

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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The Second Coming of Jomo

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93 Cornwall Gardens
London S.W. 7
ENGLANDMr. Richard Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

It had been sixteen years since the old man with the fierce looking red eyes and the iron gray beard had turned his back on Britain and returned to his Kikuyu homeland. In that time, having laid aside the academic pursuits of the European years, he had become deeply committed to the political and racial struggle in Kenya. To the government of the crown colony and thousands of white settlers he was the leader of "darkness and death", the high priest of Mau Mau. To millions to Africans, in and out of Kenya, he was the soul of freedom, the "Burning Spear" that would point the way. Now after years of imprisonment and exile, the old one stepped from a powerful luxury airliner into the grayness of London Airport to be greeted by the hot and passionate cheers of hundreds of Africans awaiting his second coming. A single banner waved above the crowd, saying, "Welcome Jomo Kenyatta, Hero of Africa."

In one hand he carried his formidable black stick with the hewn head of an elephant. In the other he waved his chiefly gichuthi, a fly whisk made from the tail of a monkey. A red, white and blue beaded cap, pillbox style, adorned his head. ("Stolen from the Arabs," sniffed one knowledgeable Britisher, "After all, the Kikuyu have no tribal dress.") The tie was bright red and his greenish-blue double breasted suit had lapels five times the size of an Ivy League model. His bearded leonine head becomes his powerful, squat body. About him there was both the aura of "Burning Spear" and the tired Leo of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Now President of the powerful majority party, the Kenya African National Union, he led his delegation of Africans, Indians, and Europeans down the ramp, and there, outside of the terminal building, milling confusion held sway. Reporters shouted questions, photographers flashed bulbs, Africans cried "Jomo", and "Uhuru", and policeman wandered silently and tensely about. Tom Mboya, general secretary of KANU who had returned from meetings in Brussels and Scandinavia, finally led Kenyatta and the delegation to a conference room to meet press and television. (I had had two hours' worth of tea and conversation with Mboya when he stopped in London on his way to the Continent).

The delegation from the Kenya African National Union had come to London to make representations to Reginald Maudling, the new Colonial Secretary. They desired to impress upon him that KANU was disappointed with the vaguely projected timetable for constitutional talks, "during the first quarter of next year." The party interpreted this to mean Britain will not grant independence to Kenya before the end of 1962. In the meantime, the Kenya African Democratic Union, which was completely outvoted in the last elections by KANU, continues to maintain the Government. They took power when KANU refused

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to do so unless Kenyatta was freed from prison. Bitterness between the two groups has continued to increase with charges by KADU that KANU is a Kikuyu-Luo tribal coalition that will not respect the rights of the smaller tribes of Kenya after independence. KANU, on the other hand resents the minority government of KADU, KADU's "sell out" of Kenyatta, and the party's close cooperation with the British-appointed governor, Sir Patrick Renison, who was the man who labeled Kenyatta a leader of "darkness and death."

To questions as to why the KANU delegation came to London instead of remaining and working out matters in Kenya, Kenyatta replied that Kenya's problems could not be settled between the two parties. Mboya elaborated. "We submit that Kenya is still a crown colony and very much a responsibility of the British Government, with ultimate responsibility still resting with Her Majesty's Minister of State for the Colonies. We cannot therefore accept the attempt to use other groups in Kenya with vested personal interest to act as spokesmen for the British Government." It was to invoke the "ultimate responsibility" that Jomo, followed by his men, had come again.

I did not get a chance to shake the hand of "Burning Spear" until after the delegation's first meeting with the Minister of State of the Colonies. In a meeting room of a large London hotel 80 reporters gathered to ask about the result of the meeting. Substantial numbers of Africans gathered to admire and support "Jomo," and a bundle of British Bobbies stood by to keep the peace. Earlier in the day, when Kenyatta was on his way to the Colonial Office, a member of the League of Empire Loyalists missed hitting him with a badly aimed egg. The man was arrested and later fired.

This earlier failure did not deter other members of the League, an organization which is headed by British Fascist Sir Oswald Mosley. Before the press conference started, I heard a familiar voice, shouting "Take that from the League of Empire Loyalists, Jomo Kenyatta, you blood butcher." And there was a tall, dark haired young lady trying to lay her umbrella across Jomo's skull. She didn't make it because Scotland Yard was right on the job.

It was the same woman who had sat behind me during a speech by Martin Luther King Jr. on his first trip to London. Among their other Neanderthal slogans, The League of Empire Loyalists also include "Keep Britain White." That night, until finally ushered out, she had spasmodically given forth to such loud battle cries as "Rubbish", "you're a traitor to your own people", "What rot," etc. Kenyatta was not ready to discuss completely the substance of the first meeting. He and his delegation, all of whom took part in the press conference did, however, underscore the three points they had impressed upon the secretary:

1. In Kenya economic deterioration was beginning to accelerate.
2. The KANU - KADU political deadlock was coming to a head, with tribal conflict in the offing.
3. Because of these facts KANU rejected the scheme for a constitutional conference early in 1962 and wanted one in November or December.

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The press conference was highly stimulated by some personal revelations that came from Kenyatta. When asked about his age, Kenyatta hesitated, and said he found it hard to believe anyone still wanted to talk about that. When pressed, he finally declared in a strong voice, "I am over 71 now." At this point his face became quite animated, he said "I don't think you could put me down." Suddenly he jumped up, extended his arms sidewise, and began to flex his muscles. "Do you want to try me," he shouted at his questioner. "I'll put you down." Laughter filled the room. I for one was pretty sure he could put me down. (Well, maybe not to stay, maybe).

Asked about his prison life, Kenyatta said the concrete floor had been his bed for seven years. One blanket served as a mattress and another as cover. He now has high blood pressure, and because of a vitamin deficiency, has on occasion suffered from eczema. There are still scars on his body from the prison years. He insists, however, "I have no bitterness whatsoever, because I know my cause is just."

While Kenyatta was the star of this production, the supporting cast was dramatic and intriguing in its own right. Four I found to be especially so, Mboya, Mungai Njoroge, Bruce Mackenzie and Oginga Odinga.

Much has been written and said about Mboya. I herewith add my own speculations to the list. My first impressions, gained during the Sunday afternoon we sat drinking tea, were buttressed by his performance at this press conference and by the additional times I saw him in London. He is a neat, very well dressed man. His gray suit was "sharp", a white handkerchief peeped neatly from his top jacket pocket, a ring of splendor glittered on his finger, and a gold watch gleamed on his wrist. He was a picture of dark, brooding intelligence and efficiency. He sat at Kenyatta's right hand and was often consulted for advice and solicited to "add something." The contrast between the young and the old was clear to see. Kenyatta was most at ease discussing the struggle, enunciating the basic goals, calling for unity, touching the heart. Mboya was a man of facts, quotes, restrained ease, and of startling quiet competence. The two complement each other. If there is impatience and ambition riding Mboya, it did not show in this setting. Perhaps he is just "playing it cool." In fact looking at the two of them, I thought; "The hot poppa and the cool cat" Louis Armstrong and Miles Davis in a jam session. The young and the cool is bound to "cut" the hot and the old sooner or later.

Mongai Njoroge, M.D. graduate of Stanford Medical School and member of the Kenya Legislative Council, was a person of quiet demeanor, flashing humor, and sophistication. Before leaving San Francisco, I had been told by numerous persons of the sterling qualities of young Doctor Njoroge. They did not exaggerate. Between discussions of the excruciating trials of political, medical and social developments in Kenya, we teased each other about the old Stanford-University of California football rivalry. In the midst of our declarations of University loyalty, we discovered neither of us had ever made it to the annual "Big Game."

Bruce Mackenzie, was one of the two European members of the twelve-man KANU delegation. He was born in South Africa, and calls himself a "detrribalized Scot." He is a man of large size and his face is dominated by formidable mutton-chop whiskers. Mackenzie was serving as President of the Royal Agricultural Society of Kenya when he decided to enter politics. He is a long-time friend of Tom Mboya and one of the very few Europeans who have cast their lot with KANU. He regards

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himself as a realist, not an extremist; but his willingness to integrate himself with an African political party has cost him something. Other Europeans in Kenya have cold shouldered him, slighted his wife, and at school, his two girls have been "sent to Coventry." His adherence to KANU, its goals, and policies has all the fierceness of the convert.

Oginga Odinga, Vice-President of the Kenya African National Union, held down the amen corner throughout Kenyatta's several speeches. He was a cheer leader waving his own gichuthi and wearing his own red, white and blue skullcap. He continuously punctuated Kenyatta's remarks by cries of "Hear! Hear! Uhuru," and long moans of approval. He added spice, fervor and a certain sense of irony to the KANU mission.

It was at the end of the press conference that Mboya first introduced me to Kenyatta. When I shook the hand of "Burning Spear" I realized for the second time what the expression "ham handed" means. (The first time it had been the hand of Joe Louis.) In the swirling and pushing crowd there was only time for a short exchange. My other three meetings with Jomo were of the same hurried quality. Even sitting in the hotel quarters of the KANU delegation he remained the center of a continuous mass of revolving people, predominantly Africans complete with Dignity Bags (brief cases). The last time I saw and heard Kenyatta in London was at an evening reception given in his honor by the Committee of African Organizations at their posh headquarters, Africa Unity House. The bags were missing but the dignity was there, that is, until Jomo arrived.

Prior to his arrival the elegant reception room reverberated with the intellectual echoes and accents of Cambridge, Oxford and the London School of Economics. The multiracial, carefully-dressed group sipped, smoked and smiled. Members of Parliament from the British Labor Party chatted with African nationalist political leaders from Southern Rhodesia, South Africa and Uganda. Ghanaian hostesses, gracefully swathed in their national dress, filled and refilled glasses. Embassy and consular officials from China (Peking), Tunisia, and other nations sauntered and mixed. I stood talking with two of my friends, one from Nigeria, the other from Ghana. Then Jomo was there. The cry, for that is what it was, rippled and flowed around the room. "Jomo is here." As the old one stepped through the door, cap, gichuthi, stick and all, the tones of Oxford, Cambridge, and LSE were overwhelmed as the raw cry of Africa split the air again and again. "Uhuru!" "Uhuru!" "Uhuru!"

For me, and I suspect for other non-Africans there, it was a buoyant and compassionate moment. For a fleeting second, I was one with them in their hates, their hurts, and their hopes.

"Burning Spear" rose to the occasion. In the other setting he had been vague and oracular in responding to specific questions. Here at Africa Unity House he was at home, both with the people and the generalities of his cause. He flayed the colonialists, including the "neo-Colonialists;" looked forward to the promised land of Pan-Africanism; laughed at the petty men who thought they could hold back the social and political renaissance of Africa; and roared Uhuru again and again with his compatriots. In his quietness and grayness, Tom Mboya stood by, occasionally smiling, occasionally underscoring some of Kenyatta's more painful remembrances with a somber nod.

The intense applause that followed gradually settled down into regular rhythmic handclaps and then into song. Jomo Kenyatta and his party of Africans, Europeans and Indians moved out of the room, singing and shaking hands as they went along. It was a "socko" finish for the second coming of Jomo. But the next few weeks here, in London and in Kenya, will provide the real measure of his success.

Most sincerely,

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Charles Patterson