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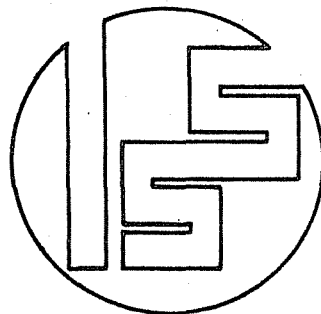
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OCCASIONAL PAPERS

Agrarian Revolution and the Land Question in Buganda

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Agrarian Revolution and the Land Question in Buganda

It is the irony of history that, despite the spectacular accomplishments of the Western European industrial revolution and the agricultural revolution before it, most of mankind is still faced with the more primitive problem of how to eke out a living from the soil. From the amount of knowledge and technological expertise that exists, one would have expected that appropriate solutions would be readily attainable. But yet not: recent history in underdeveloped countries belies such facile assumptions. If anything development elsewhere has proved more of a liability than an asset to the late-starters. Not only is the way ahead blocked by entrenched vested interests, but also vision is obscured by certain historically determined belief systems and perceptual categories. Nothing illustrates this point of view more vividly than the evolution of land policy and development in Buganda (Uganda).

The Traditional Past.

It is still a question whether 18th and 19th century Buganda was a "feudal" society or not. For those who treat the dyadic nature of the relationship between lord and vassal as the crucial variable and less so the association between office and landholding¹, Buganda had not reached the feudal stage by the time of the arrival of Europeans in the 19th century. Those for whom association of office with estate and dependent tenure is equally crucial, Buganda had entered the feudal stage by the middle of the 19th century. Desire for descriptive accuracy, on the one hand, and desire for theoretical precision or elegance, on the other, are understable intellectual inclinations but both could be misleading. In the study of Buganda kingship, bureaucracy, royal and chiefly munificence, no doubt because of their spectacular and exotic features, have been objects of great descriptive accuracy. What went on underneath the splendour and the pomp received either no attention at all as a basic historical process or became ^{an} object of blind empiricism. And yet after the sudden collapse of the Buganda political edifice in 1966, that is what continues inexorably. Consequently, the development of productive forces and production relations in Buganda will be the main concern in this essay.

1. e.g. E.M. Chilver, Jack Goody and H.W. West.

As is to be expected of any agrarian society, land in Buganda is, and has been, the greatest source of sustenance and wealth. However, its distribution and what it produces as a result of human labour has undergone a number of significant changes in the last hundred years or so. First, it is believed by the various specialists on Ganda society that, at least, before the 19th century Buganda was occupied by autonomous descent groups, viz. clans, with probably the Kabaka (king) being primus inter pares (see Mair, 1933; pp. 187-205, Richards, 1959; pp. 45-46, Fallers, 1964; p. 91, and West, 1964; pp. 1-2). The Baganda also believe this to be the case:

"When the Kings came into the country they found clans possessing the land. The hills were occupied by the clans, a clan would have its hill, each clan had a head who was practically the ruler of the clan. When the king came in he began to drive out these people and gave land to favourites who were members of the clan in that part of the country; the land thus given was called butaka. When he got stronger he took the land from the members of the clan and gave it to favourites (not of the clan); they were called batongole and the land given to them butongole"¹

Exactly how the balance of power between the clan-heads (bataka) and the king was maintained for more than thirty generations² and precisely why it only changed during the 19th century, it is not clear from the literature or from oral tradition. But, without any further evidence, it would not be unreasonable to suggest a correlation between accumulation of surplus by the Kabaka and his supporters through a predatory and imperialist economy during the 19th century³ and the emergence of the Kabaka as the supreme ruler of Buganda.

The apparent contradiction between state-formation by the Kabaka and maintenance of local autonomy by kindred groups notwithstanding, it is quite clear that at an early period clan and lineage leaders (bataka) in Buganda, like elsewhere in Africa, were responsible for allocation of land among kinsmen and that the latter by virtue of their

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1. As quoted by Chilver in Richards, 1959; p. 380.
 2. The last Kabaka of Buganda, Mutesa II, is believed to be the 34th successor of the founding king of Buganda, Kintu (Cf. Richards, op. cit., p. 43 and Fallers, op. cit., p. 75).
 3. It was during this period that Buganda, through military conquest, expanded to more than six times its original size. Above all, there is every indication that the Kabaka had complete disposition over the loot and plunder from conquered territories. The direct control over the army and most of the externally derived surplus must have been more than sufficient for him to establish himself over the clan leaders and the rest of the population.

membership in the clan regarded this as their inalienable right. The land was theirs in more than just a metaphorical sense. Insofar as the bataka were not entitled to any fees, tribute, or labour services for performing their kinship duties, their route to primitive accumulation was blocked. Insofar as land was a free commodity within the clan and insofar as the primary producers expended their labour-power for their own benefit, they suffered no exploitation.¹ But insofar as each clan head had the right to settle tenants on the clan land and receive personal profit from dues and tribute and, probably, services, the road to primitive accumulation was open; and insofar as the majority of clansmen did not settle on their clan estates but, instead, sought favour with more powerful estate masters, there was general exploitation, if not intensive.

The successful intervention by the Kabaka from the middle of the 19th century onwards marked the emergence of a new mode of economic and political organization. It represented a movement away from clan estates to fiefs or benefices in land. In the newly acquired areas, where there were no established Ganda clan estates, this was not difficult to achieve. The Kabaka merely created administrative domains (butongole) in the charge of his trusted officers (batongole). Even in the areas where the clans were dominant, it does not seem that the king was short of supporters who saw opportunities for self-aggrandizement in the new set-up. Prospects for personal control over land and people and a direct share in the surplus extracted from within and from without were not only a sufficient inducement to ambitious individuals but were also the surest way of avoiding being an object of the same policies. Clanship and heredity as sources of power were being supplanted by an appointive system, wherein power was exercised solely at the king's grace or pleasure. From the point of view of the analogy with feudalism in Europe, it is worth noting here that in the late 19th century political status in Buganda determined control over land and not the other way round, as was the case in Europe where land rights were hereditary.

1. This would be untrue only if there was taxation or any other form of exaction by the Kabaka. But there is no evidence to confirm that.

Irrespective of the changing fortunes of the Kabaka's appointees, by the end of the 19th century two classes of people or status categories in Buganda had been firmly established, viz. the chiefs or "lords" (bami) who were the appointees of the Kabaka and the undistinguished residue of the population (bakopi). In addition to clan tenure (butaka) which was getting attenuated, two important land relations had become pervasive, viz. fiefs (butongole) for the political elite and tenantry (busenze)¹ for the governed. In practice this implied a virtual extinction of communal land rights as a means of livelihood and a complete disappearance of local autonomy in favour of centralised control. The Kabaka had, as the Luganda metaphor goes, "eaten up" or "owned" the whole of Buganda. He had become the supreme lord and every Muganda was his "man" or servant.

Earlier we postulated a direct link between state-formation in Buganda and the extraction and use of surplus, while not denying the fact that organization of primary production remained the same throughout the period under consideration. In Buganda each household, including that of the Kabaka and the chiefs, depended on its own labour for subsistence. Actually, women were the real cultivators of the soil, while masculine contribution did not go any further than the initial clearing of the ground, occasional hunting and fishing. But for the plots they cultivated the women depended on men. As has been mentioned already, the latter acquired access to land by "attaching themselves in loyal dependence to a superior" - normally, a member of the ruling elite. As has been stressed earlier, the political elite depended on the Kabaka for their estates. This tiered dependence established a system of services which put the Buganda economy far beyond a mere household economy. For the land he received a mukopi ("peasant") paid tribute and dues to his overlord and rendered him services as a craftsman, house-builder and warrior. The chiefs, on their part, served the Kabaka by keeping the population under strict supervision, by collecting taxes and tribute and by raising an army for raiding the neighbouring states. In this way an economy of predation, not production, was created and the spoils - livestock, women, slaves, ivory and barkcloth - shared among the elite as part of the Kabaka's bounty.

Once again, it should be noted that insofar as the Baganda bakopi

1. As against kibanja, a tenant plot: bibanja = plural.

("peasants") were not tied to the soil¹ nor were they obliged to tend their master's fields, they were not serfs in the European sense. Insofar as the Baganda chiefs held their estates only by virtue of their political appointments² and had no hereditary titles or rights in land, they are not comparable to the European feudal lords. But their effective control over land and people in their life-time not only afforded them opportunities for primitive accumulation, but also created conditions for possible consolidation of their power and disposition over land. This is precisely what happened afterwards. In 1888 a clique of royal appointees conducted a coup and expelled the Kabaka (who must have been trying to keep them in check) and established themselves as the new masters of the state. Fortunately for them the newly arrived British colonialists accepted them as such.

The Colonial Past

Buganda was actually declared a British Protectorate in 1894 but the cross-roads in land policy was not reached until 1900. It was in that year that Sir Harry Johnston, the British Special Commissioner for the Protectorate of Uganda (Buganda), signed the famous Uganda Agreement with the Buganda new political captains. The terms of the Agreement are a clear indication of the extent to which the chiefs had managed to consolidate their power, at least, against the general population. Similarly, they are a reflection of their skill in taking advantage of the new alliance with the British, without suffering most of its disadvantages. As one observer puts it:

"In addition to being the residuary administrators of their areas the Bakungu (appointed chiefs) were, to begin with, both personal representatives of the Kabaka (by this time a minor) and supporters of his throne. They were, too, the powerful disposers of jurisdiction over land and peasants and political leaders of the utmost importance" (Low and Pratt, 1960; p. 47).

Land, a never failing source of political power and control over people and resources, inevitably became the primary concern of the chiefs in their negotiations with Johnston. The latter's fundamental

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1. They had the right ^{of} removal (kusenguka) and a chance of being appointed to a chieftainship.
 2. They were subject to demotions and dismissals and in the circumstances reverted to the status of ordinary bakopi.

lack of understanding of the land situation in Buganda, compounded by English feudal preconceptions and naive notions about "tribal land" in Africa, did more to bring Buganda closer to real feudalism than anything else. But, notwithstanding Johnston's follies, Britain, as a socio-economic force, represented something quite different. It represented advanced European capitalism which Buganda could not escape, despite its chiefly atavism. Buganda had moved irrevocably from a situation where the country was seen as divided into a hierarchy of domains of jurisdiction attainable at the Kabaka's grace to a situation where rights in land were vested in individual holders in perpetuity. Johnston's mailo¹ system, as it got to be known afterwards, acted as a double-edged sword. It at once complemented the feudalist ambitions of the chiefs in Buganda and, at the same time, created grounds for the emergence of capitalism in the area. Cultivation of cash crops made it possible for individual landowners to acquire wealth by means other than primitive accumulation or predation.

Who were the fortunate individuals? When the Agreement was signed on 10 March, 1900, it limited individual rights in land to "1,000 chiefs and landowners - the Kabaka, the Regents and senior chiefs, and some minor chiefs" (these turned out to be more than 4,000). The Kabaka, members of the royal family, the Regents (and two other important chiefs), and sazza chiefs (county chiefs) were to receive specified amounts of land, which added up to about 700 square miles of private and official estates. The rest of the allottees were to share about 8,000 square miles. At this time before any proper land surveys had been made, measurements were bound to be inaccurate. But it is sufficient to note that each allottee received at the average about two square miles, while the senior chiefs and the Regents fell in the range of 15-45 square miles each, and a grand total of 350 square miles for the Kabaka. It was "aristocracies within aristocracies", as Low so aptly puts it. The immediate implication of the Agreement was to exclude the rest of the population from enjoying similar rights in land as the chiefs i.e. not only were they deprived of rights of ownership ab initio but also their rights of occupancy, compared to most Africa, received no attention at all.

As a result of the Agreement, under statutory law only three types of land tenure were recognised in Buganda, viz. -

1. The allotments were measured in square miles and hence the coinage by the Baganda, mailo.

- (a) Public land known as Crown land (about 6,800 square miles)
- (b) Land held by the Kabaka, chiefs and private landowners known as mailo land, divided into official mailo (about 700 square miles) and private mailo (about 8,000 square miles).
- (c) Freehold¹ which was land transferred from the Crown to individuals or corporations (104 square miles).

Subjectively, this did not have any immediate impact on the people's consciousness. Humble supplication to a mailo owner as a method of gaining access to land sufficed as much as it did to the Kabaka's chiefs in the period prior to the Agreement. But, objectively, the dissociation of rights over land from governmental functions created a new type of property relations. Land had become a salable commodity at the complete disposal of individuals who had a legal obligation neither to the Kabaka nor to the people settled on their land. Secondly, within a few years land became an important commodity for investment and generation of continuous wealth through exploitation of hired labour - another novel relationship, employers and employees among the indigenous population (cf. areas of white settlement elsewhere in Africa where only whites were capitalist employers).

The imperialist muddling and feudal trappings notwithstanding, Buganda had entered a new economic era which was heralded by the arrival of the first sacks of cotton from America in December, 1903. As Wrigley remarks: "From then on the economy was on a new and solid footing. By applying their fertile soil to the production of specialised crops for the world market the Baganda and other people of the Protectorate not only soon achieved independence of imperial subsidies but attained a much higher level of income than they had ever been able to acquire by the old methods" (Wrigley in Fallers, op. cit.; p. 33). In answering the question, "Who was to have the direction of this process?" and "How were the proceeds to be distributed?", Wrigley writes:

"..... it had undoubtedly been assumed that the new economy would be managed, like old, by the chiefs, who would act as entrepreneurs and develop their estates after the manner of English landowners. And it seemed at first that this was how things would in fact be done. The chiefs did just what was required of them in setting the peasants to work on the cotton fields in 1904. The project was launched by means of written agreements between its

1. The highest figure ever reached in this category is 345 square miles or 1.9 per cent of the total land area in Buganda (Buganda Planning Commission Report, 1965).

authors, the British-owned Uganda Company, and certain prominent Baganda, the former undertaking to supply seed and instruction and to buy the crop, the latter to see that the seed was planted and the cotton in due course delivered to the Company" (in Fallers, op. cit.; p. 34).

The people were being mobilized to increase production for the benefit of a British Imperial company, for imperial administration and the political elite in Buganda. In as much as cotton production did increase from about 54 bales valued at £236 in 1904 to the impressive figure of 13,378 bales worth £165,412 in 1911 and accounted for half of the total exports of the Protectorate, Buganda was experiencing growth without development. The people were neither the objects nor the subjects of development. Only the new landowner-chiefs were regarded as such. After a promising start, however, progress began to slacken and the landowners were not fulfilling the expectations of their benefactors. A number of reasons were advanced to explain the apathy of the landowner-chiefs. Some commentators such as Wrigley believe that "the dynamic oligarchs of the earlier period had for the most part become, or been succeeded by a race of comfortable country squires and routine administrators", who, invariably, "looked on their land, not as a factor of production, but as a capital asset" i.e. sales and dues from tenants were the easiest route to prosperity. West, writing several years later, holds almost the same view that "landlords made practically no entrepreneurial or technical contribution to the management and development of their land, but instead remained in a passive state as impersonal rent farmers whose attitude has changed but little from the traditional concept of 'estates of administration'" (West, unpublished manuscript, 1967).

For perfectly good reasons the landowner-chiefs were falling out of favour. British imperialism would have been a strange imperialism, indeed, if it were to support the ambitions of an unknown bunch of chiefs for their own sake. Production was its main concern. Between 1910-15 production had been observably slipping out of the hands of the chiefs into those ^{of} peasant producers. Consequently, by 1916 there had developed a feeling among British administrators in favour of the producers and against the landowners. Peasant producers came to be regarded as the agents of progress and, therefore, proper objects of solicitude. This was in contrast to the chiefs who were now seen as a

"forested plutocracy" or "mere parasites" who got richer by extorting money and services from the true producers. Obviously, feudalistic trappings had become an encumbrance on the new mode of production and land policy and production relations had to be revised accordingly.

What was the new mode of production? Properly speaking, one should not talk about peasant production in Buganda before 1900. Peasant production in Buganda, as far as it existed at all, was a consequence of the individualization of rights in land and the introduction of cotton cultivation for the world market. While at first cotton production was geared towards demesne farming, soon after the peasants, who had easy access to good soil as tenants,¹ were able to convert their labour dues into cash payments and to expend their labour on their own plots. As has been alluded to already, small-scale production came to predominate in Buganda from 1916 onwards - bearing in mind that even the operations of the landowners were not much different in techniques and scale from those of their tenants. However, of critical structural importance is the emergence in the succeeding decade of a substantial number of small producers on independent plots. This was accounted for by two processes: (i) fragmentation of the original estates through inheritance and sales; and (ii) upward mobility by tenants through purchase of land from the cotton proceeds. Wrigley's poetic formulation testifies to the same:

"Thus there arose an agrarian middle-class of landowners whose property was measured, not in square miles as hitherto, but in tens of acres. This class was formed by a double movement from above and below. It was composed on the one hand of the joint inheritors of once large estates and by proprietors who had sold off the greater part of their lands, and on the other by the new men who were re-entering rural society from outside by purchasing a modest position in the ranks of the landowning class" (in Fallers, op. cit.; p. 39).

In the long-run independent peasant production is incompatible with feudalistic control almost in the same manner as advancing capitalist farming is antithetical to peasant cultivation. These are the contradictory motions which found expression in Buganda at one and the same time. No sooner had cash crop production been established in

1. One does not have to exaggerate the plight of the tenants in Buganda in order to arrive at valid theoretical conclusions about the negative implications of the system as such.

Buganda and the new economic opportunities recognised by individuals than certain tensions were felt in society. The landowner-chiefs sought to maximise their benefits by making excessive demands on the peasants.¹ In 1926 the Lukiiko (Buganda Legislative Assembly) tried to fix these by legislation at the increased rates of 35 per cent of the cotton cultivated by the tenants, two pounds of coffee for every ten pounds grown and one pound out of every ten pounds of any other cash product (cf Low and Pratt, op. cit.; p. 237). This elicited a sharp response from the administration which had made up its mind as far back as 1924 to "do everything possible to encourage the appearance and multiplication of the peasant proprietor". Reports of "frequent and general evictions" of the peasants by the landowners (see Low and Pratt, op. cit.; pp. 110-111) and continued agitation by the Bataka, other minor chiefs and individuals who did not have any land, or not as much as they had expected,² gave the colonial government a perfect excuse for striking at their erstwhile allies, the landowner-chiefs. On 15 October, 1926 the government publicly declared "its intention of insisting upon the passage of legislation to ensure security of tenure to native occupiers and for the limitation and regulation of rents and tribute in kind". Accordingly, towards the end of 1927 there was enacted in Buganda, against the wishes of the ruling Buganda oligarchy, the so-called Busulu and Envujjo Law. Its significance is that it guaranteed security of tenure to the peasants, as long as they met their stipulated obligations of ten shillings dues (busulu) per annum and a tithe (nvujjo) of four shillings per annum in respect of each acre or part thereof under cotton or coffee. This was an important charter for the peasants and protected them from immediate exploitation. But, as shall be seen later, while attempting to obviate the effects of a particular structural contradiction, it created yet another structural incongruity. In fact, it is our hypothesis that the British by their various policies in Buganda created such distortions or contrary motions that what would have been Buganda's agrarian and capitalist revolutions in the first half of this century were still-born.

1. A government commission, consisting of Sir Charles Griffins and J.C.R. Surrock, was appointed in 1924 to investigate land distribution in Buganda. In its report the Commission referred to exactions by the landowners, "great or small", which in some cases resulted in appropriation of up to one-third of the peasant's produce.
2. Thomas and Spencer identified these as "essentially a club of 'have-nots' banded together against the 'haves'" (Spencer & Thomas, 1938; p. 70).

The Later Phase

If we accept the fact that production was the immediate and overriding concern of the British,¹ then we have to acknowledge the contradictions mentioned above as a mandatory price of "progress" payable by the Baganda. Structural contradictions (inherent and imposed) notwithstanding, native production continued to increase in Buganda. Towards the end of the 'twenties production had expanded from cotton to coffee. From ^{modest} beginnings and an actual count of 350,000 trees or 600 acres in 1922, between 1926-29 coffee had started to compete with cotton in money value with the consequent increase in acreage throughout the thirties. For instance, by 1937 coffee acreage had reached 30,8000 - of course, not to beat cotton production at about 15,000 bales in the same year.

Against the background of the quantitative aspects of production in Buganda at this time, there are a number of qualitative points which need high-lighting. It is without doubt that the interwar period saw the victory of the small producers in Buganda. It was they who determined not only the pace but also the volume of production in the agricultural economy. This has led some analysts to talk about "a firmly established peasant economy" in Buganda at this time. The scale of production (3-5 acre plots) would warrant this supposition. But property and production relations preclude such a claim. First, it was a small minority of Baganda producers who owned their farm land either as families or as individuals. Ownership of land remained an exclusive right of the privileged by birth or other financial endowment. Second, the word "peasant" as used in Buganda at this time should not be taken to connote the labouriousness associated with it in other parts of the world. From the earliest times of this century the Baganda small-scale producers were employers of cheap foreign labour. As early as 1923 an influx of 4,500 immigrants into Buganda was recorded and it was reported that the bulk of these was "absorbed by Ganda farmers".² Thus, by 1934 Mair was able to report that wage-labour, drawn exclusively from alien tribes had become a normal feature of Ganda life and that a

1. Powesland in Richards, 1954; p. 27.

2. Supposedly, this could have been achieved by alienating large tracts of land to white settlers. But at what cost in the Buganda situation?

man who grew an acre or two of cotton liked to employ about five labourers (Mair, 1934; pp. 132-7).¹ Nor did this extraction of labour-power end there. The Baganda males universally depended on the efforts of their womenfolk for subsistence.

Wherefore, while recognising the over-all exploitation of the majority of the Baganda producers by the colonial state and its agencies:

"The increment of wealth that had accrued to the people through production for export was hardly spectacular. A rough calculation shows that in 1928-29, a season of high yields and good prices, the cotton crop yielded approximately £7 to every tax-payer in Busoga and £6 to every tax-payer in other parts of the Eastern Province and in Buganda Taxation, too, was heavy. In 1929 the Uganda Government's revenue, at £1,682,990, amounted almost to 40 per cent of the national export income. The cultivator of the Eastern Province was mulcted of Shs. 21 in direct taxation alone; and his counterpart in Buganda paid Shs. 15 to the Central Government and a further Shs. 10 to the Native authority" (Wrigley, op. cit.; p. 57),

we should not overlook the internal processes of exploitation and the production relations which sustain them. The Baganda, who are described, objectively so too, as "better off than most tribes" in the area, benefitted from and were in part responsible for the exploitation of their weaker or less fortunate neighbours. It comes as no surprise that, as is known to any field-worker in Buganda, they have great contempt for farm labour and generally regard themselves as an "employing class". Availability of cheap foreign labour also must have contributed to their indifference to collective effort in production and extreme individualism even in the organization of family labour - a cornerstone of all peasant production. In this context a comment by Audrey Richards is illuminating:

"We do not pretend to have done an intensive study of the family unit in Buganda, but our surface impressions were that it was rare to find husband and wife receiving help in cultivation from growing boys and girls, such as would be the practice in most peasant communities in Europe, let alone Africa. Furthermore, the common Bantu custom of organising working bees, by which the farmer brews beer or gives some other form of entertainment for friends or rela-

1. Her observation were confirmed by Richards et al 1951-4 (Richards, op. cit.; p. 205).

tives who come and help to do heavy work, does not appear to exist in this area. Ganda comment that things are easier for the foreigners because kinsmen live together, but, surprisingly enough, they hardly ever seem to emulate this type of family cooperation or the working pattern of other African peoples" (op. cit.; p. 206).

From the foregoing general discussion, are we to conclude that most of the Baganda producers, insofar as they rely heavily on hired labour and highly individualized production, are kulaks or rural capitalists?

First, let it be stated as a general rule that peasants are isolated producers but who rely more on family labour than anything else. In contrast kulaks and agricultural capitalists rely more on hired labour than family labour. Nor is it just a question of the type of labour used. It is also a matter of qualitative difference brought about by a distinct combination of labour-power, tools and capital i.e. technologically and historically, the two categories represent divergent tendencies. But the surprising thing in Buganda is that increased production at the time in question did not represent a qualitative change technologically. Generally-speaking, the scale and the techniques of production remained the same for all farmers. Talking about the same period, Wrigley concludes:

"An acre or two was thus added to the cultivated area of each homestead, but, except on a few estates in Buganda, the general scale of farming operations had not sensibly altered. Nor - and here the big cotton farmers of Buganda were no exceptions - had the techniques. Virtually the only technical innovation had been the substitution of imported steel hoes for local iron product" (op. cit.; p. 57).

Entrepreneurship, in the classical sense, was not the dominant feature of production in Buganda at this point in time. Literally, nothing had been done to improve the efficiency of the African labour or would-be-entrepreneurs. In short, the level of real capital - scientific and technological capacity - of the rural society in Buganda remained the same, despite the satisfaction of the imperialist demand which set in motion the whole process. The Protectorate Government was "comfortably solvent" and shortage of raw materials had ceased to be the principal worry of the manufacturers in Lancashire. In other words, the Buganda economy operated mainly as a function of British industry and the world

market. Even at the best of times, the Africans did not stand to benefit technologically from their involvement with the British simply because the division of labour was also racially determined. Processing, marketing and export trade was outside their scope - but no consumer goods were similarly classified. Does not incorporation into capitalist production and world market relations, without the benefit of the transformational effects associated with the system, constitute the very essence of underdevelopment?

The Final Phase

The remarks made above could, quite conceivably, draw a thunderous denial from the Members of the British Empire who, rightly or wrongly, believed as late as 1935 that "the complex task of building a civilisation which, in its spiritual and material aspects alike, is beyond the present range of native imagination or aspirations".¹ The point at issue is precisely whether introduced British capitalism was able to, or could, bring the range of imagination of the natives within the historical ambience of capitalism. Put in another way, could the local people, instead of being treated as objects of extended European capitalism, be allowed to be subjects of a genuine capitalist transformation in their own right? The question goes far beyond the usual concern to create a native middle-class which acts as a source of stability and a never-failing bulwark against Bolshevism when the time comes.

Summarizing the results of agricultural progress and increased production in Buganda up to World War II, Wrigley says:

"On the other hand virtually nothing had been done to improve the efficiency of African Agriculture. There was no evidence that the yield of cotton had increased, and the subsistence side of the economy had not been touched at all, save for the introduction or wider dissemination of that unpalatable and unnutritious but drought-resistant root, cassava" (op. cit.; p. 64).

But Wrigley himself admits that by the end of the Second World War:

" - - - - - the exigencies of international politics, the desperate plight of the sterling area, the prospect of an advance towards self-government immeasurably more rapid than had hitherto been envisaged - all these combined to make the growth of production

1. Official communication as quoted by Thomas and Scott, 1935; p. 43.

and wealth in Uganda seem a matter of pressing urgency" (op. cit.; p. 67).

In the period prior to World War II government efforts to improve African agriculture had been limited to soil conservation and a doomed attempt to introduce tractors in Buganda.¹ Improved cotton strains were another contribution by the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation - a British private firm. It was in the post-war circumstances that a romantic commitment to "a nation of small producers" gave way to the belief that the peasant producer had "come to a full-stop" and could no longer be relied upon for further expansion of the economy. In the manner of European development, "large-scale" farming was seen as the natural successor to peasant production. But, unlike in Europe, the material conditions for its realisation did not exist. Even the "bigger" African producers in Buganda had not yet made any technological advance and the relations between them and their labour had not undergone any qualitative change. Workers remained labouring tenants, whose skills had changed but little since the end of the 19th century. Fundamentally, what we are confronted with here is an over-all level of real capital which is too low to justify any capitalist expansion. Non-existence of a local market for agricultural products was an added structural weakness.

But looked at externally, through a process of spontaneous adjustment to colonialism, there appeared in post-war Buganda a few isolated individuals who operated "enterprises of more than average size". Their appearance was made possible by a more or less fortuitous combination of three factors - ownership of sufficient amounts of land (inherited or purchased), favourable crop prices for a prolonged period, and increased labour inputs consequent on good market prices. The fortunate individuals caught the eye of the colonial administrators, dubbed "professional farmers", became the new objects of solicitude from the administration. They were to be recipients of government aid in the form of mechanization schools, research institutes, training programmes and general extension services. Wrigley, a not altogether unsympathetic chronicler, notes:

1. A broken terrain, heavy vegetation and perennial crops in Buganda were bound to reduce the utility value of tractors even if other requirements were fulfilled - which were not.

"It was clear at any rate that mechanization was for the few, not for the many, and this brings us to a subtle and gradual change that was taking place in the pattern of the Department's work. In lieu of the handing down of rules, instructions and exhortation to an ignorant and, in theory, subservient peasantry there was emerging something more like an agricultural extension service as the term is understood in a civilized state. The Department's officers were moving away from the heart-breaking task of raising the general level of African agriculture a notch or two up the scale of efficiency, and were turning to the more rewarding process of providing guidance to the minority of farmers who were both willing and able to profit from it" (op. cit.; pp. 77-8).

Suffice it to say, an Agricultural Productivity Committee, formed by the government as a response to its own desire for increased productivity, saw the so-called professional farmers as a God-send and officially adopted them in 1953. In 1956 two Farm Institutes, intended to provide training for this type of farmer and the accompanying extension personnel, were established. In the same year a Farm Planning Unit was set up to provide guidance, in official terminology, "at the request of individual farmers or groups of farmers".

The colonial government, having created a bureaucratic elite, was now out to create an agricultural elite after its own image. To what extent was the superstructurally contrived agricultural revolution a success, it may be asked. Perhaps, an observation by Wrigley towards the end of British Rule (1959) in Uganda can be used without prejudice, as the same phenomenon continued after Independence. The following are his words: "By no means all 'new men' were any better farmers from a technical point of view than the simplest of the semi-subsistence cultivators". But, as if to console his compatriots, he adds; "There was, however, a slowly increasing number of men who not only willingly took but actually sought the advice of Agricultural Officers, whose attitudes and practices were beginning to assume a truly professional character" (op. cit.; p. 78). It would seem that, from the point of view of underdevelopment or "Jim-Crowed" agricultural revolution, what is more important than the said professionalism is the differential treatment of the producers by the government and the emergence of parasitic elitism as part of the colonial heritage. In contrast to the modest

amounts the government was spending on a few select farmers, it is estimated that between 1943-1953 all agricultural producers in Uganda (not Buganda), through the device of Marketing Boards, involuntarily contributed nearly £30 million to price assistance funds, about £22 million to development projects of all sorts (most of them non-agricultural) and an additional £30 million in export duties; and that during this period rarely did they receive as much as three-quarters of the actual market value of their produce. Instead, the prices paid in some instances ranged as low as 27 or 31 per cent of market prices.¹ It was a vertically articulated system of, to employ a biological analogy, parasites, vectors and hosts (victims).

The Post-Independence Period

The hypothesis that is being advanced at this stage of our analysis is that parasitism is an aberrant feature of "Jim-Crowed" or "Shanghaied"² capitalism. It is of special importance that the latter should be distinguished from normal capitalism, wherein exploitation is characteristically possessed of dynamic imperatives i.e. it leads logically to a fuller mobilisation of resources and, above all, to a release of new energies among the exploiters (capitalists) and the exploited (proletarians) alike. It has been noted that in the case of Buganda bureaucratic fascination with "professional farmers" led neither to a qualitative change in agriculture³ nor to a release of new energies consonant with a capitalist revolution. But on the contrary it added to the existing strata of parasitic elites. The question then is, did change of government at Independence signify any fundamental changes in the organisation of production in agriculture?

Historical occurrences, justified or not, have their own logic.

The aberrations and contradictions mentioned above needed another full

1. Figures computed by Wrigley (1959, p. 70) from the East African Statistical Department Report - Background to the Budget, Nairobi, 1955.
2. If this be unfamiliar usage, the idea of Negroes in the Southern State being limited to the railroads or of one being shipped away in a drugged state furnishes an accurate analogy to the situation we are describing.
3. Monoculturalism continued to be the dominant feature of the agricultural economy. In 1955, the best year ever, cotton and coffee accounted for 89% of agricultural export and 77% of all exports.

cycle for their implications even to be dimly recognised in Uganda. In the almost proverbial sense now Independence did not bring about any change of attitude towards development. Both the national government of Uganda and the federal government of Buganda faithfully followed the colonial policies, at least, in agriculture. For the colonial "professional farmers" they substituted "progressive farmers", whom the Department of Agriculture defined as "a farmer who actively follows the advice and puts into practice the instructions given to him by the Department of Agriculture, or the Department of Veterinary Services and Animal Husbandry, for the proper management of his farm". These were to be the prized clients of the Department. In 1962-3, despite the failure of the tractor scheme introduced in 1948, a new mechanisation scheme called the "Landmaster Scheme" was started in the main coffee county of Buddu in Buganda for the benefit of large-scale farmers. Two years later it was discovered that "most of the landmasters in the Division were not in use or working order, owing to extreme difficulty in obtaining repairs and to mechanical inexperience of the farmers". Worse still, it was further reported by the appropriate authority that "no farmer had approached one-third of the 360 hours per annum for cultivation considered necessary in the survey which preceded the implementation of the scheme".¹ The scheme had to be abandoned in 1964 as a disastrous failure.

All the same, the matter continued to be treated largely as a technical problem, solvable within the colonial ideological presuppositions about development. As if by a magic wand, Buganda contrived capitalism was expected to follow the well-known and proven route. Therefore, the Buganda government, not deterred by the Buddu experience, went ahead and announced a new estate-farming scheme in 1965 - admittedly in a different area. This time the intention was to establish central farming units, to be known as Agricultural Development Companies to which were to be linked a "number of peasant holdings". To ensure sufficient capital inflow, non-African investors were to be encouraged to enter into a partnership with Africans to develop "out-growers' schemes". Public land was to be leased specially for development of "private estates".

On the face of it, it was not the peasant who had "come to a

1. Divisional Agricultural Annual Report, Masaka, 1965.

full-stop" this time but rather the strawmen of "progress". The resort by the Buganda government to "central farming" and to partnership with "non-African investors" was a tacit acknowledgement of the inability of the African "progressive farmers" to achieve development. Instead of stating the matter in exactly those terms and ponder why, it sought to mystify the people and to find easy substitutes for what they lacked. In the absence of a virile national bourgeoisie the government was proposing state capitalism as an alternative. But it had no clear theory to it. Nor did it get any guidance or encouragement from the national government. Objectively, Buganda still is a victim of a pre-capitalist technology (used to mean more human capacities than simply tools). Secondly, its production relations in agriculture remain basically traditional, if only distorted by imposed production for an international market. Its land relations - neither feudal, peasant nor capitalistic but a peculiar amalgam of all three - are not a natural starting-point for any particular form of development. In such a situation it must have taken a singularly perverse mind to suppose that a handful of "progressive farmers" could bring about a capitalist revolution. This is a sad illusion which has come to tyrannize Buganda like so many other underdeveloped regions.

But as is well-known, disillusionment comes fast and solid in underdeveloped countries precisely because of the fragility of their basic structures. The collapse of world market prices in the early sixties exposed the technological backwardness of the Buganda "progressive farmers". They undoubtedly lacked the innovativeness which would have helped them climb out of the rut of monoculturalism. A few alternative crops to coffee and cotton e.g. tea, sugar and vanilla needed new skills which could hardly be found. In 1966-7 (when in the field) a curious process was occurring. A fair proportion of the so-called "progressive farmers" were reverting to the peasant-plus type of agriculture, or to rentier farmers by simply abandoning all or part of their once prized coffee estates. They were laying off their labour and generally complained that they had no money to pay for it or for "farm improvements".¹ But when asked what improvements would they introduce, if the money was available, it transpired that they had none in mind (except a few farmers who mentioned dairy farming in Mawokota and Buddu

1. In practice this turned out to be the usual excuse for obtaining a loan from the government

countries). Nor was this a simple case of lack of imagination. The farmers interviewed had in common certain social characteristics which might explain their personal limitations. First, most of them were either illiterate or had a few years primary education. Second, as much as half in a sample of 110 had passed their most productive age (over 55 years of age). Part of the explanation is that, according to their own testimony, a number of them took up farming as an "insurance against old age" and this happened to coincide with the coffee boom period. Retired petty-traders, petty-bureaucrats and blue-collar workers predominated in the sample. Third and most serious, they educated their sons out of agriculture or rural society, and, therefore, eliminated any possibility of being succeeded by a generation of better trained farmers. As it happens, in our sample less than 15 per cent of the "progressive farmers" were below 40 years of age. Fourth, one-fifth of them were conservative landlord-farmers who had no commitment to a bourgeois revolution. The implications of this agglomeration of cross-cutting criteria are largely intractable. But it may still be asked, can a class which is incapable of reproducing itself be regarded as a potent agent of a capitalist transformation?

As has already been mentioned, the Buganda government was not altogether unaware of the deteriorating situation in agriculture. In fact in 1965 its Economic Planning Commission came closest to initiating a proper capitalist land reform. Convinced of the incompatibility between legally entrenched tenancies, scattered about in a random fashion on the various estates, and a progressive capitalist expansion, it recommended a semi-freehold system in which legal titles would be established for the tenants. In return the tenants would be required to pay a consolidated annual fee to the landlords. The exact formulation was as follows:

"The existing Kibanja tenants would be given a legal title to their plots, which could be bought and sold and pledged as security for loans. The owners of these kibanja tenures would only lose their land if they failed to make the 'annual payment', but the kibanja would not revert automatically to the Mailo landowner, who would have to take the kibanja owner to court and the land would be sold by public auction" (Buganda Planning Commission, 1965; p. 19).

This was a double-edged sword which would have forced competition for land among landlords and tenants alike and would have ensured ultimate consolidation in the hands of successful entrepreneurs through market forces. Needless to say, the recommendations were rejected by the landlord-dominated Lukiiko for what was called "political reasons". The immediate reason was that in some of the central counties of Buganda up to 50 per cent of the tenants are immigrants from Ruanda and Burundi, whom the Baganda accept only as a source of cheap labour and not as land-sharing neighbours, no matter how modest the scale.¹ However, one suspects that the fundamental reason was that the landlords did not wish to make economic concessions to the bourgeois elite inside and outside Buganda. They rightly saw the latter as their class enemies. Secondly, they did not want to lose control over their labouring tenants. In a nut-shell, they were prepared to permit neither a revision of land relations nor a transformation of production relations in the form of free peasants and rural proletarians. As far as that went, the issue could not have been any clearer.

What is not clear are the expectations of the Buganda Planning Commission. Why did they suppose that the landlords would sign their own death warrant? Who were the entrepreneurs on whose behalf they were acting? Like everybody else they had assumed the existence of "progressive mailo owners" who were capable of "developing their land on an estate basis". Historically, is not that the exact problem of the agricultural revolution in Buganda? How could it be taken for granted? The question still stands, who are going to be the subjects of the rural transformation in Buganda, given its present circumstances? What would be the basis of their claim to such a critical historical role?

A partial answer was given in 1966 when the oligarchical superstructure of Buganda was forcibly dismantled by Obote's regime. In that occasion the traditional monarchs, the chiefs and their henchmen were simply dismissed as unsuited for bringing about a radical change in

1. Given the fact that all tenanted land in Buganda amounts to 30-40 per cent of all arable land and that the immigrant tenants could not have had much more than 25 per cent of that, at 2-3 acres per person, then the issue was largely an emotive one.

Uganda. President Obote in his "forwarding looking" speech referred to the Buganda oligarchy as a "clique of selfish men, bami (lords)" who wanted to maintain a "feudal set-up". In contrast he pledged his government to the development of the "common man" (bawejjere). At last the bourgeois nationalists were staking their claim, but only as a bureau-
cratic elite. They had no clear plan for agrarian reform. The most they did in Buganda was to abolish official mailo land¹ (which amounted to no more than 4 per cent of the land) and to transfer all public land to the national government. Constraints on the Obote government might have been severe, but what matters is that it failed to institute an agrarian revolution anywhere in Uganda. In Buganda patron-client relations on the land stayed intact, uneven distribution of land continued² and the ideology of "progressive farmers" and "estate-farming" prevailed. The national government, having given the Buganda plutocrats short-shrift, did not have a clear idea how to undermine their economic base.

A clearer view did not emerge until 1969 when the Common Man's Charter - "The Move to the Left" - was announced by President Obote. Whereas in the 1966 national plan ("Work for Progress"), of which Obote was the Chairman, nothing had been said about control over the means of production or the terms of participation by the mass of the people, in the Common Man's Charter President Obote made references to "the participation of citizens in all sectors of the economy..... through collective ownership, viz. cooperatives and State enterprises" (Article 30). But cooperatives and state enterprises had existed in Uganda before and do not seem to have made any difference. As if aware of the meaninglessness of the statement, the President elaborated on his equivocation:

"The issue of nationalisation has already been determined and therefore it is a settled matter. It was in the 1962 Constitution, as it is in the Republican Constitution of 1967. Therefore no citizen or person in private enterprise should entertain the idea that the Government of Uganda cannot, whenever it is desirable

1. For details, see Uganda Constitution, 1967 and 1969.

2. In Buganda 250,000 tenants hold 30-40 per cent of the land at an average of 4-5 acres and a range of .08-9 acres, whereas 112,000 landowners hold 60-70 per cent of the land at an average of 10-15 acres and a range of 10-1,000 acres i.e. they own 4-5 times as much land as the tenants.

in the interests of the people, nationalise any or all privately-owned interests, mailo and freehold land and all productive assets or property, at any time, for the benefit of the people. The Party, therefore, directs the Government to work along these lines (Article 39).

It took five months before these declarations were given any substance. On 1 May, 1970 the President announced a 60 per cent take-over by the Government and "the workers" of oil companies, bus services, the copper mines, "every important manufacturing industry and plantation"; of banks, credit institutions and insurance companies (Common Man's Charter, p. 42). As in the 1966 document, absolutely nothing was said about control and distribution of land, or about its exploitation. The only positive general affirmation regarding exploitation of resources and which is an improvement on the "nationalisation" declaration is contained in the statement on the "Move to the Left":

"In this Charter, we lay emphasis first on the people being given massive education in operating and establishing institutions controlled, not by individuals, but by the people collectively. The massive education should aim at reorientating the attitudes of the people towards co-operation in the management of economic institutions, and away from individual and private enrichment. We therefore direct the Government to give education to the people to acquire new attitudes in the management of our economy where collective exploitation of our resources to the benefit of all will take the place of individual and private enterprise aimed at enriching a few" (Common Man's Charter, Article 40).

So we see that, despite the recognition by the Obote government that: "Agriculture is at present far the most important sector of the Uganda economy. It accounts for more than half of gross domestic product and for 80-90 per cent of overseas export earnings. Perhaps, even more important is the fact that as much as 90 per cent of the population are dependent on this sector for their incomes" (Uganda's Second Five-Year Plan - 1966-71; p. 55), throughout its tenure it continued to have neither a land policy nor a basic conception of agrarian reform in Buganda or elsewhere in Uganda. Why?

Conclusions

Obote, a bourgeois nationalist, was violently opposed to what he called "semi-feudalists" and "neo-traditionalists". But the imme-

diate reason why he was unable to deal with them effectively is that he lacked political organisation at the grass-roots level. He was thus confined to administrative manoeuvres and was extremely fearful of a popular rebellion in Buganda in the event of his government tackling seriously the sensitive land question there. The more basic reason for his failure is that he represented a weak class economically, the politico-bureaucratic elite. This is more a consuming than an investing class and in underdeveloped countries its control over land, as a class, is usually minimal. That leaves the landlords and kulaks in command in the countryside. Pretences aside, both classes are not known for their technological and economic dynamism. As we have seen, Buganda is no exception. There are two main contradictions implicit in this passage. One is the emergence of a bourgeois nation state without a capitalist class in the true economic sense. The other is the effective control of the greatest national asset, land, by anti-capitalist elements. The phenomenon is general in Africa and it might be worthwhile to ponder its implications.

Historically-speaking, the quintessence of Buganda's underdevelopment in common with other underdeveloped regions is its incorporation into capitalist production and marketing, without being given a chance to develop the material forces and the production relations appropriate to that economic mode. The latter was the monopoly of the colonialists and so was distribution. The tutelary intervention by the British at the various critical points in Buganda, with all its civilising influence, dialectically, created a dependency relation - Prosperos and Calibans. Therefore, the problem of rural development in Buganda is not merely how to increase productivity per man per acre, but rather the production or deliverance of such men and women. If imperialism committed underdeveloped countries to a parasitic and lopsided capitalism, then in Uganda post-independence policies did a great deal to re-inforce that prior position. Hence, there is a need for a re-direction of society. In Buganda this would entail a radical revision of the existing land relations, an abolition of the landlord-

tenant relationship¹ and a transfer of effective control over land to the majority of the people. This is not to be understood as a romantic "hand-over to the people" for the maintenance of a primitive and outmoded subsistence agriculture on small, isolated plots. That would constitute no improvement on the idea of "progressive farmers". A radical revision of production-relations should be seen as a necessary corollary of changed land-relations. Land should ^{be} made available for surplus production and the people who, historically and politically, can afford neither to be capitalists or subsistence men, must be organised and trained to carry out the task of economic development. This is reminiscent of President Obote's call before the demise of his government for a "massive education aimed at reorientating the attitudes of the people towards co-operation in the management of economic institutions, away from individual and private enrichment". But as Obote now knows and as is wont of all revolutions, this takes political courage and ideological clarity. In Uganda, if the Buganda landed oligarchy and kulaks have been obscurantist and economically decadent, the national political elite and staff have been equally obtuse and ideologically decadent.

1. In Buganda this is not desirable so much because of shortage of land among the general populace but mainly because as an institution and a way of life, it militates against the development of attitudes and modes of behaviour which are appropriate to the required social and economic transformation. Conservative writers such as West who advise against nationalisation or abolition of private land interests on the grounds that it "would merely alienate a large and influential group of landowners without necessarily helping the tenants and (that) it would present Government with an administrative task which could not possibly be handled (West, 1973; p. 189) miss the point and, above all, are perpetuating the same colonial ideology.

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