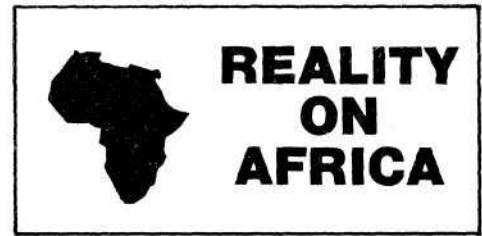


UGANDA: et in Arcadia ego . . .



by Kenneth Ingham

Uganda became independent with a better balanced economy than did any other British dependency in Africa. It did not have the oil potential of Nigeria and it did not plan to develop large-scale industry. But it produced a wide variety of export crops — coffee, cotton, tea and sugar — which did not interfere with subsistence agriculture as cocoa growing did in Ghana. There was little prospect of untold wealth, but no-one need be in want. There was already a large class of substantial, well-educated, indigenous land-owners whose labour needs were amply met both by people from other parts of the country who relied on wage labour primarily to embellish the subsistence standard of living derived from their own land or herds, and by immigrants, notably from Kenya. The labour requirements of the towns — which were few in number and, apart from Kampala, were small — were supplied in a similar fashion. After independence the revenue from export crops increased appreciably and there were no serious effects from a fall in world prices like that which undermined Zambia's income from copper. Why then did Uganda encounter disaster within the first decade of independence?

Attempts to supply an economic explanation distort the picture. President Obote's so-called socialising programme was not an attempt to appease a clamorous demand from those who felt they had come too late to the feast to benefit from the fruits of independence. Nor was it the cause of a sharp reaction against the government from those who had done well since independence. Such feelings may have been present but they were wholly subordinate to the political issues which determined the course of events.

NO LEADER

Uganda, like the other former colonies and dependencies, lacked any strong feeling of national identity. Unlike other new nations it lacked also a universally accepted leader upon whom to focus the people's loyalty. Uganda had never even had a unified independence movement. While the political leaders of half the country sought a democratic system of government leading possibly to the establishment of a republic, the kingdom of Uganda, occupying a quarter of the country's area and accommodating a third of its population, wished to retain its traditional monarchical system and to respect its well established identity. The remaining quarter, consisting of smaller kingdoms, was divided in its

loyalties. Its political spokesmen appeared to incline towards a democratic programme, but glanced frequently over their shoulders to see the reaction of their traditional rulers. A further decisive factor was the absence of a common language. Kiswahili had never made much progress in Uganda and English was understood only by a few. Consequently, political leaders could not campaign effectively outside their own districts. One other factor must be taken into account. Under the enlightened governorship of Sir Andrew Cohen from 1952 to 1957 the idea of self-government, and later of independence, for Uganda, became so clearly the target of the colonial administration that even the binding force deriving from the presence of a common enemy was absent. Meanwhile, the deportation of the Kabaka (ruler) of Buganda by Cohen, after a dispute over the degree of cooperation a governor could expect from Buganda under the terms of the 1900 agreement between Britain and Buganda, distracted attention from the independence movement and focused it upon the rights of the Buganda kingdom. Consequently, Buganda's reluctance, ostensibly on grounds of annoyance with Britain, to participate in a national legislature in the closing years of colonial government, while annoying to the British administration, was potentially disastrous for the prospects of a united, independent Uganda.

NO UNITED OBJECTIVE

The attempt to plaster over this division by offering Buganda federal status within Uganda could not conceal the lack of a united objective. Nor was federal status for Buganda the only problem, for the lesser kingdoms — Bunyoro, Toro and Ankole — also sought and were given a similar status. While few former dependencies had any clear plan — other than to put an end to colonial rule — none, save Nigeria, had the additional burden of a constitution which made the formulation of a unified plan almost impossible. It was not, in Uganda's case, the federal nature of the constitution which created the problem, but the fact that Buganda in particular, and the other kingdoms to a lesser extent, could not accept subordination to a national legislature in which their wishes might be overruled. British administration, while providing an overall framework of government, had inadvertently encouraged the growth of separate identities. This was not the result of any policy of divide and rule. It sprang from a well-intentioned if rather muddled

desire to honour agreements, to promote local traditional institutions — and to avoid undue expense. This had strengthened the distinctive characteristics of those peoples already possessing unified systems of government. Further, by using Baganda agents to extend British overrule throughout the protectorate, the colonial authorities had inadvertently encouraged a desire to emulate Buganda's distinctive characteristics among the other peoples of the country.

This legacy of division the late colonial administration bequeathed to its successor. It is true that a group of educated Baganda, many of them Roman Catholics who, for historical reasons, had been unable to play a full role in the politics of the kingdom, were prepared to work for a more democratic form of government for the whole of Uganda. These had formed themselves into the Democratic Party and had established branches, principally consisting of Roman Catholics, in other parts of the country. But their following in Buganda was slight. The vast majority of the people, either from loyalty to the traditional government, or in some cases from fear of their chiefs, supported the movement calling itself Kabaka Yekka (the Kabaka alone).

ALLIANCE

It was the common desire to defeat the Democratic Party which led Milton Obote's Uganda People's Congress and Kabaka Yekka to enter into an alliance which brought them jointly to power at the time of independence. Clearly this was an alliance of incompatibles which prime minister Obote tried *intelligently but vainly* to cement by offering the Kabaka the role of President of Uganda in order to reconcile the Baganda to participation in a larger political unit. Even the title "Republic" was avoided to accommodate Buganda's monarchist sentiments. Instead Uganda was officially described as an "independent sovereign state."

In spite of these measures a split in the alliance was inevitable. The issue over which hostilities came to light was that of the so-called "lost counties", certain districts annexed by Buganda with British assistance from Bunyoro in the 1890s during the formative years of the protectorate. The colonial government had been aware that this was a question calculated to arouse passions after independence. It might well have solved the problem by means of a referendum before handing over the government to the Ugandan leaders. Instead it had been agreed that a referendum should take place after independence. For Obote the issue was essentially a digression, because the districts were and would remain part of the new state of Uganda. To the Baganda and Banyoro their ownership was a matter of pride — not, it should be said, primarily of economic significance. Obote's determination to go ahead with the referendum led to a further division between his party and Kabaka Yekka, and in August he dissolved the alliance. When the vote proved favourable to Bunyoro, the hostility between Buganda and Obote's government was sealed.

FRICTION

The following year the UPC proposed legislation to make Kabaka Yekka illegal. By this time several KY members of parliament had defected to the UPC as, too, had some of the leaders of the Democratic Party in an attempt to bridge the tribal divisions that were becoming increasingly obvious. Friction between the government and Kabaka Yekka con-

tinued, however, and early in 1966 Obote suspended the constitution. Another constitution was adopted by parliament in April under which Obote himself became president and the privileges of Buganda were abrogated. The Buganda council rejected the constitution and ordered all Uganda government troops out of Buganda. Since the centre of the Uganda government was within the Buganda kingdom this could not be accepted and government forces attacked the Kabaka's palace. The Kabaka himself escaped and fled to England. In 1967 another constitution was introduced which abolished the kingdoms and divided Buganda into administrative districts. Nothing now could produce a settlement between Buganda and the Ugandan government, while former supporters of Obote in the other kingdoms were also alienated. Tension grew. Assassination attempts against the president further exacerbated relations. Obote became withdrawn from events and his suspicions gave licence to his less disciplined supporters to take reprisals against people allegedly hostile to the government.

Throughout this time the economy remained buoyant. External aid flowed on a generous scale. A variety of new developments took place for the general benefit of the community. In October 1969 Obote published his charter of the common man which, while ostensibly aimed at closing the gap between rich and poor, was primarily a plan to acquire control, on behalf of the people of Uganda, of large-scale foreign banking, commercial and manufacturing concerns. He promised, however, that compensation would be paid and that for want of trained Africans to run the various activities expatriates would be encouraged to remain in posts. The "socialist" elements in this programme were exaggerated by the British government, while Obote's nationalistic aims were overlooked. Together with the president's opposition to the supply of arms by Britain to South Africa his "socialism" aroused much criticism if not active hostility in Britain. His overthrow in 1971 was, therefore, acclaimed both in Britain and in Buganda, and also by some in other parts of Uganda who were horrified by the growing lack of control over the armed forces and by the increase of violence throughout the country.

IDI AMIN

The sudden rise to power of Idi Amin, Obote's successor, was the clear result of the divisions which had grown up in Uganda. Obote had become increasingly dependent upon those sections of the army which he believed were, for tribal reasons, loyal to his government. Idi Amin, in whom he had placed particular trust, had been secretly building up his own support in the army by enlisting men from his own tribal area which extended over the Uganda border into Zaire and the Sudan. The loyalty of these men was, consequently, to Amin and not to the government. He had, simultaneously, been getting rid of his opponents — in one instance by murder — and he had also been embezzling funds from the sale of military supplies to dissidents in Zaire. When Obote challenged him he threw down the gauntlet in the president's absence at a Commonwealth conference in Singapore.

By the swift disarming of those elements of the army still loyal to Obote, Amin took sole charge of all military power in the country. His coup was greatly assisted by the jubilation of the Baganda at the overthrow of the man whom they deemed to be their main enemy. Their

jubilant quickly turned to dread when Amin showed himself to be an arbitrary, incompetent tyrant, incapable of administering the country and prepared to murder anyone who voiced any dissent. An attempt to win approval by ordering from the country all Asians who were not citizens of Uganda appealed briefly to the concupiscence of those who envied the Asians their virtual control of the lower, middle and some of the upper levels of trade. It was soon seen, however, that the spoils were not to be distributed to the people as a whole, but were to be given to Amin's armed hoodlums and members of his immediate entourage who quickly squandered their gains and destroyed the country's trade.

EFFECT ON PRODUCTION

The loss of the Asians, coupled with the terror spread by Amin's rabble, had a swift effect upon the country's production for export. No-one felt safe with a valuable crop on his land. Nor was it easy to export anything that was produced when a breakdown of relations with Kenya took place because of the government's inability to pay for services and the threat which Amin's regime posed to stability along the borders. This led to the closing of the railway link with the coast. Nevertheless, the people living at a distance from the towns and from the main roads were cushioned against the worst effects of Amin's rule by the fertility of the soil. In the countryside food was still produced in sufficient quantities. Only in the towns was it in short supply, and these shortages gave birth to an active black market and to a breakdown of respect for controls which was to have serious repercussions after Amin's overthrow.

While the absence of widespread poverty or starvation may have delayed any popular uprising against Amin the more politically minded elements in the country who had escaped assassination, and those who had fled to other countries for fear of assassination, were plotting means to overthrow the government. But the absence of any united aim beyond the overthrow of Amin made coordinated action difficult. While many who had formerly criticised Obote were prepared to admit that he has probably the best leader Uganda could produce, there was a sufficiently numerous and powerful element which could never accept him.

COMMITTEE

The committee which eventually led the attack on Amin in conjunction with the armed forces of Tanzania had all the merits and all the disadvantages of any similar group. It contained a rich collection of talents and an equally rich variety of objectives. Yusuf Lule, who became president after Amin's overthrow, was an intelligent man of great charm, but he lacked the toughness to control the rest of his group. He had, however, the merit of being a Muganda who was acceptable to many of his fellow Baganda without giving offence to the rest of the country. His overthrow and succession by Godfrey Binaisa was inevitable, though regretted by many who respected Lule's virtues and were prepared to overlook his shortcomings. Binaisa was a tougher man, but for the Baganda traditionalists carried the stigma of an earlier association with Obote. In any case, the committee lacked the unity to act decisively to restore law and order. They also did not have an adequate police force and were compelled to rely on a Tanzanian army which all too quickly found itself no longer acclaimed as a

triumphant ally but instead was seen as an alien presence. The banning of all political parties in August 1979 was intended to promote a united effort to restore the country's stability. It was a vain gesture, both because of the obvious divisions even among the ruling committee itself, and because political parties simply could not be eliminated.

The parliamentary elections which took place in 1980 were certainly not conducted according to Marquess of Queensbury rules, in spite of the presence of an external observer team. The intrigue was not all on one side, though the success of the UPC and the restoration of Obote as president meant that the accusations were mainly levelled against the victors. The continuing inability of the new government to restore law and order, particularly in Buganda, and the excesses of a still untrained and poorly disciplined army in areas suspected of a residual loyalty to Amin gave encouragement to the opposition. Obote himself was willing to accept constitutional opposition in parliament and the Democratic Party tried to provide that opposition. Small guerrilla units dedicated to the overthrow of the government and operating mainly in Buganda continued to make the return of stable administration difficult, however. Relations with Kenya had to be conducted with caution because of Obote's friendship with Tanzania, with which Kenya was on less than friendly terms. President Nyerere, too, was anxious to terminate his military involvement in Uganda to cut down costs.

MORE SETTLED

Gradually a more settled state of affairs has been taking shape, except in the north-western districts, the area in which support for Amin was strongest. Even in Buganda guerrilla activities have become more sporadic and food supplies are beginning to return to Kampala. The decline of the black market is a slow process because, with the recent stunning but realistic devaluation of the currency, foreign imports have remained in very short supply. Shortages, and the corruption they encourage, are a serious obstacle to peaceful administration, while a too heavy-handed attempt to control disaffection readily provokes hostility to the government. This is particularly true in Buganda, where urban problems are more acute and where Obote remains for many a worse scourge than Amin.

For the future the government's first objectives must be to ensure discipline and restraint on the part of the forces responsible for law and order and to encourage the production of export crops so as to provide foreign exchange. It is fortunate that much of the country's coffee and cotton are grown in the eastern districts, the most settled area and the one with readiest access to Kenya and the Indian Ocean ports. If the government can achieve credibility in the pursuit of its main objectives the sheer fertility of Uganda can swing the balance in favour of recovery. It is a formidable task, and many who might help are still watching nervously in exile to see if their return might be possible without undue risk either to their personal security or to their professional or financial prospects. Their predicament is a genuine one, for those who have struggled through the horrors of the Amin era and the difficulties of the last four years might not welcome competition for advancement or economic gain from those who had left the country. The overall problem of Uganda is one of confidence, not of resources — or even effectivley, of their distribution. It has a complex historical legacy to overcome. □