

**POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN UGANDA :  
1960-1980**

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## PREFACE

Political developments are manifestations of underlying conflict in social and political systems. Uganda, in this perspective, cannot be extricated from other states with a colonial background. Yet Uganda in many aspects has its uniqueness to offer. The concept of the Buganda state, the long span of the military regime, the intervention of neighbouring Tanzania are issues which are peculiar to Uganda. This study envisages a survey of political developments in Uganda since 1960, keeping in mind the problems of development in general. It will try to examine the nature of dependency, the extent of external control, the character of class stratifications, such concepts as "tribalism", "Africanisation", and "socialism", and the extent to which these are contributing factors to the continuance of underdevelopment, de-stabilisation, and violence.

The 1971 coup and the subsequent military rule will, of necessity, lead us into an analysis of the preceding republican constitution, Obote's "socialism" and "The Move to the Left" during 1969-1970. The study also makes a survey of the internal setting beginning with the pre-independence

situation, the dissolution of kingdoms and the abrogation of the colonial constitutions. An attempt has also been made to assess the role and impact of tribalism, religion and social divisions on the developments inside Uganda. Against the backdrop of the colonial/pre-independence period, this study has mainly concentrated on post-independence Uganda. It has tried to offer a diagnosis of the present post-Idi political quagmire.

I am grateful to Dr Vijay Gupta for the guidance he has given me in the writing of this dissertation. Though his views were not always in congruence with mine, he constantly encouraged me in my work. I am also thankful to Dr Anirudha Gupta for having helped me in the early stages of my research. Mr Joseph Ongodia has also given me considerable help in getting access to certain books and primary documents on Uganda which would not have been available otherwise. Thanks are also due to the information bureau of the Uganda High Commission. The staff of the JNU Library was very cooperative, and without their help it would not have been possible to finish my dissertation so soon. I have profited greatly from my interviews and discussions with many diplomats, journalists and academicians. Last, but not the least, my thanks are due

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W. L. HANGSHING

**CHAPTER I**

**POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN UGANDA**

Regional economic imbalance; tribal and ethnic antagonisms; political alignments along religious lines; politics, confined to only the upper echelon of society and devoid of the dynamics of mass participation, coupled with an extensive dependence on an export-import economy; were all crucial ingredients to the political spectrum that presented itself to an independent Uganda in 1962. The focus of this dissertation is on the political developments in Uganda after independence, but it becomes imperative that for a clear grasp of the situation that the new nation faced at independence, we dwell briefly at least on the development of social, economic, and political systems and institutions during the preceding periods, since historical events cannot be studied in isolation but in relation to the past. This chapter is therefore devoted to tracing out the historical development of the various political determinants and thereby prepare a premise for an understanding of the political developments in Uganda after 1960. From a brief sketch of the precolonial conditions that prevailed in Uganda, this chapter will proceed to locate the beginnings of "regionalism" and "tribalism" and then go on to analyse the impact of colonialism keeping in mind an attempt to delineate a distinct evolutionary pattern in the politics of Uganda. For this purpose, this chapter has been divided into two broad sections, viz: Precolonial Uganda and Colonial Uganda.

## PRECOLONIAL UGANDA

Regional economic imbalance, a factor that has plagued Ugandan politics, was distinguishable even as early as the mid nineteenth century. The levels of social development ~~was~~<sup>were</sup> essentially uneven and the economic disparity between the southern regions (Buganda in particular) and the rest of the country to the north was noticeable since then. Inter-tribal conflicts were also a regular feature of the times,<sup>1</sup> and this, along with the flourishing slave trade that had penetrated from the coastal regions of East Africa, was an important factor that shaped the future political conformation.

### Development of Southern hegemony over the North

The northern region had always had a relatively harsh environment. Owing to this, the population was scarce and whatever few inhabitants that existed had to rely for their livelihood on simple herding and shifting agriculture, both of which were least conducive to sedentary living. The resultant society was therefore decentralised and segmental. Social solidarity could extend only to a small group as tribes were generally small and hence vulnerable to raids

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1 Detailed information of the inter-tribe warfare during the period prior to colonisation can be obtained from Roland Olivier and Gervase Mathew, ed. History of East Africa, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1963, pp.403-7.



and exploitation by stronger communities such as the southern kingdoms where society had attained a certain degree of strength and solidarity through centralisation of power.

In contrast to the north, the security of agriculture in the south, owing to the fertile soil and regular water supply, led to a comparatively more ordered and settled society. The economy had developed beyond the subsistence level and the social structure had assumed feudal characteristics. Buganda, Bunyoro-Kitare, Nkore, Toro, and Busoga were clear manifestations of the centralised feudal systems that had evolved. The centralised characteristic of these southern kingdoms was perhaps the most important factor that not only determined their prevalence over the north but also protected them from the exploitation of the coastal slave traders.

Slave trade had existed in East Africa since time immemorial. It was the one most significant factor that severely conditioned the level and character of social development. Its adverse impact began to be seriously felt in the latter half of the eighteenth century when it assumed an enormous proportion. The height of the slave trade came in 1840,<sup>2</sup> when it became a significant part of the Indian Ocean trade.

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2 Mahmood Mamdani, Politics and Class formation in Uganda, Monthly Review Press (New York, London), 1976, pp.18-19.

Slave trade was to have a very profound effect on the existing social fabric. It not only led to the decline of all other kinds of trade but also threatened the very foundations of social production. In an economy with a low level of technology and plentiful land, the slave trade meant the export of the most crucial force of production: social labour. The consequent depopulation and reduction of productive capacity in relation to consumption exposed the society to the vagaries of nature.<sup>3</sup> Add to this the inter-tribal conflicts that was rampant during those times and it becomes easy to foresee the eventual breakdown of the brittle state of affairs and the widening of the disparity between tribe and tribe and region and region; a problem that has plagued the country at every stage of its development.

It was the northern regions that suffered most from the slave trade. They were exposed to the centralised kingdoms of the south as well as to the raiders who came from southern Sudan, even as late as the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Thus even before the coming of colonialism, the north had been some sort of a labour reservoir.<sup>5</sup>

3 The slave trade concentrated on the export of able bodies alone. While total production diminished, the proportion of productive members declined even further, while the proportion/dependants increased in relation to total population.

4 John Beattie, *The Nyoro State*, p.67. Quoted in Mamdani, n.2, p.20.

5 This trend continued under colonialism when, with the establishment of a peasant based cash-crop economy, the northern regions became a major source of peasant labour for the more fertile south.

The level of development before colonisation

Interestingly, Mahmood Mamdani has observed that "although the political and social organisations were essentially communal, societies such as these in the north were however not static.... Even long before colonial influence, increasing contact with neighbouring people through regular trade in, or systematic raids for cattle, treasures or slaves, had brought about a certain level of awareness and systematisation.... there was a gradual transformation of the communal societies to class societies. They did not necessarily have to await the external impact of colonialism."<sup>6</sup> Though it would be a little far fetched to claim that the social order was on the threshold of a capitalist production, these northern communities were definitely passing through a transitional/formative phase. Perhaps they were in the process of being assimilated into the socio-economic order of the more superior south, or perhaps they were "military democracies"<sup>7</sup> as R. Mukherjee has identified them, but the important thing to observe here is that colonialism, when it came, was to have an immense constricting impact on whatever natural/dialectical developments that were occurring.

Since the north had been under the subjugation of the southern politics-economic order, a focus on the southern

6 Mamdani, n.2, pp.22-23.

7 Ramkrishna Mukherjee, The Problem of Uganda: A Study in Acculturation, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin, 1956, p.73.

regions comprising of Buganda, Bunyoro-Kitare, Nkore, Toro, and Busoga would present a more comprehensive study of the pre-colonial structure.

In the southern regions, peasant-landlord social stratification had firmly taken roots. The peasants were subject to the rule of individual lords (chiefs or heads of clans) who could extract as tribute, produce and services in return for guarantees of security. The situation was possible only because of the large surplus production. Owing to this fact as also the expansion of trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the south also witnessed the formation of groups of artisan classes usually patronised by a Lord or a king.<sup>8</sup>

Although comparatively well advanced, merchant-trade and manufacture was still in its infancy and positively incapable of withstanding colonial exploitation. The basic unit of consumption and production in these southern kingdoms was still the household and most of the production still

<sup>8</sup> Toro had a good supply of copper and the Batoro specialised in copper working. The Basoga built and supplied the canoes for transport on lake Victoria. The Kayonza (in Kagezi) and the Banyoro who made use of their own and northern Acholi iron deposits, had developed a group of smiths and manufactured and exported spear and hoe blades. The Banyoro were also the major suppliers of salt and their pottery was in constant demand throughout the region. In Buganda the great chiefs had in their service carpenters, potters, and smiths who assumed an indispensable role in repairing and maintaining the increasing number of firearms, the import of which the Kabaka of Uganda monopolised.

took place on peasant farms and it was basically for domestic consumption. The trade that existed was a trade in surpluses and was essentially complementary and not competitive, the primary objective being the satisfaction of internal consumption needs; unlike the colonial period when trade dominated and dictated production to the needs of a far away metropole. Capital accumulation, profit multiplication, and the boundless thirst for surplus appropriation had not yet permeated. Moreover the political power of the ruling class, and hence the overall development of the economy and the advancement of the productive forces, were still circumscribed by traditional (social) forces.

The relatively considerable centralisation of authority was a result of the higher stage of economic evolution when compared to the north. It would be worth our while here to focus our discussion on Buganda, for it was Buganda that dominated the southern region of Uganda on the eve of the British advent.<sup>9</sup> It was Buganda that most clearly typified the nature of centralisation that existed.

Of the Buganda kings John Roscoe has commented - at "a time when paganism held undisputed sway, and the kings and chiefs bowed before the multitude of gods, a time before Arab influence had begun to make itself felt, or the coast

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9 Olivier and Mathews, n.1, pp.403-407.

civilisation to pervade the interior", the kings were all powerful. The despotism of kings Mutesa and Mwanga has been well recorded.<sup>10</sup>

Buganda, apart from being superior to Bunyoro<sup>11</sup> in arms technology, possessed a less rigid social structure. The Bunyoro was dominated by a cattle-keeping aristocracy (the Hima) which was a closed group and ethnically distinct, and there was no possibility of assimilation from outside. This social rigidity was an inherent weakness. Each new expansion made the problem of control more acute for this minority ruling strata. On the other hand, the Buganda lords, according to historical records, did not claim to be an aristocracy of the blood and therefore the aristocracy was not limited by ethnicity. The kabaka (king) was supposed to maintain the balance of power at the court by recruiting individuals of different tribes and different ethnicity.<sup>12</sup> The ruling elite so chosen could thus be based on merit and capability. The absence of rigid tribalism and the prevalence of individual mobility added to the possibility of centralisation of power around the throne. Hence, apart from the hereditary bataka (clan) chiefs, there was also a

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10 Z.A. Marsh and G.W. Kingsnorth, An Introduction to the History of East Africa, Cambridge University Press, 1965, p.115.

11 Bunyoro dominated the solution region during the 17th and 18th centuries till it was overcome by Buganda.

12 John Roscoe, The Buganda: Their Customs and Beliefs, Frank Cass and Co Ltd (London), 1965, for further reference on Kings powers, p.2.

hierarchy of bakunga chiefs appointed by the kabaka. Since the bataka chiefs also exercised a monopoly over religious authority, the kabaka invited propounders of other religious systems (Islam in the mid 19th century; Christianity in the end of the 19th century to preach their faith in the Buganda capital.<sup>13</sup>) The kabaka became the head of all the chiefs. The high degree of centralisation, the absence of rigid, caste defined social structure and the presence of individual mobility were the strong points of the Bugandan power. Because of the existing centralisation the kabaka could monopolise the ivory trade and thus also effectively control the importation and ownership of guns the Arabs brought, which further enhanced the central authority.

The first notable change took place during the reign of king Metusa (1854-1884).<sup>14</sup> He instituted a standing army and also introduced into it the system of grades and ranks. It was also during Metusa's times that the ruling class showed the first signs of assuming a mercantile colouring. Cash consciousness was beginning to take roots. The creation of a navy by Metusa contributed a great deal in enhancing a mercantile economy.<sup>15</sup>

#### Engagement in mercantilism by the Bugandan ruling classes

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- 13 Marsh and Kingsworth, n.10, pp.72-86. for a brief note on missionary movements.  
 14 Mukherjee, n.7, pp.96-97.  
 15 Mamdani, n.2, p.30.

had by 1880 brought about a qualitative transformation in the social structure. The feudal lords had shown a tendency towards commercial pursuits, and rightly so, for they were the only ones among the indigenous peoples who had the capacity. Centralisation had also created the firm infrastructural basis for a national mercantile economy. Firstly corvee<sup>16</sup> labour was possible. Through corvee labour a network of roads could be constructed and maintained, linking the countryside with the royal capital of Buganda. This facilitated the efficient collection of social surplus from within as from without. Secondly, there existed a well developed system of tax collection.<sup>17</sup> Collection in kind, usually in the form of cattle, barkcloths and cowry shells, goats and hoes and even in human-kind i.e. boys and girls,<sup>18</sup> was giving way to currency, of cowry shells,<sup>19</sup> which facilitated the incentive for accumulation. There had also emerged a class of highly skilled professional craftsmen who catered to the demands of the kabaka and his bakunga chiefs. The trade with the Arabs, a monopoly of the king and his chiefs, had assumed considerable proportions (by pre-mercantile standards), so that the once feudal class was attaining a mercantile feature. The merchants profit was gaining preponderance over the feudal form of surplus acquisition.

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16 Corvee was a form of compulsory labour imposed by the King.

17 Roscoe, n.12, p.224, pp.245-46.

18 Taxation in boys and girls was a source of state labour in royal enclosures. Women were given as presents to be wives of or slaves and to help in providing food for the king's retainers.

19 Roscoe, n.12, p.452.



A mercantile economy also meant the growth of an urban culture. Urbanisation brought new consumption demands and spread them gradually across larger segments of the population. New forms of production were introduced to satisfy the new demands. By the 19th century, Buganda artisans were manufacturing sandals, barkcloth, soap and pottery.<sup>20</sup> Thus even before the coming of the British new social and economic distinctions were emerging and Buganda seemed to be poised for a leap into a complete mercantile economy.

#### The immediate impact of colonialism

The period of colonisation, ushered in by the late 19th century, not only brought to a halt but also reversed whatever progressive developments that had occurred. Colonialism drove the economy of the region into the vortex of export to and import from the metropole. In spite of what oxbridge historians like Professor Frankle may say, such as: "the discovery and propagation of viable export crops is perhaps the most important single factor in the economic development of backward areas",<sup>21</sup> it meant the dismantling of native institutions, the reversion of a natural evolutionary process. The native institutions were incompatible to the aims of the colonial policy. De-urbanisation and de-industrialisation were the result. The changed pattern of trade witnessed a

20 Mukherjee, n.7, pp.58-59 & 62-65.

21 Cyril Ehrlich, History of East Africa, Vincent Harlow and E.M. Chilver, ed., Oxford, 1965, p.395.

diminution in the number of skilled artisans and a gradual constriction of the local handicrafts industry. Its earlier patrons, the kabaka and his bakunga chiefs who had been taking up trade and commerce now reverted to being a totally parasitical semi-feudal landed class, living off rent and "chiefly" salaries. Moreover the appointment of only aristocratic individuals to public offices only served to rigidify traditional distinctions of "castes" and "tribes", a rigidity which Buganda had outgrown. The patrons of the new market were now a new and ascending group, the middle class/compradore bourgeoisie "who were too weak to challenge imperialism of manifest any genuine historical creativity".<sup>22</sup> They would in fact only consolidate the new equilibrium, for their interest would be fused with the interest of the colonial system.

#### COLONIAL UGANDA

Referring to the penetration of Africa by the Europeans L.P. Mair has pointed out that "the main streams of contact may be classified as religious, political, and economic, and their representatives as missionary, administrative and settler. Each of these has as its avowed object the development of native life in one direction or another, and in the initial stages the result of each, sometimes

<sup>22</sup> John S. Saul, The State and Revolution in East Africa, London Heinemann Ibadan Nairobi, 1979, p.335.

deliberately produced, sometimes inadvertently, has been mainly the destruction of native institutions.<sup>23</sup> Looking from the perspective of the "white man's burden", she has seen the contradictions as merely a problem of adjustment. The fact was that the colonial economy was an alien culture and totally unacceptable to the pre-colonial conditions. The result was obvious. As the whole community was transformed and adapted towards a new entity for participation in the western capitalist economic system, as wage-labour came to be the "thin edge of the industrial wedge", and as "economic individualism" began to sink in, the breakdown of the previous systems was a foregone conclusion. More than economic exploitation from without, what the society had to fear was the growth among its own members of a spirit of individualistic acquisitiveness in which every man sought to exploit his neighbour, and in which the members themselves became partners of capitalist accumulation.

### Indirect Rule

The "scramble for Africa" and the first six years of British involvement in Uganda, from 1887 to 1894 produced considerable disorder. The proclamation of Uganda as a British protectorate in 1894 and the ensuing system of "indirect rule" brought to the fore a class of collaborators - those who would receive partial treatment in return for

23 L.P. Mair, An African People in the Twentieth Century, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1934, p.2.

helping to maintain law and order - among the "natives" or brought in from other dependencies. The land settlement under the Buganda Agreement<sup>24</sup> of 1900 presents a capsule manifestation of the nature of indirect rule. It was meant to, and it did have parallel effects to that of the Land settlement of 1772 in India. It created a class of loyal and obliging ruling oligarchy like the Indian Zamindars. The potentially dynamic precolonial ruling classes were at one stroke converted into a parasitic collaborating class, divorced from both trade and production, central only to the process of consumption.

The 1900 Agreement reflected another aspect of indirect rule - namely the policy of "divide and rule". The battle of Mengo in 1892 was a clear example of the policy to weaken the group of Baganda landlords. Lord Lugard, leading the troops of the Imperial British East Africa Company, cashed-in on the existing divisions within the class by deliberately joining forces with the Buganda protestants. The battle of Mengo proved to be more than just a defeat for the catholic sections of the landlords. It had grave consequences for the development of nationalism in the long run. The class of landlords created by the ensuing Agreement in 1900 became predominantly Protestants. The Catholics got only a few nominal chiefly

<sup>24</sup> Henry W. West, Land Policy in Buganda, Cambridge University Press, London, 1972. Also see J.R. Goody, ed., African Study Series, edn 3.

positions (which were tied to the land grants) in the western regions.

In addition to tribal loyalties, religion became a significant ingredient of Ugandan politics.

After Mengo, the Buganda protestants became the trusted lieutenants of colonial rule. They played a role comparable to the role of the Rajput princes in early British India. They were instrumental in the conquest of the kingdoms of Bunyoro-Kitara and Busoga. In return, large areas of east and north-east Bunyoro were incorporated into the Buganda kingdom as a gift from the colonial state. These areas known as the "Lost Counties", were to become one of the most explosive political issues in independent Uganda. The Peasantry in these "counties" became tenants of the kabaka and his landlord chiefs who in turn were agents of the colonial administrative apparatus. This was another instance of indirect rule. In fact indirect rule was just another side of the coin that read "divide and rule", the creation of internal divisions to make the task of colonial rule easier. The reason behind the appointment of Buganda chiefs in Ankole and Toro, and Toro chiefs among the Wamba becomes quite obvious. Among the northern Lugbara, the British appointed as chiefs the remnants of Emin Pasha's "Tubi" troops from southern Sudan. The British also merged the Kingdom of Nkore with surrounding areas to make the district

of Akole. The seeds of future inter-tribal antagonisms were sown deep during indirect rule.

Indirect rule ushered in another political factor in Uganda - the Asians, notably Indians. In Africa, the Indians were an alien element, as alien as the colonial economy was to the indigenous systems and institutions. Their establishment and eventual preponderance in trade can be understood only in terms of the colonial economy, which was essentially an export-import economy based on the principles of British "metropole mercantilism", and which was at this time tied to the dictates of the Lancashire industry.

#### Establishment of an export economy

The two major events that launched Uganda into the vortex of a satellite economy were the completion of the Uganda railway, and the formation of the British Cotton Growing Association (B.C.G.A.). Both were in 1902. The former signified the forging of infrastructural ties with the international capitalist economy - it meant cheap transportation cost and the beginning of a thorough exploitation of the colony. The latter, a result of Lancashire's anxiety to be independent of the United States as a source of raw cotton,<sup>25</sup> meant that cotton was to be the vital sector of the

<sup>25</sup> Since the American civil war, the U.S. raw cotton exports had shown a marked decline owing chiefly to domestic consumption.

satellite economy and around the export of which the whole Ugandan economy was to evolve. Moreover, owing to the mounting activation of Indian nationalism, India as a source base for cotton presented a rather uncertain future. It became absolutely essential that Uganda become a new source. But though Ugandan soil and climate was conducive to cotton cultivation, cotton was not a natural crop of Uganda. It had to be planted.

### Enter the Indians

A plantation economy required wage-labour, slavery having been abolished. At the outset when full colonial control had not yet been established, extraction of labour from the inhabitants was possible only upto a point. The only answer was Britain's Indian Empire. Lugard wrote - "From the overcrowded provinces in India.....we could draw labourers, both artisans and coolies, while they might also afford a recruiting ground for soldiers and police."<sup>26</sup>

Indian merchants had had an early record of trade connections with the East African coast, but it was only under the aegis of indirect rule that the Indians penetrated interior Uganda. Owing to restrictions on the purchase of land by the government, those who came as indentured labourers subsequently took to trade. The majority of the Indians came

26 Frederick D. Lugard, The Rise of our East African Empire, Frank Cass & Co Ltd, London, 1968, p.488.

and established themselves in retail trade, with encouragements from the colonial power. There was a deliberate colonial policy to confine the African to the agricultural economy and out of the marketplace. The British had learnt that the bourgeoisie in the colony had for political reasons to be an ethnically alien petty bourgeoisie.

Nurtured to maintain the vital link in the export-import exchange economy, the 'Indian interest' became purely commercial in nature. They developed into an intermediate class, dependent on government goodwill, their interest in harmony with the metropolitan bourgeoisie. In social relations they were totally alienated from the masses, most unlike the African bourgeoisie whose methods of advance was to be through mass political organisations and mass political struggles.

### The African Peasantry

Owing to the comparatively higher cost of cotton production in the plantations, the peasant sector gradually gained the upper hand. As Lancashire decided that cotton export was to be the future nucleus of the Ugandan economy, the international economic slump of 1921 decided that cotton in Uganda was to be essentially peasant based. While during the inter-war period the plantations reeled under the pressure of freight and insurance rates increases, the B.C.G.A. stepped in to ensure a regular supply of cotton



from the peasants by buying up all the cotton produced at higher prices than what was being offered by the ginning companies.

"Not only did peasant agriculture receive metropolitan support because of the nature of its commodity, cotton, but the commodity market crisis affected it less severely because of the nature of peasant agriculture. The plantations were directed solely towards export, which tied their fortunes to fluctuations in the international market, a market they did not, and could not hope to control. The small scale growers, on the other hand, also produced other crops for their own use. If their export crop failed, they still had their subsistence food crops to fall back on. The partial subordination of the peasant production to the dictates of the international market proved to be a source of strength. Uganda was to be primarily a peasant based cash-crop economy.

As the cotton industry altered the Ugandan economy into a mono-good economy, the process saw the destruction of all other forms of indigenous industry. From the perspective of dependency theorist the entire economy was being underdeveloped. "The development of underdevelopment" (A.G. Frank) and the vortex of metropole-satellite relationship introduced an uneven development in the region and further widened regional imbalances. In 1920-21, 81,000 lbs of lint were produced in Uganda, and 69,000 lbs (or 85 per cent) originated in the southern regions.<sup>27</sup> The southern areas,

27 M.S.M. Kiwameka, "Uganda under the British" in B.A. Ogot and J.A. Kieran, eds., Zamani, EAPH Longmans of Kenya Ltd, Nairobi, 1968, p.319.

mainly Buganda, already experienced some kind of a cash economy under the feudal lords and were therefore more receptive to the introduction of cotton, a cash crop. In the northern and western areas, owing to the entire "indifference in money matters"<sup>28</sup> introduction of cotton was a well nigh impossibility. The north continued to be left out of the mainstream of development and merely remained a source of labour for the south.

### Political parties

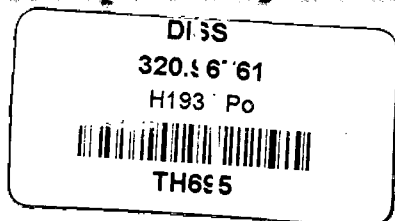
Till as late as 1950 there was no political party in Uganda worthy of being called a national party whose aim would be the achievement of independence. A reason for the slow emergence of African political parties in Uganda, by contrast with all its East and Central African neighbours, was to be found in the lack of any countrywide political issues, and the absence of any longlived conflicts between Europeans and Africans, which might have stirred African feelings deeply. There were few economic discontents, and there was generally ample space for the educated african minority in the chiefly, ecclesiastical and educational hierarchies of the country. Another important reason for the slow emergence of anti-imperial, independence oriented political parties was perhaps the confinement of various issues to their

28 A.G. Povesland, Economic Policy and Labour, W. Elkan, ed. East African Institute of Social Research, Kampala, Uganda, 1957, pp.8-9.

respective kingdoms and district councils. Since 1937, local councils had begun to include Africans who did not belong to the chiefly hierarchy, and by the middle of the fifties "Non-officials" everywhere had occupied an overwhelming majority of their seats. These offices had acted as an outlet for the energies of many an African with the potential of playing actively in national politics. The wider issue of overthrowing the foreign yoke never came to the fore as political energies got drained away within provincial exercises.

By the end of the Second World War it had begun to seem probable that Uganda would eventually emerge as a self-governing nation-state on an equal footing with others in the modern world. It was mainly as a result of this realisation that political parties began to emerge. Whereas in other countries, political organisations had emerged out of a sense of nationalism to remove foreign rule, here in Uganda it was the other way round. Political parties came up as an essential requirement, as contenders for the right to control the government of the future independent Uganda nation-state after the British colonial authorities had withdrawn. The struggle was naturally not against the colonial authorities but amongst the local political elites themselves.

A nation state of Buganda had also emerged as a strong concept during the 1950s. The Bagandans who considered



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themselves as economically more advanced and ethnically different from the rest of Uganda could not bear to see themselves being pulled down to the economic level of their counterparts. In Audrey I. Richards' words "The difference between the standard of living of the wealthy Ganda and that of the naked Karomojong herdsmen on the eastern border was so great that the existence of the richer tribe, which saw itself being pulled down to the level of the poorer, were understandable if not admirable."<sup>29</sup> So the concept of Baganda presented another serious obstacle towards the formation of an all encompassing national party, and Buganda comprised of one-fourth the population. Even under colonial rule Buganda had maintained its autonomy. For many, very many, Baganda, their identity lay with their age-old kingdom, and in the question of a unitary state in which it would be seriously outnumbered by its potentially iconoclastic neighbours, they found their whole future challenged. On the other hand, these neighbours had been satellites of Buganda for too long as many of them felt. Buganda had for them far too many archaic and autocratic overtones to be at all acceptable; their conflict with the Baganda by 1960-61 was therefore, at bottom, a conflict about the values and cultural identity of the wider country to which they now belonged. In this uncompromising situation therefore, the emergence of an all encompassing national movement was a distant dream.

<sup>29</sup> Audrey I. Richards, The Multicultural State of East Africa, McGill Queens University Press, Montreal and London, 1969, p.37.

The politics of post independence Uganda was already well moulded before independence. The concept of Buganda, the lost counties issue were to be in the forefront in the immediate years after independence. Polarity of politics around the unitary Uganda being out of the question, polarity against neo-economic dependency upon the metropole would also never be an important consideration for the participants in government. Therefore the continuation of the peasant-based economy and the consolidation of Indian bourgeoisie was a foregone conclusion. Over and above these, politics would be polarised around less important issues of tribe and religion decorated often with rough and ready ideological postulates. None of the parties that were formed were in origin primarily a party of Ugandan nationalism, bred in the exigencies of the struggle for independence. Rather they all had their origin in the struggle for the allocation for political power upon the attainment of independence. They were drawn forth, that is, not so much by the fear that self-government might not be attained, but by the fear that unless positive action was taken political power upon the attainment of independence would pass to other groups in the country who might pay scant regard to the interests and aspirations of those who stood outside them. This trend continued in post independence Uganda and it is the intention of this dissertation to enquire as to what extent such a conceptualisation of Ugandan politics holds water.

**CHAPTER II**

**POST INDEPENDENCE UGANDA UNDER THE NEO-FEDERAL CONSTITUTION**

Independence, on 9 October 1962, found Uganda in a very fluid state of affairs. The federal structure of the constitution and the multi party system was an unfamiliar and untested feature. Political alignments were ill defined and contradictory constitutional powers between region and centre plagued the functioning of the new constitution. Starting with the alliance of the Uganda Peoples Congress and the Kabaka Yekka, the power conflict that ensued was manifested in the "Lost counties" issue in 1964, the Buganda Crisis in 1966, the abrogation of the Federal constitution, culminating in the attempt at a national ideological expression namely the "Move to the Left". It is these various political events that this chapter will attempt to analyse.

Post independence Uganda clearly saw the continuation of the pre-independence politics. Namely, the demands of Buganda for assurance of the maintenance of their socio-economic predominance occupied the forefront in the process of nation-building. Buganda represented the kulak (landlord) class in Uganda and they were symbolised by the institution of the Kabaka and the Lukiko.<sup>1</sup> The Buganda Lukiko had

1 In 1897, the Lukiko, which had been the assembly of those who had come to pay court to the Kabaka, was now finally constituted as the "native council" of Buganda. It was filled up with appointed (Bakunga) chiefs, and came to exercise both legislative and judicial powers of some considerable substance. Art.II of the 1900 'Uganda Agreement', set out the constitution of the Lukiko, or "native council", which, in addition to the three ministers (the Katakiro, or chief minister; the

unilaterally declared independence in 1960. Even though this had not been taken very seriously, some kind of a federal status for Buganda within Uganda was an indispensable condition for the future. Therefore, although Buganda's campaign had stirred into life the long-standing envy of the Baganda which had become so widespread in the rest of Uganda and had found expression in the non-Baganda - almost anti-Baganda and perhaps even anti-kulak - party, the Uganda Peoples' Congress led by the rising Lango politician, Milton Obote, Obote seems to have come to the conclusion that conflict with the Baganda was likely to be much too costly. It would be better to join them instead. He therefore formally accepted Buganda's compromise claim for federal status within an independent Uganda, and created the alliance between his own UPC and Buganda's Kabaka Yekka (Kabaka only) party, which swept Uganda into independence before the end of 1962. The alliance was clearly a marriage de convenance, and according to the arrangement Kabaka Mutesa was appointed as President of Uganda. Outwardly it was a superbly well-contrived conclusion to the controversies of the previous decade. The

Omulamuzi, or chief justice; the Omwanika or treasurer;) already allocated, was hence forward to consist of twenty Saza (county) chiefs, three 'notables' selected by the Kabaka for each county, and six other persons of importance (who came to be known as the Kabaka's representatives). So constituted, the Lukiko was empowered to pass resolutions concerning the "native administration of Uganda" (sic. Buganda) for forwarding to the Kabaka. With minor adjustments, this same Lukiko continued after independence to embody the privileges of the Kabaka and the autonomy of Buganda within Uganda.



Prime Minister of Uganda was a northerner and the Kabaka of Buganda was the President of Uganda. Buganda's autonomy also remained intact. But as superficial as the alliance was, the inherent contradictions began to tell, and the abrogation of the federal constitution can be summed up as inevitable. First, let us examine the functioning of the constitution devised at independence.

### Duality of the Neo-Federal Constitution

The constitution established at independence provided for a dual division of powers between the centre and the regions. The provision of substantial powers <sup>to the regions</sup> was the basic characteristic of the federal constitution. In effect, however, only one region - Buganda - was given separate and substantial powers independent of the centre. The Buganda Lukiko (Parliament) controlled public services, local government, its public debt, and had separate powers of taxation; furthermore, its revenue was supplemented by grants from the state, as specified in the constitution. Buganda had its own court system, and subject to the control of the Uganda Inspector-General, its own police force. It selected twenty-one representatives to the National Assembly indirectly, through the Lukiko, rather than by direct elections. None of these powers could be altered by the Uganda Parliament without the concurring vote of the Lukiko.<sup>2</sup> The situation was however

2 Emory Bundy, "Uganda's New Constitution", East Africa Journal, July 1966, p.25.

different in respect of the other regions of Uganda. The non-Buganda southern kingdoms were granted only a semi-federal status, the "rights" that had been granted to the local privileged class and the district councils that they controlled having been annulled by the central government at independence. The north was ruled directly by the central government, while for the western kingdoms and Busoga, an Act of 1963 had stated that none of these areas could "introduce any bill in their assemblies before the Minister of Regional Administration of the Central Government approved it."<sup>3</sup>

The Neo-Federal constitution was clearly an embodiment of Buganda bourgeois privileges over the rest of Uganda and also a symbol of status-quo over the regional disparities that had developed, to the advantage of Buganda. Having failed to gain total autonomy, Buganda was successful in bargaining for itself a substantial degree of autonomy within the greater union of Uganda. The constitution granted them special legal and political powers which ensured them control over the economic surplus in Buganda, and it must be remembered here that Buganda was the economic heartland of Uganda.<sup>4</sup> The Federal Constitution was therefore an unequal and a discriminatory arrangement. The Western Kingdoms and

<sup>3</sup> Apollo Nsibambia, "Federalism: Its Rise and Fall in Uganda", East Africa Journal, December 1966, p.15.

<sup>4</sup> In 1963, 80.6 per cent of Uganda's exports outside East Africa was accounted for by coffee and cotton. Buganda with one-fourth of the population of Uganda contained 90 per cent of coffee and 13 per cent of cotton acreage.

Busoga Act of 1963 further proved this point. In the light of the introduction of the universal Adult Suffrage and a strong anti-Buganda sentiment that had developed, the Westminster experiment was an anachronism, and the ensuing struggle between the Baganda and non-Baganda political elites, a struggle basically for control over the economy, was merely a logical denouement.

Before entering into a discussion on the issue of the "Lost Counties" which was the first major battleground for the bourgeois political struggle, it would be worthwhile here to go into the formation of the political parties.

### Political Parties

Three parties contested the general elections of 1962, namely the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC); The Kabaka Yekka (KY); and the Democratic Party (DP). The UPC secured 37 seats, the KY 21 and the DP 24. The UPC in alliance with the KY formed the government. As we shall see this was a very unstable political equilibrium.

Formed on 9 March 1960 the UPC was the result of a merger of the Milton Obote section of the Uganda National Congress (UNC) and the Uganda Peoples Union (UPU). The UNC, apart from possessing the advantage of being the oldest organised political party, had among the ranks of its leaders

both Baganda as well as genuine nationalists.<sup>5</sup> This was an inherent contradiction, for the "concept of Buganda", a concept very dear to the Baganda kulaks for it symbolised the conservation of their own predominance, was a grave obstacle to nation building to which Obote and the UPC later committed themselves. The influence of the Baganda's "kingdom politics" within the UNC had become so overwhelming that when the Kabaka was deported in 1953 primarily because of his demand for a separate Buganda independence and his opposition to the British proposal for the formation of an East Africa Federation, the party as a whole found itself compelled to lead the popular assault on Britain against the deportation. The dilemma therefore was whether it was Buganda or Uganda that the UNC was to be concerned about. Outside Buganda, it was probably because of this reason - the strong Baganda lobby within the party - that the party did not campaign on the basis of the national sentiment of Uganda but rather on the basis of issues particular to tribes.<sup>6</sup> This may have been a quick way of winning support but surely not a very firm base for laying the foundations of a national party. The split in 1959 was therefore not very surprising. It was the logical path towards the development of a national party. It resulted in the rise of new political leaders such as Obote and Mayanja (a Bagandan) who were nationalistic in outlook and

5 Akiki B. Mujaju, "The Role of the UPC as a party of government in Uganda", Canadian Journal of African Studies, 1976, p.447, pp.443-67.

6 Ibid., p.447.

abhorrent to the "concept of Buganda". It was this group that joined the UPU to form the UPC.

The UPU, consisting of an African bourgeoisie drawn from the eastern and western regions, was another regionally biased party. It had a very weak mass base and depended largely on the influence wielded by its local bourgeois leaders. It was formed only about a year before its merger with the UPC. Though the party was moderate enough to express displeasure over the deportation of the Kabaka, it shared with the Obote section the overriding objective of forging a United Uganda.

The UPC thus acquired characteristics that were a combination of the UNC and the UPU. Strongly averse to the "concept of Buganda", the party had strong bases in former UNC areas, Acholi, Lango, Bukedi and West Nile. While it acquired from the UNC a certain degree of militancy and mass support, it acquired from the UPU the element of "Big boss politics". This was exemplified in the fact that in those areas (generally the former UPU areas) where the UPC president did not have an independent political base, he was dependent on the influence wielded by his associates in their respective home districts.<sup>7</sup>

The Kabaka Yekka (KY) or the "King only" was a party formed on the basis of Baganda egotism. Having failed to secure

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.449.

a separate statehood, its basic platform remained the maintenance of Buganda's autonomy within the unified state of Uganda. As the name itself implies the Kabaka was the symbolic binding chord between the kulaks who controlled the helm of affairs through the Lukiko and their subjects, the peasantry. Through this common emotional bond, the party therefore had a very strong mass base. The appeal of the Kabaka Yekka was however confined to the district of Buganda only. It must be noted that the KY was not defined in terms of religion or in terms of class interest rooted in the production process. Perhaps it was because of this that the UPC and the DP, as political parties, were able to make deep inroads into Buganda either through the promise of economic reforms or the appeal to religious affinities. Even as late as 1969, during the introduction of the "Move to the Left", one of the primary motives of Obote was to wean away the mass support of the kulaks by promising economic reform represented by the "Common Man's Charter". The DP, a religious (Catholic) party also maintained a substantial following in Buganda.

The Democratic Party was an all out Catholic party and its membership ran across both class interest and economic differences. While the KY situated itself in Buganda where kulak interest dominated, and the UPC found support among the African trading sections and in areas where trading

communities had come up in a substantial way, the thrust of the DP's campaign was the appeal to the Catholic church. The DP found strong bases in those areas that were relatively untouched by trading enterprises and where the Catholic chiefs were able to maintain strong control.

### Polarisation at the political level

The first few years of independence witnessed the attempt of the UPC to project itself with a national image. Its main concern towards this direction was the incorporation of diverse national sub-entities, which in essence meant the accommodation of various ideologies. A major thrust in its policy was therefore the incorporation of Buganda into the greater national concept of Uganda. This was also a matter of necessity for the UPC was extremely weak in Buganda. The UPC-KY alliance, despite ideological contradictions, has sometimes been explained in these terms. From an objective perspective, it was also an opportunistic coalition between the kulaks and the trading sections to obtain the reins of power and thereby secure the means of surplus accumulation. At the political level, the populist and nationalistic outlook of many of the UPC leaders were at variance with the elitist and conservative outlook of the Kabaka and his chief advisors who controlled the Kabaka Yekka.

Another issue that influenced political events was the question of religion. With special reference to Busoga, which was predominantly Catholic, Dan Mudola has argued that religion had a negligible impact on politics during the transition period. He argues that, since 1900 a protestant political hegemony had been so clearly established that members of other religious groups were resigned to seeking only a patron-client relationship with the dominant group. "It was mostly factors other than religion that counted in party alignments".<sup>8</sup> Sure of their established position, Protestant chiefs chose to support either the DP or UPC (at this time the DP was identified as Catholic and the UPC as Protestant) without any fear that their political hegemony would be challenged.

There was also a deliberate policy on the part of the UPC to avoid political schisms on the basis of religion.

Religion however, cannot altogether be ruled out as a political stimulant. In spite of the events after 1900 the Catholic population had grown to be an entity to be reckoned with. By 1959, when the census was held, 62.4 per cent of the declared Christians in Uganda were Catholics. The major opposition party, the DP, was openly associated with the Catholic Church and became the champion of Catholic aspirations. In that atmosphere the UPC was unwillingly treated as a

<sup>8</sup> Dan Mudola, "Religion and Politics in Uganda, the case of Busoga, 1900-62", African Affairs, vol.77, no.306, January 1978, pp.22-35.



Protestant party. The fact that many of its members joined it and became loyal to it because its dominant leaders were Protestant was not too much of a help in Obote's attempts at projecting the UPC as a secular, all-encompassing national party.<sup>9</sup> Colin Leys, emphasising the politicisation of religious diversity and commenting on the competition between the UPC and the DP in the 1950s and 60s, observed that it was based on religion; "unlike nearly all other multi-party systems in Africa, the UPC-DP struggle was not a competition between ethnic groups with their characteristic regional bases. It was a competition between the adherents of the Roman Catholic Church, wherever it was established, and, in effect, everyone else." His detailed case-study of one district, Acholi, demonstrated the manner in which party loyalties, determined on this basis, defined an all-pervasive jockeying for position within every local institution. Questions related to the distribution of various goods and surpluses were resolved through politico-religious loyalties.

Explanation of the political polarisation in Uganda either in terms of religious diversity or "regionalism" or even "tribalism" seems incomplete. It was not so simple. Political alliances at the centre of the country sometimes followed an ethnic line, sometimes politico-religious allegiances, sometimes a racial difference. More often they clustered along some combinations of these alignments. What

<sup>9</sup> Mujaju, n.5, p.451.

is required here, to bring all the facets of the political structure into a comprehensive understanding, is an analysis in terms of the broader setting of imperialism and class struggle, as Uganda was incorporated into the global imperialist system.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a cash-crop oriented economy had been established during colonial era. The dominant products of the agricultural sector were coffee and cotton. In 1963 these two products accounted for 80.6 per cent of Uganda's exports and all of this was grown by African peasants. After independence the Ugandan economy became totally dependent on exports primarily of cotton and coffee, and subsequently on the peasant. This was a legacy of the colonial economy. Uganda was transformed into a satellite economy wholly centred around the requirements of the metropole. In this dependency syndrome the ruling class played the effective role of an agent. In independent Uganda the ruling class comprised of the wealthy traders and the big kulaks who had entered politics or influenced it, but in relation to a ruling class in developed capitalism they were an "underdeveloped bourgeoisie" with a weak economic base and fragmented at the level of politics.<sup>10</sup> Besides not being a consolidated class it was dependent heavily on the peasant populace in both the economic and political sphere. This may explain Obote's eager attempts at wooing the rural

<sup>10</sup> John S. Saul, The State and Revolution in Eastern Africa, London: Heinemann, Ibadan, Nairobi, 1979, p.357.

population especially from the peripheral districts by promising a redressal of the regional economic imbalances. The ruling classes were dependent on the peasants for political support as much as for production.<sup>11</sup> Besides the enforced creation of a peasant based, cash-crop economy designed, quite specifically, to service imperial requirements, another feature of the subjugation of the local economy to the international economy was the emergence of the indigenous compradore bourgeoisie. This class was no mere casual by-product of colonisation but rather a class whose consolidation came to be considered by the British as vital to their long term interests. They were looked upon as a class necessary to inherit power and serve the interests of the imperial power. Mr Lennox Boyd, the then colonial secretary, said in the House of Commons in London that "an African property owning middle class would be one of the stabilising factors in that continent." Africanisation had also proceeded a great extent to aid in the formation of this intermediate bourgeois class.<sup>12</sup>

Another by-product of the export-import imperial system, the emergence of the intermediary Asian "commercial bourgeoisie" in the economic sphere has also been identified already in our previous chapter. Their strategic position in the economy was

11 Colin Leys, Politicians and Policies: An Essay on Politics in Acholi, Uganda 1962-65, p.4.

12 George R. Bosa, "African Businessmen in Uganda", East Africa Journal, April 1967, p.19.

to become the target of African bourgeois aspirations. In that they were non-African they were to become the points of negative polarisation and an anti-Asian stance was to become a catchy slogan for any African party out to win votes, but in that the Asian bourgeoisie could never aspire for political office they would never pose a direct political threat, and therefore, the political struggle in the immediate future would be confined to Africans.

With the above observation as a point of departure the post independence political equilibrium becomes a little more comprehensible. When the question over control of the state power arose (this also meant control over the surplus production, namely that of Buganda), the elite section of the society, the very people who had been created to serve as the linkage between metropole and satellite, aligned themselves into political parties - whether ideologically nationalist (UPC), tribal (KY) or religious (DP). The focal points of these alignments were "traders", "kulaks" and "chiefs". But again this was not a clear-out demarcation. There was a thorough interpenetration amongst the various focal points. The UPC was not only a traders' front but also kulaks' and bureaucrats', and many members of the bureaucrats came from a "chiefly" background. The foremost distinctiveness of the UPC was a united Uganda, "anti-Buganda", platform. Secondly, they were protestants at least so far as the Catholic membership of the DP was concerned. The DP was supposedly an alliance of the chiefs, intellectuals and

peasants but it also consisted of a strong section of both the kulaks and traders. Therefore the picture that seems to appear is a competition for the control of power among the elite sections themselves, a picture seemingly unrecognisable in terms of a class conflict. More likely the situation was a struggle for control among the various fractions of the ruling class. The important thing, as it were, was to have access to government, for this meant access to power and wealth and a guarantee of personal security.

#### The "Lost Counties" issue

The "Lost Counties" issue in 1964 was really the beginning of a showdown between Baganda and non-Baganda over who was to control the economic surplus of Buganda; it brought to the fore a question mark over the suitability of the neo-federal constitution and all that it stood for.

The Uganda (Independence) Order in council of 1962 called for a referendum of voters in the two Lost Counties, which had a clear Bunyoro majority, after 9 October 1964, to determine their future affiliation: to Bunyoro or to Buganda. The issue was simple but crucial: as parts of Buganda, the producers in the "lost Counties" would pay the bulk of their taxes to the Buganda state; as parts of Bunyoro they would pay them to Kampala. It was clear which way the Bunyoro

peasants would vote. Payment to Kampala was, for obvious reasons, a lighter proposition than payment to the oppressive Baganda landlords, and not being Baganda, and thus not protected by the 1927 Busulu and Nvujjo Law,<sup>13</sup> the tenent peasantry was sure to vote for freedom from its Lord, the Kabaka. This would have been a very serious blow to the privileges of Buganda. Over the severest objections of the Kabaka Yekka, the UPC held the referendum on 9 October 1964. As expected 75 per cent of the peasants voted to join Bunyoro, and the territory Buganda controlled was diminished by two counties.

The "Lost Counties" issue finally led to the break up of the UPC-KY coalition. 1964 also saw the beginning of the process whereby the KY gradually but painfully shed its tribal ideology. By 1965, the Kabaka had decided to disband the KY as a party, and most of its members joined the UPC masquerading as the Buganda UPC.

#### The 1966 Crisis and the abrogation of the Federal Constitution

The 1966 crisis was an expression of further fragmentation and intensified intrigue politically, that had come to characterise Ugandan politics. The scene took the form of pure power conflict within the UPC. Whether it was the southern,

<sup>13</sup> The 1927 Busulu and Nvujjo Law fixed an upper ceiling for land rent. It was applicable only to Baganda peasants, who were thus protected from oppressive landlords who increased land rents as cash-crop production expanded.

"Bantu", politicians in league against Obote, or the small property owning traders and kulaks against the representatives of the governing bureaucracy, the means they chose to acquire control of state power was through a parliamentary coup. It began with charges of corruption and misappropriation of Congolese gold captured during the Congo turmoil against the Prime Minister and Col Amin, the deputy commander of the Ugandan Army, and two of Obote's closest cabinet colleagues. This was followed by the arrest of five cabinet members belonging to the Buganda faction in the UPC. The Kabaka was dismissed as President and the constitution was suspended.

The Obote government introduced a "unitary" constitution that abrogated all of Buganda's "federal" powers - at one stroke ending the financial and political autonomy of the Baganda and the Kabaka. The Baganda Lukiko refused to pass the new constitution and demanded the withdrawal of the central government from Buganda soil by 30 May 1966. In other words, it revived the old demand of a separate statehood. The call given by the Lukiko was popularly supported throughout Uganda. Impatient Baganda peasants out in the countryside launched violent assaults upon the rural police stations - those scattered symbols of the central government's authority, which contained (or so it was thought) policemen who were mostly from Obote's own northern part of the country. Obote immediately riposted by sending his Special Force against the

Kabaka's palace. A sharp conflict ensued. Mutesa II fled the country. The crisis was brought under control and order restored in Buganda when the central government brought in the army. By 1967 the "revolutionary" constitution outlawed all kingdoms in Uganda and declared the state supreme. The result was the final elimination of the Buganda state.

Politics in Uganda during the period of the neo-federal constitution was confined to the African privileged classes. Competition for power within this section of the society intertwined with what was an extreme form of uneven development characterised, in particular, by Buganda's dramatic headstart. This in turn was overlaid by "tribalism" especially of Buganda, and the politicisation of religious differentiation upon which the DP was built. Beneath this political kaleidoscope ran the current of neo-colonialism in which the African upper classes were held prisoner and the only means of surplus appropriation was control of the state machinery. In Uganda it was the failure of this class to act unitedly and effectively as a cohesive group that reversed the conventional process of "nation building". In the end, the abrogation of the federal constitution brought to a stop the open and incessant political infighting amongst political elites. It marked a significant turn in the development of Ugandan politics. The focus of Ugandan politics narrowed down to a small section of the rulers headed by Milton Obote and the Bureaucratic



machinery. Struggle for control among the elites, marked by a series of political issues such as the validity of Buganda's privileges and the Lost Counties, the victorious emergence of Obote and his ruling fraction and the liquidation of the "concept of Buganda" were the background to the next stage - "The Move to the Left". The 1966-67 episode was the culmination of the struggle between Buganda and the central authority, represented by Obote. The substance of the conflict, as it always had been, was the question of who would control the surplus of Buganda. (In fact, the crisis had begun when the central government reduced its annual grant to the Buganda government by the amount of the non-African tax collected by the latter).<sup>14</sup> Obote and his ruling fraction were however without a mass base, so the next phase of Ugandan politics witnesses their attempts to consolidate the victory and rectify their weaknesses, namely a weak mass base.

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14 Nsibambia, n.3, p.15.

**CHAPTER III**

**"THE MOVE TO THE LEFT"**

On May 1969, President Milton Obote officially proclaimed the "Move to the Left". It was ostensibly a propagation of a socialist path of development. The various programmes that were to be undertaken under this move were outlined under the 'Common Man's Charter'. As the term itself implied, the Charter embodied a far reaching re-distribution of wealth, and the ownership of property, that was to automatically benefit the common masses. Re-distribution necessarily involved a redressal of the economic imbalance that, in Uganda, had become regional and tribal. A preliminary step in this direction was the nationalisation of the means of surplus appropriation. On May 1970, Obote announced his intention to take over 60 per cent ownership in all the multinational companies in the country. A day later, the national assembly enacted a bill "providing government control over eighty-five companies operating in Uganda". However, the January 1971 coup brought the various socialisation programmes to an abrupt halt. Only a few of the negotiations for take-over were completed. It would therefore be a fallacy to confine our analysis of Socialism in Uganda to the period of a little over a year. Rather, the introduction of the "Move to the Left" must be seen as a symbolic landmark in the developments of politics since independence. The aggrandisements of a state as it emerges from a state of colonialism, and as it takes control of the helm of affairs is to be observed as a logical

phenomenon. This trend is clearly discernible in the Ugandan case, and the "Move" was a culmination of this trend and not a sudden new development. The intention of this chapter is to trace out this gradual development within the observation that, beneath the guise of the socialist move lay the determination of a party (the UPC) - whittled down in strength after the Buganda crisis, shorn of its mass support following an economic crisis, and threatened with a political upset by the opposition - to retain power by any means. It is within this model that an attempt will be made to bring to a comprehensible formula the equation between tribalism, class conflict, and the regional economic imbalance. Also, within this premise, an attempt will be made to understand the relationship of the state with the Indian commercial bourgeoisie and the multinational corporations. In spite of Obote's patriotic proclamations of "Africanisation" and "Socialism", it is during the period of the "Move to the Left" that the interests of the ruling bureaucracy and these two sections/forces become most conspicuously fused in the service of international economic imperialism. It will also be interesting to observe how Obote manoeuvred to reconcile the two concepts of "Africanisation" and "Socialism", for while the former was an African bourgeois slogan the latter meant a dismantling of bourgeois institutions.

#### The need for an ideology

The precipitants to the ideological quandary that Obote

found himself in, prior to the 1971 coup, can be traced back to the events of 1966-67. The political upheavals of 1966-67 witnessed the demise of the Baganda state, and with the end of Baganda participation in government. It must be remembered here that Buganda represented the strongest indigenous Kulak and trader formation. An opposition of this group formed a positive threat since they also had a very strong mass base. In the concept of "Buganda" and of "Kabaka" (Kingship), other things remaining equal, they always maintained an emotional appeal among the Baganda masses. This had been clearly demonstrated during the Kabaka's exile and the abrogation of the federal constitution in 1966. The Kabaka and the federal constitution had been the embodiment of the status quo of Buganda hegemony in Uganda. It was only through a strong reliance on the army, which for historical reasons had become dominated by the Acholi, Langi (Obote's tribe) and Iteso tribesmen, that Obote was able to restore order throughout Buganda. Therefore, in Obote's eyes, they (the opposition led by Bagandas) were always a force to be reckoned with. Here, more than anything else, Ugandan political manoeuvres become rooted in tribalism; a tribalism emphasised by the reality of uneven-development which ran clearly along tribal lines. In 1966, having eliminated the "Baganda state" lobby within the UPC, Obote also alienated a large proportion of his mass sympathy (the Baganda populace) the very ground on which he stood. Consequently, as John S. Saul has analysed, as a result

of his loss of support among the southern Bantu politicians, Obote found it difficult to avoid consolidating a northern, "Nilotic", and, towards the end of his reign, even a Langi fraction as one crucial pillar of his own support. Never entirely happy with this seeming necessity forced upon him by the dynamics of political circumstances, he constantly manoeuvred to diversify and expand the ruling bloc over which he presided. "In fact, one motivation behind his celebrated 'Move to the Left' was precisely his desire to escape from the "northern" corner (including strong reliance on the predominantly northern recruited army) into which he was being pushed".<sup>1</sup>

In Mamdani's perception, the ideology was produced to justify state ownership and state property, the state being under the control of the bureaucracy which was emerging as a class, and that like every other ruling class it chose a socialist ideology as a means by which it could identify its particular interests with the general interests of society. The expansion of the state sector was identified as the building of socialism and the period of its own formation as that of a transition to socialism.<sup>2</sup> The bureaucracy has emerged as a class and the "Move to the Left" was a

1 John S. Saul, The State and Revolution in Eastern Africa, London, Heinemann, Ibadan, Nairobi, 1979, p.374.

2 Mahmood Mamdani, Politics and Class Formation in Uganda, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1976, p.273.

bureaucratic class project. This is however hard to digest in its entirety. Owing to the diffusion of occupation, there was a widespread interpenetration between kulaks, traders and the bureaucracy. It is difficult to talk of the bureaucracy as having a separate class interest. Even if they had emerged as a class, it is hard to imagine, especially in the African context, a bureaucratic class that would venture into a programme of self-denial such as that was signified by socialisation of property. Mamdani is not wrong when he maintains that the ideology was produced to justify state ownership and state property. But the question is who controlled the state? Was it the bureaucracy as a class of whom Obote was just a political arm? Or was it Obote and his UPC as a ruling party, for whom the bureaucracy was an institutionalised instrument? The latter is easier to accept, if only because it makes it easier to explain the dubious nature of the "Move to the left" and the socialism that it propagated. During 1969, Obote and the ruling UPC was faced with many grave realities. Firstly, there was an acute economic crisis. Secondly, unrest arising out of this was successfully harnessed by the opposition and they were becoming very vocal in their criticism of the government. Then there was also the fact, which Obote apparently realised, that the ruling party had been relying on the armed forces to a dangerous extent for their sustenance. The need of the hour was a new direction in government. The answer which Obote

conjured was the official proclamation of "Socialism" - "Move to the Left" - into which he may have been influenced by Nyerere's "Arusha Declaration" in 1967 in Tanzania. In its basics, it was a political ploy by which Obote hoped to prop up his party's failing image in the face of a nationwide unrest. While hoping to distract the public mind from the immediate economic crisis, he at the same time aimed at undermining the standing of his political opponents.

#### Consolidation by the state

If the "Move to the Left" exemplified a consolidation of the means of surplus appropriation by a faction of the bourgeoisie who represented the state, and if it is to be seen as just another turn in the process of coalition-building by the ruling party, then this process is traceable since independence. An African bourgeois class fostered carefully by the colonialists had emerged and a political struggle for the position vacated by the colonialists had ensued. To the political elites such as the bourgeoisie, traders, kulaks and chiefs, the important thing was to have access to government for this meant access to power and wealth and a guarantee of personal security. Arising out of the question of uneven development, there was the widespread assumption that the function of government was primarily if



not exclusively to benefit the governors".<sup>3</sup> Once governorship was achieved or control of the state accomplished, the important thing for the ruling class became the consolidation of its position and widening of its power base by the expansion of the public sector. This summed up Obote's endeavour towards creating state controlled organisation known as parastatals. The proximity of the advent of the parastatals to the defeat of the 'Buganda' opposition in 1966-67 further adds validity to the above analysis.

Parastatals were meant to supersede the cooperatives and supervise the economy directly. Cooperatives had so far been a major focal point of indigenous capital formation and hence a formative ground for an African commercial bourgeoisie. They controlled the buying, distribution and marketing of all the major cash crops, notably cotton and coffee. Prior to independence the colonial state had kept strict control over the financial operations of cooperatives through the Cooperative Societies Legislation of 1946 (Amended in 1952). After independence, the state repealed the 1946 Act and replaced it with the Cooperatives Societies Act (1963), which reduced state control to an advisory capacity and granted financial autonomy to the cooperatives. It must be noticed here that the state was then under the control of the UPC-KY coalition. The state therefore represented the interests of the traders,

rich farmers and kulaks, a large majority of whom were drawn from Buganda. "At the society level, committees (of cooperatives) are usually composed of the 'big men' of the village - those who are already relatively well placed in terms of the local social situation", wrote E.A. Brett in his study of cooperatives.<sup>4</sup> Cooperatives had become the organisational means of capital accumulation for the rich farmers (and in some cases, the traders) who controlled the committees and thus the use of surplus funds. After 1967, the state was in the hands of the UPC alone and the 'Buganda' components were driven into the opposition camp. The creation of Parastatals thence was a direct punch at the kulaks and traders in whom control over cooperative policy was vested. Correspondingly, Parastatals meant the consolidation of commercial power in the hands of the ruling party.

The basis of government was narrowing down to a small group, and this group was using the government machinery to catapult its own members into positions of economic and political power. They later pushed the government itself into the productive sphere of its own members and to the discomfort of anyone who could pose a political threat.

#### The dissolution of African Business Promotions Limited

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4 E.A. Brett, "Problems of Cooperative Development in Uganda", UN Research Institute for Social Development, (Mimeo), Geneva, 1973.

(ABP Ltd) in 1966 and the subsequent creation of the National Trading Corporation (N.T.C.), a state controlled Parastatal. ABP had been created to "train and develop (African) entrepreneurs" in business executions.<sup>5</sup> Although limited in effort, understaffed, and giving limited assistance to only a small number of African entrepreneurs, ABP Ltd, offering credit guarantees, discounting, hirepurchase, and confirming, had been a positive step towards Africanisation.<sup>6</sup> It was basically a bourgeois institution concerned with the welfare of the upper rungs of African business. The NTC was created because of the "need of a substantial share of trade in this country passing into the hands of Africans", and was to ensure that Africans "participate fully in (the) import and export trade".<sup>7</sup> Both the ABP Ltd and the NTC were bourgeois institutions for Africanisation. One bourgeois institution was dismantled only to be replaced by another whose activities were even more remote from any concepts of socialisation or the equal distribution of property or the means to it. As Mamdani has observed, "the NTC directed its attention primarily at assisting members of the governing bureaucracy to organise business". It was another tool of the narrowing ruling clique to push up its own members into socially advantageous positions. Without doubt, it was an

5 G.R. Bosa, "African Businessmen in Uganda", East Africa Journal, April 1967, p.19.

6 For further information on the steps towards Africanisation and on the operation of the ABP Ltd, refer chapter 4 in Bosa, The Financing of Small Scale Enterprises in Uganda, pp.45-46, and Jack Parsons, The Africanisation of Trade in Uganda, pp.12-14.

7 President's speech, Uganda Parliamentary Debates, Hansard, 1 December 1965, vols 51-54.

instrument for the commercialisation of the bureaucracy, an institutionalised system of the ruling faction.

The cooperatives and the ABP Ltd had been the embodiment of bourgeois patriotism in upholding the concept of "Africanisation", a positive means of assisting African enterprise especially in the face of an Indian commercial bourgeois dominance in the wholesale trade. The cooperatives had seen active government encouragement in the form of funds, loans, and subsidies. The ABP had been set up with no less noble an intention. But those had been the times when government had been representative of also the kulaks and traders in general in the form of the UPC-KY alliance. The emphasis here is that the execution of state policy was a reflection of the composition of those in government. After the 1966-67 episode, the government was solely in the hands of Obote's faction, a narrow clique which was intolerant of seeing any economic power in the hands of those who were potential threats to their position. It must be mentioned here that the Indian commercial bourgeoisie posed no direct political threat to Obote or for that matter to anyone in political office. Not that they had no political aspirations but their situation prevented them from playing any direct role in politics. But owing to their non-African identity they had become the indirect victims of any party who tried to project an African image. However owing to the actual narrow

and confined character of the ruling party and also because of their apolitical nature, they remained largely unscathed in the economic combat that ensued. In fact, as will be discussed in later pages of this chapter, they were to benefit from the "Move to the Left".

The ostensible reason for the reduction of the cooperatives to a secondary position was the persistent corruption within. It was cited that because of this malaise they had failed to fulfil the national mission of Africanisation. (State commissions charged with conducting investigations into the affairs of the cooperative unions reported rampant corruption in the ranks of the cooperatives, submitting detailed accounts of how they had been used for private accumulation by individual members of the petty bourgeoisie. Government ministers charged the cooperatives with exploiting the people).<sup>8</sup> State assistance to the African traders was also withheld plainly on the ground that the traders could avail themselves of loan facilities existing in commercial terms in the banks and other financial institutions. But financial institutions such as banking and insurance were mostly in the hands of multinationals for whom concepts like Africanisation would hardly be a matter for consideration for policy decisions.

<sup>8</sup> UG, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Affairs of all Cooperative Unions in Uganda, 1967, in Mamdani, n.2, p.261.

If the state policy had to be revised, or cooperatives and other African "self help" institutions criticised on the grounds that they bred corruption or that they were a monopoly of only a privileged section of Africans, it must also be pointed out that Parastatals were no less an evil. They were the symbol of power concentration in the hands of even fewer a number.

Another Parastatal besides the NTC that further validates the above paradigm was the Produce Marketing Board (PMB). Its purpose was to assist state control of the internal marketing of food items. Section 9 of the 1968 Law establishing the PMB stated: "No person shall buy any controlled minor crops (a) unless he has a licence, (b) except in a declared market."<sup>9</sup>

According to the 1968 Law, since the state both issued licences and declared marketing areas, it now had the power to allocate trade in essential commodities to African wholesalers, who as it turned out, was generally a member of the governing class. The wholesalers appointed by the PMB were to undertake both the buying and selling of essential food commodities in the national market, two functions hitherto carried on by two different sections of capital and defining the separate economic base of each: buying by the

9 The Minor Crops Bill, Uganda Parliamentary Debates, 6 February 1968, Hansard, vols 78-81, p.2665.

cooperatives and selling by the Indian commercial bourgeoisie. While the PMB's agents were to buy locally grown foodstuffs through the cooperatives, the cooperative's share was reduced to that of being the agent of the Parastatal on the market. The Indian commercial bourgeoisie's role in food distribution, on the other hand, was simply taken over by the agents of the PMB.

### The Economic Crisis

The economic crisis that Uganda faced in 1969 was the most immediate cause that drove Obote towards the ideological of the "Move to the Left". Rising prices and chaos in the distribution system had a direct cause and effect relationship with the political struggle and the ensuing aggrandisement of economic power by the state. The economy of Uganda being predominantly a peasant based one, the brunt of the crisis was felt by the direct producers - the peasantry.

Using the power of their accumulated capital and their existing monopoly control over the distributive system of the economy, Indian wholesalers responded with economic sabotage. While the Law forbade their buying directly from the grower, there was no prohibition against their buying from the PMB wholesale agent. On the other hand the PMB subdistributor/wholesaler was as much a capitalist as the Indian wholesaler.

He too operated by the rules of the market: maximise profits and minimise losses. While the Indian wholesaler resorted to hoarding, the FMB agent, without sufficient capital to hold his stock for a long period, had to sell in the face of falling prices. The Indian wholesaler bought the supplies of the local agent in bulk, stored them as long as necessary to create a scarcity and ensure a monopoly position, and sold the stock at a marked-up monopoly price.

The February 1968 monthly report for Bungyoro/Mubende stated that "sugar distribution is in chaos". The price of basic foodstuffs monopolised by the state went up, salt from 0/20 to 0/50 and in some places even 0/70, and rice of the first grade from 1/20 to 1/70.

The victims were the producers of cashcrops and the consumers of foodstuffs - the peasantry. For them the catastrophe was two-fold. Not only did the price of the basic commodities they bought (such as salt) rise, but the price of the commodities they sold declined. Legally they could not sell to anyone but the PMB. The price the PMB offered was low in comparison to the prices the market had previously offered, or to what the black market offered. The PMB offered the grower Shs 18 per 200-pound of maize, whereas the private trader had offered him Shs 30. The board's minimum price for millet was Shs 40 per 200-pound bag, whereas the market price had been Shs 80.



The PMB agent was not intended to replace the local cooperative as much as to augment it; at the same time, he failed to replace the Indian wholesaler. All three sections of capital - the cooperative, the parastatal, and Indian wholesaler - extracted their income from the peasant's surplus.

The opposition trading classes were able to politicise the growing peasant discontent. They organised the growers opposition through the cooperatives by refusing to cooperate with the PMB, or to buy on behalf of the PMB at prevailing prices. At the same time the ruling party, inextricably linked with the import-export economy were unable to tackle the roots of the economic problem.

A refusal to buy on the part of the African traders, economic sabotage by the Indian commercial bourgeoisie, and incapacity of the ruling party were the substance of the 1969 crisis. The answer, or at least what Obote thought was the answer, was a political solution. All other political parties were banned and the political ideology of the "Move to the Left" was launched.

### Nationalisation

The various stages of consolidation by the state had been characterised by the nature of the faction or factions that

controlled the state. The ensuing economic combat had resulted in the economic crisis of 1969. Owing to this crisis Obote and his government had lost mass sympathy. The very ground on which he stood was crumbling. Realising this, Obote was looking for ways in which he could strengthen his base or win allies. The army had been a very dangerous ally and in fact the military had been pampered and literally paid off to keep itself out of harm's way. In this atmosphere the natural allies for Obote were the foreign capital and the Indian capital in Uganda, notwithstanding the socialistic pretensions. On the other hand, these two big 'capitals' were always on the lookout for state patronage. In this light the "Move to the Left" was a means by which Obote could appease the masses by promising an equitable distribution of property and at the same time come to an understanding with both the multinational corporations and the Indian commercial bourgeoisie. This is amply demonstrated in the execution of the programmes of nationalisation. The "Move to the Left" was simply another step in consolidation by those who controlled the state - namely Obote and his UPC.

The processes of nationalisation were bogged down into tedious negotiations over the terms and conditions of takeover of normally only a fraction of only 50 per cent of the corporations. Only a few of the negotiations for takeover were completed. This can of course be attributed to the 1971 coup,

but National and Grindleys Bank was the only British bank with whom a 60 per cent takeover was negotiated. Even here, it was granted the right to establish an international merchant banking subsidiary in which state ownership would be limited to 40 per cent. Brookbond-Liebig, manufacturers of tea, agreed to a 60 per cent government takeover of packing and distribution, but not of manufacturing. The only multinational to agree to a 60 per cent takeover of all its undertakings was a Canadian Copper concern. Interestingly, it was observed in 1965 that "the known copper reserves at Kilembe are sufficient to permit mining only until 1971 at the present rate of working".<sup>10</sup> In this case nationalisation was a much-desired insurance against losses at a time of high risk operation. Finally, a number of multinationals were simply dropped from the list in the coming months. In fact only a week after proclaiming the nationalisation decree the foreign minister was announcing in the National Assembly: "It (is) quite obvious...that there (is) still a lot of room for foreign initiatives and group and private individual enterprise to play a meaningful role in the country's economy."<sup>11</sup>

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10 A.M. O'Conner, Railways and Development in Uganda, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1955, p.84.

11 Latim, Uganda Parliamentary Debates, Hansard, vols 87-89, 24 February 1969, p.364.

For many of the foreign companies, as well as group and private individual enterprises, nationalisation was a welcome sight. To multinationals, besides giving an insurance against losses as in the case of the Canadian copper concern, nationalisation would also give them access to state capital (since it would be 'compensated' for the assets nationalised), keep all management in its own hands, and give it the political advantage of being known as a national company. In fact some months before the nationalisation decree the state was approached by the oil companies "with proposals for participation in equity to the extent of 50 per cent by government". In time, this status was duly accorded. Madhavani, the most important Ugandan Indian industrial capitalist, had also previously offered the government 50 per cent participation in all his holdings.<sup>12</sup>

For the private enterprises too, the presence of state owned enterprises especially banks and other financial institutions could be of immense benefit. Partnership with the state could also be turned to their advantage.

In the final analysis, though the "Move to the Left" had implied a dismantling of bourgeois institutions through the process of nationalisation and expansion of the state

<sup>12</sup> Yash Tandon, "The Pragmatic Industrialist" in Becker and Madhvani, eds, Jayant Madhvani, Privately printed, London, 1973, p.17.

sector, the actual situation was quite remote from this projection. The converse, the consolidation and strengthening of bourgeois institutions whether foreign, Indian or the ruling faction, was a distinguishable feature of the period immediately before the coup. Clearly enough, it was a situation where, far from assuming the master role, the members of the government were merely aspiring for the role of a junior partner in the international capitalist system. Nationalisation gave the state little more than formal ownership. Its members gained access to various directorships and other nominal posts within the various companies but their control in the process of accumulation would be marginal only. They would however reap political support for having nationalised; for "Africanisation" was still a catchy slogan. It was an effective eyewash for the ruling party's many ulterior purposes - in actual practice only selective "Africanisation" existed. The ruling party selected only loyal persons for bureaucratic posts and at the same time the expanding hold of the public sector over the economy could be employed to choke the economic viability of the opposition bourgeoisie.

The very nature of the negotiations for takeover had revealed that the ruling party, economically weak, had very little bargaining strength. Consequently, what it achieved

could be little more than a subsidiary partnership. This revelation re-emphasises the observation that the "Move to the Left" was in effect a move towards a widening of the unequal capital formation rather than a move to eradicate the unequal development bequeathed by colonialism. It was a move by the ruling party to tilt the existing unequal development in its favour. In the end it drove Obote deeper into the vortex of international capitalism.

So long as Ugandan economy was tied to exports and imports - export of primary products and import of western capital and manufactured goods - and so long as Obote was willing to preserve the status quo and manoeuvre to his advantage within the framework, any pronounced move towards leftism could not be antagonistic towards either the multinational or the Indian commercial bourgeoisie who flourished as agents/intermediaries between the satellite and the metropole. Thus, in spite of all the campaigns for Africanisation and strong criticisms levelled against the tactics of hoarding and monopoly pricing adopted by the Indian traders during the 1969 economic crisis, the cumulative result was an alliance. In the wake of the 1969 crisis the P.M.B. made a U-turn in its policy of appointing African distributing agents to undermine the Indian wholesalers and began to appoint joint African-Indian companies, or simply Indian wholesalers, as its distributing agents. Further, the

import-export sector through which the Indian bourgeoisie primarily accumulated capital and which had been totally nationalised, was now to be merely supervised by the state-established Export-Import Corporation. The director and chairman of the corporation, appointed by the president, was none other than Jayant Madhvani. The executive committee presiding over the export-import trade decided to let existing export-import firms continue with their business provided they gave the corporation a 1 per cent commission on all their transactions.<sup>13</sup>

In the final analysis, it becomes perfectly discernible that Obote was no socialist. Our examination of the "Move to the Left" has proved that point. As we have seen, the "Move to the Left" demanded only a marginal readjustment on the part of the international capital and the domestic private sector. In certain respects it even augmented their function. From the perspective of the commercialisation of the bureaucracy it is hard to bring to a reconciliation, "Africanisation" and the "Move to the Left", for while Obote used both of them rigorously, they both meant completely different things. This could only mean that the socialistic cries was only a sham and were used only to consolidate the position of the rulers. Far from implying a re-distribution of property on the basis of universal equality, it meant aggrandisement by those who controlled the state. This had been a basic characteristic of Ugandan politics.

<sup>13</sup> Mamdani, n.2, p.271.

**CHAPTER IV**

**UGANDA UNDER MILITARY RULE**



The military coup on 25 January 1971 placed Amin on the seat of the President of Uganda. Uganda since then had evidently witnessed a severe form of human suppression and constriction of all forms of individual freedoms. This had subjected Amin to wide international scrutiny, and the picture of him that emerged ranges from one of awe and admiration, the champion of black Muslims to one of amusement, shock, embarrassment and hopeless disgust. This apparent confusion stems from the fact that too many writers, especially those who had direct experiences with him, have tended to see him as an individual freak out of the context of the general Ugandan political atmosphere. They have picturised him as a bizarre nightmarish experience, the spectre of whom still haunts the Ugandan mind, however hard many may try to forget. Much of this is due to our man's robust and flamboyant personality. "He strode into the international political arena with all the accompanying thunder of thor", wrote David Martin of the Observer (London). Now that Amin has come and gone, we are in a more advantageous position to offer a detached analysis of the causes, nature and legacy of Uganda under military rule, staying aloof from biasness and personalised ridicule, thereby placing Field Marshall Idi Amin, as a military dictator, in the proper Ugandan political context. Our attempt will be to examine just how much of Amin was a reality and

how much was merely a myth and an aberration in the development of Ugandan politics. It will not be necessary to go at length into the personal fortunes of Amin himself, for such an approach would amount to the fallible assumption that the military junta was merely the result of the ambitions of Amin, the person, and that it would not have occurred otherwise. That the coup of January 1971 was a fact and that the decade of military rule that ensued was also a fact would be best accepted as our point of departure in analysing the preconditions and the nature of military rule, taking up such issues as alignments within the army, assertion of military control, expulsion of the Asians, the continuing grip of neo-colonial dependence and widespread violence whether organised or decentralised.

### Preconditions

Many writers seem to have overstated the significance of the "Move to the Left" ideology as the basic precipitant to the army takeover. While maintaining that the army composed of an "economic class, an elite stratum with a set of economic interests to project," Michael F. Lofchie goes on to emphasise the case that "the coup of January 1971 was the army's political response to an increasingly socialist regime whose equalitarian domestic policies posed more and more of a threat to the military's economic privileges".<sup>1</sup>

1 Michael F. Lofchie, "The Ugandan Coup - Class Action by the Military", Journal of Modern African Studies, vol 10, no.1, 1972, p.19.

Mamdani sees the coup as evidencing the resistance of the entrepreneurial petty bourgeoisie not to "socialism" but to the aggrandisement of the governing bureaucracy which he takes the "move" to exemplify.<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, these views run along different lines but they have a common factor in that they both give prime importance to the "Move to the Left" in the emergence of the military state.

We have already stated in our previous chapter that the government lacked the ability, if not the will, to enact its socialist proposals embodied in the "Common Man's Charter", which in itself was vaged and ill-defined. The relationship in which the military had, in effect, been paid-off to remain in the barracks was in no way coming to an end during the period of the "Move". Under the nationalisation programme, when several directorships became vacant and were to be filled by representatives of the government, Obote was careful to let the army officers know that they would also to be among the gainers. In the commercial Banking sector, for example, Obote appointed 20 directors, three of these were awarded to the military, and were filled by majors Oyite-Ojok, Abwola, and Kakukire. The The army was extremely well served, moving increasingly into

2 This is in broad reference to the model Mahmood Mamdani builds in his book, Politics and Class Formation in Uganda, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1976.

sectors which previously had been the civilian domain in Uganda.<sup>3</sup> When the system of car loans for public servants was terminated, army officers were provided with chauffeur-driven vehicles to ensure that they did not suffer from any embarrassing withdrawal symptoms. The soldiers were carefully insulated from such petty irritations.<sup>4</sup>

It seems improbable that the coup was the military's direct response to their apprehensions about Obote's "Move to the Left".

It is also difficult to see the military as a whole acting as a cohesive class. There was no all pervasive spontaneous mutiny in response to Amin's action. A significant number of Langi and Acholi contingents were not in opposition to Obote and during the first few days of uncertainty, they merely watched events in suspended animation. Moreover, Amin's factions defined them as the enemy at the time of the coup and proceeded to annihilate them. Rather than any class construct, ethnicity seemed to be a more powerful force and certainly overshadowed any class identification that may have been projected at the time of the coup.

It is also important to draw a distinction between the officer corps and the lower ranks of the army, because there

3 Irving Gershenberg, "A Further Comment on the 1971 Ugandan Coup", Journal of Modern African Studies, vol 10, no.4, 1972, p.638.

4 John D. Chick, "Class Conflict and Military Intervention in Uganda", Journal of Modern African Studies, December 1972, p.635.

were clear signs of conflict between different levels in the military hierarchy. Amin was much more closely identified with the non-commissioned officers and men, than he was with the senior officers, most of whom were considerably younger and better educated than he was. In this context, it is significant that the first broadcast after the takeover was made by an N.C.O., warrant officer Sam Wilfred Aswa,<sup>5</sup> and there were numerous promotions from the ranks in the following weeks to replace officers killed or detained during the fighting which accompanied the coup.

Immediately after the coup, the coup-makers announced on Kampala radio, "eighteen points" containing their grievances against the previous regime. Apart from those directly connected with the status of the army, such as complaints about lack of equipment, confusion in the apparatus of control, and attempts to weaken the army by the establishment of rival security services, there were attacks on corruption, detention without trial, the activities of secret police, economic mismanagement, divisive and sectional policies. The eighteen points included a number which related directly to Obote's economic ideology and policy. One of the justifications given for the overthrow of the Obote regime was their failure to implement the various promises of the

5 Uganda Argus and The People, 26 January 1971.

"Move to the Left". Most of these can be dismissed as gestures by the soldiers to justify the overthrow and the honourability of their actions, but the "eighteen points" also contained genuine complaints and this may explain the popularity with which the coup was received in the south, especially in the towns and villeges of the defunct kingdom of Buganda.

Perhaps it is because of the cheer it brought in the districts of Buganda, which comprised the most wealthy regions of Uganda, that Mamdani saw an "entrepreneurial petty bourgeoisie" participation in the coup. The wide approval that the coup received among the Baganda is an accepted fact, but subsequent events clearly showed that they were not to be members of the new power axis that Amin was to build in the same manner that Obote had been building his. The way in which Amin set about eliminating his potential or suspected enemies, irrespective of whether they belonged to the army or the camp in opposition to Obote, proved that the power structure was to be an entirely new one, one based around the West Nile tribes. It also proved that the overthrow of the Obote government was purely a military manoeuvre, and that also by only the faction that Amin represented within the cadres. The complicity of the other sections of the society, such as the Ganda or the "entrepreneurial petty bourgeoisie" can be ruled out simply by the lack of evidence in the actual engineering of the coup.

Understating the importance of the "Move to the Left" as the basic precondition to the coup, the army's entrance into the political mould of the country can be traced back to the month of January 1964, when the army mutined in demand for better service conditions and living standards. The army was virtually "bought-off"<sup>6</sup> and this established a precedent for later government submission to economic blackmail by the military. Then as discipline and command within the army came increasingly to depend on personal, factional and tribal considerations Amin's faction rose in importance because of his loyalty to Obote. During the constitutional crisis under the neo-federal constitution, the commander of the armed forces Brigadier Opolot, an easterner, was evidently siding with the dissidents against Obote. He was subsequently arrested and imprisoned. As a result of these splits and alignments that had permeated even into the army, Obote was driven into an increasing reliance on loyal military factions. This was most marked during 1964-67, when, the locus of power ran along the Langi and the Acholi, a younger generation of leaders within the UPC, a few long standing debtors and sycophants and most important, the Amin faction in the army. Obote was able to subdue Buganda and the dissident Cabinet ministers only because the bulk of the armed forces sided with their

<sup>6</sup> Lofchie, n.1, p.21.

second-in-command, Col Amin who remained loyal to him. Virtual free hand was then given to Amin's forces in the "pacification" of Buganda after the "Buganda crisis" had blown over and the Kabaka had gone into exile. The predominantly northern recruited army was given full authority to 'bring to heel' the southerners, thus establishing a precedent for the imposition of the army's will over the populace by direct and personal intimidation.

In the atmosphere of a politically weak regime, lacking popular mass support, and thriving upon opportunistic alliances, such as the politics that characterised Obote's tenure from the very beginning, the military was able to establish an extortionary relationship with the state and make exorbitant financial demands on the society. Obote, on the other hand, had very little choice but to condescend. Among other bonuses and facilities that the army enjoyed,<sup>7</sup> the annual Budgetary allocation of the army, which was beyond all proportions to the developmental requirements of the country, was a reflection of the extent the army had a hold over the state.<sup>8</sup>

7 The declaration of the State of Emergency in Buganda in 1966 for example entitled the soldiers to double pay for service in the Emergency area.

8 By 1968, the Ministry of Defence allocation was 10.2 per cent of the National Budget. It was 6.9 per cent in Kenya and 3.8 per cent in Tanzania. That year Uganda spent more than \$ 17 million on its military establishments, an amount nearly equal to the combined military expenditures of Kenya and Tanzania. When linked with the inflated pay scales of the army, these figures indicate the extent to which the Uganda army had been able to establish an extortionary relationship with the state.



Following the suspected complications of Amin in the assassination attempt in 1969, Obote seemed to have realised his dangerous reliance on Amin. In an attempt to outmanoeuvre Amin within the military cadre, and ensure the army's loyalty, Obote embarked upon a campaign of recruiting and promoting Langi and Acholi tribesmen, and building up a countervailing military force in the form of the General Service Unit (GSU),<sup>9</sup> and the Special Forces (SF).<sup>10</sup> On the other side, Amin was also consolidating his command among the lower ranks and among his own tribesmen, the Kakwa, the Madi, the Nubians and the Sudanese recruits. Thus what is witnessed in the years preceding the coup is the polarisation of forces in the military structure along tribal and ethnic lines, which was also to a certain extent religious.

In the atmosphere of confrontation, Amin was facing almost certain indictment in the Brigadier Okoya murder case. He also faced charges of corruption and mismanagement of large sums of the defence budget. Matters were already reaching ahead, when Obote took off for a commonwealth

9 A para-military police organisation, the GSU, was a strong presidential favourite for expenditure on equipment and operations. It functioned out of uniform, largely as a semi-conspiratorial secret police and its payroll was widely suspected to include a nation-wide network of informers who held official positions at all ranks of the Uganda Government.

10 The SF was an elite armed force unit of about 1000 men, favoured in terms of arms, equipment, and budgetary allotment. It functioned primarily as a kind of special Presidential Unit, potentially performing a bodyguard role and deriving special status from its privileged position within the military.

conference in Singapore. In his absence, Amin with his mechanised battalion made his move and the coup d'etat eventually paid him off.

### The Power Base of Amin's Regime

If Obote's power base had been dominated by Langi, Acholi, Iteso and other northern elements, then Amin's dictatorship did not prescribe to a new pattern of politics so much as a narrower version of the old. The post coup power arrangement rested on the northern-most tribes of the west Nile region - the Kakwa (Amin's own tribe), the Lugbara and to a lesser degree the Madi. Amin also recruited several thousand Nubian, Southern Sudanese and Congolese mercenaries,<sup>11</sup> and together they formed the repressive backbone of Amin's coalition.

In the immediate post-coup period, the coalition seemed to encompass a much wider spectrum. The Buganda kulaks and traders, the factions which had been deprived or under-rewarded in the days of Obote suddenly emerged as Amin's supporters, or at least viewed the downfall of Obote with

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11 In the Uganda army the Nubians were the descendants of the black Moslem Sudanese who settled all over East Africa after service in the colonial period. They were drawn into the Ugandan army from as far afield as Nairobi. The Southern Sudanese, came from the refugee camps and re-settlement schemes set up in Uganda during the civil war in the Sudan. The Congolese were alleged to be remnants of the Simba rebels from the Mulelist rebellion in the Congo (Zaire) in the early 1960s.

approval and hoped for better days ahead under Amin. As Glentworth and Hancock put it, "the losers of 1966, the victims of Obote's suspicion after the assassination attempt, those who were agile or anonymous enough to change sides on 25 January, all became participants in the Amin coalition and publicly paid tribute to their benefactor."<sup>12</sup> Even prominent men could make the switch. (William Oryema, head of the police service and patently involved in Obote's plans to remove Amin, became a Cabinet Minister. Henry Kyemba, Obote's private secretary before the coup, returned from Singapore to be permanent secretary first to the Cabinet and then in the Ministry of Labour. Justus Byagagaire, permanent secretary to the Cabinet under Obote became successively Minister of Labour and Minister of Public Service and Local Administration after the coup.) It was however an unstable and temporary realignment. It was reminiscent of the UPC-KY alliance in 1962. - a marriage of convenience. Like Obote, Amin first looked to his home area and then found it both possible and necessary to widen his power base. Amin's initial coalition was however very short lived and the bureaucracy became mere cyphers, not guiding or forming policy so much as trying to make the presidential decrees workable. The abrupt and early 'retirement' of twenty-two top civil servants in 1972 was self-evident of the ineffectuality of the bureaucracy.

12 Garth Glentworth and Ian Hancock, "Obote and Amin: Change and Continuity in Modern Uganda Politics", African Affairs, vol.72, no.288, July 1973, p.251.

An ingredient of Amin's new coalition was Islam. Amin always tried to put on a veneer of muslim orthodoxy about himself, although the actual depth of his personal commitment to the religion is questionable. Even though in his speeches he declared that he would tolerate all religions, it was clear right from the beginning that Muslims were in the establishment. African Muslims were receiving favours far beyond their share, and Amin became closely associated with militant Islam in north and Saharan Africa. Glentworth and Hancock have commented, "there can be no dispute that the army now has a powerful Muslim representation among the rank and file and in the officer corps, and that Muslim traders were doing proportionately better in the take-over of Asian businesses".<sup>13</sup>

#### The Nature of the Amin Regime

Special characteristics of the decade of Amin's rule in Uganda, in retrospect, are: the purges within the army, the expulsion of the Indian community, unmitigated violence throughout the country, the depredation of the economy and an aggressive foreign policy. They have often been dismissed as the behaviour of a cruel and imbecile ruler. It was true that Amin carried things to an extreme. He was definitely a less civilised political creature than Obote, but the regime certainly contained recognisable traits, amidst all the

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.252.

apparent confusion, of a political continuum. In the way in which hitherto unspoken assumptions became explicit, and in the way in which the struggle for control of the production surplus (the power struggle amongst the elites which we have so far identified) was stripped of its ideological trappings, the Amin regime seemed far removed from any connection with the everyday good and civilised government which Obote, for all his personal ambitions, did try to provide. But we have to see how Amin fitted into the framework of Ugandan politics that we have built up - Government exists to benefit those who are in control and that the goal is the enrichment of this group, and the deprivation and incapacitation of those outside the government and that "disloyal" and "dissident" Ugandans are traitors and are expendable. Whether it was the UPC-KY alliance of early independence years, or the single party state set up in 1966, or the "Move to the Left" ideology thereafter, the motivation was never a constructive new action but merely a delineation between those in government and those outside it. In Amin's period those in control were the armed forces who sided with him, their fellow tribesmen and black Ugandan Muslims. Rather than a bizarre interlude, the Amin regime, in spite of its extremities, still remained a part and parcel of such a politics.

Like Obote's policy before him Amin's policy subsequently was recognisable: promotion of the Kakwa, the Lugbara

and the Sudanese from the ranks to positions of majors and lieutenant-colonels; massive expenditure on military equipment and recruitment to produce an army of nearly 20,000, three times its original size and large enough for all the Muslim officers to feel that they had their own empires; the liquidation of Acholi and Langi troops and the GSU and SF men which took place in mid 1971 and January 1972; the "disappearance" of prominent Ugandan who appear to have been closely identified with Obote or who are known or believed to be hostile to Amin or who were held to be personally responsible for the problems of the current government. Once Amin had committed his regime to the policy of physical elimination of political opponents, it seemed he lost control of the machinery of violence he himself had created, uneducated and therefore uninformed that he was. General, widespread violence seems to have overtaken his calculations, if he had any. In the hands of the wider segments of the army, the example he set meant the physical and cruel elimination of many, even for petty stakes. Under Obote, it was at worst imprisonment or exile. But under Amin, notwithstanding his dreaded phrases of "finish him" or "take him away" which meant certain, and often inhuman, death, the most notable feature was the uncontrolled wanton killings and mass homicide.

After his overthrow, Obote had taken refuge in Dar es Salaam, and with a core of students, escaped political leaders and some loyal men, established a training camp at Kingolwira

to the east of the town of Morogoro, 122 miles inland from Dar es Salaam. On 17 September 1972, with the help of Tanzania and with about one thousand men, he managed to launch an invasion from across the Tanzanian border with the purpose of dislodging Amin. The invasion failed. Obote's "Peoples Army" had to beat a hasty retreat, leaving many to be captured and slaughtered by Amin's soldiers. In the wake of the abortive invasion, Amin unleashed a wave of repressive measures on all suspects, saboteurs and agents of Obote. The main victims were the Ankole in the extreme south-west of the country. The area had been a strong base for the UPC, and the people had given willing support to the guerillas of Obote's "Peoples Army". The Baganda, who had rejoiced at Obote's downfall, but who had hoped for a reinstatement of the Kabaka, thus falling into the bracket of "saboteurs" to the current government, were also not spared.<sup>14</sup>

The September invasion probably provided Amin the justification he needed for dealing with his opponents, real or imagined, with a heavy hand. Whether or not the degree of repression would have been much milder had the invasion never occurred, however remains a matter of conjecture. Owing to the continued activity of Obote's guerillas, and

14 David Martin has given a graphic account of the killings in his 8th chapter, "Amin's first Repression" of his book General Amin, Faber and Faber, London, 1974.

the open support given to them by Nyerere, the threat of displacement faced by Amin was indeed more real and substantial than those faced by Obote during his tenure. The extent of defensive or offensive control that the state exercised during Amin and during Obote therefore had a direct equation with the circumstances faced by each regime. Such a comparative approach enables us to see the various situations in an objective light. It also frees us from the subjective criticism let loose by the media. A defence of the Amin regime is however not the intention of this dissertation, for the violence and cruelty, told and untold, during the regime is undoubtable. But a distinction needs to be drawn between the violence emanating from the centre and the violence that was random, uncontrolled and widespread. In Ali A. Mazrui's words, "It is important to remember the ancient distinction between tyranny and anarchy. How much of the anguish of Uganda is due to the tyranny exercised by Idi Amin ? How much of it is .... a consequence of sheer anarchy and normative collapse ?"<sup>15</sup>

In Uganda, the tyrannical factor has been far more publicised, partly because of the flamboyant personality of Idi Amin and his capacity to attract international notoriety. But as time wore on for the regime, Uganda became as much a case of sheer decentralised violence as a case of purposeful tyranny.

<sup>15</sup> An afterword by Ali A. Mazrui in David Gwyn, Idi Amin, Death-Light of Africa, Little Brown & Company, Canada, 1977, p.210.



This is not to deny the argument that many of the more publicised murders were indeed centrally directed, often instigated by Field Marshal Idi Amin himself. The murder of Chief Justice Kiwanuka in 1972, the murder of Vice-Chancellor Kalimuzo of Makerere University in the same year, and the murder of Archbishop Luvum in 1977 along with two cabinet ministers were almost certainly ordered by Idi Amin himself. But far less publicised are the far more numerous cases of wanton decentralised brutality. On balance many more people must have died, or been mutilated, in Uganda as a result of decentralised violence than in response to purposeful brutality by the regime.

Hailing from a very small tribe, the President found he could not but help relying mainly on mercenary recruits for sustenance. The mercenary soldiers in turn realised that their survival depended on the existence of Amin. The situation was one of mutual dependence and the common interest was survival. But it seems that even while Amin drew undoubtable loyalty from his soldiers, he never held any strong control over them. Even as early as 1971, during the "rape terror" incident, President Amin's agreement to send more reliable soldiers to patrol the campus and to keep the military rapists at bay, speaks proof of this fact.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> During mid-1971, there was a scare among Langi and Acholi girls when some soldiers broke into Mary Stuart Hall at Makerere University. On the request of Vice-Chancellor Kalimuzo, President Amin agreed to send his more reliable soldiers to patrol the campus and to keep the military rapists at bay. Gwyn, op.cit., pp.218-19.

Having opened the floodgates of intimidation and violence, it seems President Amin was hardly in a position to control it. Far from having a President who had firm control of the situation, what is more likely in Uganda during the period is that the relationship between the President and the soldiers was one of a partnership in an enterprise in which the whole country was held to ransom.

In addition to the problems of distinguishing tyranny from anarchy, there is also the problem of distinguishing the religious from the secular in the Ugandan situation. The tribes that formed the basis of Amin's power, the Nubians, the Kakwa or the Sudanese formed only a small minority of the Muslim population of Uganda. The majority of Ugandan Muslims belonged to none of these three categories. It is therefore difficult to see Amin's calculations as religious to any extent. His supposed announcements of converting Uganda to Islam were perhaps merely his attempt to enlarge himself in International politics, especially among the Arab states. His need for funds to maintain his army, given the wreckage he had caused to the domestic economy, was acute, and was an important factor in this regard.

A formidably anti-Catholic bias among the list of Amin's dead, the murder of various Christian church-persons, most notably the Reverend Janani Luwum, the Anglican

archbishop of Uganda, has been highly publicised. The Catholic community has also been depicted as the ones who suffered the most casualties during Amin's death-light. Lest we fall a prey to the vast number of literature describing the military regime in such light, it is important that we hold our guns and enquire at the outset whether the deaths were a result of religious jealousy or a competition for power rooted in "tribalism" or even class differences. In the Ugandan political situation ethnic polarisation has been a perennial and over-riding factor. It has occupied the mainstream of political development, and this mainstream sometimes converged with the currents of economic stratification and class struggle, sometimes with regional disparities, and sometimes with ideological conflicts. In the Uganda of Amin's times, it converged with religious identities, or so it seemed. The ethnic factor however remained the over-riding current. A pure politicisation-of-religion approach would fail to explain why Amin and his soldiers kept hounding the Langi and the Acholi and indeed other Ugandans, among whom were Christians as well as Muslims. After all, if Janani Luvum was a Catholic, he was also an Acholi, like Cabinet Minister Oryema, who was killed with him.

Our argument is that, in Amin's Uganda the element of continuity was very strong. A direct comparison can be drawn between Obote's period and Amin's. The ingredients were the

same, only, the reaction was magnified ten-fold during the latter. This is not a denial of the bizarre and unexplainable aspects of Idi Amin's regime. It is no doubt hard to place the episode of the Indian expulsion in a proper analytical frame, and surely, Amin himself would hardly have the capacity to provide a coherent explanation as to why he drove the domestic economy into such a wreck, which, was tantamount to suicide for himself and his regime.

#### Expulsion of the Indian Community and the Ugandan Economy thereafter

In 1972, Amin decreed the expulsion and expropriation of approximately 72,000 Indians.

The most important field of the Indian Community's economic involvement in Uganda was in the wholesale trade. Given the time-lags between orders and deliveries of imports and the consequent importance of stock-control, the Indian merchants played an indispensable role in the import and distribution of 'essential' consumer goods.

The Indians also had a fairly substantial representation among the technical professions such as teaching, accounting, management functions, the cotton ginning industry, the transport industry, and at the level of supervisors in the construction industry. The cotton ginning industry was crucial

for a considerable part of peasant farmer income in the east and north of the country and accounted for a large proportion of export earnings. The transport industry was of course very important for the continued working of the internal marketing system, which included foodstuffs as well as export crops.

The wide ranging effect of the expulsion had on the economy was therefore quite obvious, especially in the short run. The vacuum created, especially in the specialised professions could not be filled in at least another four to five years, because of the training and familiarisation required. The considerable loss of skilled manpower led to a reduction in the operating efficiency of large parts of the economy. Manufacturing output declined, public finance on the revenue side fell. The result was an increasing difficulty in the balance of payments situation, and an impetus to increasing prices and increasing cost of living.

During the decision making of the expulsion decree, the favourable ~~favourable~~ prospects that could have been foreseen was that it would lead to a reduction of foreign exchange demand for purposes of capital outflow<sup>17</sup> and certain luxury imports catering mainly to the Indian demand.

17 The Indian community had always felt insecure in Uganda because of the adverse legal and political conditions. The period of 1965-1966 had also witnessed widespread anti-Indian movements and riots. Owing to these events the Indians had felt that they would eventually have to move out. They were therefore compelled to take recourse to such security measures as stacking up their capital earnings in foreign banks and out of the country. This capital outflow, along with the remittances they sent to their home countries accounted for a large part of the foreign exchange demand.

Such calculations being the major objective of the expulsion is however questionable, for the expulsion decree shows that it was purely racial in content.<sup>18</sup>

The expulsion, together with what amounted to expropriation, was a radical political break from previous policies towards the Indian community. All the while, the Indian community had been considered by Africans and by themselves as politically impotent. They had generally remained in the background of politics, seeking the good offices of whoever was in power. When Amin came to power there was ample evidence to show that the Indian community was eager to obtain his favour. In this light, Amin's expulsion of the Indians rather than securing their valuable economic support, like Obote before him had done, evades a logical and scientific explanation. The more logical action for Amin would have been to secure the alliance of the Indians and thereby build a sound economic base for his government. The only explanation that can be offered is that Amin lacked the political shrewdness and sense of government of his predecessor, Obote, the great coalition builder. Instead of calculating a long-run, he got carried away by the psychological anti-Indian euphoria that had

<sup>18</sup> James S. Read, "Some Legal Aspects of the Expulsion", Expulsions of a Minority: Essays on Ugandan Asians, ed., Michael Twaddle, London, University of London, 1975, p.201.

erupted sporadically since independence, as also the temptation of immediately confiscating the real estates and other properties of the Indians for his soldiers.

If we take into account Mamdani's model, the Obote section of the petty bourgeoisie having been eliminated, the field was set for an economic duel between the Indian commercial bourgeoisie and the African kulaks, namely of the Baganda. But our analysis of the nature of the military regime has shown that the Baganda had no place in the government of Idi Amin, which was formed on a tribal basis rather than on economic differences. In fact, the new axis of power was the northernmost tribes of the west Nile region, who had very little contact with the Indian community, keeping aside economic competition.

Obote was a child of colonialism, and being such, he was unknowingly shackled by the chain of neo-colonial economics. He and his class (the white collared officialdom) had been nursed to maintain the linkage between the metropolis and the colony. The Indian traders also occupied a vital link in that export-import vortex. As such, they both therefore had a common interest in maintaining the neo-colonial superstructure. But on the contrary, the Idi Amin regime was no product of colonialism. It was a product of the period characterised by Obote's coalition building.

They had not gone through the psychological indoctrination that the Ugandan bourgeoisie had gone through, neither did they sense any stake in the maintenance of the economic linkage with the metropolis. Amin's regime was purely African, and in an African setting the politics had been basically ethnical and racial. The Amin decade, characterised by extreme tribal antagonisms and ruthless elimination of opponents, drew a remarkable similarity to pre-colonial Africa. In such a relapse to Africanism, the Indian community could not have a relevant role.

Hence, the expulsion can be attributed to the preponderance of an African mind. It marked an abrupt break from neocolonial economic domination. Perhaps it was because of this that Amin, in his days, sometimes became the symbol and champion of Africa. But Amin failed to understand the mechanics of modern economics, and after dismantling the old, he failed to provide a new economic system. As the time wore on he faced increasing financial difficulty even to pay his soldiers.

We have seen how Uganda had been fashioned into a typical colonial economy, predominantly peasant-based and dependant on the exports of a limited range of raw materials and agricultural products. The commercial bourgeoisie and the foreign capital did no doubt play a significant role in the



setting up of industries to cater to the local demand (cement, sugar, textiles, chemicals, tea, coffee, etc), but the strong dependence of these industries on exportation, through the Indian merchants, kept the economy within the dependency syndrome. Once this system of dependency was severed, the economy went down in the dumps. The solution that Amin resorted to, to finance and equip his military, was an unrestrained printing of money. This led to a money supply totally in excess of the production and the availability of goods and services. The resultant inflation was a foregone conclusion. The peasantry, the primary producers, suffered the most severe oppression. The official prices fixed for their crops were far behind the pace set by their rising costs and the inflating prices of consumer goods. "Often they never got paid at all".<sup>19</sup> These had two adverse effects on the economy. Firstly, foreign-exchange earning cash-crop production declined considerably, as the farmers turned increasingly to staple food production for their own domestic consumption. The most seriously affected crops were coffee, cotton, tea and sugarcane. The Ugandan peasant-based economy which had been exposed to the international economy was now reversed to the conditions of the pre-colonial household economy. Secondly, there was a tremendous growth of illegal trade such as black marketing

<sup>19</sup> Richard Fossett, "Uganda After Amin", The World Today, April 1980, p.150.

'magendo', and trans-border smuggling. "Officially, Uganda and Kenya shillings are at par and equivalent to about 6p in sterling, but at the border you can buy 11 Uganda shillings for one Kenya shilling. In this situation, the attractions of smuggling a sack of coffee into Kenya, or a drum of kerosene into Zaïre, are obvious".<sup>20</sup>

Industry and the infrastructure were completely uncared. The foreign exchange that should have gone into the imports of industrial goods from the metropole, were all siphoned off to maintain and equip the army. Factories were completely starved of spare parts and new machinery. The total neglect of the transport system, both road and railroad, has also been widely publicised.

So far as the economy was concerned, the story was one of chaos and total collapse.

#### Dusting of Idi Amin

Amin's difficulty in maintaining his government became more and more apparent towards the second five years of his reign. Resentment against his methods began to surface among the population, though in a much subdued form. The increasing number of those seeking asylum outside the country

20 Ibid., p.151.

bore testimony to this. Within the army too there was dissent, manifested by the continual mutinies in the various army barracks, and Amin had to spend much of his time outside the capital quelling rebellions. In the face of such domestic problems, Amin raised the bogey of controversy over a salient of the Kagera river in Tanzania. He claimed that the Kagera river was the natural boundary between Uganda and Tanzania, rather than the arbitrary land boundary fixed between Britain and Germany before the First World War, when Tanganyika was a German colony.<sup>21</sup> The Kagera salient, as it came to be called, is a triangular strip of land, 1850 sq kms in area, to the east of Lake Victoria bounded by the Kagera river and the Uganda border on the north. In October 1978, Uganda invaded Tanzania and occupied the salient. This was also in retaliation to the help Nyerere, President of Tanzania, had been providing to Obote's guerilla organisation. It also provided Amin with a first defensive post against any possible invasion from Tanzania. However, this provided Nyerere the perfect pretext for an open declaration of war on Amin's Uganda, and thence to provide the thrust for Obote to act.

In March 1979, a conference was held in Moshi, Tanzania, bringing together more than a hundred Ugandans

<sup>21</sup> Observer (London), 5 November 1978.

from over twenty separate exile groups. They covered a wide spectrum of political views, but with remarkable unity of purpose they sank their differences and were able to dedicate themselves to the single aim of overthrowing Amin. Thus they set up the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF). On Saturday, 14 April 1979, Professor Lule and his UNLF government were sworn in at Kampala after a successful invasion by the UNLF and the Tanzanian army. The overthrow of Amin was received with fanfare and jubilation, and the Tanzanian army hailed as liberators. A week later, the British formally announced recognition of Lule and his UNLF government, and in spite of the repudiation of OAU principles and UN obligations that the Tanzanian action had meant, the international community viewed the events with tacit approval.

In analysing the composition of the new forces, it is important to note that the new leader elected at Moshi was Professor Lule and not Obote. Lule was selected on the basis of his being the least controversial, and therefore he could be said to have the widest representation. From the motley colour of the membership of the UNLF it can be deduced that it represented not just the Langi, not just the Acholi, nor just the African commercial class, but also the Baganda, the Kulaks, the peasants, men of the professions, in fact all the peoples of Uganda who had had

enough of Idi Amin and the likes. Of course, the sections excluded were the West Nilers who had been the power base of the military government, and the Nubians and Sudanese who being mercenaries mostly, did not have any legitimate place in Ugandan society anyway. Unlike the UPC or the KY of earlier years, the UNLF was an organisation of leaders though encompassing all national groups. In the subsequent stages, this embryonic party could not develop and consolidate itself. It could not manipulate the post-Idi Amin situation to its advantage. It relapsed into the familiar old tribal and economic polarisations and disintegrated into just another one of the negative coalitions of the past. One fatal area was its failure to incorporate the West Nilers into the mainstream of national politics.

The legacy of the Amin period will remain an indelible stain on the succeeding political developments. The extreme degree of tribal antagonisms he introduced will be hard to erase. Violence and physical intimidation had become almost habitual and it will be in this area that the new government will be put to task. The export-import trade and in fact all aspects of trade and commerce had been virtually obliterated. From one perspective this freed Uganda from the shackles of neo-colonial dependence, but this also sent Uganda into an economic doldrum. Uganda had to start anew, and it will be interesting to note what direction it takes or will it fall unwittingly into the quagmire economic dependency again ?

**CHAPTER V**

**CONCLUSION: THE POST-AMIN UGANDAN SITUATION**

Alas, Yusufu Lule,<sup>1</sup> though an honest and dedicated man he might have been, did not last long. The familiar old group rivalries, rough-and-ready ad hoc alliances, tribalism and violence began to wreck Uganda again. After barely sixty eight days in office, Lule was ousted in the course of the tribal and religious factionalism in the ruling National Consultative Council.<sup>2</sup> He was held under house arrest. His successor Godfrey Binaisa also soon fell into disagreement with the army strongmen and into disrepute with Nyerere,<sup>3</sup> who, because of the 22,000 strong army that had remained in Uganda after the overthrow of Amin, became the benefactor of any government that was set up. During early May 1980, he tried to ban all political parties and organise a one-party election. A ban on all other parties would have prevented a UPC/Obote return, but Nyerere was against any restraints on Ugandan elections. He wanted free and fair elections while his troops were still in occupation in Uganda. Binaisa also came to rub shoulders with the pro-Obote army chief of staff, Brigadier David Oyite Ojoke, whom he tried to overthrow. Binaisa was instead

- 1 Lule had been elected to provisional Presidentship on the merit of his being the least controversial. Obote was kept out of the liberation activities because his presence would have disrupted.\* The Bagandans, particularly the ardent monarchists within the UNLF, still harboured memories of the events of 1964-1967 during which, under the leadership of Obote, the "Concept of Buganda" was destroyed.
- 2 David Lamb, International Herald Tribune (Paris), 28 August 1979.
- 3 Binaisa tried but failed to transcend his dependence on Nyerere by asking Kenya to take the place of the Tanzanian troops for keeping peace within the country.

\* the unity of the UNLF.

overthrown the same month and the government came under the hands of a six-member military commission under the chairmanship of Paulo Mwangi, an old supporter of Obote. The military commission set the ball rolling for an election open to all parties thus paving the way for the return of Obote's UPC. Finally, on 10 December 1980, Uganda went to the polls after eighteen years. The three other parties of note who contested the elections were the Democratic Party, led by Paul Semogerere; the Uganda Patriotic Movement, led by Yoweri Museveni, Vice-Chairman of the military commission; and the Federalist Conservative Party, led by Joshua Mayangi Nkangi. As Obote had mass appeal and the backing of the military rulers UPC emerged victorious securing 72 seats in the 126 seat parliament, DP got 51 seats, UPI 1, DP did not secure any seat. UPC not only had a clear majority but 15 seats more than the 40 per cent required for a winning party under the 1967 constitution.<sup>4</sup> Obote was elected President. Amidst accusations of widespread rigging and irregularities in the election procedure, the DP, which had emerged the strongest opposition, along with other opposition parties such as the Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM), took recourse to unconstitutional means.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Vijay Gupta, "Chances of Obote's Return", Patriot (New Delhi), 15 April 1980.

5 Vijay Gupta, "African Affairs: Uganda Seeks Indian Assistance", The Daily (Bombay), 9 June 1981.



Thus after arousing expectations of national reconciliation and economic reconstruction that the UNLF had brought, the country slid back into political instability, economic chaos and social insecurity. Just barely four months had passed since Lule, on 13 April, had taken the oath as Uganda's new President and had said that "the nightmare was over", and that "a new era of national reconstruction had begun", when David Lamb was to comment that "it is clear that there will be no miracles. The euphoria has given way to skepticism, the dreams of national unity have been subverted by personal ambition and greed. Uganda is a dispirited country teetering on the brink of new disasters."<sup>6</sup> Corruption at the ministerial level and armed brigandage on the streets became a regular feature,<sup>7</sup> while violence and killings, both decentralised and politically motivated, increased to an extent that was reminiscent of the Amin days. Also contributing to the insecurity of life and property was the maintenance of large private armies by leading politicians. This led to a substantial erosion of the central authority, as witnessed in the inability of both Lule and Binaisa to

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6 David Lamb, n.2.

7 On arrival in Kampala, the liberating forces had released all the 4,000 inmates of the Luzira prison, mainly because there was no food to feed them. The released prisoners included a substantial number of hardened criminals. Most of the crimes in and around Kampala were committed by them. The Tanzanian army, which consisted of ill-paid impoverished soldiers, also contributed to the brigandage.

control their subordinates especially in the army,

While disorder in general can be attributed to the inability of the central authority to assert itself, it cannot be refuted that the pro-Obote forces were behind the removal of both Lule and Binaisa. Though Obote remained in Tanzania, and had kept a low profile during the liberation, it became more and more evident that he had the political situation in Uganda under his thumb. Through Nyerere, and the Tanzanian army in Uganda which was indispensable for internal security,<sup>8</sup> and also his strong influence in the National Consultative Council (NCC), Obote was making plans for his own return to Uganda, and the way for it was cleared by NCC. This however introduced Tanzania as an important element in Ugandan politics, and in the future could amount to a sacrifice of Uganda's political freedom and individuality.

Some scholars have portrayed Obote as the only leader that could pull Uganda out of the mess.<sup>9</sup> But his methods and pronounced policies indicate that there will be little or no departure from his first tenure after independence. At a last press conference before he left Tanzania for Uganda in May 1980, he had clearly indicated that he would

8 The Police Force had suffered grievously under Amin. After liberation, its strength was down to about 4,000 - less than one-third of its proper establishment. Hence the Tanzanian Army was essential for maintaining order.

9 Vijay Gupta, "Subverters Fear Obote's Return", Patriot (New Delhi), 21 October 1980.

like to resume where he left off - building an independent economy.<sup>10</sup> But during his election campaign, he promised that, if returned to power, he would welcome back the Indians expelled by Idi Amin in 1972.<sup>11</sup> The UPC's election manifesto had a number which called on the Indians to come back to Uganda to redevelop their industries "after negotiations with the government". The manifesto also promised to recruit skilled aliens to man technical jobs where there was no expertise, moderate and liberal policies to rebuild the country and guaranteed repatriation of profits and capital to investors.<sup>12</sup> On the ethnical front, there has been an attempt to woo the West Nile tribes into the mainstream. He has condemned revenge and appealed for tribal unity amidst a wave of vengeful killings and retaliation. The Baganda has remained ever strongly suspicious of Obote. Thus like in the pre-Amin days, Obote is expected to stand for the interests of the African commercial bourgeoisie; the Indian businessmen will be roped in for economic support; the power base will be again among the northern tribes. Despite his efforts for unity, the West Nile groups will remain excluded from the political mainstream, and the slogan of self reliance will be raised to dupe the common populace.

<sup>10</sup> National Herald (New Delhi), 17 December 1980.

<sup>11</sup> Vijay Gupta, "African Affairs: Uganda Seeks Indian Assistance", The Daily (Bombay), 9 June 1981. Also refer Patriot (New Delhi), 17 December 1980.

<sup>12</sup> Patriot (New Delhi), 24 November 1980.

The military commission declared all the non-UPC candidates later as invalid with the result the UPC bagged six uncontested seats from the West Nile region, which is known to have been a stronghold of Obote's opponents. Apparently, the military commission had put many obstacles in the way of the DP candidates filing their nomination in good time. The summary dismissal of the Chief Justice, William Wambuzi, and his replacement by George Masika, former public prosecutor during Obote's presidency, barely two weeks before the polling, was equally ominous. It was plainly designed to forestall anti-UPC parties' approach to the courts to challenge electoral malpractices. Despite these irregularities the military commission got a 'good behaviour' certificate from the Commonwealth team.

That a strong dependence on the army was a basic contributory factor to the coup in 1971 has already been established in our earlier chapter. There were definite signs that the policy towards the armed forces would change very little so far as Obote was concerned. The conflict between Binaisa and Ojoke, the control of the election machinery by the Obote factions in the military, and the maintenance of private armies by various political leaders, were a manifestation of the continuing politicisation of the military. According to the Commonwealth Observer group

report<sup>13</sup> the Chairman of the military commission issued a proclamation on 11 December amending the electoral law in two positive ways. (1) to legitimise the extension of polling hours (2) to invest in himself "the sole power to announce results as well as the power to declare the poll in individual constituencies to be invalid. Each returning officer was enjoined to communicate the results only to the chairman of the military commission and to provide him with a confidential report on various aspects of the poll. The proclamation also provided that no decision made by the chairman of the military commission could be challenged in any court of law." The chairman of the military commission explained to the Commonwealth Observer group that he was anxious to avoid repetition of incompetence (a number of polling officers had reached upto 7 hours late) at this crucial stage at the conclusion of the counting. In the climate of suspicion and apprehension which this proclamation created the military commission empowered the polling officers to make public declaration of results.

In the final analysis, one may ask two basic questions regarding the Ugandan political situation: What is the reason for the continuing instability and violence ? and what is the solution ?

13 "Uganda Elections December 1980", The Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, pp.30-31.

The answer to the first question lies at various levels of analysis: the inability of the leadership to commit themselves and the country on a scientific path of development; the continuance of economic dependance; the pervasiveness of "tribalism"; the politicisation of the military; and the continuing exclusion of the masses in government. All these issues were interlinked and very deeply entrenched in the Ugandan socio-political fabric. In retrospect, the overthrow of Amin provided the most opportune moment for a reconstruction from the lowest level (the masses) and direction of the country on a new economic programme and social reorganisation that would transcend alignments along lines of tribalism, ethnicity, and region, and free itself from the dependancy syndrome. Amin had destroyed the economy, but he had also erased other antagonisms because of a general anti-Amin atmosphere. The unity among the various components of the UNLF, when it was formed, bears out this point. But the leadership failed or were unable to capitalize on this and the country relapsed into the old patterns again. The root of the problem was the non-participation of the masses in the power structure. The government became confined once again to an upper stratum only, and in such a situation jockeying for personal power and wealth was a logical conclusion. Lacking the basis of mass power, the only assurance of continued office had to be military support, and tribal and ethnic loyalties.

To offer a comprehensive answer to the second question would be too ambitious an attempt and is also not the purpose of this dissertation. However it would not be too wrong to say that the problems of Uganda are Ugandans' and only a committed and enlightened Ugandan leadership aware of its basic problems can pull it out of its present nightmarish situation.

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