

# Abstracts of Some Recent Papers

## ANTHROPOLOGY

MENDES MOREIRA, 'Breve ensaio etnográfico acerca dos Bijagós', *Boletim cultural da Guiné Portuguesa*, Lisbon; vol. i, no. 1, pp. 69-115. A description of the Bijago (Bisao) who inhabit islands off the Guinea coast. They are supposed to number 20,000. They are tall (1.72 m.) and well proportioned, dolichocephalous. 'Our knowledge of the Bijago language is very limited.' [Sir H. H. Johnston listed Bisao or Pepel as Semi-bantu (no. 270); the vocabulary here given differs from his; some words are Bantu, e.g. *okanto*, woman, cf. Ila *mukaintu*; *kademo*, field, cf. B. *ku-lima*, cultivate.] They have no notion of hygiene; but to emit intestinal gas in the presence of another person is, through shame, sufficient reason for suicide. They believe in a Supreme Being, Nindo, and in good and bad spirits; also in reincarnation. 'The Bijago are one of the few tribes on earth in which woman occupies the primary place in the domestic and social organization, and also one of the few polyandrous tribes of the globe. As absolute mistress of her home she chooses the man with whom to cohabit as long as he pleases her. If she dislikes him and wants another she simply turns him out of the house . . . and he goes with his belongings without a word, scrupulously respecting the woman's will. She can, without dismissing him, take another man.' There is no crime of adultery. The Bijago ethnic group is divided into four families which take the name of their supposed ancestors: Orakuma, Ominka, Ogubane, and Oraga. These are distributed through the islands. The matriarchate is the basis of the domestic, social, and even political life. 'Queens' figure largely in Bijago history: to-day there are no queens or kings. The Government has substituted 'chiefs' elected by the people; but they are mere decorative figures and the real chiefs are those men or women who are heads of the four families; they live in the shade, without their identity being known except by their subjects, who obey them implicitly; the official 'chiefs' do nothing without consulting them.

## SOCIOLOGY

PIERRE DE BRIEY, 'Migration of Indigenous Workers in the Belgian Congo', *International Labour Review*; vol. lii, no. 4, pp. 335-51. A distinction is drawn between workers who migrate temporarily or casually and workers who are detached from their surroundings and uprooted. It is the latter group—and recruited men in a special degree—who need the most watchful social protection. The home community also needs protection. Before regulating the recruitment and engagement of workers it is of the highest importance to watch over the preservation of the indigenous society as a whole. Two kinds of measures have been adopted to this end: a land policy that tends to restrict or stop the granting of concessions to European enterprises in certain zones; and steps which aim at stopping recruitment and even engagement of workers in specified areas. There are signs of weakening in regard to land policy. In regard to restriction of recruiting the principal difficulty lay in discovering the composition of a given population. Demographic inquiries were undertaken. If the ratios in a satisfactory community be taken to be 100 men to 106 women, 240 women and children to every 100 men, and 130 children to every 100 women, in 1938 the ratios for the whole colony were 106.2 women to every 100 men, 239.3 women and children to every 100 men, and 125.2 children to every 100 women. These are averages calculated on the basis of administrative censuses, but 'they do give an approximate picture of the situation'. In that year there was a total of 528,527 'workers' (presumably working for other people), including 218,233 working in their own surroundings and climate, and 310,294 working

more or less far from their homes. Those in the first group represent less than 10 per cent. of the male population; those in the second rather over 10 per cent. The discrepancy between the proportion allowed by law and the actual figures is explicable by the fact that spontaneous engagements are not restricted by law; and in various districts 60, 70, 100 per cent. of the migratory labour was purely voluntary. M. de Briey thinks that these spontaneous engagements, even if too numerous, cannot have the disastrous social effects of excessive recruiting; yet the social consequences remain serious. The indigenous population tends to become a vast proletariat. The economic focus of indigenous life is displaced. Even where the Africans continue to cultivate their fields, or to see that this is done, the crops are no longer as varied or as extensive as they used to be. The social cohesion of the group is modified. If statistics are correct, one able-bodied man out of about four works for a European and the proportion is higher if the number of men working indirectly for the undertaking is added. And to obtain an idea of the total number withdrawn from their customary surroundings it would also be necessary to add the population of the centres not under tribal law. These figures are pre-war; during the war greater numbers were employed; and it is expected that the total industrial labour force will remain at a higher level than that of 1938. How in these circumstances can indigenous society be protected? Is it possible to counteract spontaneous engagement? One way might be to diminish the attraction of employment or to create a rival attraction.

After reviewing measures taken to protect workers, the writer considers the economic and social aspects of the stabilization of labour. The Belgian Congo has had to cope with great difficulties owing to its possession of large-scale industries with a high demand for labour, whereas the indigenous population was primitive, sparse, and debilitated. In combating the evil, State action was closely co-ordinated with that taken by the large undertakings which prepared for stabilization by favouring long-term engagements and by providing for the health and well-being of the workers. Medical expenses form about 10 per cent. of the total cost of indigenous labour employed by the Mining Union Co. In 1939 99.3 per cent. of the total number employed had signed a contract for three years; 59 per cent. had served for more than three years. The death-rate declined from 51 per thousand in 1926 to 3.67 in 1939; the birth-rate rose from 142 per thousand households in 1927 to 163 in 1939—in 1942 to 179. Stabilization of labour has become a fact. This will not abolish the evil; to a certain extent, it may even be said to perpetuate it; but it makes it smaller. 'It is the social measures taken in Belgian Congo which have enabled a primitive society to achieve an industrial output that is enormous considering the sparsity of the population, and yet to escape dissolution, weakening or serious external deterioration.' 'It will be highly interesting to follow the course of social policy in the Belgian Congo during the years to come. Even now it appears that during the last few years, in spite of all the limitations imposed on recruiting and engagement, the growth in the indigenous labour supply has been much more rapid than in the population as a whole. This raises the question whether the Belgian colonial Government will not be faced one day with having to choose between the demands of an ever-growing industry and the needs of the population on which that growth is based. . . economic policy must be co-ordinated with social policy. Whatever measure the Government adopts, success will depend on the human factor. Therefore, any attempts on these lines ought to begin with a study of the indigenous community, a study not only of the demographic conditions of the population, but of the physical, economic, social and political conditions most conducive to its development.'

J. VAN WING, 'La Situation actuelle des populations congolaises', *Institut Royal Colonial Belge, Bulletin des séances*, Brussels; vol. xvi, no. 3. The veteran missionary sets out neither to criticize nor to judge, but to describe facts. During five years of war all the native popula-

tion of Belgian Congo was mobilized to produce the utmost possible and at the utmost speed; it was inevitable that the producer was sacrificed to production. The white personnel suffered; Native society suffered more. How stands it with that society now in regard to number, composition, vitality, mentality? Consider first the non-tribal population of the cities and of the centres of labour: of a total population of 10,390,000 in 1944, these numbered 1,430,000. Since 1935 the proportion has grown from 5 per cent. to 14, and 75 per cent. of the increase is due to the war. The exodus has been chiefly of young men; in many regions a good number of villages are empty of them. Statistics of 1944 show 623,000 men, 415,000 women, and 450,000 children outside the chiefdoms. Not more than one-half or one-third of the children are related to the adults: the rest are there on their own. In the large centres schools are sufficient and attendance of boys is improving; but many of the girls leave school too early and give themselves to prostitution. In general one must say that the licentiousness among boys and girls is disastrous. In some centres the majority of women live in regular unions and the children are numerous; in others most of them have neither regular unions nor children. One cause of their immorality is their lack of employment. Among the men three classes are to be distinguished: the independent, non-salaried; the wage-earners (domestic 'boys', labourers, &c.); the *évolués*, comprising all the men who have no manual trade. Their own criterion is: not to work like common blacks, to be lodged and dressed like Whites, and to talk French. There are tens of thousands of them in Belgian Congo; the capital alone has nearly 2,000. It has been a common mistake to pay them on a higher scale than the best artisans: a clerk may begin on 1,000 francs a month, while a roadman has 100 francs and an agricultural monitor with four children has no more than 75. They are prodigal with their money. In the large centres up to 90 per cent. are not regularly married or are unfaithful: no homes, no family, and therefore no stability, but only an egoism centred on the individual, and no curbs such as there are in a Bantu community. Almost all the *évolués* are baptized Catholics or Protestants. Most of them have had a good education. But because of their matrimonial situation, the majority cannot practise their new religion and so get no support and no restraint from religion. It is true that some live a good moral life, but these are a minority. Among the majority a lamentable mentality has developed, marked by a muffled animosity toward the Whites. It is a dangerous mentality when you think of the extent to which they are cognizant of what goes on in offices behind the scenes. Father Van Wing proceeds to tell of the efforts to influence this important class for good and makes special mention of the quarterly *La Voix du Congolais* started by the Government Bureau de l'Information and edited entirely by *évolués*: editors and writers have full freedom to express their ideas. But side by side with groups of sincere men who do not hide their views there are secret associations of these 'civilized' Africans.

What of the people living in tribal conditions? Are they increasing or decreasing? In the absence of accurate censuses it is difficult to answer. According to statistics which are sufficiently approximate, the people may be divided into three groups: those increasing; those diminishing; those stationary. In the last category are the Baluba, the Alur, Logo, Lugwari, Walendu, and others, making in all not one-half of the total population. Of the regressive tribes, the Bobangi, north of the Kasai, have already disappeared; the large Nkundu-Mongo group is so deeply affected that its best friends are in despair; the Batetela are in the same case. The whole central basin, if we must believe observers on the spot, will be emptied unless remedies to fit the situation are found. The progressive peoples are few: among them the Lokele of Stanleyville, the Bapende and the Bakongo of the Lower Congo. Around Kisantu there was an increase of 600 per cent. between 1915 and 1945. 'After prolonged observations and discreet inquiries in the different regions, my opinion is that the population is decreasing and that the rate of regression will be more rapid in the next decade than in the last.'

## ECONOMICS

WILLIAM ALLAN, 'African Land Usage', *Human Problems in British Central Africa, The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, Livingstone; no. 3, June 1945, pp. 13-20. In Northern Rhodesia a deliberate and systematic survey of African systems has been undertaken and a new technique evolved for estimating the population-carrying capacity of different classes of land. The very long dry season, and the great extent of the weak, leached soils of the ancient land surfaces, impose a low limit on the capacity. Emphasis is laid upon the conception of critical density—the greatest number of people the land will maintain in perpetuity—as being partly relative to the traditional system of agriculture employed. The Soil Selection Systems of some tribes (Ngoni, Chewa, Nsenga, and Lamba) have a capacity of about 22 persons per square mile; the Semi-Chitemene System of the Swaka, about 12; the Mixed System of the Western Lala, about 7; the primitive Small-Circle Chitemene of the Wisa and eastern Lala, probably no more than 5; the stronger soil types, used under Soil Selection methods, will carry 120 people to the square mile. The traditional systems must obviously be modified sooner or later to allow for increasing populations. At present natural increase rates of 1 to 1½ per cent. per annum are not uncommon, perhaps; and these rise in some areas to 5 per cent. owing to immigration; the mean density for the whole country is little more than 6 persons per square mile. [This is calculated on the total area; would it not have been better to give the figure for the reserves only?] 'Over great areas of the country population densities are well below the critical point for the traditional systems and often this critical point is unlikely to be reached for fifty years or a good deal more. Consequently the necessity for modification of the traditional systems to conform with the carrying capacity of the land has in these areas yet to arise.' Many of the traditional systems, however, are degenerating even where there is more than ample land. Frequently the subsidiary crops are neglected or have almost disappeared. The value of the diet is seriously lowered, with, probably, an increased death-rate among infants and the aged. The chief cause is migration of the men. 'Far too high a proportion of the village labour power is absent at any one time.' More dramatic degeneration, coupled with rapid land destruction, has taken place over areas great in the aggregate, owing to over-population and, on the railway line, to the use of the plough and the unlimited market for maize. In a few parts congestion has reached extreme limits—300 people and more to the square mile. 'It would seem that degenerate changes such as I have outlined, often accentuated by large scale production of cash crops, are taking place over much of Africa. The rate of land degeneration may not be sufficient to warrant Jack's prophecy that "the end of the century would be an optimistically distant date for the end of a human dominion over the land" but it contains enough of probability to be a sobering reflection at the beginning of an era devoted to development.'

Where the processes of degeneration have not gone too far, the traditional systems can be gradually modified and used as bases on which to build more permanent and stable systems of land usage. Mr. Allan proceeds to discuss permanent agriculture based on livestock. Outside of Barotse-land the use of stock manure is unknown and is opposed by cattle-owning tribes. Perhaps at most one-tenth of the Africans are cattle-owners and these cattle are distributed almost exclusively in groups—the distribution being limited and determined by the tsetse (over vast areas), the presence of good pastoral land, and the ability to obtain cattle. Improvements involving the use of animal manure cannot now, for many years to come, find more than a limited application. In the cattle and plough areas of the railway line, where the traditional systems have disappeared and an agricultural revolution is necessary, a system of rotational cropping with manuring has been experimentally demonstrated: the problem is to ensure its adoption. When adopted the limiting factor becomes the stock-carrying capacity of the natural grazing: for most of the country

this is very low owing to the prolonged rainy season. If cattle could be stall-fed on hay and fodder crops, obviously the human carrying capacity of the land could be greatly increased, but in view of the poverty of the people, and their attitude to labour and to cattle, Mr. Allan thinks this a remote possibility except in a few and specially favoured areas. He concludes his article (which should be studied as a whole): 'The development of African land usage is far from being the simple problem that some would have us believe. . . . I myself believe that in the era of development it will be better, as a general principle, to guide and adapt the traditional systems of agriculture, rather than attempt to sweep them away and to replace them with alien methods.'

## LAW

PIERRE PIRON, 'Le Mariage monogamique et le Statut familial des Indigènes', *Lovania*, Élisabethville; no. 8, pp. 110-43. The war provoked such disturbances in the social and domestic order that the government of Belgian Congo could temporize no longer. There was a time when it was thought that a solution of many problems could be found by allowing Africans who aspired to a higher status to escape from the customary law. This exemption, which any African could obtain without difficulty and notably by contracting marriage before a civil officer, sufficed in the eyes of the law to turn a savage into a civilized being. Disenchantment followed. Our legal rules, incompatible as they were with Native mentality, proved impotent to replace customary discipline, the more so because no penalties were provided for defections from the duties of the new status. The remedy was worse than the disease. Civil marriage, and the *immatriculation* of which it was a corollary, too often favoured disintegration of *mores*; civil marriage ended by falling into ridicule. This unhappy experience having shown the necessity of not prematurely withdrawing Africans from their ancestral laws, it was believed that great hopes might be founded on the remarkable evolutionary faculty of the customary law. Ably, tactfully guided, that evolution could permit the almost automatic adaptation of custom to newly introduced elements. But the evolution of customs can only follow and not precede the evolution of manners (*mœurs*) and we are still in the transition period. To wait until a Christian custom be planted firmly all over the Colony would risk prolonged misunderstandings in many regions. So the intervention of the legislator was seen to be necessary; but no agreement could be reached as to what should be done. For over thirty years various projects were under consideration, but divergent principles could not be reconciled. Then on 10 July 1945, urged on by present post-war conditions, the Governor-General signed Ordinance no. 157 for the organization and protection of native monogamous marriage. It allowed for the registration of marriages previously contracted according to the religious or customary form chosen by the parties: the registration renders monogamous by law a union which is already so in fact. Why was it not confined to Christian marriages? At first this was the intention but it was abandoned in the interests of liberty of conscience. The Ordinance has foreseen the possibility that Africans, who have not made a Christian confession, might desire to contract a monogamous marriage and have it protected by registration. The necessary conditions were fixed by Ordinance no. 290 of October 1945. A Christian marriage may be registered if it is attested by a certificate signed by a minister of religion. A customary marriage, and its conformity with custom, must be verified by the president of the territorial tribunal when he has satisfied himself as to the consent of the spouses and their families and on production of attestation by a Native authority. Registration is not obligatory but is done at the request of the parties. After a period of trial, varying according to regional conditions, presumably it will gradually be made obligatory everywhere.

The customary law sanctions the rights and reciprocal duties of the spouses. Registration does not annul these sanctions; on the contrary, it expressly confirms them so far as they



re not opposed to public order. This is right, since customary disciplines will for a long time remain one of the solid supports of the family structure. Registration forbids polygamy in any form and imposes upon the spouses reciprocal duties of cohabitation, fidelity and assistance, and the obligation to share in the expenses of the household and in the rearing of children. It is chiefly in the repression of conjugal infidelities that the Ordinance departs from Belgian law. Penalties fall on anyone instrumental in breaking the marriage bond—even on a European seducer. A man risks penal servitude if he is proved to have knowingly favoured his wife's misconduct. [The writer does not enter into details of the penalties.] If the union proves to be temporarily or definitely impossible, the law allows for (a) release from cohabitation; (b) *séparation de corps*; (c) cancellation of the registration. Cancellation, a last resource, is not divorce; it simply does away with the effects of registration, placing the spouses in the juridical situation in which they were before it was done. Divorce would take place under customary law. A Christian would be forbidden to marry again.

This Ordinance is an original attempt to reconcile the principles of the metropolitan law and the realities of native life. It is open to criticism on the ground that it is applicable only to Africans. It contains some real innovations: the bringing together of civil effects and repressive measures resulting from registration; the implicit recognition of the possibility of christianizing customs; the renunciation of civil marriage; and the legal consecration of the effects of religious marriage. M. Piron criticizes it on the ground that it consecrates a rupture between law and fact: registration ceases while the marriage subsists. Cancellation should take place only after the marriage is dissolved. With this amendment it would become, in the hands of administrators and missionaries, an instrument of the first grade in the promotion of the moral evolution of the native population, in the stabilization of the family, and increase of the birth-rate. The rest of the article sets out other suggestions for reform.

#### EDUCATION

HOPE HAY, 'Mass Literacy in Northern Rhodesia', *The International Review of Missions*, London; vol. xxxv, no. 139, July 1946. Describes an experiment in the Mindolo mine compound. After three months of preparation—the production of a primer in Bemba, a literary census which revealed that of 3,692 resident adults, 2,347 were totally illiterate (including some who had lost what they had learnt at school), and specific training of the two Jeanes teachers who were to assist—the campaign began in April 1945. Simultaneously an attempt was made to meet the needs of the educated and semi-educated by classes in English. Mrs. Hay is convinced by her experience of the superiority of the method of individual teaching that was adopted with the illiterates. Departing somewhat from the Laubach system, they placed obligation upon the learner by requiring him (or her) to find his (or her) own teacher among the newly literate or among educated friends. After eleven months 752 adults (574 men and 178 women) were known to have learnt to read and write: no fewer than 51 tribes were represented among them. 'The average time taken by a completely illiterate person to become literate is less than a month'—i.e. he is able to read vernacular newspapers. Lapsed illiterates took longer. Mrs. Hay assigns these reasons for the speed with which success was obtained: (a) the vernacular spelling is phonetic; (b) a suitable primer; (c) individual teaching; (d) the intense application of the adults to their task. They did not lose interest after passing the final test but joined reading circles. 'There is no stopping them and we have been hard put to it to cope with them all. . . . We see that the mental capacity of the African adult is in no way inferior to that of other peoples. Given appropriate tools and shown a method which suits his nature, he can finish a job as speedily and as efficiently as anyone.'