

# Mozambican Labour to Rhodesia

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An important aspect of relations between Mozambique and Rhodesia during the colonial period was the supply by Mozambique of migrant labour to Rhodesia. The cumulative effect of decades of recruitment was that by 1974 there were an estimated 79,778 Mozambican men and 8,048 women working on the farms, mines and industries of Rhodesia

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The flow of migrant labour to Rhodesia from Mozambique, like the flow of migrant labour to South Africa, resulted from the backwardness of Portuguese capital in relation to other capitals operating in the region. There was, however, an important difference in the Mozambican migrant labour flow between South Africa and Rhodesia. Whereas most of the men who went to work in South Africa were legally recruited by the official recruitment agency of the South African mines — WENELA — most of the men who went to Rhodesia did so clandestinely and illegally. Recognised recruiting organisations operated only during part of the colonial period (1901-1933 and 1947-1959) and covered only a limited part of the central catchment zone, namely, Tete Province. Most Mozambican migrants from the central provinces (Manica, Sofala, Tete and Zambezia) (<sup>1</sup>) were recruited 'clandestinely' and 'unofficially' by Rhodesian employers and/or their agents

acting outside the control of the Portuguese authorities.

The critical difference in the two systems of labour recruitment seem to us to lie in the fact that the areas of central Mozambique which served as a labour reserve for Rhodesia were also areas from which (non-Portuguese) plantation capital also drew its labour supplies. There was, therefore, competition between plantation capital and Rhodesian employers for the available labour. Changing patterns in the supply of Mozambican migrant labour for Rhodesia were thus the outcome of a competitive struggle between Rhodesian mines and agriculture and the plantations of central Mozambique.

### **The Plantation sector**

Plantation production was first initiated in central Mozambique, in particular in Zambezia Province, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. From the start the sector was dominated by non-Portuguese capital attracted by the concessions of land offered by the colonial state and by the right to collect taxes and conscript labour from peasants residing on the concessions. However, despite these rights, the provision of adequate supplies of labour was the major problem the plantations had to face until 1930. Firstly, plantation production relied heavily on unskilled labour and as production expanded so did the demand for labour. By 1923 labour demand on the main sugar plantations alone, (not counting copra and sisal) had risen from a few hundred men in 1897 to 20,000 men a year. Secondly, much of central Mozambique and especially the border areas were loosely-administered by the colonial state and concessionary companies. Hence, peasants could flee from labour and tax demands. Thirdly, and most importantly, the plantations had to compete with the higher wages offered by the mines in South Africa, directly until 1913 when legal recruiting was restricted to areas south of the Save river and indirectly thereafter. They also had to compete with the higher wages offered by the Rhodesian labour market which lay adjacent to the plantations' own labour supply areas. The various labour agreements concluded by Portugal with Rhodesia must thus be examined within the context of this regional competition for labour. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the 1913, 1934 and 1947 Agreements were all enacted in periods when Rhodesian mines and agriculture were anxious either to move into a labour supply area abandoned by WENELA, or to prevent WENELA from extending its own labour catchment area. The labour Agreements between

Portugal and Rhodesia for Mozambican labour were concluded, in other words, in response to the changing structure of labour demand and supply in South Africa and Rhodesia rather than in Mozambique.

The interests of the parties to the Labour Agreements were not, of course, identical. With the exception of the 1947 Agreement, which followed the acute wartime labour crisis, the volume of clandestine Mozambican labour flowing into Rhodesia in search of higher wages and less repressive working conditions was such that the Rhodesians had no need of official recruiting machinery. Nor indeed, was such a system in their interests, for clandestine labour was at all times cheaper than legally contracted labour.

For the plantations in central Mozambique on the other hand competition for labour from Rhodesia tended to put pressure on wages. The plantations therefore wanted to stop, or at least to limit, the flow of clandestine labour from Mozambique. Yet, it was precisely because wages on plantations were low that the clandestine migration existed. Unable to physically prevent men from leaving the colony or to encourage them to stay by raising wages, the colonial state was left with only one option. It could allow some legal recruiting in the hope of persuading the Rhodesian authorities to reduce or at least to register and eventually repatriate illegal immigrants from Mozambique. From the point of view of plantation capital in Mozambique, therefore, the Agreements only make sense if they are seen as a means of regulating the illegal flow of migrants.

### **The 1913 Agreement**

Prior to 1913 WENELA was permitted to recruit labour throughout Mozambique though it was formally obliged, in terms of an agreement with Rhodesian employers' organisations, to redirect part of this labour to Rhodesia. In practice, however, this part of the Agreement was not implemented. Most of the labourers recruited by WENELA in the central provinces ended up working in the South African mines, whilst Rhodesia depended entirely on the relatively small clandestine flow.

In 1913, following the restructuring of the internal supply of labour within South Africa, the areas from which WENELA drew labour were reduced to south of the Save river. At this

point Rhodesian capital (represented by the British South Africa Company then administering Rhodesia) and the Portuguese colonial state stepped in to restructure the recruiting system in central Mozambique. The first formal labour Agreement between them was the result of this reorganisatation. It was published in the 'Boletim Oficial' on October 2nd, 1913.

In the terms of the Agreement, Mozambican government authorized recruitment of 'native' labourers in Tete district, whose number couldn't exceed the monthly average of 15,000 men in Rhodesia. Such a permission wasn't effective in the zones where the 'natives' were subject to obligations resulting from local laws or legal contracts. Recruitment of labourers would be effected by persons to whom the Mozambican government would grant permits.

Beyond the control of the act of recruiting itself, the Agreement foresaw that **'before leaving Tete district, each labourer must receive a passport, valid for one year, for which an emolument of 13 shillings will be paid to the Province government by the Rhodesian Native Labourers Bureau.'** This permitted not only control of the proper labourer, but also the possibility for the Portuguese state of getting revenue.

Besides an addition fee for each worker from Tete who stayed in Rhodesia for more than one year another source of revenue was the legalization of the workers who had emigrated clandestinely. In the terms of the Agreement **'every native of Tete district, in Rhodesia, must be in possession of a pass or a passport, granted by the Province authorities'**. Every clandestine worker who wanted to regularize his situation had to pay an emolument of 20 shillings under pain of being immediately and compulsorily repatriated. Finally, the Agreement established that half of the wages of workers from Tete would be paid in the district after their return from Rhodesia.

The Curator of natives in Rhodesia, appointed by the colonial government in Lourenço Marques, dealt with all matters relating to workers from Mozambique in Rhodesia. It was also his responsibility to collect all the emoluments due to the Mozambican Government.

The intentions behind the 1913 Agreement can be summarised as follows.

From the point of view of the British South Africa Company

the Agreement provided a legally recognised labour reserve which would be closed to WENELA recruiters should the South African mines decide to expand their labour catchment areas again in the future. From the point of view of the Portuguese colonial state, on the other hand, the Agreement not only provided revenue but more importantly it provided the only means through which some control could be exercised over the clandestine flow of labour to Rhodesia and hence the only means through which the interests of the plantations could be protected. Unable to effectively patrol the extensive border with Rhodesia and thus physically prevent men from leaving Mozambique, and unwilling to order wage rises which might have reduced the exodus of labour, because of the effects on plantation capital, the Portuguese colonial state was left with little option but to try and reduce the illegal flow of labour by allowing a controlled flow of legally recruited labour. However, since employers in Rhodesia and workers from Mozambique both preferred to avoid the legal recruiting channels, the former because recruiting fees could be avoided, the latter because wages for 'volunteer' workers were higher than those for contracted workers, clandestine emigration continued unabated throughout the period.

The 1913 Agreement came to an end on March 31st, 1925. By that time another agreement was signed referring to the recruitment of labour in Tete district. The 1925 Agreement wasn't substantially different from the first and guaranteed the Portuguese government getting revenue from labour exportation.

### **THE 1934 AGREEMENT**

A third Agreement was signed in 1934. This 1934 Agreement followed a period of restructuring of the internal supply of labour for the plantation sector in Mozambique. From 1930 onwards the colonial state itself became the monopoly supplier of labour for plantations in Zambezia and through a series of measures guaranteed plantation capital a continuous supply of low-paid labour. It also allocated recruiting reserves in Zambezia and Tete and in recognition of the importance of plantation capital in Zambezia and its labour needs, prohibited employers outside the district from recruiting labour within it. These changes in the internal control and supply of labour to plantations occurred in a period (1929-1934) when the whole of southern and central Africa was suffering from the

effects of the world recession. In both Rhodesia and Mozambique agriculture and industry were laying off workers. Thus, for the first time the plantation sector had more labour available than it could use.

The 1934 Agreement coincided with the end of the depression. Once again plantations in Zambezia feared the effects of renewed competition for labour from Rhodesian employers. **'At the moment, we haven't got other recruiters in Angonia, but I was told that the gold mines of Rhodesia, which had stopped functioning, will open again, and if this will happen ... we must not be surprised if from one moment to the other we'll have a competitor in Angonia.'**

From the Rhodesian point of view the 1934 Agreement was probably designed to protect Rhodesian sources of labour against South African competition, for, from 1938 onwards WENELA once more started to recruit labour from areas north of parallel 22°. From the Portuguese point of view, on the other hand, the aims of the new Agreement were the same as those of its predecessors: a reduction of the flow of clandestine workers from Mozambique to Rhodesia and the control of illegal Mozambican immigrants inside Rhodesia. However, as in the previous period, the low wages policy pursued in central Mozambique was in direct contradiction to the aims of the Agreement and fueled the clandestine flow of labour. Thus, between 1934 and 1947 competition for labour in central Mozambique continued. Indeed, plantation capital was obliged to improve the wages and conditions of some sections of the labour force to prevent an even greater outflow of labour to Rhodesia. In 1937, for instance, Sena Sugar Estates, which recruited labour from the Angonia region of Tete, was forced to offer its workers a wage rise and to allow them to bring their families to the estates with them at the company's expense. Throughout the 1940s the company continued to complain about the effects of competition from the mines and in 1947 was obliged to reorganise its recruiting in Tete to prevent its competitors enticing away men who were waiting to go to the plantations.

## **THE 1947 AGREEMENT**

1947 marks a turning point in the history of labour relations between the Portuguese colonial state in Mozambique and colonial Rhodesia. Expansion of the Rhodesian econo-

my during the Second World War and a growing labour shortage after it led to an increased demand for foreign labour by Rhodesian employers. At the same time the South African mines were also expanding their intake of foreign migrant labour. In order to protect its sources of foreign labour from South African competition, Rhodesia entered into a series of Agreements with neighbouring states, including the Portuguese colonial state in Mozambique, which guaranteed a regular flow of labour to Rhodesia.

For the first time the colonial state in Mozambique was able to use the labour Agreement to wrest concessions from the Rhodesian state. The 1947 Agreement allowed the Rhodesian Native Labour Supply Commission (RNLSC) to establish a recruiting infrastructure in Tete district only on two conditions. Firstly, all workers from Mozambique, whether legally recruited or 'clandestine', were to be registered by the Rhodesian authorities and repatriated after two years. Secondly, the Rhodesian authorities were obliged to collect the equivalent of the Portuguese tax not only from men legally recruited from Tete Province, but from all 'Portuguese natives' in Rhodesia.

This new article increased substantially the revenue of the colonial government, **'on 200,000 workers (approximate number of 'Portuguese natives' working in Rhodesia) only 20,000 belong to Tete district and, therefore, with the Supplementary Agreement, the taxes of the remaining 180,000 to be reverted and passed to the Province budget. This meant a substantial increase of revenue.'**

Nevertheless, despite the new Agreement and with it the greater scope of the Portuguese colonial state to protect the interests of plantations in Mozambique, the Rhodesian government still attempted throughout the 1950s to recast the Agreement to suit the changed needs of its mines and farmers.

From the beginning of the 1950s the Rhodesians started to raise problems concerning the administration of the Agreement, even pointing out their disposition to denounce it as well as the supplementary articles if certain matters weren't resolved. First, they argued that a one year's contract wasn't economically viable **'because the native spends much time learning any service and one year is not enough**

**to form him professionally and to get profit out of the money spent on them.'** Hence, the Rhodesians wanted to extend the zones where they could legally recruit labour because **'the shortage of labour in Rhodesia has had disastrous effects on the industry of this land and the neighbouring territories.'** In an official letter from the Prime-Minister of Rhodesia to the General-Governor of Mozambique was asked for **'the recruiting commission for Rhodesia to be authorized to catch labour in Manica and Sofala districts.'**

The government of the Portuguese colony didn't want to satisfy any of the demands of the Rhodesians. As for the authorization of recruiting in new zones, the Governor-General answered that it was **'absolutely impossible ... since in the area of Manica and Sofala we struggle at this moment with a shortage of native workers; even the there setteled agricultural and industrial activities must have recourse to recruiting in other areas.'** As for the extension of the contract period to two years, the Repartição Central dos Negócios Indígenas took the position that **'once that the now recruited natives are allowed to renew their contract of 12 months to a maximum period of 2 years, the increase with 6 months won't alter the basic points of the Agreement. It is to be supposed that the number of natives who accept the 18 months' contract will be very reduced, since the native generally is adverse to contracts of long duration. So don't think that Rhodesia, with such a concession, will obtain a bigger crowd of recruited labour.'**

Nevertheless, the colonial Portuguese administration acted with comprehension. It didn't want the denunciation of the Agreement **'which will eliminate the acknowledged and uncountable advantages it brought us, not only by revenue, but also and even more by the control of our clandestine emigrants from outside Tete district ... whose number amounts to 60,000 natives'**.

The Rhodesian demands of the 1950s reflect the new interregional labour supply situation. Unable to attract sufficient clandestine workers for its needs, Rhodesian capital instead attempted to increase the contract period of legally recruited men and to extend the geographical areas from which they could be drawn.

The Portuguese colonial government successfully avoid-



ed implementing the Rhodesian demands. It could not, however, prevent continued competition for labour in the region, and until the late 1950s plantations continued to face Rhodesian competition in Tete which increased the pressure on wages within the plantation sector. Nevertheless, despite the inability of the Portuguese colonial state to protect capital in Mozambique from the effects of Rhodesian competition during the 1950s the 1947, Supplementary Agreement and subsequent negotiations between Portugal and Rhodesia do represent a significant shift in the regional balance of power as regards labour supply. For the first time the Rhodesian state was forced to accede in part to Portuguese demands for greater control over the flow of clandestine labour to Rhodesia.

### **DEVELOPMENTS AFTER 1958**

Thus far this article has looked at the employment of Mozambican migrant workers in Rhodesia during a long and almost uninterrupted period of growing labour demand on the farms and in the mines of the colony. The principal preoccupation of employers in Rhodesia was to procure adequate supplies of labour for their needs. Much of this labour was migrant labour from Mozambique and most Mozambican workers travelled to Rhodesia illegally. This was because the plantations of central Mozambique, which also needed labour, were unwilling to pay the relatively high wages offered by Rhodesian employers and instead relied on the coercive power of the colonial state to recruit workers. This low wages policy and the use of force by the state fueled the clandestine emigration to Rhodesia. The period until the end of the 1950s, then, was a period in which state and capital in Rhodesia sought to secure, through legal agreement with neighbouring states, and illegal means, adequate sources of labour. It can be characterised as the phase of creation of a migrant labour force.

From the late 1950s, however, Rhodesian labour policy began to change. This was due to structural changes within the Rhodesian economy. The period from the mid-1950s onwards was one of increasing mechanisation within industry. From the mid-1960s onwards, agriculture too began to mechanise. These changes led to a reduced demand for labour. The first effects on foreign migrant workers came with the passage of the Foreign Migratory Labour Act of 1958. This prohibited foreign African workers from seeking employment

in Salisbury and Bulawayo. These restrictions on employment were extended to other areas during the early 1960s until all urban areas were included. By 1966 foreign African workers were effectively limited to agricultural work or mining. This, then, was a period in which the state and capital acted together not only to procure labour but also to redistribute it, particularly to low wage sectors of the economy.

The third and final phase of foreign migrant labour use in Rhodesia started in the mid-1960s.

Reduced labour needs as a result of mechanisation led to a new phase of displacement of labour from production. This was principally characterised by the progressive squeezing out of foreign migrant labour from all sectors of the Rhodesian economy. By 1966 the Foreign Migratory Labour Act had been extended to all areas of Rhodesia except a few rural districts (Inyanga, Mebether, Chipinga, Chiredzi and Umtali) which were particularly heavily dependent on foreign migrant labour. At the same time regulations covering foreign workers were tightened up. Workers who did not possess passports and other documents were liable to be deported.

The overall effects of these measures can be seen in the table below. The figures in the table show a sharp drop in the number of new foreign recruits entering Rhodesia after 1958 and again after 1966. They also clearly show the corresponding net migration of foreign workers out of the country during these two periods.

Migrant workers from Mozambique were particularly affected by these developments. In 1959 the RNLSC closed down its operations in Mozambique. No more Mozambicans were recruited through any official bodies after that date and the number of workers who entered Rhodesia illegally also declined, as a result of the new documentation measures and restricted employment opportunities. Thus, after almost 60 years of uninterrupted labour recruitment and after years of clamouring for the right to recruit more Mozambicans as migrant labourers, Rhodesia employers quite suddenly began to dismiss workers from Mozambique. Having been instrumental in creating the conditions which forced Mozambicans to depend on wage labour for their existence Rhodesian employers now withdrew the means of livelihood of this work force.

TABLE 1

**MIGRATION OF FOREIGN AFRICAN WORKERS  
TO RHODESIA**

Year	Total Immigrants	Emigrants	Net Migration	Mozambican Immigrants (% Total Immigrants)	Emigrants	Net Migration of Mozambicans
1955	110,970	112,800	- 1,800	49,690 (44.8%)	51,000	- 1,300
1956	114,200	116,800	- 2,600	52,210 (45.7%)	59,000	- 6,800
1957	115,700	114,300	+ 1,400	54,930 (47.5%)	50,900	+ 4,000
1959	86,070	98,500	- 12,400	34,750 (40.4%)	41,100	- 6,400
1960	79,080	85,300	- 6,200	29,180 (36.9%)	31,600	- 2,400
1961	68,690	75,000	- 6,300	19,120 (27.8%)	21,200	- 2,100
1963	45,220	51,300	- 6,100	6,940 (15.3%)	11,900	- 5,000
1964	40,370	48,600	- 8,200	9,540 (23.6%)	10,600	- 1,100
1965	29,030	31,760	- 2,730	8,490 (29.2%)	7,750	+ 740
1967	16,280	20,960	- 4,680	3,290 (20.2%)	3,370	- 80
1968	19,350	21,910	- 2,560	4,660 (24.1%)	5,230	- 570
1969	15,880	18,020	- 2,140	5,550 (34.9%)	6,630	- 1,080
1971	10,500	20,250	- 9,570	3,830 (36.5%)	6,280	- 2,450
1974*	6,990	6,460	+ 530	3,270 (46.8%)	1,130	+ 2,410

\* The increase in immigration which appears to be an exception to the trend is in fact the result of an administrative reclassification. It does not reflect a real increase in immigration.

The expulsion of migrant labour from Rhodesia took place in a period when plantations in Mozambique were also gradually beginning to reduce their demand for labour. A growing labour shortage during the 1950s and international opposition to Portugal's forced labour policies led to the beginning of a new policy of mechanisation within the plantation sector. This implied the creation of a smaller, more stable and more

productive labour force. Although these changes were only slight during the 1960s they nevertheless exacerbated the problem of reduced migrant labour needs in Rhodesia, for men who had formerly worked there could not expect to be reabsorbed into wage work in the plantation sector in Mozambique.

## THE HERITAGE OF COLONIALISM

The formation of a migrant labour force within the central provinces of Mozambique, whether destined for employment on the mines and farms of Rhodesia or the plantations of Zambezia, depended on the creation among the people of the area of a dependence on wage labour for survival. Through an intense and brutal process the productive activities of the local peoples were restricted and underdeveloped in order to compel them to work as low-paid labourers on colonial farms, mines and plantations. As a result, large numbers of people in the area are now critically dependent on cash wages. This is one of the heritages of colonialism. The other is a productive structure which is no longer able to absorb the proletarianised masses of the region. As we indicated above, the late colonial period was one in which labour was expelled from production in Rhodesia and also, though on a smaller scale, in Mozambique.<sup>(2)</sup> Thus, independent Mozambique has inherited a critical and pressing unemployment problem, not only in the south where the quota of Mozambican labour to the South African mines has been drastically reduced but also in the central area. One of the most pressing problems of the present period therefore, is the need to find ways in which the productive potential of the people can be harnessed in ways beneficial to the development of the country.

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

The material on which this article is based includes the various labour Agreements between Portugal and Rhodesia cited in the text, the correspondence of the 'Repartição Central dos Negócios Indígenas' and the Rhodesian Native Labour Supply Commission, and correspondence of Sena Sugar Estates Limited. The statistical material is drawn from D.G. CLARKE, '**International Labour Supply Trends and Economic Structure In Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe In the 1970s**' (I. LOO Migration for Employment Project Working Paper WP20, Geneva 1978) and D.G. CLARKE '**Contract labour from Rhodesia to the South African Gold Mines: A Study of the International Division of a Labour Reserve**' (South African Labour and De-

velopment Research Unit, Working Paper no. 6, Cape Town, 1976). Finally, we have drawn on M. LEGASSICK and F. DE CLERQ '**The Origins and Nature of the Migrant Labour System in Southern Africa**' Paper presented to E.C.A./MULPOC Conference on Migrant Labour, Lusaka, 1978.

1. Until 1942 Manica and Sofala were under the administrative control of the Mozambique Company and not the Portuguese colonial state. These provinces were a major source of clandestine labour to Rhodesia. The article, however, concentrates more on the formal agreements between the Rhodesian and Portuguese colonial states which covered recruiting from Tete Province which served as a labour reserve not only for Manica and Sofala but also for plantations in Zambezia.
2. There is evidence that plantations in Zambezia deliberately casualised the labour force in the months immediately prior to Mozambique's independence, as a way of reducing overall labour costs. This clearly increased the employment crisis, for former migrant workers could no longer rely on employment and hence on the wage derived from it.