

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IMW-31
Harambee

P.O.Box 770
Arusha, Tanganyika
October 6, 1963

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

Dear Mr. Nolte:

At the moment, while the final Lancaster House constitutional conference is clearing up the last details before independence, it is interesting to note Kenya's recent developments. A year ago few could have predicted that the present improved atmosphere was even possible. It can perhaps best be summed up by a Swahili word of questionable origin and meaning, harambee. In spite of the experts' disagreements, however, it has come to mean 'let's get up and go', or 'pull together' and is Kenya's slogan, coined by Jomo Kenyatta himself, for creating enthusiasm for national mobilization. It is similar to Tanganyika's pre-independence rallying cry, uhuru na kazi, 'freedom and work'.

Clearly, the Kenya African National Union's (KANU) overwhelming victory at the polls last May has given the country a beacon, and there has been a dramatic improvement in the tenor of Kenya politics. The vast majority are rapidly uniting behind KANU and with a new confidence. On June first the new Government was sworn in on the day of internal self-government, replacing the cumbersome and inherently improbable KANU-KADU (Kenya African Democratic Union) coalition. Kenyatta, as the new Prime Minister, has shown a forward-looking, moderate approach combined with the sure hand of a master politician that many observers find hard to reconcile with his hesitant and inexperienced handling of matters as little as a year ago. Apparently, he has overcome his initial difficulties in readjusting to the hurly-burly of Kenya political life after nearly ten years behind barbed wire.

There are other signs of improvement also. Different Ministers make optimistic and encouraging statements regularly. Economically there is increased investment; over the past year the stock market has more than doubled in value; Nairobi's building industry, which had almost come to a standstill, is now reviving rapidly; more tourists are traveling to Kenya than ever before; fewer people are emigrating; and so on.

The European minority, whose farms are the backbone of Kenya's agricultural economy, have recently been given some words of encouragement. Speaking at a farmers' meeting at Nakuru, Kenyatta said: "We want you to stay and farm in this country." He assured them he had no intention of looking backwards: "We are going to forget the past and look forward." He went on to say his Government would respect present land titles as well as deal firmly with the recent spate of lawlessness and cattle thefts.

At the end of his speech, some of the farmers went as far as to shout "Harambee" with him. Indeed, I was told that afterwards a Southern Rhodesian had criticized the African leadership in his country: "If only we had a responsible and moderate leader like Kenyatta," he is reported to have said.

Nevertheless, in the face of these improvements there are also disquieting signs. The divisive aspects of tribalism have long been the bane of Kenya politics and remain perhaps the most urgent problems faced by the new Government. The Somali minority which inhabits the desolate Northern Frontier District continues to demand secession in order to join with their brethren in a Greater Somalia. In spite of repeated Government assurances that not an inch of Kenya soil will be allowed to secede, the Somalis have increased their agitation with the active support of Somalia. In a recent polling riot four were killed and twenty-six wounded (including seventeen policemen). Later a District Commissioner and a Senior Chief were assassinated in cold blood by two Somali terrorists. In spite of conclusive evidence that the killers are in Somalia, that Government has so far refused to extradite them.

Meanwhile, the bitter memory of Mau Mau still clouds the horizon. There are regular reports of oathings by the so-called Kenya Land Freedom Army as well as rumors of other subversive secret societies. While the Government has taken a firm stand against them, they continue. At the same time the old Mau Mau has become respectable. Although there are ample indications Government hoped to avoid the issue, a KANU member of Legislative Council, Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, has just published a book entitled Mau Mau Detainee. In it Kariuki claims Mau Mau was a genuine revolt against colonial oppression rather than an evil and perverted form of tribalism as it is more often described. The main part of the narrative deals with Kariuki's five years in detention camps and the beatings and suffering he endured. While his personal experiences have the ring of authenticity about them and are generally convincing, he gives a slanted and glossed-over version of Mau Mau as a whole. Most important, however, the book raised the subject at an extremely crucial stage in Kenya's political development, and it sparked off considerable public debate. Even Tom Mboya in a recent book, Freedom and After, felt constrained to point out that while he was never detained, he "worked closely with the affected tribes in Nairobi, and got to know some of the fighters and the leaders in the forests".

While most of the tribes of Kenya took no part in it, Mau Mau split the Kikuyu tribe right down the middle (1,700 Kikuyu loyalists were killed, compared to more than 10,000 Mau Mau and only about 30 Europeans against whom the revolt was primarily aimed). Those who were involved often lost their land to loyalists while they were in detention, and they are in the forefront in demanding European land in compensation. Land problems have played a vital role in Kenya, and not a few of the smaller tribes fear for their own security from possible domination by the two largest tribes of Kenya, the Kikuyu and the Luo.

The opposition party, KADU, depends on these smaller tribes for most of its support. Particularly since the beginning of the year they have encouraged these fears in hopes of augmenting their power to obtain a large measure of local autonomy in the regions which they control. Pushing for strong regional governments, they have often used intemperate language and threatened to secede from Kenya if their demands were not met.

KANU, however, is dedicated to a strong central government and utterly opposed to KADU's policy of 'regionalism', a policy they claim (with considerable logic) would hold back Kenya's development immeasurably both because of the clumsy nature of such a structure as well as because of the demands, financial and staff-wise, the regional administrations would make on the slim resources of the nation. KANU argues that rapid and efficient development depends on a strong central authority which will make decisions in the national interest rather than in the interest of a single region alone.

Kenyatta's major objective is to overcome this tribalism through unity, both Kenyan and African. He has often stated that he considers himself first an African leader and then a Kenyan leader. In Kenya he hopes to create a one-party state with a strong central government. Claiming KANU's electoral successes as a popular mandate to impose a strong measure of central control, he is demanding the amendment of the present regional constitution, for all practical purposes unamendable except by Colonial Office fiat. It is this question which is of greatest import at the Lancaster House talks.

To carry out this policy, Kenyatta has chosen a cabinet which most observers consider first class. With members from a number of tribes, it is neatly balanced between the old guard leaders and former Mau Mau detainees on the one hand, and the new generation of young men, many with academic qualifications, on the other. The two rivals most often mentioned as possible successors to Kenyatta have also been neatly paired: Tom Mboya as Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, and Oginga Odinga as Minister of Home Affairs.

Considering Kenyatta's relatively advanced age of 73 and the possibility of the formation of an East African Federation with him as head, the question of succession is of more than academic interest. It is increasingly suggested in Nairobi that the Mboya-Odinga rivalry has neutralized both and that neither would be able to achieve the support necessary without a drastic and probably irreparable split within KANU. Speculation therefore centers on two others: Joseph Murumbi, Minister of State at the Prime Minister's Office, and James Gichuru, Minister of Finance and Economic Planning. The former, half-Goan and half-African, has only recently returned to Kenya from exile during the Mau Mau emergency, and he is reportedly favored by Kenyatta. Gichuru, on the other hand, has the support of the rank and file, many of whom distrust Murumbi. He has long been active in politics with a

reputation for moderation and good sense, and he has proved himself an able and diplomatic negotiator.

Summing up, Kenya is a more pleasant place to be in these days than it has been for some time. Nevertheless, it has real and urgent problems; problems which have to be faced immediately. At this stage one finds a good deal of genuine skepticism, for after all a number of emerging countries have had extremely cooperative and productive periods just before achieving independence, while later not living up to the faith others, perhaps unfairly, had placed in them. Of the three East African territories, however, the Kenya Government gives the impression of knowing best what it wants and how to go about it. If indeed Kenya can forgive and forget the bitterness of its recent past, it could become one of the more stable and progressive of African countries, as well as an example of racial cooperation for the besieged countries to the south.

Very sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ian Michael Wright". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Ian Michael Wright

Received in New York October 17, 1963.