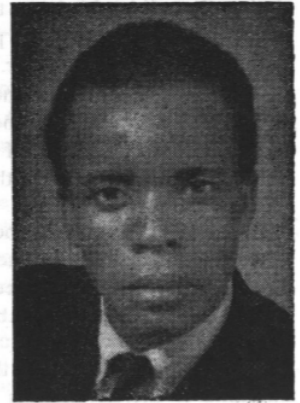


# Land of Conflict

By CLEMENT WERE

(President of the African Tenants' Union of Kenya)

**"A man may have no money in the bank, but he must have land to build a house. Land was created by God for his creatures, and no one should pretend to own large areas of land while others have nowhere to build even the smallest house. For obvious economic and moral reasons, I personally believe in possessing land, not owning land."**



**K**ENYA is a very beautiful country, rich in vegetation, minerals and wild life. It is a land of wide, flowing rivers filled with fish. The second largest lake in the world lies partly within its borders. In the centre of the country stands the great Mount Kenya, one of the world's highest mountains. Just outside Kenya's border in the south stands the famous Mount Kilimanjaro. Mount Elgon is on the western side of Kenya. There are smaller lakes like Lake Rudolf in the extreme north, and Lake Nakuru and Lake Naivasha in the Rift Valley Province. The great Rift Valley divides the beautiful country into two almost equal parts, running with few gentle curves from north to south.

On Kenya's south east lies the Indian Ocean, offering the country an excellent natural harbour, known as Kilindini Harbour, within Mombasa Town. The very large National Park full of game lies in Kenya's centre.

Kenya is a land of contrast. It has a large area in the north, almost half the size of the whole country, which could fairly be described as a semi-desert; a land where rain might not fall for a year. This wide area is not thickly populated, and the inhabitants are certainly not agriculturally minded, because of the dry climate.

But the modern man in Kenya sees the North not as a wasted land, but a good contrast making Kenya less monotonous. He is also confident that with modern agricultural techniques like irrigation, the land will be made fertile. There are also high hopes that the land contains natural resources such as minerals and oil. In short the modern man in Kenya views it as a land with lots of potential wealth and life.

This is the Kenya which attracts multitudes of settlers and tourists from all over the world — the land which has been described as "a land of conflict." The beauties and contrasts, as well as the potential wealth, have really made it a land of conflict. All the political and social noises from this country come about as a result of these beauties and contrasts. With Kenya approaching independence these noises have doubled, if not trebled.

The main cause of strife is land. Mau Mau was not warfare resulting from the Africans' primitiveness. It was

a war resulting from dissatisfaction with the system of owning land. Kenya being mainly an agricultural country, it is my great conviction that unless some clear straightforward policy is established for the use of land in Kenya, the troubles are bound to continue. And I am fully convinced that any political, economic or social policy in Kenya which chooses to avoid or to be vague on the land question is worthless.

This is the reason why we members of the African Tenants' Union of Kenya (a non-political organisation) have found it rather tame to serve a large section of Kenya's tenants without touching upon the fundamental basis of Kenya's life — the land. And this is the main reason why our Union is very much interested in the taxation of land values. In short, we are looking for a land policy which will suit our country and all its inhabitants. We are determined to learn more about the policies of landownership and tenancies as well as the right use of land.

I would like to point out that traditionally the Kenya African did not *own* land but *possessed* it. The African had no title deeds. He saw the land not as personal property but as a personal possession. The African, especially in Nyanza Province where I was born and grew up, had no grazing boundaries for his animals. He was free to cut grass from any field for thatching his house. He was free to get pottery clay for making his cooking and eating utensils from any clay field. All these were free, and in most parts of Kenya this policy of citizens enjoying all the natural gifts of God free of charge still continues and the people, including myself, value it highly, especially the freedom to fish in our beautiful lakes and rivers. But remember, the catches we make from our fishing are our own property, which we can sell or give to whoever we please. So whenever you hear an African cry for freedom he still thinks in terms of traditional freedom, freedom to produce. The policy is good and Godly, but what is needed is a method of applying it within a modern economic system.

The modern civilisation with its system of ownership, where man tends to call everything property, is completely

new to Kenya Africans. Very soon the human race, influenced by the policy of making everything capable of private ownership, will start claiming the ownership of the moon, the sun, and even the stars. Already modern man "owns" air-space above his land, and water in the oceans, seas, lakes and rivers".

I was reading in one of our local libraries when I came across the aims and objects of the publishers of *LAND & LIBERTY*. I so much liked their modern approach to land problems that I decided to introduce them to my Executive Committee, which, being equally impressed, insisted that we write to them for a more detailed policy and literature. We are keenly studying the policy with a hope that it may in the long run be the accepted land policy not only in Kenya but in the whole world. We find that the policy is, in fact, the traditional Kenya African policy *modernised*. My Executive Committee was more encouraged by the fact that the policy has made a small beginning in Jamaica.

A man may have no money in the bank, but he must have land to build a house. Land was created by God for his creatures, and no one should pretend to own large areas of land while others have nowhere to build even the smallest house. For obvious economic and moral reasons, I personally believe in *possessing* land, not *owning* land. With the rapidly increasing population, I believe it is in the interest of all humanity to adopt the policy of non-ownership of land.

Readers in Europe might be interested to learn of my personal view on the white farmers in Kenya.

It is a fact that the land in Kenya was badly acquired by the white farmers as they did not consult the then owners or possessors of the land. It is only natural that the original owners or possessors demand their land to be returned to them. It is also an economic fact that the white farmers have contributed a great deal to the present prosperity of Kenya. And for quite some years to come their presence in Kenya is vital. What Kenya needs, therefore, is a just and straightforward policy that will satisfy both the Africans and the white farmers without wrecking the economy of the country.

My personal policy on land, therefore, is that all the unused and Crown areas of land be distributed to the landless Africans, and loans as well as technical advice be given to them to develop the land. For the same reason, loans and technical advice should also be given to those Africans already having land.

It is also my firm personal view that the developed lands now in the hands of white farmers should remain so, as long as the white farmer concerned will remain in Kenya — and every encouragement should be made for him to stay on and even make Kenya his permanent home. But should the farmer wish to go of his own choice I shall personally be sorry to see him go; but I do not think it is just for the taxpayer to compensate him for either land or property or developments made on the land. He will, however, be free to arrange for

compensation from *private interested individuals* or organisations. There will be exceptions to this law, especially where a farmer must go for genuine reasons such as health or bankruptcy or such reasons as will be seen fit. In such approved cases the Government will compensate the farmer for property and developments but *there will be no compensation* for land as such.

In the case where a farmer, of whatever race, is asked by the Government to leave his land for the good of the nation, it is my strong view that such a farmer, whether white, black or blue, be compensated for both his property and developments but not for land. Where possible an alternative piece of land could be offered him.

To conclude, I wish to state here that the Kenya African is very much willing to stay as a good neighbour with his white and brown brethren, but on condition that none of the brethren shall claim privileges because of his mere colour. I am convinced, and I think many Africans are convinced, that God is determined to mix His children in the whole world, and that any human effort against this determination is as wasted as is the human effort of trying to prevent ultimate death.

The greatest challenge to modern men is how they can live together in peace without minding the mere colour of their bodies, like cattle in the grazing field — black, white, brown, spotted — who just do not care.

At the moment we human beings are worse than animals before God.

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