

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

PBM - 10  
Nyasaland Native Riots

Grand Beach Hotel  
Salima,  
Nyasaland  
November 4, 1953

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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

It is almost a month now since a display of force caused Native rioters in Nyasaland to put down their assagais and knobkerries and return to work on the tea plantations and citrus groves in the southern part of the protectorate. A good many of the Europeans we have met here have laughed the whole thing off as though it never happened. But the men responsible for Native administration--the District Commissioner and the Provincial Commissioner--are quick to tell you that the basic cause of the riots, land hunger, has not been solved. With any relaxation of police vigilance, the disturbances might easily recur.

I don't know what reports you have read of the disturbances. Perhaps you saw Time magazine, of which the overseas edition has preceded me everywhere. In one edition the Time correspondent put the blame very glibly on "Sir Godfrey's tax collectors." This explanation seems to me to require great stretching of the imagination and the Provincial Commissioner was, in fact, very reluctant to talk to "another American correspondent" (me) for fear that he would be misquoted or misunderstood.

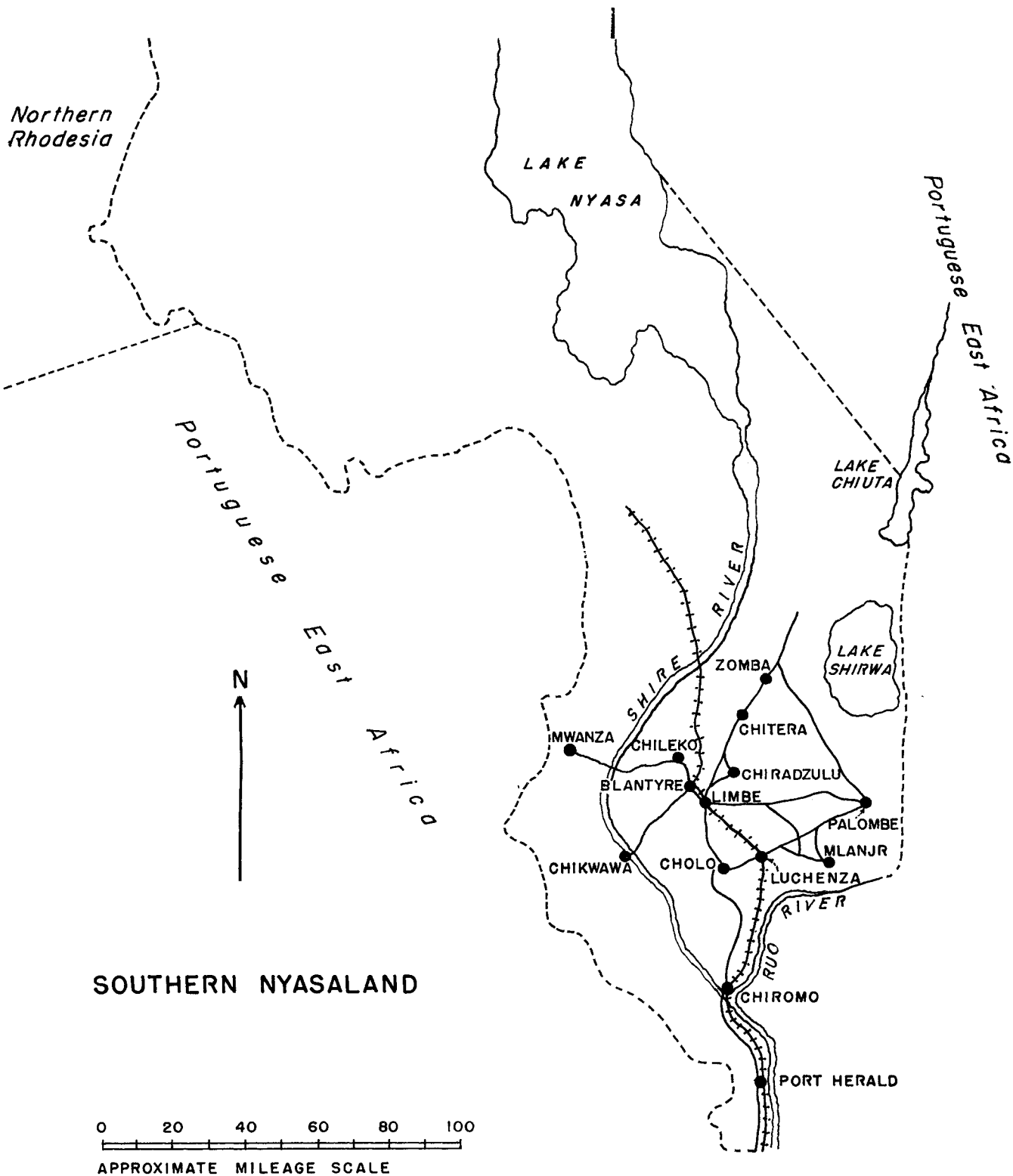
In Salisbury, where I was when the riots broke out, the feeling was that the cause of the unrest was the superstitious nature of the Natives involved. Everyone told me that they have a deadly fear that white men like nothing better than a tasty meal of roasted Native. These Salisbury "experts" also told a story about a brand of tinned meat that had been introduced in Nyasaland. Each tin, I was told, was labeled with a picture of a handsome Native and the name of the product--"Black Boy." This, to a Native, was just canned relative.

Even Sir Godfrey Huggins, in his first campaign speech for the coming elections, made reference to the Nyasaland disturbances, explaining them away in a single, pat statement. In advocating the continuation of screening prospective immigrants, Sir Godfrey said that everyone would be screened since the African was "inflammable material." For example, he pointed out that the Rev. Michael Scott<sup>1</sup> had gone to Nyasaland on a peaceful mission. The result was 11 people dead--"not bad for a peaceful missionary."

As far as I can tell, all of these reasons are partly true (except the tinned meat story), but not one of them by itself is sufficient to explain the cause behind the disturbances and the reason that they continued after the first day's incident had simmered down.

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1. This is the same Rev. Michael Scott who is at present at the United Nations in New York with a petition against Federation allegedly signed by 80-odd Nyasaland chiefs.



In finding the cause for the disturbances, it is necessary to go back to 1920. In that year, the Portuguese colonists in neighboring Mozambique (Portuguese East Africa) were faced with a rebellion by the Alomwe tribe. The Alomwe were a backward people, but when the fierce reprisals of the Portuguese were coupled with a drought and famine, even they knew enough to cross the handy border into Nyasaland Protectorate where easier taskmasters and more plentiful food could be found. At that time in the Cholo District of southern Nyasaland, there were about 14,000 Natives. In 1931 there were 59,150. Today there are, roughly, 140,000.

The Cholo District, where these Natives immigrated, is made up of about 350 square miles of tea, tung, and citrus plantations. One-fifth of the land is mountainous, unsuitable for Native occupation or cultivation. Almost all of the land is owned by Europeans whose fathers and grandfathers "bought" it from the Native chiefs in power at the turn of the century. Today Natives number, on the average, 400 to the square mile. That means that in some sections there are 700 or 800 Natives living on a square mile of European land.

These men are called "squatters." Under the Nyasaland Private Estates Ordinance they must justify their existence on the land by (a) paying rent, (b) working six months for the estate owner, or (c) raising an economic crop on the land and giving it or the proceeds to the land owner. In practice, the land owner would much prefer to have the Native work for him six months. A few collect rents, but there are no European owners who allow Natives to raise their own economic crops because of the unconservative Native methods of cultivation.

For years the rent was tied to the tax each Native laborer was required to pay. When the yearly tax was four shillings, the yearly rent was four shillings. When the tax was increased, so was the rent.<sup>1</sup> This continued until 1952, when a new law, the Africans on Private Estates Ordinance, was passed. It increased the rent from an amount equal to one year's tax to an amount equal to three years' tax. The present annual tax is 17 shillings six pence. Consequently the rent was raised from 17 shillings six pence to two pounds, 12 shillings, six pence.

Native administration in the protectorate is set up as follows: The country is divided into three sections, or provinces. Each of the provinces has a Provincial Commissioner. Under the Provincial Commissioner there are several District Commissioners and under the District Commissioners are local Native chiefs. The chiefs are paid a small sum by the government. In return they are to mix European law with their ordinary tribal law.

In the Cholo District the chiefs are not Alomwe. They are members of the Angoni tribe, a cattle-raising people from the Central Province who were put in by the British colonial government because of their administrative ability. Some of these Angoni chiefs, now in the second generation, are liked by the Southern Province Alomwe they govern. Others are merely tolerated because they lack the hereditary rights held by the old Alomwe chiefs left behind in Portuguese East Africa.

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1. The tax, in turn, is tied to the wage earned by the laborer in one month. His yearly tax, equal to one month's wages, increases every time the laborer gets a raise.

Summed up, the feelings of the Natives are as follows: They strongly resent the fact that land which they consider theirs is owned by Europeans who make them work or pay rent for the right to live on it. They resent the fact that they must move from one plot of land to another when the European farmer decides the time has come to expand his operations. They resent government attempts to make them follow modern methods of agriculture. They resent the fact that their own increase in numbers makes them overcrowded.

In 1946-47 Sir Sidney Abrahams of the colonial office in London came to Nyasaland to study the situation. In his report he strongly recommended that the government acquire undeveloped land from European land owners and give it to the Natives for their own use. This move, which might have forestalled the recent riots, was not made for the simple reason that the Nyasaland government did not have enough money to make the land purchases.

This land hunger is a grievance of long standing. It was strengthened by the recent campaign for federation. The white men, on the one hand, have been campaigning for almost 35 years for some form of amalgamation of the three territories of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. On the other hand, the 20,000 educated and semi-educated Natives in Nyasaland have been watching developments in India, the Gold Coast, and Nigeria, which have resulted in varying degrees of local self-government by the indigenous population.

The Natives were encouraged in this by representatives of the Labour Government in England who went about the country telling gatherings of Natives that they would be given self-government. What these Labour Government representatives failed to stress was the fact that by self-government they meant an equal voice with Indian and European segments of the population.

"It is wrong to say that all Natives were opposed to Federation," Southern Provincial Commissioner Barnes told me. "I will say, however, that an overwhelming majority were afraid of it. What they feared was European immigration on a large scale. They were frightened that more and more land would be taken from them until they became so overcrowded and landless that they would be forced to spend all their lives working for the white men on the white men's farms.

"I explained to them that it would be impossible for many more Europeans to immigrate here. In the first place, I told them, it would mean we would have to move hundreds of thousands of Natives, and that would be impossible. And I told them that since Nyasaland is agricultural and has no mineral incentives for industrialization, that it would be unlikely that Europeans would come here to set up factories."

Barnes gave these explanations at meetings of the Nyasaland African Congress. The Congress was formed in 1943. Made up of 15 to 20 African welfare, sporting, and social organizations, its published aim was to advise the government of the needs of the African population.

By the time of the Federation campaign, however, the Congress had become a hotbed of agitation for Africa for the Africans. With the leadership and

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1. Most of the 20,000 have not gone far beyond the sixth grade.

encouragement of African politicians from other colonies, Asiatics (Indians), extra-liberal missionaries like the Rev. Michael Scott, and socialist idealists from Great Britain, the Congress protested against any sort of Federation at any time. They boycotted the talks on Federation in London. They boycotted the coronation celebrations. And they refused to listen open-mindedly to any of the government explanations of Federation.

At one "explanation session" before Federation the Cholo District Commissioner, Dennis Martin, was told after the meeting that if he had not thrown the discussion open at the end of the meeting, he would have been killed. As it was, the discussion period consisted of nothing but protests against the new rent law and warnings that the Africans wanted European land turned over to the Natives or else.

From the way the Natives were complaining about the new rent law, Barnes told me, it was apparent that they were being misled by African Congress agitators. One of the things they were being told was that it made no difference whether they worked on the European farms for six months or not--they would still have to pay the new rent of two pounds 12 shillings six pence.

When Federation was passed, the Native "Supreme Council," made up of chiefs and Congress members, met and drew up a policy of non-cooperation with the colonial government. They told the Natives to boycott all meetings held by District Commissioners to explain Federation. They told Native members of the Nyasaland Legislative Council to withdraw. They instructed Natives to stop paying taxes and to stop paying fees and dues to Native chiefs for hunting, fishing, etc. And they told Native farmers to stop using European methods of soil conservation. According to Barnes, this entire policy was drawn up with the aid of Michael Scott.

The first chief to put this policy into effect was an Angoni chief named Gomani. He was immediately arrested by the government and removed as chief. He was taken to the Southern Province of Nyasaland but then escaped, returning to his village in the Central Province. In order to rearrest him, government police were forced to use tear gas and billy clubs. He was again taken to the Southern Province where he again escaped, fleeing to Portugese East Africa with the Rev. Michael Scott. When he returned to Nyasaland he was rearrested and held for trial. All this activity went on in April, May, and June of this year.

With the arrest of Gomani, the Angoni tribesmen in the Cholo District began a protest movement. In gangs of 50, 80, and 100, they began to move onto European farmland under cultivation or lying fallow. There they built houses, set up small villages, and refused to leave. The land owners called the police and there were three or four scraps as a result of this unauthorized squatting. This continued through June and the early part of July.

As a result of overcrowding, firewood is at a premium in the Cholo District. All the trees on unoccupied land have been cut down for burning and the only wood remaining is on a few European-owned forest reserves. One day in mid-July a European estate owner caught three women who, he alleged, had been stealing firewood from his property. He trapped them on a public road near his estate

and asked them to identify themselves and drop the wood they were carrying. They refused and the enraged landowner thereupon stripped one of the women to the bare skin and kept her clothes to provide, as he said, identification. This was a very foolish thing to do, as it violated all of the Native ideas of modesty and propriety, which are are very strong.

A protest was lodged with the District Commissioner by the local chief and the European was arrested, tried, and convicted of assault. Martin, the Cholo District Commissioner, heaved a sigh of relief when it appeared that the Natives were satisfied with the punishment given the European landlord. Then the incident occurred which marked the beginning of the serious August rioting.

The following are the facts of the first incident as released by a special commission of inquiry set up by the Governor of Nyasaland.

**The Incident at Luchenza Estate on the Night of the 18th August**

6. Mangunda Estate is one of six estates owned by J. Tennett and Company Ltd., of which Mr. Tennett and his wife and their two sons, Mr. Basil Tennett and Mr. Desmond Tennett, are directors. Mr. and Mrs. Tennett senior and Mr. Desmond Tennett live on Mangunda Estate which is situated on either side of the Cholo/Luchenza main road. Their house and the main estate buildings are close to the main road. Mr. Basil Tennett lives with his wife on the Luchenza Estate, one of the other estates owned by the company. His house is some three miles from his father's house and about two miles from the main road.

7. On Mangunda Estate there is a citrus orchard of approximately 80 acres. For some time there had been thefts of the citrus fruit on a large scale. Mr. Basil Tennett estimates that this year the company has lost about £2,000 worth of oranges. On the evening of the 18th August, 1953, Mr. Murphy, an auditor in the employ of Messrs. Deloitte, Plender, Griffiths and Company, Mr. Wheatley, the Customs Officer at Luchenza, and Mr. Desmond Tennett were dining with Mr. Basil Tennett. As a result of information which Mr. Basil Tennett had received that some Africans carrying empty sacks had been seen on the estate road leading from his house to the main road, he decided to set an ambush to catch the thieves on their return. At about 9 p.m. he set off, accompanied by Mr. Desmond Tennett, Mr. Murphy, Mr. Wheatley and three African employees. They were armed with various kinds of sticks. After proceeding about a mile along the estate road towards the main road they heard voices ahead, stopped and lay in wait on each side of the road. They

then saw five or six Africans, each of whom was carrying a filled sack of oranges. They ran into the road. Mr. Basil Tennett caught one of the thieves and overpowered him after a struggle. A belt was fastened round his legs to prevent his escape. The other thieves dropped the sacks of oranges they were carrying and ran off. Mr. Desmond Tennett chased one of them and in order to stop him gave him a "whack" on the side of his head with a stick which was weighted with a lead at one end. This African turned round, grappled with him and tried to stab him with a knife. Mr. Murphy came to the rescue, seized the knife and threw it away, but not before Mr. Desmond Tennett had received a slight cut on the neck. They overpowered this African, brought him to where the other prisoner was and made them both lie down on the ground. Mr. Desmond Tennett and Mr. Wheatley then set off for Mr. Basil Tennett's house to bring a car to pick up the sacks of oranges and the prisoners, while the others guarded the prisoners. They had not gone far when they met a party of armed Africans. Mr. Wheatley ran on to the house while Mr. Desmond Tennett returned to the remainder of the party. Mr. Basil Tennett, Mr. Desmond Tennett and Mr. Murphy, who gave evidence before us, said that they heard the shouts of a large crowd of Africans who were gathering and in order to avoid a clash they released the prisoners and ran back to the house by a circuitous route. The three Africans who accompanied the party of Europeans have disappeared and cannot now be found, but one of them made a statement to the police before he disappeared. In this statement he substantially corroborated the evidence

of the Europeans and said that he saw the two prisoners run away after they were released. In the meantime Mr. Wheatley reached the house, collected the car and Mrs. Basil Tennett, and drove back to the scene of the incident, passing through a number of hostile Africans. He said he found no-one at the spot when he arrived. He put the sacks of oranges, five of them, which had been dropped by the thieves into the car and drove on to Mangunda where he off-loaded them. Later that evening he reported the incident to the police at Cholo. Mr. Martin, when he went to Mangunda Estate the following morning, saw some bags of oranges on the verandah of the house.

8. The cries of the two captured Africans were heard in the village some quarter of a mile away. They were shouting, "I am dying, I am dying," or words to that effect. The villagers, or some of them, ran in the direction of the shouts to see what was happening. Amongst them were Luiza, Balson and Wednesday who gave evidence before us. These witnesses said that when they arrived at the estate road they saw Mr. Basil Tennett and another European whom they could not identify running towards Mr. Basil Tennett's house. They chased the two Europeans, who ran into some bluegums at the side of the road and disappeared. They continued along the road and, almost immediately after, they saw a car approaching from the direction of Mr. Basil Tennett's house. There were two Europeans in the car, the driver being Mr. Basil Tennett. It passed them and stopped some distance down the road. They followed the car and when they were some 150 yards away they saw an object being lifted from

the road into the car by Mr. Basil Tennett's companion. They continued running and when they were about 65 yards away they saw another object being lifted into the car. The car then drove on in the direction of the main road. Both Luiza and Baison thought the objects which they saw lifted into the car were human bodies but they were not sure. Wednesday was sure that they were human bodies. When they came to the spot where the car had stopped they saw two pools of blood on the surface of the road. Later that night they reported to Village Headman Nanseta that two Africans had been killed by Mr. Basil Tennett and the Customs Officer on the road leading to Mr. Basil Tennett's house. Village Headman Nanseta informed them that he would go to the spot the following morning.

9. Early in the following morning Mr. Wheatley returned to the scene of the incident to look for his belt which had been used to bind the legs of one of the prisoner. He did not find the knife but he found the buckle of the belt with a few inches of the leather attached. The leather had been cut. As he was leaving, Village Headman Nanseta arrived with the Africans who had reported to him the previous night. They said they saw Mr. Wheatley trying to cover the bloodstains on the road with sand. Near the bloodstains they found a broken string of women's beads. They then went to Chonde Police Post where they made a report to Constable Gomani. Constable Gomani passed on the report by telephone to Assistant Superintendent of Police Carswell, who is in charge of the Cholo Police Station. Mr. Carswell went to the scene of the incident. There he saw Village Headman Nanseta and a crowd of about 200 Africans. He was shown the bloodstains and the beads. He took a sample of the blood to have it analysed, and ar-

anged with Village Headman Nanseta to take statements from the witnesses at the Mandala store, which is on the main road. No statements were however taken owing to the disturbances which later occurred.

10. After a careful consideration of the evidence we are satisfied that the two thieves who were caught by Mr. Basil Tennett and his party were released by them and ran off, and that no-one was killed. We think that the thieves must have come from that

neighbourhood. Village Headman Nanseta made inquiries in his area and the surrounding areas and no-one was missing. The two thieves who were captured would naturally run off as fast as they could after they were released, knowing full well that if they were captured they would be charged with theft. We also think that had any of the thieves in fact been killed the other members of the party would have reported this to someone in authority notwithstanding the fact that they would have had to admit their part in the theft. As to the evidence of Luiza, Baison and Wednesday that the two objects they saw being lifted into the motor car were human bodies, we do not consider that at the distance they were from the motor car they would have identified, even in the moonlight, those objects as human bodies. It is also clear that these witnesses were mistaken in their identification of the driver of the motor car as Mr. Basil Tennett. He could not conceivably have run a mile to his house and returned that distance in the motor car in the time which elapsed between his disappearance into the bluegums and the time when the motor car was seen approaching. We have no doubt it was Mr. Wheatley and Mrs. Basil Tennett whom they saw in the motor car, and that the objects they saw being lifted into the motor car were sacks of oranges, as Mr. Wheatley described. These sacks of oranges were later seen by Mr. Martin, the District Commissioner, at Mangunda Estate. With regard to the bloodstains on the road, the wound which the African must have received when Desmond Tennett struck him would be sufficient to account for them.

11. Although we are satisfied that the two prisoners were released and that no-one was killed, we are equally satisfied that Luiza, Baison and Wednesday honestly believed from what they saw and heard that night that two Africans had been killed by Mr. Basil Tennett and another European. From what Village Headman Nanseta told us it was apparently felt by Africans in the neighbourhood that the Tennetts had not been good to their tenants in that some had been evicted after having been on the land a long time. We must not be taken as suggesting that there was any good ground for this feeling or that any of the tenants were unjustly evicted, as we do know that under the Natives on Private Estates Ordinance all own-

ers of freehold land had the right, each quinquennial period, to cause orders to quit to be served on their tenants by the District Commissioner, if they so wished, provided the District Commissioner was satisfied that less than ten per cent. of the tenants had been given notice to quit. We have made no inquiries into this allegation. We mention it solely because it seems probable that the existence of this feeling caused the Africans to jump more readily to the conclusion they did.

#### Part IV — The Disturbance at Mangunda Estate on the 19th of August.

12. On the morning of the 19th of August the rumour that two Africans had been killed on the previous night by a party of Europeans which included the two sons of Mr. J. Tennett, rapidly spread. Drums were beaten and large numbers of armed Africans gathered. At about 7-45 a.m. Mr. Basil Tennett, when on his way by motor car to Mangunda Estate, came upon an armed band lining the road about half a mile from his house. Road blocks had been erected and he had to crash through them. Some of the crowd struck his car with sticks as it passed. We have already mentioned that when Mr. Carswell arrived at the scene of the incident of the previous night he found a crowd of about 200 Africans. This crowd, which included the witnesses who were to make statements to Mr. Carswell at the Mandala store on the main road, set off in the direction of the store, but, instead of stopping there, continued on to Mangunda Estate where it was known Mr. Basil Tennett and his brother were. More and more gathered in the vicinity of the Mangunda Estate buildings until at one stage there were between 800 and 1,000 there. They were fully armed with spears, bows and arrows, knobkerries, sticks, stones and such like weapons and were in an angry mood. The District Commissioner and Mr. Carswell with two African police arrived at about 10 a.m. Mr. Carswell went into the Estate Office and took statements from Mr. Basil Tennett, Mr. Desmond Tennett, Mr. Wheatley and Mr. Murphy who were in the office. The District Commissioner, after telephoning to Blantyre for police reinforcements, tried to get the crowd to lay down their arms and tell him what they wanted. He persuaded ten or a dozen to sit down with him and discuss the matter. They told him they understood that two Africans had been killed the previous

night by Mr. Tennett's sons. He said he had spoken to Mr. Tennett's sons and they told him they had been out catching orange thieves and that what they thought were bodies might have been sacks of oranges. He assured them that statements would be taken and the matter very carefully investigated by the police. They were not satisfied with this and wanted him to decide the matter there and then. One of them produced a rope and suggested that the two sons of Mr. Tennett should be tied up and questioned with the other witnesses. In the meantime the crowd got bigger and bigger. After about an hour's fruitless discussion he went into the Estate Office to inquire by telephone when the reinforcements would arrive. While he was there some of the Africans started to smash the windows and attempts were made to cut the telephone wires. The wires were later successfully cut.

At 11-20 a.m. a party of police arrived from Amalika. Assistant Inspector Chivers was in charge of the party, which consisted of two other European officers and 33 African ranks. The crowd was then in an ugly mood. Insults were hurled at the police and weapons were brandished under their noses. There is little doubt that many of the crowd believed the police had come to shelter the Europeans who had, they thought, killed two Africans on the previous night. Mr. Chivers instructed his party to take no action which might further inflame the crowd. Shortly after this the crowd proceeded to block the road with trees, stones and oil drums. At 12-35 p.m. Mr. Smithyman, the Superintendent of Police, Southern Division, arrived with five European police officers, ten European Special Constables and 56 African ranks. They were armed with gas grenades, rifles and batons. They took up position near one of the Estate buildings and the Amalika party joined them. Mr. Smithyman spoke to some of the crowd to try to get them to disperse peacefully but no one took any notice of him. Then some of the Africans in the front infiltrated into the police ranks and there was danger of the police party being overrun. As the situation was out of control Mr. Smithyman asked the District Commissioner, who is a magistrate, to read the riot proclamation. The District Commissioner climbed on top of a lorry and read the proclamation in Chinyanja. Al-

though a bugle was blown to attract the attention of the crowd, there was so much noise that very few people could have heard the proclamation. Those who were able to hear greeted it with catcalls, shouting and whistling. As the proclamation had no effect Mr. Smithyman ordered the first baton party to move forward to disperse the crowd in front, and the other baton parties to clear away the infiltrating Africans. As the baton party moved forward into the crowd two shots were accidentally fired by the police. One of the crowd fell with a serious head injury. This man was later taken to Cholo Hospital where he died. From the medical evidence it appears most unlikely that his injury was caused by a bullet but that possibility cannot be entirely excluded. The crowd, however, on hearing the shots and seeing one of their number fall badly wounded, thought he had been shot. This increased their anger against the police whom they then commenced heavily to stone. The heavy stoning stopped the advance of the baton parties, who were compelled to reform. The stoning continued as they were reforming. When the baton parties had reformed, tear gas grenades were thrown into the crowd immediately in front of the police. The effect of the tear gas was to drive the crowd slightly away from the police. This enabled the baton parties to keep up the momentum of the crowd. The crowd split into three groups which withdrew some distance away. In this fracas a European Police Officer and a European Special Constable were injured.

14. During this lull both the District Commissioner and Mr. Smithyman made attempts to persuade the people to disperse. It was then about 1 p.m. Their efforts appeared to have some effect. A few Africans agreed to try to get the crowd to disperse and to produce the necessary witnesses as to the previous night's incident. Mr. Smithyman told them that full inquiries would be made. The crowd then started slowly to disperse. Nevertheless, for about another hour it was necessary on several occasions to disperse groups which approached too close to the police and the estate buildings or which were impeding traffic on the road. This was done either by baton parties or by tear gas. The baton parties which went to clear the road were again stoned by Africans hiding on each

side of the road. During this period Village Headman Mgamwane, who was thought from his conduct to be inciting the crowd to cause more trouble, was arrested. There were no further incidents after 2-9 p.m. and by 5-21 p.m. the crowd had completely dispersed. The Blantyre police then returned, leaving the Amalika police party to guard the estate buildings during the night.

15. To sum up, it is clear that the crowd gathered at Mangunda Estate where it was known Mr. Basil Tennett and his brother were, because of the rumour that they and other Europeans had killed two Africans the previous evening. They were in an angry mood and not prepared to leave the investigation of the rumour to the police. There was a real danger that they would take the law into their own hands. The existing discontent and lack of discipline in the district contributed to their unruly behaviour and their unwillingness to accept the assurance of the District Commissioner that a full investigation would be made by the police. The arrival of the first party of police from Amalika caused at least many of the crowd to think, though without any justification, that the police had come to shelter the alleged culprits, and this increased their anger. The accidental firing of two shots, coupled with the belief that one of their number had been shot, was the immediate cause of the heavy stoning of the police by the crowd, though we are not prepared to say that stoning would not, in any event, have occurred at a later stage of the disorder. We think that the police, and particularly Mr. Smithyman, should be commended for the manner in which they handled a difficult situation. It was necessary to use force to disperse the crowd which was riotously assembled. The force which was used was reasonable in the circumstances and few casualties were caused.

16. Before leaving this part of the Report, we wish to say that the accidental firing of two shots by two African constables was due to their inexperience in the handling of firearms. It seems that their rifles were accidentally discharged when being loaded. It is obviously undesirable to put firearms in the hands of persons who are inexpert in their use. Mr. Smithyman informed us that up to the present time it has been impossible for the ordinary members of the police force to receive expert training

in dealing with disturbances and in the handling of firearms, owing to the fact that, with the present establishment, they are fully occupied in normal police duties such as the detection and prevention of crime. In their yearly training they fire 35 rounds each, but in view of the volume of their normal work it has been very difficult to carry out even this training. We are, therefore, glad to hear that a specially trained riot platoon is now in the process of being formed. We would also observe that the Cholo District, with a population of 132,000, is policed by one European Police Officer and 19 Africans. Of the 19 Africans, 60 per cent. have less than three years service. The adequacy of the Police Force in the Protectorate is not within the scope of this inquiry, but we think it is a matter to which consideration might be given.

**Part V — The Disturbance at the District Office, Cholo, on the 20th August**

17. On the following day, the 20th August, there was a disturbance at the District Office, Cholo, the principal cause of which was the arrest of Village Headman Mgamwane on the previous day. It was not a serious disturbance though it might well have become serious had it not been for the tactful handling of the situation by the Provincial Commissioner and the District Commissioner. At about 7-30 a.m. a crowd of Africans, which increased to between 700 and 800, assembled in front of the District Office. They were met by the District Commissioner, who took two of the lead-

ers into his office. They demanded the release of Mgamwane and asked what had happened at Mangunda Estate on the previous day. The District Commissioner said that Mgwane was at Limbe where he would be brought before the Magistrate's Court and the question of bail would then be considered, but that the matter was not in his hands. He telephoned the Provincial Commissioner, and on the Provincial Commissioner's instructions informed the leaders that they could send a deputation to Limbe to see Mgamwane. They still, however, demanded the release of Mgamwane and arrangements were made for them to speak to him on the telephone. The crowd continued to increase and the Provincial Commissioner himself went to Cholo to take charge of the situation. The police had already left for Cholo in force. In the meantime the crowd had swelled to about 6,000 and erected road blocks, but before the Provincial Commissioner arrived a swarm of bees caused many of the crowd to disperse. The Provincial Commissioner passed the police en route and went on ahead. Nearing the District Office he was halted by the road blocks, but they were eventually opened up by the Africans in charge of them and he passed through. When he arrived at Cholo he found a crowd of about 2,500 in front of the Police Station, while another 1,500 were coming up from the main road. They were all armed with weapons such as large grass-cutting knives, spears, bows and arrows, knobkerries and haversacks filled with stones. He went forward to speak to a few Afri-

cans who were trying to control the people and they told him, "We don't want any trouble today, but the people demand that Village Headman Mgamwane should be released." He parleyed with them for about half an hour but without making much of an impression. They said the only thing that would satisfy the people would be Mgamwane's release. He then arranged for the leaders to be transported to Limbe and he went there himself. At Limbe Mgwane was released on bail, the Provincial Commissioner being his surety. The Provincial Commissioner took Mgamwane back to Cholo, arriving there at about 3-45 p.m. There Mgamwane addressed the crowd, saying that there should be no trouble with the Administration, and instructing them to return to their villages. The Provincial Commissioner in his turn addressed them, telling them to depart peacefully to their homes and to return to work. He also warned them that they should not go about in armed bands nor should they make road blocks or cut the telephone communications. The crowd then dispersed fairly rapidly and in perfect order. Throughout that day the crowd behaved generally in an orderly manner, though some stones were thrown and gas had to be used on at least one occasion.

18. There were no other disturbances arising out of the incidents on the Tennetts' estates.

19. We conclude this Report with an expression of thanks to our efficient Secretary, Mr. B. Jones-Walters of the Secretariat, and the tireless stenographers.

I went over this report with both Barnes and Martin. Both of them agreed that it was an accurate report of the incident with the minor error that the population of the Cholo District was estimated at 132,000 instead of 140,000.

I draw your attention to clause 18. Even during the spontaneous disturbance described above, it was apparent that some sort of organization had been set up to make full political use of it. Many Natives, even in the early days of unrest were being used as rioters even though they did not know what the argument was all about.

Mrs. Martin told me how, during the angry gathering at her husband's office on the 20th, she became worried about him and started to walk to the office, about 400 yards from their home. Halfway there she met a Native, armed to the teeth with a bow and arrow, spear, and a knife. She speaks the local Native dialect well, and she stopped.

"What is going on?" she asked the warrior.

"Don't know, Madam," the Native answered. "I was just told to come here and bring my weapons."

"Well, I'm worried about the DC (District Commissioner)," Mrs. Martin said. "I want to go see if he is all right."

"Don't you go, Madam, I will go," the Native said. And, leaving his weapons to be cared for by Mrs. Martin, the Native went to the office, returned five minutes later with the report that Mrs. Martin should not worry, and resumed his position beside the tree.

Martin also tells a story about a Native woman who was severely wounded by fragments of a tear gas bomb. When she was questioned later in the hospital, she told the DC that she had walked 25 miles to his office where, she had been told, there would be "fun and games."

It was evident from these occurrences that as soon as the Cholo disturbances began, agitators of the Nyasaland African Congress swung into action. So did the Nyasaland government. Special riot squads were brought into the protectorate from Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and Tanganyika. The Cholo District was heavily policed. In fact, almost all the police strength present in the colony was centered there.

"That was where we made a mistake," Barnes told me. "The Congress wasn't interested in Cholo itself any more. They were branching out."

All the disturbances that followed were cut from the same pattern. Agitators from the Congress would arrive in a Native village. If the chief was friendly to them, they used him in their plans. If he was unfriendly, they deposed him, and replaced him with a man they could trust. Then they had the chief send a letter of resignation to the government, announcing that he was going to rule as an African chief under an African government instead of as a British chief under a British government.

Tax books, printed up long before the Cholo disturbance, would then be issued and tax collectors would move about the village telling the Natives the white men would all soon go home and there would be a new government. Taxes, which varied from one shilling six pence to two shillings six pence were collected and turned over to the agitators.

By this time news of the trouble would reach the provincial headquarters and a detachment of police would be sent out to arrest the agitators, seize the tax books, put the proper chief back in his proper place, and restore order. On the way the police would come across road blocks made of ripped-up culverts, fallen trees, fallen telegraph poles, or Native women. Beside the roads would be groups of armed men who would shield themselves behind women while throwing rocks, shooting arrows, and throwing spears. No serious casualties were reported among the police, but 11 Native rioters were killed or died of wounds.

Another defensive measure used by the rioters was the half-cut tree. A tree almost cut through, would be pushed down on top of or just in front of a police

vehicle. The attacks were always violent until one or two shots were fired by the police--then the rioters ran away.

"We chased the agitators from place to place, always arriving just after they had left," Barnes said. "I'd say there were 14 or 16 of them, sometimes traveling together, sometimes only in pairs. They used the tax money they collected to hire taxicabs to take them from place to place. We've caught about 10 of them and we're still looking for a few others."

The disturbances continued intermittently through most of September until the government had developed an adequate intelligence service. After that, police arrived at villages at the same time as the agitators, arrested them, and the disturbances quickly died out. By the end of the violence almost every Native village between Zomba and Port Herald, at the north and the south of the Southern Province respectively, had had a visit from the agitators.

By the beginning of October laboring Natives who had been chased from the plantations during the disturbances were returning to work. Agitators who had been captured were being tried and imprisoned. The Nyasaland riots were over.

Much of the credit for keeping the disturbances from developing into the Mau Mau type of real killing war must go to the government. Officers of the government realized that the agitators were behind continued outbreaks of violence and that their first and most important job must be to catch them. Small groups of light planes patrolled the roads keeping tabs on movements of groups of Natives and determined action by the police forces broke up potential large-scale riots before they got started. The Kenya government advised Nyasaland to declare a state of emergency, proscribe the Nyasaland African Congress and the Supreme Council, and to treat the affair as an outbreak of the Mau Mau variety of terrorism. The commissioners in Nyasaland decided not to follow this advice, and, in the final reckoning, their handling of the situation proved to be better.

"I have a feeling that the Indians had a good deal to do with the disturbances," Barnes told me. "We have no proof, but the entire business, after the initial disturbance on Tennett's estate, reminded me of the riots I saw in India in 1923. We know that an Indian printer printed the 'African Government' tax books, but the thing that impressed me most was the way the rioters used their women as shields and road blocks. I hadn't ever seen that in Africa--only in India."

The results of the riots and their quelling has been the dissolution of the Supreme Council and the setting up of a new organization called the Nyasaland African Progressive Association (designed to replace the Congress), a rush to pay taxes, and a withdrawal of the non-cooperation policy. A few of the Native chiefs who signed Michael Scott's petition to the United Nations have now told their District Commissioners that they were forced to sign it. Without the agitators, Native resistance in Nyasaland has become aimless.

But, as I see it, all this peace and cooperation does nothing to change the land situation which provided the agitators with their chance to cause trouble. The Natives are still squatting on European land. They are still overcrowded and resentful of the fact that they have no land of their own. "In a few years

there will have to be a major redistribution of the African population if serious trouble is to be avoided," Barnes believes. "And, in the meantime, we are going to have to persuade some of the big land owners in the Cholo District to give up part of their unused holdings to the Natives there. We still can't afford to buy it, but if we can point out to the owners that it is to their advantage to cooperate, we may accomplish something. If we can't, look out for more trouble in the same place. As long as the basic problem exists, no European can feel completely safe in this country."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Bird Martin". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Peter Bird Martin

Received New York 11/19/53.