

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IMW-17  
Politics in Uganda I:  
The Hoe and the Chair

P.O.Box 5113  
Nairobi, Kenya  
March 10, 1962

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

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Our trip to Kampala started with a bang, or two bangs to be precise. It was Sunday and we had just passed Jinja, about fifty miles from our destination. It was our second straight day of driving, and we pushed on happy at the thought of curry lunch at the Imperial Hotel. Ten miles from Jinja we had a flat. Kitty and I had the same thought: lunch was over at two-thirty. We worked silently and quickly and in ten minutes we were back on the road. We could almost taste the curry. We congratulated ourselves on such a speedy job and were in the midst of estimating how long it would take us to recover from lunch when we heard the familiar flapping of another tire. I spent the next two hours hitching rides and getting the tire fixed (an Asian dealer interrupted his own curry lunch to help me), while Kitty opened a can of hot dogs.

Uganda, a country about the size of Britain, had a population of 6½ million at the 1959 census of whom all but 70,000 Asians and 10,000 Europeans were Africans. There are thirteen main tribes, the largest being the Baganda who number just over a million and who inhabit the southern area bordering Lake Victoria (see map on page 2). English is the official language, although Luganda, the language of the Baganda, is understood by at least 2½ million people. Swahili is widely understood but not popular.

Uganda's economy rests uncertainly on its two main exports, coffee and cotton, whose prices have unfortunately continually declined over the last few years. A steady increase in the size of the coffee crop has, however, offset the general decline in world prices for most agricultural produce. The Government has recently found itself in a position where recurrent costs have increased while revenue has fallen. Nevertheless it has actively pursued a program of heavy capital expenditure.

Within Uganda there are four kingdoms: Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole and Toro. Buganda is one of the four provinces, while the other three kingdoms are all in Western Province. Each kingdom has (as one might expect) its king as well as a parliament, prime minister and other cabinet officials. In general the kingdoms have been a divisive force in Uganda. Buganda and its king, the Kabaka, have been especially reluctant to cooperate with the rest of the country in its evolution towards a more centralized form of government. On the last day of 1960 it went so far as to declare its independence from the rest of Uganda.



Uganda has long been considered far in advance of the other East African territories, and self-government has been withheld only until the major political groups prove their ability to work together in a national government. By last October the Colonial Office considered the situation sufficiently promising to grant Uganda independence next October 9. The first step was to be direct elections to the Buganda Lukiko, or parliament, and it was for this reason that we had come to Kampala.

The recent developments had their origin at the end of 1960 when the Colonial Secretary appointed a Relationships Commission, under the Chairmanship of Lord Munster, "to consider the future form of government best suited to Uganda and the question of the relationship between Central government and the other authorities in Uganda".

In March 1961 a general election for Legco (the Legislative Council) was held throughout the country. The Buganda Government boycotted the election, although the Democratic Party made every effort to get its members to vote. Thus most of the Legco members elected from Buganda were DP, although there is ample evidence that suggests most Baganda supported the other major party, the Uganda People's Congress. Anyway the DP, under the leadership of Benedicto Kiwanuka, obtained a majority of the seats, while the UPC, under the leadership of Milton Obote, obtained a substantial minority. Kiwanuka became Leader of Legco and Obote was recognized as Leader of the Opposition.

The Munster Report was published in June, and it recommended "a federal position for Buganda, because she has virtually reached that position already, and a semi-federal position for the three kingdoms, in order to emphasize their right to preserve their traditional characteristics....The picture which emerges, therefore, is one of a composite state containing a single federal kingdom (Buganda) in association with the rest of the country, which would be governed unitarily".

Concerning Buganda the Munster Report went on to suggest, among other things, that:

"The Kabaka should become a genuine constitutional monarch and withdraw from politics.

"There should be direct elections to the Lukiko.

"A directly elected Lukiko, if it so wished, could choose to act as an electoral college to elect the representatives from Buganda to the National Assembly." And,

"This option of indirect election could be terminated whenever the Lukiko so resolved."

The Munster Report was generally welcomed. Soon after, the Colonial Secretary announced that a constitutional conference would be held in London in September to work out ways of implementing its recommendations. The conference would draft a new constitution for Uganda as well as a new Buganda Agreement (to replace the Agreement

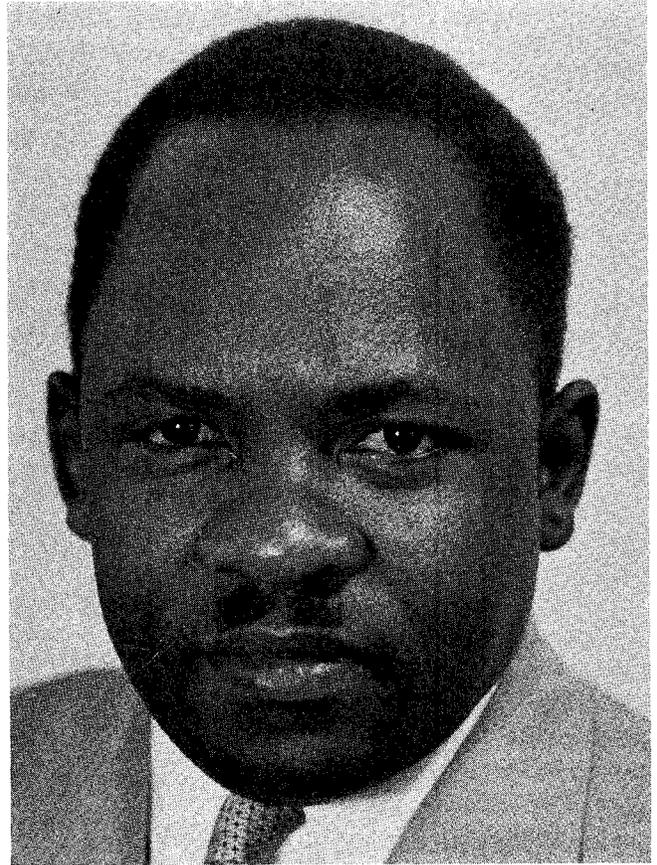


THE THREE

(top) H.H. Mutesa II, the  
Kabaka of Buganda

(b.l.) The Hon. A. Milton Obote,  
Leader of the Opposition

(b.r.) The Hon. Benedicto K.M.  
Kiwanuka, Prime Minister



of 1955) to define the relations between Buganda and the Central Government. By and large the Munster Report's suggestions were approved by the conference which determined that Uganda would attain independence exactly one year from the last day of the conference, October 9, 1962.

The resulting situation was as follows: the Lukiko was to have at least sixty-eight directly elected members out of a total membership of not more than one hundred. (In the past no members were directly elected.) It is open to the Lukiko to opt for a system of indirect election for the twenty-one members of Legco (now called the National Assembly) representing Buganda, excluding Kampala's three seats. It was decided the elections would be held on February 22, 1962. Needless to say, Kiwanuka and his DP emphatically opposed the system of indirect elections for the Lukiko.

As with many solutions to thorny problems, this one was a compromise. The Buganda delegation had gone to the conference with separate independence as its goal, but when this appeared to be all but impossible, the time was appropriate for a face-saving compromise. Kiwanuka and the DP were obviously anathema to Buganda for breaking the boycott of the earlier elections. At this moment Obote stepped in offering to support Buganda at the conference table in return for Buganda's support at the subsequent elections. The Kabaka accepted eagerly, and thus the Buganda-UPC coalition was founded.

These three men dominate Uganda politics. Both Kiwanuka and Obote are extraordinarily ambitious men who have often given the impression of being more interested in power than in responsible statesmanship. The DP is desperately afraid that the UPC which had a slight majority of votes (since most of the Buganda seats were won by only 3 or 4% of the eligible electorate) will win the next election. As a government, many of their actions and policies have been dictated by short-term political expediency. The DP also is having a hard time overcoming its identification with the Catholic Church. Most DP members are Catholics, and most non-Catholics don't like it.

The UPC on the other hand is determined to get into power, and many of their political maneuvers have a reckless flavor about them. Obote is unkindly reported to be willing to sell his soul to become the first Prime Minister of independent Uganda. Some observers feel that his compromise with the Kabaka was just that. Buganda has quite a history of broken agreements, and the big question today is how far they will honor their word to support the UPC.

The Kabaka, affectionately known around here as King Freddie, is the dominant figure in Buganda. A shrewd politician, he has a remarkable ability, no doubt inherited from his illustrious forbears, of playing one side off against the other (and often winning). He hasn't often succeeded in this with the British, but he has been able to run circles around many local politicians.

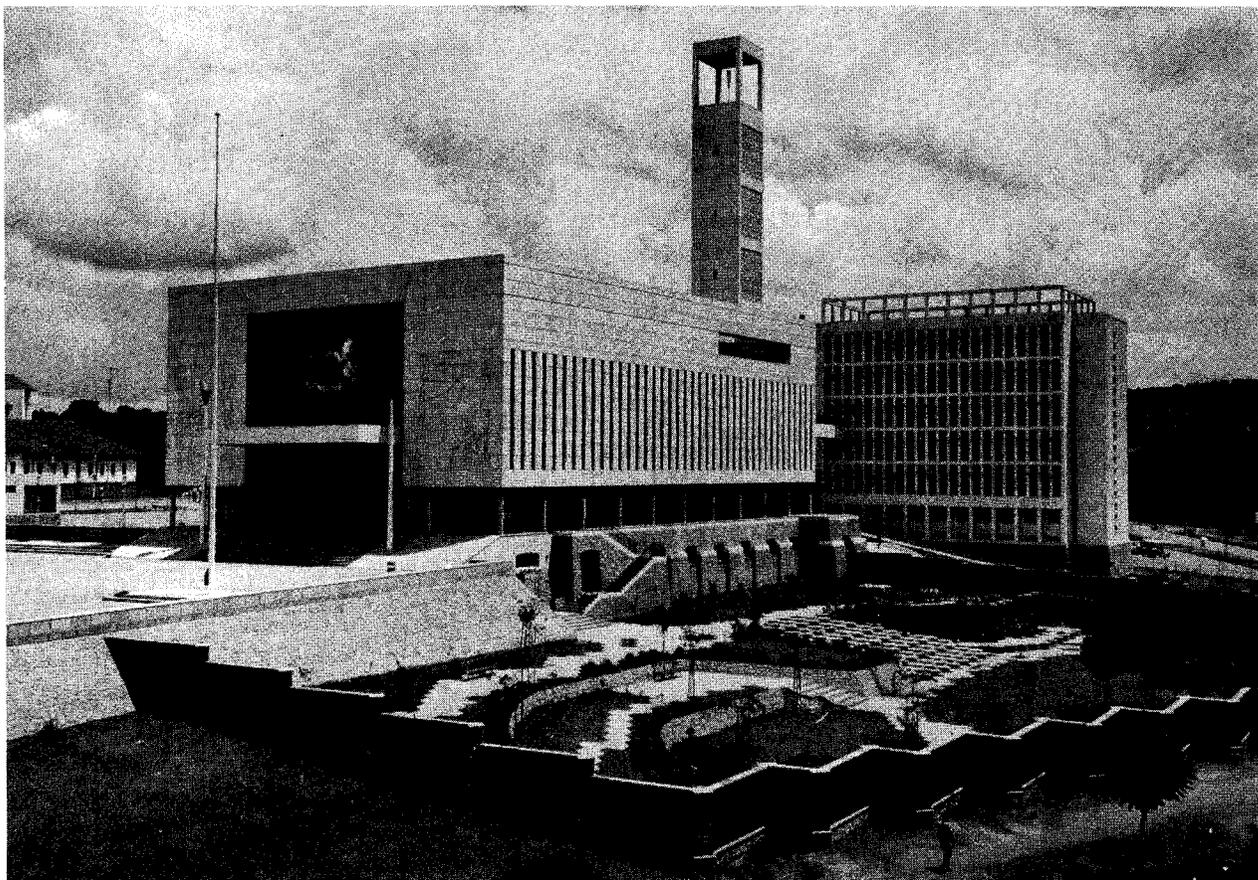
We arrived in Kampala four days before the election. Excitement

was running high. The Buganda-UPC coalition had fielded a new and all but unbeatable party calling itself Kabaka Yekka (Kabaka Only). There were high spirits in the UPC camp, while the DP was exhibiting a stiff upper lip. Both sides claimed to be able to form a national government even if they got less than half the seats in the Lukiko.

Of the sixty-eight seats up for election, all but one were being contested. In that one the DP candidate was returned unopposed. This constituency is in the so-called "lost counties", an area responsible for one of the most perplexing of the problems Uganda must solve before uhuru.

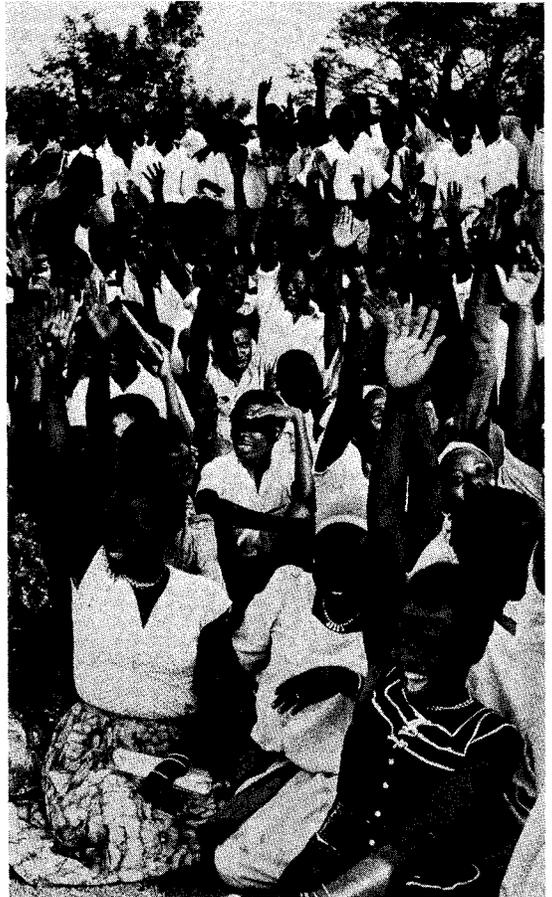
The "lost counties" have long been a source of dispute between the kingdoms of Bunyoro and Buganda. When the British arrived at the end of the last century, both kingdoms were at war with each other. Britain's alliance with Buganda, however, sealed Bunyoro's defeat. One of the penalties inflicted on Bunyoro was the assignment to Buganda of the "lost counties" which until then had been part of Bunyoro. Some of this area is still predominantly populated by Banyoro who don't like their Baganda overlords at all. In Bunyoro there is a powerful movement afoot to regain the "lost counties" before

The new National Assembly building, perhaps the most impressive parliament in Africa



uhuru. Thus the Kabaka Yekka-UPC alliance was anathema and they eagerly turned toward the DP.

Nevertheless the "lost counties" form only a small part of Buganda, and in the rest of the kingdom the situation was different. When we arrived it was clear Kabaka Yekka had skillfully conducted the campaign. Although the question of federal status for Buganda had been decided upon at the London Conference, Kabaka Yekka had made it the central election issue, in effect giving the impression that a DP victory would mean no privileged position for Buganda. The DP's insistence on direct elections to the National Assembly thus fell on deaf ears as it found itself increasingly less popular in Buganda. Kiwanuka had also made an unpardonable political blunder by stating what a good friend of the Kabaka's he was. Although no doubt they were friendly in the past, the Kabaka instantly denied it, and the DP's prospects sank even further.



Kabaka Yekka!!!

Two days before the voting we had an opportunity to go to a Kabaka Yekka-UPC political rally in Entebbe, a few miles south of Kampala. We had been invited by John Kakonge, the Secretary-General of the UPC, whom we had met in Dar es Salaam during the uhuru celebrations. He had attended an American Friends Service Committee international student seminar in Japan a few years ago, and we had many friends in common. He saw to it that we had a good introduction to Uganda politics.

When we arrived at the tree under which the rally was to be held, it was obvious we had come to the Buganda equivalent of New York's silk stocking district. Everyone was well dressed. Even tiny children wore dresses and underclothes (an article of apparel almost unknown in this part of the world). There were about a thousand people, many of whom had come in cars and even more on bicycles. There were people of all ages, young and old. The crowd was attentive and lively.

The highlight of the rally occurred for us when a portly man from West Nile spoke on religion. He was a Catholic and UPC, he said, but he strongly believed the Church shouldn't take an active role in politics. "Many people here believe that if you are a Catholic you must vote DP, because if you don't you won't be allowed to take the Sacraments. They believe as long as they vote DP

they are good Catholics, even if they have two or three wives. But I am a Catholic and I am surely not going to vote DP!"

He went on to say that religious warfare was not the way of the African. "We fought eagerly if someone stole our cattle or our wives, but it wasn't our way to fight to make someone worship a sheep rather than a cow. It was the white man's way and he brought it to Africa."

At the mention of religious warfare as the way of the white man, all eyes turned to us, the only Europeans present. There was a great deal of laughter and behind it amusement at our being put on the spot. We weren't conscious of any racial animosity, but only of having the joke on us. The fellow who was interpreting grew progressively redder and later reassured us this didn't include Americans, of course; only the British and French.

Later the same speaker told us that as soon as the DP got into power it raised ministers' salaries from 6,000 to 7,000 shillings a month. At this a disapproving grunt ran through the crowd, as if to say "Ah, this is a bad thing." We doubted his figures, and when we questioned our interpreter, he said, "That's not entirely true, but they lie more about us than we do about them."

We returned to Kampala that evening feeling we had gained a real insight into Uganda politics.

# VOTE FOR KABAKA YEKKA

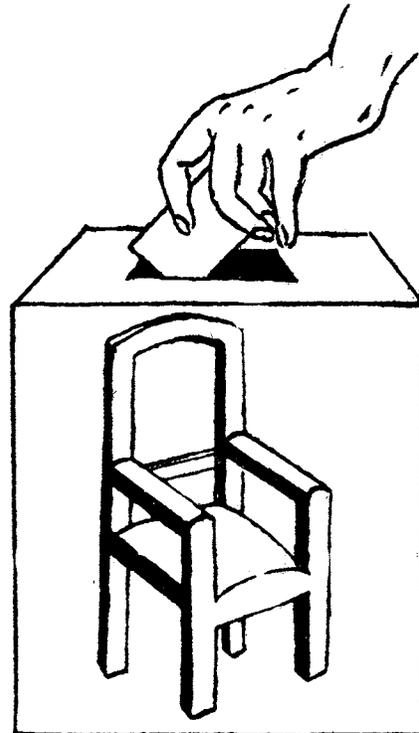
To **VOTE** is your  
fundamental right you  
must exercise it  
**TOMORROW**  
Between  
8 a.m. and 6 p.m.

A VOTE for KABAKA YEKKA  
is a vote for your real friends.  
A VOTE for KABAKA YEKKA  
is a vote for your future security

**N.B.—**

ALL NON-AFRICANS WHO VOTED  
IN THE LAST GENERAL ELECTIONS  
ARE AUTOMATICALLY ENTITLED TO  
VOTE **TOMORROW** AT THE SAME  
POLLING STATIONS.

ALL NON-AFRICANS WHO REGIS-  
TERED LAST DECEMBER ARE ALSO  
ENTITLED TO VOTE AT THE POLLING  
STATIONS WHERE THEY REGISTERED



Please put your vote in the box with the picture of chair on it.

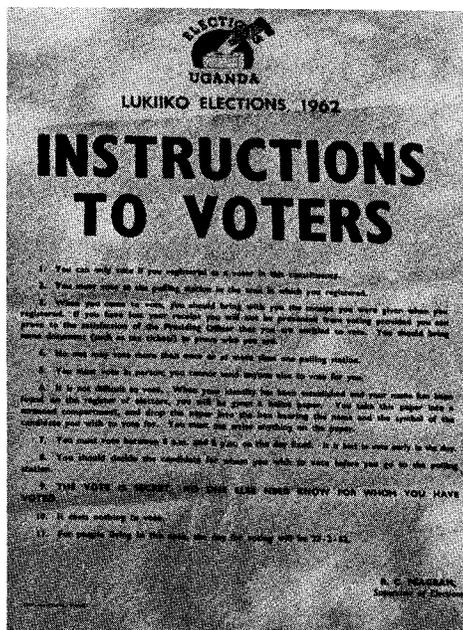
The next day was taken up with final appeals for order as everyone prepared for the elections. No one really expected violence, and indeed there wasn't any except for a few minor disturbances in the "lost counties". Nevertheless police reinforcements were brought up in readiness.

Early election day morning John Kakonge, Kitty and I left for a tour of the polling stations. We visited six, three in rural areas and three in urban Kampala, and with the exception of one in Kampala where the electors were predominantly European and Asian, the stations were jammed. People stood patiently in long lines, one of which we estimated to be one-quarter of a mile long. Many of the women had a small child by the hand or an even smaller one tightly tied on their backs. It was hot and humid, but everyone was in a good mood.

The method of voting was as follows. Upon registration each voter was given a counterfoil with his number on it. When this was presented at the poll, it enabled the voter's name to be checked quickly on the electoral roll. Each voter was given a ballot and his little finger-nail was marked with indelible red ink to ensure one man one vote. He then went into a cubicle where he dropped his ballot into the ballot box of the candidate of his choice. Ballot boxes were marked with the names of the candidates and also with their election symbols. The DP's symbol was a hoe and Kabaka Yekka's was a chair. A minute was allowed for each voter.

This was sufficiently organized in theory, but in practice it was not quite so simple. Election officials often took a long time to check names, and many voters took more than their minute in the voting booth. Many people were completely mystified by the whole process. Some couldn't find the hole in the ballot box. Some dropped their ballots between the boxes, giving someone else an excellent opportunity to fish them out and give them to the candidate of his choice. Some just gave up and threw their ballots on the floor.

While driving between polling stations a woman rushed up to the car thinking I was a Returning Officer checking the polls. She explained she had gone to the station but had not been allowed to vote. Evidently her registration counterfoil showed she had voted in the last election which indicated she was a DP member (since UPC had boycotted the election). Some over-eager Kabaka Yekka-UPC clerk thought this was an excellent opportunity of keeping the DP vote down, and so she was refused. We took her back to



the polling station and John Kakonge straightened everything out.

Later on in the afternoon we again visited some of these polling stations, but they were virtually empty. A few people were hanging around, but the excited crowds had vanished. The election officials told us virtually everyone had voted. One fellow said 95% of his district had voted, "but not the Europeans living down the road at the agricultural station. Why don't they vote?"

On our way back to Kampala we picked up a young African who told us people had slept outside the polling stations the night before so they would be sure they could vote. He had voted for Kabaka Yekka, but he admitted he didn't really know what it was all about. He thought Kabaka Yekka was a good thing, but he seriously wondered if it would help ordinary people like himself.

In forty-eight hours the outcome was clear. As one newspaper summarized it:

The result, as always in Buganda when the Kingdom's status and identity seems to be threatened, was a solid closing of the ranks and yet another demonstration that, as far as the vast mass of Baganda are concerned, nationalism ends at the Kingdom boundaries.

The DP picked up three seats (only two in contested elections), all of which were in the "lost counties". The rest (65) went to Kabaka Yekka. Thirty-one DP candidates and all the independents forfeited their deposits which means they received less than one-eighth of the votes cast in the constituency. It was a massive victory, far greater than anyone had even thought possible.

Soon after the results were announced, the DP charged Kabaka Yekka with numerous election irregularities and intimidation. No doubt there were both, on both sides. Buganda's official gazette, Akiika Embuga, warned electors, "Buganda is watching you to see that you vote for people who will be her defenders in the future." In the "lost counties" the Buganda-appointed chiefs were subject to much intimidation by DP supporters who

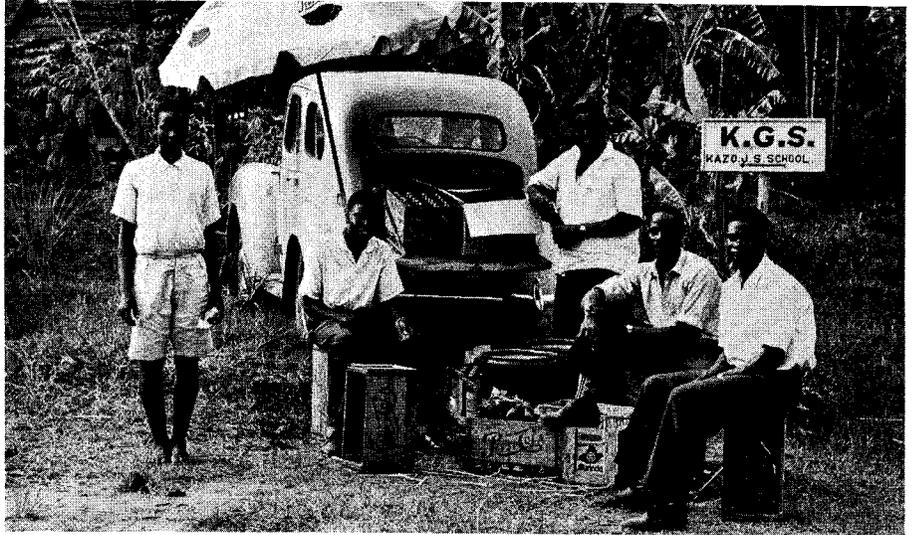


Voting lines

Private enterprise

went as far as burning down their houses. There were irregularities, but on the whole it was an orderly election.

Soon afterwards we talked to Basil Bataringaya, the DP's able Secretary-General who was in charge of their campaign. He told us that in spite of all, they would make no effort to challenge the results if only because of the size of their defeat.



He was by no means pessimistic, however, about the DP's future. He felt it had picked up much ground outside Buganda at the expense of the UPC since the last elections. He also was sure the UPC's marriage of convenience with Kabaka Yekka would work to its disadvantage outside Buganda where most tribesmen are intensely suspicious of the Baganda. There is truth in both these statements, but I would seriously question the DP's ability to dig up a majority in the new National Assembly.

The outcome of the elections will influence more than the composition of the Lukiko. Kabaka Yekka will opt for indirect elections and since the DP got so few votes, Kabaka Yekka-UPC will get all 21 National Assembly seats. Since the DP and the UPC are about equally balanced outside Buganda, these 21 members will probably hold the balance of power in the new Assembly. They are committed to support the UPC in the formation of a government, but whether they will honor the agreement and what concessions in the form of ministerial portfolios they will demand remains a mystery. Now the jockeying for position begins, and the outcome is by no means assured.

Very sincerely yours,

*Ian Michael Wright*

Ian Michael Wright

Received New York April 10, 1962