

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Settler Thoughts Today

P.O. Box 5113
Nairobi, Kenya
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Mr. Richard H. Nolte
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New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Between ten and fifteen per cent of the European (white) farmers have left Kenya. More will leave as the Government buys European farms for settlement by Africans. Nevertheless, the morale of the Settlers is higher now than at any time since 1960 when it became clear that Kenya would soon cease to be a British colony.

Within the 12,000 square miles of European farming land in Kenya there are three types of holdings; the mixed farm, which sells a variety of agricultural products, the cattle or sheep ranch, and the coffee, sisal, or tea plantation. In 1962, the three accounted for over three-quarters of Kenya's export earnings. Most of the 3000 or so European farming families are engaged in mixed farming or ranching and commercial firms own practically all the plantations.

Before 1960, few Europeans thought of leaving Kenya. Prospective farmers were still coming into the country and, although the Settler knew of the Africans' political aspirations and of the movement towards more African representation in the Kenya Government, he still dominated the Legislative Council and assumed that his political supremacy was secure.

The Lancaster House Agreement of February, 1960, which gave Africans a majority in the legislature and brought the end of British rule within sight, stunned the Settlers. Shorn of their political power, confused and afraid, they felt abandoned by the British Government which had first induced them to come to Kenya and then assured them repeatedly that they would remain under the Crown's protection. In July, 1960, the editor of the Kenya Weekly News, the paper most representative of Settler opinion, described the mood of the European farmers in this way, "Today the European landowners and farmers fear that they are about to be betrayed and they feel scant confidence in the continued possession of their homes and the farms they have made for themselves and their children.....there are increasing signs of the economy shrivelling in a cold wind of deflation.....Few Settlers look hopefully to the future."

In the months after Lancaster House, the wranglings of the two major African political parties and the extreme, often racist,

statements of some of their leaders did nothing to soothe Settler nerves. Farm development slowed and then stopped as the anxious farmers sent what money they could out of the country. More and more Europeans began to think of leaving Kenya.

Among the first actually to leave were Settlers who simply did not want to live in a country ruled by Africans. There were those too, who left hurriedly, afraid of a wholesale expulsion of Europeans when Kenya became independent. This group included many South Africans and men who feared reprisal for their activities against the Mau Mau.

Other farmers thought that their children would suffer from the seemingly inevitable plunge of educational standards and foresaw little career opportunity for them in a black man's country. In addition, they anticipated a rapid economic decline in Kenya and wanted to leave while they were still young enough to start another farm or job somewhere else. A few economically marginal farmers simply disappeared, leaving behind them a tangle of bank overdrafts and debts.

Finally, many Settlers left Kenya because the Government bought their farms for settlement by Africans. The Settlement Schemes began slowly in 1960 and were accelerated in 1962 when the Government announced that it would buy one million acres of European farming land in equal yearly installments over a five year period. During the first year of the program, which ended on 30 June 1963, 155 Settlers sold their farms to the Government (as did a number of aged or infirm farmers, the so-called "Compassionate Cases"). The list for the second year contains 250 names and although the Government has not decided what farms it will offer to buy in the following three years, one can estimate that over 1000 European farmers will be off their land when the schemes end in July, 1967. Furthermore, the Minister for Agriculture has said that at the close of the present five year plan the Government intends to buy any pockets or salients of European land that remain within the million acres.

The publicity surrounding the departing Settlers often obscures the fact that, up to now, about 85 per cent of the European farmers have stayed in Kenya. There are a number of reasons for this. Above all, Kenya is an ideal place in which to work and live. The successful farmer must work hard, but the climate is invigorating and favorable for farming, there is a plentiful supply of labor, there is time for a relaxed and pleasant social life and, despite Mau Mau and the recent unreliable rains, the markets for the farmers' products have generally been firm and he has made money. Kenya has such a hold on her farmers that many whose farms were bought by the Government for settlement have purchased farms in other parts of the country and several Settlers who left for Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa have returned, unhappy with the life or land there.

Among the "stayers" are many farmers who envy their departing friends, but who haven't the money to leave. Typical is the farmer who came to Kenya after World War II with just enough capital to start a farm with the help of generous Government loans. If he worked hard and made money, he put his profits back into his farm. When confidence rushed out of Kenya in 1960, such a farmer was at a loss; he had prospered but he had no ready cash and he could not sell his farm for its proper value in a plunging market. He had to stay.

Yet, with the exception of those in the Settlement Scheme areas, most of the European farmers who are here now plan to stay as long as the new African Government wants them. However, they have several worries about the future.

First, they foresee a steep decline in services, in standards, and in law and order when Kenya passes out of British hands. They are particularly concerned about the future state of the police and of the veterinary services. Second, they fear increased taxation. When Kenya ceases to be a colony, she will lose much of the financial support she now receives from Britain and become just another supplicant at the Commonwealth door. The Government will have to find new sources of cash and the Settlers expect their taxes to rise sharply. Third, labor union wage demands place the farmers in a disturbing quandary. If they grant a wage increase, they will have to lay off workers to keep their costs down, yet they know that the Government will object vigorously to any addition to the already swollen numbers of the unemployed. But if they refuse to pay their workers more, they face labor unrest and harassment by the militant "Youth Wings" of the two main political parties. Fourth, the uncertainty of not knowing when they will be bought out troubles those farmers living within the boundaries of the million acre Settlement Scheme. And although the Minister for Agriculture says that after the "first million acres", the purchase of European farms for settlement by African small-holders will cease, the farmers outside these boundaries worry that population pressure eventually will force the Government to expand settlement beyond its present limits.

Seeking to reassure the Settlers, the Prime Minister, Jomo Kenyatta, went to the European farming center of Nakuru on August 12, two years almost to the day after his release from detention. In a major speech which the Kenya Weekly News thought, "certainly gave the impression of real sincerity", Mr. Kenyatta outlined his Government's policy as it affects the Settlers.

350 farmers, an audience liberally dotted with rare roast beef faces and various strains of moustaches, greeted the Prime Minister with brief, reserved applause. As Mr. Kenyatta asked them, "to stay and farm well", as he promised that he had no thoughts of retribution, and as he assured them that he would do his best to control stock thefts and "Youth Wingers", the farmers grew increasingly

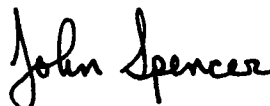
responsive. At the end of the meeting they enthusiastically joined him in the Kenya rallying cry of "Harambee". Smiling broadly, the Prime Minister waved goodbye, saying in Kiswahili, "Tujenge Kenya pamoja"--"Let us build Kenya together."

For all the warmth of the Nakuru meeting, Jomo Kenyatta is still the Mau Mau leader to some European farmers who will not trust his pledges until they are fulfilled. Nevertheless, his speech cheered most of the Settlers, primarily because it contained the first encouraging words about their future that they had heard in a long time. Also, much of the present malaise among Europeans stems from a lack of contact with the African leaders; not knowing them, the Settlers fear them. Kenyatta's directness and obvious desire to communicate calmed and impressed his audience.

Accordingly, the European farming community now looks ahead with greater hope than it did when Mervyn Hill wrote his gloomy words in 1960. True, the Government will buy the farms of some, while the others must be ready to pay more in taxes and wages, to cope with different standards of efficiency and judgement, and to sell in an increasingly competitive market. But contrary to the pessimistic expectations of three years ago, the new African Government does not want to force the European out of Kenya; instead, it bids him stay.

And so confidence tentatively creeps back among the Settlers. It is a feeling which ebbs and flows, which could disappear overnight with any outbreak of anti-European violence, but the chances are that the farmers will grow increasingly assured as long as the Kenyatta Government maintains its moderation.

Sincerely,



John Spencer