

A PROFILE OF BUGANDA

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Six years ago Uganda seemed likely to be the first East African territory to gain its independence. Now it is likely to be the last, for it has been caught in the turmoil of one of Africa's most explosive issues, the conflict of authority between the modern state and the traditional ruler. Ever since Dr. Nkrumah suppressed the power of the Ashanti Confederacy in the name of national unity, African kings and chiefs have feared for their thrones. These fears recently brought the Paramount Chief of Barotseland to London for discussions with the Colonial Secretary. In Nigeria a traditional ruler like the Sardauna of Sokoto felt that his only defence was to enter party politics. The Kabaka of Buganda, Mutesa II, and his Ministers have been obsessed by this issue, especially since that day in 1953 when the Governor, Sir Andrew Cohen, unceremoniously deported him to England.

At the time the Kabaka was frequently charged with wanting to retreat to the position that his ancestors had held before the European conquest. This charge was wildly inaccurate. The traditionalists wished to hold fast to the benefits of the British alliance which, by the time of the Uganda Agreement of 1900, had secured for the Baganda the leadership among the kingdoms and races of Uganda.

British rule blocked Egyptian expansion up the Nile. The administrators and traders established themselves in Kampala and Entebbe, so that Buganda speedily became the commercial and administrative centre of the Protectorate. Buganda was also the centre of missionary activity. By supporting the conquest of the rival kingdoms of Toro, Bunyoro, and Ankole, Buganda was able to annex portions of the latter two. The wholesale conversion of most of the Baganda officials and chiefs to Christianity and their thirst for Western education persuaded the missionaries and the British officials to use the Baganda as evangelists, administrators, and teachers in other territories, thus increasing their prestige and power in the Protectorate. Finally the Agreement of 1900, far from destroying the Kabaka's kingdom, eliminated feudalism and rebuilt Buganda on the basis of freehold ownership.

Both chiefs and peasants were, in varying degrees, satisfied by the land revolution. The successful introduction of cotton and coffee as cash crops ensured prosperity in the first decades of British rule. By the mid-'fifties Buganda produced 90 per cent of Uganda's coffee, which alone accounted for almost half of the Protectorate's revenue from foreign trade. Hence the dominating position of Buganda in the affairs of Uganda, even though the kingdom contains only 28 per cent of the Protectorate's African population.

It was absurd, however, to expect that parallel Baganda and British governments would always remain in harmony. The British officials sometimes promoted social or economic policies which were unacceptable to traditionalist Africans, such as the purchase of land for the expansion of the University College of East Africa at Makerere. For as long as British prestige remained high, the Protectorate could force the Kabaka and his chiefs to carry out unpopular measures. But as British power waned and as it became apparent that Britain would insist on giving independence to Uganda rather than a separate Buganda, the Kabaka and his chiefs felt the danger of alienation from their people and were alarmed by the possible elimination of Baganda institutions in favour of a unitary state.

A speech by the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, in June 1953, when he referred to the possibility of an East African federation, provoked the showdown. The Baganda had always shown a deep antagonism to such a federation, partly because they feared the domination of Kenya settlers and partly because they would inevitably enjoy much less influence within a wider grouping. The Lukiko, or Baganda Parliament, refused to countenance the kingdom's participation in the Legislative Council of the Uganda Protectorate and demanded a timetable for Baganda independence. The Governor refused and banished the Kabaka. Two years later Mutesa returned, firmly entrenched as a national hero, a great change from the early days of his reign when he was denounced as a playboy king and a British stooge.

In Ghana the Convention People's Party was the instrument employed by Dr. Nkrumah to destroy the rule of the chiefs. When political parties at last began to appear in Uganda during the early 'fifties, most observers felt that just such a clash would take place. The most significant party was the Uganda National Congress (U.N.C.), which looked to West Africa for inspiration. Two factors, however, checked its assault upon

traditional authority. First, the Governor persuaded the Kabaka to allow a portion of the Lukiko to be elected by direct suffrage, thus eliminating one of the major complaints against that body. Then Sir Andrew exiled the Kabaka. The Uganda National Congress, swayed by its Baganda leadership and its desire for quick popularity, threw itself into the struggle for the return of the Kabaka and so transformed itself from a national party into a Baganda pressure group.

After 1955 the Congress slowly declined in influence and popularity. For four years Uganda watched its death-throes, its repeated splits, and the endless disputes over the future of monarchical rule. The party's victory in the limited 1958 elections drew an utterly false picture of its unity. Later in the same year it divided on the question of Egyptian assistance. The U.N.C. reached such a degree of impotence by 1959 that Abu Mayanja, perhaps the ablest of its leaders, abandoned the party to join the Kabaka's government as Minister of Education. The Ministry is traditionally held by a Muslim, and Mayanja was the best qualified of his faith for the job. But he must also have felt Congress politics to be a dead-end before he would risk antagonising his old friends by such a dramatic switch. In this political vacuum, parties proliferated: the Uganda African Union, the Progressive Party, the United Congress Party, and the Uganda People's Union.

At this time Milton Obote brought together some of the elements in the U.N.C. and the Uganda People's Union to form the Uganda People's Congress (U.P.C.), and Benedicto Kiwanuka reorganised the Democratic Party (D.P.), which had fought the 1958 election as a Roman Catholic party. Kiwanuka is 39, a Muganda, a former sergeant-major, a matriculant of Pius XII University College in Basutoland, and a graduate of London University. Before taking over the D.P. leadership, he had built up a flourishing law practice. He has tried to broaden the D.P. so as to include non-Catholics, but his major support outside Buganda still comes from the Catholic areas of West Nile and Acholi in the north and of Ankole and Kigezi in the south-west of the Protectorate.

Both parties are unsympathetic to the traditionalists in Buganda, but the D.P. managed to persuade a handful of Catholic Baganda to register for the 1961 election. The boycott by the remainder of the Baganda gave the D.P. a free gift of 20 of the 21 seats in the kingdom and therefore a clear majority in

the country of 44 seats to the U.P.C.'s 35, even though the U.P.C. polled 80,000 more votes. All the other parties were eliminated, while the U.N.C. itself secured only one seat and a mere 40,000 votes. The D.P.'s majority became 50 to 38 by the special elections in the Legislative Council. The party may even transform itself into a true majority party by the next election if it secures a timetable for independence at the constitutional conference which is to be held in London in September.

Neither the co-operatives nor the trade unions have produced effective resistance to the traditionalists in Buganda. Ignatius Musazi created a political party out of the co-operatives in the late 'forties; but this no longer exists, and nothing has taken its place. The trade unions are the weakest in East Africa and have recently split into two factions: the Trade Union Congress, whose moving spirit is H. M. Luande, the U.P.C. Member for Kampala East, and the recently formed Uganda Federation of Labour, based on Jinja and led by John Reich, the defeated D.P. candidate in Jinja North. The weakness of the trade unions has contributed to the indifference of the mass of non-Baganda migratory workers who staff the sugar plantations, farms, and many of the industries in the kingdom.

The Kabaka and his chief Ministers, Amos K. Sempa and Michael Kintu, are the guardians of much entrenched power. The Kabaka stands at the centre of a large circle of family relations who depend on him for their social prestige. The Ministers themselves command a considerable bureaucracy. In the last decade the British have transferred power over certain areas of education, hospital and health administration, and the agricultural and veterinary services to the Kabaka's government. These services not only give prestige but allow the exercise of a good deal of patronage.

Sempa and Kintu originally stated that they would oppose elections until the publication and satisfactory reception of the report now being prepared by Lord Munster on the relationships of the kingdoms and provinces of Uganda in an independent state. But the Ministers have gone from extreme to extreme. In 1958 they demanded a Greater Buganda in which the Kabaka would become Paramount Chief over such former tributary states as Busoga. Now they have grandiloquently declared complete independence, and they claim their new state to be economically viable.

This is difficult to assess, since it is not clear from official statements whether this independent Buganda is the present kingdom or the Greater Buganda demanded in 1958. If it is the present kingdom, it will lack the industrial complex at Jinja in Busoga, the cement of Tororo in Bukedi, the Frobisher copper mine at Kilembe in Toro, the tea estates in the same kingdom, the tobacco of Bunyoro, Kigezi, and the West Nile, and a portion of the cotton growing areas which exist in all the provinces. And the world market for Buganda's staple crop, robusta coffee, is in a particularly unsettled state. The Lukiko will also have to find the money to bridge the gap of £1,000,000 between the present government grants and the money raised in Buganda by existing poll taxes. No doubt Buganda could exist on a subsistence agriculture, as the density of population has not nearly reached the alarming figures in parts of Kikuyuland in Kenya. But the present standard of living could hardly be maintained without the aggression implicit in the scheme for Greater Buganda.

The D.P. has suggested that, rather than a single Head of State, the solution is a Council of State composed of the various rulers. It would be purely ceremonial but would allow the rulers to maintain their social precedence. The U.P.C. has shown preference for a single elected Head of State. Both parties also agree that the existing position of the rulers should be entrenched in the constitution, but that efforts should be made to prevent a full-scale federalism from developing which would cause an undue strain on the slender manpower resources of the state.

If the Kabaka's Ministers will not forego their dreams of glory and of domination, much will depend on whether Buganda's neighbours will deny her access to the sea by closing the railway now administered by the East African High Commission. Much will also depend on whether the British government is prepared to hand over to the Protectorate government the King's African Rifles and the central police and whether British officers will be allowed to remain if there is a showdown between a Uganda Prime Minister and the Kabaka.

Not only is the future of Uganda at stake but also that of the proposed East African Federation. Baganda separatism is the most difficult of the Colonial Secretary's East African problems. If he can solve it, he will have done more for East Africa than any of his predecessors.