

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JS-18  
A Kenya Settler in South Africa

New York  
15 Oct 64

Mr. Richard H. Nolte  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

"I suppose I really left Kenya," Jeffrey Chrystall said, looking out over the brown South African winter landscape, "because I didn't want to be ruled by blacks."

A handsome, rather self-conscious man of medium build in his middle forties, Chrystall was born in New Zealand. He joined the Royal Air Force when he finished school there and was stationed in India until the war broke out and his fighter squadron went to England. After two years of combat flying, he returned to India with what he describes as "the British equivalent of your OSS."

At the end of the war, having no plans for the future, Chrystall decided to try his luck in England. He was on a ship from India when he met someone who, he realizes now, changed the entire course of his life. One of his fellow passengers had quit his job in India

Jeffrey and Jean Chrystall



because British rule was ending and was on his way to Kenya where he had bought a farm. Kenya, Chrystall's new friend told him at length, was a place with a real future for the white man.

Chrystall went to the Kenya office in London immediately after he arrived in England. He discovered that the British Government was encouraging ex-servicemen to settle in Kenya by selling them farming land at a low price or by offering long-term leases to those who, like him, did not have the £2000 required for purchase. The

more he talked to people about it, the better a place Kenya seemed to be, and in 1947, Chrystall signed a lease with the Government for 640 acres near Turi, at 9000 feet in the heart of the Kenya highlands.

The first years were tough but enjoyable for Chrystall and his Kenya-born wife Jean. "We literally had to break the land to our use; pull down trees, pull up rocks, the lot. But it was fun, there were lots of chaps like me in Turi and next door in Elburgon and Molo and we all helped each other. The first place Jean and I lived in was a ramshackle circular affair full of nothing but holes and hope, but once we started paying our way with Guernseys, sheep, and pyrethrum, we decided to build a proper house. Jean was the architect and we built it with our own timber and our own bricks. Our next big improvement, and sadly, our last, was a dam which we stocked with fish and which eventually covered 34 acres."

The Chrystalls had just brought their farm under control when the Mau Mau rebellion broke out. Fortunately for them, Turi was far away from the center of the uprising, but Jean's mother lived in the heart of Mau Mau country and, in addition to his concern for her safety, too many of Chrystall's friends were in the fight for him to stay out of it. He joined the Police Air Reserve, flying spotting missions and training pilots.

Looking back on these years now, both Jeffrey and Jean Chrystall can see that they set the stage for Kenya's independence, but at the time, the thought that the Africans would soon rule themselves seemed laughable. In the period of political turmoil that followed the quashing of Mau Mau, Chrystall had, at first, some sympathy for Michael Blundell's limited multi-racial policies, but he became convinced that they would never succeed. "It was clear that the Africans themselves wanted no part of it and, mind you, there is no historical precedent for the system at all. It has never worked before and it won't work now."

The defeat of the Europeans at the 1960 Lancaster House Conference, then, came as a complete and stunning surprise to Chrystall, as it did to most Settlers. "We just couldn't believe that the British Government had abandoned us as they obviously had. They lured us out to Kenya with assurances that our children and grandchildren would be safe here and each Governor and Colonial Secretary from the War on spoke the same reassuring words, promising that their Government would always protect us. Then, in one fell swoop, Macleod threw us all into the dust bin: We, the white men, suddenly became expendable. I tell you, there are some bitter people about. I am one of them."

In the gloomy months following Lancaster House, Chrystall reluctantly decided that he would rather leave Kenya, despite his love for his farm and life there, than live under African rule and so, early in 1961, he sub-let his farm to a neighbor and moved to England. The Chrystalls remember their stay with a shudder. Although he got an interesting job with the National Farmers Union (previously, he had been a member of the Executive of the Kenya National Farmers Union) Chrystall could not stand the climate, the crowds, or the

commuting and within a year he was back in Africa. He stopped briefly in Kenya to visit his farm, found little in the country that made him want to return, and went on to look at Natal Province in South Africa where many of his Kenya friends had re-settled. He liked what he saw, and bought 640 acres in the Umlaas River area, 50 miles inland from Durban.



The Chrystalls' Farm

Chrystall, his wife, and her mother live in a simple white house with a thatched roof, surrounded by a landscape that resembles the close-cropped, rolling down country of Turi, but which, compared with the rugged Kenya highlands, somehow looks subdued and domesticated. Chrystall has found farming in South Africa more difficult and less profitable than he expected. "We started off here with potatoes and sheep and if we'd had to go it on those alone, we'd have had it; farming doesn't pay as well here as it did in Kenya. It isn't the backbone of the economy and, therefore, it is not as well organized. We've been given a good quota of sugar cane now, thank God, and hope to get 12% off the land instead of the 3% the potatoes would have brought us.

"But there are, I suppose, many things we miss about Kenya. First of all, there was a spirit in Kenya you can't find in South Africa: we were pioneers there, the modern version of your frontiersmen, but here, all that happened two hundred years ago; someone else's great-great-great-grandfather broke this land, not me. Look at this house; we built our own in Kenya, some other chap I never knew made this one.

"As much as anything else, we miss the life we led in Kenya: the friends who'd been through it all with us; the amateur dramatics; the polo; the pure air; the rich virgin soil; the rough beauty of the highlands; the easy way the days slipped by. And then there's the labor. The natives here are dim beyond belief, mainly, I guess, because all the clever Zulus go to the factories. In Kenya, most of our boys were Kyukes (Kikuyus), hard-working intelligent chaps who knew more about our cattle than we did ourselves. Yet on the

whole we're glad to be here despite that bloody awful South African accent! To see a country we loved go to pot would have been more than we could bear. Jean and I swore that once we had left Kenya we would never look back and we haven't. But one can't help remembering; our youth's there, you see.

"Here in South Africa, they have the right idea. I'm no Nationalist, but Verwoerd knows what he is talking about when he says the natives aren't ready for the vote. They're not and won't be for a long time. Let's face it, they can't carry on without white leadership. If you don't believe me, just look at the mess the Africans made of the European land they took over in Kenya. They got first class farms and now they're all on famine relief. No race can maintain a state if it can't maintain itself.

"Verwoerd knew that we in Kenya were clued up about Africans and he wanted us to come here. Just to show you what I mean, the South African Government gives each Kenya family that settles here £60 a head for travel expenses, we get customs concessions on what we bring in, free lodging in a hotel until we find a job, help in finding one, and, if you are a farmer, loans when you finally get settled. They want us here all right.

"And they want to be friendly with your country too. You Americans spend your time playing up to these new African countries forgetting, so it seems to me, that South Africa is one of your staunchest allies against Communism -- you tell me what other country has passed a Suppression of Communism Act. Communism is gaining throughout the world and South Africa is the only country to stand up to it."

Jeffrey Chrystall typifies the 1500-odd European farmers who have left Kenya in the past four years. Like him, many moved to South Africa; others went to Australia, to New Zealand, or even back to England. They left Kenya bitterly angry at Britain, whose Government, they thought, had lured them out to Kenya with guarantees of support and protection, had watched indifferently while they struggled to build the country's economy and then, quite abruptly, had abandoned them. Myopic and withdrawn from the world, they could not see that their feudal way of life was dead or that it would pass unmourned except by those few who were part of it.

Sincerely,

  
John Spencer