

■ Despite the repressive measures of the British in all parts of Africa to keep her hold on her dependent territories, the natives are fighting back

The Bataka Movement In Uganda

By George Padmore

THE postwar spirit of nationalist awakening has penetrated into the East African Protectorate of Uganda, where the people revolted against the corrupt and effete Native Administration of the Buganda Kingdom in January, 1945. But for the timely intervention of British military forces, the Kabaka might have been forced to abdicate and his place taken by his brother, the late king's favorite son. Scores of Africans were killed and wounded, and the then prime minister, Martin Luther Nsibirwa, was assassinated by a young nationalist.

After order was restored, many prominent Africans, including the uncle of the Kabaka, Prince Suna, and a former prime minister, Samwiri Wamala, as well as a number of Saza chiefs, were arrested by the British government. Some were banished without trial to other parts of the Protectorate, while others were exiled to the Seychelles—the

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“British Siberia” in the Indian Ocean.

On April 25, 1949, renewed disturbances broke out in Kampala when angry crowds of natives attacked the headquarters of the puppet Native Government presided over by the Kabaka or native king. Prompt action was again taken by the British authorities to protect their quislings, through whom they exercise dictatorship over the five million blacks under the system of indirect rule. On this occasion, troops were brought from the neighboring colony of Kenya to reinforce the local police. Several Africans were shot and over 1,400 arrested, including leaders of the popular movement known as the *Bataka*. Martial law was proclaimed and the Governor, Sir John Hall, issued instructions that “any police officer, administrative officer, or a chief of the Buganda government may in his discretion disperse any assembly of five persons or more. If any such assembly, in the opinion of a police officer of the rank of assistant inspector or above, seems likely to commit a breach of the peace, the

officer, after due warning, may employ such forces as he considers necessary, including the use of firearms."

The Governor also assured his European subordinates that "if any harm or death is caused by such force the police officer or any other person aiding him will not be liable to prosecution."

In addition to assuming full dictatorial powers, the Governor declared all strikes illegal and suppressed the African Farmers Union, whose president, I. K. Muzazi, arrived in London in January, 1948, to protest to the Colonial Office against the exploitation of the native cotton growers by European and especially Indian ginners. "We have been greatly impressed and profoundly shocked by the volume and convincing nature of the evidence which we have heard as to the widespread deliberate cheating of the growers over the selling of his cotton," declared the report of the Government Cotton Industry Commission of 1948. Nevertheless, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, who was once the greatest critic of the exploitation of Africans, has refused to see the accredited representative of the Buganda farmer.

TIME-HONORED EXCUSE

Despite repeated efforts by members of Parliament to elicit information from the Government, Mr. Creech-Jones and his under secretary, Mr. Rees-Williams, have refused to comment on the economic and political grievances of the Buganda workers and peasants, hiding behind the time-honored excuse that the Governor having appointed a

commission of inquiry consisting of one man, a former chief justice, silence must be maintained until the commissioner makes his report. It will be several months before this report is published.

Meanwhile, letters smuggled out of Uganda to Mr. Semakula Mulumba, the representative of the *Bataka*, Elders of the Clans, in London, have brought alarming reports on the repressive measures adopted by the British authorities to suppress the nationalist aspirations of the Africans.

KILL WITH IMPUNITY

"The Protectorate Government is killing the people with impunity and malice. Nobody dare protest. An average of eight to ten bodies are buried every day. Other bodies are dumped in the same pit. Nobody is allowed to see them," asserts one report made public at a protest meeting held in London on June 8, 1949, under auspices of the Colored Colonial Workers Association of Great Britain. Another report alleges that since April 26 more than 300 Africans have been killed and more than 2,000 arrested, and declares that "the beating and every kind of torture inflicted on them exceeds Christ's sufferings." The British authorities, says the same report, "brought in troops with trucks and armored cars, full of gasoline, with which they burned the houses of the chiefs, of employees of the Protectorate Government and the Buganda Government." This was used as a pretext for arresting the *Bataka Elders*.

As a result of these shocking revelations, Mr. Fenner Brockway, for-

mer member of Parliament and chairman of the International Committee of the Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism, has appealed to Prime Minister Attlee to appoint

a parliamentary commission to visit Uganda and enquire into the cause of the disturbances. "The unrest in Uganda," asserts Mr. Brockway, who is a member of the British Labor party, "arises from the popular demands—first, for the democratization of the native assembly, and, second, for the right of farmers to process their cotton crops co-operatively and to export in bulk to Britain without the intervention of profiteering middle-men. These demands would appear to be reasonable and progressive and ought to be welcomed by a Labor Colonial Secretary."

BACKGROUND POLITICAL

In this part of Equatorial Africa, Imperialism has always been closely linked with religion. The missionaries work hand-in-glove with the British officials. It was largely through the behavior of the Church of England missionaries and Catholic White Fathers, who instigated religious civil wars amongst their African converts during the latter part of the last century, that Uganda became a British protectorate. Even since the British have made it a rule that the *Kabaka* (king) as well as his two chief cabinet ministers, the *Katikiro* (prime minister) and the *Omuwanika* (finance minister) must be members of the Church of England, the *Omulamuzi* (chief justice) is always a Roman Catholic. It is not surprising, therefore, that the *Kabaka* and his ministers are under constant pressure from the British protectorate officials on the one hand and the religious hierarchy on the other to make economic concessions to State and Church.



Alice Schalek

BUGANDA woman, Uganda, Africa.

Before the present *Kabaka*, Mutesa II, reached his majority in 1939, the then governor had appointed the three ministers a Council of Regents. These men were completely under the influence of the Resident, the senior British official who acts as the "adviser" to the Buganda native administration, headed by these same ministers. In 1941 the Regents became involved in a court scandal arising out of the marriage of *Nanasole*, the Queen Mother (widow of the late king, *Daudi Chwa*) to a commoner named *Kigozi*. To placate the indignant people, the British forced Martin Luther Nsibirwa, the prime minister, to resign. He was succeeded by Samwiri Wamala. The Buganda also demanded the dismissal of the finance minister, Sarwano Kulubya who, in association with the minister, was held responsible for the disgrace brought upon the Buganda nation by the Queen Mother's *mésalliance*.

While the British were prepared to sacrifice Nsibirwa, they refused to dispense with the service of Kulubya, their most trusted agent in the native administrative setup. It was during this 1948 crisis that certain progressive young Buganda formed a nationalist movement which secured the support of the *Bataka*, the traditional Elders of Buganda clans and guardians of the ancestral land rights of the *Bakopi*, the peasant communities. In order to put an end to the corruption of the ministers and certain influential Saza chiefs, who constituted the main pillars of the native administration, the educated Africans demanded the democratization of the *Lukiko*—the native parliament—and the introduction of

freedom of assembly, speech, and press. But the British government refused to agree to these demands.

BISHOP BRITISH AGENT

The supporters of the *Bataka* movement, now a sort of united front between the Elders of the Clans and the progressive educated youths, accused the British protectorate government of bringing pressure on the *Kabaka* and his ministers, especially the prime minister, Samwiri Wamala, to sign away certain Africans' land rights so as to enable the Colonial Development Corporation and other foreign capitalist interests to exploit the country's mineral resources once the proposed hydro-electrical scheme is completed as part of the British ten-year-development plan.

Similar allegations have been made by the *Bataka* against the Anglican Bishop of Uganda, the Right Reverend Dr. Stuart. This British church dignitary has been accused of entering into a secret agreement by which rights in church lands were ceded to the British government.

Under the Anglo-Uganda agreement of 1900, which forced British sovereignty upon the Kingdom of Buganda, over 70 square miles of land belonging to the *bakopi* or peasants were alienated from the Africans and vested in the Anglican hierarchy for the exclusive benefit of the Native Church in Uganda. The land in question is reported to be rich in uranium and other minerals. The native clergy and laity, many of them supporters of the *Bataka* movement, are opposed to the transaction. They do not want to part with their property, which they feel should be

used for exclusive religious purposes. In a petition addressed to the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations, they accuse their Bishop Stuart of being "a British government agent who persistently works with misguided Christian zeal for the said purpose of substituting social confusion for the order established by our ancestors in the whole society of Uganda."

LAMBETH CONFERENCE

During the Lambeth Conference in 1948, a similar document was circulated to the archbishops and bishops of the Anglican Communion. In it the Africans alleged that the Bishop of Uganda was trying to set the Church, in that the protectorate was incorporated into the Archbishopric of East Africa, against the wishes of the native clergy and laity in furtherance of a British Imperial scheme to unite the three East African territories—Uganda, Kenya, and Tanganyika—under the political and religious control of European settlers, who are pressing their claim for setting up an all-white dominion linked up with the Rhodesias and Nyasaland.

It was against this background of general dissatisfaction with British political imperialism and religious exploitation that the first disturbance occurred in January, 1945. It was precipitated by an economic strike among the workers in Kampala for increased wages to meet the rise in the postwar cost of living. But the outbreak soon developed into a popular demonstration against the Native Administration, and in particular against the Kabaka's most hated minister, the Treasurer Kulu-

bya, whom the British maintained in office despite the people's demand for his dismissal for the part he played in the Queen Mother's *mésalliance*.

The 1945 revolt was even more brutally suppressed than the recent disturbances. However, the hated Kulubya was forced to resign. His place was taken by a younger man, Kawalya Kagwa, the son of Sir Opolo Kagwa, a former prime minister and one of those who signed away Uganda to the British in 1900. The new minister served as a lieutenant in the King's East African Army in Burma during the last war.

After "law and order were restored and Pan-Britannica vindicated, the Governor ordered the arrest of the then prime minister, Samwiri Wamala, who was later banished from Buganda. It is said that Wamala had refused to play the British game and collaborate with Kulubya in selling out his country to foreign interests.

UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT

With Wamala out of the way and the nationalist movement driven underground, the Governor brought Martin Luther Nsibirwa out of retirement and reappointed him prime minister in place of the banished Wamala. Indignation seized the people and trouble started again. But before Martin Luther Nsibirwa was able to get the hand-picked chiefs in the Lukiko to approve the plans of the British government, he was assassinated by George William Senkatuka. The young nationalist shot the prime minister as he was about to enter the Anglican Cathedral of

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ing, interesting and extremely likeable. The months I had spent beside them had strengthened my opinions, fortified my admiration, and cleared my tongue to speak out for the Negro. My voice is small, yet a thousand small voices can combine into a roar.

BATAKA MOVEMENT

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Namirembe on September 5, 1945.

With Kulubya forced out of office and Misibirwa suddenly removed by an assassin's bullet, panic seized the British officials. They considered these chiefs their most reliable agents in the Native Administration and decided to strike terror in the hearts of the people. Hundreds of Africans were arrested and banished without trial. Every government department was purged of supporters of the Bataka movement. Anyone suspected of "dangerous thoughts" was dismissed. Among the victims were fourteen Gombolola chiefs, a former Budo schoolmaster, the librarian of the High Court, the head typist in the Protectorate Agent's office at Kampala, and several wealthy and influential landowners who opposed the policy of European settlement as in Kenya. Senkatuka was tried and hanged. He refused to implicate others in his crime, declaring that he did what he did to save his country from traitors like Martin Luther Nsibirwa.

ONE-MAN COMMISSION

After the reign of terror subsided, the Governor appointed a one-man

commission then, as now, to white-wash official action. The Commissioner, who was also a chief justice, still in the service of the Uganda government, declared that "the police and military displayed great restraint and patience, and did not fire until there was really no other course open to them consistent with the proper carrying out of their duties." The Government was vindicated! However, the report admitted that both Government and police were taken by surprise, being without any information suggesting the possibility of the disturbances which occurred. To avoid a repetition of this defect, the Commissioner of Police suggested a fusion of the CID, the local Scotland Yard, with the Security Intelligence Bureau, and several police officers outlined schemes for the organization of a special branch, one of the principal duties of which would be to keep the authorities thoroughly posted as to what was going on amongst the Africans, sense public opinion, and try to obtain the earliest and fullest information of any subversive activities.

"BLACK MARTYRS"

Ever since the religious civil wars of the last century, the Buganda describe their country as "the land of black martyrs." Only too true. For recent events have shown that today as in the past, the soil of Uganda must be soaked in African blood in order to bring a little justice and political democracy to the common people. Thanks to the sacrifices made by those who were killed and suffered exile, the Colonial Office decided to introduce a few reforms.

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BATAKA MOVEMENT

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In September, 1945, the Governor sent the Kabaka to Madalene college. Cambridge university. With the young king out of the country, Sir John Hall, with the approval of the Secretary of the State for Colonies, ordered the Kabaka's ministers to reorganize the Lukiko and alter the entire system of indirect rule administration.

Besides reforming the native parliament by granting the common people the right to elect 31 out of the 89 members, who until 1945 were all handpicked Saza and Gombolola chiefs, paid functionaries of the British government, as their principal tax-gatherers. But even this reform fell short of the demands put forward constitutionally by the Bataka before the organization was declared illegal.

Under the Mengo Agreement of

1900, the British imperial government had pledged to respect the land rights of the bakopi or peasants and to allow them to elect 60 representatives to the Lukiko. But during the past half century the British officials responsible for the carrying out of the treaty have so gerrymandered the Native Administration that none but their puppets ever get into the Lukiko. And even now that the people have caught up with them, the Labor government has only grudgingly granted them 31 seats. And even this apparent concession has been nullified by arresting and imprisoning the very men whom the people would like to select to represent them. Public assembly is suppressed; trade unions, political organizations and farmers societies have been made illegal, and the native press completely muzzled.

In August, 1948, the Governor amended the existing press and censorship laws to confer upon himself dictatorial powers over the press and public assemblies. Under the new regulations, he has the power to insist that any newspaper publishing an article, report, letter, or advertisement which, in his opinion contains any statement of fact which is false or distorted, shall publish on a specified date, and in the same position as the original article, a correction compiled by him. Failure to do so will constitute a criminal offense and the newspaper proprietor or editor, or both, will be liable to a fine or imprisonment, or both.

Under an amendment to the police ordinance, the Governor can, if he considers it necessary, proclaim any area a "gazetted area" in which it will be unlawful to convene an as-

sembly at which more than 250 persons are to be present unless prior permission is obtained from the British authorities. Such a gathering includes processions, and penalties will be imposed on organizers and those taking part.

ASSEMBLYING PROHIBITED

During the recent troubles not more than five Africans were allowed to assemble in public. The editors of the African newspapers *Gambuze* and *Mugobansonga* are now serving sentences of imprisonment for publishing a letter signed by fourteen natives asking for the resignation of the present prime minister.

Another African, Mr. F. Kibuke-Musoke, former assistant minister of finance who served twenty-five years in the British government service in Uganda and came to London in 1948 to consult the Secretary of State concerning certain public matters in his country, was arrested on his return to Uganda and sentenced to six months' imprisonment for being in possession of a copy of the petition sent to the United Nations Trusteeship Council by the people of Buganda, as well as the letter circulated to the British and American bishops at the Lambeth Conference during Mr. Kubuka-Musoke's visit to England.

And to add insult to injury, the Governor, with the approval of the

Colonial Office, hastened to justify his high-handed actions by branding those Africans who dare to demand the implementation of those lofty principles of racial equality and democracy, so frequently enunciated by Mr. Creech-Jones, as "Communist. Even the *Bataka*—the traditional Elders of the Buganda Clans, an institution which forms an integral part of the social structure of the Uganda nation, have suddenly become the "agents of the Kremlin" in the eyes of Sir John Hall and his official minions.

Commenting upon these allegations, Mr. Brockway in his appeal to the prime minister says that the Governor's aspersion "apparently is based on the fact that the demands of the *Bataka* were forwarded to the Russian delegation at the United Nations and were voiced by Mr. Gromyko. Reports from Uganda indicate that in fact Communist influence has been negligible, but the condemnation of a movement which has mass support as Communist has inevitably had the opposite effect to what the authorities desire." This internationally known English Socialist concludes by warning his party that "confidence in Labor's administration of Uganda will be restored only by thorough investigation of the grievances of the people and by bold measures to remedy them."

Truly, those whom the gods seek to destroy they first make mad!



DID YOU KNOW —

That Mississippi ranks first among the states in Negro farm ownership?