

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JBG-31
Mau Mau

F.O. Marangu
Moshi, Tanganyika
8 November 1952

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The current Mau Mau¹ disturbances flared in Kenya while I was miles from the nearest road or radio in Tanganyika Masailand, and I had no word of them until a few days ago. They are important enough to justify an earlier trip to Nairobi than I had planned (especially since the rains have set in early and made it unwise to start out on a trip across central Tanganyika) and I will drive to Nairobi in a few days, as soon as I can service the jeep. There I can follow things first hand, and perhaps go north to the center of the disturbed area.

So far, my only first hand information has come from several friends, met along the Kondo-Nairobi road, who have given me several-days-old descriptions of what they had seen in Nairobi to the north and elsewhere in Kenya where the Kikuyu (the particular tribe concerned) live. The East African papers have been full of Mau Mau. From these two sources I can give you an outline of events, chronologically, and draw on my earlier observations in the area to provide a few basic ideas and appraisals.

1. The several Wachagga here who know the Kikuyu language say that Mau Mau is simply an expression used in oath taking, like "I hereby swear." But this is denied by Mr. Joelson, in an October issue of East Africa and Rhodesia, who says Kikuyu linguists have been unable to indicate a meaning. He says the last two letters indicate a connection with the Kenya African Union.

The Mau Mau is an anti-European, anti-Christian secret terrorist sect which is believed to have developed out of the Kikuyu Central Association which was proscribed in 1940. Like other such organizations (Dini ya Msambwa, Dini ya Mbojet, Kipsigis Central Association) the Mau Mau has been declared an unlawful society in Kenya. Mau Mau members take an oath in secret ceremony, usually in a hut with numerous props or witchcraft symbols. The number seven is used repeatedly, the person being sworn being cut seven times on the arm, and led seven times under an arch of the branches of a spiritually potent plant. The oath includes such avowals as to bring in the head of a European if ordered to do so, to come when called in the night to assist in any Mau Mau operation, to support by every means the basic Mau Mau cause of driving the Europeans into the sea, and to do all possible to restore the old tribal life as it existed before the Europeans came. It should be distinguished, in its creed, from African nationalist movements which seek a fuller role for Africans within the Western framework.

Crimes attributed to the Mau Mau have been going on since the beginning of the year, increasing gradually and then swiftly, and the situation became rapidly worse during September and October. The first victims were Africans. Africans were attacked, beaten up and killed because they refused to take Mau Mau oaths, because they opposed the movement, and because they were prepared to or had testified against Mau Mau members. Many oath-taking ceremonies were reported, and many huts of those refusing to take the oath were burned. In September the attack turned openly upon Europeans as well as prominent African leaders opposed to the Mau Mau. On September 12 a gang of Africans, believed to be intent on killing a European priest who had been condemned to death by a Mau Mau court for his denunciation of the movement, attacked the Kiriku Roman Catholic Mission in the Kiambu Reserve. A panga¹ attack on one priest was thwarted. Early in October two European women were killed by stabbing, a farm manager in Kiambu was shot and stabbed, a gang of Africans attacked an elderly couple with pangas in their home at Lower Kabete. Late in the month a European and his two kitchen servants were murdered at North Kinangop, and over 300 cattle and sheep were massacred on four European farms in the Nanyuki area. In September three headmen in the Nyeri District were killed. On October 8th one of the three senior Kikuyu chiefs, Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kungu, who had been threatened because he was prominent in organizing demonstrations against the Mau Mau, was murdered in his automobile in broad daylight. On the 22nd a second senior chief, Nderi, was slashed to death by pangas while trying to break up a 500 strong Mau Mau ceremony. Earlier, on October 10, a lesser chief, Chief Paulo of Othaya Location in Nyeri District, was ambushed and fired at by four Kikuyus believed to be Mau Mau adherents, but he returned fire with a revolver and escaped unhurt. The toll at present is some 33 Europeans and Africans murdered in five months.

At first government action was fairly limited. A collective fine was imposed on inhabitants of Nyeri District for suppressing evidence in the investigation of cases of arson; eight District Officers were given the powers of Supreme Court judges to deal more severely and without delay with Mau Mau cases, curfews were imposed, police forces were increased. Early in September special legislation to deal with the situation was considered by the Kenya Executive Council and referred to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London. On the 13th the Members for Law and Order and for African Affairs left for London for discussions on this legislation with the Secretary. Late in the month a special emergency session of the Legislative Council began its consideration of nine special bills and all of these were soon passed into law though opposed by all six African members of the Council. These bills - some permanent and some temporary - provide for the registration and supervision of all organizations of ten members or more (a permanent measure), one year's control of the press to deal with near-seditious statements, the admissibility as evidence of sworn affidavits, increased punishment of receivers of stolen goods, increased penalties for trespassing, the exercise by Resident Magistrates of powers normally held only by the high court, the arrest of people at unlawful assemblies without a warrant, the transfer of power to restrict and control traffic on roads at night from the Traffic Ordinance to the Police Bill, and

1. A machete, or chopping knife, literally translated as "sword."

the restriction of movements of members of subversive organizations by Provincial Commissioners in certain areas. At the end of the month the new Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, was sworn in, and within a week he made a tour of the affected areas.

Finally on October 20th the new Governor, under powers conferred by the Emergency Powers Order in Council 1939, declared a State of Emergency throughout Kenya and a series of emergency regulations were announced. The main purpose of this action was to permit the arrest and detention of Africans responsible for the disorders. This roundup, called "Operation Jock Scott" commenced immediately and by October 24th 104 Africans had been arrested and removed to the Northern Frontier District. These included Jomo Kenyatta, President of the Kenya African Union, Richard Achieng Oneko, Secretary of the K.A.U., Fred Kubai, ex-treasurer of the K.A.U., twenty-five branch officials of the organization, persons associated with the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association, which Kenyatta directs, and several editors of vernacular newspapers.

The Declaration and the roundup were delayed until forces deemed adequate were available to maintain order and discourage outbreaks of violence by Mau Mau adherents. On the 20th planes carrying part of the First Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers from the Canal Zone landed at Eastleigh, Nairobi. Two battalions of the K.A.R. (King's African Rifles) in Kenya had been reinforced by one more battalion and two additional companies from Uganda and Tanganyika. The Kenya Regiment, a territorial unit of Europeans, had been called out and a Home Guard had been formed to patrol the suburbs of Nairobi. A few days later H.M.S. Kenya arrived in Mombasa.

At the end of the month the Colonial Secretary arrived in Nairobi and made a tour of the areas affected. He stated that there was absolutely no evidence to show that press reports that "the African population had disappeared into the hills" were correct on a large scale.

These disturbances do not amount to a general uprising throughout Kenya Colony.¹ They all have occurred inside an oval some 150 miles high on the map, its bottom at Nairobi and its east and west curves reaching roughly to Mount Kenya on the East and the white farming center of Nakuru to the West. (This area includes the Nairobi, Kiambu, Thika, Fort Hall, South Nyeri and North Nyeri Districts of the Central Province which contain the Kikuyu reserves and European farms and the predominantly European Nakuru, Naivasha, and Laikipia areas in the Rift Valley Province.) The Mau Mau movement appears to be confined entirely to the Kikuyu tribe, which totals some 500,000 and which, through its position around the urban center of Nairobi and the white farming highlands, has had considerable contact with Europeans. Their limited reserves have become with increasing population seriously overcrowded and overgrazed, which tends to compound a feeling of grievance already sizeable because of the low salaries and slum conditions prevailing in the native quarters of Nairobi; and a number of them, beyond local labor requirements, have created a "squatter problem" on some of the European farms. In Nairobi they were probably largely responsible for the wave of housebreaking, theft and robbery before the recent Mau Mau disturbances. The Kikuyu are reputed to have a capacity for deception and intrigue,

1. Area (including Protectorate Zone) 219,730 square miles. Population: Europeans 29,700; Asians 125,200; Africans 5,251,100.

and a reverence for the powers of witchcraft, which would make them susceptible to the Mau Mau secret oath taking ceremonies.¹ In other tribal areas little Mau Mau activity has been reported and is usually attributed to immigrant Kikuyu. The few living here on Kilimanjaro have been suspected responsible for the disappearance of an unpopular headman, but they have caused no trouble recently, and they appeared receptive to a warning talk by the District Officer.

The physical damage has been substantial, but is not on the scale of a general uprising. An important factor here is the small number of firearms in native hands. Very few Africans in Kenya were allowed firearms licenses (practically none for weapons of precision), and they have not had such access to poorly guarded military stores as did, for instance, the dissidents of postwar Burma. They have guns enough for assassination and small bushwacking raids, but not for sizeable oppositions to military actions. The reported retreat of large numbers of young Kikuyu to the Aberdares most likely does not indicate a coming organized rebellion, though this might be changed if they could lay hands on a few hundred rifles or tommy guns.

The nature of the murders and of the destruction of cattle by crippling and hamstringing, vicious by European standards, would have caused damaging suspicion and alarm even among a racially homogenous group. In an area where a small number of Europeans own a large amount of good land, with Africans living in reserves now crowded by increasing population, the actual damage has multiplied itself many times in psychological effect. Mr. Winnington-Ingram, the District Commissioner at Kondoa whom I met just after he had travelled through Nairobi, said he had witnessed an entirely new atmosphere in the city. In his many years in East Africa he had never seen Europeans in numbers carrying weapons on the streets of a town, nor felt the need to be carrying one himself. A settler from near Nakuru whom I met at Arusha said much the same. Though all the labor on his farm was Kikuyu, nothing had happened. He and his wife were trying to pretend that all remained as before, but they felt the need to remove the bolts from the rifles leaning in the corners - rifles which had been kept handy to protect the crops and livestock from game animals - and for the first time in twenty five years they were sleeping with loaded firearms near the bed. The District assistant at Kondoa told me he had just received from his mother, farming near Nyeri, a letter beginning "I am writing by lamplight, with a shotgun across the desk and two dogs in the room ..."

Even those African politicians who have usually been regarded as moderate have failed to back the government completely in its efforts to handle the situation.² Africans have accused Europeans of taking advantage of the situation

1. Elspeth Huxley's Red Strangers, an anthropological study published as a novel, gives a good picture of the organization and individual psychology of this tribe.

2. Little is known about the reaction of Asiatics. One Indian organization, the East African Indian National Congress, has supported the African members of the Legislative Council. The Congress has condemned violence, but it has opposed the emergency legislation asserting that it contravenes principles of democracy and British law, mixes politics with crime, and does not have the support of African leaders. The Congress is not, however, representative of a large portion of the Asiatic population and has in the past joined hands with the Kenya African Union primarily as a means of thwarting the Europeans.

to bring about a harsh suppression of legitimate Kikuyu claims for more land and better conditions. Europeans, noting the public utterances of Mr. E.W. Mathu, leader of the African members in Legislative Council, accuse him of professing moderation and at the same time opposing with the other African members the emergency legislation and using the violence as a bargaining point. He has emphasized at this time the need of Africans for equality - for more land, for a one-third increase in pay, for eligibility for appointment to high rank in the administration, and for the Queen's commission in the armed forces. He has stated that the lowness of salaries and the poverty of the Kikuyu in some areas has forced them to steal in order to live. Though he has publicly denounced the Mau Mau, he implies that it cannot be halted until some of these demands are satisfied. Since the land question, the most bitter of all, can be regarded as a deadlock, one can gather that he expects the violence to continue for a long time.

One of the most interesting developments has been the arrest of officers of the K.A.U. (Kenya African Union). This predominantly Kikuyu organization has claimed to be working (with the support of Fenner Brockway's Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism) by constitutional means for greater political and economic rights for Africans, increased membership in government councils, more land, higher wages, etc., and has denounced the Mau Mau. Government officials have now strongly implied that K.A.U. officials have been directing Mau Mau activities. A Colonial Office statement issued at the time of the declaration of a state of emergency said the action was taken in order to detain persons behind the Mau Mau. At the same time a government spokesman in Kenya, although saying that these persons were detained because they were believed to have been responsible for the present state of disorder, was not prepared to identify any of them with the Mau Mau movement. Mr. Lyttleton at a press conference on November 2 stated that he was satisfied that the officials of the K.A.U. who had been detained "have had a great deal to do with the Mau Mau" although he had earlier (October 22) only ventured that Kenyatta was arrested "as an individual concerned with Mau Mau terrorism." The Provincial Commissioner of the Central Province, which contains the Kikuyu area, had stated earlier (October 24) that the "Mau Mau has been associated with many of those who have taken into their hands the powers of organizing the K.A.U. Through this organization they have misled large numbers of the followers of the K.A.U." He also asserted that the Mau Mau had been working through the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association, headed by Kenyatta, to attack the educational system and the Christian religion.

Before the mass arrests and the above statements had been made, another link between the two organizations had been revealed. Jesse Kariuku, former Vice President of the Kikuyu Central Association, an organizer of the K.A.U., and currently a trustee and travelling inspector of the K.A.U., was convicted as a "leading member" of the Mau Mau and an undesirable citizen and restricted to the Northern Frontier District on October 21.¹ Another suggestive development was the arrest of two brothers and the father (ex-Senior Chief Koinange) of Mbiu Koinange, the K.A.U. representative in London, for the murder of Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kungu.

1. The Assistant Secretary General of the K.A.U., Paul Joseph Ngei, an editor of two vernacular papers was arrested for wrongfully interfering with a witness in the proceedings against Kariuku, convicted and imprisoned for three months.

The K.A.U. as an organization has not been proscribed, as Mr. Lyttleton pointed out on October 22. The government is obviously anxious to avoid the alienation of the Organization's entire African membership and accusations that it is, during the emergency, stifling legitimate political organizations.

The question of the motivations of Kenyatta and the other K.A.U. leaders - if they have actually directed the tribal, anti-progressive Mau Mau - remains a matter of guess-work. Disregarding the possibility that these comparatively westernized leaders have reverted sincerely to the tenets of the Mau Mau, the only possible conclusion is that they have used the movement opportunistically to achieve their own westernized goals. These may be the same as those of other African nationalists, or, in view of the known communist contacts of Kenyatta and Koinange, they may be something more.

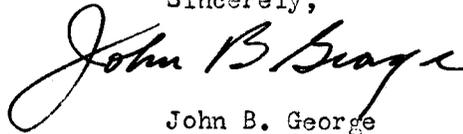
In direct reference to this possibility, Mr. Lyttleton, when asked whether there was any evidence of outside influence in connection with the Mau Mau movement, replied that he did not know. There were certain features of the problem which followed a pattern that has been seen in other parts of the world, but that was not to say that there had been outside influence. He emphatically denied that there was any similarity between the disturbances in Malaya and the present situation in Kenya. European settlers from Kenya to whom I spoke in Arusha were convinced that the Mau Mau was directed by communist agents sent across the Kenya-Ethiopia border from the Russian legation in Addis Ababa, which has often been rumored as an over-staffed center of communist activities in Africa. An educational officer in the administration here for over twenty years was also convinced that the Africans were incapable of carrying out Mau Mau operations without foreign direction. The only feature of Mau Mau activities which suggests to me a degree of discipline and organization which might come from a higher source than tribal villages is their omission thus far of Indians as targets for terrorism. The "natural" native resentment which I have noticed definitely includes the Indian traders and storekeepers. The sparing of them in this recent outbreak might be deliberate, and perhaps indicative of a higher sense of political advantage than could come from leaders in the villages. But this might only mean that the Mau Mau had received counsel from a few educated Kikuyu.

No one knows what changes this experience will bring in Kenya. It may be that the murders of Europeans and also of Africans will be halted, though the vastness of the area and poor communications make policing difficult. The Mau Mau may be suppressed. But the factors which breed continuing discontent among the Kikuyu remain: the disparity between African and European incomes and living standards, the ownership by Europeans of large tracts of fertile land alleged to have been "stolen from the Kikuyu," the dependence of these Europeans upon cheap native labor, the continuing existence of a slum-dwelling African population in Nairobi, the emergence of educated natives who are discontent because they cannot obtain the white collar jobs they feel qualified for.

It is not so much the contrast in standards and the comparative wealth of the Europeans. This of itself - without some special precipitant - has not yet

caused much trouble elsewhere in East Africa. The peculiarity of the Kikuyu is that this disparity has been made more obvious by the juxtaposition of crowded overpopulated native reserves and large, open European farms, and that the Kikuyu are an emergent tribe, with many members undergoing urban sophistication and disillusionment, with a few being exposed to the outside ideas of London and even of Moscow. It may be that the crimes will be halted and fears will subside. The Kikuyu-European land issue, however, will remain an unsolvable mess - so charged with racial argument that it cannot bear discussion by a Royal Commission soon to arrive in Nairobi. The Mau Mau may have had no direct connection with the land or other economic problems. The Colonial Secretary has said that it definitely had not. But until something is done about the land issue (and things being as they are, I see no lasting remedy) the doings of the Mau Mau can be logically explained to any native who feels aggrieved. It may be that the old confidence and security of the European farmer to leave his doors unlocked and walk about at night unarmed - may never return to Kenya.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John B. George". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned between the word "Sincerely," and the printed name "John B. George".

John B. George

Received New York 11/18/52.