THE MOZAMBIQUE CONVENTION
Slave Traffic in 1928.
By T. W. Ford.

A Treaty, known as the Mozambique Convention, between Portugal and the Union of South Africa had been in existence since 1909. Recently new negotiations have been opened up between the two governments concerning the further recruitment of native labour in Portuguese East Africa. The essential feature of this convention and also the new agreements amount to the traffic in slaves by Portugal and the enslavement of native

labour (confinement in compounds) by the mineowners of the South African Union.

In the exploitation of the Rand mining district of South Africa, one of the main problems faced by the mineowners has been the difficulty of securing a sufficient native labour supply. On the one hand recruitment of native labour in the territory of the Union was hindered by the requirements of the white farmers and the industries of the towns of the Union, who require and use this labour. On the other hand recruitment from the tropics (South of 22° Latitude) was not successful as the effect in the charge of climate upon the natives caused prevalent contraction of pneumonia which resulted in a very high mortality rate among the natives imported. In Portuguese East Africa which is nearby there is a plentiful supply of native labour ; there the mineowners turned for labour.

The essential points of the Mozambique Convention were : (I)The Rand mineowners were allowed to recruit native labour in Portuguese East Africa on a contract basis for 2I months ; (2) in return Delagoan Bay, a Portuguese port nearest to Witwatersrand, was allowed 50 to 55% of all import traffic into the Witwatersrand district.

However, since the world war there has been much friction between the two governments over the Convention. In I923 there was a bad harvest in South Africa which threw a large number of native workers on the farms out of work. In order to utilise these natives in the Transvaal district the Union restricted the recruitement of natives from Portuguese East Africa to 75,000 per year. During the war a large export traffic in coal developed, but since the Delagoa Bay port did not have sufficient facilities for handling this traffic, the Union Government in I924 denounced this Convention.

In the meantime sugar and cotton planting in the Mozambique region and the installation of adequate port facilities at Delagoa Bay created a demand for labour in this region. In 1927 the Portuguese legislature passed laws prohibiting recruitment of labour by the South

African Union altogether, to take effect in May 1928.

This was a blow to the Union, and another Convention was concluded on the following general terms : (a) as before, the Delagoa Bay Port is to receive 50 to 55 per cent. of the import traffic in all "competitive areas" ; (b) machinery is to be set up to meet the needs of the railroads ; (c) native labour recruitement to continue. However, the number of natives actually working in the Rand district is to be reduced to 80,000 in 5 years ; (d) The maximum period of service is reduced to 18 months ; and natives are not to be re-engaged before 6 months ; and (e) one half of the wages of the labourers is to be retained by the mine owners and paid to them at the end of their contract period as they return home.

The convention actually legalises human bondage and slavery of the Negroes of East Africa and the only effective means the natives have for combatting this evil is to struggle for the organisation into trade unions of the 100,000 or more workers who are already occupied in the mining area. It is necessary to demand the abolition of compounds (prisons or slave quarters) ; the establishment of suitable dwellings, adquate health protection, and higher wages. The native and white unions of South Africa should secure contact with these enslaved workers. Protests should be made against the Mozambique Treaty and a movement set on foot for its abolition. Especially should this be done in South Africa where the workers maintain a certain degree of organisation.

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