

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IMW-3

Background to Jomo Kenyatta

P.O. Box 5113
Nairobi, Kenya
9 August 1961Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

On August 1st the Governor of Kenya, Sir Patrick Rennison, announced that Jomo Kenyatta "will be moved to the new house which is being built for him in Kiambu as soon as it is ready; that he will be under minor restrictions there for a short period only, to enable the authorities to deal with the public excitement which will no doubt be caused by his return; and that thereafter he will be released from restriction". His house will be completed by the middle of August.

Jomo Kenyatta was arrested in October 1952 and convicted the following May of managing and being a member of Mau Mau. Since then he has symbolized "darkness and death" to Kenya Europeans, and freedom and self-respect to Africans. During the recent elections in January and February Kenyatta's release became a major campaign issue. The Governor made it quite clear, however, he wouldn't be released until a new, predominantly African, government was functioning well, and until more was known of his attitudes toward current issues. For this purpose Kenyatta was moved from Lodwar in the barren Northern Frontier District to Maralal, only 200 miles from Nairobi, where he was allowed visitors for the first time since his imprisonment eight years earlier.

Sir Patrick Rennison ostensibly based his decision on the fact that "My new Government...is working well", and that recently "Kenyatta has given every indication that he is now in no way irreconcilable to the maintenance of law and order and to the association of all the peoples of Kenya with its progress to independence in an East African setting based on a sound economy". He continued that "Even those---and there are still many---who have deeply felt anxieties about the possible consequences of his release have come to realise that in the changed political circumstances in Kenya the wiser counsel is to release him at a time when Great Britain is responsible for law and order. They realise also that his continued restriction is an impediment to good relations and orderly progress."

Kenyatta was born around 1893 and educated at a Church of Scotland Mission near Nairobi where he was baptized. From 1921 to 1926 he was a clerk in the Public Works Department in Nairobi, but he became interested in politics only in 1922 when he joined the Young Kikuyu Association then headed by Harry Thuku. With Thuku's arrest later that year, the Y.K.A.

became inactive and was later revived as the Kikuyu Central Association of which Kenyatta became General Secretary in 1928 as well as editor of their newspaper, Mwigwithania, whose motto was "Progress and Work".

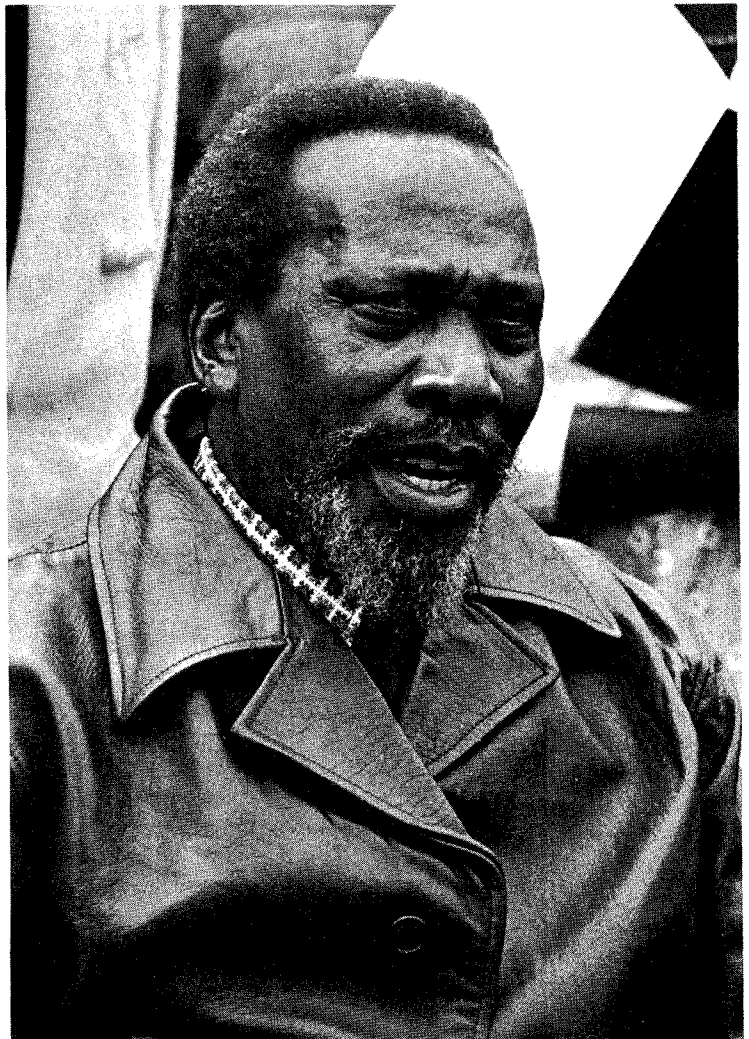
In 1929, on behalf of the K.C.A., Kenyatta went to London to present Kikuyu grievances to the Colonial Office. He also visited Russia for two months at the end of the year, and the Corfield Report* claims he joined the Communist Party at this time. In September 1930 he returned to Kenya, but he soon returned to England in May 1931 to present a memorandum to the Kenya Land Commission, known as the Carter Commission. He spent the next fifteen years in England where he found influential friends who helped him as spokesman for the Kikuyu in England. In 1933 he again visited Russia, and the Corfield Report states he was "reliably reported as having attended the Lenin School of Subversion" in Moscow, but this is unconfirmed elsewhere.

KENYATTA

(Kenya Information Services)

During this period Kenyatta attended the London School of Economics where he worked for a diploma in anthropology under the late Professor Malinowski. He published a book on the Kikuyu called Facing Mount Kenya which was not only anthropology but rather a justification of Kikuyu culture in general. It was an attempt to win from the western world a recognition of the Kikuyu heritage.

After the war Kenyatta became closely concerned with the Pan-Africa Movement and its leaders, among whom were Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore and Peter Abrahams. When it became evident that British colonial policy vis à vis Kenya would change only when confronted with massive popular organizations, Kenyatta, in September 1946, sailed for



*The Origins and Growth of Mau Mau. The Government Printer, Nairobi---1960.

Mombasa with little or no warning to his friends.

He returned to Kenya as the only Kikuyu to have made a mark on the intellectual life of Europe. Soon after his arrival, he visited the Governor, Sir Philip Mitchell, and asked if he could take an active part in politics. The Governor suggested that since he had been away for such a long time, he should make his start in local government, a suggestion he did not follow. Instead he helped develop the Kenya African Union of which he was elected president in 1947. Kenyatta now emerged as the central figure in African politics. This didn't mean he was entirely in control of the situation, however. KAU was beset by great strains and stresses, and Kenyatta found himself increasingly in the position of trying to arbitrate a wide range of opinion from those who wished to gain independence through non-violence to those committed to violence. The situation rapidly deteriorated in 1948 as violence increased. On August 4, 1950 Mau Mau was declared an illegal society, although it was not known who was behind it, if anyone. Europeans generally assumed Kenyatta to be the guiding force, but there was no direct evidence to prove his connection despite the fact that his every move for the past three years had been observed by the Kenya Police and countless informers. There were, however, a number of factors which pointed to his close association with the society.

On October 20, 1952 a state of emergency was declared and Jomo Kenyatta was arrested and charged with managing Mau Mau. After a lively trial which lasted five months, he was convicted and sentenced to seven years imprisonment and then indefinite restriction. What Kenyatta's real connection with Mau Mau was is a moot question (Mau Mau as such kept no records), but there is little doubt he was involved.

Since Kenyatta's conviction in 1953, he has had virtually no contact with the Kenya political scene (save through the newspapers and radio) until he was moved to Maralal at the beginning of 1961. Since then there has been a steady stream of visitors, among them government officials, newspapermen, scholars, representatives of religious groups and African politicians. He has sometimes given the impression of agreeing with everyone, but he has sought unity between the two rival political parties: the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) and the Kenya African National Union (KANU).

Kenyatta's imminent release is looked upon with great expectation here. No one really has the vaguest idea what will happen and how he will fit into political life, but speculation centers on several questions. The most important is whether Kenyatta will be able to achieve unity among KADU and KANU. Six months ago this was not doubted, but a member of the Legislative Council (LegCo) recently remarked: "We don't know how Kenyatta will stand up to modern politics. It may be that once he is out someone else will emerge as the

national leader." His role in an independent Kenya government or in a federal government (Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda) is by no means assured, and he will have to exert his leadership effectively or else one of the bright young politicians may try to oust him from his present undoubted leadership.

Of more immediate importance is whether Kenyatta will be able to take an active role in Kenya politics immediately. At the moment there is an Order-in-Council debarring from the Kenya Legislative Council people who have served a term of imprisonment exceeding two years. About two weeks ago LegCo passed a resolution asking for the removal of this provision, but the Colonial Secretary, Iain Macleod, said the U.K. Government had no proposal to make in relation to the Order-in-Council. Kenya settlers point out that if the order were amended to allow Kenyatta to sit in LegCo, Kenya would be "the only country under British rule wherein a convicted felon---as opposed to one convicted of a misdemeanor---can be elected to the Legislature". Until it is amended, Kenyatta will have to remain on the sidelines.

Lastly there is the question of his personal politics. Will he pursue a policy of Kenya for the Kikuyu (one of the aims of Mau Mau) or will he work for greater unity among the tribes? What will be his attitude toward the growing Kenya Land Freedom Army (KLFA)? This is a group of between 500 and 2000 loosely organized hard-core terrorists reportedly master-minded by a member of the former Mau Mau hierarchy. Its purpose is to rid Kenya of the white man and to dominate the black leadership upon independence. Already a plot to kill Ronald Ngala, the Leader of Government Business (the equivalent of prime minister in the colonial government), has been discovered and destroyed. There is always the possibility that Kenyatta himself might be the target of such a plot if his politics run counter to those of the KLFA. The KLFA is reaching a good number of people, as evidenced by an African who, when recently asked if he was a member of Mau Mau, replied: "The old one or the new one?"

We're in for an interesting period in Kenya. Whatever it is, it won't be dull!

Very sincerely yours,



Ian Michael Wright