W. Gutkind, Robin Cohen, and Jean Copans, eds., *African Labor History* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1978), p.56.

<sup>7</sup>See William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: the Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment 1830-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). Of course, free market labor was highly unsatisfactory from the Caribbean employers' point of view since not enough of it was available at prices they were willing to pay and led to new labor recruitments from West Africa; see also Johnson U. J. Asiegbu, *Slavery and the Politics of Liberation 1787-1861: a Study of Liberated African Emigration and British Anti-Slavery Policy* (London: Longmans, 1969) and David Eltis, *Economic Growth*



and attitudes on both the European and African side that are examined in detail in this study. In brief, Free State and Belgian colonizers were driven by prejudices and economic constraints to offer wages too low to attract workers in adequate numbers. On the African side was a widespread reluctance to enter the labor market, not for reasons unique to African culture as has often been alleged, but as recent comparative research has argued, for reasons that were common to most of humanity in similar circumstances. Eastern Zaïrians, like emancipated slaves in the Caribbean and like preindustrial Westerners, in David Eltis's words, "regarded wage labor as slavery," saw freedom in "self-employment or at least the avoidance of wage labor," and therefore shunned "factories and plantations alike...unless the wage offered was very high."<sup>8</sup> The fact that the Free State and Belgian Congo, like many other colonial powers in sub-Saharan Africa, chose to overcome this reluctance by the application of physical constraints added to the view that wage labor was a form of slavery. While eastern Zaïrians may not have used a variant of the word *chibaro*, that meant both recruited laborer and slave in most of Africa south of the region, they certainly viewed things in a similar light.<sup>9</sup>

The growth of a less directly coercive system of wage labor during the middle years of colonial rule resulted from changes in government labor policy, in the magnitude of labor demands in different sectors of the economy, and in the responses of Africans to new economic and social circumstances. To include these changes this study has adopted a broad approach to labor history. Thus it examines the development of the colonial state as the only serious employer of labor in the early years of the colony and the later growth of a large private sector labor force. It considers both the growing labor demands that took Africans out of their home areas to serve as soldiers, porters, and casual labor and the generally unsalaried labor required locally for collecting products of nature such as ivory, latex, and palm oil in the early

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*and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>8</sup>Eltis, *Economic Growth*, pp.19, 23; idem, "Free and Coerced Transatlantic Migrations: Some Comparisons," *American Historical Review* 88 (April 1983): 267.

<sup>9</sup>Charles Van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-33* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), p.99.

colonial period and the analogous compulsory cultivation of cash crops in later decades. As this study shows, the mobilization of all of these forms of labor, in the mines and factories, in transportation and road building, in agriculture both peasant and commercial, whether for wages or not, whether public or private, interacted to shape both European and African attitudes toward employment, to affect the supply of labor and the demand for it.

Despite the reversals of the First World War and the Great Depression, progress in the direction of a free market in African labor occurred by the time this study terminates in 1940. The Belgian Congo had repudiated (though not entirely abandoned) the direct use of force in the recruitment of wage labor, while continuing to subscribe to it in the compulsory cultivation of cash crops. Wages had risen. Some of the mining companies had made progress in policies of "labor stabilization" by improving living conditions in the mining camps and reducing reliance on short-term labor. Significant steps had also been taken toward granting some Africans residence rights in the emerging urban centers. By the beginning of the Second World War a Zairian working class was in formation, though the process had advanced further in Shaba and Kinshasa than in the eastern region. Many cultural, economic, and legal constraints remained. Under the heavy hand of Belgian rule, African unions were not permitted to operate until 1946 and strikes by African labor remained illegal until 1959.<sup>10</sup> The period following the war would see the rapid acceleration of these trends toward the creation of a working class. That new era deserves treatment in a separate study.

This study's emphasis on the continuities of pre-industrial slavery and colonial labor, its inclusion of so broad a range of labor types, and its termination at the point when economic motives were just beginning to replace force as the principal mobilizer of labor may seem strange, for to most researchers in Africa and elsewhere labor history is synonymous with industrial labor history and particularly with the formation of workingmen's associations and a working class consciousness.<sup>11</sup> The reasons for their focus on industrial labor in iso-

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<sup>10</sup>Edouard Bustin, "The Congo," in *Five African States*, ed. Gwendolen Carter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), p.80.

<sup>11</sup>Two recent examples are Gutkind, et al., *African Labor History* and Bill Freund, "Labor and Labor History in Africa: a Review of the Literature," *African Studies*

lation from agricultural and on colonial labor in isolation from pre-colonial have much to commend them. For one thing not all forms of African slavery involved labor mobilization: some were forms of social differentiation, reproductive strategies, or conspicuous display that paid little heed to a slave's productive capacity.<sup>12</sup> In addition slave and industrial labor systems only overlapped geographically in some parts of the continent: most of Africa's indigenous slavery occurred in West Africa; a large part of the continent's industrial labor history has focused on southern Africa. Finally, ideological reasons have kept studies of African slaves and African proletarians separate. Marxists and others have seen unions as a response to the intrusion of capitalism, as part of a new mode of production that demanded to be treated independently.

Valid though these reasons are for dealing with industrial labor as a separate topic, my earlier studies of African slavery in West Africa have convinced me that there are also good reasons to look at labor development in a larger context.<sup>13</sup> Slavery often was a way of mobilizing labor where no labor "market" existed, and, as this study shows, such coercive patterns of mobilization often had surprising persistence. E. P. Thompson described his classic labor history as "a biography of the English working class from its adolescence to its early manhood."<sup>14</sup> In humble comparison, this work might be described as a biography of the Zaïrian working class from its infancy to its adolescence. Thompson began his study with the 1790s, omitting the millennium or two of the history of the pre-adolescence of the European working class; this labor history of eastern Zaïre begins several

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*Review*, 27 (1984):1-58, both of which confine their attention to the colonial period, as did R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen, eds., *The Development of an African Working Class* (London: Longman, 1975).

<sup>12</sup>Cf. I. Kopytoff and S. Miers, "African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," in S. Miers and I. Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977).

<sup>13</sup>"The Ideological Context of Slavery in Southeastern Nigeria in the 19th Century," pp. 101-22 in *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa*, ed. Paul Lovejoy (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981); "Nineteenth-Century Patterns of Slavery and Economic Growth in Southeastern Nigeria," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 12(1979):1-16.

<sup>14</sup>E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p.11.

decades after Thompson's ends in the 1830s. Where Thompson found Calvinism, the French Revolution, and industrialization as the engines of working-class formation, the ideology, technology and economy of imperialism were the external dynamo in eastern Zaïre. Though the capitalist base of this process is clear, from the Zanzibari's forced entry using guns from Western factories through the formal empire of direct European control, it is also clear that the absence of sufficient injections of capital into the economy of the region was also a major factor in its relations with the world economy.

A second justification for this study that has grown as the study progressed is as an approach to the general history of Zaïre. A persistent problem in trying to explore the labor history of eastern Zaïre has been the dearth of detailed studies of most aspects of the country. Despite Zaïre's enormous size—and because of it—the country has been the subject of relatively few major works. This is particularly true of books in English dealing with its colonial and pre-colonial history. The three brief surveys that appeared in the 1960s continue to be cited as the standard accounts, even though their preoccupation with the European side of events does not reflect current approaches to African history.<sup>15</sup> At the same time there is a substantial lack of information on almost all aspects of colonial history. Some important regional studies of Zaïre, particularly on colonial Katanga (modern Shaba) province have appeared, and that approach deserves to be applied elsewhere.<sup>16</sup>

Eastern Zaïre is a prime candidate for a regional study both

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<sup>15</sup>Ruth Slade, *King Leopold's Congo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); Bustin, "The Congo"; Roger Anstey, *King Leopold's Legacy: the Congo Under Belgian Rule, 1908-1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966). A more recent study of the European side of events is L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

<sup>16</sup>Edouard Bustin, *Lunda Under Belgian Rule: the Politics of Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). S. E. Katzenellenbogen, "Labor Recruitment in Central Africa: the Case of Katanga," in *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India*, C. Dewey and A. G. Hopkins, eds., (London: Athione Press, 1978); Charles Perrings, *Black Mineworkers in Central Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1979); Bruce Fetter, *The Creation of Elisabethville 1910-1940* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976); J. L. Vellut, "Rural Poverty in Western Shaba, c. 1890-1930," and B. Jewsiewicki, "Unequal Development: Capitalism in the Katanga Economy, 1919-40," in *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa*, R. Palmer and N. Parsons, eds., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

because of its long history as a distinct unit and because of the great importance it had in the economic development of colonial Zaïre. One is not likely to discover the extraordinary range of eastern Zaïre's importance from reading most existing studies of the colonial period. During the period under study 35 to 40 percent of the Congo's population dwelt in the eastern Congo and they constituted the colony's major labor pool. From 1927 down to the end of the 1930 two-fifths of the Congo's wage labor force was in the eastern Congo.<sup>17</sup> Not surprisingly, the region was highly important to the colony's economy. By the later 1920s the eastern Congo was supplying a third of the colony's direct tax revenue, nearly all of its gold exports (worth over forty million francs a year), and three-quarters of its ivory exports. The agricultural production was equally important: 85 percent of cotton and coffee, 75 percent of rice, 50 percent of sesame, a fifth of the palm produce, and nearly all of the cattle.<sup>18</sup> During the 1930s, despite the continuing rise in importance of Katanga and Kasai as mineral producers, the eastern Congo retained its importance as a mining center, sharply increasing its gold production and adding significant new production in tin.

The regional approach also enables one to shift the perspective on colonial Zaïre away from the capital. Instead of approaching issues from the top down and from the center outward, the view here (with apologies to V. S. Naipaul and to those his novel offended) is, from beyond the great bend in the Zaïre river where the most promising and most inaccessible eastern province lay.<sup>19</sup>

Both as a study of labor history and as a regional study of Zaïre this work has notable shortcomings. While the laboring masses of eastern Zaïre were meant to be the focus of this study, there is often much more in what follows about labor policy than labor history. Despite the detailed new information it presents, this study is not expected to alter the terms of the study of African labor history substantially. Even as a regional history it has notable lacunae: it is spotty in treating the labor practices of private companies and concessions, to cite one recurrent example; it is notably weaker on the 1930s than on

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<sup>17</sup>RACB 1939/44, p.34.

<sup>18</sup>A. Moeller, "Le développement de la Province Orientale et les voies de communication," (*Congo*) 1930 1:63-64.

<sup>19</sup>V. S. Naipaul, *The Bend in the River* (New York: Knopf, 1979).

the 1920s, to cite another. For these faults the author's limitations of vision and diligence, despite ten years spent on the project, must bear primary responsibility. The study relies almost entirely on archives and secondary works. Though oral interviews would have helped to shift the focus in favor of the ordinary working person, the number of interviews that would have been necessary to deal with so large an area would have necessitated time and resources beyond the realm of possibility.<sup>20</sup> It seemed better to accept the flaws that would inevitably result from a preliminary survey in order to provide an overview and guide to the region that might attract more researchers to the field.

In mitigation of his failings the author also wishes to point out the special limitations posed by the state of the historical sources for the history of eastern Zaïre. The Zanzibari left no records except for Tippu Tip's remarkable autobiography.<sup>21</sup> King Leopold systematically destroyed most of the Free State's records on the eve of the Belgian takeover, though a few records survived in Brussels and elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> The early years of the Belgian Congo are little better preserved. The colony's central government records appear to have been brought to Brussels in 1960, where they remain unavailable to researchers. Provincial, district, and other local records for the period under study mostly were lost through neglect in the colonial period or during the political upheavals that followed independence, though some records survive in Kisangani. The biggest exceptions are the extensive records of the Uele district for the 1910s and 1920s brought to Belgium in 1948 and preserved at the Musée Royal de l'Afrique

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<sup>20</sup>Many oral interviews on this topic have been done, notably by the students of the Institut Supérieur Pédagogique at Bukavu, and have proved useful to this survey.

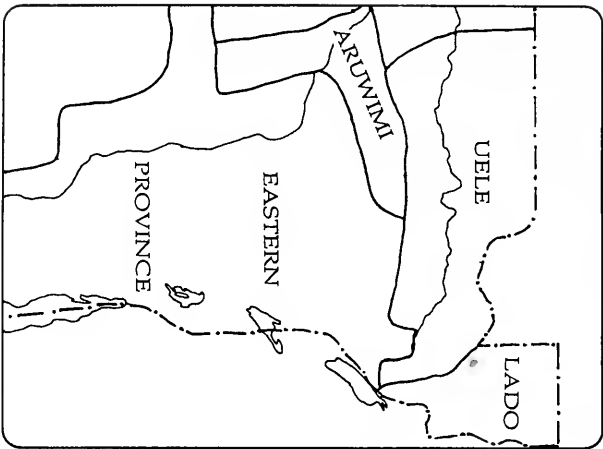
<sup>21</sup>A loose German translation appeared shortly after Tippu's death was subsequently rendered into English: Heinrich Brode, *Tippoo Tib: the Story of His Career in Central Africa, Narrated from His Own Accounts*, tr. H. Havelock (London: Edward Arnold, 1907). The original Swahili text with more accurate translations are available in W. H. Whitely, tr. and ed., *Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi yaani Tippu Tip*, supplement to *East African Swahili Committee Journals*, 28.2 (1958) and 29.1 (1959) also (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1966) and François Bontinck, tr. and ed., *L'autobiographie de Hamed ben Mohammed el-Murjebi Tippu Tip (ca. 1840-1905)* (Brussels: ARSOM, 1974). The latter has particularly useful notes.

<sup>22</sup>See M. Van Grieken-Taverniers, "Inventaire des archives des affaires étrangères de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo et du Ministère des Colonies (1885-1914)," *Mémoire de l'ARSC, Classe des sciences morales et politiques*, n.s. 9(1955).

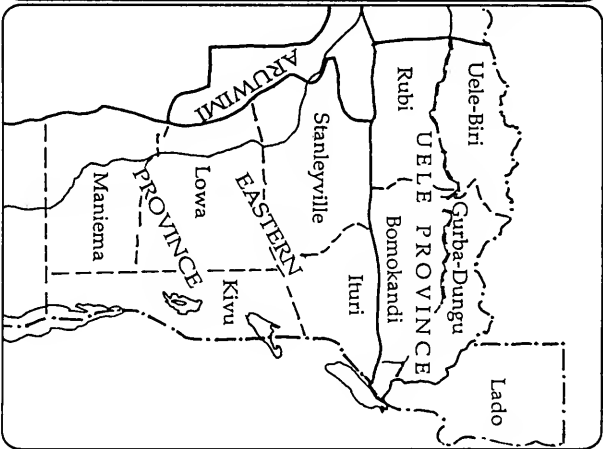
Centrale and those of the South Kivu Sub-Region, going back to the Free State period. By default, the main archival sources are the records of the Ministry of Colonies, though these are remarkably deficient for the early decades of the Congo, as well as for the 1930s. The deficiencies perhaps due to the disruptions of the First and Second World Wars and to the fact that no formal archives were established during the first forty years of the colony's existence. Some gaps in information have been made up by using the detailed records of British consular observers in the Congo during the decade before the First World War. Missionary archives, personal papers in public collections, and reports and articles from newspapers and other periodicals have also helped to fill some of the gaps in knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

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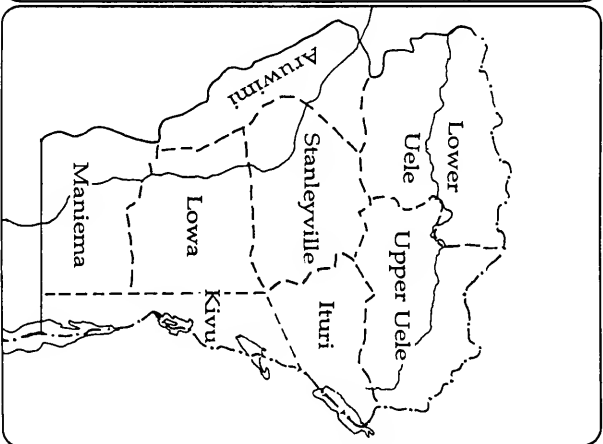
<sup>23</sup>See bibliography.



Map 2. Political Divisions of the Eastern Congo, 1894



Map 3. Political Divisions of the Eastern Congo, 1904



Map 4. Political Divisions of the Eastern Province, 1914



## Chapter 2

### Slaves and Freedmen, 1865-1895

In the three decades between 1865 and 1895, the peoples of eastern Zaïre lost their autonomy, first to Afro-Arab traders in the service of the Sultan of Zanzibar and then to the Congo Free State in the service of King Leopold II of Belgium. These events were a turning point in the political history of the region for they eventually led to the formation of modern Zaïre. What is less well understood is that these events were also a watershed in the region's social and economic history. The agents of Zanzibar and of the Free State wrenched the region out of its isolation and forced it into contact with the world economy. The conquerors' success was due both to their possession of an overwhelming technological advantage in firearms and to their willingness to use force in mobilizing African labor on a large scale to further their economic goals. The far-reaching changes associated with the process of labor mobilization remained a dominant feature of the decades that followed.

This chapter considers three topics: the social and economic conditions of the peoples of eastern Zaïre on the eve of Zanzibari intrusion, the establishment of Zanzibari hegemony in the region and its consequences, and the takeover of the region by the Congo Free State.

#### Land and People

The vegetation, topography, and human cultures of eastern Zaïre are diverse. The center of the region is dominated by the eastern end of the vast equatorial African rain forest that extends for some 400 kilometers on either side of the equator. For all its geographical prominence the forest has been home to only a relatively small percentage

of the region's population. It is the mixed semi-deciduous forests and savannas north and south of the rain forest that have been more hospitable human environments, supporting dense populations, especially along the Uele-Bomokandi and Lualaba-Luama valleys. Finally, the hills and mountains that hug the eastern frontier, following the Western Rift Valley and its Great Lakes, provide the region's most arresting scenery and are home to its densest population. The higher elevations, healthy climate, rich volcanic soils, and difficulty of access to these fabled "Mountains of the Moon" have promoted the development of mixed farming societies whose densities approach those of Rwanda and Burundi to the east, from which in fact they have absorbed considerable overflow.<sup>1</sup>

The diversity of eastern Zaïre's peoples makes generalizations difficult, especially with regard to pre-colonial times for which little direct evidence exists.<sup>2</sup> According to one recent work eighty-nine different ethnic groups inhabit eastern Zaïre today.<sup>3</sup> These modern divisions, however, correspond very imperfectly to the social and political units of precolonial and early colonial organization since present-day ethnography reflects the process of ethnic amalgamation promoted by the colonial governments in their efforts to create units of effective local government, concealing the fact that the actual units of governance a century ago were much smaller. When the Belgian Congo began reorganizing its administration on the basis of actual African polities, it discovered that chiefdoms in Maniema district had an average of only 350 inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the ethnic units in

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<sup>1</sup>Léon de Saint-Moulin, "Mouvements récents de population dans la zone de peuplement dense de l'est du Kivu," *Etudes d'histoire africaine*, 7 (1975):113.

<sup>2</sup>Credible reconstructions of the pre-colonial lives of some groups are David T. Lloyd, "The Precolonial Economic History of the Avongara Azande, c. 1750-1916," Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1978; David S. Newbury, "Kings and Clans: Ijwi Island, ca. 1780-ca. 1840," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1979; Randall Packard, *Chiefship and Cosmology: An Historical Study of Political Competition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>Georges Laclavère, ed., *Atlas de la République du Zaïre* (Paris: Editions Jeune Afrique, 1978), p.29.

<sup>4</sup>Emile Vandewoude, *Documents pour servir à l'étude des populations du Congo belge. Aperçu historique (1886-1933) de l'étude des populations autochtones par les fonctionnaires et agents du Service territorial, suivi de l'inventaire des études historique, ethnographique et linguistique conservées aux Archives du Congo belge* Archives du Congo belge, N° 2 (Léopoldville: Archives du Congo Belge, Section Documentation, 1958), p.29. Cf. A.

existence on the eve of the colonial period were far from homogeneous. Since the eighteenth century expanding Zande and Mangbetu kingdoms, for example, had been superimposing their languages and identities upon peoples of diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds in the north, with varying degrees of success.<sup>5</sup> In the southwest the Tetela, among whom Tippu Tip began his rise to power and whose "mutinies" against the Free State were so dramatic, encompassed peoples now classified as Kusu and Songye, as well as Tetela.<sup>6</sup> The Lega, who have occupied a large part of the southern rain forest for some centuries, are surrounded by what one modern anthropologist calls "a rather bewildering diversity of ethnic units," which, because of their complex historical and cultural ties to the Lega, he suggests, should be considered as parts of a great "Lega cluster."<sup>7</sup> Finally, the Zanzibari intrusion into eastern Zaïre had severely disrupted many ethnic units and at the same time led to the creation of both new amalgams and a new identity, the *arabisés*, who would play an important role in the subsequent history of the region.

The adaptations of pre-colonial societies to eastern Zaïre's physical diversity had also produced many different economies, each with its own accumulated knowledge and technologies. The savanna and eastern highlands peoples generally practiced mixed agriculture, involving a variety of crops and livestock. Cattle-keeping was a particularly important along the eastern frontier. The forest restricted agriculture and herding but encouraged hunting and gathering. The Pygmies of the Ituri forest practiced no agriculture at all, nor did the specialized fishing peoples of the rivers and lakes. Nearly all of these communities participated in some exchange, particularly at the local level.

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Moeller, "L'adaptation des sociétés indigènes de la Province Orientale à la situation créée par la colonisation," *Bulletin des séances de l'IRCB*, 2 (1931):52-54.

<sup>5</sup>Jan Vansina, "The Peoples of the Forest," in *History of Central Africa*, D. Birmingham and P. M. Martin, eds. (London: Longman, 1983), 1:96-97; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Azande: History and Political Institutions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp.27-37.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Turner, review of *La Mutinière militaire au Kasai en 1895: Introduction* by Marcel Storme, *Journal of African History*, 12 (1972):522.

<sup>7</sup>Daniel Biebuyck, *Lega Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp.17, 21.

Contrary to the belief widespread among later colonial officials that Africans had satisfied their simple wants without much more exertion than plucking fruit from a tree, pre-colonial production was both complex and arduous, as the observations of early visitors attest. Henry M. Stanley noted that the inhabitants of the Ubwari peninsula on lake Tanganyika opposite Ujiji were cultivators of enormous quantities of cassava, as well as millet, which they traded with the Rundi for palm-oil and butter and with the people of Ujiji for cloth and beads.<sup>8</sup> In the densely populated area near lake Kivu there were immense fields of sweet potatoes, sorghum, rice, cassava, peanuts, beans, and tobacco, as well as large banana groves, great herds of cattle and goats, fishing, honey, and palm oil.<sup>9</sup> In Maniema David Livingstone judged the people of Kabambare and the Lega to be indifferent cultivators who concentrated on bananas and peanuts but resisted cassava, to their detriment in time of famine. In the late 1860s, before the destructions brought by Zanzibari conquests, Stanley was told that the valley of the Lualaba south of Nyangwe had been thickly settled with cultivated groves of banana trees, "flocks of goats and droves of black pigs round every village."<sup>10</sup> Pierre Salmon described the inhabitants of the northern Aruwimi and Rubi valleys in 1888 as energetic farmers, who before the Zanzibari invasion, cultivated bananas, cassava, corn, peanuts, and melons.<sup>11</sup>

Nor were craft and other industries absent from the region. Iron mining and smithing were widespread.<sup>12</sup> Wood carving of both utilitarian and artistic objects was a notable feature of the region.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Henry M. Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1878), 2:58.

<sup>9</sup>Lieutenant Lange. "Rapport concernant la reconnaissance faite dans la région de la Haut-Ruzizi [July 1894]," 3 August 1894; AA, AE(242)226.

<sup>10</sup>David Livingstone, *The Last Journals...in Central Africa from 1865 to his Death*, Horace Waller, ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875), pp.344-46; dispatch from Nyangwe, 28 October 1876, *Stanley's Despatches to the New York Herald, 1871-1872, 1874-1877*, N. R. Bennett, ed.(Boston: Boston University Press, 1970), p.323.

<sup>11</sup>Pierre Salmon, *Le voyage de Van Kerckhoven aux Stanley Falls et au camp de Yambuuya (1888)* (Brussels: ARSOM, 1978), p. 40; Lieutenant Nahan, "Reconnaissance de Banalia vers Buta et retour par Bolulu," *Belgique Coloniale*, 20 November 1898, pp.557-59.

<sup>12</sup>Cameron found iron smelteries through Maniema; see his *Across Africa*, new ed. (London: George Philip & Son, 1885), pp.245-53, 278. Nahan visited several forges and mines south of the Tele; "Reconnaissance," pp.557-58.

<sup>13</sup>See the illustrations of leaf-bladed paddles, arrows and spears in Stanley, *In*

Salt-making existed in Kivu, Maniema, and Aruwimi.<sup>14</sup> Making cloth from raffia, bark, and hides was also a common occupation.<sup>15</sup> In most parts of the region the dwellings were simple but adequate, and villages neat and clean. In places, traditional building techniques produced structures of some note, such as the vast reception hall of the Mangbetu king Munza, which, even allowing for Schweinfurth's romanticism, was exceptionally large and well designed.<sup>16</sup>

While markets were not a notable feature of the region in the mid-nineteenth century, except on the Zaïre bend and perhaps at Uvira on lake Tanganyika, the exchange of goods was a normal part of life. Populations specializing in hunting or fishing traded with agriculturalists. The Wagenia around Stanley Falls, for example, exchanged their surplus smoked fish for bananas, manioc, and beautifully made canoes with the peoples of the Lindi, Aruwimi, and Lomami, and were also middlemen in a trade in hatchets and spears.<sup>17</sup> The exchanges in these and other wares may also have stimulated the development of the various currencies—iron, raffia-cloth, and shell—that were in use.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, before the intrusion of outsiders it

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*Darkest Africa*, pp.107, 111.

<sup>14</sup>Thivoz, chef de la mission géographique de la Ruzizi-Kivu, "Rapport...sur l'exploration de la zone neutre," no date (1905?), document N° 25 in Emile Vandewoude, ed., *Documents relatifs à l'ancien district du Kivu*. Archives du Congo Belge N° 3 (Léopoldville: Section Documentation Bureau Archives, 1959), pp.188-89; Tippu Tip, *Maisha*, p.103; Salmon, *Voyage de Van Kerckhoven*, p.40.

<sup>15</sup>Lange, Rapport...Haut-Ruzizi, mentions men wearing cowhide, goathide and barkcloth garments; Tippu Tip, *Maisha*, pp.83, says the Maniema people and their neighbors to the south made raffia cloths (*viramba*), which served as a unit of exchange before the Zanzibari intrusion. At the populous river mart of Basoko the Free State agent Guillaume Van Kerckhoven found numerous craft industries: "Here they make enormous quantities of salt, magnificent pots, fishing devices (hooks, harpoons, etc.) of very great perfection, finally excessively well made spears and knives." Salmon, *Voyage de Van Kerckhoven*, p.40.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Robert O. Collins, ed., *African History* (New York: Random House, 1971), pp.318-19.

<sup>17</sup>Camille Coquilhat, *Sur le Haut-Congo* (Paris: J. Lebègue, 1888), pp.420-23; Hermann von Wissmann, *My Second Journey Through Equatorial Africa from the Congo in the Years 1886 and 1887*, trans. Minna J. A. Bergmann (London: Chatto and Windus, 1891), p.223.

<sup>18</sup>The Lega, who were not great traders, used a currency of perforated fragments of achata shells strung on raffia, called *musanga*, though this may have been a special purpose currency. See Biebuyck, *Lega Culture*, pp.27-32.

seems that trade was more an incidental activity than a profession. Relatively little production was intended for the market; what ended up there was the surplus not needed for subsistence.

The absence of production specialists and entrepreneurs meant that the division of labor that existed in eastern Zaïre was based largely on gender and social status. The fundamental separation of tasks into men's and women's work was strictly adhered to, at least among free persons. A large share of the ordinary work of farming fell upon women as did a considerable share of the carrying tasks, from babies to bananas. Crafts, such as the making of cloth, pottery, and baskets, also generally came under the heading of women's work. Men hunted, fished, herded cattle, cleared land for farming, smelted and smithed, and went to war.<sup>19</sup>

Social stratification varied much more than gender roles in the region. The conquest societies of the Uele savannas displayed very sharply demarcated social pyramids, in which the conquering Zande or Mangbetu occupied a higher status than the conquered older inhabitants and where royal lineages stood above other members of the conquering caste. Tribute to the royals was an important labor activity, either directly or through exactions of goods. Elsewhere in the region stratification was less pronounced, except for differences accorded to age. Personal achievement, institutionalized in secret societies among the Lega, also existed. In these areas forms of communal labor for public welfare and various kinds of service to the chiefs existed as well.

Because of its later importance, stratification based on slavery merits detailed examination. The region's isolation, low population densities, and limited economic development inhibited the formation of a slave population in most areas. The greatest concentration of slaves occurred in the kingdoms of the northern savanna created by the Mangbetu, Babwa, and Zande conquests in the nineteenth century. Most were acquired as prisoners of war who, if not ransomed, became

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<sup>19</sup>Among the Lega women's work included housecleaning, food preparation and anything else having to do with cooking such as collecting firewood, planting and harvesting, making pottery, catching small fish and crevettes, and carrying all sorts of loads. Men's work included clearing and otherwise preparing fields for planting, hunting, fishing, gathering honey, building houses, bridges, and rafts, weaving and rope making, iron smithing and smelting, making fermented beverages, and war. Charles Delhaise, *Les Warega (Congo Belge)* (Brussels: Albert de Wit, 1909). pp.41, 63.

slaves for life. Among the Mangbetu at least, a majority of these slaves were women, who were acquired by commoner lineages to build up their numbers and by royal lineages to produce the food used in royal largesse. Rulers also distributed slave wives as a way of attracting followers, a practice particularly important among the Zande. The slave status was not hereditary, and, while the position of slaves was inferior to that of free persons, the growing subordination of free commoners in Zande and Mangbetu states in the late nineteenth century to the royal clans led to a blurring of that distinction. Colonial officials often considered that the claims a Zande or Mangbetu ruler was able to make on the labor of his subjects made them his slaves in effect if not in law.<sup>20</sup>

More widespread was the purchase or capture of women as wives, although it is not clear how much their status differed from wives acquired from the payment of bridewealth. In 1869, while traveling through Maniema in the southeastern portion of the region, Livingstone had found interest in slaves confined to purchasing females intended as wives; male slaves were considered more troublesome than valuable, being generally criminals, troublemakers, and sorcerers sold by their own people.<sup>21</sup> Likewise in the conflicts between the petty states throughout most of Kivu region male prisoners of war were generally either killed or ransomed and the women were incorporated as wives.<sup>22</sup> Even allowing for the sparseness of the historical record, examples of economically motivated slavery were rare before the influence of the Afro-Arab intruders. One exception (probably influenced by this intrusion) was the encounter in 1874 between the explorer Cameron and a chief of the Wagenia, a fisherfolk on the

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<sup>20</sup>G. De Bauw, "La zone Uere-Bomu," *Belgique Coloniale*, 17 February 1901, pp.73-74; C. R. Lagae, *Les Azande ou Niam-Niam. L'organisation zande. Croyances religieuses et magiques. coutumes familiales* (Brussels: Vromant & Co., 1926) pp.46-53; Lloyd, "Precolonial Economic History," pp.254-74; Curtis A. Keim, "Women in Slavery among the Mangbetu c. 1800-1910," in Robertson and Klein, *Women and Slavery*, pp.144-59.

<sup>21</sup>Livingstone, *Last Journals*, pp.305,310.

<sup>22</sup>Birhakaheka Njiga, "La principauté de Nyangezi: essai d'histoire socio-économique (1850-1960)," mémoire de licence en histoire, ISP, Bukavu, 1978, 1:142-43; Kabemba Assan, "Les rapports entre Arabes et Manyema dans l'histoire du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Cahiers du CERUKI, séries C2 (Sciences Humaines)*, N<sup>o</sup> 1 (1979), p.45; Cyr. Van Overbergh, Preface to Delhaise, *Warega*, pp.xiv-xv.

upper Congo, at Nyangwe. The chief was willing to sell Cameron canoes only in exchange for slaves, arguing as follows:

the cowries would be lying idle and bringing him nothing till he managed to buy slaves with them, whereas if he received slaves in payment he could set them at work at once to paddle canoes between the markets, to catch fish, to make pottery, or to cultivate his fields; in fact, he did not want his capital to lie idle.<sup>23</sup>

In effect, this low incidence of slavery was linked to the relatively low level of economic and political development in the region, which in turn reflected its low population density and isolation. The small scale of political units limited the degree of social differentiation that might be present: the distance between a typical chief and his lowest subject was not great. Economically the low level of exchange meant that there existed neither a way of marketing war captives and other potential slaves far enough from their homelands to impede their return nor a demand for labor that might serve larger economic ends. All of this was about to change.

It should be emphasized that the general sufficiency and occasional abundance that existed in eastern Zaïre in the mid-nineteenth century occurred at fairly modest levels. While the region's material and non-material cultures had much in common with neighboring parts of equatorial Africa, its agricultural production, political development, architectural magnificence, commercial systems, and general prosperity often were inferior to those in the surrounding areas. The reasons have nothing to do with the personal talents of the eastern Congolese, but with their geography and historical experience. The dominant feature of this region in the mid-nineteenth century was isolation. The location of eastern Zaïre far from the coasts and natural barriers blocked or limited the kinds of contacts and interactions that had affected neighboring parts of Africa.

This isolation was not entirely a bad thing. It meant that, *inter alia*, the region was late in feeling the destructive effects that empire-building, slave trading, and the introduction of firearms were having elsewhere on the continent. But this isolation also meant that when

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<sup>23</sup>Cameron, *Across Africa*, p.290. Cameron makes clear that most Wagenia had no interest in owning slaves, a point that is also stressed by Sidney Langford Hinde, *The Fall of the Congo Arabs* (London: Thomas Whittaker, 1897), p.157.



outside forces did begin to penetrate the region with a vengeance in the last third of the nineteenth century, there was far less experience for the inhabitants to draw upon to resist it and consequently far broader and deeper destruction at every level. While one must be careful not to exaggerate the extent of this initial collision—societies such as the Lega and much of Kivu were relatively unscathed by it, there can be no doubt that the establishment of a Zanzibari hegemony and its violent overthrow by the Free State profoundly affected the political, social, and economic life of the region both as a direct result of conquest and exploitation and indirectly through the spread of infectious diseases that would have long-term demographic consequences.<sup>24</sup>

Beginning in the 1860s eastern Zaïre's relatively peaceful isolation was disturbed, disrupted, and, in many cases destroyed by the intrusion of armed traders and conquerors from the Nile, Zanzibar, and Europe. What distinguished these intruders from the earlier Mangbetu and Zande in the northern savanna of the region was not race: it would be some time before non-Africans would play any significant direct role in this process. Rather the newcomers had access to the world market, which provided them a motive for occupying the region and the means to achieve it. The initial motive for all these intrusions was the obtaining of ivory which eastern Zaïre's elephant population produced and which its human population had long collected. Modern firearms provided the means by which this prize might be obtained at modest cost.

The intruders arrived in eastern Zaïre from several directions and with different effects. The earliest ivory traders, from the upper Nile, reached the Uele valley in 1865. On the basis of Georg Schweinfurth's observations, it was once thought that these traders had caused massive disruptions in the Mangbetu kingdoms. Curtis Keim, however, has argued convincingly that, while significant, their contacts were limited and far from decisive.<sup>25</sup> Traders from the Angolan networks also began moving into the southwestern frontiers of eastern Zaïre in the 1860s and 1870s in search of ivory.<sup>26</sup> These two groups of intru-

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<sup>24</sup>For the effects of endemic diseases see below, chapter 5.

<sup>25</sup>Curtis A. Keim, "Long-distance Trade and the Mangbetu," *Journal of African History*, 24 (1983):1-22.

<sup>26</sup>In mid-1872 David Livingstone heard of three "Portuguese" ivory traders in Katanga who had come from "Matiamvo" (Mwata Yamvo, the Lunda king or

ders were halted by rival traders from the Swahili coast of East Africa sent by the sultan of the rapidly developing entrepôt of Zanzibar backed by Indian capital and European weapons. Having formed mutually beneficial relations with the Nyamwezi traders east of lake Tanganyika, the Zanzibari pioneers established major trading colonies at or near Unyamwebe and at Ujiji on the east shore of lake Tanganyika before 1850. Perhaps as early as 1856, the Zanzibari traders began crossing the lake and moving up into the savanna and forest fringes of what became known as Maniema.<sup>27</sup> A modest headquarters was established on the upper Congo or Lualaba river at Nyangwe, where a combination of trading, raiding, and intimidation began to accumulate large stocks of ivory. In the mid-1870s the most famous of these Zanzibari traders, Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, better known as Tippu Tip, moved into the region for the first time and established his headquarters at Kasongo. This was Tippu Tip's third expedition from Zanzibar and the longest and best financed, being backed by 50,000 Maria Teresa dollars in Indian capital. Within a few years he was the dominant political and economic power in the region.<sup>28</sup>

Before long, Western explorers and missionaries were following the Zanzibari's caravans. First to arrive was the gentle Livingstone, who traversed Maniema in 1869-70 as far as Nyangwe before turning back. Next came Vernon L. Cameron, who met Tippu Tip at Nyangwe in August 1874. Henry Morton Stanley met Tippu Tip in October 1876 and profited from Tippu's assistance in making his pioneering descent of the river. The first Westerners attempting to influence events in the region were the Missionaries of Our Lady of Africa, better known as

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capital); see Livingstone, *Last Journals*, pp.428, 431. The next year Cameron encountered a marauding "Portuguese" caravan which had been in the Luba country for a year, led by José Antonio Alvey (alias Kendele), whom he described as "an old and ugly negro"; see his *Across Africa*, pp.319-28. Most significant was Tippu Tip's apparently decisive defeat of a "Portuguese" force attacking the Tetela, west of Nyangwe, in September 1876; see his *Maisha*, p.111.

<sup>27</sup>Alison Smith, "The Southern Section of the Interior 1840-84," *History of East Africa*, vol. 1, Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp.269-72.

<sup>28</sup>Alison Smith, "Historical Introduction" to *Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi yaani Tippu Tip*, W.H. Whitely, trans. and ed., supplement to *East Africa Swahili Committee Journals*, 28 (1958):9-15. Tippu Tip's grandfather, Juma bin Rijab, had been one of those who pioneered the alliances with the Nyamwezi.

the White Fathers, who established their stations along the main Zanzibari routes and near Zanzibari settlements and gathered their first adherents by redeeming slaves.<sup>29</sup> Their first station in eastern Zaïre was established in November 1879 at Masanze (Mulwewa) near Uvira on lake Tanganyika.

Last to arrive were the European imperialists, officials of King Leopold's Congo Free State, which the Berlin Conference in 1885 had accorded sovereignty over the Congo basin. The claim to eastern Zaïre was based on Stanley's initial explorations and his subsequent travels on behalf of the International Congo Association, but Free State control remained feeble until the 1890s. This was certainly clear to the White Fathers at Kibanga, who received their first communication from the Free State in the form of a letter from the Department of Finances, dated October 1, 1889, informing them that they did not have proper title to the lands the mission had occupied since April 1883. The mission diarist commented sarcastically:

Can it be believed that these administrators, who still have two thousand kilometers of *pori* [Swahili for "wilderness"] to cross before reaching Tanganyika, who leave us to grapple with the Arabs, the only real masters by right of conquest and occupation of this land, have just said we are in their territory, subject to their prescriptions and decrees!<sup>30</sup>

### Zanzibari Colonization

Of all of the intruders in this period, it was the Zanzibari, who, by dint of their ruthless activities, left the most lasting impression on the region's communications network, language, administration, and labor patterns. The Zanzibari were a diverse group of Omani Arabs, coastal Swahili, inland Africans, and others. Tippu Tip himself had

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<sup>29</sup>Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (London: Longmans, 1952), pp.51-52.

<sup>30</sup>APB, Kibanga Diary, 19 April 1890, *Chronique des Pères Blancs*, N° 50 (April 1891), pp.415-16. Two years later, at a time when the mission considered every one and everything for forty leagues around a creature of Rumaliza, the arrival of a new letter from the State's agent at Kasongo-Nyangwe declaring his intention to organize the territory was greeted with the sardonic comment: "Good!! ...Soon we will be civilized." Kibanga Diary, 4 May 1892 and 15 May 1892, *Chronique des Pères Blancs*, N° 58 (April 1893), pp.400-1.

Arab, Swahili, and Nyamwezi ancestors. The porters, guards, and other followers who accompanied these traders included Nyamwezi, Yao, and other Africans from outside the region. Tippu Tip called his partly-Islamicized, Swahili-speaking followers *waungwana*, literally "free men," to distinguish them from *watumua*, "slaves," and from the *washenzi*, literally "savages," the term used for local Africans. Many of the latter also became auxiliaries in the Zanzibari forces.<sup>31</sup>

The extension of the Zanzibari ivory trade west of lake Tanganyika appears to have been promoted by a rise in ivory prices in 1856-57 and facilitated by the shipment of unprecedented quantities of firearms inland from Zanzibar beginning in 1859-60.<sup>32</sup> As stout opposition from the kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi blocked the most direct route, the traders apparently went by canoe from Ujiji.<sup>33</sup> The earliest Zanzibari outposts were at or near Uvira on the northwest shore of lake Tanganyika, from where the traders advanced into Maniema as far as Kabambare, where their progress was halted by stout resistance until 1868. That year Mwini Kusu, the respected chief of Kabambare, entered into an alliance of friendship with the Zanzibari Mwini Mokaia (alias Katomba) that opened up the territory west of the Luama. Mokaia, who had been the head man at Ujiji, set up camp at Mamohela. Shortly afterwards, Mwini Dugumbi (alias Molembe-Lembe) made his way with guns blazing beyond Kabambare as far as Nyangwe on the Lualaba. Nyangwe became a new headquarters for the collection of ivory, of which Dugumbi was carrying some 18,000 pounds in September 1869 when he met Livingstone on his way in.<sup>34</sup>

Dugumbi's success and Mwini Kusu's death marked a disastrous turning point in the history of Maniema. Dugumbi's followers soon were abusing local Africans rather freely. They were joined in December 1869 by "a large horde of Ujijians" armed with 500 guns, drawn by the news of cheap ivory.<sup>35</sup> For the weak, the arrival of this

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<sup>31</sup>Tippu Tip, *Maisha*, p. 51; Melvin E. Page, "The Manyema Hordes of Tippu Tip: a Case Study in Social Stratification and the Slave Trade in Eastern Africa," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 1 (January 1974):71-81.

<sup>32</sup>Smith, "Southern Section," pp.275-76.

<sup>33</sup>Stanley, *Darkest Africa*, 1:455. Canoes up to forty-eight feet in length were purchased on the opposite shore at Goma in the 1870s; *ibid.*, 2:2.

<sup>34</sup>Livingstone, *Last Journals*, pp.292,302-4; Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, 2:87.

<sup>35</sup>Livingstone, *Last Journals*, pp.310-11, 327. Kabembe, "Rapports entre Arabes et

horde meant the appropriation of their homes and supplies without compensation by the passing caravans (whose members might wantonly burn down a village as they departed), impressment as porters, enslavement, and death. Some learned to flee at the first hint of strangers. Others tested their spears and wooden shields against the intruders' "tobacco pipes," as they derisively called their smoking guns, though such resistance was of limited success. For the moderately powerful an alliance with the Zanzibari traders could be used to settle old scores with neighboring chiefs, at least until they too fell victim.<sup>36</sup>

By mid-1874 Nyangwe had become a prospering entrepôt divided into two rival Zanzibari camps. In the northern half, Mwini Dugumbi and his followers filled some 300 houses. Stanley described him as "an east coast trader of Sa'adani, a half-caste, a vulgar, coarse-minded old man of probably seventy years of age, with a negroid nose and a negroid mind."<sup>37</sup> The southern half of Nyangwe was occupied by the followers of Abed ben Salum el-Khaduri (alias Tanganyika), "a fine white-headed old Arab."<sup>38</sup>

That same year Tippu Tip entered eastern Zaïre for the first time, by a circuitous route through Katanga where he collected ivory and made an important alliance with the Tetele chief, Kasongo Rushie, before reaching the Lualaba from the southwest. Though he was warmly welcomed at Nyangwe, he chose to set up his own headquarters to the south at Kasongo, where some of his kinsmen were already located. Tippu immediately became its chief and set about ending the opposition of local Africans whose boycott had brought famine and decline to Kasongo.<sup>39</sup> Tippu Tip made a far better impression on those who met him than had the other Zanzibari at Nyangwe; the European explorers were unanimous in praising his good looks,

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Manyema," pp.31-46) sees 1868 as a watershed between a period of mutual "observation and tolerance" and one of bad relations, divergent interests, and violent conflicts.

<sup>36</sup>Livingstone, *Last Journals*, pp.327, 335, 369-72, 390-92, 395-96; Stanley, *Darkest Africa*, 2:84-87.

<sup>37</sup>Stanley, *Darkest Africa*, 2:118; in less racist terms, Cameron, attributed Dugumbi's "decline into idiocy" to overindulgence in sex, marijuana, and drink; *Across Africa*, pp.285-86.

<sup>38</sup>Cameron, *Across Africa*, p.284.

<sup>39</sup>Tippu, *Maisha*, pp.99-107.

intelligence, and sophistication.<sup>40</sup>

After taking the "immense quantity" of ivory he had collected south and east of the Lualaba to Zanzibar in 1881, Tippu Tip returned to eastern Zaïre at the head of a large and well armed caravan. At his first post, Kasongo Rushie, he bestowed "as many as 10,000 guns" on his loyal and feared young slave, Ngongo Lutete, who had inherited that station, and then moved on to Kisangani, below the Stanley Falls, from where he dispatched twenty caravans into neighboring districts in search of ivory. The most important of these expeditions went up the Aruwimi, where no initial success was met with. In 1887 Tippu Tip's men established bases at Yambuya (near the confluence of the Aruwimi and the Congo) and further upstream at Banalia. In 1888 they made contact with Niangara, a chief on the Upper Uele and in 1890 they concluded a brief alliance with the Zande chief Jabir.<sup>41</sup>

Thus by the mid-1880s the Zanzibari under Tippu Tip were firmly established between lake Tanganyika and the Lomami river and down the Lomami to its confluence with the Lualaba. At that time Zanzibari auxiliaries were also expanding rapidly into the Uele valley and northern Kivu.<sup>42</sup> Yet it was a loose empire at best, designed more for short-term economic gain than orderly administration. It is probably true, as Wissmann said explicitly and Stanley implied, that the brutal excesses committed in the process were due to Tippu's subordinates more than to the man himself, though like King Leopold who succeeded him, he can hardly escape the blame for the excesses of the system he created and staffed.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Cameron, *Across Africa*, p.293; Stanley, *Darkest Africa*, 2:95-96.

<sup>41</sup>Tippu, *Maisha*, para.123, 155-63; Renault, *Lavigerie*, I:339; Lieutenant Gustin, "Vers le Nil," *Mouvement Géographique*, 1 May 1898, col. 229.

<sup>42</sup>Senga Ongala, "Les arabisés Kusu et la création et l'évolution du poste de Walikale (1901-1954)," (travail de fin d'étude, histoire, ISP, Bukavu, 1978).

<sup>43</sup>Wissmann, *Through Equatorial Africa*, pp.183-85,198-203, on the upper Lomami early in 1887 described the excesses committed by Tippu Tip's governor, Said, including using prisoners for target practice, chopping off captive's hands, and large numbers of deaths, as due to the arbitrary powers such subordinates had, noting that Tippu would have stopped them had he been there in person. Stanley, *Darkest Africa*, pp.141-43, described the scorched earth policies in a large area of the Ituri valley later that same year of a newly arrived band independent of Tippu Tip led by Kilonga-Longa as much worse than anything Tippu Tip was responsible for. He noted that the worst excesses were by Maniema youths trained as auxiliaries by the Zanzibari leaders.

There is ample evidence that their conquest of eastern Zaïre, along with disruption, destruction, and death on a large scale, also produced an enormous change in labor mobilization, including a great increase in slavery, which needs to be considered in greater detail. Initially the slaves seem to have been more a by-product of conquest rather than its goal. Once acquired, they were a convenient labor force in the absence of a free labor market. This does not mean that this new, high incidence of slavery would necessarily have continued once the conquest was over, but it hardly suggests that the institution would have disappeared either.

Most of these new slaves were males, captured in raids on small villages. One Zanzibari ivory merchant encountered by Cameron in July 1874 at Kwakasongo employed 600 Nyamwezi, "all armed with guns," who received no pay but were "allowed to loot the country all round in search of subsistence and slaves," some of whom they bestowed on their employer in exchange for more powder to sustain their ravages.<sup>44</sup> At first many of the captives were ransomed by their relatives in exchange for ivory, but, as local caches of ivory were depleted, the unredeemed were sold to distant strangers.<sup>45</sup> Some female captives were incorporated into the harems of the Zanzibari who settled in the region. For example, by the mid-1870s Mwini Dugumbi at Nyangwe had 100 to 300 harem slaves. His chief henchman, Mwini Mohara (alias Mtagamoyo), had sixty; his rival Abed ben Salum had a more modest thirty. Tippu Tip and his entourage had fifty slave women in 1876. Large numbers of female captives taken in *razzias* (raids) over the next decade became the property of other Zanzibari leaders and their followers.<sup>46</sup>

Many captives were also used to meet the labor demands of commerce, conquest, and cultivation, beginning a practice which continued under Free State and Belgian rule. The growing trade, especially in ivory, demanded more and more porters. While the Zanzibari appear to have had a preference for free porters (such as the

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<sup>44</sup>Cameron, *Across Africa*, p.280.

<sup>45</sup>Richard Stanley and Alan Neame, eds., *The Exploration Diaries of H. M. Stanley* (London: William Kimber, 1961), 7 November 1876.

<sup>46</sup>Cameron *Across Africa*, p.285; Stanley and Neame, *Exploration Diaries*, 7 November 1876; Stanley *Through the Dark Continent*, 2:117-20, 30; Coquilhat, *Haut-Congo*, p.427.

Nyamwezi they employed east of lake Tanganyika and early in their intrusion into Maniema), captive slaves were the only source of manpower available in eastern Zaïre to carry the tusks to the markets east of the lake. Cameron related that Tippu Tip and other traders "asserted that they would be glad to find other means of transport for their goods instead of trusting it to slaves; but...they availed themselves of the means at their disposal."<sup>47</sup> A major drawback of slaves was their natural desire to escape. Cameron reported that half of those impressed into portage escaped before a caravan reached lake Tanganyika.<sup>48</sup> But of those who completed the trek to Ujiji or Unyan-yembe, the explorer asserted, most then hired out as "free porters," an impressive example of how slavery could be a relatively brief, if brutal mechanism for generating a mobile labor force in an area unaccustomed both to travel and to wage labor. Once across the lake the impressed porters could have had little hope of returning directly home, so their willingness to sign on with a new caravan may have owed as much to their needing a means of livelihood as to their liking the work. In any case, European explorers noted, slave porters, though bound, gagged, and attached to slave forks, were not otherwise cruelly treated.<sup>49</sup>

By the 1880s the Zanzibari had established a more regular caravan service along the main route across the region. For some time, Tippu told a State agent in 1885, slaves had not been captured to carry ivory. Instead, what he termed "domestic slaves" conveyed the ivory from Kisangani to Nyangwe, where other porters took it as far as Ujiji, and so on to the coast, each team of porters returning to their home base.<sup>50</sup> By that time free Maniema porters were also relatively common and those Tippu Tip supplied to Stanley in 1887 deserted when they were abused.<sup>51</sup>

If the capture of slaves to serve as porters was not as important as

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<sup>47</sup>Cameron *Across Africa*, p.305.

<sup>48</sup>See C.S. Forester's moving tale of just such an escapee, *The Sky and the Forest* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948).

<sup>49</sup>Cameron, *Across Africa*, p.256; Norman R. Bennett, ed., *Stanley's Despatches to the New York Herald, 1871-1872, 1874-1877*, (Boston: Boston University Press, 1970), Nyangwe, 28 October 1876, pp.324-25.

<sup>50</sup>Coquilhat, *Haut-Congo*, pp.415-16.

<sup>51</sup>Tippu Tip to Mahomed Masood and Seif bin Ahmed, Stanleyville, no date. Translation in FO 84/1975 N° 8, received 21 December 1888.



has sometimes been asserted, there were certainly other uses to which the Zanzibari put the large numbers of captives they came to control. Many youths were turned into servants and soldiers. In 1876 Tippu Tip had about fifty youths whom he was training "as gun-bearers, house servants, scouts, cooks, carpenters, house-builders, blacksmiths, and leaders of trading parties."<sup>52</sup> Many such captives (including some bought outside the region) became loyal soldiers in the Zanzibari forces, head men, and outpost commanders. Detached from their roots and cultural restraints, these followers were often guilty of the most brutal rapine and pillage of the countryside.<sup>53</sup> Thus, many people in Maniema passed rather rapidly from being "the chief victims of Arab ruthlessness" to "the worst marauders in Stanley's accounts of the Upper Congo" in the 1880s.<sup>54</sup>

Like those established earlier east of the lakes, the major permanent Zanzibari settlements in eastern Zaïre, of which Kasongo became the finest, were distinguished by substantial dwellings and surrounded by well laid out, flourishing plantations featuring many crops new to the region, such as rice, citrus fruits, and sesame. These impressive estates required considerable labor, which was supplied through levies on local inhabitants—whose own farms suffered in consequence—and through the use of slaves captured in campaigns. There is no way to estimate the quantity of these plantation slaves, but regular replenishment of their numbers was necessary for, like those at Ujiji and other Zanzibari settlements, they were worked hard, fed little, and most died off within a year.<sup>55</sup>

### Free State Colonization

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century Zanzibari dominion in eastern Zaïre was challenged by the technological and economic resources of European powers. For some time it was unclear into

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<sup>52</sup>Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, 2:129-30.

<sup>53</sup>MRAC, R.G. 1078: L. N. Chaltin, Notes redigées sur la question arabe, carnet 1, p.20; AA, D(387)4, Dhanis to Fivé, 1893?; cf. Senga, "Les arabisés Kusu", pp.32-34.

<sup>54</sup>Smith, "Historical Introduction," p.32.

<sup>55</sup>AA, BMC(46)11, Isidore Tobbacq, Journal, p.18; Chaltin, Notes, pp.20,34; Le Clement de St.-Marcq, *Mouvement Géographique*, 25 May 1890, p.42; Senga, "Les arabisés Kusu," p.34; Hinde, *Fall of Congo Arabs*, pp.183-85.

whose hands the region would fall, as Britain, Germany, and France were vying with King Leopold's International Congo Association for its control. In 1885 Leopold's claim to the region had received general recognition from the other European powers at Berlin, but the new Free State could not establish effective control over the eastern Congo basin because of its severe shortages of personnel, ammunition, and supplies. An alliance with Tippu Tip was the only way open to them.

Tippu responded honorably and realistically. Approached by Leopold's agent, Ernest Cambier, about an alliance in 1882, he had immediately reported the matter to Sultan Barghash in Zanzibar, who pledged Tippu his full support if he would return to the heart of Africa.<sup>56</sup> Returning to Kisangani in 1884, Tippu repudiated an agreement made in his absence delimiting the territory of the Zanzibari and Leopold's International Congo Association at the seventh cataract.<sup>57</sup> Yet in March 1887, when Tippu was once more back in Zanzibar, he accepted Stanley offer to become governor of the Stanley Falls district.

Tippu Tip's alliance with the Free State was based on the Sultan of Zanzibar's growing weakness and his recognition of the Europeans' strength and ability to supply him with trade goods and weapons in return for ivory. The alliance was equally based on the Free State's recognition of Tippu Tip's preeminence and its weakness in eastern Zaïre. The Free State was badly strapped for cash and personnel. This *modus vivendi* allowed it time to concentrate on securing its northern and eastern frontiers against French and British challenges, and to improve its lines of communication into eastern Zaïre, including the construction of a railroad around the cataracts of the lower Congo.

Both sides in the alliance appear to have exaggerated the extent of the other's power. While Tippu was indisputably the most powerful of the Zanzibari traders in the region, the willingness of many of the others to submit to his authority was dependent on his ability to enforce his directives. Moreover, whatever authority he derived from being the Sultan's officially designated representative in the region obviously did not continue when he became the Free State's governor in August 1887.<sup>58</sup> Finally, Tippu's rise to commercial and political

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<sup>56</sup>Smith, "Southern Section," pp.291-92.

<sup>57</sup>Ceulemans, *Question arabe*, pp.64-65.

<sup>58</sup>For example, Tippu wrote the acting British consul general (G. H. Portal) at Zanzibar, 19 March 1889: "And now all the Arabs are my enemies. They say I am the

preeminence had generated many animosities. The center of these rivalries was in the oldest main Zanzibari colony, Nyangwe, which by 1889 was under the sole control of Dugumbi's old henchman Mtagamoyo, of whom no one seems to have had anything but a low opinion.<sup>59</sup> Nyangwe's traders were pushing actively through the Ituri forest and were rivaling Tippu as well along the Lualaba below the Stanley Falls.<sup>60</sup>

Given these rivalries, it is highly significant that the new governor received, and was seen to receive, scarcely any support from the Free State during his time in office. For the first nine months after his appointment there was not even a Free State agent at the Stanley Falls station, and the other Zanzibari stations lacked agents for even longer times, complicating the exchange of ivory for trade goods and munitions. Moreover, as his supplies of arms and ammunition diminished and food began to run short at the Falls, the State made no move to resupply him.<sup>61</sup> When the Free State's principal agent, Stanley (acting in his private capacity), went so far as to sue Tippu over the disastrous expedition to rescue Emin Pasha from the Mahdists, it was clearly the last straw. Tippu states that it was the need to defend himself against Stanley's charges of failing to provide porters that made him decide to return to Zanzibar in 1890, but one must suspect that he desired to disengage himself from a disagreeable and increasingly dangerous situation. Stopping at his old headquarters at Kasongo on his way to the coast, Tippu was begged by his followers to stay. He declined, arguing that while his forces had been sufficient to beat the weak and divided peoples of Maniema, they were insufficient to beat the Europeans who now had the advantage in arms and men.<sup>62</sup>

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man who gave up all the places of the mainland to the Belgian King." FO 403/119, N<sup>o</sup> 239 (translation), pp.121.

<sup>59</sup>In Tippu Tip's estimation, "He is a man whose heart is as big as the end of my finger. He has no feeling, he kills a native as though he were a serpent—it matters not of what sex." Quoted in Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, 2:119-120; cf. Livingstone's view in his *Last Journals*, p.385.

<sup>60</sup>Smith, "Historical Introduction," pp.27-28.

<sup>61</sup>In the letter to the British consul general at Zanzibar cited above, Tippu entreated, "I wish you to write a letter to the Belgian King informing him that I am under him, and that I am the agent for him; telling him also to provide me with some arms.... What I earnestly wish from the Belgian King is that he should not leave me alone."

<sup>62</sup>Tippu, *Maisha*, p.161. Further along on his trip to the coast he told a London

The bloody conflict that soon followed was rather clumsily, but perhaps not deliberately, provoked by the Belgian forces in the region. Belgian Antislavery Society agents, acting in a quasi-official capacity around lake Tanganyika, drove the local Zanzibari leader Rumliza to the edge of war in 1890, an action postponed only by Tippu's direct prohibition and a shortage of arms. The Congo-Nile expedition through Uele under Van Kerckhoven in 1891-92, provoked numerous conflicts with the several Zanzibari bands operating in that area. The expedition seized several thousand tusks and profoundly alienated both pro- and anti-Tippu groups headquartered along the Lualaba. An ill-timed and disastrous Belgian commercial expedition on the Lualaba in May 1892 made relations worse. When the Free State agent Dhanis signed a treaty of protection with Tippu's once loyal slave, Ngongo Lutete, who had been carving out his own base of power in Kasai ever since Tippu left the region, even Tippu's followers could not retain much loyalty to the State. The ever-impetuous Dhanis advanced across the Lomami into Zanzibari country and overwhelmed a Kasongo force, leaving 3,000 dead. By early 1893 Mohara was defeated and Nyangwe and Kasongo were soon in Dhanis's hands. In September a combined Free State army overcame Rumliza's forces and that leader retreated into German East Africa. By the beginning of 1894 the remaining Zanzibari resistance had been overcome, though with considerable bloodshed. The methods of the Free State campaigns were no less bloody than those of the Zanzibari, and the African population suffered further devastation.

Eastern Zaïre's new master had already given clear evidence that, like the Zanzibari, its main goal was profit and African labor the main means to that end. From the Congo Free State's beginning one of Leopold's thorniest problems had been the shortage of labor. Even for a man given to grandiose schemes the extraordinarily far-flung efforts to recruit workers for his colony is striking. In 1888, for example, he proposed a Chinese colonization of the Congo and the next year his agent Gustave Becker was in Australia exploring the recruitment of Fiji islanders and East Indians.<sup>63</sup> If little came of these and other

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Missionary Society member, "The White man is stronger than I am: they will eat my possessions as I ate those of the pagans."; Alison Smith, review of Ceulemans, *Question arabe*, *Journal of African History* 1 (1960):168.

<sup>63</sup>Jean Stengers, "Correspondance Leopold II-de Cuvelier," *Bulletin IRCB*, 24

schemes, they still illustrate the acuteness of the labor shortage in the Congo. Most of the Free State's porters, laborers for building the lower Congo railroad, and members of the Force Publique (the paramilitary colonial police) during this period were recruited from Zanzibar, West Africa, northeast Africa, Portuguese Africa, and the Rhodesias.

Of these, the recruitment from Zanzibar was the most important. At the end of 1888 the Free State entered into a ten-year contract for the recruitment of Zanzibari laborers on three-year contracts. These recruits (evidently intended for the construction of the Lower Congo railroad) were to be paid five piasters (25 fr) a month, with six-months salary paid in advance and the rest paid quarterly with two-thirds withheld until the end of the contract and paid upon their return at Zanzibar. The problem with these terms was the status of the recruits, most of whom were likely to be slaves. Since nearly three-quarters of the salary was paid in Zanzibar, their masters were in an excellent position to appropriate these wages. In mid-January 1890 the sultan had given orders for his own men to assist in the collection of a thousand men for the Congo, but the next month, under British pressure, he began to waver. The British, anxious to guard the treaty provisions suppressing all slave trade to Zanzibar from any kind of evasions, played on the sultan's concern about this loss of labor to his dominions. One gang of laborers sailed for the Congo at the end of April, 1890, and another 149 departed early in July, but the British got the sultan to agree that these men would be the last. Belgian efforts to allow the recruitment of more laborers in 1891 and again in 1892 appear to have failed.<sup>64</sup>

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(1953):827-28; AA, AE(352)539 Becker to Janssen, Melborne, 24 April 1889. See also Barbara Emerson, *Leopold II of the Belgians: King of Colonialism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), ch.22.

<sup>64</sup>FO 403/136: Contract between Sewa Hajee, a British Indian in Zanzibar, and L. De Cazenave, the consul general of Belgium in Zanzibar, dated 1 December 1888, in N<sup>o</sup> 216; Euan-Smith to Salisbury, Zanzibar, 16 January 1890, N<sup>o</sup> 51; 25 February 1890, N<sup>o</sup> 315. FO 403/137, N<sup>o</sup> 447, Euan-Smith to Salisbury, 2 June 1890; FO 403/138, N<sup>o</sup> 138, Euan-Smith to Salisbury, Zanzibar, 19 July 1890. FO403/159, N<sup>o</sup> 37, Martin Gosselin to Salisbury, Brussels, 19 July 1891; N<sup>o</sup> 39, Euan-Smith to Salisbury, Zanzibar, 20 July 1891. FO881/6339, N<sup>o</sup> 130, Vivian to Salisbury, Brussels, 26 February 1892; N<sup>o</sup> 145, *idem*, 3 March 1892; N<sup>o</sup> 149, Salisbury to Gosselin, FO, 10 March 1892. Evidently contracts for much less than three years were signed because 300 to 400 Zanzibari laborers were scheduled to return from the Congo in October-November 1891. Of

In tandem with these efforts to recruit from Zanzibar and elsewhere were efforts to recruit African labor within the colony, particularly from among the slaves of Zanzibari in the east. As early as 1886 some slaves were redeemed for service around the government post at Stanley Falls. In 1890 an accord was made with the Zanzibari chief Djuma-Dina to supply 500 able-bodied young men from Maniema to serve nine-year contracts for a monthly wage of ten francs, a dhوتي (four yards) of cloth and rations. Authorization was also given to recruit children at least four feet tall, who would be raised at the Colonie Scolaire at Nouvelles-Anvers. The Belgian consul at Zanzibar in the first half of 1890 had tried to recruit Maniema labor through Sefu, Tippu Tip's son, who refused to act without his father's authorization. In December 1891 Tippu Tip (then at Zanzibar) signed a contract to furnish 1,800 free men and 800 free women as laborers on the Lower Congo railroad and in March 1892 he signed another to provide 2,000 able-bodied men for the Force Publique. The first of these were to be delivered to the post of Bena-Kamba on the Lomami at the end of 1892. The commissions paid for this recruitment, £3.50, MT\$70, and £4 respectively, were high enough to leave little doubt that the free laborers were to be obtained by redeeming slaves. Tippu Tip gave orders to Sefu to begin sending 800 Maniema a month, but the MT\$50,000 worth of goods sent to finance the recruitment, in Tippu Tip's words, "fell into a hole," i.e. were intercepted by Rumaliza and others, on the verge of revolting against the Free State. The revolt of Ngongo Lutete also prevented the deal from being concluded.<sup>65</sup>

The Free State also offered commissions to its officers for recruiting men, women (for cleaning and farming), and adolescents for the Force Publique. At Stanley Falls the State's agents had begun redeeming slaves of the Zanzibari for money and goods in 1886. During his years there Captain Nicholas Tobback bought and freed some two thousand slaves, though he personally refused to profit from these transactions.<sup>66</sup>

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two contingents of recruits 46 percent returned to Zanzibar at the end of their contract, 24 percent signed new contracts in the Congo, and 30 percent died.

<sup>65</sup>Ceulemans, *Question arabe*, pp.183, 224-30; Tippu Tip, *Maisha*, para. 180-81. By 1892 Tippu Tip's personal fortune probably amounted to some MT\$800,000, according to Bontinck, *L'autobiographie*, pp.291-92.

<sup>66</sup>Ceulemans, *Question arabe*, p.225; AA, BMC(46)11/B, Tobback, Journal, p.20.

Meanwhile, the Free State's military campaigns against the rebellious Zanzibari and their African allies were producing large numbers of captives, who were then declared liberated. In the three years of the campaigns more than 5,000 captives arrived at the military camp at Lusambo in Kasai, which served the eastern Congo: so many that some had to be parcelled out among local chiefs and even given to individual soldiers.<sup>67</sup>

Through direct redemptions or through the freeing of captives taken in these campaigns many more slaves came into the service of the State and of missionaries on the shores of lake Tanganyika. The commander of Tanganyika district in December 1894 reported hanging six slave traders in recent months and expected to arrest four more shortly, while freeing considerable numbers of slaves in the process, mostly from Maniema. Two months later his reports mention having 175 to 200 freedmen serving as soldiers, plus "two villages of former Arab slaves who belong to the State" working in agriculture, including, he recorded, "about 150 youths suitable to be soldiers in two to three years and that I have not given to the missions, because they form the reserve of the Force Publique in Tanganyika."<sup>68</sup> Many other former slaves and dependants of the Zanzibari were settled along main roads to raise food and supply porters to the government.

Catholic missionaries were actively involved in the redemption of bodies (as well as souls), which provided them with converts as well as a work force. In August 1886 the White Fathers' orphanage on lake Tanganyika redeemed its 250th slave, a year in which it acquired seventy-six boys, ten girls, and twenty-one young women. They recorded their 1,450th redemption in November of the turbulent year of 1891 when Rumliza was establishing control over the northern part of the lake and churning up considerable numbers of captives. The 1,500th redemption came early in 1892, but with the establishment of Free State control mission redemptions fell sharply. The redeemed slaves worked (mostly as farmers) for the mission until they married, and beyond that if they remained on mission grounds.<sup>69</sup> Male slaves

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<sup>67</sup>Ceulemans, *Question arabe*, pp.233-34.

<sup>68</sup>AA,AE(200)4, Capitain Descamps to GG, Mtoa, 12 December 1894 and 8 February 1895.

<sup>69</sup>APB: Journal of the Kibanga Station, 24 August 1886, 31 December 1886, and November 1892, *Chronique des Phres Blancs*, N° 35 (July 1887), p.463, N° 36 (October

too young to be employed at the time of their emancipation were sent to the Colonies Scolaires where they were trained to become militiamen or laborers. In 1892 Governor General Wahis urged officials to make "unceasing efforts" to round up enough youth for these camps to ensure the State's future supplies of employees.<sup>70</sup>

During the last third of the nineteenth century the organization of labor in eastern Zaïre achieved an important new orientation. The Zanzibari penetration began the process by reducing large numbers of people to slavery, to the status of commodities, whose labor and persons had a value determined by the market forces that impelled that intrusion. The Free State both extended and altered that process. Though officially eschewing slavery, it depended on marketing the fruits of African labor on an even larger scale than had the Zanzibari. The military conquests of the Zanzibari and the Free State also furthered the formation of a mobile labor force. Especially in Maniema and Uele, old social orders were shattered and refugees, whose ties to land and lineage were severed, sought the employ of new masters.

The extent of this mobilization of labor by 1895 should not be exaggerated. As the chapters that follow will show, the process had only begun. Subsequent decades would see its extension into areas of eastern Zaïre relatively untouched in this period (notably the densely-populated eastern frontier) and the establishment of increasingly systematic efforts at mobilizing labor by European colonial governments.

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1887), p.614; N° 55 (July 1892), p.413. The orphanage was originally at Masanze, but moved to Kibanga in June 1883. In the early years many orphans were lost to small-pox. For the most part those redeemed at Kibanga seem to have stayed willingly, but elsewhere ex-slaves were driven to desert their mission masters. The White Fathers' boys' orphanage at Old Kasongo began suffering from large scale desertions by orphans "considering themselves slaves and wishing a more complete freedom," and had to be closed down in 1913. (APB: Rapport général, Vicariat Apostolique du Haut-Congo, 1912-13, p.578; *idem*, 1913-14, p.314.)

<sup>70</sup>AA, D(387)2, Wahis to CDs, 28 March 1892.



## Chapter 3

### Forced Labor and Attempted Reform, 1895-1910

The Free State, having acquired at great cost the vast, remote, and potentially rich territory of the eastern Congo, found its exploitation no easy task. The colony's administrative staff were few. Necessity and King Leopold's injunctions required that they live frugally and turn a profit. To meet their day-to-day needs and provide goods for export Free State officials devoted most of their energies to harnessing African labor, the region's one accessible resource.

The gross abuses that arose from this hastily installed and ill-supervised system soon provoked an international scandal. Well publicized investigations in 1903-4 by Roger Casement, the British Consul at Boma, and in 1905-6 by an international Commission of Inquiry appointed by King Leopold added fuel to the fire. Bursts of reform activity by the Free State in 1903 and in 1906 were too little and too late. When Belgian missionaries and liberals joined the foreign critics in protesting the abuses, Leopold was forced to give up his position as absolute King-Sovereign of the colony.<sup>1</sup>

In November 1908 the government of Belgium assumed official responsibility for the Congo. As constitutional monarch of Belgium, Leopold remained nominal head of the Congo, but real authority rested with the new Ministry of Colonies, subject to the approval and supervision of the Belgian Parliament and the scrutiny of the new Colonial Council, whose members were nominated by the houses of Parliament as well as by the king. Implementing the rights and reforms embodied in the new "Colonial Charter" took time, so that

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Vermeersch, a Jesuit priest, rallied the Catholics with his *La Question congolaise* (Brussels: Charles Bulens, 1906) and Filicien Cattier's *Etude sur la situation de l'Etat Indépendent du Congo* (Brussels: 1906), did the same for the liberals.

many cruel and abusive labor practices continued for the rest of the decade.

### Administration and Policy

The Free State administered the eastern Congo as three separate districts, each headed by a commissioner general answering to the governor general of the colony. The smallest district was that of Aruwimi, which followed the course of the Lomami river but which took its name from the Aruwimi river at whose mouth the district capital, Basoko, was located. Across the north stretched the Uele district, following the course of that river. In September 1903 Uele was divided into five zones: Uere-Bili and Gurba-Dungu north of the river, Rubi and Bomokandi south of the river, and the Lado enclave along the Nile. A remnant of the Egyptian empire in the Sudan, Lado had been placed under Free State administration in 1893 for the lifetime of King Leopold. The largest of the three districts was the Province Orientale, which included all the remaining territory in the eastern Congo as well as the entire southeastern Congo until that was placed under the Comité Spécial du Katanga in 1900. It was divided into five zones within the eastern Congo: Stanley Falls, Ponthierville, and Maniema along the Lualaba, and Upper Ituri and Ruzizi-Kivu along the Great Lakes of the eastern frontier.<sup>2</sup> The capital of the Province Orientale was Stanleyville, the river-port town that had grown out of Tippu Tip's Kisangani and the old Stanley Falls station.

Because recruiting adequate numbers of qualified personnel for the Congo was a very difficult problem, the Free State's multinational staff varied widely in qualifications. The lack of skill and moral character of many of those charged with implementing the crudely formulated colonial policies contributed to the disastrous consequences. Leopold's Commission of Inquiry reported that "a good number of [European] agents thought only of obtaining the as much as possible in the minimum possible time."<sup>3</sup> Others critics felt the state had

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<sup>2</sup>The Province Orientale was earlier called Stanley Falls district. Before 1903 Uele's territories had been known as Uere-Bomu, Makrakra, Rubi-Uele, and Makua; Lado had had a separate administration. An administration was not created for Ruzizi-Kivu until about 1900; in 1904 the territory along lake Edward was joined to Ruzizi-Kivu. *BOEIC 1905*, pp.5-6; Vandewoude, *Documents...du Kivu*, pp.10-12.

created this mentality. "The failure to attract suitable candidates is not difficult to understand," wrote the British minister, "when it is realized that...promotion depends not on administrative ability, but on ability to collect taxes."<sup>4</sup> As Joseph Conrad's Mr. Kurtz tellingly illustrates, even the best of men could easily find themselves stretched beyond their moral, psychological, and physical limits, when burdened with the vast responsibilities and subject to the constant demands that were characteristic of the early Free State period and when isolated from the restraining influences of their own society.<sup>5</sup>

Over time the burden of administration was eased by increases in the number of administrators, if not necessarily in their quality.<sup>6</sup> In general, the quality of the chief administrators in the eastern Congo was good. The Belgian military furnished a large proportion of them, especially in the early days, and at least one African agent held a position of authority.<sup>7</sup> The commissioners general of the Province Orientale in this period were Justin Malfeyt (1899-1903) and Adolphe de Meulemeester (1903-6), both of whom returned as vice-governors

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<sup>3</sup>Edmond Janssens, Giacomo Nisco, and E. de Schumacher, "Rapport de la Commission d'Enquête à M. le Secrétaire de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo, 30 octobre 1905," *BO.EIC 1905*, p.164.

<sup>4</sup>FO 403/399 Beale to Grey, 6 September 1907, in Emerson, *Leopold II*, p.238.

<sup>5</sup>*Heart of Darkness* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902). Kurtz was modelled on the Frenchman, Georges-Antoine Klein, the Stanley Falls agent of the Société Anonyme Belge, whom Conrad encountered in the eastern Congo in 1890. Earlier that year Conrad had written his cousin that 60 percent of new SAB employees returned to Europe within six months and only 7 per cent completed their three-year contracts. Conrad's own term of service as a steamboat captain for the SAB also ended after less than six months because of illness. See Gerard Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad in the Congo* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1926). The morbidity rate for Free State employees must have been similar.

<sup>6</sup>In 1891 the Free State had only 289 European agents, in 1897 there were 684, and by 1900 the number had grown to 1,031. See Edmond Van Eetvelde, "Rapport au Roi," 25 January 1897, *BOEIC 1897*, p.56; "Rapport au Roi-Souverain, 5 July 1900, *BOEIC 1900*, p.129.

<sup>7</sup>One such case was an African named Badjoko, Malfeyt's former houseboy, fluent in French and English, who became the official *chef de poste* at Yanongi in the Stanley Falls zone. All observers agreed he was an outstandingly successful administrator, but some criticized his harsh methods of obtaining the rubber tax. See Marcus Dorman, *A Journal of a Tour in the Congo Free State* (London: Kegan Paul, 1905), p.169; Michell to Cromie, Stanleyville, 6 May 1907, FO 403/388, p.3; Gerald Campbell, Report on a Tour in the Province Orientale, Aruwimi, and Equator Districts [1909-10], FO 403/417, p.35.

general of the redrawn Province Orientale in the next decade. Albert Sillie, who was acting head of the province in 1906-7, was a veteran of the campaigns in Maniema and Uele and other pacification expeditions. He made a favorable impression on the British vice-consul because of his leniency toward the Africans and his strictness with European agents.<sup>8</sup> Less is known about those heading the other two districts in the Eastern Congo. In 1904 Uele was headed by Baron de Rennette and Aruwimi by Captain Aléxandre Pimpurniaux.<sup>9</sup>

Despite Leopold's frequent use of humanitarianism as a guise for the creation of his vast Central African empire, his primary motive in coming to Africa had been profit. But making this vast area profitable required considerable investment and time. During the decade and a half after the king had founded his first Congo organization in 1878, he expended tens of millions of his own and other investors' francs, persuaded Belgium to lend the Congo 25 million francs, and borrowed more millions elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> These funds went into the conquest and administration of the vast empire and provided it with the rudiments of a transportation network along the major rivers, but revenues did not begin to offset expenses until the boom in rubber began exports in the late 1890s.

The development of these rubber exports illustrates Leopold's personal style. The king's options had been severely limited by the "free trade" provisions, prohibiting import duties, which had been imposed by the great powers at the Berlin Conference when they permitted Leopold to acquire control of the vast colony. Despite the opposition of much of his cabinet and the protest resignation of his governor general, Camillo Janssen, the king imposed a characteristically devious solution. Building upon an 1885 decree that had asserted the State's claim to all "vacant" lands in the Congo, new regulations announced in 1891, 1892, and 1893 defined as "vacant" all lands not actually settled or under cultivation, claimed as state property all wild plants and animals on these lands—notably elephants and wild rubber plants—and imposed a labor tax on Africans to be paid in

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<sup>8</sup>*Biographie Coloniale Belge*, (Brussels: IRCB/ARSC, 1948-77) 2:856-60 (Sillie) & III:588-92 (Malfeyt); Michell to Cromie, Stanleyville, 6 May 1907, FO403/388, p.3.

<sup>9</sup>Dorman, *Journal*, pp.156, 167. Pimpurniaux had been in the colonial service since 1894; see *Biographie Coloniale Belge*, 1:756-57.

<sup>10</sup>Emerson, *Leopold II*, pp.87-90, 142-52.

ivory and latex or in other labor services. In the face of opposition from commercial firms and other signatories of the Berlin Act, Leopold modified the original land claims by dividing the vacant lands in the Congo into three zones: a *Domaine Privé* reserved to the State, a free zone open to commercial exploitation, and a third zone not then designated to either use.<sup>11</sup> In the eastern Congo relatively modest tracts west of the Lualaba and along the Lindi were in the free zone, while all of Uele and the northern part of Stanley Falls district belonged to the *Domaine Privé*. The rest of Stanley Falls was in the third, undesignated zone, where free trade likewise did not exist.<sup>12</sup>

Leopold's solution to the exploitation of the state domains was also highly original, though it rested on a very conventional base. As in other African colonies in this period, both the limits of supply lines and the shortage of funds dictated that administrators live as far as possible on local resources. A law of 6 October 1891 required that at the certification and investiture of each African chief a list would be made of the *prestations* in goods to be furnished and the labor services (*corvées*) and laborers to be furnished.<sup>13</sup> The exactions of food, building materials, porters, and all sorts of casual labor from the local inhabitants were thus a normal feature of the earliest days of European rule and one that long remained deeply entrenched. However, this rather modest system was broadened tremendously by an unpublished decree of 5 November 1892 that authorized the secretary of state "to take whatever measures he regards useful or necessary to ensure the exploitation of the *Domaine Privé's* resources" and by a special decree of 28 November 1893 that authorized the collection of taxes in the Province Orientale to cover the expenses of the "Arab wars." The last decree served as the basis for more extensive demands for portage, ivory, and rubber. In all of these cases the labor was to be paid, but in the case of rubber, it is important to note that the remuneration covered only the labor involved in its collection, the rubber in the "vacant lands" of the *Domaine Privé* being considered state property already.<sup>14</sup> The obligations under this heading soon

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp.153-55.

<sup>12</sup>See Vermeersch, *Question congolaise*, pp.102-3.

<sup>13</sup>BOEIC 1891, pp.259-61.

<sup>14</sup>AA, IRCB(507)84, Verbiest, "Perception de l'impôt," pp.1-2; "Memorandum respecting Taxation and Currency in the Congo Free State," enclosure in N<sup>o</sup> 2, Grey

came to exceed all others in their magnitude and onerousness.

The second defining influence on the eastern Congo in this period was the legacy of institutions, personnel and policies left by the Zanzibari. About 1893 Governor General Théophile Wahis described the regime in the eastern Congo as follows: It is "in short just about what had been created by the Arabs. The division of territory is what they had established. The personnel, who occupy the regions here and there, are those whom they sent there."<sup>15</sup> He might have added that the Free State's labor recruitment policies resembled those of the Zanzibari, except that slavery was no longer officially recognized.

The Free State's campaigns had driven out the major Zanzibari traders, but, as the governor general noted, their many servants, employees, and slaves who had escaped death in these wars had become important agents and allies of the Free State. In the main settlements along the Lualaba from Stanleyville to Kasongo, the plantations established by the Zanzibari continued to provide the rice and citrus on which the Europeans depended. Along the trail eastward from Stanleyville, settlements of Islamicized Africans (*arabisés*) provided porters and provisions to the European officials, much as they had to their Zanzibari masters. In 1905 the chief of one such village of laborers—whose non-African name, Apache, suggests how thoroughly he was a creature of the administration—complained to the Commission of Inquiry that a Catholic missionary was telling his men that they were free to leave, either to sign labor contracts with the State or to return to their homes. Apache said he had been given these men by Lieutenant Lothaire at the end of the "Arab" wars in 1894 and he used them and their descendants to work his coffee and rice plantations and to provide the porters requisitioned by the State.<sup>16</sup> This was not an isolated instance. According to British consular officials in the area chiefs all along the road leading east from Stanleyville were obliged to furnish porters to carry the loads of travellers. One vice-consul reported as follows:

In some instances these porters are literally slaves, and are considered so both by their masters and themselves. They formerly belonged to Bangwana [Islamicized former slaves of the Zanzibari] raiders. When

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to Hardinge, FO, 27 March 1908, *PP*, Africa, N° 3 (1908), pp.10-12.

<sup>15</sup>In Ceulemans, *Question arabe*, pp.53-54.

<sup>16</sup>AA, AE(349-350)528, Commission d'Enquête, dispositions, N° 346.

the slaves were emancipated they were supposed to leave their masters, though hardly any did so, and they immediately returned. The State then made the masters "Chiefs," and when porters are wanted these Chiefs are called upon to supply them. They naturally send these former slaves, who cannot refuse to go.<sup>17</sup>

A similar instance was reported by another British vice-consul in 1909: he found former Zanzibari dependents still furnishing rice and portorage along the eastern part of the main road from Stanleyville to lake Albert.<sup>18</sup>

The "personnel" of the Zanzibari dominion also were important in building up a military-police force necessary to establish control over the eastern Congo. As was shown in the previous chapter, the conquest of the region had provided the Free State with large numbers of prisoners both free and slave, who quickly became a significant component of the Free State's Force Publique. Many of these *arabisés* also served as sentinels and/or auxiliaries in the service of the tiny state administration in the villages outside government outposts. Untrained, ill-supervised, loyal to neither the African villagers nor the Free State, yet in possession of enormous power, these individuals often abused their positions, as their counterparts had under the Zanzibari. Of course the responsibility for these abuses, and those of the European agents, ultimately lay with the Free State administration and King Leopold. In these early years such officials largely ignored the excesses, so long as the quotas in rubber, ivory, and other goods were met.

An American, E. J. Glave, left a carefully record of the administrative practices he observed in 1894-95 during a trip from lake Tanganyika to Basoko. Glave had worked for the Free State on the middle Congo in the 1880s and seems to have had no particular axe to grind. He generally accepted the need for harsh measures—"to beat the natives into submission," in his words, and to accustom them to the habit of steady work for the State—so long as they were paid for it, but he found that in all too many parts of the former heartland of Zanzibari operations remuneration was lacking:

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<sup>17</sup>Mitchell to Nightingale, Bafwesendi, 18 September 1907, *PP*, Africa, N<sup>o</sup> 1(1908), N<sup>o</sup> 23, p.48.

<sup>18</sup>Campbell, "Report on...the Province Orientale," p.60.

The State conducts its pacification of the country after the fashion of the Arabs, so the natives are not gainers at all. The Arabs in the employ of the state are compelled to bring in ivory and rubber, and are permitted to employ any measures considered necessary to obtain this result. They employ the same means as in the days gone by, when Tippu Tib was one of the masters of the situation. They raid villages, take slaves, and give them back for ivory. The state has not suppressed slavery, but established a monopoly by driving out the Arabs and Wangwana competitors.<sup>19</sup>

A decade later, Commissioner General de Meulemeester told the Commission of Inquiry that such auxiliaries were no longer in use, though he lauded the importance of their services to the State in earlier times.<sup>20</sup>

The third influence on Free State operations was indigenous African political and economic institutions. Although African political institutions varied enormously from the large Zande and Mangbetu kingdoms of northern Uele to the tiny village-states of Maniema, the local African chief quickly became the mainstay of government rule and labor policy. Caught in that cruel vise so vividly described by Lloyd Fallers, African chiefs in eastern Zaïre struggled to defend their people as much as possible, while meeting enough of the often excessive demands of colonial authorities to retain their positions.<sup>21</sup> Many, such as the great Zande rulers Mopoie, Sasa, and Semio, passively resisted the ever-growing government demands for rubber, porters, and food in an effort to retain the support of their subjects, but soon found themselves displaced or replaced by government appointees.<sup>22</sup>

It is clear that the relationship between the African chiefs and the

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<sup>19</sup>"Cruelty in the Congo Free State. Concluding Extract from the Journals of the late E. J. Glave," *Century* 54 (September 1897):705-6.

<sup>20</sup>AA, AE(350)528, N<sup>o</sup> 330, 21 January 1905; the commissioner had given the order, but compliance was not universal: in 1906 an agent named Moro in Upper Ituri was still stationing armed African sentinels in isolated posts, for which dereliction orders were given not to renew his contract. AA, IRCB(722)73/II, 29 September 1906.

<sup>21</sup>*Bantu Bureaucracy*, new ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965), ch. 8.

<sup>22</sup>One of these appointees was Gouga, who was made head of the Zande at Bondo about 1905, and about whom "stories of every kind of brutality...were on the lips of every native in the surrounding country," according to the British Consul Jack P. Armstrong, "Report on the Condition of the Natives in the Uele District," 3 September 1910, FO 403/425 in N<sup>o</sup> 16, pp.14-15, 22.



Free State resembled the relationship the chiefs had had with the Zanzibari. To supply the laborers and military recruits demanded by the State, the chiefs drew upon their domestic slaves, former slaves, and other defenseless persons among their subjects just as they had for the Zanzibari.<sup>23</sup> European missions also inherited the benefits of these predatory levies. In 1906 the head of the Catholic mission at Kasongo, Tippu Tip's old headquarters recorded this observation:

In the past when an Arab set himself up in a region, one of his first moves was to demand some children from the local chief as a pledge of their alliance or of their submission: these children, having become the property of the Arab, were then installed either among the soldiers or the servants of this slave trade. From that moment on they could not dream of returning to their relatives or their homes. Now there is apprehension of a similar system on our part...: thus a certain near-by chief has been seen to collect some twenty boys in his village, mostly orphans and vagabonds, and to send them to us, saying: "Here are the children you want, take full charge of these who live with you; henceforth they are yours."<sup>24</sup>

While relations between chief and people in many African communities were thus distorted by the role chiefs had to play in the service of the Europeans, some African societies or chiefs were able to use the Free State's presence, as they had the Zanzibari's, to distort their positions vis-à-vis their neighbors or subjects. In the territory of Isangi just west of Kisangani, for example, the Yalusuna, already slave-holders before their conquest by the whites, reduced to slavery a not insignificant number of additional villages that were not yet subject to white rule in order to meet their rubber quotas without doing the collection themselves. Eventually, these slaves sought colonial protection from these excesses.<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere, newly freed slaves were

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<sup>23</sup>See the remarks of the Rev. A. De Clercq, former Provincial of the Scheut missionaries in the Congo Free State and Captain R. Dubreucq, a Free State administrator (Conseil Colonial, *CRA 1908/9*, pp.165- 67). Their indications of the importance of slaves in providing a labor force apply specifically to the Kasai and Equator provinces, but suggest the practice was more general. For the Aruwimi district of the eastern Congo see Mitchell to Nightingale, Stanleyville, 27 November 1907, *PP*, Africa (N<sup>o</sup> 1), N<sup>o</sup> 29, p.59.

<sup>24</sup>APB, RAPB 1907, p.403.

<sup>25</sup>AA, D(385), Rapport d'enquête, chefferie de Yamfira, territoire d'Isangi, district

impressed into service. As was shown above, liberated Africans from the "pacification" of the eastern Congo who were not needed for the Force Publique had been put in the custody of some traditional and some newly created chiefs. What became of the "surplus" of freed persons around the military camp at Lusambo is unclear.

The Mangbetu rulers in Uele also used their enhanced coercive powers in the early colonial period to exact more work and goods from their own subjects for themselves as well as for the state, and to assert their authority over neighboring peoples, such as the Mamvu. Increasingly it seemed to their subjects, as well as to outside observers, that they had become slaves of their rulers.<sup>26</sup>

The Free State had come into existence waving a banner of reform: it promised to end slavery, extend liberal Western values, and uplift African lives. From the beginning the State had clothed its exploitation of labor in the robes of education. According to its secretary of state, Baron Edmond van Eetvelde:

The State deems labor to be one of the best means to regenerate the native: it is in his agricultural activities that the native comes to initiate himself into it, learning to clear and cultivate the soil, to plant coffee and tobacco, to collect rubber and other vegetable products, at the same time as he finds an equitable remuneration.<sup>27</sup>

This process, Eetvelde suggested, was to be accomplished by persuasion, but where that was not enough, Africans were to be driven to work by requisitions of goods and services for which they would be remunerated.

The reality of labor practices was quite different. Grossly understaffed, under-financed, and overextended, the administration's primary function came to be ensuring its own survival and, beyond that, extracting a profit from its poor colony. The system of *prestations* supplied local agents with the food, shelter, and transport they needed and fed Leopold's insatiable appetite for wild rubber and ivory.

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d'Aruwimi, no date.

<sup>26</sup>Keim, "Women in Slavery among the Mangbetu"; see also Armstrong, "Report on Uele," pp.18-19.

<sup>27</sup>Van Eetvelde, "Rapport au roi," 25 January 1897, *BOEIC 1897*, pp.47-49.

## Labor Exactions, 1895-1903

The Commission of Inquiry assessed the operation of the system of *prestations* before 1903 overall in the Congo in the following terms:

In general, it is true to say that everything concerning the native requisitions and exactions was in reality, until recent years, left to the agents' judgment. Without bothering himself too much about the legal basis, each station or concession head demanded from the natives the most varied exactions in labor and in kind, either to meet his own needs and those of the station or to exploit the wealth of the *Domaine*.<sup>28</sup>

These commissioners, like other contemporary investigators, paid greatest attention to concessionary tracts of the middle Congo, where the worst abuses of the period seem to have taken place. It is difficult to document the activities of the state's agents elsewhere in the colony—not least because Leopold ordered the systematic destruction of its records on the eve of the Belgian takeover—but the documents that escaped that purge suggest that in the eastern Congo the resort to compulsion was much more often the practice than the use of effective inducements to free labor.<sup>29</sup> This evidence also shows that the impositions to which Africans were subject varied considerably with the character of the administrator and the needs he had to meet. Africans near government posts, along portage routes, and in rubber producing areas suffered the most from violence and overwork.

Because the historical record is so meager, it is worth recounting in some detail Glave's observations concerning the newly conquered Maniema.<sup>30</sup> Moving through the area from southeast to northwest in 1894-95, he described the government stations and agents he encountered and the system of *prestations* which, not surprisingly in the circumstances, he termed "tribute." At Kabambare, which Glave visited in December 1894, the outlying villages, "all friendly and submis-

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<sup>28</sup>Janssens, "Rapport," p.164.

<sup>29</sup>See Jean Stengers, "The Congo Free State and the Belgian Congo before 1914," in *Colonialism in Africa*, vol. 1: *The History and Politics of Colonialism, 1870-1914*, L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, eds. (Cambridge : At the University Press, 1969), pp.267-71.

<sup>30</sup>"Extracts from the Journals of the Late E. J. Glave," *Century*, 53 (April 1897):900-915 and 54(September 1897):699-715.

sive," paid their tribute in labor, including portorage to Kasongo, and in goods, mostly ivory and rubber. At the New Kasongo station on the Lualaba, to which much of the large population of the destroyed Old Kasongo further inland had moved, he noted a great variety of tribute forms: "Some do paddling; others build; others, again, bring in wood for building purposes. The chiefs west of here supply mandiba mats as their tribute. Some bring in ivory and rubber." At Nyangwe, where 5,000 auxiliaries were kept busy enforcing government authority in the outlying areas, he reported that a good deal of ivory was brought in "as tribute" along with some rubber, which the station head, Emile Lemery, thought could be expanded to fifteen tons a month "when more tribes are brought under control."<sup>31</sup> At Bayongwe, also under Lemery's command, some villages had also been forced to move closer to the river to provide food, canoes, and camping places, while others were compelled to bring in rubber to avoid military reprisals.

At Riba-Riba (Lokandu) in the Ponthierville zone, under Lieutenant Rue, some villagers were "required to cut wood for station purposes; others to search for rubber; others for ivory; some to serve as soldiers for six or seven years." If they failed to fulfill their quotas, Glave reported, villages were subject to armed assaults and delinquent individuals, including women, might receive severe beatings. At Basoko in Aruwimi district, which he reached in February 1895, Glave found Africans compelled to furnish canoe-portorage, general labor around the station (usually by women), and fish. For this no compensation was offered beyond an occasional "small piece of cloth" for the chief. He found similar methods used for obtaining ivory at Isangi on the Lomami.

Another area for which information on early administration has survived is the Lado enclave, a part of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan that was administered by the Congo during King Leopold's lifetime. In 1899 a British observer reported that the general mode of operation of the newly-established Free State administration consisted in sending troops under a white officer (the latter a refinement notably lacking in Maniema in 1894-95) to the villages for food with regular and frequent resorts to attacks, looting, and taking of prisoners. "The plain truth

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<sup>31</sup>Lemery mentions Glave's visit in a letter to his mother from Nyangwe, 24 January 1895, AA, D(382)29.1.

is," the observer noted, "that there is no civilized supervision by responsible men."<sup>32</sup> In 1902-3 the Free State administration was described as still being "tyrannical...compulsion."<sup>33</sup>

The final area of the eastern Congo whose early administrative history can be known, in this case from the Free State's own records, is the territory between lakes Kivu and Tanganyika. There was no great need for labor in this area until the outbreak of the First World War and the density of population was quite high, even though scattered among the hilly countryside in many isolated communities. The local reports show a pattern of peaceful visits by an administrator with a few soldiers. Generally the inhabitants immediately took flight and it took twelve to twenty-four hours to coax them back with assurances of the administrator's peaceful intentions. Then requests were made for supplies of bamboo and building sticks, for a market to be held (paid for in beads), and for laborers for roadbuilding and portage. The demands appear to have been moderate, the responses uneven, and the administrators generally patient in trying to secure compliance. It must be borne in mind, however, that this area was also claimed by Germany and that the Free State's agents were under special instructions to avoid any actions that might disturb the local people.<sup>34</sup>

Detailed information on other areas of the eastern Congo has not survived, but it is still possible to reconstruct the larger patterns of work obligations that fell on Africans in this period from what is known of administrative practice and the volume of commerce. In addition to the *prestations* in food, supplies and local labor, which fell disproportionately on Africans nearest government stations, there

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<sup>32</sup>Report by Dr. Milne on the Administrative Methods of the Congo Free State in the Upper Nile Valley," FO 403/304 in N<sup>o</sup> 97, pp.202-3. Milne recorded: "Lt. [Edmond] Bertrand told me that Inspector [Louis-Napoleon] Chaltin, the present Head of the Nile district, strongly depreciated the taking of prisoners into the station [as food was in short supply there already], but that Commandant [Emile] Henry—than whom, in private life, I never met a more good-natured, absent-minded man—either wilfully or unknowingly, connived at the practice."

<sup>33</sup>FO 403/364: Reginald Wingate, "Note on the present Administration in the Lado Enclave," Khartoum, 23 November 1904, p.25.

<sup>34</sup>SKU: Rappports de reconnaissance, Luvungi, 1904-9, passim; Vandewoude, *Documents...Kivu*, N<sup>o</sup> 1 (Instructions concernant territoires litigieux, 1900; Instructions, 1902), N<sup>o</sup> 48 (Rappports mensuels sur la situation générale, Uvira, 1903-5).

were also very important exactions in ivory, portorage, and rubber. Few details of the first two are known before 1903. It would seem that ivory collection in the eastern Congo peaked around the turn of the century, as it did in the Congo generally, when the accumulated stocks of "dead" ivory were depleted and the specialized ivory hunters were brought under control.<sup>35</sup>

Portorage seems to have been a more widespread and onerous labor burden in this period. The growing requisitions of food, building materials, and exactions in ivory and rubber necessarily involved a great deal of localized head portorage. There was also a growing imposition of head and canoe portorage for goods and supplies over the routes that led from the Lualaba and the Nile and from lake Tanganyika. Only scattered details are known for the years before 1903, though the more detailed accounts in the next section of this chapter suggest what the pattern of operations must have been.

As with other kinds of exactions, force was regularly employed in securing this labor. Along the Uele east of Bima, for example, two armed attacks were employed in 1891 to convince the Bakango to furnish canoemen for the state.<sup>36</sup> In 1896-97 small villages of Kibali were raided for porters, who were led off tied together, leaving behind "a good number" of killed and wounded.<sup>37</sup> The only indication of volume is the estimate that the transport service westward from Rejaf on the Nile moved 4,000 two-man loads in six months in 1899 "without too much resort to arms."<sup>38</sup>

Far greater amounts of labor went into collecting wild rubber. During this period quotas were increasing and an ever widening circle of African villages was subject to them. A number of things made the rubber tax the most generally hated aspect of Free State rule: the collecting itself, the quantities demanded, the increasingly long

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<sup>35</sup>Exports of ivory from the Free State's own territories averaged 233 metric tons a year in 1893-97, 244 tons in 1898-1902, and 189 tons in 1903-7. Over 90 percent of this came from the Upper Congo, i.e. the region above Stanley Pool, with about 40 percent of the total coming from the eastern Congo. *BOEIC* 1894, p.50; 1895, p.10; 1896, p.44; 1897, p.116; 1898, p.60; 1899, p.80; 1900, p.45; 1901, p.113; 1902, p.64; 1903, p.71; 1904, p.65; 1905, p.25; 1906, p.83; 1907, p.432; 1908, p.139.

<sup>36</sup>Lieutenant Gustin, "Vers le Nil: de Léopoldville à Djibir," *Mouvement Géographique*, 1 May 1898, col. 229; cf. G. De Bauw, "La Zone Uere-Bomu," *Belgique Coloniale*, 17 February 1901, p.74.

<sup>37</sup>H. Bodart, "Journal Personnel," pp.27-28; AA, D(382)9/1.

<sup>38</sup>MRAC, RG1078/7, Chaltin, Journal, 7 October 1899.

Table 3.1  
Ivory Tax Collected, Eastern Congo, 1901-1910  
(in Metric Tons)

ZONES	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
Uere-Bili	19	16	15		36	31	46			43
Rubi	31	25				13		9	18	
Bomokandi						7	6		1	2
Gurba-Dungu					0	1		6	4	
Upper Ituri	10				2	2				
Aruwimi	2	6				6				
Lomami Company	5						5	4		
Stanley Falls		13				8				
Ponthierville	11	11				8				
Maniema	7				2	3				
<b>TOTALS</b>										
A. Eastern Congo	95	71	NA	NA	NA	79	NA	NA	NA	NA
B. Entire Congo	263	198	249	185	167	210	178	205	NA	NA
A as percent of B	36	36				38				

*Notes:* Many totals are derived from incomplete monthly reports which have been averaged to give an annual total; those based on fewer than four monthly reports in a year are italicized. Most series are too incomplete to permit the calculation even of rough totals.

*Sources:* BOEIC 1902, p.64; 1903, p.71; 1904, p.65; 1905, p.25; 1906, p.83; 1907, p.435; 1908, p.139; AA, AE(342)512, remarks of the commissioner general of Aruwimi.

trips to find sources, and the dangers which resulted. The disagreeable nature of the collection process is brought out in this 1892 description from the area of Basoko:

The native makes a gash in the vine. In great haste, he collects the rubber escaping precipitously...from the cut. He spreads it on his chest, on his thighs and on his arms, lets it dry and soon become firm. Then he pulls it off and makes a ball of it. This work is rather tiring. The first few times it is not without pain that the man pulls it off the hairy parts of his body. The native doesn't like making rubber. He must be compelled to do it.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup>MRAC RG 1078/4, Chaltin, Journal, 16 July 1892, p. 80.

The quantity of rubber which could be collected was limited by the profusion of wild rubber vines in a region: the savanna lands of the north and south had relatively little, with the notable exception of the northern river valleys, nor did the mountainous country in the east. The quantity of rubber was also limited by the number of people under the actual control of the administration and the degree of effective control that could be exercised—highly significant factors in the early years of Free State administration. Each administrative unit was assigned a quota, but administrators were encouraged to collect ever-increasing amounts, which was to their advantage financially and in terms of advancement, since they received a commission on the amount collected.

Though it is not easy to find details of rubber collection for this period, its abusive character is clear from the number of rebellions it provoked.<sup>40</sup> Some of the largest uprisings took place just west of eastern Congo at the turn of the century and probably inspired those to the east. Among these were the Zappo Zap and Tetela uprisings in Kasai on the border of Maniema in 1899-1900, and the Buja rising in Bengala near Aruwimi district in 1898-1901.<sup>41</sup> The earliest recorded uprising in the eastern Congo, after the Zanzibari resistance, was a *natophe* (rubber) revolt in Aruwimi in 1895. Although excessive rubber exactions were only one of the grievances, the imposition of fines in rubber as a punishment for the widespread uprisings must have added to the hatred of the rubber quotas.<sup>42</sup> That district also saw turmoil in 1903, particularly among the Ngandu, provoked by the heavy portage demands.<sup>43</sup>

The western zones of Uele district provide another example of the manner in which excessive rubber exactions led to revolts. In 1898 acting Governor General Félix Fuchs wrote to Antoine Verstraeten, the head of the Rubi zone, instructing him to show "fresh proof of your activity and devotion by making the district you command

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<sup>40</sup>See table 3.2 for 1901ff.

<sup>41</sup>For a general account of these and other contemporary revolts see Jean Stengers and Jan Vansina, "Western Equatorial Africa: B. King Leopold's Congo, 1886-1908," in *Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 6: c.1870-c.1905, Roland Oliver and G. N. Sanderson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp.332-33.

<sup>42</sup>Glave, "Journal [19/20 February 1895]," 54:706; MRAC, RG1078/15, Chaltin, Journal, 10 September 1895.

<sup>43</sup>*Tribune Congolaise*, 27 August 1903.



produce the maximum of resources which can be drawn from it." Verstraeten in turn wrote to his agents, instructing them that, in addition to the already heavy burden of providing food and portorage along the Buta-Nile route (see below), from the beginning of 1899 the inhabitants were also to supply four metric tons of rubber a month—over ten times what the post of Libokwa had recently been supplying. Verstraeten reportedly gave his agents *carte blanche* in how they went about collecting the rubber, advising them: "Employ gentleness at first," and, if that didn't work, "employ force of arms."

The constantly rising rubber quotas, combined with the growing demands for portorage and for livestock and other provisions, drove a portion of the Babwa to rebel in mid-1899. The harsh suppression of this rebellion and the continuing exactions provoked a general revolt late in 1900 among the Babwa of western Uele, who captured the important station of Libokwa, including stores of cartridges and merchandise. Despite strenuous repression in September-October of 1901, the unrest simmered throughout 1902. Scapegoats were made of Commandant Verstraeten, whose appointment was not renewed, and his over-zealous subordinate, Captain Edouard Tilkens, who in 1902 fled the colony to escape arrest for having imposed a "reign of terror" in his part of the zone. Although the Free State tried to portray the circumstances in Uele as exceptional, questions about the whole system of rubber collection were raised in the Belgian Parliament.<sup>44</sup>

Elsewhere in Uele, there were other uprisings against the Free State regime, the details of which are less well documented. Up to 1903 a high level of rubber collection was being extracted by agent Servais from the Meje, who refused to continue this onerous burden

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<sup>44</sup>AA, IRCB(722)73/1, summaries of the mail presented to King Leopold, especially 22 November 1901, May 1902, 2 July 1902; Belgium, *Annales Parlementaires, Chambre des Représentants*, séance 1 July 1903, pp.1718-21. Vandewalde's account of the events to the Belgian House is summarized in E. D. Morel's *Red Rubber: The Story of the Rubber Slave Trade Flourishing on the Congo in the Year of Grace 1906* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906), p.37, 62, whose translations are quoted here. Other details are in H. R. Fox-Bourne, *Civilisation in Congoland: a Story of International Wrong-Doing* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1903), pp.263-64, quoting the *Times* of 8 January, 27 April, 17 September, and 15 October 1901. Compare Verstraeten's entry in the *Biographie Coloniale Belge*, 1:932-34, which makes no mention of the scandalous side of these events, and Tilkens', *ibid.*, 3:845-47, which contains much detail of the debate they provoked.

for his successor, W. E. Thornton, an American, whom the Meje murdered and reportedly ate.<sup>45</sup> The revolt of the neighboring Zande chief Fune early in 1902 seems to have been connected partly to rubber collection, since after his defeat he had to furnish some two tons of it.<sup>46</sup> The details of what followed are not known, but when Governor General Théophile Wahis visited Uele at the end of 1905, he was able to remark on the "tranquility and contentment of the great majority of the people" there and predict that "as the obligations weighing on them become less heavy...their submission [will become] more complete."<sup>47</sup>

If the reports of such revolts stirred criticism in Belgium, they raised an absolute storm of protest in Britain. In the latter half of 1903, Roger Casement, the British consul in the Free State since 1901, traveled up the Congo to investigate the stories of atrocities that had been filtering out of the Upper Congo. Casement, who had once worked for the Free State and who, as British consul, had been sending back reports critical of labor practices in the Lower Congo, never reached the eastern Congo. Satisfied that he had authenticated enough instances of forced labor, beatings, mutilations, and other abuses of Africans along the middle stretches of the river, he returned to Boma to write his scathing report that was delivered to the Foreign Office in mid-December and published in an expurgated version in mid-February 1904. Meanwhile, with Casement's encouragement, the young editor of the *West African Mail*, E. D. Morel, had formed the Congo Reform Association, which led an active campaign against the rubber tax system for the next several years.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>*Tribune Congolaise*, 2 July 1903 and 21 January 1904; Michell to Cromie, Stanleyville, 12 August 1907, FO 403/388 in N<sup>o</sup> 47. Thornton had been in charge of Banalia when the missionary George Grenfell passed through in 1899; see George Hawker, *The Life of George Grenfell, Congo Missionary and Explorer*, (London: Religious Tract Society, 1909), p.440. See Thornton's entry in the *Biographie Colonial Belge*, 5:806-7.

<sup>46</sup>E. D. Morel, *History of the Congo Reform Movement*, Wm. Roger Louis and Jean Stengers, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p.97, citing news items in the *Tribune Congolaise*.

<sup>47</sup>Baron Wahis to King Leopold, Buta, 12 November 1905, cited in Jean Stengers, "Morel and Belgium," in Morel, *History*, p.241. Ironically Stengers quotes this to show how Wahis could be lulled into forgetting the abuses at Abir when in a "calm" area. Wahis could hardly have forgotten the long unrest in this part of Uele so soon.

<sup>48</sup>See Morel, *History*; S. J. S. Cookey, *Britain and the Congo Question 1885-1913* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968); Emerson, *Leopold II*, pp.241-48.

## The 1903 Reforms

Evidently as a result of the growing unrest in the Congo and the rising storm of protest in Europe, the Free State undertook the first major reform of its labor tax. By a decree of 18 November 1903 the *prestations* were limited to a maximum of forty hours a month per adult male. The tax of Africans who were not employed directly by the State had to be converted into some quantity of goods, e.g. rubber, whose production represented forty hours of labor. However, the subordination of reform to production remained, as is clearly illustrated by this confidential directive from Vice-Governor General Costermans to all district and zone heads early in 1904:

You should note well that the application of the law on *prestations* should result, not only in maintaining the results of previous years, but also in recording a constant increase in the resources of the Treasury. The receipts of one year, for a district must not be less than those of the previous year; on the contrary, an increase must be aimed at.<sup>49</sup>

Ideally, the increases were to be achieved by a continuous increase in administrative control and in the efficiency with which the collection was done. The directive stressed (in boldface) the need to keep the level of remuneration to Africans fixed at a low level because of budgetary constraints. While this directive was not incompatible with genuine reform, it certainly could not have lessened the impression among administrators that the State still cared more about production than about reform. Not surprisingly, the "tables of equivalences" drawn up by administrators tended to exaggerate the productivity of their subjects and idealize their efficiency.<sup>50</sup>

Although Leopold denied that the Free State was guilty of any systematic abuses, pressures by the British government and reform-minded Belgians finally forced him to appoint an international Commission of Inquiry consisting of three jurists, one Belgian, one Italian,

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<sup>49</sup>Costermans à MM les Commissaires de district et Chefs de zone, Boma, 29 February 1904, N° 1283/g, enclosed testimony of H.A. Delhaye, 20 October 1904, Commission d'Enquete, procès verbal N° 15, AA, AE(349)528.

<sup>50</sup>For example, the annex to procès verbal N° 330, De Meulemeester, commissaire général, PO, Stanleyville 21 January 1905, Commission d'Enquête, AA, AE(350)528.

and one Swiss. The Commission conducted hearings in the Congo from October 1904 to February 1905, covering much of the same route as Casement, but advancing further up river. At Stanleyville they gathered considerable information on conditions in the eastern Congo from officials and from African workers. Finally published in the Free State's *Bulletin Officiel* in November 1905, the Commission's report was deliberately low-keyed—especially compared to Casement's—but the criticisms in it were all the more stinging for their restrained tone and their conjunction with praise of the Free State's accomplishments.<sup>51</sup> Like Casement, the commissioners devoted some of their strongest criticisms for the territories of the ABIR (Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company) concession, in which the Free State was the principal investor, but they also documented a larger pattern of abuses which included the eastern Congo. The Free State's exploitation of labor, especially for rubber collection and portage, came in for particular criticism.

Overall, the commissioners did not consider the reform law of November 1903 to have produced significant improvements. The emphasis on sustaining and increasing production still led to exactions in goods that almost everywhere exceeded the forty hour limit and thus further lowered the remuneration Africans received since that was measured in hours.<sup>52</sup> They found demands for food and building materials and labor corvées for maintaining roads and telegraph routes were frequent, widespread, and very much disliked by Africans, especially those close enough to government outposts to be called upon constantly or at short notice.<sup>53</sup>

However, it was in rubber collection and portage that the

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<sup>51</sup>Emerson, *King Leopold*, pp.248-52.

<sup>52</sup>Janssens, "Rapport d'enquête," p.169.

<sup>53</sup>Janssens, "Rapport d'enquête," pp.184-85. This does not mean that the law had not led to improvement anywhere. In Lado, for instance, a British observer late in 1904 concluded that the labor system had become more systematic and less despotic: "Forced labour is not now, as it used to be, generally employed, and the following appears to be the system of obtaining it for Government purposes. A requisition for the amount of labor required is forwarded to a Chief, who then provided the men, to whom a soldier's ration is given while employed. Each relief works, as a rule, for seven days, at the expiration of the period each man is paid a piece of cloth as the price of hire, whilst the Chief himself receives a muzzle-loading gun for each gang of 100 men he provides." Reginald Wingate, "Note on the present Administration in the Lado Enclave," Khartoum, 23 November 1904, FO 403/364 in N<sup>o</sup> 18, pp.25-26.

Commission signaled the worst abuses. Evidence of how rubber was collected in the eastern Congo during 1903-6 can be uncovered from the Commission and other sources. How much rubber was collected is shown in table 3.2. Unlike the colony as a whole, which registered a sharp drop in rubber collection following the 1903 reforms, the eastern Congo's collections fell only slightly in 1904 and 1905 and then continued to expand, reaching a peak of nearly 1,900 metric tons in 1906 at a time when overall rubber production in the colony was stagnant. The increase came largely from the Uele district and the Ituri zone in the northern part of the region, whose production more than offset declines in Aruwimi and Ponthierville, which had been under State control much longer. As in the colony as a whole, the declines in the latter areas were due to the destruction of wild rubber plants as a result of the collectors incising them too deeply or from simply severing vines completely so as to obtain all the latex at once. How much of this destruction was the result of incessant and excessive demands for immediate results by administrators (as critics of the State maintained), of Congolese fecklessness and indolence (as most State officials claimed), or of deliberate sabotage by African resisters (as modern Africanists might argue) cannot be determined from the evidence. But the decline itself was noted on the Lindi river north of Stanleyville, on the Lomami, and on the Lualaba by touring British diplomats.<sup>54</sup> Beginning in 1899 the loss of wild rubber plants had led to programs to require the planting of new rubber trees or vines to replace those being destroyed and to provide for more concentrated sources.<sup>55</sup> In 1904 the governor general reported that the State had planted the number required by law (about 3 million) and that private organizations had planted an additional 1.5 million.<sup>56</sup> Reports from 1906 suggest that the planting was being seriously followed in the eastern Congo, with Ponthierville zone reporting 50,000 seeds planted in a single quarter, Gurba-Dungu zone reporting "great progress," and

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<sup>54</sup>Michell to Nightingale, Stanleyville, 5 July 1906, *PP*, Africa N° 1 (1907) in N° 9, p.25; Beak to Nightingale, Kasongo, 8 May 1907, *PP*, Africa N° 1 (1908) in N° 4, p.13; Campbell, Report on...the Province Orientale," pp.45-46.

<sup>55</sup>See decree of 5 January 1899, requiring the planting of 150 shoots for every ton of rubber harvested in Crown forests (*BOEIC 1899*, p.16) and the decree of 7 June 1902 raising the figure to 500 shoots per ton effective in 1903 (*BOEIC 1902*, pp.136-37).

<sup>56</sup>Rapport du GG au Secretaire d'Etat 1904," *BOEIC 1904*, p.155.

Table 3.2  
Rubber Tax Collected, Eastern Congo, 1901-1910  
(in Metric Tons)

ZONES	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
Uere-Bili	1	21				103	148			59
Rubi	3	42				82		224	106	
Bomokandi			300	200	200	127	141		102	106
Gurba-Dungu						4		13	8	
Upper Ituri	77	c100	c150	c200	250	279	c300			338
Aruwimi	149	90	250	100	100	176				
<i>Lomami Company</i>	136	155	166	160	150	96	77	75		
Stanley Falls	564	444	400	300	360	524	c500			
Ponthierville	309	402	c350	c300	c250	242	c200			
Maniema	<u>116</u>	<u>c100</u>	<u>c150</u>	<u>203</u>	<u>218</u>	<u>226</u>	<u>c200</u>			
<b>TOTALS</b>										
A. Eastern Congo	1355	1354	1766	1463	1528	1859	1766	NA	NA	
B. Entire Colony	6023	5350	5918	4831	4849	4862	4657	4560	3751	
A as percent of B	22	25	30	30	32	38	38			

*Note:* Many totals are derived from scattered monthly reports which have been averaged to give an annual total; those based on fewer than four monthly reports in a year are italicized. In order to permit calculation of regional annual totals, estimates that scale the gap between known years have been assigned to some zones; they are marked by "c". Other round numbers are contemporary estimates.

*Sources:* Monthly reports by zone in MRAC 50.30.44, 47, 511; AA, AI(1371-72); AA, IRCB(772)73/I; RAPO 1905 (précis), AA, IRCB(772)73/II; Rapport économique, first half 1912, Uere-Bili, MRAC 50.30.516. Rapports du conseil d'administration, Compagnie de Lomami, 1901-6, in *Mouvement Géographique*, 1901, col.647; 1902, col.641; 27 December 1903; 7 February 1904; 5 February 1905; 11 February 1906; 10 February 1907. "La Production du Caoutchouc au Congo," *Mouvement Géographique*, 28 October 1906. AA, AE(342)512, remarks of commissioner general of Aruwimi. BOEIC 1902, p.63; 1903, p.69; 1904, p.63; 1905, p.23; 1906, p.81; 1907, p. 433; 1908, p.137; RACB 1909, p.34.

Uere-Bili reporting 13,682 seeds planted.<sup>57</sup>

The level of production is not to be explained by such replanting efforts, but, as the 1904-5 Commission of Inquiry argued, by the fact

<sup>57</sup>Monthly reports, Ponthierville (June 1906), Gurba-Dungu (May 1906), Uere-Bili (March 1906), AA, IRCB(722)73/II.

that an African was forced to spend "the greater part of his time in the collection of rubber" in flagrant violation of the 1903 law limiting such labor to forty hours per month. Enforcement of rubber quotas with accompanying hostage-taking, flogging, and other violent acts, was worst in the ABIR concession, but the Commission also found notable violations also notable in the Uele and Aruwimi districts of the eastern Congo.<sup>58</sup> The revolts and unrest chronic in Uele in the prior years appear to have been checked by a more systematic application of military force. For example, in December 1903 rubber production in Uere-Bili zone was 2,800 kg, but jumped to 6,200 kg a year later after a military occupation of Likafi and Zia territories and reached an average of 8,600 kg a month during the spring of 1905.<sup>59</sup>

The operation of the reform in Aruwimi is known in more detail. The assistant administrator of that zone reported at the beginning of 1905 as follows:

The *prestations* of rubber are coming in very badly. We only require 1.5 kilograms of fresh rubber per month per adult male... When there is a shortfall we generally apply pressure on the chief, who is taken prisoner to the station, or against those whom he designates as having shown ill will. This pressure must be applied rather often.... The blacks in this region have an invariable repugnance against work of any sort, and especially against rubber work.<sup>60</sup>

Special attention must be paid to labor for portorage, which the Commission of Inquiry considered was, "without doubt, of all the corvées, that which weighs most heavily on the native."<sup>61</sup> Reform in the use of portorage could not come through labor legislation alone, no matter how sincerely and effectively enforced; first there would have to be a thorough and expensive restructuring of the system of transport in use in the Congo, such as had been done through the construction of the Lower Congo railroad in 1898. Thus, the establish-

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<sup>58</sup>Janssens, "Rapport d'enquête," pp.192-96.

<sup>59</sup>RCB(772)73: Extracts from monthly reports of Uere-Bili. It is unclear if these increases resulted from bringing greater numbers of Africans into compliance.

<sup>60</sup>Olaf Andreas Lund, Basoko, 17 January 1905, testimony to the Commission d'Enquête, procès verbal N° 327, AA, AE(350)528.

<sup>61</sup>Janssens, "Rapport d'Enquête," pp.135-285. This judgment is supported by Major P. H. G. Powell-Cotton, who was in Ituri in 1905: "Un officier anglais au Congo," *La Belgique maritime et coloniale*, 19 May 1907, p.697.

ment of the Compagnie des Chemins de Fer du Congo Supérieur aux Grands Lacs Africains (CFL) at the beginning of 1902 to build a series of railroads in the eastern Congo, skirting the Stanley Falls rapids and connecting the Lualaba with lakes Albert and Tanganyika on the colony's eastern frontier was also a reform measure of great importance as was the introduction of more steamboats on the region's rivers.<sup>62</sup>

To see the labor demands for head and canoe portage in context it is necessary to review the transportation networks and bottlenecks of the eastern Congo. Goods approached the eastern Congo from three directions: from the Atlantic up the Congo and some of its northern tributaries, from the Mediterranean up the Nile, and from the Indian Ocean over the railroads of East Africa. Within the region goods moved north and south on the Lualaba, east and west by river and overland in Uele, and east and west overland between lake Kivu and the river. The Commission of Inquiry report singled out the riverain and overland routes connecting Stanleyville and lake Kivu for special criticism, noting that the volume of goods to be transported was enormous, the local population sparse, and the burden falling again and again on the same accessible portion of the population, who were being worked literally to death.

Until the completion of a 125 kilometer railroad around Stanley Falls in 1906, a heavy burden of portage had been necessary in that area, although few details are known. On the navigable stretch of the Lualaba from Ponthierville to Kindu a small steamer, the *Baron Dhanis*, had been in service since 1894, but its capacity was far inferior to the growing volume of commerce, necessitating extensive use of canoe portage. The canoe trip upstream from Ponthierville to Kindu took eleven days of five to nine hours each with the transport being provided in turn by the villages along the river.<sup>63</sup> Information

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<sup>62</sup>These were also measures to "nationalize" the transportation system by reducing dependence on routes to the eastern Congo from the Nile and the Indian ocean. See Michel Cobut, "Historique des transports au Congo, période 1918-1928," (Mémoire de licence, Institut catholique des hautes études commerciales, 1966), pp.101-2; Jean-Philippe Peemans, "Congo- Belgique, 1900-1960" in *Diffusion du progrès et convergence des prix. Etudes internationales*, (Louvain and Paris: Nauwelaerts, 1970), 2:75-76.

<sup>63</sup>Commissaire Général de la PO, annexe à la letter du GG du 24 August 1908, N° 1926, pp.36-37.



about the routes from the Lualaba to the eastern frontier is provided by an unpublished report from late 1904:

The recruitment of porters at Kasongo requires 1,200 to 1,400 men a month (travelers included). Most of the loads must be lifted by two porters. The porters, recruited from within a maximum of three days walk, carry as far as Kabambare, i.e. for nine days. In reality the loads destined for lake Kivu overwhelm Maniema because the recruitment is too narrowly concentrated and Maniema insufficiently subdued and known to recruit from within a more extended radius.<sup>64</sup>

In mid-1904 missionaries found the people around Kalembelembe and Kabambare decimated by famine and sleeping sickness and observed that "those whom the State recruits for portage are no longer able to do that work: they are old men with wrinkled skin and children worn out by hunger or covered with sores," several of whom collapsed during the first few hours on the trail.<sup>65</sup> Another unpublished report, prepared early in 1906, made it clear that little had changed:

There remain at Kabambare, on 31 December 1905, 2,869 loads in transit; 966 were evacuated during the month. The *chef de poste* writes: the natives are fatigued from portage which decimates them and discontents them because the new [payment] schedule suppresses their food allowance for the return trip.<sup>66</sup>

Goods intended for the northwestern part of the region followed several tributaries of the Congo to the limits of their navigability. During the pacification wars all transport had gone up the Ubangi and Uele to Jabir (modern Bondo), but from about 1896 a shorter route up the Itimbiri to Buta (on the Rubi) and overland to Bima on the Uele began to take an increasing part of the traffic.<sup>67</sup> One of the earliest major projects involving Buta was the transport of the disassembled

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<sup>64</sup>MRAC 54.95.165, Zone de Manyema. Rapport sur la ligne des transports de Stanleyville à Kalembe Lembe, Kasongo, 4 November 1904, pp.11-12.

<sup>65</sup>APB: Diaire, Bruges St. Donat (July-August 1904), Chronique, N° 122 (December 1905), pp.571-72.

<sup>66</sup>AA, IRCB(722)73/II, Rapport politique, Maniema, December 1905 (summary).

<sup>67</sup>V. Monnom, ed., *Etat Indépendant du Congo: documents sur le pays et ses habitants* (Brussels: Monnom, 1904), pp.30-31.

steamer the *Van der Kerkhove* overland from there to the Nile. A Belgian officer in the area privately confessed his anxiety over the misery and deaths this would lead to among the 1,500 porters required, a "colossal number" for those days, who were paid only fifty cowries for the eastward trek and two yards of *americani* cloth for the return. To get the number he had to put the chiefs into chains, take women and children as hostages, and use military force.<sup>68</sup> A third route ran from Basoko up the Aruwimi to Banalia, described in 1899 as an important administrative center and transit link of some 1,500 inhabitants. From there portage routes ran northeast to the Nile and eastward to lake Albert, as well as south to Stanleyville.<sup>69</sup>

The greatest potential lay with Buta, which by 1903-4 was a flourishing transit center, linked by newly-completed portage trails via Bima to Bomokandi on the Uele and to the French-Congo border, with a new trail under construction to Zobia. Goods destined for Buta and beyond were brought by small steamer to Ibembo, from where canoes carried them around the shallow section (including a portage around some rapids) to Djamba. The new small steamer, *Milz*, brought them on to Buta, making the trip twice a week (except in the dry season) and carrying some 3,000 head loads each time. The great volume of portage required to move these goods beyond Buta soon exceeded the capacities of the available porters, so that by November 1904 "an immense quantity of stores" had backed up in Buta awaiting shipment.<sup>70</sup>

Goods destined for the eastern half of the region could more conveniently be brought in from the Nile or across East Africa. The Nile had long provided a link to the northeast Congo, especially to the Lado enclave which adjoined it. In 1904 a new motor road through the enclave from Rejaf to Aba was completed, providing improved transit to Upper Ituri. However, heavy wood-burning vehicles were too much for the road and its light bridges. Donkeys and ox-carts proved more successful. The road had been built as a temporary

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<sup>68</sup>Lieutenant Tilkens to Major Lenssens, 20 July 1898, quoted by Vandewalde, Belgium, *Annales Parlementaires, Chambre des Représentants*, séance 1 July 1903, p.1718.

<sup>69</sup>Letter of George Grenfell to Mr. Baynes, 25 September 1899, in Hawker, *Life of George Grenfell*, pp.440-41.

<sup>70</sup>Dorman, *Journal of a Tour*, pp.156-59; *La Tribune Congolaise*, 12 May 1904 and 17 September 1904.

expedient intended to be replaced by a railroad across Uele linking the navigable part of the Itimbiri to the Nile. King Leopold had announced this scheme in 1898 and a road bed (except for bridges) was eventually completed from Bambili to Rejaf, but the cession of the enclave to the Sudan and lack of finances doomed the project.<sup>71</sup>

In fact it was the railroads of East Africa that provided the eastern Congo's best links to the outside world. Completed to Kisumu on lake Victoria in 1902, the Uganda railroad provided service from Mombasa which was important for the development of the Kilo-Moto mines as well as for missionaries stationed in the eastern Congo. The addition of the British steamer *Samuel Baker* on lake Albert from September 1909 made the liaison even more attractive, even though the connection from the lake up the steep escarpment and on to Kilo was still by ox carts and porters.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the growth of rail and water transit, human transport remained important in most of the region. The rude trail from Stanleyville to the eastern frontier grew in importance, even though its bridges were little more than "rickety bundles of sticks tied together with creepers."<sup>73</sup> Because overland transit was slow and labor intensive, the canoe portage was less costly, even on rivers with many rapids to ford. To send a thirty-five kilogram load east from Stanleyville to Avakubi, for example, cost 3.79 fr via the Lindi river but over six times as much (24.75 fr) by land. The return voyage was even cheaper via the Lindi (2.39 fr), since it was downstream.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>*Mouvement Géographique* 20 February 1898; *Tribune Congolaise* 27 August 1903 and 19 May 1905; "Rapport au Roi," *BOEIC* 1907, pp.156-57; Robert O. Collins, *King Leopold, England, and the Upper Nile* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp.272-310. This was part of a grander scheme of a Cape-to-Cairo railroad.

<sup>72</sup>Gérard Malherbe, "La mission au Lac Albert (Ituri-Zaïre) 1911-1934: Elements et indications pour une étude," (Thesis, Université Catholique de Louvain, Faculté de Théologie, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1976), pp.152-53; Bakonzi, "Gold Mines," pp.129-31. The inauspicious inauguration of the ox cart road in 1908 was noted by a British observer who observed that the news of the first ox cart's arrival in Kilo did not include the pertinent "fact that the cart was followed by porters carrying the load." Gerald Campbell, "Report on a Tour in the Aruwimi and Haut Ituri Districts of the Congo State [1909]," FO 403/410 in N° 43, p.73.

<sup>73</sup>Michell to Nightingale, Bafwasendi, River Lindi, 18 September 1906, *PP*, Africa N° 1 (1907), p.48.

<sup>74</sup>AA, AE(350)528, procès-verbal N° 330, De Meulemeester, 21 January 1905, annex D.

Until 1906 canoe and head portage were part of the forty hours of prestations to which Africans were subject in return for fixed wages. These wages varied from zone to zone depending on local prices. At the beginning of 1905 carriers were receiving 0.625 fr a day in Stanley Falls, 0.375 fr in Ponthierville and Maniema, and 0.18 fr in Upper Ituri. Since they were not paid in cash but in lengths of cloth called dhotis, whose value also varied by location, the rate of pay was even more erratic: it took a carrier four days to earn a dhوتي in Stanley Falls, eight days in Ponthierville and Maniema, and nearly seventeen days in Upper Ituri.<sup>75</sup> Road porters normally worked eight five-hour days per month and canoemen worked five eight-hour days, but it was the volume of demand, not the limits of labor owed, that determined who was impressed and how often.

Most accounts of the reforms in the Free State in the first five years of the twentieth century have tended to see them as part of Leopold's extensive public relations effort to counter the British-led campaign to expose the State's atrocities and excesses. This view has much to recommend it. Certainly there does not appear to have been any general easing of the labor burden on Africans in this period as a result of the limits announced in 1903. Yet there is another way to view the situation. Sincerity is not an absolute. One need not consider the reforms a sham to say they were ineffective. As the transport reforms illustrate more clearly, the Free State was not so much opposing reform as trying to achieve it painlessly. The government's primary function was to sustain the pace of economic growth. To do that it had to mechanize its transport system, which had become unequal to the volumes of goods it had to handle. Mechanization would then ease the burden of portage. Similarly in rubber, excessive exactions led to rebellions and the destruction of vines. Limiting the burdens to a reasonable level and distributing the work among as large a group as possible made good economic sense. The decisive issue became whether rubber exactions could be held to reasonable levels without slowing or stopping economic growth. With much of the population not effectively under control and the mechanization of transport still rudimentary, the answer was no. This was the conclusion of the Commission of Inquiry and its report gradually generated support among a growing number of persons in Belgium, Britain, and else-

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<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*

where for policies that imposed absolute limits on labor exactions, regardless of the economic consequences

### The 1906 Reforms

In the midst of the uproar caused by his Commission of Inquiry's report Leopold issued a series of new reforms in 1906 that made the continuation of excesses harder though not impossible. A circular letter of 9 March transformed the various exactions in labor and goods into a personal tax. The reform decree of 3 June fixed the level of taxation in the Congo at between six and twenty-four francs per person, but since the promised introduction of coinage was still five years away for most of the eastern Congo, the amount owed continued to be in goods and services. As Vice-Governor General Lantonnais put it: "This remuneration will be calculated in the same manner as under the previous regime and in taking into consideration the same level of salaries, but it should from now on be expressed in numerical values on the tables of equivalences."<sup>76</sup> The decree also promised the introduction of currency at some future date, but left the remuneration of workers for the time in goods.

There is no reason to doubt the Free State government's sincerity in this second reform effort.<sup>77</sup> Official directives insisted that labor equivalences were to be recalculated with greater care and realism. The reform decrees were also adequately promulgated, one state inspector spending seven and a half months on tour explaining them to local administrators in the north and east of the region. Nevertheless, no amount of sincerity could remove the fundamental contradictions at the base of the Free State's existence. Vice-Consul Michell doubted that any state post could survive on requisitions limited to forty hours labor per month from those African men it could reach. In his travels in 1906 he discovered villagers who had to spend three times that amount of time to meet their rubber quotas even after the

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<sup>76</sup>BOEIC 1906, p.373.

<sup>77</sup>Though this preliminary inquiry from Baerts to GG (AA, IRCB (772)73/II, telegram of 30 March 1906) casts doubt on Leopold's intentions: "Roi-Souverain veut décréter que l'impôt sera en argent mais avec faculté pour nègre de payer en nature par produits de 40 heures de travail par mois. Quel devrais être le montant de l'impôt en argent pour donner à l'Etat plus que l'impôt en nature?"

decree, and who were so ill-paid that he could report that he had "never seen such a miserably poor lot" of Africans in his nineteen years on the continent. He further reported that the communities of former Zanzibari followers had been settled along the main roads. In addition to maintaining the roads, they were required to provide food and portorage for the local administrators and for European travelers. These compulsory obligations were a dreadful burden for which the modest remuneration was no adequate compensation.<sup>78</sup>

A decree of 1906 also expressed the tax assessment in money, but this simply led to another table of equivalence. To the British vice-consul this decree did not modify "in any way...the 'corvée' system hitherto in force."<sup>79</sup> The general result of these reform decrees was to reduce the quantities of rubber demanded but imbalances between the amounts of rubber still required on the one hand and the over-estimates of productivity and declining resources on the other meant that many abuses continued. For example, in July 1908 the commissioner general of Uele felt compelled to write the heads of his district warning that nearly everywhere the amounts of rubber being demanded took in excess of the forty hours of labor required by law and insisting that the maximum labor tax of 480 hours a year per man not be exceeded. At the same time, he noted that there was also the "inescapable necessity" to avoid any precipitous fall in production. He suggested that the rubber tax be collected less often so as to reduce the time spent traveling to and from the vines (often deep in the forest), a tactic that was being tried with some success in other places at that time.<sup>80</sup> It is noteworthy that, apparently as a result of the continuation of these reforms begun at the end of the Free State period, rubber collection declined, not only in Uele but in the western zones as well. Both declining resources and reform required that the amounts of rubber exacted also be reduced. In Stanley Falls zone quotas fell from 48 kg per man in 1907 to 24 in 1908 and to 18 in 1909. Upper Ituri's went from 72 kg in 1907 to 24 in 1908 and Rubi dropped from

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<sup>78</sup>Michell to Nightingale, Bafwasendi, River Lindi, 18 September 1906, *PP*, Africa N° 1 (1907) in N° 23, pp.46-50.

<sup>79</sup>Michell to Nightingale, 23 March 1907, *PP*, Africa N° 1(1908) in N° 2.

<sup>80</sup>Tombeur au Chefs de zone de l'Uele, 17 July 1908, AA, AI(1371)68, also in MRAC 50.30.542. Evidence of overwork survives at the local level as well (e.g., Goebel, RA, Uere-Bili, 1907-8, 29 September 1908, AA, AI[1371]68).

17.2 kg in 1908 to 13.2 in 1909. In Aruwimi, however, the low rate of 18 kg per year of 1904 rose to 26 for 1908 before being reduced to 20 for 1909. Generally the amounts collected fell short of these quotas.<sup>81</sup>

Despite these reforms, exactions of goods and labor remained at unpopular levels. Resort to force was not unknown in ensuring the compliance of reluctant communities. For example, early one morning in late September 1906, administrator Janguart called on Kabodjo's village in south Kivu, demanding fifty laborers by 1 P M. When only seventeen were forthcoming by 2 P M, Janguart simply had his soldiers seize all the men in sight. Not surprisingly, these unwilling recruits drifted away at their first chance and repeated appeals had to be made to the chiefs.<sup>82</sup> In December 1907 soldiers sent to villages that had not met their rubber quotas around Panga in Stanleyville district acted with extreme harshness. Several men, women, and children were killed; others fled into the surrounding forest.<sup>83</sup> While this may have been an extreme case, tours of "unsubmissive" areas by officials and armed soldiers—operations termed *reconnaissances pacifiques*—were a persistent feature of Belgian rule and generally resulted in Africans fleeing their homes until the troops had passed. A missionary who witnessed one such operation in southern Kivu at the beginning of 1908 explained sardonically that "the Blacks have not yet come to associate the idea of peace with soldiers."<sup>84</sup> More specific reasons for flight are evident from this instruction to another expedition that year in the same area: "*no seizure of livestock should take place,*" "*everything, absolutely everything*" was to be bought and paid for, troops were to hold their fire unless aggressively attacked.<sup>85</sup>

It is difficult to document how onerous it was to comply with

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<sup>81</sup>Campbell, "Report on...Aruwimi and Haut Ituri," pp.61-62; Chef de Zone, Rubi, au GG, Buta, 2 July 1909, MRAC 50.30.542.

<sup>82</sup>SKU: Janguart, Rapport sur une reconnaissance effectuée [du 23 septembre au 14 octobre 1906].

<sup>83</sup>Bryant P. Shaw, "Force Publique, Force Unique: the Military in the Belgian Congo, 1914-1939," (Ph.D. dissertation, history, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1984), p.27, citing AA, FP(800)162, Panga, Operation Militaire Mandefu, annex to governor general's letter N° 1618, 16 July 1908.

<sup>84</sup>APB, Journal, Thielt Saint-Pierre, 30 January 1908, Chronique, N° 156 (December 1908), pp.953-54.

<sup>85</sup>SKU, Rapports Reconnaissance, Luvungi: Derche (commandant supérieur des territoires de la Ruzizi-Kivu), "Instructions concernant l'occupation des deux chefferies de Moganga et Gwese," Uvira, 4 August 1908. Emphasis in original.

Table 3.3  
Schedule of *Prestations*, Rubi Zone, Uele, 1907-1911

REQUISITION	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911
Rubber (metric tons)	220	151	100	222	197
Bananas (thousands of bunches)		932	8,821	8,967	
Manioc (metric tons)		1,068	7,,824	7,001	
Chikwange loaves (thousands)			1,320		
Corn (metric tons)		915	243	400	
Rice, unhulled (metric tons)		206	192	78	
Fish (thousands)		20	4	2	
Palm oil (thousands of liters)		93	94	32	
Labor: (thousands of hours)					
for road maintenance			885	249	412
for transport			7,743	7,390	8,505
for other purposes			232	10	200
Total hours of labor (thousands)	NA	7,105	8,860	7,649	9,117

*Source:* MRAC 50.30.542: Zone du Rubi, Rôle général des prestations dues par les indigènes pendant l'année, 1909, 1910, 1911.

these simple demands for supplies and routine labor. In areas like Kivu in the early years of the century it may not have been too burdensome, although the records show that the burdens fell especially heavily on those communities most accessible to the government stations. In other areas a much smaller population might find itself having to supply much larger demands. For example, provisioning the 2,000-man military camp at Lisala on the middle Congo, which served the eastern Congo, imposed a severe burden on the thinly-populated surrounding area.<sup>86</sup>

In the vast northern territories of Uele requisitions of food were supposed to be used only to feed African employees; the white employees were instructed to buy their food at local markets. In fact, such markets were generally coerced.<sup>87</sup> Because of the traditional

<sup>86</sup>Michell to Nightingale, 26 December 1906, in *PP*, Africa N° 1 (1907), p.65; Shaw, "Force Publique," p.295, citing AA, H(836): Camp de Lisala, Rapport trimestriel de la Commission d'Hygiène, fourth quarter 1907.

<sup>87</sup>Cf. Rapport mensuel, Zone de la Gurba-Dungu, August 1908, AA, AI(1371)65; Rapports mensuels sur le recrutement des prestations, Zone de Rubi, 1909, MRAC



gender division of labor the work of supplying such markets fell primarily or even exclusively on females.<sup>88</sup> For example, women from villages near the Yambuya station on the lower Aruwimi were each required to bring sixty rolls of *kwanga* (manioc bread) every Saturday, a task that kept them very busy and for which they were not paid, although the local chief received four pieces of cloth.<sup>89</sup>

When it came to transport, the reforms of 1906 had a number of effects. One of the most significant was the impetus they gave to improving the eastern Congo's meager system of roads. By the last years of the Free State's rule it was accepted that the economic development of the eastern half of the colony depended on the creation of an adequate transportation system, that the limited trade and taxation in kind already existing were already imposing too great a burden on human carriers, and that vast sums would have to be spent to build motor roads and railroads.<sup>90</sup> But the changes were slow in coming.

To alleviate one transportation bottleneck the colony decided to build a motor road from Buta to Bambili above the rapids on the Uele river 216 km away. Labor was raised by conscription from the surrounding zones under a decree of "public utility." During 1906 desertions ran so high that there were fears "the great majority" might abandon the site, a situation dealt with by raising still more workers in the same fashion.<sup>91</sup> Some sixty-two kilometers were complete in early 1909 and another twenty-five by the end of 1910, but the entire road was not finished until the start of the war. The completed portions were less useful than expected because of shortages of fuel and an unstable surface during the rainy season. In 1910 the government announced plans for a narrow-gauge railroad instead—a project that would not see completion for another quarter century.<sup>92</sup>

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50.30.256; Olav Svihus, Rapport d'une reconnaissance (1909), Asa, 2 January 1910, MRAC 50.30.545; Armstrong, "Report on Uele," p.26.

<sup>88</sup>For example, in the Zone de Rubi in 1910 men were required to provide portage and roadwork, women bananas and manioc: Chef de Poste, Bima, au Chef de Zone, 21 April 1909, MRAC 50.30.542. However, elsewhere in Uele even the roadwork was done "almost exclusively" by women. See Armstrong, "Report on Uele," p.25.

<sup>89</sup>"Report by Consul Mackie-1911," FO 403/425 in N° 85, p.142.

<sup>90</sup>"Rapport au Roi," *BO.EIC 1906*, p.196; "Rapport au Roi," *BOEIC 1907*, pp.156-57.

<sup>91</sup>*Tribune Congolaise*, 6 September 1906; summaries of letters from the vice-governor general of the PO, 29 September and 1 October 1906, AA, IRCB (722)73/II.

<sup>92</sup>RACB 1910, p.92. See below chapters 5 and 6.

In the southern part of the region the burden of portage remained high. A British acting vice-consul who toured Maniema in the summer of 1907 reported that practically every male in the villages just south of Kasongo had to spend fourteen days a month in portage. His account of their complaints suggests what these long-suffering individuals never bothered to complain about:

The general complaint of the natives of this group is, firstly, that their pay is insufficient, and secondly, that it is irregular. Moreover, they state that the wages due to carriers who die en route are not given to their relatives. These natives think that they ought to get 2 dotis [a month] instead of 1.5 dotis.<sup>93</sup>

For a time starting in late 1906, when the steamer *Dhanis* was out of service on the Lualaba, efforts were made to supply Kivu via East Africa,<sup>94</sup> but the relief, if any, seems to have been slight and was in any event interrupted by the First World War.

The requisitioning of porters was suppressed late in 1906 with paid full-time laborers being used instead, although road and telegraph maintenance was to be done by part-time "volunteers." On a long tour of Upper Ituri zone early in 1909 the British consul found numerous abuses still operating: carriers and canoemen were underpaid or not paid at all by officials, canoes were requisitioned as tax and paid for at rates well below their values.<sup>95</sup>

Although the new Belgian administration in 1908 promised reforms, the task was immense and the financial restrictions difficult to overcome. Meanwhile, reports accumulated about portage from local agents, detailing high volume, poor conditions, and low wages. After a tour of his vast territory after the Belgian takeover in 1908, an administrator fresh from a tour of his territory reported that everywhere there was "a real fatigue among the natives in regard to portage," a problem that only grew worse during the next fifteen years.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>PP, Africa, N° 1 (1908), "Report by Acting Vice-Consul Beak on his recent Tour of the Katanga portion of the Congo Free State," p.17. A dhoti was worth about 6 fr.

<sup>94</sup>AA, AE(342)521(2), Commissioner of the PO to GG, 24 August 1908, pp.16-17; RACB 1909, p.255.

<sup>95</sup>Michell to Nightingale, Stanleyville, 27 September 1906, PP, Africa N° 1 (1907) in N° 29; "Rapport au Roi, 1906," BOEIC 1906, pp.187-88; Campbell, "Report on... Aruwimi and Haut Ituri," 1909, FO 403/410 in N° 43, p.66.

<sup>96</sup>MRAC 50.30.44, Rapport général, zone du Rubi, December 1908.

## Wage Labor

Despite the greater significance of labor exactions, conscription, and other forms of forced labor, the number of Africans working for wages in the eastern Congo was increasing during this period. Under the law of 8 November 1888 labor contracts had to be written, cover a period of no more than seven years, and carry the seal (*visa*) of a competent official certifying that the African understood the terms and consented to them. An important motive for signing labor contracts during this period was to escape from the *prestations* and other labor demands that fell on those living in traditional communities. Thus, the reason for the large number of wage-earners from Uele found throughout the Congo, was related to the portage demands which grew increasingly heavy from 1897 and the subsequent conscription of laborers by the hundreds for the Buta-Bambili motor road.<sup>97</sup> In other places men joined the Force Publique or signed labor contracts to escape from rubber exactions.<sup>98</sup> In so doing, some at least found themselves going from the frying pan into the fire. Yaya, a whitewasher in Stanleyville, for example, agreed to a six-year contract at the beginning of 1900, but he told the Commission of Inquiry that he had received a written contract only in mid-1904 and that the contract had been officially certified only in January 1905 (on the eve of the Commission's arrival). On that latter occasion he had decided not to raise the issue of the insufficiency of his wages after seeing those just ahead of him whipped after making demands for higher pay. In explaining the whippings the official responsible, Léon van der Broek, testified that he regarded such protests as having "the character of a revolt."<sup>99</sup>

One very notable consequence of the limitation on impressed labor imposed by the reforms of 1906 was the large increase in the number of paid state employees. Statistics for the region have not survived, but table 3.4 gives a good idea of the size and distribution of the state work force in one important district at the end of this period (not

<sup>97</sup>Rapport sur le recrutement de la main-d'œuvre indigène, Bas Uele, N° 3554, Buta, 18 October 1918, MRAC 50.30.555.

<sup>98</sup>See Olaf Andreas Lund, testimony to the Commission of Inquiry, procès verbal N° 327, Basoko, 17 January 1905, AA, AE(350)528.

<sup>99</sup>AA, AE(350)528, procès verbaux N° 340 and 344, 24 January 1905; see related testimony in procès verbaux N° 341 and 352.

Table 3.4  
State Employees in Zones of the Uele District, 1907-1909

EMPLOYMENT	Uere-Bili Nov. 1907	Rubi Dec. 1910	Gurba-Dungu Jan. 1909	Bomokandi Jan. 1909	Total
Agriculture Service	86	198	71	193	548
Domaine National	53		23	179	255
General Service	72	137	119	147	475
canoemen	150	207	11	249	617
couriers, escorts	46	241	104	89	480
guards, servants, etc.	<u>64</u>	<u>215</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>74</u>	<u>413</u>
Total African staff	471	998	388	931	2,788
European staff	23	37	22	28	110

Sources: Rapports mensuels, AA, AI(1371)25, (1372)86, 91; MRAC 50.30.543.

including those at work on roads or in other special categories such as the Force Publique and the Kilo mines).

An important category of wage labor was the soldier-police of the Force Publique, which depended heavily on recruits from the eastern Congo. From the end of the Zanzibari wars to the beginning of the First World War, this region regularly supplied between 40 and 50 percent of the new recruits in most years, a contribution that enabled the Force Publique to end its dependence on foreign recruits by 1900. Overall from 1892 to 1914 the eastern Congo furnished 27,802 recruits, 42 percent of the domestic recruits in the Congo.<sup>100</sup> Within the eastern Congo recruitment was not proportional to the distribution of the population. Densely populated Kivu, which was not under effective control until the First World War, appears to have furnished no recruits at all until 1908. Most of the region's recruits came from Upper Uele, Aruwimi, and Maniema.<sup>101</sup>

In the early years of the Free State many of these were prisoners and ex-slaves taken in the wars against the Zanzibari.<sup>102</sup> Beginning in

<sup>100</sup>F. Flament, ed. *La Force Publique de sa naissance à 1914: participation des militaires à l'histoire des premières années du Congo* (Brussels: IRCB, 1952), p.509.

<sup>101</sup>Conseil Colonial, CRA 1913/14, pp.758-59; Cattier, *Droit et administration*, p.261; AA,D(387)2, Wahis aux CDs, Boma, 1 September 1892.

<sup>102</sup>Not surprisingly there were reports of rebelliousness among these *arabisés*; "Rapport au Roi-Souverain," 15 August 1900, BOEIC 1900, p.132-34.

July 1891, the government began conscription of Congolese militiamen, aimed at reducing the dependence on foreign Africans. In theory the recruits were chosen by lot by their African chiefs, but in practice the chiefs filled their quotas from among the weak and friendless under their control, including substantial numbers of domestic slaves and prisoners of war. Thus, to the numbers of freedmen serving a sort of apprenticeship in the military were added substantial numbers of other ex-slaves. The line between them was further blurred in September 1892 when the term "freedman" (*libéré*) was officially suppressed, "militiaman" being used for both the freedmen and the new recruits. Recruits from the eastern Congo were especially valued, notably those from Upper Uele, Aruwimi, and Maniema. Many were conscripts handed over by the African chiefs as part of their duties to the state and in return for a recruitment bonus.

Despite a reputation for harsh and arbitrary discipline, including whipping, the Force Publique did attract many true volunteers, who in theory could choose to serve for as little as two years, though such short terms were discouraged. In the Rubi zone of Uele, for example, service in the Force Publique had become so attractive by the end of this period that contracts guaranteeing subsequent enlistment in the Force Publique were an effective way of recruiting labor for local and distant projects.<sup>103</sup> After five years of active duty recruits who had not re-enlisted became part of the reserve and were settled around government posts to raise crops and do other work. In Uele, where these reserve forces were particularly numerous, they were routinely listed in the monthly reports along with European and African employees. At the end of the Free State period there were over 700 ex-soldiers around the posts of Uere-Bili zone, 562 in Bomokandi zone, and 103 in Gurba-Dungu zone.<sup>104</sup> There were probably equally large numbers in Rubi zone, but the records have not survived.

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<sup>103</sup>MRAC 50.30.58: Landeghem to GG, Buta, 6 February 1911 and 27 September 1911; MRAC 50.30.67: vice-governor general to head of Rubi zone, Boma, 20 February 1911, promising four-year terms in the Force Publique to 100 workers recruited for labor in Boma; for complaints of whipping see AA, AE(350)528, procès-verbaux N<sup>o</sup> 335-37, Stanleyville, 22 January 1905.

<sup>104</sup>AA, AI(1371)25, Rapport mensuel, November 1907, Uere-Bili; AI(1372)86, rapport mensuel, January 1909, Bomokandi; AI(1372)77, rapport mensuel, October 1908, Gurba-Dungu. In the Uvira zone of Kivu fifty-nine former soldiers were living around the administrative posts; SKU, Rapport mensuel, Uvira, January 1909.

As has been seen, the Force Publique served a vital role in forcing the payment of prestations; another important role was in providing a work force. The process began unofficially with conscripts for the Force Publique being directed to other tasks, at times with the promise of becoming regular soldiers later. These "soldier-workers" were joined by others conscripted through the chiefs to work on projects such as the Lower Congo railroad from 1890 and the Stanleyville-Ponthierville section of the CFL from 1902. Several victims of these practices were interviewed by the Commission of Inquiry of 1904-5,<sup>105</sup> which concluded that few of the 3,000 workers on the Stanleyville-Ponthierville railroad had been informed of the terms of their employment or were in possession of the contracts required by the law of 1888. The Commissioners noted, "It is rare that a free man signs up with the State of his own initiative.... Very often then, to obtain laborers, there has been recourse to compulsion and the chiefs are obliged to furnish laborers as they furnish soldiers."<sup>106</sup>

Another reform decree of 3 June 1906 legalized the continued conscription for five-year terms of labor for works of public utility as had been done since 1891 in the case of "soldier-workers" in the Force Publique.<sup>107</sup> This provision was found particularly useful in the Province Orientale which furnished 3,900 of the 9,025 recruited for this purpose in the Colony from 1906 to 1909. Some of these were put to use building the motor roads across Uele, an activity which employed 850 soldier-workers in 1908, while a larger number were recruited to work on the railbeds of the CFL's second section (Kindu-Kongolo), for which the State had agreed to provide the labor. The workers were paid quite modest wages, beginning at one dhoti a month in their first year and rising to three per month as they gained experience. They were well fed despite the strain that so large a contingent put on local supplies. When the initial five-year contracts of the conscripts expired, many of them renewed their contracts voluntarily.<sup>108</sup> By 1908 the CFL employed 5,560 workers, of whom

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<sup>105</sup>AA, AE(349-350)528, Commission d'Enquête, Dispositions, N<sup>o</sup> 338 and 345.

<sup>106</sup>Janssens, "Rapport," pp.257-59.

<sup>107</sup>BOEIC 1891, pp.230-32, decree of 30 July 1891.

<sup>108</sup>BOEIC 1908, annex, pp.91-99; Michell to Nightingale, 25 May 1906 and 27 November 1906, *PP*, Africa N<sup>o</sup> 1 (1907), pp.28, 60; Beak to Nightingale, 8 May 1907 and Michell to Cromie, 23 September 1907, *PP*, Africa N<sup>o</sup> 1 (1908), pp.11-13, 45-46. Food had to be brought in from lake Kivu for the railroad workers at prices the Kivu

3,665 were conscripts and 1,895 were volunteers, and the Uele roads employed 850, most of whom were conscripts. The first extension of this recruitment for public utility after the Belgian takeover gave rise to a vigorous debate in the Colonial Council, led by H. Speyer, a professor at the University of Brussels, who argued that such recruitment was a violation of the second article of the Colonial Charter which forbade anyone being forced to work for private companies or individuals. Speyers' position was a distinct minority on the Colonial Council in January 1909, but in April the Belgian Chamber of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution asking that free labor be substituted for these conscripts on the CFL as soon as possible and in January 1910, after a tour of the railroad construction sites, the minister of colonies was able to announce that no more labor would be recruited for public utility for the CFL.<sup>109</sup>

The situation in the Lomami valley was more complex. There the Lomami Company, created by the Katanga Company in 1898 to buy products in the Lomami valley, controlled a vast concession so completely that the State did not even collect taxes. In 1904, to halt the flight of Africans from the neighboring ABIR concession, the State directed the Lomami Company to collect taxes for it in their concession as well. Conditions in the Lomami concession at that time were far from ideal. One colonial official, Commandant Verhaege, charged that Africans in the concession were forced to work so much for the Company that they had no time to tend their own fields, so that there were frequent revolts and bloody counter measures.<sup>110</sup> A few months later an assistant attorney general, Manlio Scarpari, told the Commission of Inquiry of a lengthy on-site investigation he had made of the company. He found some parts of the concession in good order, but

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authorities complained were destroying their efforts to fix wages and prices. AA, IRCB(722)73/II, Rapport politique, Ruzzi-Kivu, first quarter 1905. Problems of food supply continued to be acute; see: Michell to Nightingale, 23 March 1907 and Michell to Cromie. 23 September 1907, in *PP*, Africa N° 1 (1908). See Free State replies in AA, AE(342)521bis.

<sup>109</sup>Conseil Colonial, CRA 1908-9, pp.52-68, 211; 1909, p.251; 1910, 1:9. When the conscription was abrogated in 1910 and salaries began to be paid in cash, the number of volunteers increased sharply, reaching 84 percent in 1910 and 100 percent in 1911; RACB 1910, p.84; 1911, p.77.

<sup>110</sup>AA, IRCB(722)73/I, lettre N° 313, 27 February 1904 (precis). The GG added that if the company didn't made radical changes there would be a really serious revolt.

others, including the important site of Opala, had serious infractions. At Isanga wages were "excessively low," the employees underage, and without valid contracts. He charged his report had only got him in trouble with the head of Aruwimi.<sup>111</sup> Another revolt did occur in the second quarter of 1905.<sup>112</sup> However, a tour of the concession by the British consul early in 1907, escorted by the new reform-minded director of the company, Paul le Marinel, produced a very favorable impression. Since his arrival in July 1906 the new director had insisted on absolutely voluntary labor in return for payment in a brass rod currency he had introduced himself in the absence of any Free State coinage this far upriver. The vice-consul called it "free trade," but a senior official commented it was nothing of the sort, being work not trade and not all that voluntary in any case.<sup>113</sup> As events in the next decade would demonstrate, this attempt at reform, while sincere, did not fundamentally change the company's tradition of labor abuse.

Another center of wage labor that would in time be the region's largest was developing in the northeastern corner of the Congo near lake Albert. In 1905 the government had begun gold mining operations at a site known as Kilo. The area was very mountainous, unserved by transportation routes until 1908 when an ox cart road was opened, and proved unhealthy for Africans from other areas. To alleviate the very difficult recruitment of labor, the governor general late in 1905 authorized conscription under the "public utility" provisions of the law. The rising controversy over the colony's labor policies led Brussels to disallow this recruitment and to assign a senior magistrate to the Upper Ituri zone to ensure that mine labor contracts were freely entered in. The governor general asked that these reforms be delayed to avoid disrupting the mining and pleaded with his superiors in Brussels to restore the right to recruit labor by force, since, he argued, "There can be no illusion over the difficulty that there will be to enlist for these works without having recourse to compulsion."<sup>114</sup> The outcome of this appeal is unknown, but it appears that, when the mining area was transferred from the direct administration of the colony to

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<sup>111</sup>AA, AE(349)528, procès-verbal N° 18, 22 October 1904.

<sup>112</sup>AA, IRCB(722)73/I, letter of 29 August 1906.

<sup>113</sup>Michell to Cromie, 1 March 1907, *PP*, Africa N° 1 (1908), pp.2-3; AA, AE(342)521, remarks of CD, Uele, annexed to letter of the GG, 3 August 1908.

<sup>114</sup>AA, IRCB(722)73/II, 29 September 1906.



Leopold's *Domaine de la Couronne*, labor was again recruited under the "public utility" provisions until April 1907.<sup>115</sup>

According to the British vice-consul the labor force at Kilo during these early years consisted of "criminals, cannibals, 'revoltés' and 'recrutés'..., including some riffraff who had been made to work on the Ponthierville railway, but had proved too unruly."<sup>116</sup> Conditions were harsh, food in very short supply and corporal punishment the rule. However, the vice-consul found that matters had improved dramatically under Belgian rule with good wages, abundant food, and the abolition of corporal punishment (whipping) making voluntary recruitment easy. By May 1909 the number of mine workers had risen to 1,400 from 800 a year earlier.<sup>117</sup> These reforms also did not last.

### Motivating Labor

During the years of its administration, the Free State brought Africans forcibly into a market economy, yet it did little to create a free market in labor. In place of the Zanzibari's slavery and tribute, the Free State created a system of forced labor and forced requisitions in goods. The negative effects of these *prestations* on labor recruitment were felt in three main areas: (1) the depression of real earnings because labor was often paid in arbitrary assortments of overvalued goods, (2) the depression of wage rates generally, but especially for government employees, and (3) shortages (especially of food) resulting from disincentives to local markets because of these low wages.

The payment of wages in kind, instead of in currency, was bound up with the State's dominance of the economy generally. With the State as the principal market for goods and labor and the principal source of payment, it made sense (at least to the bookkeepers) not to

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<sup>115</sup>Engh (Chef de zone du Haut Ituri) au Commissaire Général de la PO, 20 May 1909, AA, AE(344)522, p.5.

<sup>116</sup>Campbell, "Report on...Aruwimi and Haut Ituri," FO 403/410 in N° 43, pp.59-91. See E.D. Morel, Congo Reform Association, to Sir Edward Grey, Liverpool, 14 July 1908, FO 403/400, N° 13, p.17, drawing attention to "the deplorable accounts which are to had from Belgian sources as to the systematic slave raids that are being conducted by the Congo Government in the Oriental Province..., to procure labour for the Kilo gold workings."

<sup>117</sup>RACB 1909, p.253.

intrude a money economy into the simpler system of direct exchange. Payment in kind tended to reinforce the state's control of the economy by depriving Africans of any loose change they might be tempted to spend on the baubles of itinerant peddlers. However, the system did not work smoothly. Surviving records from the Uele zones illustrate that the situation of that Africans often receiving inadequate remuneration, "sometimes...in goods of little local value," reported by the 1904-5 Commission of Inquiry, did not soon disappear.<sup>118</sup> For one thing, it was not uncommon for there to be shortages of goods. In April 1906, for example, a state inspector reported that at Rungu station there had been no goods in stock for seven months; another at Zobia station spoke of the "continuous lack of goods," in both cases making the regular payment of porters and canoemen impossible.<sup>119</sup> In other cases there were sufficient stocks but only of unwanted goods, as was the case in a station in Upper Ituri zone in January 1906 where 60 percent of the stock consisted of beads of no value or interest to the local inhabitants.<sup>120</sup> Even where there was an abundance and variety of goods, the individual worker, as a practical matter, had no hope of exercising the free choice of goods he was promised by law. As a British vice-consul noted: "It is impossible for a busy chef de poste to escort from 50 to 100 natives around the store, and they have to take what he gives them."<sup>121</sup> Finally, the values assigned to the goods was often artificially high, in practice making the already low wage rates even lower.<sup>122</sup>

The new Belgian Congo was pledged to alter this system, though little real change occurred until the next decade. Yet just as the Free State had long followed Zanzibari practices, this new administration also inherited patterns of behavior and attitudes from the Free State

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<sup>118</sup>Janssens, "Rapport d'enquête," p.166.

<sup>119</sup>Rapport d'Inspection, Poste de Rungu, Zone de Bomokandi, April 1906, AA, IRCB(722)73/II; Rapport sur l'inspection du Poste de Zobia, transports, 10 February 1911, MRAC 50.30.1.

<sup>120</sup>Rapport par M. Lund d'un inspection, 2 May 1906, AA, IRCB(722)73/II.

<sup>121</sup>Campbell, "Report on...Aruwimi and Haut Ituri," p.67. See the records of payments in kind to individual workers in the Buta station, Rubi zone, in October and November 1911, which exhibit very standardized assortments of Americani cloth, belts, spools of thread, needles, pieces of *coteline*, glasses, and indigo cloth; MRAC 50.30.517.

<sup>122</sup>Cf. Armstrong, "Report on Uele," pp.22-23.

that would not change easily. One of the main legacies was the tendency to ignore the problems caused by a lack of incentive and freedom in the labor system and to blame the Africans instead for the failings of the system. Throughout this period, when called upon to justify the extension of this quasi-feudal economy (with its emphasis on direct obligations in labor and goods and its resistance to a money economy), the colonial authorities had a ready answer: the African must be brought out of his native indolence and taught the value of work. They argued that a concise, non-monetary political economy was a necessary first step in this process of transformation.

How long the process need last was a difficult question—some would still be talking publicly in those same terms in the 1950s! Clearly, coercion and restriction of economic choice suited purposes far beyond and far less idealistic than this civilizing mission. Thus, reform came slowly and reluctantly, more in response to external political pressures than to the dynamics of the internal process of "education" underway in the colony. Indeed, pressures from below for moving on to the next stage, seemed to trouble administrators not please them. For example, in March 1909, an official circular replied to inquiries from puzzled local administrators as to how they were to deal with Africans who wanted to produce more rubber than their tax quotas. The vice-governor general explained that the government was in favor of voluntary labor "in principle," but his description of the free market was identical to tax collection: voluntary labor should be paid at the same low rate as remuneration for the rubber tax and chiefs should likewise receive the standard indemnity of 5 percent of the value. Why this peculiar model of a "free market" economy? The vice-governor's explanation showed his preference for labor that was more cheap than free: "Thus, in rewarding voluntary labor at a rate above that of the tax, we would risk *artificially* raising the local salary rate and giving an *unjustified* increment to the products of native industry."<sup>123</sup> The British vice-consul was of the opposite opinion; he declared, "Give the native the opportunity of freely earning money and he will be only too glad to get the quit of his obligation to the State by the payment of 2 fr per month."<sup>124</sup> That cry too would be

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<sup>123</sup>Vice-governor general, circular N° 2074, Boma, 17 March 1909, MRAC 50.30.66; emphasis added.

<sup>124</sup>Michell to Nightingale, 23 March 1907, *PP*, Africa N° 1 (1908) in N° 2.

heard in reports for the next five years.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Cf. "Memorandum respecting Taxation and Currency in the Congo Free State," Foreign Office, 27 March 1908, *PP*, Africa N° 3 (1908)

## Chapter 4

### Belgium's Bad Beginnings, 1910-1919

When it reluctantly agreed to take over responsibility for the Congo in September 1908, the Belgian Parliament laid down two ground rules. The first was a pledge of major reforms embodied in the Colonial Charter; the second was a refusal to subsidize the costs of reform and administration from the national treasury. Uniquely among African colonies of this era, the Belgian Congo was to be self-supporting. Thus the reforms and the economic development that had to accompany them had to depend on the funds that the government could raise from taxation and secure from private investors, with all the limitations inherent in these sources. Another constraint on the new Congo government was the fact that it did not begin with a clean slate. Belgium had no national tradition or theory of colonialism, but it did inherit most of the Free State's personnel and paternalistic attitudes toward Africans along with the colony's enormous problems.<sup>1</sup> So it is not surprising that the implementation of reform in the early years of Belgian rule was severely limited by the constraints of personnel, finance, and ideology that were built into the new government. In the eastern Congo the legal restructuring of King Leopold's colony began to take effect only in 1910. The First World War caused a serious interruption of these preliminary reform efforts. The German occupation of Belgium in August 1914 forced its government to operate from exile in London. The colony remained secure, despite some audacious German incursions into Kivu at the beginning of the war. In 1916 Belgium launched an invasion of German East Africa. As the colonial army grew to 25,000 men, rice production in the eastern Congo had to be increased dramatically to feed them. Simul-

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<sup>1</sup>Anstey, *King Leopold's Legacy*, pp.40-43.

taneously the province's gold production was increased as part of an effort to fund the war effort.<sup>2</sup> However, all this was accomplished at a terrible cost in human exertion. The number of Africans in military service, portering, mining, and cash crop production increased dramatically, as did the use of force in their recruitment. The compensation these Africans received remained low. Thus the decade saw the return of some of the worst features of the Free State era.

### Administration and Policy

Between 1910 and 1913 the eastern Congo took on the political shape it maintained for the next two decades. Part of the change involved finalizing the Congo's external frontiers. In May and June of 1910, some months after the death of King Leopold, the frontiers with the British and German colonies to the east were settled. As had been agreed previously, the Lado enclave was surrendered to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan; the eastern border was redrawn to correspond to natural frontiers, running through the middle of lakes Albert, Edward, and Kivu. This added territory west of lake Albert but deleted much more east of lake Kivu.<sup>3</sup> At the same time internal changes were coming about as the consequence of reform efforts intended at restructuring the Congo into smaller, more responsive units of administration. Late in 1910 the giant old Eastern Province was divided along the fifth parallel south, the northern half becoming Stanleyville District, which in September 1911 was subdivided into five zones. In March 1912 these five zones were redesignated as the districts of Ituri, Kivu, Lowa, Maniema, and Stanleyville, and by a decree in November the next year they were combined with the old districts of Aruwimi and Uele (the latter divided into Upper and Lower divisions) to form a new Eastern Province, headed by a vice-governor general.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Jacques Crokaert, "Le développement économique du Congo Belge pendant la guerre," *Revue Economique Internationale*, (April 1921), pp.1-16. Overall colonial exports tripled between 1914 and 1917.

<sup>3</sup>Jacques Willequet, *Le Congo Belge et la Weltpolitik 1894-1914* (Brussels: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1962), pp.227-76.

<sup>4</sup>Vandewoude, *Documents...du Kivu*, pp.12-13; RACB 1912, p.67; RACB 1915, p.5; G. W. Prothero, ed., *British Possessions, II; the Congo*. Great Britain, Foreign Office, Historical Section, Peace Handbooks, vol. 16, N°96-99 (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1920), 98:33, 99:51.

Another thorny issue of administration concerned the quality of colonial agents, especially at the lower ranks. To many observers changes in this area seemed fundamental to a general program of reform. Thus the British foreign secretary found it "extraordinary that the Belgian government should fail to comprehend the elementary importance of showing the world by the choice of new men that their new measures [were] a reality."<sup>5</sup> Some individuals were disciplined or removed, but in general the personnel of the Free State stayed on.<sup>6</sup> The top administration of the Eastern Province remained entirely in the hands of former Free State agents, notably Justin Malfeyt, who served as vice-governor general from March 1909 to July 1916, and Adolphe de Meulemeester, who held that post from August 1917 until the middle of the next decade.<sup>7</sup> During the critical year in between, the province was in the able hands of Aléxis Bertrand, another old hand who had been in the colonial service since 1897.<sup>8</sup> In time even

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<sup>5</sup>FO 403/418: Grey to Granville, FO, 6 July 1910. An example of Belgian opinion occurred in this exchange during a January 9, 1912, meeting of the Colonial Council (CRA 1911-12, pp.171-72): Minister of Colonies (J. Renkin): "I don't doubt that the quality of the *chefs de poste* can be improved, I am giving that question every attention...." Mr. Diderrich: "We all know that the *chefs de poste* occupy the lowest level of the administrative hierarchy. The character of many of them is totally inferior and that results especially from the conditions under which they are recruited." M. Vauthier: "It seems to me that information received from many sources indicates that many *chefs de poste* are unequal to their duties..." Minister of Colonies (breaking in): "Excuse me... We cannot forget that in short the *chefs de poste* made the Congo. There are efforts today, I don't know why, to give them an odious reputation." The minister did not seem to have appreciated the irony of his last remarks.

<sup>6</sup>For example, a minor official in Uele was strongly taken to task for neglecting his duties, abusing his authority, and devoting all his efforts to ensuring his own comfort; André Jacques Landeghem (chef de Zone du Rubi) to Vandergoten (chef de poste, Titule), Bima, 28 March 1911. Landeghem (1876-1943), who had headed Buta zone in 1906-9 before taking over charge of Rubi, was commissioner general of Uele from 1912 to 1922.

<sup>7</sup>From 1895 to 1903 Malfeyt (1862-1903) had variously served as head of Stanley Falls, commissioner general of the Eastern Province, and head of Kivu; see his entry (by A. Engels) in *BCB*, III:588-92. De Meulemeester had served as commissioner general in 1903-6.

<sup>8</sup>Bertrand (1870-1946) had served as an officer in Lado and as head of the Ubangi and Equator districts in the northwest. Deeply troubled by the turmoil over the Free State, Bertrand had spent some months prowling his district preoccupied with finding a proper African policy. The new minister of colonies reportedly considered him "a dedicated 'humanitarian,' and strongly—perhaps too strongly—'pro-native'"; FO 403-425, N°59: Sir Arthur Hardinge to Sir Edward Grey, Brussels, 8 March 1911.

the British consular officials in the Congo became convinced that replacing local officials was less significant than removing the unreasonable pressures they had been under in putting a stop to the old abuses.<sup>9</sup>

The major thrust of the reform effort was to correct the scandalous impressment of labor and goods. However, devising a tax system which was free from the abuses of the Leopoldian regime was no easy matter. Before one could tax in coin, currency had to be introduced, something that had never been done in the eastern Congo. Then it was necessary to provide mechanisms for putting cash into Africans' hands so that some part of it could be reclaimed as tax. For some Africans wage employment for the government, missions, and private firms could provide this income, but for most the money for tax would have to come from the sale of crops, animal products, and forest products. In order to make the sale of wild products (particularly rubber) possible in turn, it was necessary to dismantle the *Domaine Privé*. Legislation in 1909 had divided the *Domaine* into three zones where the government's claim to wild products was to be relinquished successively in mid 1910, 1911, and 1912. The eastern Congo, except for the Gurba-Dungu zone of Uele, was within the latter two zones.<sup>10</sup> As their zones were freed, Africans were able to harvest and sell wild products as well as those from their own fields and herds.

Another reform after the Belgian takeover was the raising of nominal wages. Beginning in the second half of 1910 the minimum monthly wage for government employees (except for those in agri-

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In 1909 he was made head of the vast Uele district and in 1913 had become second in command in the province as the commissioner general; Musée Royal de l'Armée, Brussels, dossier personnel N<sup>o</sup>11816, Aléxis-Felicien Bertrand; "Le commandant d'artillerie Bertrand," *Belgique Militaire*, 2(1910):548-49; H. V., "Nos Grands coloniaux: le Colonel Bertrand," *La Neptune* (Antwerp), 25 May 1924.

<sup>9</sup>Consul H. G. Mackie to Sir Edward Grey, Boma, 30 May 1911, FO 403/425 N<sup>o</sup>85, pp.119-20; Consul W. J. Lamont, "Report on a Tour of Upper Congo: Section II. Report on the Third Zone Opened to Free Trade, July 1, 1912, Aruwimi and Uele Districts," in Lamont to Grey, Boma, 20 November 1912, FO 403/443 N<sup>o</sup>1, p.17.

<sup>10</sup>RACB 1910, pp.231-32. The British consul was of the opinion that the early relinquishing of claims in Gurba-Dungu was based on the Congo administration's plan to open up "to free-trade areas which it knew to be quite worthless while reserving for itself every inch of territory of any value"; Armstrong, "Report on Uele," p. 25. This judgment seems unduly harsh, although the choice is puzzling.



culture, public works, and the Force Publique) became 4.50 fr (plus rations), an increase of about 50 percent in Uele and Kivu.<sup>11</sup> Even after the reforms, wage rates remained low, especially with regard to food allowances, which stayed at ten centimes a day (3 fr a month).

In addition to the gradual abolition of the government's trading monopoly and the introduction of taxes and wages in currency, the decade beginning in 1910 also saw other important changes in the legal underpinnings of the labor situation. Basic was the comprehensive decree of 17 August 1910 concerning labor contracts, which replaced older, vaguer legislation that had been enforced laxly if at all. The 1910 law limited the duration of any labor contract to three years (instead of seven) and enumerated the circumstances under which either contracting party could legally break a contract, as well as the penalties for an illegal violation of the terms of a contract. Where currency had been introduced, wages were to be paid in cash. Contracts of more than three months had to be written and the consent of the worker certified with an official *visa* by a proper official. The new law had authorized only fines and detention as punishment for violation of contracts by Africans, but special ordinances permitted the Kilo-Moto mines to impose physical punishments on their employees so long as this was specified in their labor contracts.<sup>12</sup>

To find ways of resolving the growing shortage of labor in the public and private sectors the government created provincial and district recruitment commissions. The Eastern Province's commission met for the first time in December 1918, though none of the district commissioners was able to attend, because of the press of duties and restrictions on travel due to the influenza epidemic.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Vice-Gouverneur Fuchs, Circulaire N°3078, Boma, 22 April 1910, MRAC 50.30.67.

<sup>12</sup>AA, MOI(3605)176, ordinances of 14 March 1911 (Kilo) and 2 April 1911 (Moto). The absence of such legislation for the Katanga mines was no obstacle to the same punishments being inflicted there, since the officials looked the other way, at least until 1917 when high officials began to argue that such punishments could not be imposed without a change in the law. Curiously, when it came to a vote in 1918, the measure was overwhelmingly defeated, the majority expressing a preference for using the head tax as the principal goad to recruitment. AA, MOI(3605)176, Rutten (Procureur Général) to Vice-Governor General (Katanga), Elisabethville, 24 May 1917; Chef de Cabinet, pour Ministre, au GG, 22 September 1917; AA, MOI(3605)175, Conseil du Gouvernement, 6<sup>e</sup> réunion, 7<sup>e</sup> séance, Kinshasa, 23 September 1918, question 26.

<sup>13</sup>Ordinance of 22 April 1918 in *BACB 1918*, pp.293-95; AA, MOI(3598)132,

The difficulty the Belgian Congo had in collecting taxes during this decade clearly illustrates how ineffectively it controlled Africans in the eastern Congo. The colony had to draw up tax rolls before the essentially communal taxes in goods and labor could be replaced by a head tax on adult males. Yet by the end of 1919 the colony officially estimated that it had failed even to identify over a fifth of its population, much less collect taxes from them.<sup>14</sup> The Eastern Province contained about half of this unenumerated population, most notably in Maniema, where in 1921 a third of the population was estimated to have been missed, and in Kivu, where two-thirds was not on the tax roles.<sup>15</sup> A semi-official history of the territory around the district capital Costermansville (Bukavu) in 1911 eloquently captured the precarious state of affairs in Kivu :

The political situation becomes worse and worse as the whole sector falls back into insubmission. In January Catholic missionaries are attacked by Katana's people; in February Kabare and Ngweshe ravage the subdued regions. The invested chief Moliri is assassinated by the rebels in March; in April the chief Ngweshe provokes disruptions, killing and wounding numerous natives; in May Scrutton's prospecting mission, which is operating at the edge of Mogange's and Ngweshe's chiefdoms, is attacked in turn.... During all the rest of the year there is complete anarchy in all the groups, even those which have been subdued for a long time.<sup>16</sup>

The war did not end insubmission in Kivu but it did bring more force to bear.<sup>17</sup>

### From Labor Tax to Taxed Labor in the Government Sector

Implementation of the reform measures was slow and difficult. Until the new taxes were in place, the old *prestations* in goods and services remained in effect, and given the administration's need to sustain essential services without increasing expenses, the abuses also

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Compte-rendu, Commission de Recrutement, PO, Stanleyville, 14 December 1918. The provincial commission did not meet again until 1927.

<sup>14</sup>RACB 1920, p.11.

<sup>15</sup>RACB 1921, p.81; see RACB 1922, pp.29, 64.

<sup>16</sup>"Histoire du Territoire de Costermansville," ca. 1921, document N°68 in Vandewoude, *Documents...Kivu*, p.448.

<sup>17</sup>See RACB 1918; RACB 1919, p.13.

remained. Thus, in 1911 English Baptist missionaries reported that Africans in the triangle between the lower Aruwimi and the Lualaba rivers were forced to gather rubber for two to three months at a time and were then sent out again after a month or less in their villages. The substance of these reports was confirmed in detail during an inspection by a British consul.<sup>18</sup> From mid-1912 when the rubber tax was officially ended everywhere in the eastern Congo, production fell sharply as most Africans refused to participate further in this dread enterprise and generally resisted the inducements offered by traders.<sup>19</sup> However, African labor could still be coerced by other direct measures and the indirect pressures of taxation in money. The government continued to intervene routinely to obtain laborers and food supplies for its posts and on behalf of other employers.

The transition from labor tax to paid labor can be followed in unusual detail through the extensive records surviving for Rubi zone of Lower Uele. There the labor tax, collected largely in the form of portage along the heavily traveled trails and rivers in that district, remained extensive throughout 1911. The number of carriers recruited each month at the post of Titule "weighed very heavily" since it equalled half the adult male population; porters on the Buta-Bambili route were "exhibiting much ill will as a result of extreme fatigue"; and at the end of the year troops had to be called out to collect porters (750 from a population of 1,541 adult men) in the fourteen villages of Bagbe.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Report by Consul Mackie," 30 May 1911, FO 403/425 in N<sup>o</sup>85, pp.140-43.

<sup>19</sup>See R. J. Purdon, "Report on a Tour of Stanleyville, Lowa, Maniema and a Portion of Aruwimi," FO 403/443 enclosed in N<sup>o</sup>6, Lamont to Grey, 16 December 1912, p.40, which notes the decline in Lowa; MRAC 50.30.60, acting chef de zone, Uere-Bili, to GG, Bondo, 10 May 1913, which records the failure of conferences and of commissions offered to African chiefs to revive interest at Bambili and Bondo; and MRAC 50.30.17, Heinzmann, Rapport général du mois d'avril 1915, Territoire de Buta, which says rubber (and ivory) would not appear in the Buta market without pressure being placed on the chiefs and suggests forcing tax delinquents to collect rubber as a remedy.

<sup>20</sup>MRAC 50.30.1, Rapport sur l'inspection du poste de Titule, 31 March 1911; MRAC 50.30.50, Chef de Zone du Rubi au GG, Ibembe, 2 June 1911; MRAC 50.30.427, Porteurs recrutés pendant le mois, 1911, zone de Rubi: in January 1911 Titule recruited 2,209 porters out of a male population of 4,300; the next month 2,374 were recruited. Recruitment for Titule had averaged 1,798 a month in 1909 and 1,838 a month in 1910; MRAC 50.30.470, Porteurs recrutés pendant le mois, 1909, 1910, Zone de Rubi. MRAC 50.30.308, "Rapport sur le recrutement de porteurs effectué chez les Bagbe,"

Such massive recruitment not only exhausted the carriers involved, but also depressed the wages of the smaller number of African carriers who worked for the government on regular contracts. They received less than two-thirds the wage paid by private firms in the area and their food allowances were well below what was needed to provide an adequate diet.<sup>21</sup> Concerned about being able to attract sufficient numbers of porters and canoemen when the compulsory labor of 480 hours a year was replaced by a money tax, the head of Rubi zone proposed raising wages and rations to the level paid by the private merchants. His proposal was rejected as likely to produce too big a drain on the treasury, but he was allowed to raise the ration to ten centimes a day.<sup>22</sup> When Uele passed into the free trade zone in 1912, salaries of ordinary laborers were fixed at 4.50 fr a month for the first two-year contract, 5.50 fr for the second, with the food allowance still at ten centimes a day.<sup>23</sup> This same wage scale remained in effect in Lower Uele for government employees at least until 1918.<sup>24</sup>

In effect the government chose to sustain its labor force through the push of taxation and direct compulsion where necessary, rather than by the pull of adequately attractive wages. In Uele, one official reported, the result of abolishing the labor tax and instituting a money tax that began at six francs was to reduce take-home pay. Lowered incomes also did widespread economic harm by making it nearly

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Buta, 3 December 1911.

<sup>21</sup>MRAC 50.30.58, Chef de zone du Rubi au GG, Djamba, 12 October 1911. As the head of Rubi zone explained in 1911: "As far as the payment of portage is concerned, it has not yet seemed necessary for us to raise the established wage up till now. Indeed, so long as we can...have recourse to the labor tax, nothing forces us to raise our rate of pay." Chef de zone du Rubi au GG, Buta, 18 July 1911, N°180/A, MRAC 50.30.58.

<sup>22</sup>MRAC 50.30.58, Chef de Zone du Rubi au GG, Djamba, 12 October 1911, N° 268a; MRAC 50.30.67, l'Inspecteur d'Etat, A. Gérard, au Chef de Zone du Rubi, no date, N°10421. In Rubi zone 3 fr a month for food was clearly inadequate since the administrator calculated it would cost about 3.50 fr a month to provide a diet consisting entirely of bananas, palm oil, and rice with no meat or fish. Chef de Zone du Rubi au GG, Buta, 9 September 1912, MRAC 50.30.52. See also the calculation that it cost about thirty centimes a day to feed a sick person in Buta (presumably including animal protein), whereas the government allotted only six centimes a day. "The future of the race is without doubt strongly compromised...," warned the zone's physician (Vandersloten au Chef de Zone du Rubi, Buta, 8 October 1911, MRAC 50.30.58).

<sup>23</sup>MRAC 50.30.68/95 Circulaire N°1338, Boma, 9 February 1912.

<sup>24</sup>MRAC 50.30.557.

impossible to set up the effective system of produce markets he had been trying to do for some time, since rural Africans found it unprofitable to sell food at prices wage earners could afford. Even the important transit center of Titule had no food market. Instead, the government compelled women and children to bring foodstuffs from villages as far as 35 km away for remuneration that the administrator could only describe as "derisory."<sup>25</sup> These coerced food markets with their attendant burdens of portage continued to exist for the next two decades.<sup>26</sup>

Elsewhere the initial tax rates were also very high compared to incomes and grew higher as the decade progressed. One Kivu chief, having been led to believe that the tax rate would be two francs per man, was stunned when a rate of five francs was announced.<sup>27</sup> By 1915 the general rate in the Eastern Province had risen to twelve francs, though this had to be cut in half in parts of Ituri and most of Upper Uele in the course of the year.<sup>28</sup> In Ituri and elsewhere, where the tax rates even in 1917 were judged to be higher than most individual men could pay, the tax remained largely what it had been under the Free State: a collective tax on the community, met by pooling the resources from rubber collection and portage to purchase tokens which were distributed, "more or less equitably," by the chiefs.<sup>29</sup> In areas where the tax was paid individually, those who were able to pay rented out their tokens to others whose travel or other activities made them likely to be stopped by officials.<sup>30</sup>

The consequences of not paying the tax were strengthened by the decree of 17 July 1914, which provided for sure and certain punishment. While some officials argued that taxation was not intended to be a direct compulsion to work, this was not in fact how it was perceived and used by many others.<sup>31</sup> In Lower Uele, for example,

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<sup>25</sup>MRAC 50.30.1, Landeghem, Rapport sur l'inspection du poste de Titule, 31 March 1911.

<sup>26</sup>See chapter 6

<sup>27</sup>APB, Diaire de Nya Ngezi, pp.52-59 (5 February to 9 April 1911).

<sup>28</sup>RACB 1915, pp.21-23.

<sup>29</sup>AA, D(778)A.II.3, Bertrand, "Observations-Rapport Trimestriel Ituri, second quarter 1917," 25 August 1917.

<sup>30</sup>Bashizi Tchib-a-lonza Zaluba, "De la colonisation agricole: étude de quelques plantations à Walungu (1927-1960)," travail de fin d'études, histoire, ISP, Bukavu, 1980, p.81.

Table 4.1  
Head Tax Paid, Eastern Province, 1914-1919  
(thousands of francs)

DISTRICT	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
Aruwimi		646	720	724	749	610
Lower Uele		580	834	963	905	651
Upper Uele		811	925	893	917	728
Stanleyville		736	825	874	795	871
Lowa		613	554	399	481	542
Maniema		502	534	425	480	543
Ituri		950	955	921	743	602
Kivu		<u>51</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>162</u>	<u>238</u>	<u>239</u>
TOTALS	3,645	4,889	5,382	5,361	5,309	4,786

Sources: RACB 1915, p.24, 1916, p.32, 1917, p.46, 1919, p.195.

village chiefs were responsible for rounding up tax delinquents, who were then put to work. Many individuals in 1916 and 1917 were reported to be fleeing to other administrative areas to escape these tax measures.<sup>32</sup> These tax delinquents then had to serve a term in labor gangs usually working at various local public works and health-related projects. However, officials faced with the labor shortages of the war years were quick to suggest that they might also be put to use at larger tasks, such as provisioning the Kilo-Moto mines and assuring a supply of porters to private parties, in other words, a return to a version of the abandoned labor tax.<sup>33</sup>

It was their use as porters that showed the greatest increase in the latter war years and which occasioned much official correspondence because of the delicacy of the issues it raised.<sup>34</sup> The number of days

<sup>31</sup>RACB 1915, p. 21; Conseil Colonial, CRA 1932, séance 6 May 1932, Mr. Wauters, p.589. See also note 12 above.

<sup>32</sup>MRAC 50.30.300, Responses of the administrators of Bambili, Zobia, Gwane, and other territories to the circular N°1213 R292 of 17 May 1917. The head of Bondo said he did not make use of the chiefs in this way. Mentions of persons fleeing to as far away as German East Africa are in MRAC 50.30.326 and 328.

<sup>33</sup>The extensive correspondence provoked by Governor General Henry's suggestion to the vice-governor general of the PO (3 May 1917) that *constraints* be used for the mines has been preserved in AA, D(778); in the end legal problems prevented such use.

of convict labor increased sharply during the last years of the war with portorage consuming a growing share of them. Statistics are available only for an eighteen-month period from October 1916 to March 1918, but these show that this labor doubled in size, with portorage going from less than 4 percent of the total in the last quarter of 1916 to nearly 18 percent in the first quarter of 1918.<sup>35</sup> A similar use of prison labor, instituted in 1914 by Vice-Governor General Malfeyt, by which persons convicted of offenses such as vagrancy could be paroled under labor contract to private employers found few takers.<sup>36</sup>

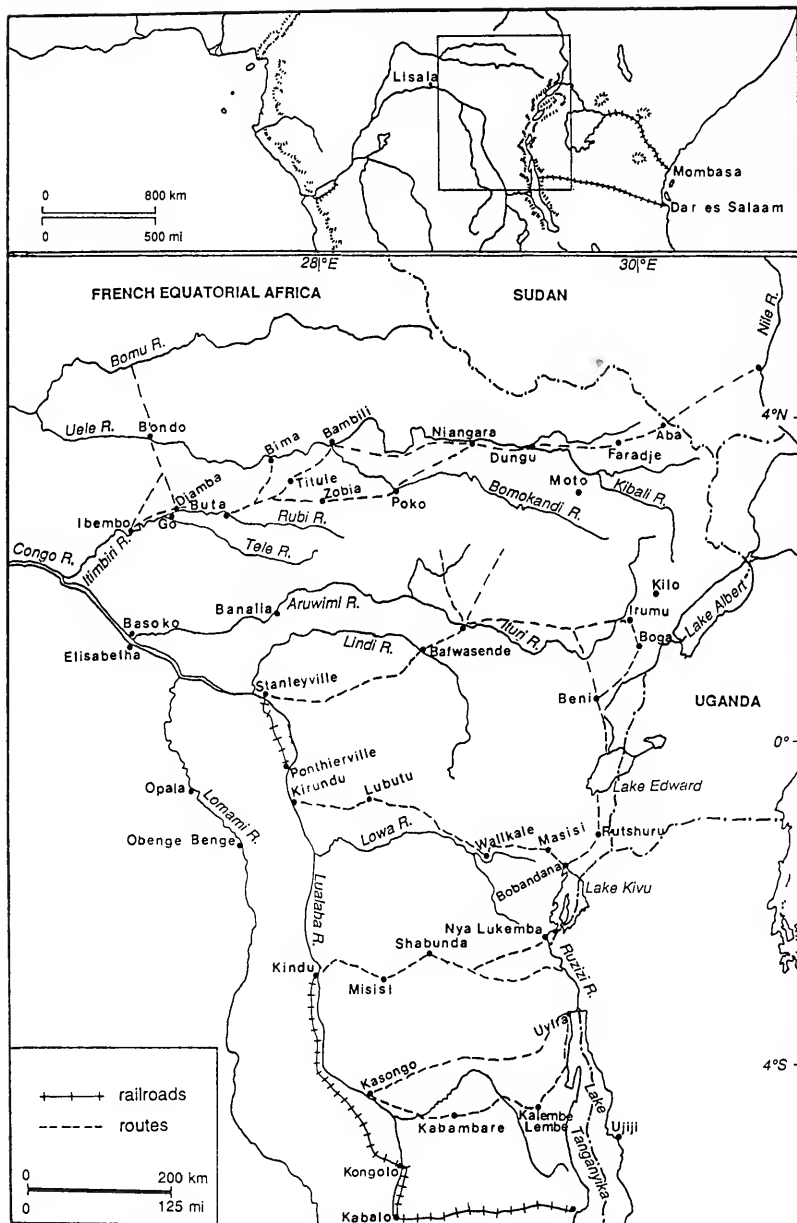
The passive resistance of Africans to paying taxes was in some places accompanied by active rebellion against the imposition of effective colonial rule. The annual reports for this decade list the numerous police operations necessary to back up official presence, as well as the much more serious and often prolonged military operations to suppress more significant resistance. The number of military operations in the Eastern Province is indicative of the absence of effective control in that region of the colony. How closely these operations were related to active resistance to the impositions in tax and labor of the colony is hard to say. Some appear to have concerned disputes between African neighbors or within African societies, and all have been laundered through several layers of administration before being published in the brief, sanitized versions of the annual reports. Other sources are lacking in most cases. However, the frequency of such unrest in the vicinity of the Kilo-Moto mines suggests that there was a particular focus and cause. The events there in 1916 (discussed below) surely were related to the mines' demands for labor and supplies.

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<sup>34</sup>See particularly, Bertrand to DC, Bas Uele, 6 January 1917 with enclosure, Bertrand to GG, January 1916, MRAC 50.30.456. Because this portorage was serving private parties and because, to ensure regular service, the number of constraints had to be maintained at a fixed level, it seemed to resemble all too closely the forced labor of the Free State which the Colonial Council had approved two laws against in 1914.

<sup>35</sup>Rapport sur administration générale, Bas Uele, fourth quarter 1916, AA, H(850); Rapports trimestriels sur l'administration générale, Bas Uele 1917, MRAC 50.30.24; Rapports mensuelles sur l'administration générale, Bas Uele, August and November 1917, MRAC 50.30.19; Rapport sur l'administration générale, Bas Uele, first quarter 1918, MRAC 50.30.26.

<sup>36</sup>AA, Ed. Schweisthal, "Legislation sur le vagabondage et la mendicité: maisons et ateliers de travail," annex to Procès verbal, Comité Régional, PO, first session, 1927.



Map 5. Transportation Routes in the Eastern Congo, 1900-1918



## Reform in the Concessions and Mines

Another task in establishing a reformed and effective administration was to impose greater control over the private concessions (the Lomami Company and the Huileries du Congo Belge) as well as the mining companies both public (Kilo-Moto) and private (Forminière) which are examined later. This was one of the most intractable issues over the next two decades. Failure to solve these issues seriously tarnished the Congo administration's record of reform in other areas.

While committed to reforming the concessionary system of the Free State, the new Belgian administration did not intend to abolish that system. Indeed, to find exports to replace the diminishing quantities of wild rubber and ivory, it created new concessions and renewed old ones. In 1911, for example, the government entered into an agreement with the British soap company, Lever Brothers, to develop palm oil exports. A new subsidiary, the Huileries du Congo Belge (HCB), was granted extensive rights to exploit wild palm trees and establish new palm plantations in various parts of the colony, including a large section of Aruwimi district around Elisabetha. The HCB was required to pay a minimum wage of only twenty-five centimes a day, maintain schools and medical facilities, in addition to the usual requirements concerning feeding, housing and sanitation.<sup>37</sup> By the end of 1915 the HCB operations at Elisabetha employed 4,000 persons, making it the second largest commercial employer in the province. As in other large operations the interests of the company tended to supercede the application of normal administrative supervision and in the course of that year "gave rise to numerous complaints regarding the regime which the company was imposing on its workers and on the natives inhabiting the concession."<sup>38</sup> Apparently the company was also finding it difficult to attract and to hold laborers, since the number of their employees fell to below 2,500 in 1916 and 1917. An appeal to the authorities of Lower Uele district failed to produce any new recruits.<sup>39</sup> By the end of 1918 the

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<sup>37</sup>Buell, *Native Problem*, 2:511-14, 528-31.

<sup>38</sup>AA, D(778)A.II.3, Note d'ensemble concernant les rapports généraux des districts du Vice-Gouvernement général de la PO en 1915, 27 April 1916; Rapport sur l'administration générale du Vice-Gouvernement de la PO, first half 1916, p. 11.

<sup>39</sup>RACB 1916, p.74; 1917, p.71; MRAC 50.30.533, CD, Bas Uele, au Directeur du

Elisabetha contingent had fallen to under 1,400, a much greater decline than the work forces of other firms and other operations of the HCB experienced as a result of the influenza epidemic that year.<sup>40</sup> The specific problems at Elisabetha during this period are not well documented, but the head of Aruwimi district attributed the declining work force in 1920 to the inadequacy of the food allowance the company was paying, which along with low wages and high taxes was probably at the root of the problems in earlier years as well.<sup>41</sup>

Conditions in the neighboring concessions of the old Lomami Company remained scandalous during the decade with government efforts at reform coming only late. The British Vice-Consul Purdon, who toured the area in the latter half of 1912, reported extraordinary abuses: Africans were deliberately paid less than the legal wage, given short-weight on the rubber they were forced to collect, and subjected to excessive requisitions and taxes. He found the Africans in the vicinity of Obenge Bengé "poor, squalid, and dirty" and "practically slaves" of the company. "If the State officials responsible for their welfare have not reported the conditions which prevail," he charged, "then they are either wilfully blind and unfit for their positions, or they realize the futility of reporting these facts to the Government."<sup>42</sup> In fact, at least one local official, the head of Opala, was reporting problems with the way regular workers were being paid in his post and the "famine salaries" of fifty centimes a week (often paid with a salt block worth only thirty-five centimes) paid to half-day laborers.<sup>43</sup> Further investigations revealed that forced labor, underpayment, and ill-treatment were general throughout the Company's concession. The subsequent arrest and trial of a number of Lomami Company agents caused a virtual shutdown of the company's operations for a time in 1915.<sup>44</sup> Here too reforms were slow in being fully implemented.

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District d'Elisabetha, de la HCB, 14 April 1917. The CD replied that the few Lower Uele peoples who were familiar with oil palm harvesting were doing fine at home, that the movement of people would rise spreading sleeping sickness, that his people had no wish to go to a distant and unknown place, and that he had no intention of using force to make them.

<sup>40</sup>RACB 1918, pp.99-100.

<sup>41</sup>Ministre des Colonies aux HCB, 30 September 1921, AA, MOI(3602)156.

<sup>42</sup>Purdon, "Report on a Tour...of Stanleyville," pp.35-36.

<sup>43</sup>AA, MOI(3606)178, Cinti, Chef de Poste, Opala, to CD, 12 October 1912.

<sup>44</sup>FO403/443, Purdon to Castens, Stanleyville, 1 April 1913, in N°52, p.141; FO403/

If the government may have avoid direct recruitment for the Lomami Company, that was not true in the case of the mining companies, despite the provision in the Colonial Charter against recruiting for private persons or companies. In practice powerful private firms were frequently supplied with porters and other labor on the same terms as the government. An instance noted by a British consul occurred at the Kanua mining camps of the Société Forestière et Minière du Congo (Forminière), where villagers from as far as sixty-eight miles away were required to supply about 400 loads of foodstuffs a week. The work was not done willingly, but at least the pay was in cash and at rates much higher than those paid by the government posts in the area, which were also supplied by compulsion.<sup>45</sup> The consul's report did not bring about any improvement. A little more than a year later the new commissioner general of the province, Aléxis Bertrand, cited the existence of "caravans...composed of women, sometimes carrying children, who travel distances of over 50 km" in order to bring provisions to the same camp. He also noted that at least half of their pay was in salt or trade goods of trifling value and at rates one-third below the going rate. Although Bertrand could find no hard evidence to back it up, he believed that these Africans felt they were obligated to provide these supplies at these rates and instructed the district commissioner to inform Africans of their right to payment in cash and at mutually agreeable prices.<sup>46</sup> However, officials continued to provide the mine with recruits (Zobia territory furnishing 150 laborers in August 1914) and with foodstuffs for the Kanua market. How willingly Africans participated is doubtful, since 240 of the 600 miners at Kanua had deserted by early in 1915, perhaps in part because of the continued problems in obtaining adequate food supplies.<sup>47</sup>

The activities at the Kanua mines during the war years are undocumented, but conditions may have resembled those at the

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444, "Report by Vice-Consul Purdon on the Political and Commercial Situation of Stanleyville," 1 June 1913, p.3; AA, D(778)A.II.3, Note d'ensemble concernant les rapports généraux des districts du Vice-Gouvernement général de la PO en 1915, 27 April 1916.

<sup>45</sup>FO 403/443 in N°1, W. J. Lamont, "Report on a Tour in the Upper Congo (August to October 1912)," p.10.

<sup>46</sup>MRAC 50.30.70, Bertrand to CD, Bas Uele, Buta, 12 January 1914.

<sup>47</sup>MRAC 50.30.12, Rapport général, Territoire de Zobia, August 1914; RACB 1915, p.78.

Babeyru mines near the Stanleyville-Ituri district border, which the Forminière also operated, where a "veritable mutiny" took place among its 300-500 African miners in 1917, during the course of which the company's stores were looted. Since the company preferred to keep this episode quiet, it may be inferred that conditions were not exemplary.<sup>48</sup>

Nor were conditions better at the government-owned gold mines in the northeastern corner of the province. The first impression of the White Fathers who opened a mission station at Kilo in 1911 was that this gold-mining region would be an Eldorado for Africans as well, where the Lendu and Nyali people could satisfy their simple needs easily from their fertile fields while gaining a small margin of comfort by selling their agricultural surplus and labor to the mines. However, on longer familiarity, it became clear to the missionaries that the demands made by the state for taxes and porters and by the mines for labor and food "weighed heavily on the Kilo populations."<sup>49</sup> Particularly onerous were the incessant requirements to produce extra food and carry it to the mining camps, a service for which they were poorly remunerated.

In 1910 mining operations were beginning at a new complex of sites around Moto some 360 kilometers further north, that by mid-decade surpassed Kilo in labor use. The establishment of this new center was pushed forward vigorously without adequate advance preparations being made for the housing, medical care, and provisioning of the employees or the construction of the road network necessary to link the mining camps. The result was an enormous strain on the meager resources of the region. Not only did the gold have to be mined, but networks of roads linking the various camps had to be built through the difficult terrain, food had to be grown for the mining and road crews, and the food had to be carried over long distances to their camps. The situation was made worse by the hostile relations that developed between the Kilo-Moto officials and the territorial administration. Finally, the increased activity in this area coincided with and aggravated the expansion of sleeping sickness in

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<sup>48</sup>RACB 1915, p.77, 1916, p.74, 1917, p.71; AA, D(778)A.II.3, Bertrand, Observations-Rapport trimestriel, Ituri, second half 1917.

<sup>49</sup>Malherbe, "La mission au Lac Albert," pp.287-300.

the northeast.

By May 1912 desertions among the 600 African miners at Moto had become common and with good reason. In addition to other "grave abuses," official investigations found that many miners had been recruited against their wills. In some cases "recruits" were sent off, yoked together around the neck like slaves, by chiefs who were paid a bonus (*prime*) for each man they delivered.<sup>50</sup> By the latter part of 1913 the recruitment of permanent workers for the mines had improved (though force had not disappeared), but the recruitment of short-term (fifteen working days) workers was described as "less satisfactory." The chiefs, themselves faced with violence from the mine employers if they failed to furnish enough men, often used force in their recruiting. Such force was needed to get men to accept the fairly miserable living conditions, a pitiful ten centime a day wage, and often skimpy rations that included no meat or salt. Late in 1913 the wage rate for these temporary workers was doubled, but that was still less than half what regular employees of the mines were paid.<sup>51</sup>

The provisioning of the expanding mining camps affected a much larger number of Africans, who were even less well paid. In 1912 25 to 30-kg loads of rations were being carried from 25 or even 40 km away for absurdly small remuneration. The next year the volume increased as did the distances, but the average load of provisions earned its producer and carrier less than the going rate for the portage alone.<sup>52</sup> Naturally at those rates the efforts were not spontaneous; in the opinion of the commissioner general of the province "a veritable tax of foodstuffs" drained toward Moto, involving thousands of persons (including women and children) who were compelled to appear weekly with their produce at the mines.<sup>53</sup> Instead of free labor, the investigator found that:

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<sup>50</sup>Aléxis Bertrand, Rapport sur les Mines de la Moto, in Bertrand to GG, 26 September 1913, AA, D(778)A.III. Bertrand, the Commissioner general of the province, cites reports of investigations earlier that year by the head of the Gurba-Dungu zone, by Mr. Rossi, the magistrate (Procureur du Roi) in Uele, by Mr. Ernst, the Belgian consul in Uganda, and others, the originals of which are not in the archives. The essential facts in Bertrand's report are confirmed by Rossi au procureur général, Boma, 2 April 1914, AA, D(778)A.III. A shortened version of Ernst's report on sanitation at Kilo-Moto is in AA, H(839), Ernst to GG, 6 July 1913.

<sup>51</sup>Bertrand, Rapport...Moto, pp.5-9.

<sup>52</sup>Bertrand au GG, 7 May 1912; Bertrand, Rapport...Moto.

<sup>53</sup>Bertrand, Rapport...Moto, p. 4.

[in] a vast region of Uele district, poor and poorly populated, the corvée imposed on the population, a truly excessive corvée, is infinitely higher and less well paid than anywhere else. We act on the chiefs through commissions in money and more considerable ones in kind, for provisioning, portage, and recruitment. The system involves abuses which are proportional to the results obtained.... And under the pretext that these unfortunate natives (and it is difficult to describe them in other terms) have gotten legal coinage, we will soon be sending them tax collectors.<sup>54</sup>

The root of the problem, Bertrand felt, was that nearly everyone regarded the mines as the colony's "golden halo" to which everything might be sacrificed, including, it seemed, the reform program. "The recruitment of laborers and the bringing of foodstuffs were pushed; forced labor, *prestations* in kind in effect were reestablished in proportions rarely attained before in Uele district." How did the authorities react? "The most prudent closed their eyes, let or made the chiefs act without involving themselves; they steered clear of villages and chiefdoms where excesses of zeal could not pass unnoticed."<sup>55</sup>

These abuses and attitudes at Kilo-Moto in 1913 show clearly that the similar and more widespread problems of 1914-18 were not simply the result of wartime emotions and pressures. Indeed, it is easier to relate the wartime abuses to a mind-set ready to sacrifice African welfare to any sufficiently important goal whether economic or nationalist. In any event, the continuing problems at the mines during the war were also the result of the decision made in 1916 to expand the mines' production as a way of dealing with the costs of the war.<sup>56</sup>

The mines were the subject of a series of investigations and reports during the war years: in 1914-1915 the sub-director of economic affairs of the Ministry of Colonies, Mr. le Kithule de Ryhove, toured the

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<sup>54</sup>Bertrand to GG 6 June 1913, AA, D(778)A.III.

<sup>55</sup>Bertrand, *Rapport...Moto*, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup>According to Bakonzi, "Gold Mines," pp.112, 116, 127, 166, when the Ministry's director of public works, Charles Maertens, arrived to promote this policy in 1916, the then director general of the mines, Emile Braive, resigned in disagreement and was temporarily replaced by Maertens, who later in the year went to South Africa to secure the machinery necessary to begin the move from alluvial to reef mining. In fact, although the mines' gold sales would be important to the colony's wartime budget, their output increased only modestly during the latter years of the war, and reef mining played no significant part in their operations until after the war.

region; during 1916 Edmond Leplae, the Ministry's director of agriculture investigated Kilo; in November 1916 came another magistrate's report on the mines; in 1917 Charles Maertens, the acting director of the mines, conducted his own investigations. The procureur-général of Katanga and later governor general, Martin-Jean Rutten, also reported on a tour of the Kilo region.<sup>57</sup> All made it clear, as did those before the start of the war, that recruitment for the mines involved extensive use of compulsion and that this illegal recruitment existed because the production of gold was put above every other consideration.

A composite picture of recruitment drawn from these reports went something like this: a recruiter from the mines went around to each village chief accompanied by soldiers or the mines' own policemen, presented him with presents, and assigned him a quota of men (usually double the number needed since half normally deserted as soon as they could). The chief then rounded up those he liked the least or feared or who were least able to resist and sent them to the administrative post tied together by the neck. From there they were sent on to the district headquarters in chains, which were removed just outside the town to escape the notice of the magistrate. Chiefs were paid ten francs for each recruit as well as presents for meeting their quotas. Chiefs failing to cooperate fully risked losing their positions or other punishments. According to the head of Ituri district three-quarters of the Kilo mine labor was made up of such recruits, an eighth of volunteers, and an eighth of captured deserters.<sup>58</sup>

To Maertens the differences between this and the slave trade of the pre-colonial Africa were slight: recruiting for the mines was less direct than slaving, since the men were rounded up by the chiefs the colony had invested, and more hypocritical, since it was wrapped up in a

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<sup>57</sup>The originals of all of these, except Maertens', are missing from the Ministry of Colonies archives. Leplae's is summarized in Bertrand, 17 November 1916, Minute: M. Ingénieur-Directeur de Kilo, D(778)A.III; Rutten's tour is mentioned in Louis Franck, "Activité de la Colonie pendant la Guerre," Belgium, *Documents Parlementaires, Chambre des Représentants*, session 1918-19, annexe au N° 34, pp.24-25; the rest are summarized in Maertens, *Du recrutement*, 1917, AA, MOI(3548)33.

<sup>58</sup>Cited in Maertens, *Du recrutement*, p.17-18. Maertens was of the opinion that captured deserters made up a larger percentage and that most of the volunteers were former houseboys abandoned by their while employers, strayed porters, and individuals wanting to escape the authorities of their village; he did not hold them in high esteem.

high-sounding legal form. For the African removed from his village, the difference must also have been hard to see. Maertens also found living conditions at the mines deplorable: for the African miner, he reported, nourishment was "barely sufficient," shelter was a "miserably built hut," and the callous white foreman was ever ready to use his whip and "bestially covetous" of the miner's wife.<sup>59</sup>

All of these investigators agreed that the blatant physical abuse of Africans should stop, but they differed in their solutions to the illegal forced recruitment. Recognizing that Africans were unlikely to volunteer in sufficient numbers and that the mines were too important to the colony not to be exploited (though perhaps at a slower pace), the general consensus was that the colony should legalize the situation by declaring the mines to be in the public interest (*d'utilité publique*), thereby making compulsory labor legal.<sup>60</sup> Many of these observers also believed that compulsion was necessary, at least initially, because Africans were too home-loving and too innately lazy to be attracted to work at the mines by any reasonable incentives.<sup>61</sup> This view drew support from the fact that, while desertion was often extremely high among newly recruited workers, many miners renewed their contracts after completing a full term, apparently having gotten a taste for the work. Thus the head of the province could report that in 1919 the Moto mines still employed a quarter of those engaged in 1910 and half of those who began work in 1914 and 1915, and that two-fifths of those whose contracts expired in 1919 had renewed them.<sup>62</sup>

The vice-governor disagreed with those who never ceased claiming that one had to force Africans to work, arguing that the Kilo mines' difficulties in recruiting labor on their own were due to the mine's bad reputation. The minister of colonies also came out at this time on the side of largely positive incentives in recruitment:

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<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.34-35.

<sup>60</sup>Maertens, Du recrutement, pp.1-2; Boyton (acting head of Ituri) to the Vice-Governor General, 10 August 1917, AA, MOI(3602)166; Bertrand (acting Vice-Governor General) to GG, 6 November 1917, AA, D(778)A.III.

<sup>61</sup>E.g., Ch. Scheyvaerts, Rapport d'Inspection de la Main-d'œuvre de Uele, 3 June 1919, pp.29-30, AA, MOI(3603)167.

<sup>62</sup>De Meulemeester to GG, 10 November 1919, AA, MOI(3603)167. He also reported that desertions among regular employees at Moto were down to 5 percent in the second half of 1918, though auxiliary laborers still deserted at the rate of 30 to 35 percent; desertions at Kilo were higher, especially among the Alur, running 22 percent in 1918.



Nothing would be more vexing and more contrary, both to common sense and to the wishes of the Government, than a mining policy that, instead of attracting its work force by the benefits to be found in mine work, drives it away by the manner in which the laborer is treated, housed, and fed.<sup>63</sup>

Despite these views at the highest levels of the administration the road to reform at Kilo-Moto was a long and tortuous one.

Recruitment of miners was made more difficult by having two distinct categories of miners. The practice of employing short-term "auxiliary" workers (on terms of fifteen working days initially but by 1918 generally for two or three months), in addition to regular mine workers (on three-year contracts), had begun as a way of meeting temporary labor needs. However, as it became harder to recruit enough regular African miners, in part because government officials resisted assisting in recruitment for long-term contracts, the number of auxiliaries grew rapidly despite their much lower productivity. As table 4.2 shows, the number of auxiliary workers at the Moto mines went from 1,202 at the end of 1917 (a quarter of the work force) to 1,898 a year later (a third of the work force) to 2,982 in 1920 (two-fifths of the work force). The motives of the auxiliaries were quite clear: they either had to pay their head tax or go to work on a road gang. The posts of Arebi and Gombari in Upper Uele were furnishing 975 to 1,100 auxiliaries a month to the Moto mines, a clear indication of the large-scale recruiting that such-short term labor necessitated. Nevertheless, the reforms of 1918-19 mandated that the contracts of first time employees were to be limited to three months duration, then six months, then twelve months. The protests from the mines were clear: those signing on for only three months would never be inspired to renew their contracts.<sup>64</sup>

The misery caused to Africans in the northeast was not confined to the miners. On a far greater scale were the impositions that affected nearly all Africans in the region who were forced to supply food to the

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<sup>63</sup>Louis Franck, "Activité de la Colonie pendant la Guerre," Belgique, *Documents Parlementaire, Chambre des Représentants*, session 1918-1919, annexe au N°34, p. 25.

<sup>64</sup>De Meulemeester to DCs, 24 April 1919; Delmotte (ingénieur, Kilo) to GG, 25 June 1919; Lacomblez (Principal Engineer, acting Director, Mines de l'Ituri), 10 August 1919, AA, MOI(3603)167.

Table 4.2  
African Labor at Kilo-Moto, 1908-1920

YEAR	Kilo Total	Moto			Grand Total
		Regular	Auxiliary	Total	
1908	800				800
1909 (May)	1,400				1,400
1910 (mid)	c.2,000				
1911 (April)	c.3,000			586	3,586
1912 (May)				1,107	
1913 (Sept)			300-350	2,355	
1914	NA			NA	NA
1915	4,000			4,000	8,000
1916	3,948			5,975	9,923
1917	3,607	3,896	1,202	5,098	8,705
1918	3,893	4,008	1,898	5,806	9,699
1919	2,868	3,409	1,260	6,851	9,719
1920	2,714	3,392	2,982	6,374	9,088

*Sources:* RACB 1909, p.253; Malherbe, "Mission au Lac Albert," p.154, quoting estimate of Father Beauchamp, who visited Kilo in July-August 1910; APB, *Diaire de Vieux-Kilo*, 24 April 1911, p.2; Bertrand to GG, 7 May 1912, AA, D(778)A.III; Bertrand to GG, 26 September 1913, AA, D(778)A.III; RACB 1915, p.77; 1916, p.53; 1917, p.71; 1918, pp.74, 101; "Mines de Kilo-Moto," *Congo*, 1924, 1:98.

mines. Formal contracts were signed in 1912, initiated by the commissioner general of the province and approved at the highest level in Boma, by which African chiefs in the region of the Kilo mines agreed to supply food in return for fixed payments of which the chiefs kept the lion's share.<sup>65</sup> The growing size of the mining camps increased the pressures on African farmers to supply food. The Africans, in turn, increased their resistance to what one high official called a reinstatement of "a regime of the long-since condemned taxes in kind and in labor."<sup>66</sup> During 1915-16 there were a series of separate rebellions among the Lendu, Lugbara, and Lese against the forced furnishing of foodstuffs, the Lendu even burning some mining camps. The latter

<sup>65</sup>Bertrand to GG, 6 February 1917, AA, D(778)A.III. Bertrand cites a file then in the hands of the Procureur du Roi Detry.

<sup>66</sup>Bertrand, 17 November 1916, Minute: Ingénieur-Directeur, Kilo, AA, D(778)A.III.

revolt was suppressed with the aid of the new chief of Kilo, N'Goli (Goli), in a particularly bloody fashion that left a strong impression on the colonial administrators, and, one must imagine, on the Lendu.<sup>67</sup> The food shortages in turn led to serious privations among the miners, many of whom deserted. There was also an increase in the use of corporal punishment in the mining camps about this time.

In addition to purchasing food from African farmers in the area, the mines also tried other approaches to meeting food needs. One of these was to grow their own crops on land near the mines. This policy had begun in the Kilo mines in 1909 and the employment of miners' wives to grow crops had succeeded in supplying these mines with a large part of their food needs up to 1916. After that date Kilo paid a food allowance to its workers and allowed them to purchase their own food. The farming wives were replaced by men hired to grow crops for the company.<sup>68</sup> The company farms developed more slowly at Moto than did the mining camps themselves; by mid-1912 there were only forty hectares under cultivation. While mostly males were employed at this task at first (perhaps to clear the land), such farms soon came to employ only females, nearly all the wives of miners.<sup>69</sup>

Another approach was to encourage white farmers to settle in these temperate and fertile regions. The first to arrive were Afrikaners, who at first transported goods to the mines in ox carts and then began to raise food crops for the mines. Government efforts to encourage Belgian settlement near Kilo-Moto (as in Katanga) met with limited success.<sup>70</sup> The colonists were generally unhappy at the rate of remuneration offered by the notoriously stingy mines. A third approach, resisted by the company, was contracting with a private firm to supply food. An operation known as the Congo Oriental Company offered to supply palm oil early in 1917, but the mines did not sign an agreement until after the head of the province made it clear that the administration would no longer use illegal force to extract foodstuffs from local Africans.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>RACB 1916, pp. 4-5; Bakonzi, "Gold Mines," pp.112-13.

<sup>68</sup>Bakonzi, "Gold Mines," pp.134-8.

<sup>69</sup>There were twenty women and 299 men employed at cultivation in September 1911; two years later the number was 409 women and no men. Bertrand to GG, 7 May 1912 and 26 September 1913, AA, D(778)A.III.

<sup>70</sup>Malherbe, "La mission au Lac Albert," pp.274-75; RACB 1915, p.110, RACB 1916, p.134.

The responsibility for the perennial abuse of labor by the Kilo-Moto mines can be assigned to several different groups and circumstances. Many abuses were ascribable to lowest level of European employees, the ones most likely to have contact with Africans, to take advantage of their positions of authority, and to give vent to their emotions. As the war went on, the the number of Europeans in non-military service in the colony dropped, so that many lesser posts at the mines were filled with whoever was available, often persons of dubious qualification and character. If inadequately supervised, such overseers were likely to take advantage of their positions.

Others were of the opinion that greater responsibility was to be laid at the feet of the mines' local directors. In particular, Mr. Manfroy, the principal engineer of Kilo-Moto, came in for considerable blame for failing to correct abuses. According to one investigator, Manfroy was able to nullify the effect of the reports of Bertrand, Ernst, Rossi and others by insisting to Brussels that "everything was the best in the best of all possible worlds."<sup>72</sup> Manfroy was not the only culprit. In an unusually blunt letter the governor general protested the reappointment of Mr. Mathelin as a director of the mines at a salary of 40,000 francs because of his "brutality and lack of humanity" as indicated in several reports. The governor general indicated that he would advise both Manfroy and Mathelin that should any new instances of inhumanity under their administrations come to his attention, he would see to it that their colonial careers came to an end.<sup>73</sup>

Most observers put greatest weight on the structure of authority and responsibility in the northeast as a third and more complex factor in explaining Kilo-Moto mess. From the time of the Belgian takeover the mines had been administered as part of the colony with its officials part of the colonial service. In theory these officials were responsible to the colony's governor general, but in practice the mines were often able to operate independently of the governor general, answering only to those in the Ministry of Colonies. It was, however, their relationship with the officials of the local territorial administrations that was most irksome. Possessing their own police force, dealing directly with

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<sup>71</sup>De Meulemeester to GG, 10 December 1919, AA, MOI(3603)167. See Bakonzi, "Gold Mines," pp.154-55.

<sup>72</sup>Maertens, *Du Recrutement*, p.2.

<sup>73</sup>GG to Minister, 6 December 1918, AA, AI(1416).

chiefs in the recruitment of labor and provisions, and with the ear of the powers in Brussels, the mines were soon recognized both by the African population and by the territorial agents as the superior of the two colonial administrations in the northeast. When the policies of the two clashed, it was the mines' interests which won out and African welfare (the responsibility of the Territorial Administration) that lost out. Territorial officials learned to close their eyes to the situation, so that when abuses became known the responsibility inevitably fell on the African chiefs and headmen or other subalterns.<sup>74</sup> A potential check on this ruthless system was the Congo's strong judicial system, whose independence was unique among African colonies.<sup>75</sup> As has been seen, it was this judiciary which conducted many of the exposés of Kilo-Moto's abuses, but when these failed to produce much effect its members also learned to avert their eyes from the mines' misdeeds.<sup>76</sup>

The African uprisings of 1916 and the subsequent new round of investigations finally led to reform of this "absolutist and arbitrary" regime. Two assistant magistrates and the principal inspector of industry and commerce recommended to the Ituri labor commission that, if reform were to be forthcoming, it could only be by the mines undertaking their own recruitment without recourse to any intervention of the Territorial Service. The inspector further recommended that this be done through a complete separation of the technical and personnel functions of the mine officials.<sup>77</sup> But the decision of the government went in quite a different direction: Kilo-Moto was separated from the colonial administration in 1919 and made an autonomous public corporation, while the recruitment of its labor force was placed entirely in the hands of the Territorial Service, who were enjoined from using any direct pressures in the process.<sup>78</sup> How well that reform worked will be considered in the next chapter.

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<sup>74</sup>Bertrand, Rapport...Moto, pp.9-11, and Bertrand to GG, 6 February 1917, AA, D(778)A.III.

<sup>75</sup>Buell, *Native Problem*, 2:468ff.

<sup>76</sup>Bertrand to GG, 7 March 1917; AA, D(778)A.III.

<sup>77</sup>Les Substituts Ferronte, Devaux, Inspecteur principal de l'industrie et commerce, Charles Scheyvaerts, "Note pour M. le President de la Sous-Commission de Recrutement du District de l'Ituri," Irumu, 11 February 1919; Scheyvaerts, "Rapport d'Inspection de l'Uele," pp. 34-35, 3 June 1919, AA, MOI(3603)167.

<sup>78</sup>De Meulemeester to DCs, 24 April 1919, AA, MOI(3603)167.

## The War

The efforts at reform and economic development were affected dramatically by the Belgian Congo's decision to launch an invasion of German East Africa from the Eastern Province in April 1916. Besides contributing indirectly to the labor abuses at Kilo-Moto already noted, the war effort would be a direct cause of the overwork and death of many Africans in the eastern Congo. At first the colony had refrained from direct action against the neighboring German territories, but in 1915 it began a mobilization which put some ten to twelve thousand troops on the Congo's eastern frontier by year's end. Most of these came from the Force Publique, to whose numbers were added some 3,000 from the Territorial Police. To permit a sustained attack on German East Africa the government abruptly announced in February 1916 that it was suspending all mustering out in the Force Publique and calling up 5,000 new recruits (over twice the number of the previous years), whom it wanted by the end of April. Toward this number the Eastern Province supplied 2,970 men, of whom 2,557 were found fit for induction.<sup>79</sup>

Even before serious conflict began, the transport of munitions and supplies to the frontier with German East Africa had begun imposing a heavy burden on the thinly populated forest districts of Lova and Maniema, which lay between the Lualaba and the eastern frontier. At first both officials and missionaries described Africans as responding loyally to the huge new requisitions in food, porters and soldiers.<sup>80</sup> However, when the demands continued throughout 1915, African fatigue and ill-will developed as men, women, and even children were caught up in the debilitating war effort. Throughout Kivu, missionaries reported, the populations were "overwhelmed by corvées and daily requisitions of food and men." In the vicinity of the military headquarters at Kibati northwest of lake Kivu food requisitions

<sup>79</sup>RACB 1916, p.98-99; Governor General Henry to vice-governors general, Boma, 1 February 1916, MRAC 50.30.353.

<sup>80</sup>AA, D(778)A.II.3, Note d'ensemble concernant les rapports généraux des districts du Vice Gouvernement de la PO en 1914, 21 April 1915; APB, Haut-Congo, 1914-15, p. 273: [For war effort] "Des populations des environs ont fourni plusieurs centaines de tonnes de vivres et contribué aussi d'une façon très efficace au ravitaillement des troupes du Congo. Le resultat a été extrêmement satisfaisant, car les déprédations dont sont coutumières des troupes de passage ont été ainsi évitées; les cultures ont pu être entretenues, et la confiance entre soldat et indigène s'est affermée."

Table 4.3  
Force Publique Recruitment, 1910-1921

YEAR	Complement	Belgian Congo Reenlistees/Recruits	Eastern Congo Recruits
1910	14,000	3,375	1,477
1911		3,375	1,422
1912		3,750	1,777
1913	1,500	2,250	1,072
1914	15,000	1,500	2,250
1915	18,000	3,750	
1916	18,000	5,000	2,970
1917	18,000	1,250	2,500
1918	18,000	6,703	0
1919	18,000	4,300	
1920	16,000	1,000	
1921	15,650	1,270	2,550

Sources: Flament, *La Force Publique*, p. 509; RACB 1916, p.250; 1917, p.90; 1918, p.113; Conseil Colonial, CRA 1913/14, p.126; 1919, pp.468, 487; 1920, pp.564-65.

brought on a famine in a drought-stricken area. In the villages of Bobandana and Makelili, where the corvées were unusually severe, the situation was "truly sad" according to Belgian missionaries: "The father of the family is at the front, the mother is grinding flour for the soldiers, and the children are carrying the foodstuffs!"<sup>81</sup>

These miseries were further increased by the offensive into German East Africa in April 1916 aimed at increasing Belgium's already enormous colonial territories.<sup>82</sup> The acting head of the province stated the situation bluntly in 1916: "We can't choose to ignore that it is hardly likely we will be able to continue: human strengths have their limits, as do the food reserves of relatively lightly-populated African states lacking proper means of transport."<sup>83</sup> Pressure had to be applied on

<sup>81</sup>APB, RAPB 1915-16, pp.103, 119-23, 127-29; cf. Rene-Jules Cornet, *Bwana Muganga (Hommes en blanc en Afrique noire)* (Brussels: ARSOM, 1971), p.238.

<sup>82</sup>William Roger Louis, *Ruanda-Urundi 1884-1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp.207ff.

<sup>83</sup>AA, D(778)A.II.3, Note d'ensemble concernant des rapports généraux des districts du Vice-Gouvernement général de la PO en 1915, 27 April 1916.

subordinate officials to obtain the large number of recruits for the Force Publique. In 1915 the head of Lower Uele had boasted that the loyalty of the Africans had enabled him to fill his quota entirely with volunteers. In March 1916, however, he had to instruct his subordinates to resort to conscription if necessary. Although offering to exceed his quota in April, by May he was receiving reports from his staff that they had been able to meet their quotas of recruits only by resorting to a good deal of arm twisting.<sup>84</sup>

The central problem was that executing the 1916 offensive required, not only soldiers and supplies, but a massive increase in the volume of portage as well. To spread the burden among more people new portage routes to the eastern frontier were opened up. Along the most direct route—still forty days march, running from Kirundu on the upper Congo through the forests of Lowa to the mountains of Rutshuru north of lake Kivu on the Rwandan border—porters carried 36,689 loads in 1915, half of those in the last quarter of the year, and an additional 24,736 loads in the first five months of 1916. To relieve the burden on the Africans along this route a very much longer and more northerly route was organized in 1916 from Stanleyville to Irumu and then south to lake Kivu. This northern route carried nearly 5,000 loads in the first five months of 1916. On the two more southerly routes, starting from Kindu and Kasongo on the river to territory between lakes Kivu and Tanganyika, 27,000 loads were carried in 1915 and 37,033 in the first five months of 1916.<sup>85</sup> These routes, collectively stretching over hundreds of kilometers, were little more than narrow footpaths and the carrying was especially exhausting through the mountains at the eastern end. The route from Kindu ran through Misisi, deep in the equatorial forest, where the steep ravines made portage exhausting, especially since the clay soil was "like a sort of hard butter where you slip even on level ground."<sup>86</sup>

Head portage was supposed to be abandoned as soon as the

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<sup>84</sup>Landeghem, RA, Bas Uele, 1915, MRAC 50.30.16; Landeghem to Agents Territoriaux, 24 March 1916, MRAC 50.30.353; Agent Territorial Sorrel, Likati, to Landeghem, 22 May 1916, acting Agent Territorial Mendrich, Zobia, to Landeghem, 28 May 1916, and Vice-Governor General Malfeyt to DC, Bas Uele, Stanleyville, 8 May 1916, MRAC 50.30.343.

<sup>85</sup>RACB 1916, pp.87-88; Belgium, Ministry of National Defence, *Les campagnes coloniales belges*, (Brussels: Imprimerie de l'ICM, 1927), 1:29-30.

<sup>86</sup>APB, RAPB 1923-24, Vieux-Kasongo, p.530.



railroad across northern Katanga to lake Tanganyika was completed in July 1916. In fact it continued on a large scale until November. The population of Lowa, numbering only 83,518 adult men, was exhausted by over three million days of portage during the year. Some 1,359 had died of overwork and disease. To the south in Maniema the *corvée des transports de guerre* toward Kivu came to an end in late September, with results only somewhat less fatiguing than in Lowa.<sup>87</sup>

The effects in Kivu were also severe. The troops passing by the southern end of lake Kivu during the first half of 1916 made incessant demands for food and porters. North of the lake conditions were even worse. Famine increased as the war demands left people with too little time to farm. Fevers and dysentery began to claim the weakened population. Some family heads were driven to sell off family members to buy food. Large numbers of those compelled into portage died along the road of cold, fatigue, hunger, dysentery, and fever.<sup>88</sup> A Dutch White Father named Smulders, who spoke out against the abuses suffered by Africans and had the temerity to send a letter to a Dutch newspaper on the subject, soon found himself removed at the order of the Belgian general Tombeur, who accused Smulders of German sympathies and demanded his replacement by a Belgian.<sup>89</sup>

One reason why this portage was so severely debilitating was that loads legally restricted to no more than 25 kg in fact generally weighed (at least during 1915) 30 kg or more.<sup>90</sup> The burden of portage did not end at the eastern frontier for additional porters were recruited to accompany the troops invading German East Africa from May through September 1916. A law of 5 August 1915, had put such

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<sup>87</sup>RACB 1916, pp.4, 8, 87-88; AA, D(778)A.II.3, Rapport sur l'administration générale du Vice-Gouvernement général de la PO, first and second halves, 1916.

<sup>88</sup>APB, RAPB 1916-17, pp.86-88, 116-120, 124. A Catholic mission between Goma and Rutshuru recorded the following at the end of 1916: "La famine devient plus en plus forte. Des familles entières sont emportées; elles s'enferment dans la maison et s'y laissent mourir. Et la rareté absolue de vivres nous empêche de secourir ces malheureux." APB, Diaire de Rygari, 17 December 1916, p.6.

<sup>89</sup>APB,133.364, Roelens à Livinhac, Thielt St Pierre, Kivu, 18 March 1916; 122/I, Van Hoef à Mgr. et Vénére Père, Tongrès Ste Marie, Lulenga, 2 April 1916; Ruboneka Kaboy, "Implantation misionnaire au Kivu (Zaire): Une étude historique des établissements des Pères Blancs: 1880-1945," (thèse de doctorat, Faculté d'Histoire Ecclesiastique, Université Pontificale Gregorienne, Rome, 1980), pp.568-69.

<sup>90</sup>MRAC, 62.40.1088, Vice-Governor General Malfeyt to GG Henry, Stanleyville, 1 February 1916 (confidential).

porters under military discipline. The recruitment of military porters was suspended in mid-1916, but resumed with a vengeance in 1917 when Belgium was persuaded to resume activities in Tanganyika, in response to a German counteroffensive.<sup>91</sup> In March the Eastern Province was called upon to furnish 1,000 more military porters immediately and in July the quota was raised to 5,000 (out of a colony-wide total of 13,000).<sup>92</sup> The porters were paid twenty-one centimes a day. An additional 1.25 fr a month was paid to those who survived at the end of their engagement. Most of these military porters were released in 1918.<sup>93</sup>

Since few were willing to volunteer for such service, authorities had been authorized to use force in recruiting under an ordinance-law of 19 July 1917, with the inevitable consequences. For example, late in 1917 fear, unrest, and discontent over this recruitment were reported throughout Lower Uele district.<sup>94</sup> One administrator there complained to his superiors against the new quotas: "Already there is unrest over this recruitment.... The region is losing a considerable part of its population.... The youth are gone as conscripts for the Force Publique, conscripted porters, workers for the mines and commercial firms."<sup>95</sup> In Lowa district African resistance to post-war impositions in 1919 was attributed to their exhaustion by war time portage. Among many affected populations, such as the Hunde of Kivu, the suffering of war time portage was still remembered decades later.<sup>96</sup>

Another integral part of the war effort was the forced production of foodstuffs, especially rice, for the troops, their porters, and for export to Europe. Legislation in effect from 1 August 1917 to 1 July 1918 required Africans to sell their entire harvest to government agents at fixed prices. The same areas of the Eastern Province that were fur-

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<sup>91</sup>MRAC 50.30.73, Bertrand (acting Governor, PO) to CDs, Bas Uele and Stanleyville, 22 August 1916, N°1319AI. John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.246.

<sup>92</sup>RACB 1917, p.85; MRAC 50.30.345, Acting Governor Bertrand to CDs, Stanleyville, 31 March 1917 and 10 July 1917.

<sup>93</sup>MRAC 50.30.353, Commandant Supérieur, Udjidji, au CDs, 2 June 1918; RACB 1918, p.113. Cf. G.W.T. Hodges, "African Manpower Statistics for the British Forces in East Africa, 1914-1918," *Journal of African History*, 19 (1978):101-16.

<sup>94</sup>MRAC 50.30.24, Rapport sur l'administration général, Bas Uele, 4th quarter 1917.

<sup>95</sup>MRAC 50.30.345, Agent Territorial, Zobia, au CD, Bas Uele, 18 November 1917.

<sup>96</sup>RACB 1919, p.12; Bahati Mutimatona, "Les Bahundu et la colonisation belge (1902-1960)," (Travail de fin d'études, histoire, ISP, Bukavu, 1977), pp.77-80.

nishing porters to the front also furnished about three-fourths of this rice production. Sales from Lowa district, for example, went from 800 metric tons in 1915 to 1,024 in 1916, 1,350 in 1917, and 5,975 in 1918, and Stanleyville, Maniema, and Lower Uele districts were similarly affected.<sup>97</sup> The transport of this rice, often over considerable distances, to the designated purchasing centers fell on the African producers at no additional remuneration. For example, to get his crop to the increasingly important market at Shuka in Stanleyville district a cultivator of one hectare of rice had to engage in 120 days of unpaid head portage at 25 kg a load, if his women had already done the arduous task of hulling the rice by hand, or 168 days, if they had not.<sup>98</sup> In the more remote parts of Lower Uele the costs of canoe or head portage from the buying centers to Buta left very little or nothing to pay the producers and led to complaints that the forced labor of the Free State era had returned.<sup>99</sup> Much of the portage of rice was accomplished through wartime legislation authorizing sixty days per year of coerced labor per adult male, imposing, in the judgment of the Permanent Commission for the Protection of the Natives, an intolerable burden on the province.<sup>100</sup>

Thus, the decision to invade German East Africa—a campaign which had no effect on the outcome of the war except to ensure Belgium's share in the colonial spoils—was a further example of how readily African interests were subordinated to European gains. The people of the eastern Congo paid dearly for this campaign through heavy recruitment of soldiers, massive and debilitating portage, and the forced production of foodstuffs, which entailed further portage. Few parts of the province escaped these burdens, which came on top of those already existing. Records do not permit measuring the loss of lives entailed in these efforts, but they were certainly great.

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<sup>97</sup>RACB 1915, p.69; 1916, p.65; Edmond Lepiae, "Histoire et développement des cultures obligatoires de coton et de riz au Congo belge de 1917 à 1933," *Congo* 1933, 1:658.

<sup>98</sup>AA, D(778)A.I, Bertrand to GG, Stanleyville, 30 August 1917.

<sup>99</sup>MRAC 50.30.421, Acting Vice-Governor General Bertrand to CDs, Bas Uele and Stanleyville, 13 February 1917; CD, Bas Uele to Agent Territorial, Zobia, 23 October 1917; Note semestrielle sur l'agriculture et élevage, Territoire de Zobia, 6 July 1918; Agent Territorial, Ibembo, to CD, Bas Uele, 13 December 1917.

<sup>100</sup>Léon Guébels, ed., *Relation complete des travaux de la Commission Permanente pour la protection des indigènes au Congo belge*, (Brussels: Centre d'Etude de Problèmes Sociaux Indigènes, 1953), pp.218-19.

## Health and Population

In the view of many contemporary observers the combined effect of greater administrative control, commerce, and wartime activities during the first dozen years of direct Belgian rule had been to produce a serious demographic crisis in the Congo. Thus, it is suitable to conclude this chapter with a review of the health situation in the Eastern Province. There is no doubt that Africans' health was affected by the spread of disease along the roads and trails of the province, the recruitment of many individuals away from their homes, and the often debilitating effects of excessive labor demands. Some of the health problems at places like Kilo-Moto have already been mentioned. It remains to consider the effects of the spread of sleeping sickness and the post-war epidemics of influenza and other diseases.

In 1910 the Eastern Province was threatened on all sides by the spread of sleeping sickness. The situation was at its worst in Maniema and Kivu district south of Uvira, but the disease was also threatening other parts of the province as it spread eastward from Bangala province, south from French Equatorial Africa, and east from Uganda and German East Africa. At Goma and Nya-Lukemba (north and south of lake Kivu) and at Beni (between lakes Edward and Albert) all persons coming from the east were subject to medical exams and for a time the Ugandan frontier was closed. In June 1911 Great Britain closed their side of the Ugandan frontier to stop the spread; in June 1914 the Germans closed their frontier for the same reason. To the north the contamination had spread down the Uele valley from Faradje eastward 150 km to Dungu by early in 1913; by mid-1914 it had spread another 200 km from Dungu past Niangara to Suronga. By mid-1913 the disease had also advanced up the Rubi between Ibembo and Go.<sup>101</sup>

The Colony's medical service had been preparing for this threat for a decade, but the onslaught still took some time to meet effectively. The new Belgian Congo government established a more autonomous Health Service and in 1910 more than doubled the number of isolation camps known as lazaret-villages and promulgated new legislation making sleeping sickness efforts the responsibility of the entire colonial staff.<sup>102</sup> Generous commitments to new medical teams and ser-

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<sup>101</sup>AA, H(850) and (855).

VICES were made, but the recruitment of the necessary doctors progressed slowly. By the second quarter of 1913, when Uele district was being threatened from three directions, the responsible officials still lacked an adequate understanding of the magnitude of the contamination and were without plans to meet it. In April, after fighting for four years to get the government to take effective action against the disease which he felt was threatening the survival of the people in his charge, the district commissioner of Uele (Bertrand), on his own authority, issued a sweeping prohibition of a major part of commercial travel in Uele. This was almost immediately annulled by the governor general, but it seems to have goaded the government into greater action. Soon after, an effective medical inspector, Doctor Rodhain, arrived to delimit the affected areas, allowing the restrictive provisions of the law of January 1913 to be applied in Uele: a medical passport required of all Africans travelling more than 30 km from home, restrictions on caravan routes, and compulsory treatment for all affected persons. Nevertheless, on the eve of the war the situation in Uele was grave and doctors were in short supply.<sup>103</sup>

The war brought the sleeping sickness campaign nearly to a halt: "doctors were called elsewhere, not replaced or replaced by persons without special training; funds declined."<sup>104</sup> The details are poorly documented, but reports show that even large operations such as Kilo-Moto took inadequate measures against sleeping sickness during the war years, in part because the mines were frequently without doctors.<sup>105</sup> Not only did the war effort blunt efforts at controlling the disease, but increased travel across the province and into German East Africa provided greater mechanisms for its spread. Yet for some reason sleeping sickness does not appear to have spread in the province. Although sleeping sickness remained a serious problem after the war, it does not seem to have become a worse one.

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<sup>102</sup>Maryinez Lyons, "From 'Death Camps' to *Cordon Sanitaire*: the Development of Sleeping Sickness Policy in the Uele District of the Belgian Congo, 1903-1914," *Journal of African History*, 26 (1985):84-86.

<sup>103</sup>AA, H(855)MS-U/44, Bertrand to GG, 11 April 1913, and passim; RACB 1925, p. 16; AA, H(850), "Nouveau Dossier."

<sup>104</sup>Medecin-Inspecteur s'Heeren, Rapport sur la Mission de la Maladie du Sommeil de l'Uele, July 1921, AA, H(855)MS/U63, p.1.

<sup>105</sup>Bertrand to GG, 6 February 1917, AA, D(778)A.III; and Scheyvaerts, "Rapport d'Inspection de l'Uele," pp.3, 8.

Instead, the menace to public health at the war's end came from a new source: the global influenza epidemic. Because the severity of the influenza epidemic was linked to the general state of health of the population, it is important to review the effects of the war effort on public health. Only scattered evidence exists, but the White Fathers' mission diaries in Kivu give a revealing glimpse of an important and war-battered area. The accounts begin in 1915 with the arrival of relapsing fever along the portage route north of lake Kivu, which carried off many adults and children.<sup>106</sup> As was seen above, the unrelenting requisitions of men and food for the invasion of 1916 had brought on a dreadful famine, especially severe in northern Kivu, which lasted throughout 1917, relieved only temporarily by the June harvest. While it is not possible to quantify the extent of the misery and death brought on by this war effort, the missionaries in northern Kivu, who, at one station alone, gave relief to a hundred new victims a day while their supplies lasted, were convinced of its severity. One mission station saw 250 of its own flock weaken and die of hunger; famished children and adults set off on long migrations in search of food, half of these "walking cadavers" dying along the way; malnutrition brought on dysentery, claiming "a goodly number" of additional victims. Missionaries in Kivu and Ituri reported that the misery become so acute that people (especially young women) were being sold into slavery by their families to provide food for the rest.<sup>107</sup> Nineteen eighteen brought smallpox and cerebro-spinal meningitis to Kivu and the northeast. After the missionaries' meager supplies of smallpox vaccine (which in any case had turned out to be ineffective) was exhausted, some Kivu Africans began administering their own inoculations of live virus. By the time the epidemic stopped in the dry season it had claimed a thousand victims northwest of lake Kivu and some two thousand among the Alur north of lake Albert. The losses to meningitis are unknown in Uvira, although a single mission school

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<sup>106</sup>RAPB 1915-16, Haut-Congo, Tongrès-Sainte-Marie, pp.130-31.

<sup>107</sup>APB, *Daire de Rugari*, 1:5 (30 November 1916), 8 (January 1917), 11 (17 May 1917), 2:1 (28 June 1917), 21 (10 October 1917), 23, (12 November 1917), 24 (3 December 1917). RAPB 1916-17, Haut Congo, pp.86-88. In May 1917 the head of the Katana Mission on Lake Kivu had a list of a hundred whom he would redeem from slavery as soon as he found the funds: RAPB 1917-18, Haut Congo, p.412. H. Eugene Bowe, "Slaves," *Inland Africa*, October 1921, p.12, tells of a young Alur woman being exchanged during the famine of 1918-19 for a small patch of sweet potatoes.

to the north lost an astonishing 3,000 persons. In the northeast, where a meningitis epidemic broke out at the Kilo mines, officials put the deaths at 1,500 in Ituri and 1,000 in Upper Uele.<sup>108</sup> Bishop Huys summed up the dreadful state of his mission area in his report for 1918-19 as follows:

Our poor peoples of the Upper Congo have been cruelly put to the test in 1918-1919. The military operations for the conquest of German East Africa have demanded thousands of porters. Unhappily these necessary helpers were not only submitted to a goodly number of privations and to changes in climate that were fatal to their health, but as well they were decimated by various contagious diseases which raged cruelly. We mention only cerebrospinal meningitis, dysentery and typhoid fever. When the demobilization comes, hundreds of porters from the Upper Congo will be absent.<sup>109</sup>

Meningitis returned in the 1920s, but in 1919 it temporarily gave precedence as the worst of the epidemics to Spanish influenza (which had reached Kasai and Katanga in 1918), moved in from East Africa. The grippe reached the weakened population of Kivu in January and rapidly claimed its victims. Northwest of lake Kivu: "children were falling along the road, adults in their fields, canoemen with the paddle in their hands."<sup>110</sup> That mission area lost a thousand persons, a tenth of its population. The Fathers at Liege-Saint-Lambert at the south end of the lake reported counting over 2,500 dead. The mission at Tongrès-Sainte-Marie, north of the lake reported only fifty-eight deaths because of flu in their area, but had to add another 223 deaths due to meningitis and dysentery. Before the epidemic was over Bishop Huys had put the number of flu deaths in Kivu and northern Katanga at 10,000.<sup>111</sup> That estimate appears moderate, since a year later the Colony officially estimated that it had lost 4 to 5 percent of its population to influenza, which, if evenly distributed, would have been between 130,000 and 164,000 for the Eastern Province, including some

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<sup>108</sup>APB, RAPB 1917-18, p.414; *Diarie de Rugari*, 2:29-34 (May-September 1918), RAPB 1918-19, pp.146, 174-75; Malherbe, "Mission au Lac Albert," p.304; RACB 1918, p.130.

<sup>109</sup>APB, RAPB 1918-1919, *Rapport général*, Haut-Congo, p.145.

<sup>110</sup>APB, RAPB 1919-20, Pelichy (Saint-Joseph), pp.184-85.

<sup>111</sup>APB, RAPB 1919-20, pp.183, 185, 189; RAPB 1918-19, p.148.

25,000 to 35,000 in Kivu.<sup>112</sup>

These spectacular losses brought the population question to the boil again. In December 1919 the members of the Permanent Commission for the Protection of the Natives charged that the depopulation of the Congo was continuing at a rapid and alarming rate, due largely to diseases introduced or spread by Europeans—principally smallpox, but also tuberculosis, meningitis, typhoid fevers, influenza, and syphilis—as well as to excessive *corvées*, overemphasis on cash crops, and excessive labor recruitment.<sup>113</sup> The authorities were quick to deny that the Congo's population was declining and asserted that it probably was stable.<sup>114</sup> Others were joined the debate. The leading Protestant journal charged that the "progressive" depopulation of Congo [was] an indisputable fact," while a Jesuit argued that depopulation surely was occurring, since life spans were short, mortality was high, and birth rates were low. In support of the latter he offered statistics for 1917 suggesting there were only 1.2 children per adult woman in the colony.<sup>115</sup> Similarly a report to the National Colonial Congress stated that, while no figures could be certain, the probable direction of population change was downward, essentially for the reasons offered by the Permanent Commission and deriving largely from the consequences of the colonial occupation.<sup>116</sup>

More recent, scientific studies, notably by Anatole Romaniuk, have not resolved these disputes, though they have put them in a larger

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<sup>112</sup>RACB 1919, p.184; RACB 1920, p.11 for population estimates.

<sup>113</sup>Guébels, *Relation...de la Commission Permanente*, pp.184-91.

<sup>114</sup>Vice-Governor General Martin Rutten, "Notes Démographiques Congolaises," *Congo* 1920, 2:260-75; "Discours de M. Franck, Ministre des Colonies, à la Chambre des Représentants, 24 November 1920," *Congo* (1920) 2:358-69. It is interesting to note that Rutten, who became governor general at the beginning of 1923, argued that the colony's statistics were so inaccurate that they couldn't be used to prove that the population was declining, increasing, or anything else. In fact, neither authority offered any solid evidence to support his claims.

<sup>115</sup>Opening sentence of "Notes and Comments," *Congo Mission News*, 48 (July 1924):1; L. Le Grand, S.J., "La dépopulation du Congo Belge et les recensements de 1917," *Congo* (1921) 1:202-10. Le Grand's statistics showed that in the Eastern Province, Stanleyville district had only 1.2 children per woman, Aruwimi had 1.1, while Kivu had 1.6.

<sup>116</sup>O. Louwers and André Hoornaert, *La question sociale au Congo. Rapport au comité du congrès colonial national. Compte-rendu de la séance plénière du 24 novembre 1924* (Brussels: Goemaere, 1924).



context. It is now clear that the low population and low fertility characteristic of much of equatorial Africa are only partly a product of the European colonialism. It is also clear that the great variations in fertility rates within the eastern Congo are largely correlated to the incidence of female sterility. For example, one study has shown that the incidence of sterility among women from the Eastern Province born before 1900 varied from 4 to 6 percent in Kivu to 25 to 28 percent in the Uele districts and 34 percent in Maniema, the worst case in the Congo. These differences apparently began before the arrival of the Europeans, at least as early as the arrival of the Swahili-Arab traders from East Africa (Maniema, Stanleyville district and part of Uele being occupied by the Zanzibari, while most of Kivu was not), that venereal disease is the root problem, and that denatality grew worse up until the time of the first world war.<sup>117</sup>

## Conclusions

The establishment of effective Belgian administration, coupled with the end of taxation in kind and the introduction of coinage, had a notable effect on African labor in the Eastern Province. If the end of the red rubber system and of payment in kind were important milestones, it is hard to argue that the decade saw any easing of the overall burdens falling on Africans. Some excesses disappeared, but new ones arose, and larger numbers of people felt the weight of the colonial yoke. For most residents of the province, labor still took place in the context of agriculture. The pressures to pay new and ever increasing taxes led many to grow and market food crops.<sup>118</sup> Direct govern-

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<sup>117</sup>Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "Population et démographie en Afrique Equatoriale Française dans le premier tiers du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *African Historical Demography* (Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, 1977), pp.331-51; Ralph A. Austen and Rita Headrick, "Equatorial Africa under Colonial Rule," in Birmingham and Martin, eds., *History of Central Africa*, 2:63-70; Anatole Romaniuk, *La fécondité des populations congolaises* (Paris: Mouton, 1967), pp. 135, 323-24; *idem*, "Infertility in Tropical Africa," in John C. Caldwell and Chukuka Okonjo, eds., *The Population of Tropical Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), pp.215, 223.

<sup>118</sup>Calculations by Peemans, "Congo-Belgique," p.361), suggest that tax receipts in Stanleyville district represented 90 percent of a monthly wage in 1912 but only 50 percent in 1920; for Maniema the proportions were 70 in 1912 and 59 in 1920; exceptionally in the Ueles the ratios were about the same: 62 and 64. Peemans does not

ment compulsion remained a major part of this process particularly in compelling the provisioning of government stations, towns, and mining camps. The institution of compulsory cultivation of rice for military use during the war was the beginning of what would become a major and perennial feature of Belgian rule. Other Africans met their tax obligations by engaging in short-term labor, particularly as porters and laborers for large concessions and mines. Here, too, the government was not reluctant to intervene in the process, whether through the creation of labor gangs of tax delinquents, the forced recruitment of labor for Kilo-Moto, or the massive conscription of porters during the war.

The permanent wage-labor force remained of modest size during the decade, but it also was the beginning of a much larger system. Figures for the size of that force are difficult to come by for the early part of the decade, but some indications are possible. The 1912 budget (July 1912 to June 1913) provided for the employment of 3,100 Africans in the General Services and Public Works administrations. Of these 1,575 were for the eastern Congo, with 900 for what was then Stanleyville district, 450 for Uele, and 225 for Aruwimi.<sup>119</sup> These numbers clearly do not include some 5,000 Africans then working for the mines at Kilo-Moto; nor do they include numerous Africans employed by the state in agriculture, public health, and transport. The number of employees in the private sector is unknown for 1912, but in 1915 there were 7,500 working for the major employers (CFL, HCB, and Forminière).<sup>120</sup> By 1919 the labor situation is clearer. Over 26,000 Africans were employed in the province, half of them for the state including some 9,000 at Kilo-Moto. Private firms and missions employed the other half, of which 8,200 were in commerce and industry, 2,900 in agriculture, and 2,000 in domestic service. The work force was very unevenly distributed within the province: the three southern districts (Kivu, Maniema, and Lowa) accounted for only 4,000 workers, while the three northern districts (Ituri and Upper and Lower Uele) accounted for 18,000 workers. The other 5,000 were in Stanley-

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provide sufficiently detailed information on his sources and method of calculation to permit replication of these calculations, which are the reverse of what I would expect for Stanleyville and Maniema.

<sup>119</sup>MRAC 50.30.68/95 Circulaire N°1338, Boma, 9 February 1912.

<sup>120</sup>RAPO 1919 (extract), AA, MOI(3545)15. See figure 4.1.

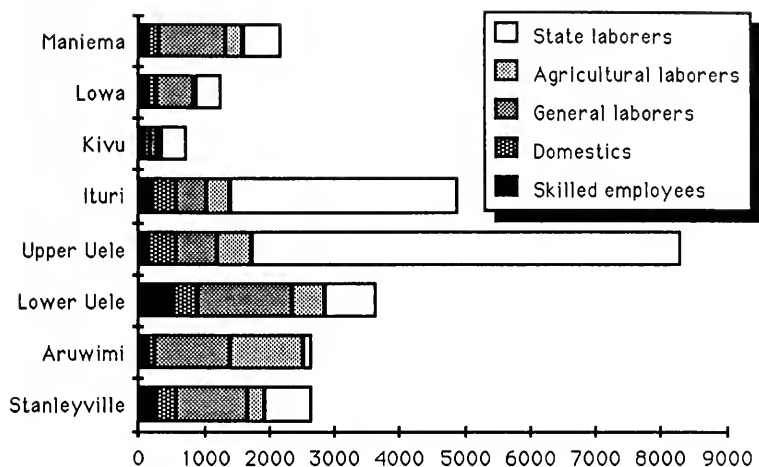


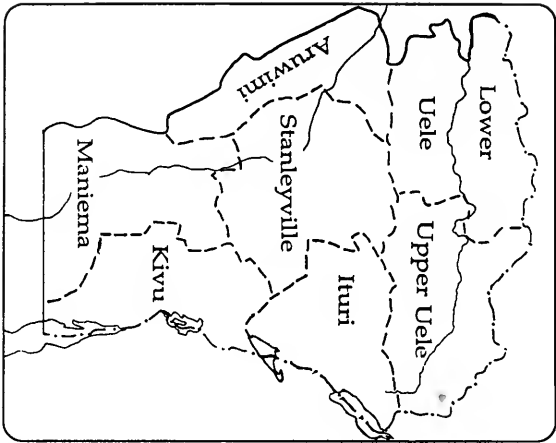
Figure 4.1 African Wage Earners, Eastern Province, 1919

Source: AA, MOI(3545)15, RAPO 1919.

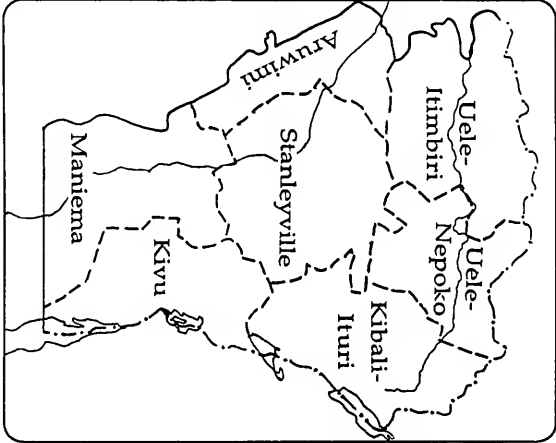
ville and Aruwimi districts, the latter the only district where the greatest number of workers were agricultural laborers (a large proportion in HCB's employ, despite that firm's temporary decline at that time).<sup>121</sup> These pioneers in permanent wage-labor have left few records of their reasons for this choice. No doubt many factors affected individual decisions, but it does not seem that the conditions and wages offered by most employers could have been a major factor.

Because it was launched and supplied from this province, the military campaign in German East Africa had a particularly devastating effect. By generating massive new labor demands it exhausted and weakened much of the population opening the way for serious losses in the post-war epidemics. The war also interrupted the process of reform that had made only limited progress by 1914 and reinforced the tradition of authoritarian intervention in labor mobilization just when that tradition was being weakened by internal and external criticism. Thus, the next decade began with a weakened tradition of reform and increased demands for African labor.

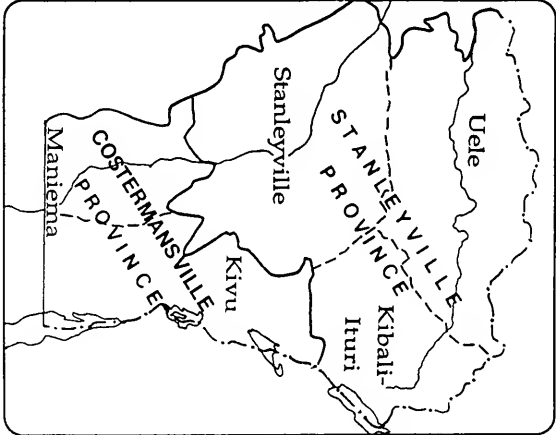
<sup>121</sup>Ibid.



Map 6. Political Divisions of the Eastern Province, 1924



Map 7. Political Divisions of the Eastern Province, 1930



Map 8. Political Divisions of the Eastern Congo, 1934

## Chapter 5

### Economic Transformations of the 'Twenties

The war effort had delayed industrialization, road building, and administrative reform in the Eastern Province, while intensifying portage, food production, and forced labor. Not surprisingly the post-war years saw massive and often chaotic activity on these fronts, necessitating a large increase in the use of African labor. The clearest measure of the rapidity of change was the growing number of Africans who were full-time employees: 26,176 in 1919, 104,365 in 1925, and 182,727 at the end of 1929. This increase was far faster than in the Congo generally. The Eastern Province, with about two-fifths of the colony's population, went from supplying 22.5 percent of its salaried labor force in 1920 to supplying almost 44 percent in 1929.<sup>1</sup> This growth was accompanied by a shift away from the colony as the principal employer to private firms and individuals. In 1919 half the salaried labor force was in the public sector; by the end of 1925 three-fourths of the much larger labor force in the eastern Congo was privately employed.<sup>2</sup>

Enormous growth also took place in African commercial agriculture. The province's rice production, for example, increased from 10,000 metric tons in 1920 to 25,000 tons in 1927. Palm oil sales went from under 2,000 metric tons in 1920 to 11,500 tons in 1929 and raw cotton from under 1,000 tons in 1920 to over 17,500 tons in 1929.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>AA, MOI(3545)15: RAPO 1919; RACB 1920, p.41; RACB 1925, p.178; Aléxis Bertrand, *Le problème de la main-d'œuvre au Congo Belge. Rapport de la commission de la main-d'œuvre indigène 1930-1931. Province Orientale* (Brussels: Imprimerie A. Lesigne, 1931), pp.6-7.

<sup>2</sup>AA, MOI(3545)15: RAPO 1919; RACB 1925, p.178.

<sup>3</sup>RACB 1921, pp.173-75; 1927, p.103; 1929, p.124.

Table 5.1  
Indices of Growth, 1921-1930  
(1920 = 100)

	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930
Population	107	110	113	115	118	118	122	127	121	124
Head tax	99	105	87	88	92	74	80	106	117	145
Wage laborers	106	158	191	217	537	553	626	633	648	637
Cotton harvest	120	308	250	481	1062	1738	1872	2156	2205	3092
Rice harvest	100	123	169	174	244	323	252	325	316	417
Days of portorage	77	90	100	103	92	79	73	59	50	55
Highways (km)	104	207	326	546	582	840	1089	1350	1541	1672

*Notes:* Population figures are based on counts (not estimates). Though the census results are too low, they correlate more realistically with the population subject to the head tax. Head tax receipts have been adjusted for inflation using indexes from Edmond Leplae, "Histoire et développement des cultures obligatoires de coton et de riz au Congo belge de 1917 à 1933," *Congo* (1933) 1:622, and Jean Stengers, *Combien le Congo a-t-il coûté à la Belgique?* (Brussels: ARSC, 1957), p.318. Cotton is unginned and rice unhulled by weight.

*Source:* Appendices 1-5; table 5.5; RACB 1930, p.125.

The growth of a settler community in Kivu greatly increased the number of African wage laborers in agriculture. Finally, there was continued high use of head portorage to supply all the labor camps and transport the industrial, mining, and agricultural production.

The colony took major new actions to manage these rising demands for African labor during the decade. The first of what would be a series of labor commissions was appointed in 1924. Its findings led to limits being imposed on the numbers of Africans who might be recruited from any area. In 1928 the colony officially ended direct government intervention in the recruitment of labor for private enterprises. A massive road and railroad construction program aimed at reducing the burden of portorage temporarily imposed vast new demands for construction gangs and for porters to bring them food. The arrival of the Great Depression at the end of the decade did more than any of these measures to reduce the labor burden on Africans.

## Administration and Policy

Two major administrative reorganizations of internal boundaries took place during the 1920s. In 1922 Lowa district was suppressed with its territory being divided among Stanleyville, Kivu, and Maniema districts. In 1928 the boundary between Upper Uele and Ituri districts was altered to put all of the gold mines in the latter. At that time Upper Uele was renamed Uele-Nepoko and Ituri became Kibali-Ituri. Lower Uele district became Uele-Itimbiri. In 1926 Alfred Moeller succeeded Adolphe de Meulemeester as governor of the Eastern Province.

The terms and conditions of work became more clearly demarcated by law during this decade. As in other African colonies in this era, the legislation favored the employers' interests. Nevertheless, African workers derived some benefits from the legal changes, which mandated improved working conditions as a way to facilitate recruitment and reduce discontent in the workplace. Two laws were of particular importance.<sup>4</sup> Implementing a decree of 15 June 1921 that made provincial authorities responsible for regulating African labor, the Eastern Province's ordonnance of 4 February 1922 provided for smallpox vaccination, specified the nature of the diet to be provided and obliged the employer to provide medical care (and part salary) to ill or injured workers and housing for those more than three kilometers from home. The second law, the decree of 16 March 1922 on labor contracts and recruitment with subsequent revisions, provided that labor contracts be freely entered into, that they have a definite and limited duration, and that the contracting parties observe their terms. The law also licensed and regulated labor recruitment. All contracts over six months duration required the *visa* of a competent authority certifying its terms and the African's free consent to them. The enforcement of such provisions proved difficult.

The rising demand for labor after the war renewed concern about the demographic health of the colony. In December 1924 the minister of colonies established a commission which he charged to discover "the measures which may be taken to provide all enterprises with the men which they need, without hindering the development of the

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<sup>4</sup>For what follows I depend heavily on Théodore Heyse, *Le régime du travail au Congo Belge*, 2nd ed. (Brussels: Goemaere, 1924).

population and at the same time promoting its physical, moral, and intellectual advancement."<sup>5</sup> Of particular concern were the long and short term demographic effects of the rough and random recruiting that had been practiced. After reviewing the situation the commission recommended placing a cap on the recruitment at 5 percent of the able-bodied men in a community. However, the commission also recommended that an additional 5 percent might be recruited for European enterprises within a two-day radius of the workers' homes, on the assumption that their ability to return home occasionally would permit normal family life and reproduction to continue. Finally, the Commission stated that "15 percent more of the male population could be employed in the vicinity of their homes in the production of food-stuffs, or in porterage for short distances."<sup>6</sup> In July 1925 these limits were officially adopted and, with certain modifications, remained the basis for labor recruitment policy until the late 1930s. In so doing the Belgian Congo became the only colonial power in Africa officially endorsing such a policy of labor restraint.<sup>7</sup>

The three years following the 1925 labor commission report saw continued growth in industry and agriculture. A special labor committee asked to review conditions in the colony in 1928, reported that while in certain areas (none in the Eastern Province) development had reached the point where a free and mobile labor pool already existed, the demographic limits on labor recruitment established in 1925 should be continued with only minor adjustments.<sup>8</sup> The committee also unanimously reaffirmed that recruitment of labor should be completely free and that the administration should actively intervene and propagandize to encourage Africans to play their role in colonial development, without the administration actually becoming recruiters of the first instance. With almost comical understatement, the committee admitted that "these two aspects of the problem [were] some-

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<sup>5</sup>Congo, (May-June 1925), p.2.

<sup>6</sup>Raymond Leslie Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1928), 2:547.

<sup>7</sup>Buell, *Native Problem*, 2:550.

<sup>8</sup>Ostensibly because of improvements in the transport network the definition of two-days travel for a short-distance recruit was increased from 60 km to a 100 km. The completely spontaneous departure of persons seeking work was not to be restricted. In areas of high labor intensity and other special situations higher quotas were to be allowed.



times difficult to reconcile."<sup>9</sup>

A special sub-committee on the Eastern Province, headed by the province's Governor Moeller, proposed stronger measures for protecting African communities from overrecruitment and assuring adequate numbers of workers to established industries. Finding that labor utilization had reached or exceeded African limits in nearly all of the province's nine economic zones, the sub-committee advocated a moratorium on all new European investment, except for limited development of palm-oil and food production, and that serious consideration be given to rolling back development plans in some areas. Because of the already intensive use of labor, the sub-committee opposed additional recruitment for work outside the individual zones, except in south-central Uele, parts of Kivu, and the Urega territory of Maniema.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the governor had already prohibited recruitment in parts of the mining region of Ituri district until the end of 1928 and in the Kasongo territory of Maniema district until the end of 1929.<sup>11</sup> In line with the 1928 report Moeller directed that every request for a new concession should be evaluated in terms of the availability of labor before any search for suitable land was made. Between December 1928 to April 1930 more than a hundred such evaluations were made.<sup>12</sup> Yet such moves to enforce the guidelines were accompanied by other directives aimed at stretching the recruitment quotas. For example, a directive from Brussels in mid-1928 stated: "When a decision authorizing the employ of available labor will have been taken by the governor [of a province] for a certain grouping, the recruitment for labor at two-days' distance cannot have the effect of diverting from this community more than 20 percent of the total number of able-bodied men."<sup>13</sup> This, of course, was twice the figure recommended by the labor commissions.

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<sup>9</sup>Rapport du Comité Consultatif de la main-d'œuvre (1928)," *Le Problème de la main-d'œuvre au Congo belge* (Brussels: Goemaere, 1928), pp.36-55.

<sup>10</sup>Alfred Moeller, "Sous-Comité de la Province Orientale. Rapport au Comité consultatif de la main-d'œuvre, 25 September 1928," *Le Problème de la main-d'œuvre au Congo belge. Supplément* (Brussels; Goemaere, 1928), pp.5-11.

<sup>11</sup>RACB 1927, p.10.

<sup>12</sup>KAT, D353/1 Terrains: Moeller to all CDs, Stanleyville, 19 April 1929, and replies.

<sup>13</sup>KAT, R Mechanisation/R1104, Instructions provinciales recrutement 1936: Dépêche ministérielle 147 du 30 April 1928 transmise par dépêche 3851-X4 au GG en date du 30 May 1928 transmise au districts par 5444 du 9 July 1928.

## Government Labor Recruitment

During this decade the proportion of labor in the public sector declined sharply from about half of the labor force in 1920 to about a quarter in 1929. In large part this was due to the tremendous expansion of private investment in mining, commerce, agriculture, and other industries. The figures also reflect the decrease in certain government operations or their transfer to the private sector. The latter include the contracting of some railroad and road construction to private firms and the transformation of the province's largest single employer, the Kilo-Moto mines, into a private corporation in 1926. However, the importance of the government as a recruiter of labor for its own and for private needs did not decline as rapidly. Having come to rely upon the government to furnish their labor, the industries, missions, and colonists struggled vigorously to retain that assistance. Only in 1928 did the government officially end its direct involvement as a labor recruiter for private enterprises, including Kilo-Moto, though it continued to play an active role in recruitment in many areas.

As in other colonies military recruitment remained a special category. The Force Publique was only slightly reduced from its wartime size, staying at an official complement between about 16,000 and 17,000 men during the decade, including some 650 from territories annexed from former German East Africa. About half the annual replenishments were met through reenlistments, but the rest had to be made up from volunteers and conscripts, with the districts of the Eastern Province being assigned an average annual quota of about 1,150.<sup>14</sup> Meeting these quotas was no easy task since the greater freedom and higher wages of the expanding private sector were more attractive to most young men wishing to leave their rural homes than the long commitment and harsh discipline of military service. Thus recruiting operations in most places were little more than "manhunts" that caused mass flight and sometimes provoked confrontations, as in Avakubi territory in 1922.<sup>15</sup> Returning from a tour of the Eastern

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<sup>14</sup>In 1924 the province's recruitment quota was 1,409, in 1925 900, in 1926 1,350, in 1927 750, in 1928 994, and in 1929 1,495. The figure dropped to 348 for 1930 when the size of the Force was reduced. AA, RAPO AIMO 1927, p.28; RACB 1929, p.108.

<sup>15</sup>Bryant P. Shaw, "Force Publique, Force Unique: the Military in the Belgian

Province late in the decade, an experienced member of the Colonial Council, Colonel Bertrand, charged that military recruitment in the Eastern Province had become a form of enslavement for the recruit and a "nightmare" for administrators. He reported that some chiefs were reduced "to holding lotteries in the market place to obtain the few men they had to furnish" and that chiefs in Kivu found it expeditious to give one of their own cows in compensation to the family of the supposed volunteer in order to maintain calm. Everywhere Bertrand went he had found the jails full of deserters, a likely sign of unwilling recruitment.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, missionaries in Kivu at that time reported that young men were seized at night and carried off to become soldiers.<sup>17</sup>

Another form of labor impressment fell on African men remaining in their rural communities, who were obliged to furnish certain labor for local needs. Under the decree of 2 May 1910, unpaid *corvées* could be used to keep the village clean, build a temporary jail, and take measures necessary to promote public health, including establishing a cemetery, erecting a temporary dispensary, and clearing disease-harboring brush. Paid *corvées* were to be used in erecting a rest house, a school at the district capital, building and maintaining roads and bridges, as well as (under the "civil requisitions" authorized under the decree of 26 December 1922) furnishing guides, porters, and canoemen to touring officials. These impressments were limited to sixty days a year (including a maximum of twenty-five days in the case of civil requisitions) and normally to no more than five days in any month (no more than two weeks at a time in the case of civil requisitions).<sup>18</sup>

Much of this labor was used in building new roads, including the recruitment of many thousands of women and children as well as men. In 1927 the colony employed some 25,000 Africans in Uele-Nepoko district and 6,785 in Kivu, mostly on road building, plus 3,680 on roads alone in Stanleyville district. In Kibali-Ituri district over

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Congo, 1914-1939" (Ph.D. dissertation, history, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1984), p.216.

<sup>16</sup>CC, CRA 1929, pp.837-839.

<sup>17</sup>APB, *Diaire de Rugari*, 22 June 1929, 2:100. The quota to be recruited was particularly high in 1929; see above note 14.

<sup>18</sup>Buell, *Native Problem*, 2:499-502.

8,600 full-time and over 8,000 part-time laborers were employed by the administration or by the MGL in road building in 1930. According to official figures, in 1927 this labor equalled 73,340 man/years in the Eastern Province, about 60 percent of the theoretical maximum if every man had worked the full sixty days. However, such labor was not evenly recruited and violations of the law were not unknown. For example, the weight of these corvées in the Doruma territory of Uele-Nepoko was so great in 1928 that it caused a sharp drop in the size of the cotton harvest and a mass exodus of people, who were apprehended and forced to return. The next year a colonial medical officer, Dr. Trolli, found excessive numbers of impressments in four territories of the Kibali-Ituri district and the illegal impressment of women and children for road work in another territory of that district.<sup>19</sup> The 1930-31 Labor Commission found that corvées under this heading in Bafwasende averaged ninety hours a month, over twice the amount allowed, and that in Banalia and elsewhere laborers were paid too little to buy enough food. The Commission also noted that markets to provision state posts and even private interests were still held under forced conditions with prices fixed well below normal. Indeed, the post at Niangara was cited as being "one of the rare secondary posts in the province which is not provisioned by methods of requisition."<sup>20</sup>

The only other official recruitment of general consequence was by the Office du Travail (Offitra), the colony's official recruiter for the labor needed for the massive reconstruction of the Lower Congo railroad. Most of this went to the Belgian Société Africaine de Construction (Safricas). Meeting the labor needs of this important project was difficult and the subject of bitter disputes throughout the 1920s. The governor general initially authorizing forced recruitment in an ordonnance of 1 October 1919, but this was struck down in court and repudiated by the Ministry and the Colonial Council.<sup>21</sup> However, it

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<sup>19</sup>Comité Consultative de la main-d'œuvre, *Rapport de la Sous-Commission chargé de dépouiller le Questionnaire des Employeurs de Main-d'Œuvre indigène au Congo Belge* (Bruxelles: Etablissements Généraux d'Imprimerie, 1932), pp.20-24. AA, MOI(3608)204: Jasper, Minister of Colonies, to GG, 10 September 1928; RA/CB (157)5: RA.KI 1930, p.38; AI(1422): Rapport sur l'administration générale, Uele-Nepoko, first half 1928, p.26.

<sup>20</sup>Bertrand, *Problème de la main-d'œuvre*, pp.84, 101, 103, 135, 158, 164; quote on p.158.

turned out to be impossible to obtain sufficient labor without forced recruitment, so that coercion returned in other forms. During 1924 the Eastern Province was expected to supply the project with a hundred recruits a month, but by November had delivered only 381. This failing, which it shared with the Equator province, set off a flurry of correspondence through the levels of the administration. Most local agents took the position that they could not meet their quotas without resorting to force and petitioned the government to legalize that course of action despite the inevitable consequences. Upper Uele's official Labor Commission justified its support for legalizing the impressment of labor by pointing out the fallacy of relying on volunteers:

Recruitment based on the free consent of the natives places the administrators in difficult and delicate situations; they must operate through the chiefs in order to limit their own responsibility and close their eyes to the abuses of the latter, of which the least is that the same natives always bear this burden.<sup>22</sup>

Early in 1926 the revelation by a Belgian newspaper of particularly gross recruitment abuses in the Poko territory of Lower Uele led to an official investigation. Evidence collected from African chiefs and local officials revealed that laborers had been recruited for Offitra against their will. Some had been deceived into thinking they were only going as far as the district capital of Buta to work on coffee plantations. Others, who knew they were going to the Lower Congo, had been sent off in slave yokes under armed guard. Some aspects of this incident may have been extreme, but the general pattern was not. Governor General Rutten was convinced that the recruits from the Eastern and Equator provinces "could not have been obtained without frequent transgressions of the principle of free hiring" so that many of the workers had been obtained through compulsion or the fear of compulsion.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Conseil Colonial, CRA 1920, pp.5-10, 114, 199; "Les 'levées des travailleurs'," *Congo* (1920), pp.368-70.

<sup>22</sup>Compte rendu, Commission de la Main-d'œuvre, Haut-Uele, séance du 7 October 1925, AA, MOI(3598)132/PO, p.6.

<sup>23</sup>Stocker (Commissaire, Haut Uele) to Governor, PO, 14 April 1926, and enclosures; Rutten to Minister of Colonies, 16 February 1926, AA, MOI(3559bis).

The colony found itself in an economic and moral dilemma. There seemed no way to uphold the principle of free labor and at the same time complete the railroad. Yet the new railroad was essential to relieve the transportation bottleneck in the Lower Congo and reduce the heavy burden of human portage there. In May 1926, after carefully considering these alternatives, the Colonial Council reluctantly approved the Ministry's plan to authorize forced recruitment as the lesser of two evils. Over the vehement protests of Governor General Rutten, who felt the potential benefits of completing the railroad quickly were being defeated by "hard-core adversaries of forced labor and short-sighted humanitarians," the measure was rejected by the Belgian Parliament, whose members feared a further outcry from a public already aroused by the news of illegal forced recruitment and by scandalous working conditions at Safricas (see below).<sup>24</sup>

Yet in choosing not to recruit legally by force, was the Ministry not choosing to do so illegally? The historical record on this point (as on so many others) is largely mute. It is known that Offitra succeeded in obtaining some 1,800 recruits from the Eastern Province in 1925, 2,521 in 1926, and 2,030 in 1927. It is also known that the work force for the first quarter of 1927, planned for 13,800, never rose above 6,660. By 1928 the province's annual report described recruitment for Offitra as "increasingly difficult" and "unpopular"; only about 1,500 recruits were obtained in the Eastern Province that year. However, in 1930 the number recruited was 2,700, suggesting that there may have been a return to the practices of coercion typical of the mid-1920s.<sup>25</sup> It is also possible that Depression unemployment increased the number of true volunteers.

Although the government studied, modified, and agonized over its African labor policies during this decade, its use of force in obtaining labor for the Force Publique and for public works projects continued a long tradition and set an example that was readily imitated by state corporations and private employers.

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<sup>24</sup>Conseil Colonial, CRA 1926, pp.392-403; "Les 'levées des travailleurs'," p.368-70; Rutten to Minister of Colonies, N° 339, Boma 3 August 1926, AA, MOI (3600)141.

<sup>25</sup>RACB 1925, p.179; AA, RA/CB(137)1, RAPO, Avant Propos. 1926. p.9; (137)2, RAPO, Avant Propos, 1927, p.2; MOI(3600)141, Safricas to Minister of Colonies, 5 December 1927.; (138)2, RAPO.AIMO 1928, pp.32-33; Bertrand, *Problème de la main-d'œuvre*, p.19.

## Industrial Labor

The number of wage-earners in commerce and industry, including the state corporations, rose rapidly during this decade. The total salaried African work force in the Eastern Province had been just over 26,000 in 1919; a decade later the number in non-agricultural labor alone exceeded 83,000. Much of this labor force was distributed among small and middle-sized firms throughout the province, but a few large mining and concessionary companies employed over a third of this total.

The giant among these was the government-owned gold mining operation of Kilo-Moto, which in 1919 became an autonomous state corporation known as the Régie Industrielle des Mines de Kilo-Moto (RIM). The frenzied production efforts of the war years continued well into 1920 and exhausted the known gold deposits as well as exhausting and alienating the miners. Gold production fell in the early 1920s as the company was forced to explore for new gold fields, install new equipment, construct roads and buildings, and develop more reliable food and medical services for its employees. Only in 1922 did the labor force and gold production begin to climb again. In each of the next three years the RIM mined and refined some three metric tons of gold, worth over forty million francs each year to the colony.<sup>26</sup> Despite the importance of this revenue, in 1926 the Congo sold 45 percent of its interest to private shareholders in order to raise money for road, railroad, and other construction projects. The new joint-stock company, whose dividends were guaranteed by the state, was called the Société des Mines d'or de Kilo-Moto (Sokimo). The gold mines' total labor force (9,000 at the end of 1920) grew to an average of 20,000 during the second half of the decade, while the number of short-term workers fell sharply.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>For this decade see R. Anthoine, "Les Mines de Kilo-Moto. Leur évolution-leur avenir," *Revue Universelle des Mines*, 13 (May 1922):165-79; G. Moulart, *Vingt années à Kilo-Moto (1920-1940)* (Brussels: Charles Dessart, 1950); "Rapport de la Commission des Colonies chargée d'examiner le Projet de Loi contenant le Budget ordinaire du Congo Belge...pour l'exercice 1934," Belgique, *Documents Parlementaires, Sénat*, session 1933-34, N° 85, annexe III, pp.68-69; Bakonzi Agayo, "The Gold Mines of Kilo-Moto in Northeastern Zaire: 1905-1960," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1982).

<sup>27</sup>See Table 5.3.

The second largest employer in the province was the Huileries du Congo Belge (HCB), a subsidiary of Lever Brothers, which in 1911 had received enormous concessions for palm fruit collection, planting, and processing in several parts of the Congo. In the Eastern Province the work force at its 200,000-hectare Elisabetha concession along the Lomami valley of the Aruwimi district grew from some 2,000 in 1921 to 7,200 at the end of 1928. About a third of this force were engaged in the cutting and transport of palm fruit, the rest in the extraction of the oil and other activities.<sup>28</sup>

Next in importance was the CFL, whose rail lines around rapids and connecting river shipping on the Lualaba employed 2,500 men in the province in 1929. In return for building the railroads, the company had received enormous mineral-exploration and mining rights in the province, which during the latter half of the 1920s were developed by a subsidiary corporation, the Minière des Grands Lacs (MGL), whose exploration rights in Kivu and Kibali-Ituri extended over an area twice the size of Belgium. At the end of 1929 the MGL employed 2,533 Africans full time and 1,240 part time.<sup>29</sup>

The fourth largest employer in the province during this decade was another mining company, the Forminière, a Belgian-American operation. In 1928 Forminière's northern camps employed 2,400 Africans full time and 475 part time plus a few hundred elsewhere in the province.<sup>30</sup> Other major private employers included the Lomami Company with 2,431 employees at the end of 1928 and two railroad construction projects, the Chemin de Fer Vicinaux du Congo (Vici-congo) in Uele, which employed 1,150 in 1927 and the Chemin de Fer Tanganyika-Kivu (Cefaki), whose construction gangs included 1,471 Africans in 1929.<sup>31</sup>

How were these increasing numbers of laborers obtained? Despite

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<sup>28</sup>Buell, *Native Problem*, 2:511-14; AA, MOI(3545)15: RAPO, AIMO, 1925, pp.198-99; AA, RA/CB(140)4: RAPO, Affaires Economiques, 1928.

<sup>29</sup>AA, RA/CB(137)4: RAPO Avant Propos, 1929, p.28. Michel Cobut, "Historique des transports au Congo, période 1918-1928," (mémoire de licence, Institut Catholique des Hautes Etudes Commerciales, 1966), pp.101-2.

<sup>30</sup>AA, AI(1422): Rapport sur l'administration générale, Uele-Nepoko, first half 1928, pp.15-18. Buell, *Native Problem*, 2:442-45.

<sup>31</sup>AA, MOI(3608)204: G. Trolli, Rapport d'inspection médicale et d'hygiène du district du Bas Uele, 14/20 December 1927; RA/CB(140)4: RAPO, Affaires Economique, 1928 and 1929, part 2, pp.204-21.



the theoretical ban on recruitment for private employers, government involvement in the recruitment process was common. The justification for this official recruitment was the need to overcome African indolence. As the colony's annual report for 1921 unctuously put it:

Our officials continue to lend the assistance of their authority and their influence over the natives, without which the European enterprises would be imperiled, to the recruitment of labor, a difficult task in which they are sustained by the sense of performing the duty incumbent on the collaborators in the colonial work.<sup>32</sup>

To counter the reluctance of Africans to sell their labor Governor General Lippens directed the colonial administration in 1922 to be "apostles of labor,...not of a haphazard labor which is content with paying taxes, but a persevering labor, which is the basis of all prosperity, development and civilization."<sup>33</sup> That such labor was also in the interests of private companies and their investors was not without significance and this factor influenced both high officials and local administrators.

The Lever Brothers' HCB operation may have been an extreme example of this dependence on government-supplied labor, but it was hardly an isolated one. Because of its importance to the Aruwimi district, the HCB succeeded in inveigling the colonial administration to recruit its several thousand workers, no easy task in view of the low wages and deficiencies in housing and food which were the subject of constant complaints. In September 1925 the administrator of Yanonge territory wrote his superior wondering how the unceasing instructions he received to recruit more and more labor for the HCB could be construed as carrying out the colonial mission of improving the welfare of Africans. He expressed the belief that agents like himself were "daily becoming more and more veritable merchants of men" like the Arab slavers of earlier decades, at whose approach villages emptied of their inhabitants. Recruitment, he argued, resembled slave trading not only in the use of force but as well in sending recruits so far from their homes. Indeed, Africans' unwillingness to leave home was the main reason force had to be used in the first place. "What would the peasants of Belgium...say," he asked rhetorically, "if they were obliged

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<sup>32</sup>RACB 1921, p.157.

<sup>33</sup>Quoted in Buell, *Native Problem*, 2: 539.

to go to work in the factories of Bohemia?"<sup>34</sup>

This Territorial Administrator was not the only person to be troubled by such circumstances. Raymond Buell, touring the Eastern Province a few months later in the course of researching his monumental survey of colonial labor, stated that the Belgian Congo was the only place in Africa where he had found the government recruiting labor by force for private employers, except for Portuguese Mozambique. He based this conclusion upon the "unanimous testimony of administrators, traders, and missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant," and "upon documents which different Belgian officials have let me read" (including the letter just quoted from Yanonge), as well as upon his own observations of forced recruitment, which included the following incident:

My first visual evidence...came at Kirundu, a post on the Lualaba [just south of Ponthierville], where I saw about fifteen or twenty old men, some of whom were accompanied by naked wives and babies lined up with ropes tying them together around their necks, waiting for the boat. The administrator...told me he was sending them down to Stanleyville to work for the Belgika—a commercial society, operating a rice mill. He said these men were complaining against their chiefs and were running away into the forests, so he thought he would send them down to work.<sup>35</sup>

The situation at the government mines of Kilo-Moto also reflected the continuing need for the government to intervene. In 1924 the district commissioner of Ituri wrote the governor of the province that none of the most recent recruits for the mines was a volunteer and that "all were taken by force." He further predicted that the mining industry would be imperiled quickly if the chiefs were not compelled to furnish "recruits."<sup>36</sup>

By mid-decade opposition to recruitment for private firms was also

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<sup>34</sup>Cited in Buell, *Native Problem*, 2:542. The French text and the identity of the territory in question are in Buell to Grimshaw, Bolenge, 29 January 1926, Joint International Missionary Council/Conference of British Missionary Societies Archives, Africa and India 1910-1945, Box 287. Reluctance to be so far from home was also cited by RAPO, AIMO, p.198, as the reason "a large part of the labor force must be recruited *par voie d'autorité*."

<sup>35</sup>Buell to Grimshaw, 29 January 1926.

<sup>36</sup>Hackars to de Meulemeester, 25 July and 18 September 1924, AA, MOI(3602) 166.

building at the upper end of the colonial administration, led by Governor General Rutten, who had come to office in January 1923. In 1924 he admonished Governor Moeller for forced recruitment for Kilo-Moto, while still urging that all possible "moral persuasion" short of actual physical violence be used.<sup>37</sup> A few months later, in an unusually frank letter, he challenged the minister of colonies' view that African chiefs would have to be weaned slowly from forced recruiting of labor. Rutten argued that such abuses were "contrary to their real interests" and existed only because of government pressures:

They knew we closed our eyes to the means used so long as the results were attained, while we would hold them strictly accountable for any shortfall. Thus, as soon as the administration shows itself more preoccupied with making the laws observed than in raising numerous workers,...it will be obeyed everywhere promptly, even joyfully.<sup>38</sup>

The next year he took issue with Governor Moeller's view that while forced recruitment was "regrettable" and removed incentives for employers to improve working conditions, it still needed to be done, though perhaps more discreetly through an official labor bureau, such as already existed in Kasai and Katanga provinces. "For too long," Rutten rejoined, "we have faced our administrators with this dilemma: either displease the employers or break the law."<sup>39</sup>

Under the pressure of Rutten and other critics, in December 1925, the minister of colonies had "issued instructions ordering the administrative officials to stop the 'direct recruitment of labor for private employers.'" During a two-year period of transition, local authorities might continue "more or less direct intervention" where needed, but all direct intervention was to end by the beginning of 1928.<sup>40</sup> This transitional period was a critical one for the many employers who had come to rely heavily on the administration's intervention on their behalf, and the most powerful of them used every means at their disposal to delay the change as long as possible. The CFL tried to plead

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<sup>37</sup>GG to Governor, PO, 17 April 1925, quoted in Buell, *Native Problem*, 2:543.

<sup>38</sup>GG to Minister of Colonies, 13 July 1925, p.1, AA, MOI(3545)8.

<sup>39</sup>Moeller to GG, Report, 9 August 1926, p.18, AA, MOI(3602)166; Rutten to Moeller, 19 October 1926 and Ruttento Minister, 30 March 1927, AA, MOI(3601)148.

<sup>40</sup>Cited in Buell *Native Problem*, 2: 550-51.

that their public utility as a transport company entitled them to continued special treatment, but the Ministry of Colonies rejected this appeal, suggesting that the company raise its wages and improve working conditions.<sup>41</sup>

Other examples of how difficult government disengagement from recruitment could be are not hard to find. One is provided by the case of the Société Coloniale de Construction (Socol), which was building the new Vicicongo railroad from Aketi to Buta. After receiving reports of labor abuse and other problems the general administrator of the Ministry of Colonies wrote to the governor general indicating that the local administration should no longer be recruiting for a private firm. In this case Rutten did not exhibit any enthusiasm for the reform, perhaps because of the pressures he was under to improve transport in this region. He replied that, while the instructions of 7 December 1925, did provide for an eventual end to direct intervention, they also quite explicitly stated that "more or less direct intervention" was permitted where still necessary and in the public interest. The minister responded since "transition" meant moving from one point to another, Socol should begin doing its own recruiting. However, later correspondence makes clear that direct and active official recruitment remained the rule in Lower Uele for Socol, for the railroad company, and for the Union Nationale des Transporteurs Fleuviaux (Unatra), the state transportation company responsible for the river link to Aketi. In 1928 the province's commissioner general reported that these firms still made no effort to recruit on their own; as a practical matter, he explained, "The non-direct intervention of the administration in matters of recruitment for enterprises assuring public services is an impossible thing."<sup>42</sup>

The directors of the now private Société des Mines d'Or de Kilo-Moto, the province's largest employer, were also convinced—along with some local officials—that they could never recruit adequate numbers on their own and were not eager to try. Despite government urging that they use the transition period to establish their own labor bureau, the mines delayed doing so until the very end of 1927.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>AA, MOI(3601)142: Administrator General to CFL, Brussels, 31 July 1926.

<sup>42</sup>AA, MOI(3601)148, Administrator General, Ministry of Colonies, to GG, 12 August 1926; GG to Minister of Colonies, 9 September 1926; Gilson, Commissioner General, for the Governor, PO, to GG, 8 March 1928 and 21 August 1928.

They were equally slow in moving to conserve labor by mechanizing their labor-intensive mining methods, which one official charged had "changed little since the time of the Egyptian Pharaohs," and by eliminating their reliance on short-term laborers (*auxiliaires*), who had to be recruited in large numbers.<sup>44</sup> The initial results were poor. In Kibali-Ituri district Kilo-Moto recruiters failed to get their quota of men, even though the Watsa, the Grands Lacs, and the Sengule mining companies in that district had no such problems. In the Medje and Wamba territories of Uele-Nepoko district Kilo-Moto recruiters got such poor results and stirred up such unrest that the district commissioner ordered his officials to resume the actual recruitment, yet these were territories where even Offitra was obtaining volunteers without difficulty.<sup>45</sup> During 1929 Kilo-Moto found recruitment considerably easier in Kibali-Ituri, though not so easy as the Minière des Grands Lacs, which was turning job-seekers away.<sup>46</sup> The administration continued to provide both companies with thousands of laborers for the construction of roads in their areas.

For other employers the end of administrative recruiting produced mixed results. Laborers turned out more readily in Uele-Itimbiri and Kibali-Ituri, responding to higher wages and better treatment. The higher wages could be paid because new investment in tools increased productivity. However, in Maniema (particularly in Lowa territory) recruitment remained difficult, still requiring "the frequent intervention" of the administration to provide private enterprises the personnel they required.<sup>47</sup> Similar intervention was used in 1928 on behalf of European colonists in Kivu district, where even after direct intervention ended its effects lived on. A 1932 report noted that "the great part of the laborers still had the impression that they remained attached to a specific plantation."<sup>48</sup> A judicial official who examined

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<sup>43</sup>First Minister, Ministry of Colonies to RIM, 3 July 1928, AA, MOI(3602)166.

<sup>44</sup>KAT, R13 (Commission MOI de Bruxelles. Outillage Indigène): Raduigès, CD, Uele-Nepoko, to Governor, PO, Niangara, 3 September 1928.

<sup>45</sup>Rapport de l'administration générale, Uele-Nepoko, first half 1928, pp.13-14, AA, AI(1422); RAPO, AIMO, 1928, pp.18-19, 29-30, AA, RA/CB(138)2.

<sup>46</sup>RACB 1929, p.108.

<sup>47</sup>RAPO, AIMO, 1928, pp.29-31, AA, RA/CB(138)2.

<sup>48</sup>Musimwa Bisharhwa, "Histoire coloniale de Kaziba: Essai d'études des aspects religieux et économiques (1908-1960)," (Travail de fin d'étude, history, ISP, Bukavu,

the records of 450 African workers charged with violations of their labor contracts in Stanleyville town during 1927 and the first half of 1928 had reported that forced labor was the principal cause of "indiscipline."<sup>49</sup> In Stanleyville and Ponthierville districts the fine line between encouraging recruitment through the chiefs and furnishing it was difficult to observe because of the constant demands made on administrators by their superiors and private enterprises. The 1930-31 Labor Commission found that in Stanleyville especially the administrators still "intervened" among chiefs to assure an adequate number of recruits for private persons.<sup>50</sup> Thus, although the official suppression of direct intervention for private employers was a major reform, it was a hard reform to enforce.

The administration's insistence that African conservatism was to blame is not borne out by the facts. Employers who improved working conditions saw a better response from Africans. However, conservatism among many European employers was a problem. As the next chapter will show it was hard for administrators, chiefs, and employers to break away from the long tradition of forced or coerced recruitment. Once the demand for labor began to grow again after the depression, instances of direct intervention recurred.

### Agricultural Labor

A perennial subject of dispute in the Belgian colonial system was the relative emphasis to be placed on the development of African agriculture and on the development of European-run enterprises. At the end of 1914 Governor General Henry had pointed out the gap between stated policy and practice: "For many years numerous letters and circulars have drawn the attention of our officials to the opportunity to develop native agriculture, and yet up to now one cannot report a serious effort toward achieving practical results." The next year he announced a bold initiative to close that gap: "The government intends to favor above all the development of native agriculture." In the governor general's view the impressive production of rice in the

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a Mr. Buzzi in 1928; RA, Banya-Rongo (Kivu), AIMO, 1932, p.26.

<sup>49</sup>Rapport du Substitut Procureur du Roi, Rezette, annex to the letter of the GG, 10 January 1929, AA, AI(1415).

<sup>50</sup>Bertrand, *Problème de la main-d'œuvre*, pp.80, 90.

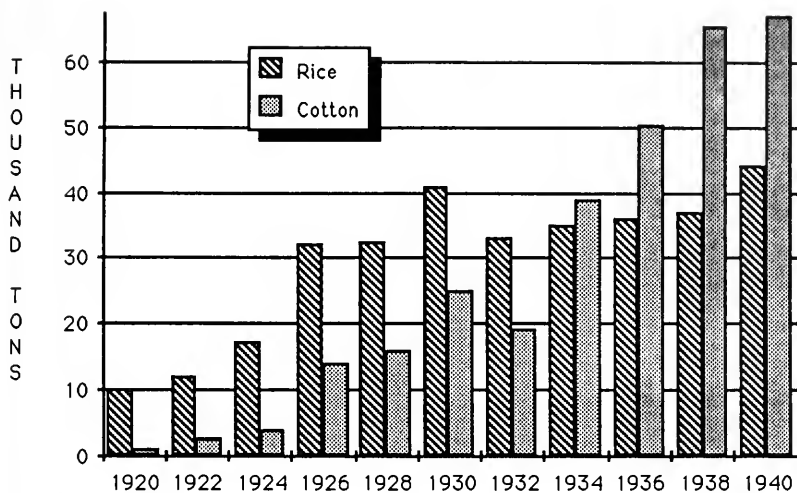


Figure 5.1 Cash crop production in the Eastern Province, 1920-1940

Source: Appendices 4 and 5.

Eastern Province and Kasai during these war years provided the model for this expansion of African cash crops.<sup>51</sup>

The plans for African agriculture were influenced by wartime successes in cotton growing. During a tour of eastern Africa in 1915-16 the colony's agricultural service, Edmond Leplae, had been impressed by the successful development of cotton growing in Uganda, especially by the fact that it had been done without the expense of technical studies, hiring agronomists, or an extensive publicity effort. Instead the British had simply distributed the seeds and ordered the great chiefs of Buganda to have them planted. To Leplae it was clear that the way to success was to compel the cultivation of needed crops, an idea reinforced by his visit to Portuguese Mozambique.<sup>52</sup> The culti-

<sup>51</sup>Eugène Henry, "Circulaire du Gouverneur Général relative à l'établissement de culture de produits d'exportation par les indigènes," *BACB* 4 (December 1914): 549-52; *RACB* 1915, p.104.

<sup>52</sup>E. Leplae, "Histoire et développement des cultures obligatoires de coton et de riz au Congo belge de 1917 à 1933," *Congo* (1933) 1:645-753. Cf. "Material Development in Congo Belge," *Congo Mission News*, 76 (October 1931):22-23, and E. F. Tollens, "An Economic Analysis of Cotton Production, Marketing and Processing in Northeastern Zaire," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1975). Although forced cotton growing had been imposed in the concession of the Mozam-

vation of cotton had been introduced in Maniema and Sankuru (west of Maniema in Kasai province) in 1915-16 where it had met with immediate success, the early crops being purchased by the State for munitions uses. In imitation of the successful Ugandan scheme and in continuation of the wartime crop impositions a new law of 1917 required Africans "to grow annually in the chiefdom, for the exclusive benefit of its members, food crops or plantations of export products."<sup>53</sup> In 1918 cotton cultivation for military needs was extended into Uele, where the Zande had been growing cotton introduced by Egyptians since early in the century.<sup>54</sup> Uele soon became the major cotton growing region of the Belgian Congo.

As the subsequent decades painfully illustrated, these successes came at a high price. The program for developing African commercial farming incorporated many of the worst features of its wartime predecessor: the incentive to grow the crops was from compulsion; the profits were reaped largely by the colony and its European buying agents not by the producers; the rush to achieve production goals led to exhausting portorage and food shortages for many Africans. At the base of the program was the requirement for Africans to plant fields of a specified size to cotton. At first each farmer was required to plant a hectare (2.5 acres), which meant clearing and cultivating fields in addition to those used for subsistence food crops. By the end of the 1920s the requirement had been expanded to as much as five hectares in parts of Uele (table 5.2).

The purchasing of cotton was equally tightly controlled. A private Belgian firm, the *Compagnie Cotonnière Congolaise* (Cotonco), was given exclusive rights to purchase raw cotton for ginning in specified zones and forbidden to engage in any other kind of trade. On recommendation of the British Cotton Growers' Association, the government

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bique Company early in the century, it was not made an official colonial policy until 1926 in imitation of the Belgian Congo system. This law was not enforced until ten years later. Mozambique extended compulsory cultivation to rice in 1941. See Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "'Tawani, Machambero!': Forced Cotton and Rice Growing on the Zambezi," *Journal of African History* 19 (1978):239-63.

<sup>53</sup>Ordinance-law of 20 February 1917 (addition to the decree of 2 May 1910).

<sup>54</sup>Ugo Graziani, "Reconnaissance effectuée des territoires Nord Uele du 29 avril au 3 juin 1908," 21 June 1908, AA:AI(1371)46. The cotton program was under the direction of an American agronomist from Tennessee, Edward Fisher, who had previously worked in the Gold Coast and in the Lower Congo.



Table 5.2  
Compulsory Cultivation in the Eastern Province, 1929

DISTRICTS	Cotton (hectares)	Food Crops (hectares)	Palm Trees (numbers)	Other Trees (numbers)
Aruwimi		0.2-2.5	10-25	
Stanleyville		7.5-12.5	6-25	
Uele-Itimbiri	1.5-5	0.5-2.7	10	
Uele-Nepoko	3-5	0.5-3	10	
Kibali-Ituri		2	10	10
Kivu	4	3	10	10
Maniema	2.5-3.5	2.5-10	10	

*Notes:* In Maniema cotton alone was imposed in the five southern territories, while foodstuffs alone were imposed in the northern two (rice alone in Lowa). The ten hectare figure for Maniema is anomalous; three hectares was the maximum area imposed in 1930-31. In most of Uele-Nepoko only cotton was imposed; the food crops for Kilo-Moto were imposed in parts of Dungu, Wamba, and Medje territories.

*Sources:* RAPO, Agriculture, 1929, p.13; RA, Uele-Nepoko, Agriculture, 1929, p.7, AA, RA/CB(156)3; RA, Maniema, Agriculture, 1929-31, p.7, AA, RA/CB(159)4-6.

also set minimum purchase prices to protect the African producers from market fluctuations, but in practice these were nearly always the maximum prices paid as well. In 1920 compensation was fixed at fifty centimes a kilogram, but was cut in half the next year. Though the prices gradually rose to sixty centimes a kilo in 1925 and 120 in 1930, the gains were more than offset by the decade's terrible inflation. Like rice-growers, those raising cotton made less per unit at the end of the decade than at the beginning.<sup>55</sup> Because the number of buying stations was limited at first and motor roads were equally scarce, the rapid development of cotton growing witnessed an equally rapid increase in portorage (see below). This continued until late in the decade when the new roads in Uele permitted locating buying stations closer to the producers.

By 1922 the two Uele districts accounted for over half of the

<sup>55</sup>RACB 1921, p.199; 1922, p.71; 1931, p.79; AA, RA/CB(141)10: RAPO, Agriculture, 1926, p.4.

province's cotton production; by 1928 they were producing 80 percent. The long-time head of Lower Uele district attributed the success of cotton growing in the northern savanna to two factors. The first was the absence of any other cash crop, in contrast with Maniema where cotton competed with food cash crops, notably rice and palm oil. The second factor was Uele's large and powerful political systems, which (as in Uganda) made it easier for the government to enforce compulsory cultivation of a hectare of cotton per man. "Nothing would demonstrate better than the results of cotton growing," he concluded, "the excellence of the principle that we are in the Congo to develop the native in spite of himself if necessary."<sup>56</sup>

Whether the inhabitants of Uele were profiting from cotton growing became a contentious question as the decade advanced, though no one doubted that the colony was much better off. Leplae claimed that cotton-growers in Uele cleared 100 to 200 francs a year after taxes, even though he felt those taxes were probably excessive.<sup>57</sup> Some missionaries and other officials were less sure of the program's benefits. An American evangelical returning to Yakuluku in the Zande area at the beginning of 1926 after a three-year absence was amazed by the rapid growth of commerce, roads, and African cash crops, but he noted, "With raising cotton, coffee, working in the mines and on the roads, [people] do not get much time 'to sit' in their villages. Most of the villages I have seen are going to wrack and ruin, and the Azande people always have had such lovely places."<sup>58</sup> A British missionary asserted that rigorously enforced cotton growing left Uele residents with too little time to grow the food they needed.<sup>59</sup> A former agent in Uele-Itimbiri wrote to Brussels in 1925 charging that because of forced cotton growing hunger was becoming common in this rich agricultural area capable of producing two crops a year. He

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<sup>56</sup>André Jacques Landeghem, "De l'influence des cultures de coton par les indigènes sur le développement économique des régions cotonnières," *Congo* (1927) 2:298-303.

<sup>57</sup>Leplae, "Histoire des cultures obligatoires," pp.725-27.

<sup>58</sup>W.O. Kemptner in *Inland Africa*, 9(June 1925):5.

<sup>59</sup>E. Torday to Hanns Vischer, Boltons, 30 May 1929, Joint International Missionary Council/Conference of British Missionary Societies Archives, Box 287: "When a man brings his cotton to the Station and has not the full amount imposed--well ask one of your Sudan friends what happens if M. Delhay for example is the cotton collector. He is just one of many, but as he is near the border they might know."

further reported witnessing "hundreds of women carrying loads of cotton balls weighing 30 kilos from Lébe to Monga, i. e. seven long days walk," for which they received no pay and were forced to forage along the road for their food. The men, he charged, worked all year on their fifteen ares of cotton in return for only 25 fr, with inflation cancelling out gains in production. In his view the effect of the cotton program was to reduce over a hundred thousand souls "to slavery, to misery."<sup>60</sup>

Criticism of the cotton program also came from senior officials. In 1927 the governor of the province reported that producers regularly got short weight from buying agents, who sometimes pocketed the difference.<sup>61</sup> A year later the head of Uele-Nepoko district noted that many Africans were, in his words, "discouraged," "discontent," and "agitated" by the requirement to grow cotton and no longer had for cotton that "fine enthusiasm of the early days."<sup>62</sup> Finally a member of the Colonial Council who had spent a quarter century in the area wrote frankly to the governor about cotton as follows:

Among the natives the *malaise* is incontestable: we have not succeeded in making this crop popular as in Uganda. The remunerations are insignificant and the blacks continue only under the pressure of the administration. Choose the correct answer: either it is impossible to increase the remunerations presently agreed upon and the growing of cotton in the P[rovince] O[rientale] is an artificial enterprise which on its own has no chance to succeed or the remuneration can be increased and it is unpardonable that the cotton companies, with the cooperation of the Administration, should make such profits, all of whose weight falls on the natives. The current experiment has lasted long enough to expect results.... We are faced with forced labor of an abusive character and we cannot deceive ourselves that this only concerns those dealing with this in Geneva and elsewhere.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>L. Duchemin to M. Arnold, Secretary General, Ministry of Colonies, Ostende, 4 February 1925, AA, MOI(3547)25. This file also contains letters solicited from Congo authorities which cast aspersions on Duchemin's character but do not attempt to refute the substance of his charges.

<sup>61</sup>AA, Procès verbal, Comité Regional, PO, first session 1927, 2 May 1927.

<sup>62</sup>AA, AI(1422), Rapport de l'administration générale, Uele-Nepoko, first half 1928.

<sup>63</sup>A. Bertrand to Governor Moeller, 27 February 1929, AA, D(778)B.I. The reference to Geneva was to the international conference there at work on a forced labor convention. The convention was issued in 1930, but Belgium ratified it only in 1944,

Much less is known of Maniema cotton-growers during this decade, but the following reminiscences of an old chief in the Kasongo area strongly resemble those of the critics in Uele:

Thus the peasant agreed to plant cotton not because he could sell it at a profit but because the colonial authorities required it of him. The refractory were led off to prison or were subjected to the torture of the whips or else they had to pay heavy fines. It was not rare to see peasants who, wishing to escape cultivating cotton, first cooked the seeds before planting them in order to convince the colonialists that their soil was not suited to that crop.<sup>64</sup>

In many ways the success of the cotton experiment set the model followed with regard to other African cash crops. During the 1920s compulsory cultivation was seen as the solution to growing food shortages that resulted from the growing number of Africans recruited into the non-agricultural labor force and from the emphasis on non-food crops such as cotton. In this case too, compulsion was not simply a way of getting Africans to grow crops for the market, but of forcing them to do so for very inadequate compensation. Food prices were kept low so that European employers could contain their labor costs.

The transformation of food production in the Eastern Province during the 1920s was as dramatic as the transformation of cotton production. At the beginning of the decade province was already exporting foodstuffs to other parts of the colony. The Middle and Lower Congo bought an estimated 10,000 metric tons of rice in 1920, along with quantities of palm oil, fish, smoked meat, and manioc flour. In 1922 Maniema alone sold 1,134 tons of rice, 591 tons of palm oil, 480 tons of peanuts, 179 tons of cassava flour, and 32 tons of corn to the mining camps of Katanga.<sup>65</sup> In 1928 the province's food exports included 17,814 tons of palm nuts, 9,242 tons of palm oil, and 472 tons even then with reservations concerning the use of "compulsory and educational cultivation."

<sup>64</sup>Recorded in 1972 by Ramazani Mwanatingu, "La culture du coton dans la zone de Kabambare," (Travail de fin d'études, Géographie-Histoire, ISP, Bukavu), p.32.

<sup>65</sup>RACB 1920, p.37; RACB 1922, p.72. In 1926 Kivu was also "contributing greatly to the provisioning of Katanga" and Maniema was described as the "granary of Katanga," but the next year Maniema, while continuing to ship peanuts and corn south, had ceased to supply Katanga with manioc flour and rice, the latter because of the high prices compared to those from Rhodesia. AA, RAPO, Economique, 1926, p.89, RAPO, Economique, 1927 (extrait), pp.12-13.

Table 5.3  
Sources of Provisions for the Kilo-Moto Mines, 1925-1930  
(in metric tons)

SOURCE	1925	1926	1927	1928	1930
African producers	6,153	7,731	6,987		
African markets	3,084	3,341	4,226	5,511	14,485
Company farms	1,206	2,522	3,288		1,280
Colonists	758	1,345	1,469		580
Employee Farms	500				300
Merchants (meat)	0		213		

Sources: AA, RAPO, *Economique*, 1926, p.88; 1927, p.11; Bertrand, *Problème de la main-d'œuvre*, pp.194-95.

of sesame seeds, as well as some 25,000 tons of rice.<sup>66</sup>

Within the province the trade in foodstuffs was concentrated in the mining regions, in the major towns (especially Stanleyville), and along the main transportation routes, including the large work camps that came into existence as the roads and railroads were greatly expanded. Despite the enormous growth in food production during the decade supplying a number of places in the province remained difficult, in part due to the low producer prices. In the case of the HCB camps, for example, a 1927 report admitted that supplying provisions "would be impossible without the direct assistance of the administration."<sup>67</sup>

Another area where compulsory cultivation of food crops was vigorously imposed was around the mining camps of Kilo-Moto. Early in the decade food shortages were notorious in these camps and what food came in was obtained only by administrative pressure. One approach to the problem was the introduction of European colonists. The first were Afrikaners from South Africa. By 1927 there were thirty colonists in Ituri, who supplied nearly 1,500 tons of food to the mines (table 5.3). Even though the colonists were paid two to three times the

<sup>66</sup>RACB 1928, p.47.

<sup>67</sup>AA, RAPO, *Economique*, 1926, pp.88-89; RAPO, *Economique*, 1927 (extrait), pp.11-13. The latter reported difficulties in supplying food to the HCB (Aruwimi), the Mines de la Tele at Sengule, the Minière des Grands Lacs (Ituri), and the towns of Niangara and Stanleyville.

rate accorded African producers, they were still unhappy with the prices they received. In 1925 most of the Afrikaners switched to growing coffee which was experiencing a boom at that time. The mines also established their own farms, which by 1927 were supplying over twice as much food as the colonists. These company farms were expanded to furnish both crops and cattle. However, an amount more than double these two was being supplied by African producers directly and through the mine company's purchases in African markets. By 1929 these African sources were providing 80 percent of the 16,000 tons of fresh and dried foodstuffs for the Kilo-Moto mines.<sup>68</sup>

African labor grew all of this food, whether on the plantations of the colonists and the company or on their own lands.<sup>69</sup> This tremendous labor effort was not entirely spontaneous. As was seen earlier, the administration was reluctant to allow free markets to determine prices and to draw producers into market production. Instead, it made extensive use of price manipulation and compulsory cultivation regulations. The annual report for the Kibali-Ituri district in 1929 makes clear the effects of this policy:

All agricultural activity of the peoples of the district is required for provisioning the mining centers of Kilo-Moto and the Grands Lacs where there are over 35,000 men, women, and children to feed. The natives grow only food crops whose yields they sell at the buying centers from where they are trucked to the Mines....

The agricultural labor imposed consists principally of food crops at the rate of 10 ares [one hectare] per man per season (20 ares a year). These crops are divided among the chiefdoms according to the needs of the mining work force and the European centers in such a way that employers can find locally the products that must make up the statutory diet of the workers. In general the natives regularly carry out the labor imposed.... Only the natives of the territories of Mahagi and Geti need to be stimulated constantly to plant their farms; the reason is that most of the natives of these territories are pastoralists.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Malherbe, "La mission au Lac Albert," pp.535-37; RACB 1920, p.109; RACB 1921, p.204; Moulaert, *Vingt années à Kilo-Moto*, pp.129-30; Bakonzi, "Gold Mines," pp.211ff, 355ff.

<sup>69</sup>The Europeans supplied a certain amount of administrative skill but introduced little in the way of more efficient farming methods; in 1928 only 630 hectares of Ituri district were exposed to animal or tractor-drawn plows. RAPO, Agriculture, 1928, p.10, AA, RA/CB(141)11.

Those parts of Upper Uele which supplied food as well as labor to the mines became part of the new Kibali-Ituri district in 1928, but some parts of the new Uele-Nepoko continued to be required to grow food for the mines instead of cotton.

If prices paid to the colonists were too low to hold their interest in producing food for the mines, what motivation was there for African producers receiving half or even a third as much? Even though Africans were accustomed to a much lower standard of living, it seems clear that administrative force, not the possibility of profit, was the main incentive to production. A 1930 report concerning the Ukwa chiefdom of Dungu territory, where the administration had just persuaded the mines to increase what it paid for local bananas, sweet potatoes, and manioc, noted that even at the new prices:

only the people living in the immediate vicinity of the buying centers for foodstuffs can get reasonable returns. The others are subjected to the corvées of portorage which are not remunerated, only the price of the foodstuffs being paid. In view of the modest sum received for each delivery, the native sees himself obliged to multiply his supplying if he wants to fulfill his tax obligations or satisfy some modest wants. The women and children suffer particularly from this situation, because it is upon them that the portorage of foodstuffs customarily falls.<sup>71</sup>

Despite all these problems the author of the compulsory cultivation program proudly proclaimed it a success. In an article published in 1933 Leplae claimed that during its first fifteen years compulsory cultivation had transformed impoverished and indolent Africans into prosperous producers. So accustomed were they becoming to cash cropping, he argued, that compulsion would no longer be necessary, though even in his estimate that date was still twenty or thirty years off.<sup>72</sup> In fact the compulsory cultivation continued to the end of the

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<sup>70</sup>RAKI, Agriculture, 1929, p.7, AA, RA/CB(157)6.

<sup>71</sup>For 1930 bananas were to fetch fifteen centimes a kilo, sweet potatoes ten, and manioc ten (instead of the five centimes paid previously); AA, AI(1422): RA, Uele-Nepoko, 1930, pp.42-43. In 1926-27 the prices paid to Africans for food at Kilo camps were thirty centimes a kilo for corn, fifty for unshelled peanuts, five for green bananas, twenty-five for *niangi*, and fifty for beans; AA, RAPO, Economique, 1926, p.88, 1927 (extrait), p.11.

<sup>72</sup>Leplae, "Histoire des cultures obligatoires," pp.646-52.

Table 5.4  
Agricultural Laborers, Eastern Province, 1919-1928

DISTRICT	1919	1922	1925	1928
Aruwimi	1,126	2,279	2,385	10,212
Lower-Uele/Uele-Itimbiri	477	285	1,453	1,548
Upper-Uele/Uele-Nepoko	525	493	2,426	3,579
Ituri/Kibali-Ituri	372	1,158	3,569	4,604
Kivu	68	650	2,539	22,001
Maniema (and Lowa, 1919)	50	82	548	3,236
Stanleyville	271	790	2,436	4,526
TOTAL	2,889	5,737	15,356	49,706

*Note:* 1928 figures include temporary laborers (men, women, children) as full time equivalents (250 person/days = 1 FTE)

*Sources:* RAPO 1919 (extrait), AA, MOI(3545)15; RACB 1922, p.75; RACB 1925, p.178; RAPO, Agriculture, 1928, AA, RA/CB(141)11.

colonial period, not because Africans proved to be slow learners, but because they remained convinced that such cultivation was not and was not meant to be in their interest.

While the emphasis during this decade was on developing African agriculture, the agricultural enterprises of non-Africans were not neglected. The development of settler colonization, particularly in Kivu district, shows vividly how the interests of even a modest number of Europeans could distract the colony's interest from African-based schemes.

The war had revealed to many the potential for European colonization in the hitherto neglected district of Kivu, whose volcanic soils, salubrious climate, abundant African labor, and physical beauty favored European agriculture, especially coffee plantations and cattle raising (both pioneered well before the war at the White Fathers' missions). The first real colonists had begun arriving at Bukavu in 1919-20, but substantial numbers of settlers appeared only in the mid-1920s, when the colony's road building program made the region more accessible. By 1925 local missionaries were recording an "invasion of white colonists great and small, especially great."<sup>73</sup> The number of

<sup>73</sup>APB, RAPB 1925-26, Katana, p.21.



employees in the territory around the new district capital at Costermansville (Bukavu) jumped from 1,500 to 4,500 during 1926 and was expected to increase by as many in 1927. By the end of 1928 over 8,000 hectares of land had been ceded to seventy-two colonists and one commercial firm and the area around Bukavu had been saturated with settlers.<sup>74</sup>

It was a heady and not particularly well-organized period for colonial administrators, who were making concessions of land faster than they could ascertain if it was truly vacant and faster than they could keep records. The head of Kivu district spoke of creating a second Kenya and of gradually relocating the dense African population away from the lake to make more room for colonists, even though he also noted that labor recruitment was generally (in some places exclusively) by compulsion. An official report in 1928 urged bringing back corporal punishment to deal with desertions by laborers recruited by compulsion.<sup>75</sup>

As the settlement advanced the consequences for the African inhabitants were reflected in the changing assessments of Kivu missionaries. At the beginning of the decade a Catholic missionary, perhaps influenced by the mission's long isolation in the region, hailed the early colonists as harbingers of European civilization, but also foresaw the beginning of a new era for African labor:

Many must abandon their pastoral life to be enrolled in the groups of workers. Another class of people, accustomed to doing nothing, at least to continually escaping the *corvées*, must find life a little harder than living from day to day. Yet there are others, continuously employed at portage and all sorts of works, who will not see much change in their new life.

He foresaw, too, that fear of the consequences of refusing would be more important than any other motive in overcoming African resistance to joining this process of change, estimating somewhat sardonically: "*initium sapientiae timor*."<sup>76</sup> By 1928 the abuses of land law

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<sup>74</sup>Bashizi Cirhagarhula, "Processus de domination socio-économique et marché du travail au Bushi (1920-45)," *Enquêtes et Documents d'histoire africaine*, 3(1978):5; SKU: Rapport politique, Territoire de l'Unya-Bongo (Kivu), July-December 1926; AA, RA/CB(160)12, RA, Kivu, Agric., 1928, pp.19-24.

<sup>75</sup>AA, Compte rendu, Comité régional, PO, 1927, pp.6-7; SKU: Rapport Politique, Unya-Bongo (Kivu), July-December 1928, pp.1-2.

and labor policy had become serious enough for the normally tolerant Catholic bishop of the Upper Congo, Monsignor Roelens, to complain to the minister of colonies, temporarily stirring up a storm of protest from colonists and local administrators. The minister promised an inquiry by the provincial governor, which the bishop expected "like all official inquiries in general, will very probably conclude that all is as in the best of all possible worlds." When the governor came round local missionaries told him they had seen Africans' farms and banana groves on the supposedly vacant lands of several large concessions and that they knew of one chief who signed a form certifying land to be vacant without knowing what it said. However, the commission concluded only that there was no room for additional concessions near Bukavu and that the colonists already installed could keep their lands.<sup>77</sup>

In 1928 by the standards of other colonies the European population of Kivu was modest; Kenya, with three times as many Africans as Kivu, had almost 100 times as many European males farming.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, a widespread feeling was developing among officials and non-officials that the situation was getting out of hand. Some felt as did those quoted above, that sterner measures were needed to provide land and labor for still more colonists. Others, such as Governor Moeller, wondered aloud whether Kivu would be best served by the encouragement of European colonization, African production, or mines and industry.<sup>79</sup> Many on the Colonial Council favored slowing, not intensifying, Kivu's development.

In the end the resolution of these conflicting views was placed in the hands of a new planning body, modelled on the Katanga Special Committee that had been created in 1900. Composed of colonial officials, representatives of the CGL, and other interested private parties, the Kivu National Committee, which took over in 1928, was empowered "to study and manage the region designated Kivu with regard to lines of transport and communication, the development of agriculture, agricultural colonization both European and native, and

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<sup>76</sup>APB, RAPB 1921-22, Thielt (St. Pierre), p.131.

<sup>77</sup>APB 216.108: Roelens to Voillard, Baudoinville, 18 September 1928; 216.110: Roelens to la Maison Carreé, 25 May 1929; *Diaire de Mugari*, 7 January 1929. p.29.

<sup>78</sup>Forty-six in Kivu vs. 1,805 in Kenya; Buell, *Native Problem*, 2:288.

<sup>79</sup>AA, *Compte rendu*, Comité Regional 1927, p.9.

agricultural and other industries, as well as to develop the lands of the *Domaine Privé* and the mines not yet conceded."<sup>80</sup> While supporting European agricultural development above all, one of the Committee's first acts was to halt the granting of new concessions while it sorted out the mess created by the land rush especially near the lake. At the same time it set aside a zone of 600,000 hectares of very fertile land north of the lake for new European colonization.<sup>81</sup>

At the end of the decade Kivu's fate appeared to have been sealed. Colonel Bertrand felt that in illegally seizing African lands for the profit of European settlers, "the most determined enemy of the native," the administration was pursuing a "policy of proletarianization." He also charged that the government was more concerned with adding to the colony's export figures than with the more substantial economic development of African-based production such as had occurred in the Gold Coast and Uganda.<sup>82</sup> Though there was much substance to these charges, the extent of actual European settlement at the end of the decade was still modest and the 1930s brought a more complex unfolding of economic events.

### Porterage and Roads

Every form of growth in administration, commerce, industry, and agriculture had a major secondary impact on transportation. The rapid expansion of mining camps required bring in supplies for explorations, materiel for mining, and food for the work force. The expansion of rice, cotton, and palm oil production likewise imposed new transport burdens. At the beginning of the decade the burden of porterage was already enormous. In Ituri district alone in 1920 the administration employed 35,577 porters, while the Kilo mines and other employers were using another 36,000. In 1922 there were more than twice as many porters in Ituri: 80,000 employed by the administration and 71,000 by others. Elsewhere the story was much the

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<sup>80</sup>"Rapport du Conseil Colonial 1928," p.3, in Comité National du Kivu, *Rapports du Conseil de Gérance et du Collège des Commissaires* (Brussels: Imprimerie Industrielle et Financière, 1929).

<sup>81</sup>Rapport du Conseil Colonial 1927, p.4, *Rapports de Gérance*, pp.13-14, in Comité National du Kivu, *Rapports*.

<sup>82</sup>AA, D(778)B.I: Bertrand to Governor Moeller, 27 November 1929.

same. In 1920 the Moto mines in Upper Uele employed 400 to 500 porters a month just for bringing in materiel; Stanleyville district used some 6,300 porters; Maniema had 10,000 in use because of the shortage of a river steamer. The developing interest in Kivu rang up 35,000 days of portage in 1920; 100,000 in 1922. Getting Lower Uele's cotton to market was also a terrible new burden, requiring the head portage in 1920 of 3,000 metric tons over an eleven-day route and canoe portage of 4,000 tons over a 150 km route. In 1922 Lower Uele officially counted 370,000 days of portage, but this did not include the several days of unpaid portage by each farmer to get his cotton to buying centers along the main roads. According to the district's head this portage had reduced the Babwa of Bambili to virtual nomads; their societies were exhausted and resentful, and the colonial effort was threatened. In 1923, Colonel Bertrand reported, 8,000 porters in Bambili territory alone were constantly at work moving the cotton harvest; many of them were women and children, as elsewhere in Lower Uele.<sup>83</sup> In 1923 the head of Maniema warned that the "corvée of portage still weighed heavily on his people." After a tour of the Lese people along the Irumu-Stanleyville road in 1924 the Catholic bishop of the area insisted on governmental measures to alter the conditions of portage which were decimating this population.<sup>84</sup> In short, having eased temporarily after the war, the burden of portage had expanded to new heights in the early 1920s.

At first the administration seemed unsure how to meet the developing crisis. The report on the colony in 1920 was almost schizophrenic, in one breath denouncing forced labor and calling for more recruitment, citing savings of 10 million man/days a year of portage that might be had through mechanization of transport and some agricultural tasks while recoiling from the costs of this mechanization

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<sup>83</sup>RACB 1920, p.43. AA, MOI(3606)180: RAPO Economique 1920, p.143, Rapport politique, PO, April-June 1921. MOI(3602)165: Commission Métropolitaine de la MOI, December 1924, "Notes concernant la situation des travailleurs aux mines de Kilo-Moto," p.vi. "Rapport économique Province Orientale 1922," Congo (1924) 2:108. Louwers and Hoornaert, *Question sociale*, session 24 November 1924, pp.234-35.

<sup>84</sup>AA, MOI(3606)180, Rapport politique, PO, third quarter 1921; MOI(3545)13, F. Losange to Governor, PO, 24 March 1923. p.Van Roy, "Notice nécrologique de S. Ex. Mgr. Matthysen, Evêque de Bunia," p.34, manuscript quoted by Malherbe, "Mission au Lac Albert," pp.557-558.

—ending and beginning with banalities about the educational and civilizing value of hard work.<sup>85</sup>

The only possible answer was a road building program on a massive scale—a tremendous undertaking since after three decades of European rule, mechanical transportation in the Eastern Province (larger than Belgium, France, and England combined) in 1920 existed only on the Lualaba and its navigable tributaries, on the two short railroads around the Lualaba's rapids, and along some 350 km of highway. From the terminals of these routes caravans of porters set out for the large parts of the province which were unserved by roads, rails, or rivers. Compared to British East Africa (on whose far more advanced transport systems the eastern Congo depended heavily) the Congo's need for major improvements was manifest. In August 1921, at the Ministry of Colonies' behest, the Belgian Parliament voted a special credit of 300 million francs to finance improved internal transport, including a drastic rebuilding of the Léopoldville-Matadi railroad in the Lower Congo and new railroads in Katanga province and Uele district, as well as extensive road building, especially in the two eastern provinces.<sup>86</sup> By the end of the decade some 60 million francs had been spent on the new road network in the Eastern Province, with another 38 million envisioned to complete the system.<sup>87</sup> The plan was not simply to expand the reach of mechanical transportation, but also to create a national transport system by redirecting the external trade of the eastern half of the colony toward the Atlantic.<sup>88</sup> The greatest road building efforts were concentrated in the three northern districts with their important mines and their rapidly increasing production of cotton; by 1928 they had three-fourths of the road kilometers in the province (map 9). Despite the construction of new roads in the rest of the province these northern districts still has two-thirds of the roads in 1931.

There were three especially notable road projects: 1) the rebuilding

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<sup>85</sup>RACB 1920, pp.42-43.

<sup>86</sup>Cobut, "Historique des transports au Congo," pp.11-16; RACB 1921, pp.3-5.

<sup>87</sup>RAPO, Avant-Propos, 1929, p.32, AA, RA/CB(137)4; Governor Moeller's address to the III<sup>e</sup> Congrès Colonial National, 1930, *Comptes rendus* (Brussels: A. Lesigne, 1931), p.94.

<sup>88</sup>As late as 1928 the idea of a Congo-Nile railroad was still being revived. See RAPO Avant-Propos, 1928, p.18, AA, RA/CB(137)3.

of the "Royal Congo-Nile Route" from Aketi on the Itimbiri west to Aba on the Sudan frontier via Buta, Bambili, Niangara, Dungu, and Faradje; 2) the construction of a more southerly route west from Stanleyville to Irumu (630 km); 3) a 900 km north-south route from Uvira on lake Tanganyika through the gold mining regions to Aba in the northeast. The sections of the third route completed this decade ran from Uvira to Costermansville (Bukavu) (120 km) on lake Kivu and from Goma at the northern end of lake Kivu to Irumu. These distances may seem unimpressive to a modern reader, but a contemporary missionary identified the challenge involved when he noted that the shortest of these routes (Stanleyville-Irumu) was being built through continuous forest over a distance equal to the length of England.<sup>89</sup> The even longer north-south route along the eastern frontier had to be cut through rugged mountainous country.

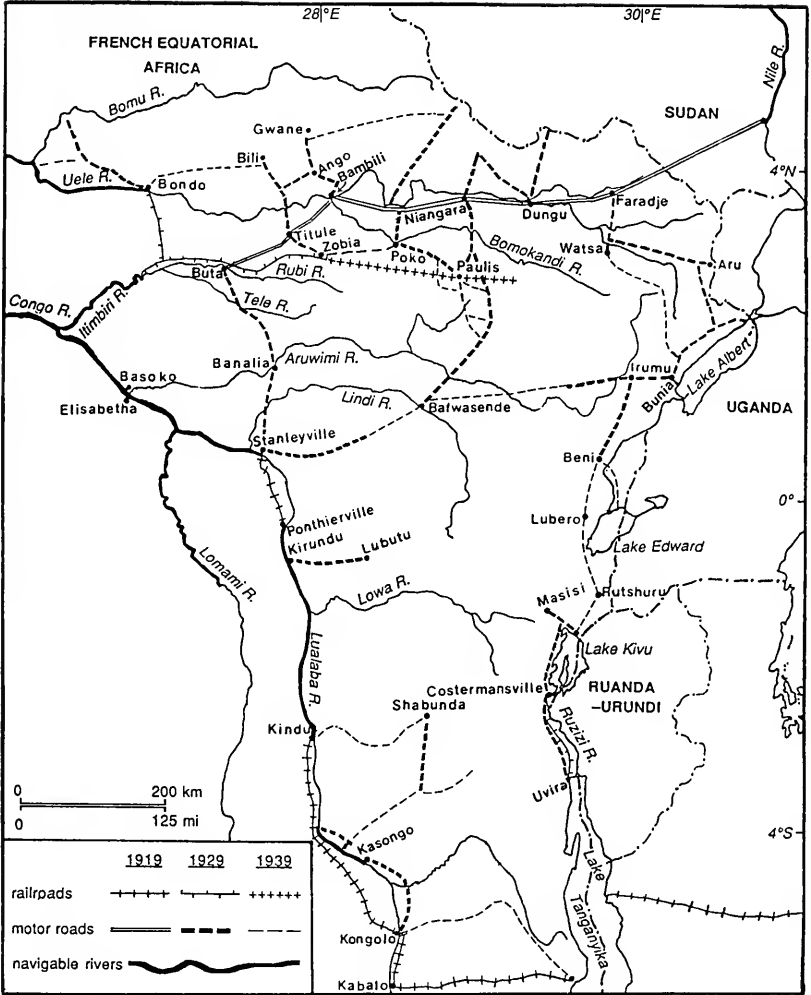
Included in the transportation program was the construction of two new narrow-gauge railroads in the Eastern Province. The Vicicongo line in the north, from Bondo on the Uele to Aketi on the Itimbiri, went into service in 1927, permitting the evacuation of cotton from Uele. Construction was also begun on a line connecting lake Tanganyika with lake Kivu, the Chemin de Fer Tanganyika-Kivu, which was never completed.<sup>90</sup>

As new roads were completed, the government made efforts to introduce vehicular transport and to outlaw the use of porters. In November 1924 in the northern districts a public trucking service was established, the Messageries Automobiles de la Province Orientale (MAPO), replacing the government-run portage service. The same year another transport service was established in the extreme northeast, the Messageries de l'Ituri Occidentale (MIO), which included head portage. Both of these were absorbed into the Société des Messageries Automobile du Congo (MACO) in 1927 and 1928. However, getting commercial firms to abandon portage was often difficult because on the main roads low wages made human transport cheaper than truck transport. Small traders trying to cut corners might have had an arguable reason to do this, but the worst offenders seem to have been large, profitable concerns, such as Interfina, which even

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<sup>89</sup>G.F.B. Morris, *Inland Africa*, 11(Mar. 1927):4. The section of the Stanleyville-Irumu between Bafwaboli and Mombasa was not completed until the next decade.

<sup>90</sup>Cobut, "Historique des transports au Congo," p.111-15.



Map 9. Transportation Routes in the Eastern Congo, 1919-1939

chose to transport rails to Ituri over a thirty-five day porterage route rather than using the East African railroads.<sup>91</sup> Early in 1918 the administrator of Titule territory (Lower Uele) had proposed prohibiting all porterage along the 150 km Bambili-Buta route because of such abuses and their "fatal" effects on the Africans, but the district administrator rejected this suggestion as "Draconian," although he and the governor general concurred in need to correct abuses and eliminate unnecessary porterage.<sup>92</sup> Beginning in February 1924 ordinances in the Eastern Province forbade porterage along specified motor roads or by women or other recruits from designated overworked territories or over distances above 250 km. Success was only partial; further violations by Interfina and others, with the connivance of local administrators, were reported.<sup>93</sup>

Another cause of avoidable porterage was the failure of private mining companies to devote sufficient effort to completing access roads before extending their operations. For example, routes to the profitable gold mines of Kilo-Moto were not completed until 1928 and those to newer mining operations took even longer.<sup>94</sup> Further south in the mountainous territory of Lubero west of lake Edward the number of porters furnished to the MGL rose from near zero in 1924 to 9,585 in 1925, to 25,600 in 1926, and to over 32,000 in 1927, mostly because the company was carrying out extensive mineral prospecting before its exploration rights came to an end.<sup>95</sup>

It was the volume of porterage that attracted the most criticism, but arguably this was not its worst feature. Like any other form of

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<sup>91</sup>AA, MOI(3606)180, De Meulemeester to Minister of Colonies, 15 December 1924.

<sup>92</sup>MRAC 50.30.26, Rapport général, first quarter 1918; Landeghem, CD, Bas Uele, à l'administrateur de Titule, 6 June 1918; MRAC 50.30.462a, CD, Bas Uele aux administrateurs de Titule, Bambili, et Zobia (confidentiel), 16 March 1918.

<sup>93</sup>AA, MOI(3606)180, Portage. Correspondance [1920-26], *passim*; AI(1416), Jules Compill à M. le CD et M. le Procureur du Roi, 7 August 1925 (enclosure in GG to Minister of Colonies. In another case in 1927 six caravans of porters were recruited by force to carry for forty-six days among the motor road from Panga to Stanleyville for a private trader; KAT, T005 1927: Commissioner General for Governor, PO, to CD, Stanleyville, 11 December 1927.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. Bertrand, *Problème de la main-d'œuvre*, p.101, concerning the Société Belgika at Bafwasende.

<sup>95</sup>AA, MOI(3589)114, F. Absil, Administrateur de la Lubero, "Portage," 20 August 1928. Porterage around Lubero fell during 1928 when the new road to Beni and Irumu was opened. See RAPO, AIMO, 1928, pp.24-25, AA, RA/CB(138)2.



Table 5.5  
Person/days of Portorage, 1925-1931  
(‘000)

DISTRICT	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931
Aruwimi	170	161	196	191	213	200	106
Lower Uele/Uele Itimbiri	156	95	103	69	79	94	132
Upper Uele/Uele Nepoko	672	238	135	69	48	59	153
Ituri/Kibali Ituri	365	491	423	395	141	164	129
Kivu	861	914	817	625	585	668	396
Maniema	222	180	234	257	359	416	478
Stanleyville	393	372	362	209	133	105	88
TOTALS	2,840	2,452	2,268	1,816	1,557	1,707	1,482

*Sources:* AA, RA/CB(138)2 and 4, RAPO, AIMO, 1928 and 1931.

physical labor, portorage need not have been debilitating had it been conducted under adequate conditions. There is ample evidence, however, that both the weight of the individual loads and the wages paid were inconsistent with good health. In official calculations and reports a porter's average load is assumed to be 25 kg (55 lbs), a heavy burden even for a well nourished, healthy, athletic backpacker or soldier, but, as was indicated above for the war years, much heavier loads were common. In fact, the government normally objected only to loads over 30 kg (66 lbs), a weight which was clearly excessive. Moreover, weights above 30 kg were not rare. The administrator of Titule (Lower Uele) encountered a caravan along the Bambili-Buta route in 1918 for the Société Belgika whose loads averaged 35.5 kg (78 lbs). Another observer reported seeing hundreds of women carrying 30-kg loads of cotton seed in Lower Uele in the early 1920s and doing so for seven days without food or payment! In 1927 the Eastern Province's Labor Committee unanimously approved setting a maximum load at 26 kg (57 lbs), but allowed district commissioners discretion to tolerate loads up to 31 kg (68 lbs).<sup>96</sup>

From the middle of the decade, as the new road and vehicles began

<sup>96</sup>MRAC 50.30.462a, Administrator, Titule, to CD, Bas Uele, 19 March 1918. AA, MOI(3547)25, L. Duchemin to M. Arnold, Secretary General, Ministry of Colonies, Ostende, 4 February 1925; AA, Compte rendu, Comité Regional de la PO, first session 1927, 27 April 1927, p.4.

to have an effect, the volume of portorage declined. Not coincidentally, official tallies of the number of days of portorage then began to appear for the first time in official publications, so that the government might reap the credit for the decline. Because of the propaganda intent, these figures should be used with caution. For one thing there are some notable omissions, of which canoe portorage is significant, since it would add another third to the official figures.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, it is evident from table 5.5 that by 1928 the Vicicongo and new motor roads had reduced portorage sharply in Uele and the roads completed by Kilo-Moto to its camps had done likewise in Kibali-Ituri.<sup>98</sup> Even so, the official claim that eight and a quarter million person-days of portorage were saved that year and of savings six times that in 1930 must be viewed with skepticism.<sup>99</sup>

### Incentives and Disincentives

The extraordinary expansion of the province's economy during the 1920s had been remarkably broadly based, affecting mining, commerce, both European and African agriculture, and the construction of new roads and railroads. The growing diversity of the economy offered new opportunities to some Africans, but a very large part of African labor remained under considerable coercion. Most contemporaries felt this coercion was necessary in order to teach African workers steady work habits. Such justifications were both simplistic and self-serving. A more accurate understanding of the situation requires an examination of the conditions that drew or failed to draw Africans into the labor market. Three aspects merit special attention: wages, working conditions, and the threats which migrant labor posed to physical and mental health.

Although wages paid in the Eastern Province rose considerably during the decade following the war, it is doubtful that these increases

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<sup>97</sup>An unpublished report of 1926 puts the total of head and canoe portorage at 3,340,000 person days, compared to 2,452,000 in the official report for head portorage. AA, RAPO, Economique, 1926, p.98.

<sup>98</sup>RACB 1928, p.120.

<sup>99</sup>AA, RA/CB(1938)2, RAPO, AIMO, 1928, pp.21-23. See the sharp questioning of the validity of such hypothetical calculations by Alexis Bertrand (now one of the Chambre des Representants' nominees to the Conseil Colonial): Conseil Colonial, CRA 1932 (Brussels: A. Lesigne, 1933), séance 22 April 1932, pp.542-43.

drew more Africans to seek wage employment for the simple reason that prices rose even faster. At the end of the World War Belgium had been forced to go off the gold standard, which led to considerable inflation at home and in the Congo. Governor Moeller suggested that by early 1927 the franc retained only a seventh of its 1918 value and that along the main roads the prices of food and other products had gone up by much more.<sup>100</sup> Moeller was well aware that wages had not kept pace. Indeed, a provincial governor's salary had only doubled between 1914 and 1926 and those of his district and territorial administrators had done only slightly better.<sup>101</sup> African wages had risen at about the same rate; indeed, if one includes their rising food allowances, which reflected local food prices, they had done somewhat better. One study suggests that wages in the southern districts of the province had doubled between 1919 and 1928, while those in the northern districts had about tripled.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, as the governor was aware, African wages had not kept up with inflation. For that matter (and this was Moeller's main concern) taxes had not kept pace with the inflation rate either, the amounts collected in the province having risen only 275 percent from 1918 to 1927. Nor was the awareness of the declining purchasing power of African workers confined to high officials. The assistant attorney-general near the end of 1928 attributed labor unrest in Stanleyville to the effects of inflation: "The black realizes that he was receiving much more several years ago because with a lower salary he was able to obtain more."<sup>103</sup>

The failure of wages to rise at anything like the rate of inflation, while not a uniquely colonial phenomenon, is a clear indication of how unfree the labor market remained. One major factor limiting its freedom was the government's role as the recruiter of last resort (and, all too often, of first resort). This relationship and its consequences were perceptively noted in an unpublished official report from Ituri district in 1924:

In Ituri the industrialists, merchants, and colonists, following the example of the Régie Industriel des Mines, have come to rely exclusively on the administration to obtain labor and porters at fixed prices

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<sup>100</sup>AA, Compte-rendu, Comité Regional, PO, 21 April 1927, p.1.

<sup>101</sup>Congo Belge, *Annuaire officiel*, 1914 and 1926.

<sup>102</sup>Peemans, "Congo-Belgique," pp.446-47.

<sup>103</sup>AA, AI(1415): A. Rezette, no date, annex to letter of GG, 10 January 1929.

that no longer correspond to the necessities of life for the black. By using moral constraint, which enlists the native to leave his chiefdom temporarily while preventing him from freely disputing his salary, we are falsifying all the economic forces in the sense that we are favoring the development of businesses which which could not survive if the working conditions were freely disputed between the parties and adapted to the qualifications of the region's labor force.<sup>104</sup>

With the government's exit from recruiting in 1928 and the stabilization of the franc, wages began to move ahead of inflation. Beginning wages (not including food rations) for permanent employees in Stanleyville district, for example, rose from 25 fr a month in 1927 to 42 fr two years later.<sup>105</sup> The wages of agricultural laborers in Aruwimi (again not including food allowances) rose from 17.50 fr a month in 1926 to 30 fr in 1930.<sup>106</sup>

Yet, by themselves, higher wages were not sufficient to attract adequate numbers of African laborers. There is considerable evidence that Africans paid as much attention to working conditions as they did to wage rates. An employer's reputation for harshness, the risks to life and health, the availability of adequate and familiar food and housing, the distance from home, all strongly influenced workers' decisions. In the 1920s the housing, food, discipline, and other working conditions were often far from attractive.

Information on working conditions in this period is derived almost exclusively from the larger employers, since they were more likely to be subject to the official investigations that have left a trail in the archives. It is unlikely that such employers were the worst, since they were better able than small employers to afford the food, housing, and medical supplies required by law, but their failings affected very large numbers of individuals. In general conditions were very defective during the first half of the decade, but the combination of government enforcement of labor laws, increased competition for labor, and the

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<sup>104</sup>Rapport sur l'administration générale de la PO, second half 1924 (extrait), AA, MOI(3545)15.

<sup>105</sup>Rapport sur le commerce, Stanleyville, deuxième semestre 1927," *Congo* (1928) 2:149-53; "Rapport sur le Commerce, Territoire de Stanleyville, deuxième semestre 1929, *Congo* (1930) 2:106-12. The salaries of temporary workers rose from twenty to forty-five francs, but they did not receive a food allowance.

<sup>106</sup>Rapport économique, Aruwimi, 1926," *Congo* (1927) 2:312; AA, RA/CB(160)4: RA, Aruwimi, Agriculture, 1930, p.19.

ending of government recruitment for private firms tended to produce improvements toward the end of the decade.

In 1920 working conditions at the newly-created Régie Industriel des Mines de Kilo-Moto, for example, were bad and getting worse. At the northern Moto camps in Upper Uele the unscrupulous director Mathelin pushed production ruthlessly. His European agents responded eagerly and brutally to a system of bonuses, whose rates were increased substantially in the first half of 1920, by driving their African workers to ever greater exertions. Whippings appear to have become the principal means of motivation. The number of lashes administered (limited by law to twelve per occasion, rose from an already high 10,461 in the second half of 1919 to 26,579 during the first half of 1920, equivalent to eight strokes per full-time African employee. Desertions also followed the upward trend in bonuses, blows, and production.<sup>107</sup> The Kilo miners in Ituri district were not victims of such direct physical abuse, but were suffering greatly at this time from shortages of food and rudimentary living conditions due to the overly rapid expansion of those mines.<sup>108</sup> In 1920 Vice-Governor General Moulart was put in charge of this state enterprise with a mandate for reform. He ordered an end to the whippings and instituted other reform measures. What followed was a subject of controversy at the time and has remained so in recent times.

To their credit the Kilo-Moto mines undertook an extensive road building program to relieve portage, installed the Congo's first hydroelectric generator to power equipment (relieving the growing portage of firewood), raised wages and food allowances, organized a vast operation for the production and distribution of food, constructed adequate housing for miners in their numerous camps, built up an extensive medical service for employees and their families (as well as a general vaccination program for the inhabitants of the mining region), and established schools for the children of its employees. All this was done while still expanding the work force to 22,000 by the end of 1927, and increasing the annual gold production to four metric tons in 1930 and preparing the way for further extensive expansion in

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<sup>107</sup>AA, MOI(3602)166: Van Reeth, Commissioner of Upper Uele, to the Vice-Governor General, 15 August 1920; Vice-Governor General Rutten, for the GG, to the Minister of Colonies, Boma, 6 November 1920.

<sup>108</sup>Moulart, *Vingt années*, pp.38, 44.

the decades that followed.<sup>109</sup>

Despite these reforms a series of investigations by provincial and local officials during the 'twenties reported that ill-treatment, ill-nourishment, and a prison-like environment continued to characterize the Kilo-Moto camps. Moulaert and other Kilo-Moto officials disputed these charges and complained of unrealistic regulations, hostile investigators, and exaggerated reports of abuses. It is probably fair to say that company officials, taking over at a time when conditions had long been dismal, justifiably felt that the government officials were giving too little credit for the considerable reforms that were being implemented, while government officials, with equal justice, found intolerable the widespread shortcomings in the treatment workers of this large and prosperous government-owned enterprise. The African employees of the mines obviously were aware of both progress and shortcomings, but it is significant that the image of the company that persisted in much of the region until the end of the decade agreed with the colonial administration in stressing the negative side.

In the view of the responsible colonial official in Brussels the problem was one that will be familiar to students of the previous decades of the Congo administration: the RIM directors in Brussels were largely concerned with the greatest production at the lowest cost compatible with equitable treatment of African labor (a "policy of parsimony" in the later words of the governor of the province).<sup>110</sup> Not yet responsible for recruiting or provisioning their labor force, the local RIM authorities concentrated on increasing production through bonuses paid to foremen who in turn abused, overworked, underpaid, and underfed the African labor.<sup>111</sup> In 1926 the direction of the RIM in Brussels was again prodded by the Ministry of Colonies into issuing

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<sup>109</sup>Moulaert, *Vingt années*, pp.43-78; Bakonzi, "Gold Mines," ch. 4 and 6.

<sup>110</sup>The phrase appears in a letter by Governor Moeller to the GG, 11 December 1926, AA, MOI(3602)166, and is repeated by R. M. Reisdorff (Director General, Ministry of Colonies) in notes on the GG's letter N° 26 of 25 May 1928 (containing a new report by Moeller of 20 March 1928).

<sup>111</sup>Albrecht Gohr (Director General, first direction, second section) to Minister of Colonies, 12 December 1925, AA, AI(1416); Moeller to GG, 11 December 1926, AA, MOI(3602)166. AA, MOI(1416): James Campill to CD and to Procureur du Roi, 7 August 1925, cites other violations of regulations concerning housing, medical care, safety, and ill-treatment of African workers. Three RIM employees were fined and imprisoned for beating workers in 1924. See Role R.M.P. N° 4447, 4506, 4708, and 4710, Parquet d'Irumu, 8 June 1925, AA, AI(1416).

explicit orders to their Congo agents to end the overwork and other abuses of African labor and into undertaking significant expenditures to bring their salaries, feeding, health and lodging into line with government regulations.<sup>112</sup> This time too improvements followed, but the Ministry was not persuaded that the mines, even after their reorganization as a joint-stock company (Sokimo) in 1926, had moved far from their traditional tight-fisted policies. After a personal inspection in 1928 Governor Moeller charged Sokimo with paying below average salaries, distributing rations irregularly, and providing defective and insufficient lodging for its African employees.<sup>113</sup>

As improbable as it may seem, one of the most widespread problems in the early 1920s was inadequate food. The problem stemmed from the location of some operations in thinly inhabited areas and the concentration on expansion of the work force without adequate provision for growing or importing enough food to feed it. Such shortages were chronic in Aruwimi early in the decade among the 2-3,000 laborers of the HCB's Elisabetha station. In 1920 the company was paying a food allowance of only a franc a week while the government was spending 3.50 fr a week to feed soldiers in the district and 1.50 fr per prisoner for food. Under government pressure the company raised the food allowance to 1.75 fr including distributions of 2 kilos of rice and half a kilo of fish per week, but this was only a partial corrective of the local shortages of food. Company officials were incensed when the government required their compliance with a new ordonnance (14 December 1922) requiring employers to provide all food in areas where local supplies were deemed to be inadequate. It appears that they complied by getting the local administrative officials to force Africans to supply the food just as they had to supply the labor.<sup>114</sup> It is unclear how much improvement came in the latter part of the decade.

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<sup>112</sup>Administrateur Délégué pour le Council, RIM, to Minister of Colonies, 19 April 1926, AA, MOI(3605)175/129; Braive, pour le Council, RIM, to Minister, 19 April 1926 and Braive to Administrator General (Ministry of Colonies), 23 April 1926, AA, AI(1416).

<sup>113</sup>AA, MOI(3602)166: Moeller to GG, 20 March 1928.

<sup>114</sup>AA, MOI(3602)156: RAPO 1920 (extract); Administrator, HCB, to Minister of Colonies, 14 October 1921; Secretary General, Ministry of Colonies, to Director, HCB, Brussels, 28 December 1923; MOI(3605)175/108: Director, HCB (Stubbe) to Director General, Ministry of Colonies, 1 March 1923; *RACB 1921*, p.184.

The parallel food shortages at Kilo-Moto in the early 1920s, which also stemmed from overly rapid expansion, were not solved quickly either since the work force continued to increase at a rapid rate. In July 1925 acting Governor General de Meulemeester reported he had evidence that food was in such short supply at the mines that many African employees had become seriously malnourished or had fled from Kilo-Moto because of food shortages and that many others had deserted because of the brutal and systematic use of whipping. In August 1925 one official investigator called the food situation at the mines "alarming" and a "disaster," citing one group of 1,384 workers, of whom six had died and 190 had to be sent away, 112 for malnutrition and predisposition to tuberculosis. Not surprisingly of the 2,000 Africans recruited by the administration for the mines that month, 500 deserted in September and another 300 were soon dismissed as unfit.<sup>115</sup> Not until the last years of the decade did the mines solve the food problem (see below).

Problems of food supply also existed in other industries. Complaints from workers from the Eastern Province employed by Safricas on the Lower Congo railroad led to an investigation in 1926 which revealed that workers received their food allowances late or had them withheld as punishment for work infractions and that this had led to numerous workers selling their equipment and forcing their wives into prostitution in order to obtain enough to eat. Conditions did not improve as the work expanded the next year, leading the Ministry to file legal charges against Safricas. The charges against the corporation were not proven, but several Safricas employees were convicted of beating Africans, failing to maintain proper work camps, and other infractions.<sup>116</sup> The next year an investigator found 250 recruits supplied by the colony for building the Vicicongo railroad in Uele had been paid only 12 fr a week, which was little more than enough to cover their food.<sup>117</sup> At about the same time the Buta court was also

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<sup>115</sup>AA, AI(1416): De Meulemeester to Minister, 24 July 1925; James Campill to M. le CD et M. le Procureur du Roi, 7 August 1925; De Meulemeester to Minister of Colonies, 23 November 1925.

<sup>116</sup>AA, MOI(3600)138, GG to Director General, Safricas, 31 October 1926, and other correspondence.

<sup>117</sup>The Vicinaux's head engineer at Aketi, F. Bernard, was convicted and given a fine of 2,500 fr for paying substandard wages and other infractions during the laborers'



condemning Unatra for its "truly ill-will" shown toward complying with the province's ordonnance of 27 February 1924, and its heedless disregard to the court's previous order.<sup>118</sup> The HCB was under constant attack by the colonial authorities for its parsimonious policies. In November 1921 it was taken to task for paying an inadequate food allowance. In 1923 its housing, sanitation, medical service were criticized at the highest levels.<sup>119</sup>

The inadequate food, housing, and medical care affected the general health of workers, as did other, less tractable factors. While not so extreme an issue as in other parts of the Congo, the health risks to which African laborers were exposed were still a significant factor in the Eastern Province. One of these risks was the spread of infectious diseases that everywhere in colonial Africa became a serious problem as increased communication provided avenues for diseases to spread. The spread of sleeping sickness was a more serious problem elsewhere in the Congo, especially in Congo-Kasai which had 85 percent of the cases treated in the colony in 1925, but parts of the Eastern Province were seriously affected, notably the Ueles, which had 73 percent of the 5,905 cases treated in the province in 1925, and Maniema.<sup>120</sup> The disease's expansion was described as grave and alarming in parts of the Ueles in 1928. There were 2,757 new cases in the province in 1929 and 5,773 new cases in 1930. Areas were closed to trade to slow the disease's spread, but evidence exists that mining prospectors continued to travel in the closed territories of Gwane, Bili, and Dakwa of Uele-Itimbiri in 1928.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, government efforts to inhibit

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second three month term; such wages for the first term, it is worth noting, were perfectly legal. AA, MOI(30601)148: Vindevoghel, Procureur du Roi, to Procureur Général-Leopoldville, Buta, 16 February 1928, and Judgment of 23 February 1928, District of Buta.

<sup>118</sup>AA, MOI(3601)148: Gilson, Commissioner General, PO, to GG, 8 December 1928.

<sup>119</sup>RACB 1921, p.184; AA, MOI(3602) 156, passim.

<sup>120</sup>Belgian Congo, *Rapport sur l'hygiène publique pendant l'année 1925* (Brussels: F. van Gumpel, 1927), p.11 and table 19.

<sup>121</sup>Sleeping sickness was spreading rapidly in Niangara territory and its control in Doruma territory was difficult, despite considerable efforts, because of infiltration from French Equatorial Africa where treatment was non-existent, according to the *Rapport de l'Administration générale, Uele-Nepoko*, first half 1928, pp.20-27, and the *Rapport politique, Uele-Nepoko*, first half 1929, p.23, AA, AI(1422). The GG, following the advice of the Governor of the PO, asked Brussels to cease giving new prospecting rights and to suspend the current ones in the affected areas of Uele-

the spread of sleeping sickness were becoming effective.

Other health problems were more directly connected with the recruitment and employment of labor. A fundamental one was the high mortality that workers often suffered when moved from their home territories to areas with quite different climates, foods, and diseases. The specific causes of such illnesses were not clearly understood at the time, though malaria was known to be a factor affecting those going from uninfected highland areas to affected lowland areas. The government responded with restrictions on recruitment away from home areas and with more specific requirements for acclimatization camps and periods.

In some areas recruitment was deliberately restricted to areas of similar climate and conditions. For example, the gold mines of the northeast were divided into two groups, with those of Kilo recruiting from the highlands and Moto from lower lying areas.<sup>122</sup> Further south in the Lubero territory recruitment had been brought almost to an end by 1928. In the words of its administrator:

it would be a crime to tap the montagnards for enterprises outside the territory's economic zone: the natives have no resistance outside their home area and the tests done for the F[orce P[ublique] and for the porters crossing the Ruindi and Rutshuru plains have led to the suppression of government recruitment in the mountain region of soldiers and workers for the district.<sup>123</sup>

The recruitment efforts of the giant Union Minière du Haut Katanga (UMHK) in the Eastern Province are a revealing example of how health issues could upset the best organized recruiting efforts. In March 1919 the head of the province had closed Maniema to all outside recruitment to permit it to recover from the ravages of sleeping sickness, excessive wartime portage, and the losses during the epidemics that came at the war's end. Despite the vigorous protests of the growing mining interests in Katanga at the time and in the years that followed, Maniema remained closed, though its work force was

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Nepoko; AA, H(855)MS-U/74, Tilkins to Minister, telegram, 11 April 1928.

<sup>122</sup>Jean-Luc Vellut, "Mining in the Belgian Congo," *History of Central Africa*, David Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin, eds., 2 vols (New York: Longman, 1983), 2:144.

<sup>123</sup>F. Absil, Rapport sur la question de la Main d'œuvre, district du Kibali-Ituri, territoire de la Lubero, 20 August 1928, AA, MOI(3589)114.

encouraged to grow cotton for export and food crops (especially rice) for shipment to Katanga.<sup>124</sup> Finally, in April 1926 Union Minière received authorization to recruit 4,000 men from Maniema and southern Kivu. The company conducted its operations with exemplary care and the wages, clothing allotments, and other inducements offered were generous enough to raise protests of unfair competition from the district's other employers. At considerable expense it built acclimatization camps, where recruits would be held doing little or light work for between one and three months before being transported to Katanga, accompanied if they wished by their wives and children. The company opened two public dispensaries to promote good will, paid commissions to chiefs for each recruit, and hired experienced European agents at high salaries. In 1928 alone the recruitment mission in the province cost UMHK 1,865,000 francs.<sup>125</sup>

Yet the scheme was a great failure, a fiasco in the words of one official report. Of the 767 men recruited in 1927 most refused to reenlist when their first year contracts expired and only 479 new recruits were obtained in 1928 before the company shut down its recruitment effort in Kivu and Maniema. Of these 1,440 recruits only fourteen remained at work for UMHK at the end of 1929, only one a year later. Part of the reason for this colossal failure stemmed from men's aversion to labor recruitment, based on their bitter experiences of wartime portage and the continuing forced recruitment for the Force Publique. In parts of Lowa men simply stayed away from the local markets until well after the recruitment effort was abandoned. Another part of the problem was the reluctance of these forest-dwellers to travel to so distant and different an environment, a reluctance immediately enforced by the health problems that developed in the camps. In 1927, of 961 men recruited, twenty-two died (plus twenty-seven of their women and children) and 172 were returned home as unfit. In 1928 fifty-nine died and eighty-two were sent home.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>The original ordonnance of 17 March 1919 was defective and was replaced by one dated 1 September 1919; AA, MOI(3547)24/12, 17, 18; (3554)49/18 and 30b; (3545)13.

<sup>125</sup>AA, MOI(3545)15: Compte rendu, Comité Regional, PO, 28 April 1927; RAPO AIMO 1927, p.36; Yogoledo Tambwe ya Kasimba, "Recrutement des travailleurs de l'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga au Kivu-Maniema de 1926 à 1928," *Problèmes sociaux zaïrois*, 114/115 (1976):127-40.

<sup>126</sup>Yogoledo, "Recrutement," pp.137-39; AA, AI(1421): Rapport administrative,

More direct still were the health conditions produced by industrial conditions and the lack of adequate medical treatment in industrial enterprises. In cotton mills the dust and fibers in the air were bad enough to have caused the deaths of several African workers in Maniema and to have produced throat and lung ailments in many others, including one European.<sup>127</sup> In 1923 the mortality rate was about seven per thousand among employees of the state and CFL, but was 12.7 at the Kilo mines and 10.3 at the Moto mines, rates that continued for the rest of the decade. Mortality at HCB Elisabetha was 13.3 per thousand during the first ten months of 1924.<sup>128</sup> Establishing an effective industrial medical service took some time. Despite a law of 1922 governing the health and safety of workers in the province, no inspection service existed in 1925. Kilo-Moto was ahead of many others in having organized a medical service, but in 1927 no company in Lower Uele had a medical service and the largest, the Vicicongo and Cotonco, had no doctors, the MGL was just beginning to organize its medical service, Forminière's Minière de la Tele had several camps without the infirmarians required by the ordonnance of 20 October 1927.<sup>129</sup>

A final group of health problems among migrant laborers appear to have been psychosomatic. The pastoral Lugbara (Lugwaret), for example, died in such numbers when away from home that in 1923 the court at Niangara was compelled to free and return home the survivors from the state prison there to escape a total decimation. The Kilo-Moto mines had to employ the Lugbara and the nearby Logo close to their homes and in fellowship with others of their countrymen if disaster was to be avoided.<sup>130</sup> In the neighboring Watsa territory, among the Ndongo people, twenty-five years of close proximity to the

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Maniema, first half 1928, p.28, second half 1928, pp.9-10. After this failure UMHK turned its attention to recruiting in Ruanda-Urundi and to retaining a permanent work force through a policy of labor "stabilization."

<sup>127</sup>RACB 1921, pp.187-88.

<sup>128</sup>RACB 1925, p.25. For 1924 the mining figures were 11.5 (Kilo) and 11.4 (Moto); for 1930 mortality was 12.85 (Kilo) and 9.5 (Moto); RACB 1930, p.16.

<sup>129</sup>RACB 1925, p.25; AA: RAPO, AIMO, 1927, p.40; AA, MOI(3608)204: G. Trolli, Rapport d'inspection médicale de d'hygiène du District du Bas Uele du 14 au 20 décembre 1927.

<sup>130</sup>Compte-rendu, Commission de Main-d'œuvre, Haut-Uele, 7 October 1925, p.1; AA, MOI(3598)132/PO.

Moto mines had produced an acute demographic crisis which appeared to go beyond the simple spread of disease. In the words of its administrator, "the truth is that the introduction and multiplication of industrial centers [and all that went with them] produced a profound trauma in the psychological life and by a natural progression in the organic life of the native population."<sup>131</sup>

The 1920s witnessed the most massive changes in labor in the eastern Congo since the spread of Zanzibari control. The size, character, and remuneration of the African work force all changed dramatically. The colonial officials were caught between two policy developments. On the one hand, they were the principal agents of labor recruitment on behalf of the major employers and indirectly through the application of a substantial head tax, which, in Governor Moeller's words "had to keep its work-incentive character" and through the enforcement of the labor contract law.<sup>132</sup> On the other hand, the government was acting to restrict the scale of recruitment from any one area to fixed percentages, enforcing stricter regulations on working conditions, and reducing, if not eliminating its role as a labor recruiter for private employers.

Within the limits created by these official policies and by their own personal and cultural perspectives, Africans were also shaping labor policies in this period. Understanding African attitudes is limited by the paucity of direct evidence and by the pervasiveness of compulsion in recruitment and cultivation, but some inferences are possible. This section will conclude by examining the complexity of African responses to short and long-term employment in agricultural and mines.

In the eastern Congo as elsewhere in colonial Africa in this period there was much discussion of Africans' reluctance to work on long-term contracts. According to some theories short-term jobs were

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<sup>131</sup>Gérard, Administrateur Territorial de Watsa to CD, Kibali-Ituri, 5 September 1929, AA, D(778)B.II.2.

<sup>132</sup>Moeller's statement is from AA, Compte-rendu, Comité regional, PO, 21 April 1927, p.2. Labor contract infractions were by far the largest category of offenses for which Africans were convicted, amounting to 25 percent of the total cases in Maniema in 1928 and 43 percent in Kibali-Ituri in 1930; AA, AI(1421): Rapport sur l'administation, Maniema, first and second semesters, 1928; RA/CB(157)5: RA.KI 1930. Prison labor was used for many purposes by the government and the prison at Niangara had begun hiring out prisoners to private employers on a small scale at the end of the decade; AA, RA/CB(137)11-12: RAPO, Justice, 1929-1930.

attractive because Africans were "target workers," who worked only until they had earned enough to pay their tax, pay the bride-price for a wife, or purchase some consumer item.<sup>133</sup> It is probably true that most Africans were reluctant to leave their rural communities, at least for the first time, except on a short-term basis. In part this was a natural "testing of the waters", but to a considerable extent it also reflected the fact that few employers provided the sort of environments in which family life might flourish. Certainly the kinds of wages and working conditions just described in the Eastern Province could have been perceived as attractive on their own merits by very few rural Africans. Moreover, official government policy opposed permanent residence for Africans until the next decade and officials made periodic sweeps of "undesirables" out of such unofficial communities as existed—the last such general sweep coming during the Depression years.<sup>134</sup>

The actions of agricultural laborers in Kivu illustrate some of the complexity of African views of wage labor in this decade. Some saw wage employment a means of evading existing social obligations, especially toward village chiefs. In 1929 the head of Kivu district was convinced that most Africans who hired themselves out as long-term agricultural laborers were headstrong individuals seeking to escape the authority of their chiefs with the connivance of their European employers. Such individuals could evade certain obligations due to their chiefs by keeping their cattle on their employer's land. The chiefs in turn tried to reclaim part of the wages in lieu of these obligations. In 1930 the administrator of Unya-Bongo also affirmed that the Shi men seeking jobs with Europeans did so to escape from certain obligations owed to their chiefs.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>A lively debate has developed over whether African workers responded in an economically rational way to new employment situations in the colonial period or remained tradition-bound, short-sighted "target workers". A knowledgeable and sympathetic statement of the latter position is G. St. J. Orde Brown, *The African Labourer* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1933). A vigorous presentation of the other side is Marvin P. Miracle and Bruce Fetter, "Backward-sloping Labor-Supply Functions and African Behavior," *Economic Development and Culture Change*, 18 (1970):240-51.

<sup>134</sup>Guy Baumer, *Les centres indigènes extracoutumieres au Congo Belge* (Paris: Editions Domat-Montchrestien, 1939), pp.46-52.

<sup>135</sup>Sources for Kivu in this period are scattered among several archives. An important letter on the conflict between tribute relations with chiefs and employment

Another aspect of labor in Kivu, however, was the great difficulty of getting anything like enough people to sign up as long-term workers, even though this paid much better than short-term work (from 9 to 12 fr versus from 7 to 7.50 fr a month in 1925).<sup>136</sup> Short-term workers remained relatively easy to hire provided they were able to return home each night and provided the employer was willing to put up with numerous absences and the local practice of substituting relatives to do one's work. This remained so even though the tax burden on Kivu Africans rose steadily in the 1920s: in 1919 Kivu paid 239,000 fr in head tax (5 percent of the province's total); in 1930 they paid 3,595,000 fr in head tax (10 percent of the province's total).<sup>137</sup> Evidently African laborers were (with some success) trying to hold on to the structures of everyday life while transferring to the new work situation the norms of a communal labor environment.

The contradictions in the larger patterns of social change were clearly visible in rural Kivu. On the one hand, a process of substituting individual wage income for communal rights and labor was underway.<sup>138</sup> On the other hand, salaries were insufficient to allow farm laborers to abandon communal resources. The chief was caught in the middle: forced to supply growing numbers of laborers to the colonists, he was in danger of losing his subjects and his traditional rewards from them. The colonists, concerned with getting their work done cheaply, had little interest in the rights of the chiefs or the livelihood of the workers. The workers attempted to make the best of a situation in which neither traditional reciprocal relations nor the laws of the market place applied.

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relations with colonists is in KAT, F3m, Autorités indigènes: Le Docte, CD, Kivu, to Agent Territorial, Unya Bongo, Costermansville, 25 September 1929. Annual reports on labor (AIMO) for the territory of Unya Bongo for 1929-1932 are in SKU. Administrators' views of the "problem" of Kivu labor appear in AA, RAPO, 1929, Affaires Economiques, part 2, pp.217f., and, in a slightly fuller form, in Governor Moeller's Rapport général N° 29 of 21 March 1930, in AA, D(778)B.II.3 and also in AA, MOI (3597)126, the major part of which was published by Jean-Luc Vellut, "Enquête sur la main-d'œuvre au Kivu (1930)," *Enquête et Documents d'histoire africaine*, 3 (1978):30-38. A good overview is Bashizi Cirhagarhula, "Processus de domination socio-économique."

<sup>136</sup>AA, MOI(3545)15, RA, AIMO, PO, 1925 (extract).

<sup>137</sup>RACB 1919, pp.262-63; RACB 1930.

<sup>138</sup>Bitanana Ntamugab'umwe, "Réflexions sur les conditions des travailleurs dans la province du Kivu (1922-1945)," (Travail de fin d'études, histoire, ISP, Bukavu, 1977).

However, in the case of short-term labor recruited by the administration, it was the interests of the employers rather than of the temporary workers that played the larger role. In the case of Kilo-Moto, which was employing ten thousand auxiliary laborers at the beginning of 1927, the auxiliaries had become the "poor relations (*parents pauvres*)" of the labor force.<sup>139</sup> Such workers were paid lower wages than regular workers and did not have their head tax paid (as the mines did for regular workers). In addition, because they were employed at non-mining tasks such as road building and erecting compounds, they did not receive the bonuses that in the latter 1920s were an important part of Kilo-Moto miners' incomes. Auxiliaries also received poorer housing and food: for example, they got only one-half the meat and oil allowance of regular workers.<sup>140</sup>

An additional aspect of the auxiliary situation was the almost constant disruption that their recruitment caused in the mining area particularly. During the second half of 1922, for example, the Kilo mines and colonists of Ituri were supplied with almost 2,600 recruits a month, while Moto received 2,400 a month from the Upper Uele administration to sustain quite modest auxiliary forces. In 1925 the Moto mines received 25,503 auxiliary workers on two-month contracts from the administration, though the size of their temporary work force averaged well under 6,000 for the year. In contrast, to keep their permanent work force of 4,000 (on three-year contracts) Kilo needed only 1,785 recruits (three-quarters supplied by the administration) in 1922 and Moto required only 1,857 new recruits in 1925 to keep their permanent work force at about 5,700.<sup>141</sup> So long as the administration remained responsible for recruitment the mines employed a high proportion (up to half) of auxiliaries in their work force, but once they began to do their own recruiting starting in 1928 the proportion fell rapidly, declining to 20 percent in 1928, 5 percent in 1929, and 1 percent in 1930. A similar pattern prevailed at other employers.

A permanent labor force at Kilo-Moto grew rapidly. Of the 8,161

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<sup>139</sup>Moeller to GG, 9 August 1926, report on Kilo mines, pp.3, 14

<sup>140</sup>AA, MOI(3606)166, VanReeth (CD, Haut Uele) to Vice-Governor General, PO, 3 December 1920, pp.5-11.

<sup>141</sup>RACB 1922, p.76; AA, MOI(3545): RA.PO AIMO 1925, p.199. Given these figures the size of the auxiliary force at Kilo in 1922 must have been larger than the figure reported by the mines shown in table 5.6.



Table 5.6  
Kilo-Moto's African Work Force, 1920-1930

Year	Regular			Auxiliary			Grand Total	Percent Auxiliary
	Kilo	Moto	Total	Kilo	Moto	Total		
1920	2,714	3,392	6,106		2,982	2,982	9,088	33
1921	2,274	2,997	5,271	885	2,192	3,077	8,248	37
1922	3,894	3,905	7,799	962	3,320	4,282	12,126	35
1923	4,525	3,875	8,390	2,208	3,878	6,086	14,486	42
1924	4,605	4,860	9,465	2,866	6,378	9,244	18,709	49
1925	5,546	5,729	11,275	1,665	5,184	6,849	18,124	38
1926	6,267	6,478	12,745	3,092	6,976	10,068	22,813	44
1927	7,236	6,912	14,148	1,361	6,612	7,973	22,121	36
1928	8,161	7,886	16,047	225	4,020	4,245	20,322	21
1929	9,087	9,734	18,821	497	602	1,099	19,920	5
1930	10,201	9,608	19,809	181	72	253	20,062	1

Sources: "Mines de Kilo-Moto," *Congo*, (1924) 1:98; Bakonzi, "Gold Mines," p.410.

Africans on regular contracts at Kilo in 1928, more than a third had been there for over four years, including 319 whose first contracts had been signed more than fifteen years earlier. Of those reaching the end of their contracts at Kilo that year, 77 percent signed new ones, of which more than three-quarters were for two years or more.<sup>142</sup> Because statistics for other years are not available, these isolated figures must be treated with caution. Such high contract renewals may represent a response to improved living and working conditions, but it was the considered opinion of the 1930-31 Labor Commission that a considerable portion of those renewing their contracts did so because they lacked any savings that would have permitted them to return to their rural villages.<sup>143</sup> It is also very likely that the poverty of the surrounding rural areas was driving more and more Africans to Kilo-Moto in the years and those that followed. As Bakonzi convincingly argues, Kilo-Moto's success in stabilizing its work force after 1925 was largely due to the absence of other viable alternatives for employment, particularly because the compulsory cultivation of crops

<sup>142</sup>AA, RA/CB(140)4, RAPO, Economique, 1928.

<sup>143</sup>Bertrand, *Problème de la main d'œuvre*, p.233.

to feed the mines and towns in effect were a subsidy that kept the rural areas in misery and economic depression.<sup>144</sup>

An illustration of how rural misery pushed people out of the northeast and of how Africans responded positively to the pull of much greater wage incentives can be found not far from the mines. Beginning in 1921 the Alur and neighboring peoples along lake Albert began migrating in large numbers into British Uganda. Seeking to escape the intensive recruitment for Kilo-Moto and for head portorage, they were lured to Uganda by wages that were four to ten times higher than those in the Belgian Congo. In 1930 the number of emigrants was about two thousand. This voluntary migration continued through the 1930s and 1940s, though by 1930 the danger, if not the Belgian fears, that the entire Alur population would move permanently to Uganda had ended.<sup>145</sup> To stem the flow of emigrants Belgian authorities tried suspending direct government recruitment for the mines, asking British authorities to return the migrants, and (in the 1930s) slowing European settlement in the area.<sup>146</sup>

If most Africans who had a choice of employment were forced to choose between the lesser of two evils, there were some who did prosper in this decade. The settler invasion of Kivu, for example, brought about new opportunities as well as new exploitation. Some found a chance to evade the authority of the local chief. Others became semi-skilled artisans, earning up to 180 fr a month. An exceptional headman could command 450 fr. Some mission catechists found new callings as petty traders.<sup>147</sup> Many such individuals, whose personal lives remain unrecorded, moved to cities and towns inside the province or beyond during this decade. The larger significance of this trend became clearer during the 1930s.

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<sup>144</sup>Bakonzi, "Gold Mines," pp.739-50.

<sup>145</sup>A. W. Southall, *Alur Society: a Study in Processes and Types of Domination* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, Ltd., 1953), pp.318-20; idem, "Alur Migrants," in *Economic Development and Tribal Change*, Audrey I Richards, ed., rev. ed. (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.148-50.

<sup>146</sup>AA, RAPO, AIMO, 1927, p.26; MOI(3602)166: Moeller to GG, 11 December 1926, and Moulaert to Minister, 23 March 1928. Far larger numbers of Rwandans immigrated to Uganda as cotton workers in this period, some 35,000 entering Buganda alone in 1928; see P. G. Powesland, "History of the Migration in Uganda," in Richards, *Economic Development*, pp.29-44.

<sup>147</sup>APB, RAPB 1924-25, pp.421, 427-28.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the many efforts at labor reform and at labor mobilization that swept through the eastern Congo in the 1920s after the constraints of the war years eased. Compared to the preceding decades, the new restrictions against the abuse of African labor were significant. Though reforms were late in coming, one should not demean the importance of such decisions as the refusal to authorize forced labor for railroad construction, the withdrawal of the government from direct recruitment for the private sector, the efforts to protect communities from overrecruitment, the construction of motor roads, and the prohibition of unnecessary portage.

Yet, as the records of this decade make abundantly clear, the effect of these reforms was often blunted by other, more powerful forces or interests. The new laws were not applied to a static labor situation, but to one in which African employment by Europeans was growing so rapidly that it verged on being out of control. The labor demands of corporations, businessmen and settlers might be regulated, but they could not be ignored. Consequently, local officials were often asked to reconcile incompatible directives that demanded they supply large numbers of laborers or crops while respecting the new labor regulations. Only by closing their eyes to the law could they satisfy these demands. Higher officials had the authority to bend the regulations to accommodate European interests by raising the official limits on recruitment, by discovering "vacant" lands for settlers, by using compulsory cultivation as a way to supply food at below-market prices. Private companies and colonists used their personal ties of race, class, and nationality to evade the reforms as much as possible, trading on friendships with local administrators or the ability to bring corporate or political pressure on high officials. Long accustomed to the idea that the colony existed for their benefit and that it was the government's duty to provide them with African labor, they resisted the reforms as much as they could.

African efforts to impose their will on these policies and practices are harder to detect in this decade. The open revolts of earlier decades were rare; union activities and political nationalism were far in the future. Individual actions, largely poorly documented, seems to have been the basis for accommodation and resistance: complaining to

officials who would listen, passively resisting unpopular work rules and conditions, deserting the job and even the colony.

## Chapter 6

### Forced Labor and Labor Force, 1930-1940

The onset of the Depression brought the labor shortages of the 1920s to an abrupt, if temporary, halt. Contracting overseas markets for the Congo's crops and minerals (except gold) caused exports to decline by two-thirds between 1930 and 1933. European firms operating in the Congo cut down or closed their operations.<sup>1</sup> The colonial government, facing shrinking revenues in a budget already badly strained by an extremely high debt ratio, took steps to reduce administrative expenses: the lowest European employees were replaced with African clerks, the administrative structure was simplified, and the responsibilities of African chiefs were increased.

To protect European interests the government made loans to colonists and offered reduced tariffs for the settlers' crops and other products. The African population received no such consideration; workers were laid off or had their salaries cut by a fifth and more. When the number of unemployed in the towns and cities rose rapidly, officials moved to "purge the larger centers of their least useful and most dangerous elements."<sup>2</sup> With unemployed Africans literally beating at their doors, the firms remaining in operation (with the

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<sup>1</sup>RACB 1930, p.10. For a general treatments of the economics of this period see Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "The Colonial Economy of the Former French, Belgian, and Portuguese Zones, 1914-35," *Unesco General History of Africa*, vol. 7: *Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, A. Adu Boahen, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp.351-81, and B. Jewsiewicki, "The Great Depression and the Making of the Colonial Economic System in the Belgian Congo," *African Economic History*, 4 (1977):153-76.

<sup>2</sup>RACB 1930, p.10. The African quarter in Uvira, for example, fell from 695 to 358; RA/CB(197)7: Commentary by the CD, R. Hombert on RA, Kivu, AIMO 1932, 27 February 1934.

Table 6.1  
Indices of Growth, 1930-1940  
(1930 = 100)

	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940
Population	100	101	100	103	109	114	115	115	115	116
Head-tax	107	99	101	107	113	120	140	147	149	158
Wage Laborers	84	67	69	95	97	111	129	137	138	137
Cotton Harvest	134	78	119	157	184	203	231	264	211	271
Rice Harvest	91	81	78	86	86	88	128	91	88	108
Porterage (days)	87	151	291	391	439	375	361	354	299	NA

*Sources:* Appendices 1-5; table 6.3; RACB(138)4, RAPO, AIMO, 1931.

exception of HCB) needed no administrative help in recruiting. In 1932 the Kilo-Moto mines responded to the labor glut by hiring the unemployed in the mining region and proposing to reopen some low-grade mines, if labor could be had for two or three francs a day including food.<sup>3</sup> The head of the colony's department of agriculture, voicing attitudes common in Brussels, asserted that Africans had scarcely suffered at all from these massive dislocations and the loss of their incomes. In his view their wants were as easily to satisfy as those of the wildlife: "For the native of Equatorial Africa always finds something to feed himself in the forest and the bush, whether there is a commercial crisis or not. He really has no need of European goods."<sup>4</sup> He argued that since Africans' production went only to pay taxes and not to satisfy real needs and wants, so long as the tax rate was lowered, they would remain unaffected.

Despite Africans' lost opportunities for to earn income, their head tax was not reduced so that further revenue loss to the colony might be avoided. In fact tax collection increased significantly during the Depression years. Receipts in 1930 in the Eastern Province were 20 percent above those of 1929; those of 1931 were 7 percent above 1930.<sup>5</sup> This increase was due to higher tax rates not just better

<sup>3</sup>KAT R771: Commission MO, Comité Regional. Procès verbal of the séance of 3 May 1932. Fortunately for such Africans food prices had also declined considerably.

<sup>4</sup>Edmond Lepiae, "L'avenir de l'agriculture congolaise conformément au Discours du Duc de Brabant," *Congo* (1937) 1:235-36.

collection. Tax receipts rose in these years in every province in the colony and in every district in the Eastern Province.

Fortunately the colony's economic recovery was almost as rapid as its decline. By 1934 the African work force had regained its pre-Depression numbers and its rapid growth continued for the rest of the decade, leveling off only during the 1939-40 recession. Agricultural sales experienced much smaller declines and earlier recoveries when measured by volume. More ominous was the increase in head portage both during and after the Depression.

### Administration and Policy

The Depression provided both the excuse and the occasion to reverse the administrative decentralization of the 1920s. The number of provinces was increased, while the number of districts and territories was reduced.<sup>6</sup> In 1933 the Eastern Province was divided in two. The new Stanleyville province was made up of three districts: the gold-mining area of Kibali-Ituri, a single Uele district, and a larger Stanleyville district including Aruwimi. The new Costermansville province included Maniema and Kivu districts. District boundaries were readjusted several times during the decade.<sup>7</sup>

Labor policies were the subject of yet another examination, this one the most comprehensive to date. A new labor commission under Major A. Cayen was appointed in 1930 after missionary complaints about the effects on African societies of the "prodigal" rate of economic development during the 1920s and the government's resultant use of

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<sup>5</sup>RACB 1929, p.109; 1930, p.115; AA, RA/CB(138)4, RAPO.AIMO 1931, pp.37-38. The head of Maniema attributed the fall in tax receipts in 1933 to shortages of personnel and slow cotton sales; AA, RACB (197)8, comments of F. Stradiot on RA, AIMO, Maniema, 1933, 17 February 1934, p. 10. In Kivu at least high taxes were seen as a way to force more Africans to work for the settlers. Colonel Bertrand raised the issue of high taxation in the Colonial Council, CRA 1932, 6 May 1932, pp.576-78, 585.

<sup>6</sup>Bruce Fetter, *Colonial Rule and Regional Imbalance in Colonial Africa* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983), p.154, says the objectives of this reorganization were "to break the power of the vice-governors general of Orientale and Katanga Provinces" and to focus more attention on the economic development of Kasai and Kivu.

<sup>7</sup>In the mid-1930s, for example, the important mining territory of Lubutu passed from Kivu to Stanleyville, Kindu went from Stanleyville to Maniema, and Shabunda passed from Maniema to Kivu; AA, RA/CB(120bis)2: Reorganisation 1935.

"exaggerated restraint" in labor recruitment.<sup>8</sup> After field investigations in the Congo in 1930-31 the Commission issued reports on each of the four provinces, along with a General Report containing overall comments and conclusions. The report on the Eastern Province by Colonel Aléxis Bertrand was by far the longest and the most detailed, and appears to have strongly influenced the recommendations in the General Report.<sup>9</sup>

While these reports were far more detailed than previous studies, their analysis and recommendations did not represent significant departures from the policies already laid down. Like the 1925 Commission, the 1930-31 Labor Commission operated from the assumption that African societies were like animal herds that had to be carefully managed in order to keep their populations flourishing. Therefore, limits had been imposed—not unlike hunting quotas—on how many men might be recruited. When these limits were reached, a sort of closed season might be imposed, during which no further recruitment might be undertaken so that the population might regain its demographic strength. The analogy of Africans as wild animals was also evident in the idea that certain persons might acquire a sort of domesticated status, becoming *évolués* and thus no longer in need of the protections officially accorded their "wild" brethren in the forests and bush.<sup>10</sup>

The Commission proposed no significant changes from existing policies beyond their stricter enforcement. First, it found no further need for direct government intervention in recruiting, except in exceptional circumstances. Second, it recommended that the limit of 10 percent on the number of able bodied men that might be recruited away from any locale be enforced (though without regard to the old distinction between working at a great or small distance from home), except where the provincial governors thought it prudent to authorize

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<sup>8</sup>Victor Roelens, "Les abus de recrutement de la main-d'œuvre au Congo: une protestation des chefs religieux catholiques de la colonie," *Le Flambeau*, 1 February 1929, pp.129-30. Roelens was bishop of the Upper Congo.

<sup>9</sup>A. Cayen, *Le problème de la main-d'œuvre au Congo Belge. Rapport general de la Commission de la main-d'œuvre 1930-1931* (Brussels: Etablissements Généraux d'Imprimerie, 1931); Bertrand, *Problème de la main-d'œuvre*.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Bogumil Jewsiewicki, "Notes sur l'histoire socio-économique du Congo 1880-1960," *Etudes d'Histoire africaine*, 3 (1972):238-39, who characterizes colonial policies as resembling stock raising and culling.



recruitment up to 20 percent. Third, it called for strict enforcement of the 15 percent limit on village labor devoted to cash crops, while recognizing the need for compelling cultivation of certain crops where food shortages might otherwise result and for "educational" purposes, so long as such crops were paid a fair market price and educational programs were limited to two or three years.

Bertrand's report on the Eastern Province did not deal with most of Aruwimi, Maniema, and Kivu, but its limited scope was offset by the wealth of detail on the northern territories which it did examine and by the directness and bluntness of language that were so characteristic of the colonel and so rare in official Congo documents.<sup>11</sup> In zone after zone he delineated how far practice had deviated from stated policy and with what consequences for individual Africans and their traditional communities. The report pointed out that very soon after the 1925 Commission's limits were imposed, local administrators (and their superiors) had begun omitting cash-crop farming from calculations of how much of the African work force was engaged in working for Europeans. In effect all distinction between labor on the spot and at a small distance disappeared, permitting the hiring, not of the 10 percent of the able-bodied male population envisioned by the 1925 Commission, but of up to 25 percent. Bertrand's examination of thirty-four of the province's fifty-eight territories revealed that in only six (with 28 percent of the province's population) were the recruits fewer than 10 percent, while in twelve territories (with 30 percent of the province's population) the figure exceeded 20 percent.<sup>12</sup> The non-observance of these limits, accompanied by continued application of moral restraint in recruiting had produced a situation which Bertrand considered "extremely disquieting."

Bertrand also reported that the imposition and enforcement of compulsory cultivation was often done in an arbitrary manner and with insufficient regard for the effects on individual cultivators. He recommended that compulsory cultivation be limited to what was

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<sup>11</sup>That the report was unpopular in many circles is not surprising, but what is notable is that its critics were hard pressed to find serious flaws in it, having to content themselves with innuendo and abuse. See Conseil d'Administration de la Société des Mines d'Or de Kilo-Moto, *La véritable situation aux Mines de Kilo-Moto, réponse...au rapport du Colonel Bertrand* (Brussels: R. Bausart, 1932) and Moulaert, *Vingt années à Kilo-Moto*, pp.173-76.

<sup>12</sup>Bertrand, *Problème de la main-d'oeuvre*, pp.12-13, 247-48.

strictly necessary, that monopolies over African production (such as the Cotonco's over cotton) be limited to four or five years, and that African workers be allowed to buy their way out of labor contracts by repaying the costs of their recruitment and training.<sup>13</sup>

The most important of the recommendations of the 1930-31 Labor Commission were never implemented. The distinction between labor at small and great distances was officially dropped in 1938, but the idea of limiting recruitment to 10 or even 20 percent never received serious attention. Nor were Africans raising crops for sale to European enterprises counted in the official tallies. Instead, the government monitored only those Africans working directly for Europeans, distinguishing between those who continued to dwell in their customary social and ecological areas and those working outside these milieux.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, while the imposition of compulsory crops for "educational" purposes became more rational in this decade, the compulsion to grow specified acreages of certain crops remained to the very end of Belgian colonialism and was defended on the same basis, the backwardness of African farmers, as when it was introduced.<sup>15</sup>

The 1930-31 Labor Commission's recommendations were not carried out because of unresolved conflicts between colonial policy and practice. On the one hand, the Belgian Congo alone paid serious lip-service to the idea that limiting labor recruitment to fixed demographic percentages would help preserve the demographic health of African communities.<sup>16</sup> The idea reeked of paternalistic concern, but even if enforced, such limits by themselves could not sustain

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp.252-57.

<sup>14</sup>RACB 1938, p.25; AA, RA/CB(120 bis)12: RA, PC, AIMO 1938, p.63. The 1937 AIMO report for Stanleyville Province divided new workers into three categories: 1) entirely spontaneous, 2) solicited (by promises, bonuses, gifts, etc.), and 3) recruited. The latter was to be only for public utility labor for INEAC-Otraco; AA, RA/CB (198)6.

<sup>15</sup>The defense of compulsory cultivation by the Belgian representative to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in 1953 is revealing of how long a questionable rationale could remain official policy: "Belgium is responsible for primitive populations that do not have a taste for agricultural labor and it is thus indispensable to have recourse to compulsory cultivation in order to give an agricultural formation to these populations" (quoted in T. Heyse *Congo Belge et Ruanda-Urundi: Notes de droit public et commentaire de la Charte Coloniale*, (Brussels: G. Van Campenhout, 1957) 2:531.

<sup>16</sup>See Malcolm Hailey, *An African Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p.708.

demographic health, as the colony conceded later in the decade. On the other hand, the administration continued to show little willingness to respect such limits in those places where labor was in greatest demand. Once the Depression passed, renewed demands for ever more labor brought on much the same response from an administration which was a major shareholder in many enterprises and in some was obliged to pay fixed dividends to the other shareholders. Thus, in May 1932, when asked to consider revising recruitment limits downward, the Provincial Labor Commission reaffirmed instead that an absolute maximum of 25 percent of any locale's able-bodied men could become wage employees, but authorized district commissioners to impose lower maximums or suspend recruiting where they thought necessary.<sup>17</sup>

Despite such actions the support for the system of recruitment quotas was eroding rapidly. By the middle of the decade the enforcement of even a 25 percent limit had become extremely lax. The district commissioner of Uele, P. Bougnet, considered excessive recruitment a "real danger" to his district's population, but felt that the system of population quotas governing labor recruiting was too cumbersome and imprecise to deal with the problem.<sup>18</sup> He spoke for most administrators. In 1936 the Stanleyville Provincial Labor Commission also urged that all fixed percentages of recruitment be replaced by a simpler system.<sup>19</sup> Official approval of these actions and proposals

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<sup>17</sup>KAT, R771: Commission de la Main-d'œuvre, Comité Regionale, PO, 3 May 1932. Recruitment was suspended until the end of 1932 in 131 chiefdoms where quotas had been exceeded and the suspension of recruitment for work outside or far outside the community was imposed in ninety others. KAT, R1104: Interdiction de Recrutement 1932. However, some of these restrictions were lifted early; see below.

<sup>18</sup>KAT, R1104: Instructions pour recrutement 1936: R Dufour to CDs of Kibali-Ituri, Stanleyville, and Uele, 10 April 1936, N°282-284/AIMO/UI; R771: Procès-verbal de la réunion de la Sous-Commission de la Main-d'œuvre de l'Uele, Buta, 6 March 1936; R413h/B AIMO 1936 à 1939: Procès Verbal Commission de la Main-d'œuvre 1939. PS, 8 April 1939.

<sup>19</sup>KAT, R771: R. Dufour to GG, Stanleyville, 11 April 1936, N°296/AIMO/X.15. Dufour, the provincial commissioner, had suspended all new recruiting permits pending reports on demographic situations. Meanwhile, he had authorized recruitment of up to 20 percent of the able-bodied men for work outside the community, plus 15 percent locally. Nor were rigid formulas being observed in Costermansville province in the middle 1930s, although the 25 percent maximum for wage employment remained the rule of thumb; KAT, R413h/B AIMO 1936 à 1939: Extract from Compte-rendu, Commission de la Main-d'Oeuvre, PC, 1938.

came at the beginning of 1938. At about the same time Governor General Pierre Ryckmans, without any public announcement, officially abrogated the recruiting formulas in effect. Provincial heads were to decide how many men might be recruited in each of their territories without the local communities being undermined.<sup>20</sup> This did not throw the eastern Congo open to unlimited recruitment. On the contrary, a large number of territories in both Stanleyville and Costermansville provinces were temporarily closed to recruitment of persons away from their homes in late 1938 and 1939 and in some places the hiring of labor for local work was halted.<sup>21</sup>

In assessing the colony's official labor policies during this decade, one is impressed by the sincere efforts of administrators at all levels to regulate labor recruitment in the interests of African communities. Yet one must also share their feelings that the task was extremely difficult. The quotas recommended by the labor commissions were too complex to apply and were based on faulty demographic assumptions. Moreover, as the rest of this chapter demonstrates, forces stronger than the colonial bureaucracy were shaping labor history. Some of these were the impersonal forces of the marketplace. Some were the organized demands of large employers and locally powerful interests. Some were the legacy of earlier colonial policy decisions.

### Industrial Labor

Once the effects of the Depression began to ease in 1933 the industrial labor force resumed its upward growth. The number of Africans employed in industry in Stanleyville province rose from fewer than 42,000 in 1932-33 to 70,000 in 1938. In Costermansville province the rise was even more dramatic: from 14,500 in 1933 to over 49,000 in 1940. Mining continued to employ the largest segment of the industrial labor force in the region and experienced substantial growth during this decade with Kivu and Maniema joining Ituri as major mining centers.<sup>22</sup> In Costermansville province gold production grew

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<sup>20</sup>AA, H(4421)611: Commission de la Main-d'Oeuvre, Procès-verbal, 6 February 1940, statement of Minister of the Colonies Camus.

<sup>21</sup>RACB 1939/44, p.33.

<sup>22</sup>Besides Sokomo the main mining companies (and their gold production in 1937) were MGL (2,399 kg), Forminière and its affiliates (1,563 kg), Belgikaor (606 kg), the Société Minière de Bafwaboli (360 kg), and the Comité National du Kivu (201 kg);

from 1,355 kilograms in 1932 to 6,270 kilograms in 1940; tin ore production went from 114 tons to 5,257 tons.<sup>23</sup> Despite this growth the older mines of Kilo-Moto retained a commanding lead by also expanding production dramatically. Their fine gold production rose from 5,311 kilograms in 1932 to 7,761 in 1940.<sup>24</sup> During the decade the Kilo-Moto work force doubled, from 20,000 to 40,000 men nearly all of whom were on long-term contracts.<sup>25</sup> Two industrial areas deserve special attention. One is the perennially important gold mines of Kilo-Moto. The other is the new gold and tin mining complex that sprang up in Maniema and parts of Kivu. Together they show the problems and practices of industrial labor recruitment during this decade.

Despite the improved wages and working conditions that had come to Kilo-Moto during the 1920s, there was considerable resistance to working there in many quarters. As in the past administrators had to apply pressure on the chiefs in the northeast to meet the mines needs. One administrator told the 1930-31 Labor Commission investigator in the Eastern Province: "Were I not to intervene at all, the number of people from my jurisdiction serving in the mining camps would be reduced by three-quarters." Another noted, "To satisfy the labor demands which come my way, I am compelled to tell the chiefs assembled for these reasons that it is their duty to give workers to the Kilo-Moto Mines."<sup>26</sup>

Immediately following the inspection of the 1930-31 Labor Commission, there was a reluctance among colony administrators to involve themselves or the African chiefs under them in the actual recruiting of labor for Kilo-Moto. The loud complaints this brought forth from the mines' management committee to the minister of colonies in 1931 were quickly followed by a visit to the mines by the Governor General Auguste Tilkens, where he called a meeting of colony and mine officials. There it was decided, in the words of the

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RACB 1937, p.155. By 1936 the eastern Congo was producing 3,092 metric tons of tin ore as well, 36 percent of the colony's total, with the Syndicat Minière d'Etain the main producer; RACB 1936, p.143.

<sup>23</sup>AA, RA/CB(120bis)10, 11, 14: RA.PC, AIMO, 1934, 1936, 1940.

<sup>24</sup>Bakonzi, "Gold Mines," p.308.

<sup>25</sup>MKM, Société des Mines d'Or de Kilo-Moto, Reports 1930-39.

<sup>26</sup>Bertrand, *Problème de la main-d'œuvre*, pp.190-91. Although the report does not identify these officials, a statement essentially similar to the first is attributed to the head of Faradje territory on page 230.

historian Bakonzi, "that the local colonial administration should continue to help the gold mines in their efforts to recruit Africans from rural areas, and that the Kilo-Moto recruiting agency should be relieved," a practice that remained in effect until 1944.<sup>27</sup> This renewed intervention of the administration in recruiting was accompanied by more effective soliciting of miners by the company's own recruiting teams, which included former African employees.<sup>28</sup>

The limits on recruiting recommended by the 1930-31 Labor Commission were largely overturned to meet the mines' needs. In part of Uele prohibitions on recruitment were lifted in 1934 to permit 500 new recruits for the Sokimo. In Kibali-Ituri the restrictions in the two territories inhabited by the Nande were lifted to allow 7,500 men for the mines.<sup>29</sup> When their territory was switched from Uele to Kibali-Ituri in 1933, the Budu around Wamba were called upon to furnish 700 men for Kilo-Moto, despite the fact that they had already supplied 3,000 of the 4,000 work force at the *Minière de la Tele* (*Forminière*). They were extremely reluctant to move to the much higher elevations at Kilo-Moto because of the effects on their health. The local administrator protested that the cream of the healthy men had already been skimmed off for the mines and the *Force Publique* so that he could only get more recruits through the use of force. He demanded specific authorization from the district commissioner, who knew the Wamba situation well, before he would supply the men. In the end the Budu were exempted from recruitment to Kilo-Moto.<sup>30</sup> For 1935 Kilo-Moto recruitment quotas were raised to produce a regular work force of thirty thousand. When a medical officer intervened, citing the demographic consequences of such high levels of recruitment, his superiors

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<sup>27</sup>Bakonzi, "Gold Mines," p.146. Bakonzi is relying upon the official records of Management Committee meetings that I was unable to see.

<sup>28</sup>See AA, AI(1421): RA.PS, AIMO, 1935, p.89. The Sokimo recruited 220 volunteers in Faradje territory and 610 in Dungu territory. In Dungu men were said to have signed up willingly "because the native knows that [at Kilo-Moto] he is well treated, well paid, fed, and housed."

<sup>29</sup>KAT, R32/N8/1: R1104- 1934, Note pour Monsieur le Commissaire de Province, 15 March 1934.

<sup>30</sup>KAT, F22J/N23 Conseil de Territoire: Winckelmans to DC, Kibali Ituri, Wamba, 21 October 1934; KAT, R13 Tableau MO, District de Stanleyville. Not so lucky were another gang of "recruits" for Kilo-Moto that year who were marched to the mine in slave yokes: KAT, R13 Tableaux MO, District de Stanleyville: Bougnet, acting DC, Uele, to Provincial Commissioner, Stanleyville, Buta, 5 January 1934.

overruled him.<sup>31</sup>

The mineral rush in Costermansville province during this decade also caused severe labor problems, as was acknowledged at all levels of the administration. The opening up of gold and tin mines, the construction of roads to serve them, and the subsequent food requirements for the work camps all imposed great labor demands on the thinly populated and demographically fragile areas of Maniema and Kivu, especially because of the haste with which sites were opened. Early in 1934 the Maniema's senior administrator reported that recruitment for the mines was straining "very intensively" an already bad demographic situation in the district and the strains were likely to get worse.<sup>32</sup> In September, citing forced recruitment, excessive portage, and failures to provide African workers with adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical care, as well as "numerous acts of ill-treatment and brutality," the minister of colonies instructed the governor general to stop recruitment and the opening of new mines until these abuses could be corrected.<sup>33</sup> While many of the most extreme abuses of labor in Maniema were removed as a consequence of greater administrative vigilance, the burdens on the local population remained high throughout this decade. as mining operations continued to grow, constituting "a regime of servitude" in the words of Colonel Bertrand, the most senior member of the Colonial Council.<sup>34</sup>

The development of mining between Lubutu and Shabunda was particularly rapid. One official investigator reported that "massive temporary recruitments" continued until the end of 1935, causing Africans to flee into the bush to escape the recruiters, to the detriment of village order and food production.<sup>35</sup> By 1937 some of the territories in that area had more than 35 percent of their adult male populations

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<sup>31</sup>A. Bertrand, "De la nécessité d'une documentation scientifique ou statistique, préalable à tout mesure intéressant les indigènes," *IRCB, Bulletin des séances*, 3 (1934):643-44.

<sup>32</sup>AA, RA/CB(197)8: Commentaries by F. Stradiot on the RA Maniema AIMO 1933, 17 February 1934, pp.9, 20-21.

<sup>33</sup>Conseil Colonial, *CRA 1934*, pp.1091-98, 1457-68. The Ministry's director general, Camus, later described the situation at this time in Maniema as "catastrophic"; *Conseil Colonial, CRA 1935*, p.736.

<sup>34</sup>A. Bertrand, *Conseil Colonial, CRA 1934*, p.1096.

<sup>35</sup>Report of M. le Substitut De Reheve on the labor situation in Lubutu territory, quoted in Procureur Général, a.i., to GG, Léopoldville, 7 May 1937; KAT, F22J/N23: *Conseil du territoire*.

away at work. In some parts of Lubutu 42 percent and even 57 percent of the adult men were at work for the Europeans at the end of 1938, forcing limitations on labor recruiting and engagements.<sup>36</sup> The Lega, who inhabited much of this mining territory, were subjected to particularly heavy recruitment, which resulted in 34 percent of their able-bodied men being recruited for work in European establishments. While, as the anthropologist Biebuyck has suggested, "Many [Lega] welcomed the opportunity to work in their homelands, in close contact with their own villages and with other Lega," large numbers were subjected to considerable administrative coercion to meet the mines' labor needs.<sup>37</sup>

In opposing to the rapidity of mining development in Costermansville province, Bertrand had frequently condemned the pursuit of economic development to the detriment of African welfare. On one occasion he predicted that the runaway mining expansion would produce "a generation of rebels."<sup>38</sup> It is worth noting that in 1944 Lubutu, Masisi, and Shabunda territories were the scene of a rather bloody "Kitawala" (Watch-Tower) uprising, especially among the Kumu.<sup>39</sup>

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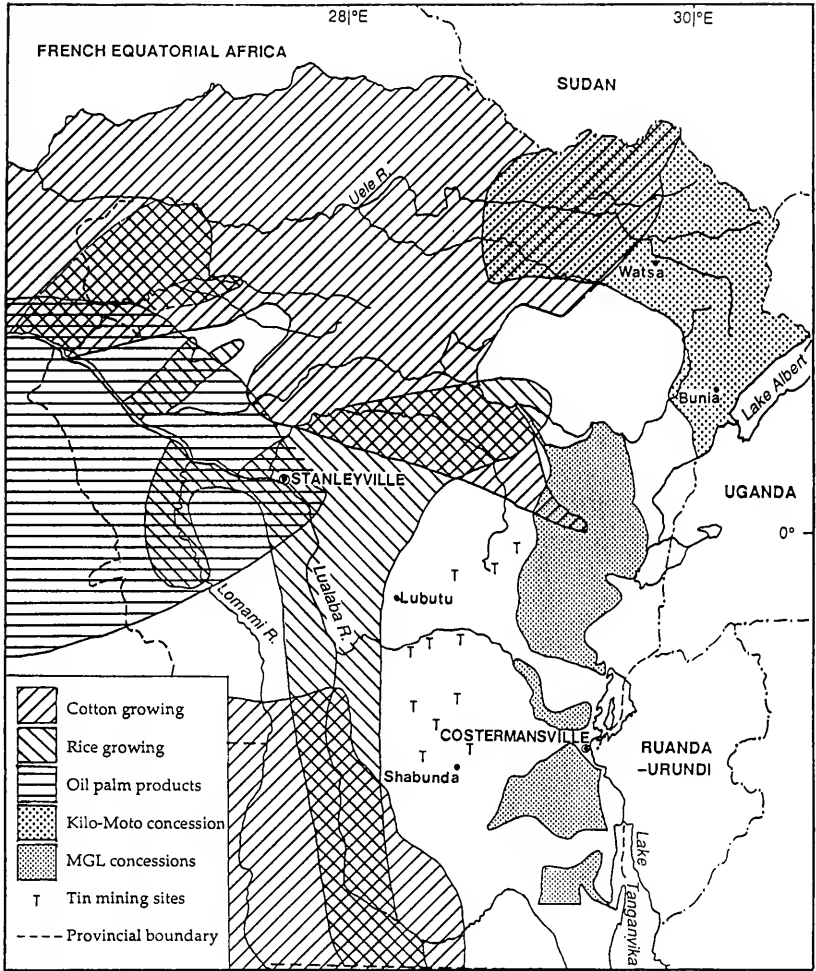
<sup>36</sup>See the prohibitions on outside recruiting in Lubutu in arrêtes N°5 (3 January 1935), N°37 (2 December 1935), and N°10 (5 March 1938), which closed all of Stanleyville province to outside recruiting; KAT, R1104 Interdiction Recrutement. Both recruitment and engagement were prohibited in Lubutu by N°63 (18 December 1938) and N°67 (20 December 1938); KAT, R413h/B AIMO 1936 à 1939: Procès verbaux, Commission de la Main-d'œuvre, Stanleyville Province, 7 April 1939, and KAT, F22J/N23 Conseil de Territoire. The closing of "engagements" was seen as facilitating putting together a work force of 1,500 men to build the Sulia-Nduma road.

<sup>37</sup>AA, D(778)B.II.3, A. Bertrand, "Au cours de la période d'euphorie économique," pp.1-4; Biebuyck, *Lega Culture*, p.14.

<sup>38</sup>Conseil Colonial, *CRA 1933*, p.742; cf. *CRA 1939*, p. 826. Frustrated by what he felt were inadequate restraints on mining operations in Maniema, Bertrand, began opposing all new prospecting permits in the district. At first abstaining on votes, then voting against the permits, Bertrand and a slowly growing number of supporters eventually succeeded in defeating one such measure in July 1938 by a vote of 9 to 5. However, this almost unprecedented rejection of a ministry-supported motion was reversed in October by a vote of 8 to 3, when two councillors who had opposed the measure switched their votes, two abstained and one was absent. See Conseil Colonial, *CRA 1935*, pp.260-63, 735-37; 1938, pp.348-51, 732-34, 996-99. Thrice more, before the Council's meetings were suspended because of the war, Bertrand succeeded in stopping the issuance of new prospecting permits in overrecruited parts of Maniema; see *CRA 1939*, pp.812-38, 1940, pp.106-8, 186-88.

<sup>39</sup>RACB 1939-44, p.9.





Map 10. Major Mining and Agricultural Areas in the Late 1930s

Sources: J. Moulaert, "Les exploitations minières de Kilo-Moto et de la Province Orientale," *Congo* (1935), 1:1-31; J.E. Opsomer, "Les cultures coloniales," *Encyclopédie du Congo Belge* (Brussels: Editions Bieleveld, n.d.), 1:425-632.

## Agricultural Labor

Agriculture continued to provide employment for the largest number of eastern Congolese in the 1930s. In addition, 37 percent of the wage labor force worked for Europeans in agriculture in 1932 and another 8 percent was employed in the processing of agricultural produce.<sup>40</sup> At the onset of the Depression the pressures for ever greater production had been abruptly abandoned, as the region's industrial labor force declined and the export markets dried up. Rice even became unsalable for a time in 1931 and the planting of rice and cotton was ordered discouraged.<sup>41</sup> As the Depression eased, the demand for foodstuffs, export crops, and labor for settlers again resumed an upward trend. Compulsion continued to be the norm both for peasant producers and agricultural recruitment for farm labor.

Food production was the largest part of African agriculture, but received less careful monitoring in the official records than production for export. It is clear that the revival of industrial and mining centers led to greatly increased demands for foodstuffs to feed them. The food crops for Kilo-Moto miners, all of which came from African production after 1931, for example, rose from 14,500 metric tons in 1930 to 39,000 tons in 1936, with some 25,000 additional tons of food being supplied to other mines in Stanleyville province the latter year.<sup>42</sup> Overall rice production in Stanleyville province rose from 11,000 metric tons in 1932, to 24,000 tons in 1934, and a peak of 44,000 tons (unhulled) in 1937. Rice in Costermansville province accounted for another 8,000 tons in 1937.<sup>43</sup> Scattered figures for other crops even more basic to the diet of African workers are shown in table 6.2 for Maniema and Stanleyville districts. The table makes clear the important growth of manioc and banana sales. Africans in Kivu district supplied another 25,000 tons of manioc flour and 24,000 tons of fresh bananas in 1938.<sup>44</sup>

This food was grown under the compulsory cultivation laws imposed in the previous decades, despite the strong trend among other

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<sup>40</sup>Statistiques Industrielles 1932. Province Orientale," *Congo* (1934) 1:440-45.

<sup>41</sup>Lepplae, "L'avenir de l'agriculture," pp.234-35; RACB 1930, p.137; AA, AI(1421): RA Manyema AIMO, 1932, ch. 2.

<sup>42</sup>AA, RA/CB(142)2: RA.PS, Agriculture, 1936, p.1.

<sup>43</sup>Appendix 4.

<sup>44</sup>AA, RA/CB(122bis)9: RA, Agriculture, CP, 1938, pp.6, 8.

Table 6.2  
Selected African Food Crop Sales, 1933-1939  
(in Metric Tons)

FOOD CROP	MANIEMA DISTRICT			STANLEYVILLE DISTRICT			
	1935	1937	1939	1933	1935	1937	1939
Fresh manioc	6,996	11,761	1,632				
Fresh bananas	2,736	7,089	7,911	7,618	8,321	63,327	64,721
Manioc/Banana flour			1,352	6,981	468	405	1,272
Peanuts	605	885	969	20	5	20	358
Corn	507	439	93	5	14	112	25
Palm oil	55	158	NA	1,582	1,814	1,806	867

*Sources:* AA, RA/CB(122bis)8, 10; RAPC, *Agriculture*, 1936, p.4, 1939, p.10. "L'agriculture du Congo Belge en 1937," BACB, 19(1938):418-506. KAT, T005 1927; S. Lauwers, CD, Stanleyville District, to governor, PS, 5 October 1942, "Développement économique du District de Stanleyville: Production agricole vendue par les indigènes."

colonial powers against such practices. The 1930 Geneva convention of the International Labor Organization had defined the imposition of such compulsory cultivation, except for famine prevention, as forced labor.<sup>45</sup> The 1930-31 Labor Commission had likewise argued that the use of compulsion, particularly in the case of food crops, was clearly for the benefit of European enterprises and that, because of laws, mercurial prices, and the uneven burdens of different family situations, Africans were less often the beneficiaries. Compulsory cultivation, plus the taxes and direct labor obligations, composed the major part of the excessive labor demands on rural Africans.<sup>46</sup>

The extent of the obligations is difficult to judge since official im-

<sup>45</sup>Heyse, *Congo Belge et Ruanda-Urundi*, 2:530. By 1933 this convention had been ratified by the governments of the Gambia, Gold Coast, Nigeria, British Cameroons, Kenya, Uganda, Nyasaland, and South Africa. France and her major black African territories ratified it in 1937. Belgium did not ratify until 1944, even then imposing a reservation exempting "cultures obligatoires et éducatives."

<sup>46</sup>Bertrand, *Problème de la main-d'œuvre*, pp.39-46, 250-51. In 1936 the Ministry of Colonies' respected jurist, O. Louwers, and P. Gustin, both royal appointees to the Colonial Council, repeated the charge that the compulsory cultivation of cotton was "largely for the profit of European enterprises," while African producers "rarely received more than the crumbs from the table." *Conseil Colonial, CRA 1936*, pp.1127-34.

positions were unevenly enforced. Evidently Africans near areas of high demand were in considerably more need of being educated to the work ethic than those in more isolated areas. In general the expanses required to be cultivated resembled those of the late 1920s (table 5.2), except that the more unrealistic requirements had been reduced during the Depression. In most parts of Stanleyville province in 1937 there was an obligation to grow two and a half hectares of rice or other food crops (three and a half in parts of Kibali-Ituri) and plant twenty-five oil palms (ten in Kibali-Ituri). In Uele, two to five hectares of cotton were imposed.<sup>47</sup>

Among the export crops imposed on Africans cotton remained of central importance. Production, which had fallen under 20,000 metric tons in 1932, surpassed 50,000 tons in 1936, and 67,000 in 1940. As a money-earner cotton had replaced rubber and ivory as the major contribution of the non-industrial sector to the colony's export earnings. Criticism of compulsion and monopolistic buying in the cotton program had ended, the director of the Agriculture Service noted, when it was seen how the cotton-growing areas had sustained the colony's revenues during the Depression years.<sup>48</sup> The director did not say if African cotton producers—of whose market acumen he held a low opinion—were satisfied, but he did maintain that for the foreseeable future cotton production would have to remain compulsory.<sup>49</sup>

The detailed report of the 1930-31 Labor Commission on the province suggested that generalizations about the effects of cotton growing on Africans in the northern savanna could not be made simply. One significant variable was the marital situation of the individual. Because women did much of the actual farming and portering of the crop to market, the burden was "light for someone...aided by two or three wives; it surpass[e]d the capacities of the single man."<sup>50</sup> The willingness with which the work was done also varied considerably: administrators in three neighboring territories of Uele-Nepoko put the share of cotton grown willingly at 25 percent (Poko), 50 percent (Amadi), and 80 percent (Dungu).<sup>51</sup> There was variation in the zeal

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<sup>47</sup>AA, RA/CB(198)6: RA.PS, AIMO, 1937, p.59.

<sup>48</sup>Lepplae, "L'avenir de l'agriculture congolaise," p.236.

<sup>49</sup>Edmond Lepplae, "Notes sur le relèvement de l'agriculture du Congo Belge: 5. Resultats économiques et éducatifs de la culture obligatoire du coton. Importance du salariat au Congo belge," *BACB*, 23 (1932):127-32.

<sup>50</sup>Bertrand, *Problème de la main-d'œuvre*, p.34.

with which compulsory cultivation was enforced: in three territories of Uele-Itimbiri in 1929-30 with about 46,000 adult men 674 had been convicted of failing to meet requirements of compulsory cultivation; in Wamba territory with 38,000 men 400 had been convicted, but in Niangara territory, where the obligations were not so strictly enforced, out of 28,000 men only eighteen had been convicted of these violations.<sup>52</sup>

A final variation of great significance was the amount of money cotton growers got to keep. Individual returns varied considerably. The Commission found, for example, that among the Mangbetu of Uele-Nepoko taxes took two-thirds of the cotton income in 1930, whereas in the economic zone designated 5A (astride the boundary of the two Uele districts) they took only 30 percent. However, it is significant that in this latter case the Commission was of the opinion that the profit of the average planter (about seventy francs) was still insufficient motivation and as a consequence production was falling.<sup>53</sup>

Much more research needs to be done on the evolution of African attitudes toward cotton production during this period. In some places, such as among the Manga people of Banalia territory, the government's efforts to convince Africans that this crop was to their advantage clearly failed. At the end of the decade the local agent reported that they took little interest in the crop, harvesting it only when actually made to, since they considered it "the white man's field."<sup>54</sup> In northern Uele compulsory cotton production was part of a complex of circumstances that drove people to emigrate to wage-labor centers, a point which is developed in the next section of this chapter. For others compulsory cotton production stimulated commercial agriculture, since peanuts, which initially were alternated with cotton crops to add nitrogen to the soil, soon became an important cash crop. Large purchases were made by the mining camps, and from mid-decade there were also exports to Europe. Peanut sales in Stanleyville province jumped from from 220 metric tons in 1935 to 2,700 tons in 1936. Most of these were from Uele. In the other cotton-growing area

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<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.172-77.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.142-43, 158-59.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.133, 169.

<sup>54</sup>K-Ag 10/6/65, F. Boey to agronomist of Bengamisa zone, Banalia, 19 December 1939.

of Maniema sales of peanuts in 1936 amounted to 972 metric tons.<sup>55</sup>

Coffee was another African cash crop that increased in importance in this decade. As in Kenya, the colonial authorities had actively discouraged African coffee growing during the 1920s on the official grounds that it would spread disease and from practical fears of a labor shortage for the settlers. However, the new emphasis given to African production led to experiments in several parts of the region which were not already heavily engaged in food or other cash crop activity. By 1936 Kivu Africans had nearly 6,000 hectares in production in 1936 (compared to 10,000 hectares on European plantations) and production in Costermansville province averaged about 4,000 metric tons a year during 1937-40. After a rocky start involving a poorly chosen species, Africans in Kibali-Ituri began planting mostly arabica stock. Six hundred thousand seedlings went into the ground there in 1935 and 500,000 in 1936, bringing the total to about a million and a half. In 1938, when these began to produce, African sales grossed 600,000 francs.<sup>56</sup>

The official emphasis on developing African agriculture was complemented by steps to stabilize European agriculture in Kivu and to promote the settlement of a small colonial elite through financial and technical aid rather than encourage large numbers of poorer colonists.<sup>57</sup> Settler plantations also become important in Kibali-Ituri and Stanleyville districts as well. While the absolute number of settlers remained modest compared to Kenya (99 in Kivu, 70 in Kibali-Ituri, 256 overall in the eastern Congo at the beginning of 1939),<sup>58</sup> their role as employers of labor was substantial. One of the reasons for this was that most settlers planted coffee, a very labor intensive crop, especially at harvest time when large numbers of women and children were employed on a task basis. As has been seen, in 1929, before the Depression reduced demand, such female day-labor had

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<sup>55</sup>AA, AI(1422): RA.UN 1930, p.42; RA/CB(142)1-2: RA.PS Agriculture 1935, p.7, 1936, p.1; RACB 1936, p.162. Stanleyville District sold only six metric tons of peanuts in 1936, but its sales were 423 tons in 1940 and 4,077 tons in 1941; KAT, T005 1927: S. Lauwers to Governor, PS, 5 October 1942.

<sup>56</sup>AA, RA/CB(122bis)8: RA.PC Agriculture, 1936, table 9; RA/CB(197)5: Commentary by F. Absil, CD, KI, on RA.Logo-Dongo AIMO 1933, 25 January 1934; RA/CB (142)1-3: RA.PS Agriculture 1935, p.8, 1936, p.12, 1937, p.6.

<sup>57</sup>B. Jewsiewicki, "Le colonat agricole européen au Congo-Belge, 1910-1960: questions politiques et économiques," *Journal of African History*, 19 (1975):62-63.

<sup>58</sup>RACB 1938, pp.208-9.

amounted to 510,000 person/days (90 percent in Kivu) and children furnished 430,000 person/days (slightly over half in Kivu).<sup>59</sup> The government did not compile estimates of such labor in the 1930s, but the growth in settler production, which more than doubled between 1933 and 1938, provides a rough measure of the growth of African plantation labor.

The problems of securing enough African labor slowed the pace of European colonization particularly in Kivu and Uele.<sup>60</sup> These difficulties arose despite a policy of unfettered labor recruitment in Kivu which was in place at the highest levels in the province from the beginning of the decade. In 1930 Governor Moeller had expressed his judgment that the limits on recruiting were to be treated as "a recommendation to be adapted to local circumstances," meaning that in areas of high demand such as Kivu recruitment could be very much higher.<sup>61</sup> Around Rutshuru in northern Kivu, at least until mid-1933, labor for all purposes was simply requisitioned from the chiefs and distributed to public and private employers.<sup>62</sup> In 1938 half of the African population in Rutshuru worked on the European coffee plantations. Further south in Banya-Rongo colonial authorities did little to counter the impression among Africans that they had been attached to particular planters, even after these policies had been abandoned and the planters had cut wages.<sup>63</sup>

As the previous chapter showed, the recruitment for Kivu's settler plantations also varied because Africans saw working for the settlers as a way from escaping from the often onerous obligations they owed their chiefs. By 1930 this was already a serious problem among Africans in Unya-Bongo. Natural disasters, such as the bovine plague of 1933-43, also tended to force Africans into European employ in Kivu

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<sup>59</sup>AA, RA/CB(141)12-13: RA.PO Agriculture 1929, 1930.

<sup>60</sup>RACB 1938, pp.190-91, 208-9; B-Ag: RA.PO Agriculture 1931, p. 37; KAT, R413h/B AIMO 1936 à 1939: Procès Verbal, Commission de la Main d'œuvre 1939, PS, 15 March 1938 and 5 April 1939. Oral sources indicate that female and child labor in Kivu were particularly poorly paid; see Bashizi Tchib-a-lonza Zaluba, "De la colonisation agricole: étude de quelques plantations à Walungu (1927-1960)," (travail de fin d'études, histoire, ISP, Bukavu, 1980), pp.81-82.

<sup>61</sup>Excerpt from Moeller's General Report N°29 of 21 March 1930, AA, D(778)B.II.3.

<sup>62</sup>SKU: RA, Unya-Bongo, AIMO, 1930. AA, RA/CB (197)7: Comments by R. Hombert, CD, on RA, Kivu, AIMO, 1933, 27 February 1934; RACB(120bis)12: RA.CP, AIMO, 1938, p.5.

<sup>63</sup>RA, Banya-Rongo, AIMO, 1932.

and Kibali-Ituri. Finally, policies of high taxes and the promotion of European manufactures had the same effect.<sup>64</sup>

The agricultural labor situation in the region of Aruwimi between the Lualaba and the Lomami rivers continued its unhappy tradition. The dominant interests of the Lomami Company and the Lever Brothers' HCB had prevented the exercise of effective control by the local administrators. Although the district was "super saturated with concessions" by 1930, according to the governor, and the employment of Africans already exceeded official limits, both companies increased their demands for labor as they extended their areas of operation in the years that followed. While foreseeing more conflicts between the two companies over access to African labor and more hardships for the African communities, the governor nevertheless allowed the Lomami Company to expand its Isangi concession from 15,000 hectares to 20,000, as had been authorized by prior agreements.<sup>65</sup>

Relations with the HCB remained equally accommodating. Despite the official ending of government recruitment for private concerns in 1928, local officials were still recruiting palm fruit harvesters by the hundreds for the HCB and the Régie des Plantations de Barumbu two years later. The district commissioner recorded his opinion that the companies were entitled to as much labor as they needed because of their large capital investments.<sup>66</sup> Nor were the conditions of labor all they should be. The 1930-31 Labor Commission, while praising the HCB's efforts in recent years to open up some isolated sections of the district to a mutually beneficial trade in palm fruit, reported that the Africans living in the central area of the Elisabetha concession were forced to perform the dangerous and unpopular work of harvesting palm fruit from trees they regarded as their own, yet were paid only for their labor.<sup>67</sup> By 1933 the administration in Aruwimi had managed to implement certain reforms in Isangi, including paying for palm fruit by weight instead of by cluster, and

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<sup>64</sup>Bashizi Cirhagarhula, "Processus de domination," p.6.

<sup>65</sup>KAT, D353.1 [Terrains]: R. van de Ghinete, Governor, PO, a.i., to GG, Stanleyville, 2 September 1930, N°3570/B20/I/T.F.; Bertrand *Problème de la main-d'œuvre*, pp. 17, 111-14.

<sup>66</sup>KAT, F22J/N23 Conseil de Territoire: Schmidt to Governor, PO, Basoko, 5 October 1930.

<sup>67</sup>Bertrand, *Problème de la main-d'œuvre*, pp.108-112. Such demands made recruitment for work outside the area, such as for Offitra, relatively easy.



making HCB assume responsibility for all its own recruiting.<sup>68</sup> Despite continuing shortages of labor and disputes with local Africans over ownership of oil-palms the colony signed new agreements with Huilever in 1934 and 1935 relieving the company of the necessity, imposed in its original convention of 1911 but repeatedly postponed, to delimit its lands from those of local African communities.<sup>69</sup>

In 1934 the Lomami Company had been persuaded to replace auxiliary laborers by those on one-year contracts. However, with the administration continuing "to furnish the help necessary to the recruitment" of this permanent work force," progress was not rapid.<sup>70</sup> The labor report for 1935 noted that the Lomami Company's concession in Opala was fifteen years behind the rest of the territory in development. The 1937 report found the area stagnant and the company uncooperative. The following year a report suggested that the company would be more interested in building a wall around its concession than in building a road to suppress portage.<sup>71</sup>

Serious gaps in information exist about many aspects of agriculture in the eastern Congo in the 1930s, but the rapidly growing importance of African agricultural production is clear. Both on their own lands and on those of settlers and concessionaires African farmers dramatically increased the production of crops for local consumption and foreign export. Because most of the peasant production and much of the agricultural labor remained subject to compulsion, it is not possible to infer what part of these efforts was motivated by the expectation of profit. Some labor probably was voluntary, notably by the larger producers of coffee and cotton, but there is ample evidence to suggest that the majority saw the compensation for their efforts as inadequate.

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<sup>68</sup>KAT, AIMO Rapports annuels-Basoko: S. Lauwers, acting CD, "Note sur le Territoire des Mobango-Mongelima, Isangi, 30 September 1933. In 1934 palm-fruit harvesters in Elisabetha received 2 fr for 40 kg of palm fruit; *RACB 1934*, pp.217-21.

<sup>69</sup>See Conseil Colonial, *CRA 1939*, pp.336-52, 227-46, for a report and discussion of the October 1938 agreement, which also reduced the company's original land claims and required it to spend 40 million francs in palm replantation in 1938 and 1939. In 1932 the HCB processed 23,265 tons of palm fruit, while the Lomami Company processed 4,074 tons; *RACB 1932*, p.175.

<sup>70</sup>KAT, R32.B8.1/R1104 Correspondance 1936: C. Marée, CD, a.i., to ATs of Isangi and Opala, Stanleyville, 27 August 1934.

<sup>71</sup>AA, AI(1421)RA.PS, AIMO, 1935, p.8; RA/CB(198)6: RA.PS, AIMO, 1937, pp.7, 34; KAT, Rapports d'Inspection Haut-Congo 1921-65: S. Lauwers, AT, "Note pour M. l'Administrateur Territorial," Isangi, July-August 1938, N°1213/AIMO/A.3.

## Porterage and Roads

Despite the road building program of the previous decade, the burden of porterage continued to be substantial during the middle 1930s. During the early years of the Depression the decline in porterage that had begun in the mid-1920s continued. Official tallies for 1931 listed under 1.5 million person/days of porterage in the province, half the level of 1925 (table 5.5). However, as the economy recovered porterage jumped to 2.5 million person/days in 1932, 5 million in 1933, and 7.5 million in 1935, before again going into a decline down to 5 million at the end of the decade (table 6.3).

What caused these startling changes? To begin with, it must be recognized that, as with other official statistics from the Congo, there are built-in inconsistencies. The 1930s' figures include porterage of food crops and of provisions for employment centers, items that were not always counted in the 1920s. Therefore the size of the increase is surely exaggerated.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, there were very substantial increases in the '30s associated with the hasty development of mining, the provisioning of the road gangs building access roads to these mines, and the provisioning of the mining crews themselves. In addition, agricultural production expanded faster than the capacity of the motor transport system. Indeed, the number of trucks in service in the Congo fell by thirty percent between 1930 and 1934. Of the 2,188 such vehicles in service in 1934, a third (745) were in Stanleyville province and fewer than 10 percent were in Costermansville province, where the road network was still meagre.<sup>73</sup>

Maniema continued to be crossed in the early 1930s by caravans of porters just as in the days of the Zanzibari. The 231 km road from Kindu to Shabunda was not completed until 1936. Most of the porterage in 1932 was in the newly formed Warega territory, which had nearly three-quarters of the district's total, of which four-fifths was for provisioning the new mining camps. In 1935 the needs of new mines and road gangs in northern Kihembwe territory (Maniema) and in neighboring northern Shabunda territory (Kivu) imposed heavy burdens. In 1936 two-thirds of the porterage in Costermansville province

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<sup>72</sup>Cf. *RACB* 1934, p.15. This does not mean that this decade's figures are complete; the report says the figures are very approximate.

<sup>73</sup>*RACB* 1934, pp.82, 86.

Table 6.3  
Porterage in the Eastern Congo, 1932-1939  
(in '000 person/days)

DISTRICT	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Stanleyville	573	187	1,564	1,970	1,224	1,108	1,034	837
Uele	1,096	2,514	2,007	2,344	2,056	1,697	1,712	1,371
Kibali-Ituri	228	369	1,049	1,274	1,148	1,086	1,001	1,071
<i>Stanleyville province</i>	1,897	3,070	4,620	5,588	4,428	3,893	3,747	3,279
Kivu	122	NA	NA	NA	1,475	NA	1,615	1,202
Maniema	563	NA	NA	NA	496	NA	676	621
<i>Costermansville prov.</i>	<u>685</u>	<u>c1,900</u>	<u>c2,000</u>	<u>c1,900</u>	<u>1,971</u>	<u>2,271</u>	<u>2,291</u>	<u>1,823</u>
Totals	2,582	4,970	6,620	7,488	6,399	6,164	6,038	5,102

Sources: AA, AI(1421) RAPO, AIMO, 1933, p.75; 1935. AA, RA/CB(138)6-8: RA.PS, 1936, p.72; 1937, p.63; 1938, p.71; 1939, p.97. AA, RA/CB(120bis)11-13: RA.PC, 1936, p.72; 1938, p.61; 1939, p.66.

(in 1938 three-quarters) still consisted of foodstuffs, most of that was concentrated in Shabunda and Kihembwe territories. A substantial part of this porterage, which declined in 1939, was by women.<sup>74</sup>

In Stanleyville province the greatest proportion of the porterage was likewise of agricultural crops destined for export or for feeding industrial workers. These items accounted for over 80 percent of the porterage in 1937 and 1939. Food crops constituted the larger share in Kibali-Ituri because of Kilo-Moto, while cotton exports dominated in Uele. The porterage for Kilo-Moto fell when the number of buying sites visited by trucks along that area's relatively dense road network was increased, but the sheer size of the mines' work force meant that even relatively short distances were multiplied by large numbers. Thus in 1937 it was estimated that the porterage for Kilo-Moto averaged only one hour per week per person, but amounted to 80,000 person/days.<sup>75</sup> Not all agricultural areas were so blessed by new roads and vehicles. In the Bafwasende territory porterage in 1940 was

<sup>74</sup>AA, AI(1421): RA, Maniema 1930, p.36; RA, Maniema, AIMO, 1932. Bertrand "De la nécessité," p.643. AA, RA/CB(122bis)7, 11, RA.PC, 1935, Agriculture, p.3; 1936, AIMO, pp.15, 47; (120bis)11-13, RA.PC, AIMO, 1936, p. 2, 1938, p.61; 1939, p.66. Mashagiro Nkuba Ngagi, "La Cobelmin et le problème de la main-d'œuvre indigène (1932-1963)," (Mémoire en licence, histoire, ISP, Bukavu, 1976), p.161.

<sup>75</sup>AA, RA/CB(198)6, 8: RA.PS, AIMO, 1937, 1939, pp.63-64.

130,000 person/days, more than half for the transport of export and food crops. The head of the district considered the burden "enormous" for a territory whose adult male population was only 25,366, but saw no way to reduce it: "There is no interest in making roads there where the population is thin: the costs of construction and then of maintenance are too heavy."<sup>76</sup>

Beginning in 1940, under wartime orders, portorage figures were officially suppressed. One must assume that stifling criticism by those who remembered the excesses of the First World War was a major motive, since it was noted, "A certain apprehension reigns in all the native locales of the Province: everyone's fear is to be chosen as a military porter."<sup>77</sup> Shortages of vehicles and fuel during the war also resulted in more portorage.

Nevertheless, without the completion of the road network in the eastern Congo the burden of portorage in the 1930s would have been far heavier. The roadbuilding effort begun in the 1920s, slowed considerably by the Depression, moved to completion in the mid-1930s. Most of this decade's construction was in the new mining regions. The MGL, for example completed 771 km of access roads during this decade, with other mining interests completing similarly amounts in Maniema.<sup>78</sup>

A motor road network was thus in place by the end of the 1930s, but most of the grander rail projects that had spurred the imaginations of early imperialists had gone the way of the Cape-to-Cairo line. No railroad was ever completed from the Congo to the Nile across Uele, although the north-south Bondo-Aketi Vicicongo line, completed in 1927, was extended along a much longer east-west axis. From Aketi the new extension ran east across the cotton-producing savanna

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<sup>76</sup>KAT, Rap Insp Bafwasande: Lauwers, Rapport d'inspection du territoire de Bafwasande, March 1940. By 1946 the burden had grown to 187,000 person/days with the portorage of cotton for distances of 10-20 km and of bananas, peanuts, and roofing leaves to the Minière de la Tele constituting nearly all of it. See KAT, Rap an Bafwasande-I: RA 1947, pp.56-58.

<sup>77</sup>AA, RA/CB(130)9: RA.PS, AIMO, 1940, p.10. American missionaries at Kasengu recorded the case of a local man named Udera, who beat up one soldier and killed another sent to arrest him for not working for the cotton company; AIM 81.22.19, letter by Fred and Hellen Lasse, 4 October 1941.

<sup>78</sup>André Huybrechts, *Transports et structures de développement au Congo* (Paris: Mouton, 1970), p.42; Compagnie Minière des Grands Lacs Africaines, *Rapport sur l'année 1939* (Brussels: Imprimerie, 1939), p.6.

through Buta, Zobia, and Paulis (Isiro)—where it halted for a time in 1934 when funds ran out—to Mungbere at the edge of the eastern mountains. In 1932 the Vicicongo carried thirty-two thousand metric tons of freight and, when complete in 1937, it carried fifty-six thousand, nearly as much as the Stanleyville-Ponthierville section of the CFL.<sup>79</sup> The one other rail project of this decade fell even further short of the original expectations. The Chemin de Fer Tanganyika-Kivu, begun by the Kivu National Committee in 1929 to link the two lakes, made it only 93 km from Kulundu (on lake Tanganyika) to the Kamanyola escarpment by November 1931, when it fell victim to the economic crisis. To avoid an expensive cut it was decided to terminate the railroad there and complete the connection to lake Kivu with a less expensive motor road up the face of the escarpment.<sup>80</sup>

Once the new roads were completed their maintenance was primarily the responsibility of the local African communities. In many areas of low population density and/or high wage employment this was an impossible task. This was the case in Shabunda territory, for example, whose road network went from 17 km in 1935 to 454 in 1939.<sup>81</sup> As one old-timer in the colony put it, "We built a lot of roads in the Congo from 1920 to 1940, but we often forgot to maintain them."<sup>82</sup>

## Conclusions

While the complexity of the changing labor situation in the Eastern Congo in the 1930s and the paucity of historical records make generalizations difficult, the direction and magnitude of the changes are reasonably clear. Although the population may have increased only by a sixth during the decade, the number of wage laborers went up by 37 percent, accounting for 24 percent of the able-bodied men in

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<sup>79</sup>Huybrechts, *Transports et structures*, p.32. RACB 1932, p.183; Pierre Rychmans, *Discours prononcé à la séance d'ouverture du Conseil du Gouvernement* (Léopoldville: Courrier d'Afrique, 1939), p.47.

<sup>80</sup>Huybrechts, *Transports et structures*, p. 32. The colony sold the railroad's rights for 35 million francs; see Conseil Colonial, CRA 1933, pp.619-21. Today the escarpment road and the railroad are both abandoned; the main road from Bukavu to Uvira detours through Rwanda.

<sup>81</sup>AA, RA/CB(174)4.: RA.PC, Travaux Publiques, 1939, pp.10-12.

<sup>82</sup>Moulaert, *Vingt années*, p.89.

Stanleyville province and 36 percent in Costermansville province in 1940. Peasant agricultural labor cannot be measured as directly, but the farming population, though thinned by the numbers drawn into wage labor, still expanded the production of food crops at a rate at least equal to the growth in the salaried work force. Non-food crops such as cotton increased much more rapidly.

Still more difficult to measure are the motives of African farmers, miners, and other laborers who produced these changes. Were they motivated to sell their labor and its fruits more by the expectation of material gain or by the desire to escape administrative punishments? Was the continued growth of wage labor and cash cropping in the 1930s the product of an emerging free labor market or the continuation of forced labor traditions? In short, which was more visible in the eastern Congo: the carrot or the stick?

In general, it may be said that the overt coercion of wage laborers decreased during this decade, but it did not disappear. Once the Depression eased, the local officials were again under pressure to ensure colonists, missions, private firms, and government agencies an adequate supply of labor at low wages. Something of the situation at mid-decade in Stanleyville province may be gathered from these statements by its head, R. Dufour. In July 1936 he wrote to his subordinates urging them not to misinterpret an earlier instruction on labor recruitment:

To prosper our enterprises need workers. The authorities must intervene without being told (*spontanément*) among native groupings in order to lead them to participate in the [colony's] economic progress in the form of labor exactions (*prestations*); they will strive by persuasive actions to vanquish the natives' hesitations to devote themselves to regular activity.<sup>83</sup>

In April 1939 the same official, in answer to the state inspector's question on the observance of the quotas on labor, replied that "these percentages were respected in their spirit and not in their letter" since the latter would have closed down every administrative unit in the province and brought economic progress to an abrupt halt. He explained that "miserable populations" were being "managed," while

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<sup>83</sup>KAT, R.Mechanization/R1104 Instructions provinciales recrutement 1936: R. Dufour to all CDs and all ATs, Stanleyville, 3 July 1936, N°496/AIMO/X.15.

healthy and prolific populations were being used rationally.<sup>84</sup> The next day he noted that the official policy of "absolute neutrality" on the part of the administration in recruiting was not always observed in his province, since some officials and agents were "still permitting themselves to be drawn into 'furnishing a labor force' to employers who threatened to go over their heads" if they didn't.<sup>85</sup>

Around the provincial capital, Stanleyville district's head admitted, "most recruiting has been done by indirect and sometimes by direct intervention by the administration," since otherwise no one would sign up. He also showed that the subtleties of non-intervention were even less clear to the African chiefs than to the administrators (unless one takes the more cynical position that the chiefs had no need to clothe their actions in high sounding language): "When a Territorial Agent signals that a recruiter is going to come into a region, they consider that communication as an order to furnish men."<sup>86</sup> A long but mild letter from the governor general's office later that year suggested that the province might make a greater effort to observe the absolute neutrality called for, especially since the larger firms were perfectly capable of recruiting on their own.<sup>87</sup>

Stanleyville's provincial reports for the latter years of the decade estimate what part of the labor force working outside their milieu did so willingly, without direct coercion in its recruitment. In 1938 the provincial average was 64 percent, while at the district level the figures were 49 percent in Uele, 52 percent in Stanleyville, and 80 percent in Kibali-Ituri. Even greater variation appeared at the territorial level. In seven territories containing 32 percent of the work force employment was spontaneous in only 5 to 19 percent of the cases; in seven other territories with 20 percent of the work force 35-65 percent were spontaneous, and the remaining nine territories reported 70-100 percent spontaneous recruitment.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>KAT, R413h/B: AIMO 1936 à 1939, Procès verbal, Commission de la Main-d'œuvre, PS, 7 April 1939.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 8 April 1939.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>KAT, F22J/N23 Conseil de Territoire: Vice-Governor General for GG to head of PS, 27 October 1939, N°11716/AO/870/III-A/4.

<sup>88</sup>AA, RA/CB(138)7-9: RA, PS, AIMO, 1938, p.77. The territories with the lowest number of volunteers were Bafwasende, Basoko, and Lubutu in Stanleyville district, Dungu and Poko in Uele district, and Wamba and Watsa in Kibali-Ituri district. The middle category included Banalia, Isangi, and Yahuma in Stanleyville and Aketi,

Direct coercion was most visible in the rural areas: African farmers (and even pastoralists and hunters) were compelled to grow specified crops. Did the educational objective behind this compulsion succeed by getting Africans to grow cash crops voluntarily? Since the compulsion continued in force, the presumption is that it did not. The low prices farmers received for their crops made it impossible for rational economic incentives to inspire market production. One study suggests that in the early years of the decade, when Depression prices prevailed, the cash income of farmers was far less than that of wage earners.<sup>89</sup> Many details presented in this chapter likewise suggest that the material rewards were not a significant motive for many cotton producers. On the other hand, in 1938 the head of Uele explained the difficulty of recruiting wage laborers in his district was because farming was both easier and more profitable.<sup>90</sup> These observations need not be contradictory. Much circumstantial evidence suggests that rural agriculture and wage-earning settings were both unattractive. In many places rural misery pushed people into wage labor. Tales of working conditions outside encouraged many others to remain where they were.

The desire of many young men to avoid the burden of compulsory cultivation when they had no wife to aid them was frequently a reason for moving to wage labor. Escaping the tyranny of traditional rulers, the rising obligations of road maintenance and other obligations, and avoiding what one study of European urban migrants calls the "idiocy of rural life," added to the pressures to join the growing numbers volunteering for wage labor.

A good example of this trend was the growing exodus of Zande from northern Uele. In this open savanna country, ideally suited to cotton, up to five hectares per man had been imposed. To make this requirement effective the government had introduced many other disruptive changes: roads were built and along them "whole tribes

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Bondo, Niangara, and Paulis in Uele. The greatest number of spontaneous wage earners were in the territories of Opala and Stanleyville in Stanleyville district, Ango, Buta, and Niapu in Uele, and Djugu, Faradje, Irumu and Mahagi in Kibali-Ituri.

<sup>89</sup>Michel Merlier, *Le Congo de la colonisation belge à l'indépendance* (Paris: François Maspero, 1962), p.355.

<sup>90</sup>KAT, R413h/B AIMO 1936 à 1938: Procès verbal, Commission de la Main-d'œuvre, PS, 21 February 1938.



[were] moved from their hidden and isolated corners among the tall grasses and forest reaches."<sup>91</sup> The roads made cotton marketing easier, but required still more labor to maintain. Cotton sales brought in more money, but higher taxes took much of it back. In Ango territory, for example, the maintenance of a kilometer of road fell upon as few as a dozen men and taxes reclaimed half of the cotton revenues. The political changes were also important: after the investiture of the new Zande paramount in 1934 the government had given Zande chiefs an especially free hand in dealing with their subjects. The chiefs used labor for building roads and maintaining the cotton buying stations, infirmaries, roads, missions, and recruited it for their personal benefit and that of private individuals. Not surprisingly people were leaving the territory in large numbers. From 1935 to 1940 the able bodied male population fell by thirteen percent or more, as younger men went to Bambili, Titule, Buta, and elsewhere in search of work as salaried employees.<sup>92</sup>

So serious was the situation in the last years of the decade that communal work obligations such as road repair, portage, construction of public buildings, required by the decree of 5 December 1933, were reduced in parts of Stanleyville province. Arguing that these numerous *corvées* forced cash-cropping peasants away from their increasingly important and skilled farm work, the head of Stanleyville province after consultation with rural communities had begun collecting a supplemental rate in selected cotton-growing areas that exempted the inhabitants from most communal work obligations. Instead, regular salaried workers were hired by the community to perform these tasks. "The ideal would be to arrive at a situation where the native cultivator could, in complete freedom of spirit and of time, devote himself to farming his fields without any fear of having to be interrupted by any call from European or native authorities."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>AIM 81.12.45, Stauffacher, "Brief History," pp.72-73.

<sup>92</sup>KAT, F22J/N23 Conseil de Territoire: Schollaert (AT, Ango), "Note sur la situation démographique des populations du Territoire d'Ango au 31 décembre 1940," 17 January 1941, pp.1-10. Schollaert put the cotton income for 1939 at 2,594,035 fr and the *impôt indigène* at 1,269,216 fr. He put the number of taxpayers at 27,340 in 1934 and 23,878 in 1939. A month later his superior put Ango's able-bodied male population at only 22,647; see P. Bougné (CD, Uele) to Governor, PO, Buta, 19 February 1941, KAT, R1104 Aff. Ind. M. Œuvre 728.

<sup>93</sup>AA, RA/CB(138)8: RA.PS AIMO 1939, pp.84-86.

This ideal was not near in January 1941 when the head of Uele argued to his provincial superior that Uele people were overworked, overtaxed, and underpaid:

Does a European planter need temporary labor? Immediately the Administrator is asked to intervene. There result instructions to the chiefs who devote themselves to hunting up men with a minimum of precautions; whereas these natives, thus tracked down, were in the middle of the cotton harvest.... Are the projects in the local stations running a little behind schedule? Immediately the Territorial Agent is ready to go, indeed to impose disciplinary punishments. There result inopportune efforts to get the materials furnished by the natives, who are ill-paid moreover, because the allocated funds are insufficient.<sup>94</sup>

Direct compulsion was not the only force pushing Africans into the cash economy. The use of tax as an indirect goad to signing labor contracts continued to be semi-official policy in this decade. That tax collection was not necessarily very indirect in its operation may be seen from this instruction from the head of Stanleyville province in 1936. When tax collection fell below 90 percent, he directed:

The tax collector will let the delinquents know that they must choose between *la contrainte* (i. e., imprisonment, since there is talk of suppressing *la contrainte mitiguée*) and signing up for an engagement of a year or less under normal conditions. The recruiter will be able to stay in the same village as the tax collector and enroll the workers who want to sign a contract.<sup>95</sup>

Even without such machinations tax rates remained high enough in this decade to have been a strong push to wage labor.<sup>96</sup>

Along with direct and indirect forces pushing Africans toward wage labor, one must consider the attractions pulling them in that

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<sup>94</sup>KAT, F22J/N23 Conseil de Territoire: P. Bougnet to Chef de Province, 21 January 1941. The governor replied: "We surely ought to sacrifice certain parts of the native population for the benefit of the European enterprises. I don't really see why this burden ought to be equally distributed among all the communities, why on the one hand we should send people to the mines against their will and on the other keep at home against their will people who really want to go." KAT, F22J/N23 Conseil de Territoire: M. Maquet to CD, Buta, 25 June 1941, p.3.

<sup>95</sup>KAT, R.Mechanization/R1104 Instructions provinciales recrutement 1936: R. Dufour to all CDs and all ATs, Stanleyville, 3 July 1936, N°496/AIMO/X.15.

<sup>96</sup>Peemans, "Congo-Belgique, 1900-1960," p.361, table 110.

direction. While wage rates are as difficult to compute for this decade as for earlier ones, the evidence does not suggest that very many Africans were the beneficiaries of rising wages.<sup>97</sup> The minutes of Stanleyville's Provincial Labor Commission meetings in the latter part of the decade contain much criticism of the inadequate wages paid by employers large and small. For example, in 1937 a settlers' group around Bunia was told by the Kibali-Ituri labor sub-commission that their labor shortages were due to their paying monthly salaries of only 15-18 fr when they should have been paying 25 fr. In 1938 the head of Uele district attributed the shortage of labor to inadequate wages. In 1939 the Commission rejected a proposal by the local head of Huilever (HCB) to lower the tax rate, telling him bluntly that his firm's unreasonably low salaries of twenty francs a month that needed to be altered, not the tax rate.<sup>98</sup>

It is prudent to avoid putting too much emphasis on the significance of wages as an inducement to labor. A careful study of the relatively sophisticated workers of Stanleyville town in 1952-53 revealed that pleasant work was far and away the most significant factor in their job preferences and that having a good boss and the social standing of one's work were also more important than good wages.<sup>99</sup> The policy of labor stabilization begun by the UMHK in the 1920s had also demonstrated that Africans would react favorably to a greatly improved work environment. The UMHK had spent substantial sums to provide more adequate housing, food, health care, and family benefits to their employees in the hope of retaining them for longer periods. In the 1930s this example began to be followed by Kilo-Moto and other large firms in the Eastern Province.

Another attractions of many larger employers in the 1930s was the fact that they furnished a regular food ration to all African workers, a practice, begun much earlier when food distribution was far more difficult, which continued until the end of the colonial period. Legislation in the 1930s specified the amounts and types of food to be

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., pp.265-67, shows a general deterioration of wages in the eastern Congo compared to capital costs and imported goods.

<sup>98</sup>Procès verbal Commission de la Main-d'œuvre, PS, 1937, 12/14 April 1937 (KAT, R771); 21 February 1938 and 7 April 1939 (KAT, R413h/B AIMO 1936 à 1939).

<sup>99</sup>Nelly Xydias, "Labour: Conditions, Aptitudes, Training," in *Social Implications of Industrialization and Urbanization in African South of the Sahara*, Daryll Forde, ed. (Paris: Unesco, 1956), pp.354-56.

Table 6.4  
Food Distributions for African Workers  
(grams per day)

FOOD	Stanleyville, 1935		Symetain Maniema, 1938	Kilo-Moto 1937
	General labor	Heavy labor		
Meat or fish	75d	75d	25d	179f
Rice (*Corn)	215	400	429	357*
Legumes	120p	120p	57p	286b
Oil	21	71	57	43
Salt	15	15	15*	15
Bananas			714	1,429
Vegetables	480	480		
<i>Total Calories</i>	2,500	3,600	4,670	4,100

*Notes:* d=dried, f=fresh, p=peanuts, b=beans or peas.

*Sources:* R. Mouchet and R. Van Nitsen, *Le main-d'oeuvre indigène au Congo Belge: les problèmes qu'elle évoque* (Brussels: Imprimerie des Travaux Publics, 1940), pp.227-29; KAT, R32 Taux ration: L. Libois, CD, Stanleyville, 1 June 1935, decision N°348.

furnished. To Africans facing food shortages at home the abundance and diversity of these distributions (table 6.4), even though meager compared to post-war standards, were highly attractive.<sup>100</sup> Wives and children also received some food allowances.<sup>101</sup>

As was explained in the previous chapter, health factors also affected a worker's attitudes toward a particular job. In general, the health of both rural and urban Africans improved somewhat in the 1930s. The establishment of a special fund in 1930 to improve African medical services and fight epidemic diseases had important long-term

<sup>100</sup>A Kivu man recalled his first job with the MGL: "When I arrived at the firm in 1938, everything was there in abundance: manioc, meat, beans, and clothes.... In the mining camps you easily forgot village life and detested it." Taberangwa Gogolelo of Mwenga, in Mashagi, "La Cobelmin," p.125.

<sup>101</sup>Some workers in places where food supplies were more abundant and secure pressed for a cash payment in place of such distributions in kind. This was successful in the case of government workers in Stanleyville district in mid-decade, who got an immediate raise of six to seven francs a week. Despite sentiment among administrators for extending this practice, it did not become common. KAT, R13 Comm MOI de Bxl/Outillage Indigène: Procès verbal de la sous commission de la main-d'œuvre du District de Stanleyville, 22 January 1934.

results.<sup>102</sup> The health measures imposed on employers by the ordinance of 18 June 1930 were probably more important, despite the laxity with which they were sometimes enforced.<sup>103</sup> The decline in mortality among the major employers during the decade suggests the growing efficacy of these efforts. At Kilo-Moto, for example, the death rates among African workers, which had been about twelve per thousand in 1929-31, at first increased to sixteen to twenty per thousand in 1932-34 (attributed by the company to epidemics and the larger number of auxiliary workers on the payroll) before gradually declining to nine per thousand in 1939.<sup>104</sup>

The terms and conditions of work also played a significant part in making some jobs more attractive. For example, the Belgikaor mines in Maniema abandoned its efforts to sign workers to long-term contracts after 1934 in response to strong local preferences among the Lega to return home for a time after a year of work.<sup>105</sup> Despite growing pressures from officials, employers around Stanleyville illegally honored African preferences for no contracts at all, a situation that permitted the workers even more flexibility in changing the term they spent with a particular employer.<sup>106</sup> Many other employers provoked complaints from their employees for excessively long hours and too few rest days.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>This was the FOREAMI (Fonds Reine Elisabeth pour l'assistance medicale aux indigènes).

<sup>103</sup>The head of Stanleyville Province, R. Dufour, admitted in 1939 that up until then the administration had "shown a great tolerance" in enforcing the requirement for adequate medicine and first aid supplies to spare the *petits colons* the expense involved, though some belated enforcement efforts were being discussed. KAT, R314h/B AIMO 1936 à 1939: Procès verbal de la Commission de Main-d'œuvre 1939, PS, 5 April 1939. The first aid kit for up to 100 workers required only such simple items as 100 tablets each of aspirin, boric acid, and quinine, some bandages, 250g. of vasoline, and two thermometers.

<sup>104</sup>AKM, Rapports 1929-1939. These rates are all unrealistically low, reflecting the practice of sending seriously ill workers home.

<sup>105</sup>J. Stiernon, Rapport d'Inspection des Mines de la Société Belgikaor, 1935, p.3, quoted in Mashagiro, "La Cobelmin," p. 129.

<sup>106</sup>KAT, AF051 Rapports d'Inspection Terr. de Stanleyville 1920-67: M. Kreutz, Rapport d'inspection du Territoire de Stanleyville, December 1940; D52 MO, Commission CFL 164: R. Dufour to J. J. Van de Velde, AT, Stanleyville, 6 October 1938, N°1146/AIMO/S.5.

<sup>107</sup>KAT, D52 MO, Commission CFL 164: Dufour to Chief Engineer, CFL, Stanleyville, 18 January 1937, and P. Ryckmans to Minister of Colonies, Leopoldville, 24 July

One of the discernable consequences of the push out of the rural areas and the pull into the cities was the emergence of a permanently urbanized labor force in the eastern Belgian Congo in the 1930s. This trend was already well underway by the end of the decade and destined to be tremendously accelerated by the effects of the Second World War. In 1937 11 percent of Stanleyville province's population was officially listed as "not living under the control of native authorities," half of whom were in the gold-mining areas of Kibali-Ituri; by the end of 1940 the figure reached 15 percent in Stanleyville and 9 percent in Costermansville province.<sup>108</sup> Such populations, which included descendants of the *arabisés* of the Zanzibari period, soldiers retired from the Force Publique, as well as newer urban wage-earners, had been building for some time, especially during the 1920s. Initially opposed to permanent African urbanization, the government altered its policy late in 1931 by granting official standing to African quarters (*centres extracoutumiers* or CECs) with limited administrative autonomy in the larger towns. CECs were established in 1932 in Stanleyville (containing 9,388 residents), in Buta (7,823), and in Kindu (6,395) and in 1935 in Costermansville (2,012). Though the authorities still controlled the admission and expulsion of residents of the CECs, the regulations were difficult to enforce. By 1938 there were some 17,000 Africans in Stanleyville, not all in the CECs.<sup>109</sup>

The establishments of CECs was more than an example of urban governance. Their existence was a recognition that Africans could no longer be regarded as short-term workers, whose true homes remained outside the developing urban-industrial economy and whose survival thus depended upon conserving the demographic vitality of those rural Congolese homelands. Henri Léonard, the head of the Ministry's Mines and Labor Service, told the minister of colonies that previous labor legislation had paid little attention to the families of

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1937, N°350/D/163, and reply N°42/577 of 5 June 1937, concerning the advisability of legislating a fixed work week, in part in response to the CFL's constant abuses.

<sup>108</sup>AA, RA/CB(198)6: RA, PS, AIMO, 1937, p.32, 34; "non soumise au régime des circonscriptions indigènes." RACB 1939-44, p.32.

<sup>109</sup>Baumer, *Les centres indigènes*, pp.51-64; Valdo Pons, *Stanleyville: an African Urban Community under Belgian Administration* (London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1969), pp. 22-37. There were only 9,609 official CEC residents in Stanleyville in 1937 (scarcely more than five years earlier) and 8,981 in Buta according to AA, RA/CB(198)6: RA, PS, AIMO, 1937, p.26.

laborers; new legislation must recognize the importance of family policies outside traditional settings.<sup>110</sup>

A new Labor Commission was assembled in Brussels in February 1940 to consider the implications of the many changes that had taken place in the African labor force during the decade. Its membership included representatives of the different colonial departments as well as Colonel Bertrand, author of the 1930-31 Labor Commission report on the Eastern Province, and Major Cayen, the head of the overall 1930-31 Commission. This 1940 Commission never issued a report. It was quite literally overtaken by the march of events; on May 10, the day the Commission was to have discussed its draft report, Belgium was invaded by Germany. While thus never officially adopted, the draft report did reflect the tenor of discussion at the preliminary sessions and its contents are revealing of the changing view of Congolese labor. The report began by recommending that only two categories remained meaningful in analyzing the sociology of African workers: those "living in a family setting and those living outside that setting." Since it had proved impossible to preserve the demographic stability of rural communities, the concern must be to promote viable family life in urban and industrial settings. Therefore, the report recommended, labor recruited for more than six months be required to include the man's family, which would necessitate the construction of adequate family housing and better organization of urban and industrial African neighborhoods, as well as family medical care, including prenatal and maternity care. The demographic concerns of the previous commissions were not entirely abandoned. Village demographic studies were still to be carried out and considered in limiting recruitment, but they were no longer to occupy so central a place as they once had in official policy.

With regard to rural Africans, the draft report recommended that the governor general study whether *corvées* for road maintenance and head taxes were not excessive in some places, as Bertrand argued they were in communities whose adult male population had been diminished by heavy recruiting. It also recommended studies of whether compulsory cultivation might not better concentrate on trees than on annual crops, and might not be better proportioned to family circumstances (recognizing the different productive capacities of single men

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<sup>110</sup>AA, H(4421)611: Léonard, "Note pour M. le Ministre," 22 November 1939.

and those with one or more wives). This also reflected Bertrand's recommendations, although he had also cast doubt on the utility of any sort of compulsory cultivation.<sup>111</sup> The draft report picked out Maniema district for special notice, the one area which had been highlighted in Bertrand's presentation, suggesting that its labor crisis, brought on by rapid mineral development, could be relieved by creating a recruiting organization such as the Office du Travail du Katanga and perhaps by tapping the labor presently leaving Ruanda-Urundi to seek work in Uganda.<sup>112</sup> The significance of this draft report is that it shows how the changes of the 1930s had led to serious reconsideration of colonial labor policies. Yet, like the 1940 Commission itself, the labor history of the Congo was overtaken by the events of the Second World War. At war's end new circumstances would require yet another rethinking of labor policies.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Aléxis Bertrand, "Problème de la M.O.I. Pointe de vue générale," presented at the session of 16 February 1940; AA, H4421)611.

<sup>112</sup>AA, H(4421)611: Commission de la Main-d'Œuvre, draft for meeting on 10 May 1940, pp.1-6.

<sup>113</sup>See Jean Stengers, ed., *Le Congo belge durant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale: Recueil d'études* (Brussels: ARSOM, 1983).



## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

*Beyond the Bend in the River* has surveyed the changes in African labor history across deliberately broad geographical, temporal and thematic expanses. The area of study, though only a portion of the immense country of Zaïre, nevertheless represents a large portion of equatorial Africa. The three-quarters of a century reviewed includes pre-colonial societies and the administrations of three successive external regimes. The kinds of labor activity covered are far broader than those of most labor studies. Moreover, because of the absence of any other surveys of the region focusing on administrative changes, the study devotes considerable attention to those matters. The reasons for setting these broad limits were given in the introduction. It now remains to assess what has been learned from this approach.

Eastern Zaïre's unity as a region of study derives directly and indirectly from a number of geographical factors. One tie among the societies of this region was their long isolation from the outside world. Remote from all the frontiers along which outsiders were penetrating sub-Saharan Africa in the centuries before the 1800s, the region was breached late and at a rush. In eastern Zaïre the overseas slave trade and colonialism began within five decades of each other here; in parts of West Africa their beginnings were five centuries apart. The labor history of the region was likewise compressed.

Remoteness went hand in hand with a low ratio of persons to land. Although the eastern Congo had roughly twice the population density of the rest of the Congo, that amounted to only four or five persons per square kilometer in the years after World War I. The population density in the late nineteenth-century was probably roughly similar. Moreover, that population was very unevenly

distributed. The mountainous eastern frontier had some of the highest densities in central Africa and the forested center of the region some of the lowest. Overall lands for cultivating and grazing and vast uncultivated tracts for hunting and food gathering were far too abundant to create much pressure toward a labor market before the late nineteenth century. Indeed, densities were so low as to have discouraged the development of even local markets in food and other goods and created disincentives to long-distance trade until the demand for ivory in the outside world attracted foreign traders to the region.

The breaching of the region's geographical isolation by traders from Zanzibar began a long process of labor mobilization. The principal form of this mobilization in the Zanzibari period was slavery, but not all forms of enslavement were a labor strategy. For some of the Zanzibari slaves served a largely political role as followers and an economic one as a product to be sold. For others slaves clearly served a labor need as porters, soldiers, servants, and cultivators. King Leopold's labor needs likewise drove him to extraordinary recruitment efforts abroad before the conquest of the eastern Congo put the Zanzibari's slaves into his hands. Although they were no longer counted as slaves, they remained a coerced labor force. Except during the Depression years, the Belgian Congo government also faced a perennial labor shortage before the changes at the end of the Second World War. All three administrations suffered from moral biases which led them to use forced labor, but these failings should not obscure the fact that all three also had to face an underlying demographic situation which made voluntary labor a rare commodity.

These demographic circumstances were not unique to eastern Zaïre or to Africa. A similar situation had occurred in the post-emancipation Caribbean. There too the availability of labor was tied to population density and the availability of arable land. In the low-density British colonies, such as Jamaica, Trinidad, St. Lucia, and Guiana, freed people preferred subsistence farming to plantation labor at the low wages offered by the planters, whereas in high density colonies such as Barbados, Antigua and St. Kitts, where the sugar planters controlled virtually all the arable land, wage labor was abundant.<sup>1</sup> The correlation between the presence of land in excess

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<sup>1</sup>William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: the Sugar Colonies and the Great*

of demand and the use of force in recruiting labor was first posited by Herman Nieboer in 1900.<sup>2</sup> Although he applied his thesis only to the development of slavery and used no African examples, Nieboer's work is clearly applicable to Africa and, I would argue, to non-slave forced labor as well.<sup>3</sup> The official abolition of slavery in eastern Zaïre did not remove the demographic circumstances that had given rise to the institution. So long as the potential labor force remained dispersed and in possession of adequate farming land, substantial coercion or substantial incentives were required to move it.

The Zanzibari and European regimes imposed unity of administration and policy on this enormous and enormously diverse region. In a rough and ready way the disparate peoples and locales became joined together. For better or worse savanna pastoralists, hilltop-dwelling cultivators, riverain fisherfolk, and forest hunter-gatherers were yoked together within artificial boundaries and under foreign rulers. Their lives were united by new laws and languages, new religions and roads, and the shared experiences of exploitation. Given how often the internal boundaries of the eastern Congo were altered, stability of the external frontiers was remarkable.

Yet these common experiences did not forge a strong sense of regional unity any more than Belgian colonialism produced strong national unity. The geographical size and diversity of the region were stronger—and are still stronger—than the efforts to overcome them. For example, the Belgians' effort to reorient the eastern Congo toward the Atlantic succeeded only in part. Kisangani and its dependencies on the great bend in the river were bound to the centers of political and

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*Experiment 1830-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp.192-93.

<sup>2</sup>H. J. Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System: Ethnographical Researches*, 2nd ed. (The Hague: 1910), pp. 302-3. By "industrial" Nieboer meant diligent, productive labor, not manufacturing. All of his research concerned "pre-industrial" societies.

<sup>3</sup>Hopkins, *Economic History*, pp. 24-25, advances an explanation of West African slavery which he says is "essentially" Nieboer's, though he warns that "Nieboer's theory is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the existence of slavery, though it happens to fit the African case." I have found Nieboer's theory to fit pre-colonial Nigeria ("Nineteenth-Century Patterns," pp.1-16), and cite other Africanists who have found it useful in note 7 of that work. For a critique of the theory in the American context see Orlando Patterson, "The Structural Origins of Slavery: A Critique of the Nieboer-Domas Hypothesis from a Comparative Perspective," in *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies*, ed Vera D. Rubin and Arthur Tuden (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1977).

economic power downstream. But the peoples on the western fringes of the Great Lakes retained closer ties to their eastern neighbors. The divorce of Stanleyville, now Upper Zaire, from Costermansville province, now Kivu, in 1933 was an amicable separation based on differences that may or may not have been irreconcilable.

The similarities in the labor policies of the Zanzibari, the Congo Free State, and the Belgian Congo were not just similar responses to a demographic situation. By surveying a broad period of time, this study has shown how each of these administrations adopted policies and institutions it found in place. The degree to which the Zanzibari adopted existing African customs is obscured by the fact that their intrusion and overthrow so disrupted the region that it is difficult to know the preexisting situation in any detail. It is clear, however, that when control of the region passed from the Zanzibari conquerors to the two European colonial regimes, existing labor institutions and policies went along. New names were applied, new features were added and old ones removed, but the underlying reality changed only slowly.

In the first place, the absorption by the Free State of the territory and administration of Tippu Tip included the absorption of much of its slave labor force. The Free State obtained control of these slaves in several ways: by monetary redemption from their owners, by capture in the wars of pacification that brought the eastern Congo under its control, and by compelling African chiefs to furnish quotas of men for various projects (soldiers, railroad laborers, porters, etc.)—quotas the chiefs often filled by sending their slaves, so long as their supplies lasted. Even when not drawing upon existing slaves, the chiefs supplied recruits to the Force Publique and workers to the state under circumstances that strongly resembled the labor requisitions practiced by the Zanzibari. The resemblances to slave labor were particularly strong during King Leopold's rule, as the Free State lacked both the resources and the will to do more than adapt the existing labor system to its own ends until the last years of its rule. The Free State's conscious and deliberate use of freedmen as its first labor force set a precedent for coerced labor that was all too easily followed during the years of Belgian rule.

The transition from the Free State to the Belgian Congo also showed more continuity than change. The Belgian administration inherited the boundaries and the personnel of the Free State. Along

with them came a tradition of forced labor and the beginnings of labor reform, both of which grew in the decades that followed. This emphasis on continuity should not obscure the fact that new officials, circumstances, and policies differentiated the Belgian Congo from its predecessor. But the abuses of the Belgian Congo era documented here, like the more notorious ones of the Free State and the Zanzibari periods, have not lost their power to shock with the passage of time.

Colonialism by its nature was abusive, but the policies of different nations differed widely. Within equatorial Africa the Belgian record, for all the faults documented here, is generally regarded as having been superior to the French and Portuguese.<sup>4</sup> At the level of the individual colonial official, this study has documented many instances of personal responsibility and of officials who carried out bad policies with too little concern for their consequences. No doubt many others were careful to keep their wrong doings out of official files. Yet this researcher has been much more struck by the quality and morality of the longer serving officials in the eastern Congo. In contrast to the Zanzibari and Free State eras when exposures of abuses came principally from foreign sources, the abuses in the 1920s and 1930s documented here come principally from the records of colonial agents, the Ministry of Colonies, and the Colonial Council. Of particular importance in exposing and confronting colonial problems and in preserving the records about them was Colonel Bertrand, whose name appears so frequently in the text and notes of this study that he might deserve to be listed as a co-author.<sup>5</sup>

A final factor providing continuity to the labor history of this period is capital. This study has not consciously employed or rejected

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<sup>4</sup>Coquery-Vidrovitch, "Colonial Economy," passim, is the most scholarly effort. On a different set of issues there are many thoughtful comparisons in Phyllis M. Martin, "The Violence of Empire," 2:1-26 in *History of Central Africa*, David Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin, eds. (New York: Longman, 1983).

<sup>5</sup>A long career in the colonial service and on the Colonial Council was capped by his election as director of the Section Morale et Politique of the prestigious IRCB in 1943. The tragic end of Bertrand's career came with his dismissal from the IRCB in December 1944, after an investigation headed by his long-time friend, J. Henry de la Lindi, on account of "l'attitude favorable à l'ennemi qu'il a observée durant l'occupation"; *Bulletin IRCB* 15 (1944):416. Bertrand died in obscurity in the Uccle commune of Brussels on 20 November 1946 at the age of 76 and was buried in a strictly private ceremony; see the death announcement in *Le Soir*, 29 November 1946. He is not mentioned in the six volumes of the *Biographie coloniale belge*.

any economic theory. Its concern was much more with recovering the details of this period than with presenting a theoretical analysis. The identification of capital as a fundamental force is not intended to be a departure from that empirical approach. It is abundantly clear that the most dynamic forces for change in this period sprang from the international economic system. In the first place, it has long been recognized that the penetration of central Africa by the Zanzibari was a "secondary imperialism," which sought ivory to supply bourgeois decorative tastes and conquered with the firearms of European industrial production. King Leopold's desire for more wealth and his adroit use of capital markets in securing the Congo basin as a personal fiefdom need no elaboration here. The tie of Belgian rule to corporate and banking interests is also too well known to merit elaboration here and too complex to receive more than the schematic outline in figure 7.1.

What does need to be stressed is the impecunious nature of this capitalism. At every stage of this process it was the presence of capital *in insufficient quantities* that shaped the directions of change. Theorists may debate whether monopoly was a natural or unnatural form of capitalism, but for eastern Zaïre it seems clear that the stifling of a free market in labor was encouraged by monopoly systems under public and private control to enable them to profit from insufficient investment. It is also clear that, as a general trend, workers were freed from direct coercion as more capital investment in transportation networks, housing, etc. increased. Here as elsewhere, capital was not so much a force for good or evil, as a force—a force that was applied in ways and quantities whose effects were felt far and wide.

The third aspect of eastern Zaïre's labor history which has received broad treatment in this study is the kinds of labor that are included. This study has examined public and private labor forces, conscripts and volunteers, peasants producers and industrial wage earners. Just as it examined the connections between pre-colonial and colonial labor, the study has sought to show how interconnected the different types of labor and labor demands were. The need to regulate competing demands for industrial labor forces, porters and agricultural producers was the major challenge of colonial policy in the 1920s and '30s—and the major failure of colonial practice.

A major feature of labor mobilization was that Africans were more

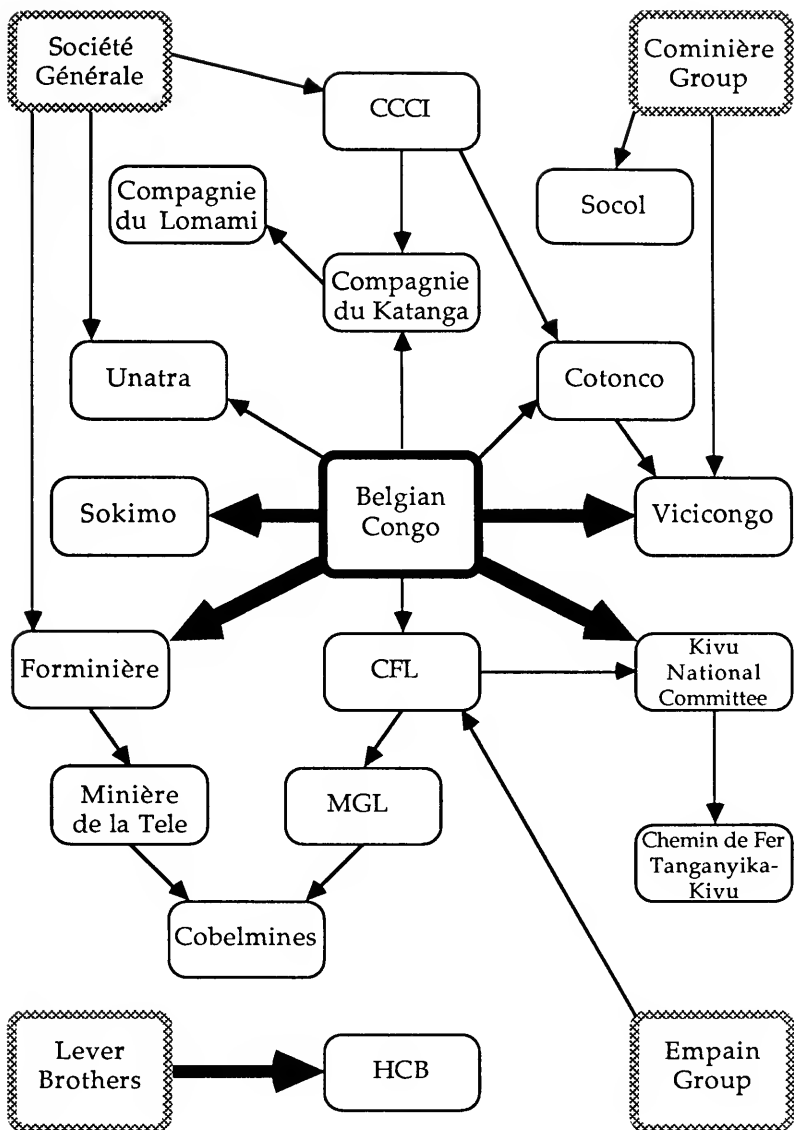


Figure 7.1. Financial Interests in the Eastern Belgian Congo in the 1930s

Note: Arrows indicate lines of principal investments; heavier arrows indicate controlling interests.

often pushed into wage labor than pulled into it. The direct push of forced recruitment was far from over in 1940 and the head tax rates had long been used as an indirect way to achieve the same end. The growing tendency in many places for the misery of rural village life to push persons into the towns and mining camps has also been noted, along with the need for more research to be done on this topic.

What remains to be examined are the reasons why the pull of wage employment remained so weak, why the incentives to wage labor in eastern Zaïre were too low to draw enough labor into the work force. The reasons varied over time. In the early part of the period the desire for short-term profits appears to have been the paramount cause of inadequate wages. The Zanzibari might have preferred wage labor in the abstract, but they were in too much of a hurry to make the kinds of changes that would have created a labor market. They offered no positive incentives to those in their service, except, perhaps, the promise of booty. Because of the limits on its investment capital, the Free State was in an equal hurry in its early years to obtain profits. Though officially committed to ending slavery, it may have offered even less in the way of incentives to wage labor and certainly relied on more systematic forms of labor coercion.

The heavy exactions in labor and goods that continued through the end of the First World War and the colony's near monopoly over the economy retarded the growth of free market labor in several ways. First, it was nearly impossible for private firms (other than concession holders) to operate and to compete for labor because of the government's virtual monopoly over all economic activities. Second, because currency was not introduced into the eastern Congo until 1911-12, payment for the impressed goods and services was made in an often arbitrary assortment of goods whose value was generally inflated. As a consequence real earnings were depressed. Third, the government's control of most labor and its ability to requisition labor depressed wage rates generally. Finally, the low payments and low wages retarded the development of local markets in food and other produce, causing food shortages and further misery.

Under Belgian rule the scope of the direct exactions was gradually curtailed, currency was introduced, and the government's direct control of the economy was drastically reduced. Nevertheless, the voluntary labor force fell far short of labor demands. The wages and other



benefits were absurdly low for various reasons. These included short-term factors such as the disruptions of war and economic depression, but three long-term factors appear to have remained dominant: geography, monopoly, and ideology. The region's remoteness from world markets and the high cost of transportation within and from the region certainly imposed limits on the wages that might be paid, yet also discouraged the investment of capital and the importation of machinery that might have improved productivity. One must be careful to avoid reductionist explanations, but the fact that the greatest changes in the incentives to labor came in the 1930s after the completion of the transport network and after the rates on transport systems had been substantially reduced, was surely no coincidence.

Second, despite the growth of the private sector labor in the Belgian Congo, the economy retained many features of a monopoly. The government itself owned a large or controlling share in many of the existing firms and was thus still an interested party; the private sector was under the control of a limited number of investment firms. The interconnections among this small group were many and complex (figure 7.1). Cooper's statement about Kenya and Zanzibar applies equally well to the Congo: "the invisible hand [of the market place] took over only when the visible one had done its work."<sup>6</sup>

Third, the belief was widespread among Congo employers and officials that Africans were not economically motivated, that paying higher wages would reduce not increase the length of their willing employment since they would reach the target motivating their employment earlier. Such a belief was not unique to the Congo, but it certainly reinforced other reasons for keeping wages artificially low.

What is equally significant is the view of quite a number of Europeans, including some in high places, that Africans in the eastern Congo would and did respond with their labor when adequate incentives were offered. In 1918 Governor General Henry, responding to rising demands for labor and for the use of force in recruiting it, expressed his view in these words:

For the native, as much as and more than for the civilized man, the only feeling which may be a principle of activity is self-interest. When the native is persuaded that it is in his interest to lend his labor to European enterprises, he will not hesitate to do it.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters*, p.68.

Self-interest for Africans in the eastern Congo was, however, more complex than the governor general may have realized. No doubt higher wages and better working conditions would have produced a larger labor response, but, as has been shown, Africans put great emphasis on social as well as material self-interest. When direct and indirect coercion did not prevent otherwise, many Africans strongly resisted leaving their social milieux even for relatively good wages, as at the Kilo-Moto mines. In some cases Africans chose much lower paying forms of labor, such as short-term farm labor in Kivu, that allowed them to retain their social ties more intact.

Yet it would be wrong to think that Africans viewed self-interest only in terms of preserving the existing social order and its norms. Self-interest was a matter of alternatives. No doubt conservatism played a role in encouraging people to stay home as did the unattractive image that working for the European developed as a result of the excesses of the rubber tax, the brutal forced labor of the war years, and the problems of food, health, and harsh discipline that prevailed at many employers. It is nevertheless true that even in the early colonial years wage employment was preferable to village life for some Africans such as the Uele people who had sought employment in the Force Publique and elsewhere, the Kivu inhabitants who sought to evade the obligations to their chiefs, and the demobilized veterans of the Force Publique who created new settlements around government posts rather than return to their villages. Except for the case of the ex-slaves in military service, for whom employment meant an escape from the inequities and iniquities of slave status, the reasons for these preferences are not easy to document, since they involved personal feelings as well as the actual conditions in the villages—neither of which are readily knowable.

What is clearer is that the numbers of such willing employees increased during the later years covered by this study. Such choices may represent worsening conditions in the rural areas, despite the government's efforts to sustain their demographic vitality. In at least some cases these government efforts made rural life more disagreeable by distributing the growing demands for village *corvées* among a declining population of healthy males. In a large number of cases the demands of compulsory cultivation made wage labor more attractive

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<sup>7</sup>Eugène Henry, RACB 1918, p. 13.

to single men. On the other hand, the relative benefits of wage labor also improved. As the major employers gradually abandoned their conviction that African labor was intrinsically temporary and short term in the late 1920s and 1930s and began efforts to stabilize it by improving the housing, feeding, and family benefits accorded to their African employees, wage employment's attractiveness increased substantially, just as Governor Henry had predicted.

Such changes were certainly welcome, and the extension of them during and after the Second World War marked a further maturing of working-class circumstances. Even so, one must be careful not to exaggerate the degree of change that occurred. Only in comparison to the drastic extremes of slavery and forced labor of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century did the conditions of the 1930s look like improvements. The labor history of industrial societies elsewhere provides adequate evidence of how constant a struggle and against what odds small gains are won. The lateness of eastern Zaïre's development of a working class, the geographical obstacles that were only eased but not erased by the introduction of motorized rail, road, and river transport, and the long tradition of coerced labor hardly put the region on the verge of a golden age by 1940.

An aspect of the broader scope eastern Zaïre's labor history that has not been treated adequately here is the role of women workers. It is clear that throughout the decades covered by this study women were a major component, if not the major component of the agricultural work force. The observations of a Free State agent writing home from Basoko late in 1891, though colored by the prevailing ideas of his time and prone to over generalize, still captured the spirit of nineteenth century life:

In Africa the men indulge in no work other than the construction of their huts. They especially loathe working the earth. All the planting is left to the women; they are the ones who prepare the fields, plant the manioc and the sugar cane, sow the corn, the sorghum, etc., and take in the harvest. It is also the women who make the manioc flour, the *chiquangue*, and the palm oil, prepare the meals, clean the markets, carry all the loads, bring in the firewood, do the marketing, etc., etc. The men fish if they are sailors, hunt if they dwell in the woods. While their wives toil arduously, they drink palm wine or sleep.<sup>8</sup>

As this study has pointed out women's role in agriculture continued during the colonial period but they played a large (and sometimes exclusive role) in the *corvées* to maintain roads to transport goods, crops, and firewood. It is their role as wage and contract laborers that is much more poorly documented. There is no question that women were employed along with men or in preference to men even in the early colonial period. For example, in 1893 there were already over eighty women employed as brickmakers in Basoko.<sup>9</sup> Large numbers of women on one to three year contracts worked on rubber plantations in Aruwimi in 1909.<sup>10</sup> However, in later decades the number of working women is very poorly documented, except for wives accompanying their husbands to the mines, who often worked as food producers. One partial exception is the large number of women who worked as seasonal laborers on settler farms, especially in Kivu.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in all eras and all districts of the eastern Congo much work remains to be done to recover the labor history of women.<sup>12</sup>

Despite this and many other omissions that have resulted from trying to approach the labor history of eastern Zaïre from a broad perspective, it is hoped that this study will be a useful introduction to a previously obscure part of African history. This study could never have been completed without the pioneering local studies undertaken by colonial officials, Zaïrian students, and a host of other scholars. It is hoped this publication will encourage others to fill in the many gaps and to correct the many errors that remain.

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<sup>8</sup>MRAC, RG 1078, Archives Chaltin, 14 November 1891, 4:34.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., book 2. A senior official in Uele who gave a female worker twenty-five strokes of the whip for insolence in 1902 was verbally reprimanded by the GG. AA, IRCB (772)73/I, Hanolet to GG, 4 November 1902, and reply.

<sup>10</sup>One hundred women worked on contracts in Mogandjo in Aurwimi, mostly alongside their husbands; FO403/410, in N<sup>o</sup>43, Campbell, "Report on...Aruwimi and Haut Uele."

<sup>11</sup>Women worked a total 344,484 days in 1928, 509,500 days in 1929, and 104,801 days in 1930; children were employed for nearly as many days: 241,512 in 1928, 429,800 in 1929, and 24,619 in 1930. Harvesting coffee was principally done by women and children. AA, RA/CB(141)11-13, RAPO, Agriculture, 1928-30.

<sup>12</sup>See the pioneering study by Barbara A. Yates, "Colonialism, Education, and Work: Sex Differentiation in Colonial Zaïre," pp.127-52 in *Women and Work in Africa*, Edna G. Bay, ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982).

## Appendices



APPENDIX 1  
 Official Registration of African Population,  
 Eastern Congo, 1919-1940 ('000)

Year	Stanley-ville	Aru-wimi	Lower Uele	Upper Uele	Ituri	Kivu	Mani-ema	Eastern Congo	Colony Total
1919								3,270	
1920	226	255	419	698	37	475	217	2,584	
1921	260	241	418	692	444	239	221	2,771	6,471
1922	353	255	422	671	494	346	301	2,842	7,015
1923	357	237	423	698	511	828	301	3,356	7,727
1924	359	248	439	668	566	805	291	3,377	
1925	354	249	441	663	608	431	298	3,043	7,693
1926	343	250	439	624	644	458	301	3,059	7,955
1927	338	264	415	643	669	510	305	3,144	8,121
1928	347	265	402	742	656	553	320	3,286	8,419
			Uele-Itimbiri	Uele-Nepoko	Kibali-Ituri				
1929	328	267	386	660	654	530	306	3,132	
1930	343	273	393	620	715	551	316	3,210	8,803
1931	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3216	8,881
1932	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3,246	8,956
			Stanleyville Province		Costermansville Province				
1933			2,433		789			3,223	8,872
1934			2,449		857			3,306	9,282
1935			2,323		1,161			3,485	9,775
1936			2,331		1,324			3,654	10,047
1937			2,382		1,302			3,685	10,217
1938			2,376		1,308			3,684	10,304
1939			2,357		1,326			3,682	10,328
1940			2,372		1,343			3,715	10,354

Note: Totals for 1919-21 include 257,000 persons in Lowa District, which was suppressed in 1922. Kivu figures for 1923-24 must have been estimates of the total population.

Sources: RACB 1920, p.11; 1921, p. 81; 1922, p.29; 1923; 1924, p.61; 1925, pp. 155-56; 1926, p.85; 1927, p.97; 1928, pp.9-10, 104; 1929, p.7; 1930, p.8; 1931, p.9; 1932, p.10; 1933, p.10; 1934, p.12; 1935, p.17; 1936, p.18; 1937, p.16; 1938, p.22; 1939-44, pp.28-29. AA, MOI(3545); RAPO, third quarter 1921 (extract); RA/CB (200)1: RAPO 1929 AIMO, p. 19.

APPENDIX 2  
Africans Employed in the Eastern Congo, 1919-1940 ('000)

Year	Stanley- ville	Aru- wimi	Lower Uele	Upper Uele	Ituri	Kivu	Mani- ema	Eastern Congo	Colony Total
1919	2.7	2.6	3.6	83.8	4.9	.8	2.0	26.2	
1920								28.2	125.1
1921	4.5	3.5	4.7	6.1	5.1	31	2.3	30.2	
1922	6.6	4.4	5.2	10.1	10.2	3.6	4.7	44.8	
1923								54.0	
1924	8.3	10.0	9.8	13.7	11.8	3.1	4.6	61.2	
1925	12.6	8.0	19.1	23.8	24.6	9.4	6.8	104.3	274.0
1926	15.9	11.7	29.7	32.8	34.5	18.2	15.2	157.8	
1927	19.1	13.1	NA	37.5	NA	17.2	NA	176.4	431.0
			Uele- Itimbiri	Uele- Nepoko	Kibali- Ituri				
1928	19.6	14.5	25.0	33.0	42.0	28.1	16.3	178.5	414.1
1929								182.7	419.5
1930								179.6	399.1
1931				228				151.8	326.3
1932								120.1	291.0
		<u>Stanleyville</u>		<u>Uele</u>					
1933		18.0		16.6	NA	NA	NA	124.1	317.0
1934		20.7		45.6	50.5	32.8	20.2	169.8	338.6
1935		26.8		44.5	46.5	43.0	12.8	173.5	377.5
1936		32.9		46.6	52.2	52.0	15.5	199.2	407.3
1937		40.9		45.8	56.9	72.0	16.6	232.1	491.6
1938		45.8		50.2	59.8	70.1	20.2	246.1	528.5
1939		49.1		46.4	62.6	68.9	20.2	247.1	544.0
1940		49.2		47.3	59.2	69.8	20.1	245.7	536.0

Note: Totals include Lova district figures of 1,300 in 1919 and 900 in 1920.

Sources: RACB 1920, p.14; 1921; 1922, p.75; 1925, p.178; 1928, p.12; 1929, p.11; 1930, pp.11, 135; 1931, p.16; 1935, p.21; 1936, p.23; 1937, p.23; 1939, pp.27-28; 1939-44, p.35. AA, MOI(3545)15: RAPO 1919 (extract), RAPO 1925 AIMO p. 197, RAPO 1924; (unclassified): RAPO 1927 AIMO pp. 31-34; RA/CB(1937)3: RAPO 1928 Avant Propos p. 17; RA/CB(141)16: RAPS 1933 Economique et Agriculture, Annexes, table 4; RA/CB(120bis)13-14: RAPC 1939 AIMO, p. 66, RAPC 1940 AIMO p. 45; RA/CB(138)8: RAPS 1939 AIMO p. 103. "Rapport économique Aruwimi 1926," Congo 1927, 2:309-13. Comité Consultative MOI, Rapport de la Sous-Commission, p.24. Bertrand, Problème de la main-d'œuvre, pp.6-7. Henri Léonard, "Le développement industriel du Congo et la législation sociale," Bulletin de l'IRCB, 12 (1941), p.274.



APPENDIX 3  
Head Tax Collected, Eastern Congo, 1915-1940  
(millions of francs per calendar year)

Year	Stanley-ville	Aru-wimi	Lower Uele	Upper Uele	Ituri	Low/ Kivu	Mani-ema	Eastern Congo	Colony Total
1915	.7	.6	.6	.8	.9	.7	.5	4.9	10.8
1916	.8	.7	.8	.9	1.0	.6	.5	5.4	11.9
1917	.9	.7	1.0	.9	.9	.6	.4	5.4	13.1
1918	.8	.7	.9	.9	.7	.7	.5	5.3	13.3
1919	.9	.6	.6	.7	.6	.7	.5	4.8	12.5
1920								6.2	NA
1921								6.4	12.9
1922								7.4	20.3
1923								9.5	27.4
1924			Uele- Itimbiri	Uele- Nepoko	Kibali- Ituri			10.6	29.0
1925						Kivu		11.6	33.1
1926	2.3	1.7	2.3	2.5	2.6	1.1	1.9	14.4	41.6
1927	2.9	2.2	2.5	3.0	3.0	1.2	2.3	17.1	52.0
1928	3.5	2.9	3.1	5.4	4.6	2.8	3.6	21.1	64.8
1929	4.4	3.8	3.9	5.4	4.6	2.8	3.6	30.5	88.0
1930	5.5	5.1	5.1	6.6	3.6	3.9	5.5	36.6	106.9
1931								39.2	109.2
1932			Stanleyville			Costermansville		36.1	89.8
1933			Province			Province		36.8	
1934			27.9			11.3		39.2	
1935			29.2			12.2		41.5	
1936			30.6			13.4		44.0	
1937			36.3			14.8		51.1	
1938			37.9			15.8		53.7	
1939			38.1			16.7		54.7	
1940								58.0	

*Note:* Missing calendar-year data results from the colonial reports sometimes reporting tax revenues only by fiscal year.

*Sources:* RACB 1915, p.35; 1916, p.32; 1917, p.46; 1918, p. 195; 1919, pp. 262-63; 1921, p.44; 1923, pp.10, 61; 1924, pp.10, 80; 1925, pp.86, 157; 1928, pp.21, 105; 1929, p.109; 1930, pp.19, 115; 1931, p.151; 1932, pp.31, 164; 1935, p.4; 1936; 1937; 1938; 1939-44; AA, RAPO 1927.

APPENDIX 4  
African Rice Production, Eastern Congo, 1920-40  
(in Metric Tons, unhulled)

Year	Stanley-ville	Aru-wimi	Lower Uele	Upper Uele	Ituri	Kivu	Mani-ema	Eastern Congo	
1920			1,882					10,000	
1921	1,026						1,134	10,000	
1922	5,766	419	1,875	225	368		3,674	12,327	
1923	5,937	300	3,899		533		6,280	16,949	
1924	5,999	501	3,704	1,260			5,582	17,046	
1925	8,460	744	4,494	1,668	833	900	3,679	20,778	
1926	6,500	3,424	7,500	800	1,820	900	4,946	32,281	
1927	9,205	2,342	5,000	658	296	1,150	6,090	25,241	
			Uele- <u>Itimbiri</u>	Uele- <u>Nepoko</u>	Kibali- <u>Ituri</u>				
1928	9,000	2,322	3,833	1,391	1,000	5,000	9,985	32,500	
1929	9,904	1,875	3,043	1,845	1,233	5,975	7,703	31,578	
1930	13,836	1,940	5,650	2,850	2,072	6,790	10,578	40,866	
1931	10,943	2,712	5,585	1,605	2,911	7,278	6,108	37,142	
			<u>Stanleyville Prov.</u>						
1932	3,940			10,914				33,159	
1933	6,157			16,250				32,075	
1934	7,537			24,000				35,042	
1935	4,260			NA			4,343	35,000	
1936	4,268			NA			4,555	36,000	
1937	11,923			44,000		1,098	7,361	52,459	
1938	10,835			32,000		455	4,937	37,392	
1939	11,803			29,700		920	5,428	36,048	
1940	16,025			37,370				44,000	

*Note:* Figures in italic are estimated by the author.

*Sources:* RACB 1920, pp.43, 61; 1921, pp.72, 175; 1923, p.69; 1925, p.186; 1927, p.103; 1931, p.178; 1932, p.205; 1933, pp.147, 288; 1934, pp.225, 264-65. AA, (Unclassified) RAPO 1926 Economique pp.46-47; RA/CB(140)7: RAPO 1931 Affaires Economiques, table 7; RA/CB(141)16: RAPS 1933 Annexes, RAPS 1934 Agriculture; RA/CB(142)2, 4, 5: RAPS 1936 Agriculture; RAPS 1938, 1939, 1940 Agriculture; RA/CB(122bis)9-10: RAPC 1938, 1939 Agriculture. KAT, T005 1927: S. Lauwers (CD), Développement économique du District de Stanleyville; Production agricole vendue par les indigènes, 5 October 1942. "Rapport sur la situation économique de la Province Orientale," Congo 1924, 2:97-98; "L'Agriculture du Congo Belge en 1937," BACB, 19 (1938):490.

Appendix 5  
 African Cotton Production, Eastern Congo, 1920-40  
 (in Metric Tons Unseeded)

Year	Uele Itimbiri	Uele Nepoko	Total PS	Kivu	Maniema	Total PC	Eastern Congo	Colony Total
1920	75				750		825	1,527
1921	200	53			762		1,015	1,770
1922	1,429	103			1,020		2,552	3,105
1923	1,220	306			511		2,037	2,610
1924	1,882	908			944		3,844	5,130
1925	3,305	3,497			1,227		8,249	9,167
1926	6,584	5,561		340	1,315		13,800	14,928
1927	6,222	6,641		212	2,177		15,252	17,639
1928	6,102	7,621		672	2,063		15,786	20,207
1929	6,904	7,974		566	2,044		17,636	21,754
1930	8,901	13,547		562	1,773		24,783	30,600
1931	14,276	15,936		456	2,681		33,349	44,799
1932			17,274	1,002	933	1,935	19,208	26,775
1933			25,007	2,170	2,330	4,500	29,507	46,400
1934			34,130	1,979	2,683	4,666	38,790	59,160
1935			41,032	1,900	2,750	4,651	45,683	77,781
1936			42,817	2,950	4,510	7,460	50,277	92,105
1937			49,992			7,251	57,243	106,496
1938			56,040			9,435	65,475	122,468
1939			42,094	4,441	5,824	10,267	52,361	112,229
1940			57,030			10,083	67,113	132,105

Sources: RACB 1931, p.79; 1939-44, p.209; AA, RA/CB(120bis)10: RAPC 1934  
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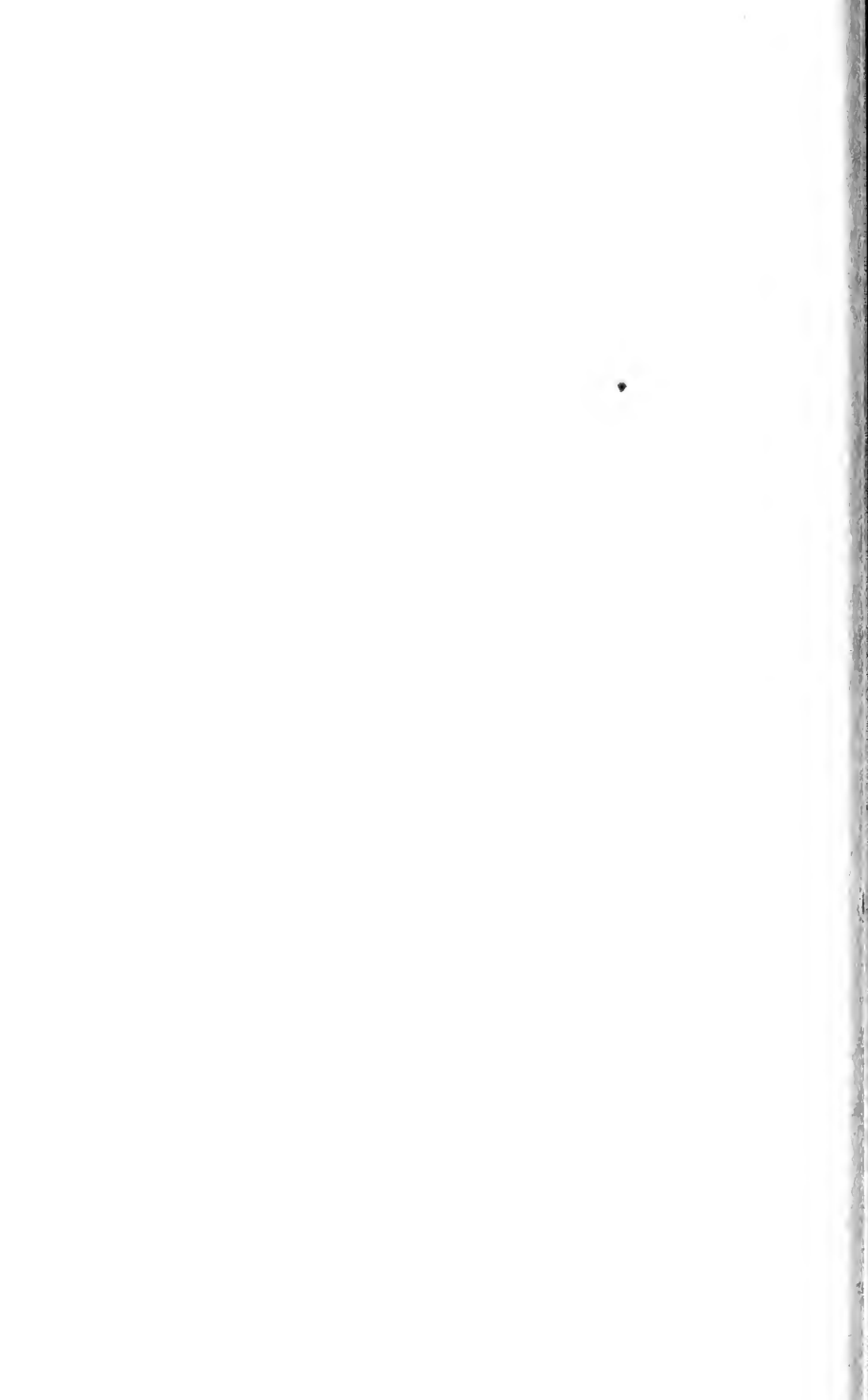
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