**TNA FO 10/730/66557**

**W. Clayton Pickersgill (Consul at St Paul de Loanda) to Lord Rosebery**

**16 March 1894**

HER MAJESTY'S CONSULATE,

ST. PAUL DE LOANDA,

March 16, 1894.

My Lord,

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of a Despatch from Mr. Vice-Consul Bannister, relative to the impressment for military service, by the Congo Independent State, of coloured British subjects contracted as labourers; together with a List of Arrivals which he has prepared, and a copy of my reply to his communication.

In that reply, reference is made to a recommendation which I venture to think Your Lordship will not consider uncalled for. A very wide difference exists between the service of the Congo State and employment on the Congo Railway. Labourers engaged by the Company know exactly where their work lies; their overseers have been forbidden to administer corporal punishment, and any man having a complaint to make in respect of assault, or breach of contract, can obtain leave of absence, descend the line to Matadi, and there appeal to the civil tribunal. He has also the advantage of being able to communicate easily with the Vice-Consul at Boma.

On the other hand, those who contract to serve the Government cannot foresee what will be demanded of them. They may be employed for a time as labourers, and then suddenly find themselves under military discipline and marched off to the far interior of Africa, at the mercy of officers whose hands are of necessity very free.

As soon as the men are enrolled in the army, interference on their behalf by a Consular officer becomes a very serious matter, and after they have left the Lower Congo, an impossibility.

If British subjects contract as mercenaries, they must take their chances, of course, as others do; but there should be no doubt when they sign agreements before Commissioners in their own colonies as to the purpose for which they are engaged; neither should the agreement itself be in any way indefinite or lacking in detail. It might even be suggested that a copy of it should be sent to the Vice-Consul, by hand of the headman of each gang.

I trust Your Lordship will not disapprove of my action in this matter. The personal observations which I made during my recent visit to the Congo State, have convinced me that the authorities there are disposed to be arbitrary in many directions, and that they ought to be strictly watched and firmly handled.

I have the honour to be, with highest consideration,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's

most obedient

humble servant,

W. Clayton Pickersgill.

Rt. Honourable,

Earl of Rosebery, K.G.,

Etc etc etc.