

MAU MAU IS VIOLENCE OF DESPAIR—By Victor Saldji*

Dr. L. S. B. Leakey in his book, *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu*, tells us that, "by the closing decades of the nineteenth century the early travellers and explorers of Kenya, describing Kikuyu land as they saw it, used such terms as 'as far as the eye could see it was one vast garden.' The Kikuyu district of Kiambu also became known as the granary of the caravans that were moving up and down the country to Uganda, since it was the source of vast quantities of grain, beans, etc. There can be no doubt at all that the Kikuyu population of the Kiambu district of that time was very considerable and that cultivation was very extensive indeed."

This does not suggest "soil destroying agricultural methods." Kikuyu land was known to be good because of what the Kikuyu had produced.

Even after the reduction of the population by the ravages of smallpox, rinderpest, drought and locusts the Kikuyu were very much in evidence. Sir Charles Eliot (who was Governor from 1901-4) wrote: "The district where the land question is likely to present real difficulties is Kikuyu, as here we have the combination of a climate and country suitable to Europeans and a numerous native population . . . No one can doubt that the rich and exceptionally fertile district of Kikuyu is destined to be one of the chief centres of European cultivation" . . . (*The East African Protectorate*, 1905).

Despite the gaps with no African population the picture is hardly one of a "wilderness."

One may broadly agree that the conditions for Mau Mau were bred by "pressure of population" the "impact of so-called civilization" and "the uncompromising missionaries." But let us be quite clear that it is the pressure of population *within the African reserves* that is being referred to. I have seen how this contrasts with the sparsity of population in the wide acres of the White Highlands. This pressure within the reserves is not a result of the work of those European social and medical workers who gave of their best, and all honour to them, but a product of the relentless policy pursued by those men who, with that basic assumption of superiority, *knew* that the African was *meant* to do the menial work, and do it for low wages.

How to secure "native labour" was the main concern of the hardcore of these early settlers. Their leader, Lord Delamere, owner of 150,000 acres, giving evidence before the Native Labour Commission of 1912-13, said: "If the policy was to be continued 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 . . ." He considered 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."

Land alienation had a two-fold object: to supply land for European settlement and to force the Africans on to the labour market. But it was not the only method of securing labour. Lord Hailey in his Survey tells us that the poll tax was "deliberately used" in order to produce a supply of labour. Just how deliberately we may judge from the brutal frankness of a leading article in the *East African Standard* of February 8, 1913, which is at least commendable for its lack of hypocrisy: "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 the supply of labour and the cost of labour depends."

This "civilization" certainly hit traditional tribal customs with an impact. The concentrated land, taxation and compulsory labour legislation disintegrated the strict inter-social relations and turned man against man.

We are told that "Kenya needs teachers to raise the standard of education of the blacks to the level of the whites." Let us pause in our pride, we educated whites, to consider what the education of these "near savages" consisted of before we assume such superiority. Although they did not have the three R's, Dr. L. S. B. Leakey tells us: "Education consisted of an organized series or stages of preparation for the responsibilities of life in the community to which the individual belonged. As such, it was fundamental education which made good citizens, honest men and women, and wise parents and leaders of the community, in which a sense of responsibility to those in lower grades and to the tribe as a whole was very strongly developed." Dr. Leakey tells us also that in the days of his boyhood among the Kikuyu thieving was almost unknown—"it was not done."

As regards a solution to the problem, I agree that ignorance is the first obstruction that must be cleared away. It is because I am convinced that there can be no hope of solving Kenya's many problems until the prevailing ignorance regarding the background to the present tragedy is cleared away, and replaced by knowledge, that I offer this criticism.

Mau Mau is no mystery when the background is known. We can only wonder that it did not come sooner. While no sane man will support the methods of Mau Mau we must recognize it for what it is—the violence of despair. It will only end when despair is replaced by hope.

* Slightly abridged and reprinted with acknowledgments from *Peace News*, November 19.

MAU MAU IS VIOLENCE OF DESPAIR—By Victor Saldji*

Dr. L. S. B. Leakey in his book, *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu*, tells us that, "by the closing decades of the nineteenth century the early travellers and explorers of Kenya, describing Kikuyu land as they saw it, used such terms as 'as far as the eye could see it was one vast garden.' The Kikuyu district of Kiambu also became known as the granary of the caravans that were moving up and down the country to Uganda, since it was the source of vast quantities of grain, beans, etc. There can be no doubt at all that the Kikuyu population of the Kiambu district of that time was very considerable and that cultivation was very extensive indeed."

This does not suggest "soil destroying agricultural methods." Kikuyu land was known to be good because of what the Kikuyu had produced.

Even after the reduction of the population by the ravages of smallpox, rinderpest, drought and locusts the Kikuyu were very much in evidence. Sir Charles Eliot (who was Governor from 1901-4) wrote: "The district where the land question is likely to present real difficulties is Kikuyu, as here we have the combination of a climate and country suitable to Europeans and a numerous native population . . . No one can doubt that the rich and exceptionally fertile district of Kikuyu is destined to be one of the chief centres of European cultivation" . . . (*The East African Protectorate*, 1905).

Despite the gaps with no African population the picture is hardly one of a "wilderness."

One may broadly agree that the conditions for Mau Mau were bred by "pressure of population" the "impact of so-called civilization" and "the uncompromising missionaries." But let us be quite clear that it is the pressure of population *within the African reserves* that is being referred to. I have seen how this contrasts with the sparsity of population in the wide acres of the White Highlands. This pressure within the reserves is not a result of the work of those European social and medical workers who gave of their best, and all honour to them, but a product of the relentless policy pursued by those men who, with that basic assumption of superiority, *knew* that the African was *meant* to do the menial work, and do it for low wages.

How to secure "native labour" was the main concern of the hardcore of these early settlers. Their leader, Lord Delamere, owner of 150,000 acres, giving evidence before the Native Labour Commission of 1912-13, said: "If the policy was to be continued 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 . . ." He considered 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."

Land alienation had a two-fold object: to supply land for European settlement and to force the Africans on to the labour market. But it was not the only method of securing labour. Lord Hailey in his Survey tells us that the poll tax was "deliberately used" in order to produce a supply of labour. Just how deliberately we may judge from the brutal frankness of a leading article in the *East African Standard* of February 8, 1913, which is at least commendable for its lack of hypocrisy: "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 the supply of labour and the cost of labour depends."

This "civilization" certainly hit traditional tribal customs with an impact. The concentrated land, taxation and compulsory labour legislation disintegrated the strict inter-social relations and turned man against man.

We are told that "Kenya needs teachers to raise the standard of education of the blacks to the level of the whites." Let us pause in our pride, we educated whites, to consider what the education of these "near savages" consisted of before we assume such superiority. Although they did not have the three R's, Dr. L. S. B. Leakey tells us: "Education consisted of an organized series or stages of preparation for the responsibilities of life in the community to which the individual belonged. As such, it was fundamental education which made good citizens, honest men and women, and wise parents and leaders of the community, in which a sense of responsibility to those in lower grades and to the tribe as a whole was very strongly developed." Dr. Leakey tells us also that in the days of his boyhood among the Kikuyu thieving was almost unknown—"it was not done."

As regards a solution to the problem, I agree that ignorance is the first obstruction that must be cleared away. It is because I am convinced that there can be no hope of solving Kenya's many problems until the prevailing ignorance regarding the background to the present tragedy is cleared away, and replaced by knowledge, that I offer this criticism.

Mau Mau is no mystery when the background is known. We can only wonder that it did not come sooner. While no sane man will support the methods of Mau Mau we must recognize it for what it is—the violence of despair. It will only end when despair is replaced by hope.

* Slightly abridged and reprinted with acknowledgments from *Peace News*, November 19.