

# British Parliamentary Delegation Reports on Kenya<sup>1</sup>

By George Padmore

THE most significant thing about the Report of the Parliamentary Delegation to Kenya is not so much what it reveals as the fact that it is the first official admission since the emergency that the Africans, especially the Kikuyus, have justifiable grievances.

Until now this has been strenuously denied by the Secretary of State for Colonies, who has all along tried to create the impression that the Africans who support Mau Mau rebellion are just gangsters who, for some mysterious reason, have suddenly "reverted" to a state of savagery. This childishly superficial explanation of the causes which have

given rise to Mau Mau even finds credence in this otherwise well informed and very revealing report.

Contrary to the hitherto cynical attitude evinced by Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton, the authors of the Report — three die-hard Tories, Messrs. Walter Elliot, C. J. M. Alport and E. B. Wakefield, and three middle-of-the-road Socialists, Messrs. Arthur Bottomley, James Johnson and R. W. Williams—have been compelled by the very nature of the objective situation which they found during their 16-days' visit to Kenya to admit frankly that notwithstanding some of the revolting methods used by Mau Mau adherents, there do

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<sup>1</sup> Colonial Office Report to the Secretary of State for the Colonies by the Parliamentary Delegation to Kenya, January, 1954. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. 9d.



exist justifiable grievances among the overwhelming majority of the African population.

These grievances (admitted in the report) range from land shortage, economic and social color bars, low wages, bad housing, limited educational facilities, the absence of social security up to the denial of political and civil rights. Moreover, their strictures on police brutality and corruption recall some of the worst features of the "Black and Tan" in Ireland. "Brutality and malpractices," says the Report, "have occurred on a scale which constitutes a threat to public confidence in the course of law and order."

In support of the indictment of the police force, the Report quotes official records, showing that "there have been prosecutions for brutality among the police forces, ending in 73 convictions. Forty cases are pending. There have also been 29 prosecutions for corruption, of which there were 12 convictions, 13 are pending." God alone knows how many other cases of brutality have gone unpunished by those in authority. This disgraceful and revolting state of affairs is the logical outcome of British methods of colonial administration.

#### TRIBAL VENDETTA

Although the Report is silent on the point, it is a well-known fact that the large majority of the police employed against Mau Mau are recruited from tribes other than the Kikuyus, and that they are encouraged by their European officers, to carry out their duties in the spirit of tribal vendetta. It is, therefore, sheer hypocrisy merely to indict "the lower levels of police" without condemning

the entire system of colonial administration, which is actually responsible for the recruitment and training of the African police as an instrument of terror against the civilian African population.

This applies not just to Kenya but to most parts of Africa. Everywhere these black "storm troopers" are looked upon as enemies of the people and the watchdogs of alien domination. And as such, they enjoy unbridled license to practice brutality, corruption and bribery. Matters have now reached such a shocking state in Kenya that the Commissioner of Police has been retired and the head of the City of London police Colonel Young, has been engaged to reorganize the police force. Colonel Young performed a similar mission in Malaya last year.

Whatever readers of the Report may think about the atrocities ascribed to Mau Mau, details of which have been deleted, the fact remains that they have achieved one positive good. And that is that their very methods of violence have accomplished what other Africans have failed to do. They have forced a Parliamentary Commission to recognise the real grievances of their fellows, including those described as "loyal Kikuyus." For they, too, are part of the five million Africans whose economic, political and social needs have until now been ignored by the white authorities in Kenya and Whitehall.

This being so, one of the greatest indictments that can be brought against colonial government as carried on in multiracial territories such as Kenya is that the system is so repressive that unless the Africans



resort to direct action, their rulers just refuse to recognise—much less redress—their grievances. This is confirmed by their revelations made in the Report.

#### BELATED RECOGNITION

All the problems mentioned by the Visiting Mission—land hunger, color bar, lack of education, low wages, social security, lack of political representation, etc., etc.,—have frequently been brought to the attention of both the Kenya Government and the Colonial Office. But instead of dealing sympathetically with the recognised leaders of the people, these men were invariably abused as “dangerous agitators,” and “semi-educated trouble-makers.”

Little or no attempt was made even by Labor Governments after the end of the war to right the wrongs of the long-suffering Africans. Had they done so, the present trouble in Kenya could have been avoided.

Kenyatta spent over 16 years in Great Britain, during which time he presented several petitions to both Tory and Socialist colonial ministers and submitted many memoranda to Royal Commissions appointed to examine the land problem in Kenya. Despite repeated promises to implement extremely modest agrarian reforms based upon the recommendations of the Hilton Young and Morris Carter Commissions, African land hunger was ignored and allowed to go from bad to worse.

By the time of the outbreak of the Mau Mau revolt, 16,000 square miles of land had been alienated to 2,000 European settlers, many of them retired British army officers and members of the old landed gen-

try and feudal families.

#### DRIVEN OFF LAND

Among the earliest settlers was Lord Delamere who had first pick of the best land in the Kikuyu country. He got plantations of over one hundred thousand acres. Other aristocrats like Lord Francis Scott, uncle of the Duchess of Gloucester, and the Earl of Plymouth secured about three hundred and fifty thousand acres between them. The son of the Duke of Abercorn acquired an estate of thirty thousand acres, while other aristocratic land-grabbers and speculators formed joint stock companies through which they control vast plantations, such as the East African Estates, which owns over three hundred and fifty thousand acres. The chairman of the company is Viscount Gobham. His uncle, the Hon. R. G. Lyttleton, holds 14,108 shares in the company.

Viscount Gobham is a cousin of Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton.

The Kikuyus, who were expelled from their ancestral homes to make way for the settlers, alone lost over 500,000 acres, for which they were not paid any compensation. The Masai, Kavirondo, and Wakamba tribes have also lost considerable lands since the British occupation.

At present the 5,500,000 Africans are confined to special areas known as Reserves. These cover about 50,000 square miles. The Kikuyus, who are the most advanced tribe, number about 1,500,000. Their reserve is about 2,000 square miles of cultivable land. The density of population is so great that in some areas it is over 1,000 per square mile. Those unable to find accommodation within the



Reserve have become squatters on the farms of white settlers. Over 250,000 of these landless Kikuyus have no rights or security of tenure. They have been reduced to the status of serfs. Others, especially the younger men, have drifted to Nairobi, the capital, where very few of them are able to secure employment because of the absence of large-scale manufacturing or mining industries.

#### WHAT IS MAU MAU?

After the failure of his mission to Britain, Jomo Kenyatta returned to Kenya in 1947. During his absence, however, the Kikuyu Central Association was suppressed by the Government in 1940, as a "subversive organization." But shortly after the end of the war, a new organization known as the Kenya African Union (K.A.U.), was formed by a new generation of Africans to continue the agitation for political, economic and social reforms.

To promote the aims and objects of the K.A.U., the organisers launched a campaign to collect a million signatures to a petition to be presented to the British Parliament. The campaign proved to be such a success that within a few months after its inauguration, the K.A.U. was able to despatch two of its executive members, Mr. Mbiyu Koinange, a Kikuyu, and Mr. Achieng Oneko, a Luo, to England, with the intention of presenting a petition to the Secretary of State for Colonies, asking him to appoint a commission to enquire into and redress their grievances, which were similar to those to which Kenyatta had drawn the British Government's attention nearly twenty years before.

After Mr. Lyttelton had refused to receive the mission, which had the backing of Mr. Fenner Brockway and a small group of Labor left-wing back-benchers, Mr. Oneko returned to Kenya to report on the failure of the mission. His colleague, Mr. Koinange, remained in Britain to carry on the work of enlightening the British public about actual conditions in Kenya.

When news of Mr. Koinange's exposures in Britain, reached Kenya, the settlers became most indignant and the leaders of the Electors Union, the European political organization, demanded the suppression of the K.A.U. But since Jomo Kenyatta, president of the Union, and other officers had publicly repudiated the use of violence, and were conducting their campaign for reforms strictly along constitutional lines, the Governor found it difficult to justify the suppression of the K.A.U.

This, however, did not restrain the settlers from carrying on their incitement against African organization as a seditious body. Then suddenly, the European press announced that they had "discovered" an African secret society which they called Mau Mau, and which they asserted was inspired and directed by Jomo Kenyatta and other leaders of the K.A.U., with the object of driving the white settlers out of Kenya Highlands and seizing political power for themselves.

The K.A.U. leaders denied these allegations and continued to appeal to their followers to avoid the use of violence. They offered to co-operate with the Government to help maintain law and order; but this was rejected and a state of emergency was declared in September, 1952.



## LEADERS ARRESTED

A few weeks later, Jomo Kenyatta and 25 other officers of the K.A.U., including Achieng Oneko, were arrested. From then on, mass arrests of members of the K.A.U. have taken place. Two months after Kenyatta and five of his colleagues were sentenced to seven years' imprisonment with hard labor on charge of "assisting in the managing of Mau Mau," the Government declared the K.A.U. an illegal organization, thus creating a political vacuum as far as the Africans were concerned.

Mau Mau, unlike the K.A.U. is not an organized political party or nationalist movement with a regular membership, a constitution, political program, and officers. Even the designation has never been satisfactorily explained, as no such word as Mau Mau exists in the Kikuyu language. [*Oddly enough, no one has pointed out that Mau is the Portuguese masculine adjective for bad or evil. Editor*]. Nevertheless, its socio-economic causes can be explained.

It is a spontaneous revolt of a de-classed section of the African rural population, uprooted from its tribal lands and driven into urban slums. At the time of the declaration of the emergency, it is estimated that over ten thousand Africans were permanently unemployed in Nairobi. Removed from tribal discipline and embittered, many of the young men took to a life of crime. It was from this *lumpen proletariat* [*Ragged proletariat: Marx's term for workers unable to live up to working-class theory. Editor*]. that "dead end" gang leaders recruited adherents to avenge themselves upon the white men, whom they hold responsible

for breaking up their tribal life and replacing it with nothing but slave labor on European farms.

Like the slave revolts of ancient Rome, the Mau Mau supporters are fighting for land, without which they prefer death.

In a country like Kenya, where according to the Parliamentary Delegation Report, "old age security, by way of pension or national provident fund" does not exist, unless an urbanised African owns a piece of land in the Reserve to which he can return in his old age, he may as well be dead.

## INTERRACIAL PARTNERSHIP

The progressive and nationalistic-minded leaders of the K.A.U. had a positive economic, political and social program which envisaged the building of an integrated African self-governing state with democratic safeguards for minority races. The Mau Mau leaders, however, look back to the past and seek to exploit traditional tribal oaths and practices to recruit and bind their followers in supporting their limited fight for land for the landless.

The immediate problem is the ending of the bloody violence on both sides and creating an atmosphere in which even the modest recommendations embodied in the Report can be discussed by the representatives of the different racial groups. But such a Round Table Conference can only be brought about by first of all securing the support of those African leaders who enjoy the confidence and loyalty of the mass of the people. And as most of those people are under arrest, it

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Fiennes Prestwich), political parties and trends (René de Villiers), and economic factors (Jan Goudriaan and D. G. Franzsen). The concluding chapter, "Quo Vadis?", on possible solutions to South Africa's racial problems is by David Marquard.

*The South African Way of Life* is full of very important facts about this African nation of "11,000,000 people of four different cultural origins, speaking a dozen different languages, and on every rung of the ladder of literacy and civilization."

*The Miracle of Language.* By Charlton Laird. Cleveland & New York: The World Publishing Company, 1953. XII+308pp. \$4.00.

Professor Laird's book is not a study in linguistic science but an intimately warm portrait of the English language from the Anglo-Saxon of the 12th century down to the American Language of the Atomic Age. There are chapters on word-borrowing, meaning, pronunciation, the English verb, the dictionary, and English grammar.

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## KENYA REPORT

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will be up to the Governor to grant them amnesty. Yet even this will not be enough to restore the status quo ante.

The British Government will have to give the Africans an irrevocable guarantee that they intend to open the Highlands to landless Kikuyus, abolish the color bar, reopen the Independent schools, and expand educational facilities, pay Africans in the civil service equal pay for equal work, and recognise the principle of party in representation in local and

central councils for government. For unless African leaders are armed with these assurances, which will enable them to offer their people something concrete by way of a better future, even the most trusted among them will be unable to bring about that psychological change which alone can help to bridge the present gulf between the Europeans and the Africans, the rulers and the ruled, without which there is no hope of cordial race relations in Africa—the prerequisite of political partnership.

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## LOOKING & LISTENING

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American Nurses' Association. The article was written by Mary Ella Chayer, former professor of nursing at Teachers College, Columbia University. . . .

The New York State Commission Against Discrimination reports that the twin forces of law and education have joined hands to break down the barriers to equality of employment and in places of public accommodation. . . . Baltimore, Maryland, hotel operators have refused to lift their restrictions against Negro patrons—they even refused to make exceptions for the Negro members of Baltimore's new American League baseball team and for Negroes on visiting teams. . . . Col. John C. Robinson, veteran aviator who flew for Ethiopia during the Italo-Ethiopian War, died in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, of injuries from a plane crash. . . . Some 3,000 different languages are spoken in the world today and the number is steadily increasing, accord-