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MAU MAU—THE HARVEST OF LAND MONOPOLY

The British public have been disturbed by the murders in Kenya. Many have been just as disturbed by the readiness, not to say eagerness, with which the Kenya Government turns to such measures as "shows of force," wholesale "round-ups" and arrests on suspicion. Possibly the emergency necessitates these arrests, but the molestation of African leaders who speak to unofficial British investigators and the expulsion, without reason given, of an Englishman with African sympathies indicates a dangerous tendency to use the occasion to hinder too close an enquiry into official action. Members of Parliament have been too tolerant of such things. It is to be hoped that the British public, who are ultimately responsible, will insist on the closest scrutiny of how the emergency powers have been used and at the same time demand fuller information than has hitherto been generally available upon the events that led to the present situation.

Although it is not pretended that the trouble started only from the activities of a few terrorist leaders, public attention might easily be diverted into other unprofitable directions. On October 16 the Colonial Secretary mentioned as a contributory cause the alleged suppression by missionaries of some tribal dances, thus depriving Africans of the opportunity, he said, of "letting off steam." As this remark was as false as it was flippant—missionaries, of course, having no such power—it should stimulate M.P.'s to ensure that the Royal Commission Mr. Lyttleton promised to set up will pursue its investigations untrammelled by tenderness towards any special interest that may be implicated. Mr. Lyttleton's very fleeting reference on the same occasion to the land question was not calculated to remind the House of important matters they should know before the Commission is appointed; that the history of Kenya has been an almost unbroken succession of African protests against alienation of their land, alternating with Royal Commissions all concerned in some degree with the land question. Only this year the Kenya African Union sent delegates to England with a petition, signed by many Europeans as well as Africans, against further alienation of Kenya land in favour of Europeans, alleging that 16,700 square miles of land had already been taken during the

present century. This petition secured neither redress from the Government nor adequate publicity in the British press. Its sponsors can reflect that the trouble and money expended in this peaceful and constitutional way would have been more effectively spent in murdering a few isolated settlers. That fills the headlines and secures the appointment of a Royal Commission. If its findings are as barren as those of previous Commissions the Africans might conclude that henceforth murder is the only argument the British Government will consider.

A leading article in *The Observer*, October 26, reflects the desire among some sections of British opinion to give more serious consideration to the Kenya land question than it has received hitherto. "Land hunger is to the African what unemployment is to the European," states this article. "Six years ago an official report on conditions in the Kiambu district of the Kikuyu Reserve said that 40 per cent of its population was landless and gave warning that some 90,000 persons 'might become without means of support within a short time' and the 1951 annual report of the Kenya African Affairs Department said, 'It is necessary to protect the loyal majority of the Kikuyu tribe from being exploited through their genuinely felt grievances over land.' These warnings, from unimpeachable official sources," continues the article, "were not acted upon. Nothing has been done to remedy the most bitterly felt land grievance—the reservation of the White Highlands for white occupation... Landlessness has the further effect of driving Africans into the towns. But there they cannot find proper houses or work... and many receive wages on which they cannot live."

The article rightly points out that force is no remedy and such measures as suppressing the Kikuyu Central Association in 1940 will merely drive grievances underground to emerge in violence. Unfortunately, however, although the writer says that settling African peasants in the unoccupied parts of the White Highlands "would be an invaluable first gesture" he makes no attempt towards a general analysis of the land problems. He assumes, without giving any evidence, that "In Kenya there is not enough land to go round" and thinks the East African High Commission might discover how to solve the land question

by "far-reaching measures" such as moving Kenya natives to "less crowded" territories, especially Tanganyika. If mere density of population was the cause of social distress this enforced migration policy would only transfer the trouble from Kenya to Tanganyika. But the diagnosis is obviously at fault. The average standard of life in great cities is at least as high as where population is sparse, and urban as well as rural communities live on land and produce wealth only from materials derived ultimately from land. The emigration solution, however, would have one "practical" advantage; it would avoid directly challenging the Kenya landowners whose influence has dominated that colony since it was constituted. This applies also to the development schemes announced by the Governor on October 28, requiring a loan of £6,750,000 for make-work projects, most of which, if economically successful, will enhance the value of privately owned land; if unsuccessful they will, of course, add to the burden of taxes required to pay money lenders. Neither of these proposed remedies touch the root of the land problem; to find the true remedy we must dig deeper.

When Europeans first came to East Africa they found a sparsely populated country with villagers cultivating watered spots in the forest and able to move on when the fertility diminished without encroaching on others' territory. It was easy for Europeans to bribe a chief and his elders to grant them concessions of vacant land, although, as absolute ownership of land is entirely alien to African tradition and custom, it will always be matter of conjecture whether the chiefs really conferred the grant in the way Europeans interpreted it. This interpretation, however, was confirmed by the Protectorate government set up in 1894. When the Uganda Railway was built, with the object of developing land along the line, vast estates, some up to 350,000 acres, were granted to European owners. Such opportunities for land speculation attracted large scale speculators, those likely to be able to exert political pressure. When the Government started to "safeguard" African interests by demarcating Native Reserves, the landed interests got to work. In 1912, on the suggestion of the Landholders Association the Protectorate government appointed a Commission to investigate the "labour shortage." A typical witness was Lord Delamere, owner of 150,000 acres and afterwards Chairman of the Kenya Land Board. "If the policy was to be continued," he said, "that every native was to be a landholder of a sufficient area on which to establish himself, then the question of obtaining a satisfactory labour supply would never be settled. The soundest policy would be to curtail the Reserves, and although it might take a few years before the effect on the labour supply was apparent, the results would be permanent." This evidence of landlord attitude can be usefully supplemented by the *East African Standard's* comment, made years afterwards, on raising poll taxes: "We consider that taxation is the only possible method of compelling the native to leave his Reserve for the purpose of seeking work. Only in this way can the cost of living be increased for the native, and it is on this that a supply of labour and the cost of labour depends."*

* Quoted in Dr. Norman Leys's book *A Last Chance in Kenya*.

Here, in brutal simplicity, is the essence of the land and labour question in all countries. This is the policy which the Kenya Government, pressed by the landed interests in Britain and Kenya, has consistently applied. Progressive reduction of African-held land, together with progressive increase of taxation has been supplemented by humiliating Pass Regulations and, on occasion, wholesale eviction. Furthermore, peasant cultivation of export crops has been deliberately discouraged. It is time for the British people to refuse to tolerate any longer a Crown Colony government serving the selfish designs of the Kenya land barons who constitute, after all, only a small proportion of the European population.

But indignation is not enough. Neither is it sufficient to assert that "all the land should belong to the natives," or "every African should be given what land he needs." Such question-begging phrases are no more effective than the British Government's fulsome declaration in 1923 of the principle of "Trusteeship" towards subject peoples.

Every person in Kenya, of whatever race, has an equal right to *use* land; none to monopolise it. All the inhabitants collectively have an equal right to the value of land because this value is produced by the inhabitants collectively. By obliging every landholder to pay in taxation annually the value of his site, whether or not he puts it to fullest use, both these objects can be attained. Every owner of vacant or under-used land would be induced to find tenants as quickly as possible—in other words to accommodate the landless. Taxation so raised could be used to abolish poll taxes. Land hunger would be satisfied although Africans as well as Europeans and Asiatics would pay land value tax (or rent, in the economic sense) according to the communally-produced advantages of their holdings. Each adult African now pays about 24s. annually in hut and poll taxes; the annual rent on a family holding of 3 or 4 acres would not equal this sum although a skilled African cultivator of fertile and well situated land would find it to his advantage to pay more than 24s. European holders of idle or under-used land would be at a disadvantage until the land was in average production, but on land adequately used the tax would be an equitable exchange for the advantages offered by the site. The transition would be towards smaller estates and peasant proprietors, but any superior skill or equipment the European possessed would have full opportunity. A community of prosperous and advancing African peasants would offer to European enterprise more opportunities, and infinitely happier opportunities, than the present artificial conditions depending upon holding down sullen helots liable to retaliate by murder.

F. D. P.

KENYA CROWN LANDS

The principles set forth in the foregoing article were embodied in a general way in the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915 applying to Kenya. The Crown Lands were to be held in trust for the people and the Ordinance authorised the Government to let considerable amounts of them on leases for 999 years at rents which are public revenue, based on percentage increasing to a maximum of 3 per cent of the capital unimproved value, subject to revision every thirty years, with the proviso that in the ascertainment of

Association of Municipal Corporations and to local M.P.s, thus ensuring wide circulation among municipalities. It is based on the comprehensive report on de-rating recently presented by the City's finance committee after consultation with the City Treasurer, Mr. J. P. Eames. The memorandum gives a clear account of the effects of de-rating and the probable effects on local authorities, Government and industry if it is repealed. It shows that if this de-rating did not obtain, the rates in Birmingham this year would be less by 2s. 2d. in the £ (*Municipal Journal* reports, October 17 and 24).

But, as the United Committee pointed out in its evidence to the Site Value Rating Enquiry Committee, the bare repeal of this de-rating will not answer the case; for that would be merely to patch the existing rating system and throw the weight of local taxation back upon buildings and improvements. The remedy within the field of local government is to assess the value of land for local taxation and to *de-rate all buildings and improvements*. Thereby local authorities will be vested with their rightful revenue. A load of taxation will be taken off the shoulders of the general taxpayers who to-day—and quite unnecessarily—are forced to provide those subventions from the Treasury which make beggars of the local authorities and which, through the control of the purse at the Whitehall end, are a standing menace to the very existence of local self-government.