

## THE PROBLEM IN EAST AFRICA

An informative talk by the Reverend Lyndon Harries, Lecturer in Swahili at London University, published in *The Listener*, December 18th, shows beyond doubt that the land question, and not the immediate outbreak by a murderous gang, is at the root of the troubles in Kenya. The Kikuyu form a fifth of Kenya's five million inhabitants and are among the most intelligent and enterprising. They are certainly the most politically conscious and restless under European domination. This is not surprising since "they have always before them, as other East Africans have not, the sight of white settlers cultivating land which they claim as their own." It was their misfortune to occupy land considered especially favourable for European settlement. This land was originally the subject of negotiation, but "the Kikuyu still maintain that originally they had simply leased the land to the whites, and that they did not realise that it was to be permanently alienated." (Such misunderstanding probably applies to the great majority of agreements by which Europeans, accustomed to absolute private property in land, have claimed to be the owners of land formerly in the possession of people to whom such a conception was unknown.) The Kikuyu land, although apparently unoccupied, was, in fact, the grazing reserves of the tribe, and this error was acknowledged by a previous Land Commission, in 1932. Meanwhile the Kikuyu, enclosed within the Reserve allotted to them by their white rulers, have been obliged to graze their cattle within a comparatively small area with the result that the land is turning into a dust bowl. This might have been avoided, as Mr. Harries suggests, if the Kikuyu had got rid of their cattle—on easy terms, perhaps, to those who had taken the grazing ground?—but this is no solution of the land question. In consequence of the impoverishment of their soil, large numbers of people move out of the Reserve to work for white settlers or to seek their living in the towns. But living costs are always rising more steeply than the rate of wages of labourers left without bargaining power, and the uprooting of so many families entails grave social evils for which Pass regulations and police measures afford no remedy.

Mr. Harries contrasts the situation in Kenya with that in Uganda which "is free from the problems arising from European settlement because white people are not allowed rights or titles to lands occupied or held by Africans, except with special consent of the Governor." In the most prosperous district, the kingdom of Buganda, "there is an African society which is variegated and urban. In other parts of the Protectorate the people are either self-cultivating peasants or pastoral people. Uganda is not unduly troubled by political tensions." Mr. Harries, however, might usefully have drawn attention to the discontent arising from the growing wealth of African landowners. Discrimination against Europeans is unjust and affords no real solution to the land problem.

Mr. Harries's B.B.C. talk was evidently intended to describe the situation rather than to advocate a solution, but after observing that "the problem here, as in Africa generally, is poverty and its consequences," he recommends the development of mines, the "creation" of secondary industries and of

schemes to promote large scale farming—all, presumably, with government assistance. These he hopes will raise the standard of life by "giving wide employment" and by providing "a large scale alternative to agriculture and the poverty associated with peasant farming." Such measures do not touch the land problem which Mr. Harries had previously shown to be the cause of the poverty. The recognition that all the people have equal rights to land and the application of the principle of land value taxation provide the obvious solution.

To assess the value of land apart from the value of improvements, deriving revenue from the value of land instead of taxing improvements, has been proved practicable in many countries including Kenya itself where the principle has been partially applied in Mombasa and in Nairobi and has been officially recommended for rural districts outside the Reserves. Its fuller development and application to all the land in the Colony would open vast new opportunities. The revenue it would provide would enable the Government to reduce or abolish other taxation at present falling upon production and to remove the poll taxes on mere existence. In consequence the costs of living and production would fall to an extent which could be described as revolutionary in spreading prosperity and allaying unrest.

Europeans, Africans and Asiatics alike would pay according to the value of their holdings, the holder who worked land well paying no more than a bad cultivator occupying a plot with similar advantages. This would tend to encourage good cultivation. In the better atmosphere that would develop as the effects of prosperity began to improve race relations, Africans would be more likely to listen to tactful advice on the subject of soil conservation.

This is the land policy under which all races can co-operate in equitable partnership towards the maximum development of Kenya's resources. It will not, of course, commend itself to those who believe that any change to be effective must be summary and dramatically coercive. But such changes seldom if ever touch the root of a social problem. Land value taxation touches directly the first of all human requirements—space on the surface of the earth.

(Contributed.)

## A DEBATE ON ALLOTMENTS

The great deal of valuable food being produced for the hungry people of this land by "entirely voluntary effort"—each ton of which saves a ton from being bought overseas—the health that is given and the recreation that is thus obtained warrants every possible encouragement of allotment diggers by Members of Parliament, said Mr. Gerald Williams (Cons., Tonbridge) during the adjournment debate in the Commons, February 12. He was glad that the Government had given a grant to the National Allotments Association and that it had enabled allotment holders to take advantage of the fertilizer subsidy. Even so, allotmenters had a number of grouses. Dog nuisance was one. During the war it had been deemed right and necessary to introduce a special Defence Regulation under which the owners of dogs that caused damage could be fined £5 or so. He knew

personally of 167 convictions in this connection and no doubt there had been many more.

Among the other grouses listed by Mr. Williams was the question of communal huts. "These huts are not rated, generally speaking, because they are agricultural buildings," he said. "But recently the assessment of these huts for rates has been transferred to the Inland Revenue, and they have re-opened the assessments on all sorts of trivial grounds. The Act states that if they are agricultural buildings, occupied together with agricultural land, they should not be charged in rates; but the Inland Revenue authorities quibble over this definition and say that if a communal hut is on a piece of waste land, perhaps 20 or 30 yards from the allotment, it is not actually on the land and therefore rates have to be paid. If a few bottles of ginger beer are sold to the members the Inland Revenue authorities say that that is not what the communal hut is meant to be used for, and rates have to be paid. In some cases it is said that certain members, although having gardens of their own, are not actually allotment holders, and the huts must therefore be rated. These are all quibbles; the law is meant to provide that communal huts belonging to allotment holders are not subject to rates."

Mr. A. Blenkinsop (Lab., Newcastle-upon-Tyne, E.) giving support, called attention to the allotment holders' need for greater security of tenure. Sir William Darling (Cons., Edinburgh, S.) suggested that "the allotment holder should be given the protection of good wiring and siting," because however intelligent they may appear to be, dogs could not read "keep off" notices! Mr. Jack Jones (Lab., Rotherham), an allotment cultivator himself, trotted out the familiar Malthusian cliché that "the world is getting shorter and shorter of food, and the population is getting larger all the time." No Parliamentary discussion on agriculture, horticulture or arboriculture would be complete without this statement.

Replying to the debate, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. G. R. H. Nugent, estimated that the value of food supplies and poultry and pigs from allotments and gardens was of the order of £44½ million annually. Although there were not enough allotments in some areas there were in the country something like one million extending over 100,000 acres. The Government's policy was to encourage all associations and societies devoted to domestic food production, but it was not in the long-term interest of domestic food producing organisations to have a permanent Government grant, since such grants necessarily involved some supervision and control by governments to ensure that the money was properly spent.

This short debate is instructive. Neither the ownership of land nor homilies about increased productivity and the alleged world food shortage are necessary to induce men to work hard and efficiently when they are assured the fruits of their efforts. Allotments flourished long before their cultivators received grants and subsidies and their holders are anxious to regain the independence which, as Mr. Nugent pointed out, is threatened by reliance upon government aid. Little, if any, taxation is paid on the £46½ million earned annually in this way, due not to any govern-

mental recognition of the sacredness of property, but because of the administrative impossibility of assessment. And except for such cases as those mentioned by Mr. Williams, allotmenters' huts are not rated. It is right that production and improvements should not be taxed, but wrong that one section of the community should enjoy as a privilege what should be the right of all. It is manifestly unjust that these cultivators who, as cultivators, make no contribution to the Exchequer, should receive their present grants and subsidies or the "protection of good wiring" that Sir William Darling suggested. Neither is it just that they should enjoy police protection and the benefits of other local services since under the De-rating Acts they make no contribution towards the cost of these benefits. Justice requires that allotment cultivators and every other class of land holder should contribute to local and national expenditure according to the value of the land they hold (that is to say, according to the benefits they receive from society), that grants and subsidies should be withdrawn, and that every section of the community should enjoy the freedom from taxation on production and improvements which is at present accorded those who dig their little plots of land at the week-end.

P. R. S.

## TWO "ABOMINABLE NO-MEN"

(1) GILBERT HARDING

"Britain could do with about a hundred Gilbert Hardings. Then no longer would we pay taxes, while the Government refused to introduce the taxation and rating of land values," said Mr. Kenneth Wolstenholme, a member of the Liberal Party Council in Manchester, February 16.

"No longer would we accept the fantastic situation whereby you can travel from Glasgow to Birmingham and back by coach, but not from Birmingham to Glasgow and back. And we would take positive action against a Tory Government which allowed one of its departments to sell milk to a dairyman, and then sued the dairyman, through another department, because the milk was sub-standard."—*News Chronicle*, February 17.

(2) JAMES ROBERTSON JUSTICE

James Robertson Justice was on his way home from making a film in Hollywood. In his hands he carried a canvas valise from which he couldn't be parted by the airport officials.

"Anything to declare?" asked the Customs officer.

"Yes. Six hawks." The film actor pulled back the zip-fastener of the valise. The Customs man peered warily inside. Sitting in a row on a perch fitted up in the bag were six hooded birds.

"You'll have to pay duty on those. They're caged birds. They're on the list. How much did you pay for them?"

"I didn't pay anything for them. I trapped them in a bow-net in California."

"All the same, you'll have to pay duty on them."

"Suppose I won't pay any duty? You can keep the hawks."

The Customs man called out in alarm as the enormous fellow with a beard started to walk purposefully out of the shed: "You're not leaving these things here. We've nothing to feed them on."

"I am, if I have to pay duty on them. I can let you have some rat meat. That's what they ate on the plane." From his pocket he produced a bloody mess.

The Customs man took one horrified look. "You can take those birds away," he said. "Take 'em away quickly and we won't say any more about it."—From "Disney finds a real-life Henry VIII," by MacDonald Hastings, published by *Picture Post*, February 21.