

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DER - 7
Boycott and
Indian Policy

c/o Barclays Bank
Queensway
Nairobi, Kenya
October 3, 1953

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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Nairobi has been seething with new tension and uneasy bewilderment because of a series of three boycotts imposed suddenly by the city's 95,000 Africans. First to be boycotted was the city bus lines, operated by Kenya Bus Services, Ltd. Bus stops were all but deserted on Wednesday evening, September 23. Only a few Africans ventured to board busses. Thousands streamed along sidewalks and roads on their way home from factories, offices, shops, hotels and European homes. Empty busses rattled past. For some of the walkers, it was a journey of several miles. Even bus drivers, who have free passes, walked to and from work, though they continued to operate their vehicles.

A boycott of Asian restaurants that had been catering to Africans then began just as suddenly. Many of these places were forced to close in a few days. Finally, Africans to a man stopped smoking in public and the sale of cigarets fell off sharply.

In all three cases, Africans said they had heard they would be killed by Mau Mau if they did not go along with the boycotts. No demands were ever made to anyone by whomever was behind the campaign. The boycotts just continued.

A battalion of British troops was sent into Nairobi, armed with rifles and sub-machine guns. By the beginning of the second week of the boycotts, there were indications, though slight, that it might be letting up. It was still too early to tell, though. But Europeans were shaken and they were saying apprehensively, "What next?" Kenya's economy, they know only too well, is almost completely dependent on the African.

What is behind the boycotts? Has Mau Mau switched its tactics? Is the shadowy, shooting war of the bamboo mountain forests to be replaced---or supplemented---with an equally shadowy war of economics in Nairobi?

Or have other Africans, not necessarily connected with Mau Mau, chosen this as a show---or test---of force in a drive to secure redress of grievances on the part of the city's low paid, ill-housed African population?

These are questions being asked these days in the offices, clubs and bars of Nairobi. Unfortunately no one who knows the answers is giving them. Mau Mau issues no statements of policy. African political leaders still at liberty may know what is in the wind, but aren't talking. Mau Mau and detention by the government both are threats for them.

Whether Mau Mau as a whole or elements within it originated the boycotts is not known with certainty. It is clear though that the name Mau Mau, with all that it implies, has been used to exact compliance from the Africans. Without exception, when questioned why they were going along with the boycotts, Africans replied: "We have heard we will be killed by Mau Mau if we do not."

A C.I.D. agent showed me privately the other day a notice, written in ink on a large piece of writing paper, which he found pinned down with stones on a path in Kariokor, one of the African locations. The notice was written in Kikuyu, then, significantly, repeated in Swahili, the lingua franca of East Africa's numerous tribes. It read:

"Warning to all African people.

"As of 23/9/53* you travel on Kenya Bus Services at danger to your life.

"General Thomas Kipalamoto."

While the agent acknowledges that the notice may have been the work of a crackpot, or that it may have been given a Mau Mau flavor to add authority to it, he feels that there is a strong likelihood that it is a genuine directive from at least one group in Mau Mau. This "general" is not known to the authorities and they suspect that the name was cooked up on the spur of the moment.

The success in securing compliance from Africans points up the fact that by and large Mau Mau and other thugs are the law in Nairobi's African areas. There, law-abiding Africans have been suffering helplessly from robberies, thefts and assaults. Murders occur every few days.

* The date of the month is put first in Kenya, followed by the number of the month.

The police have admitted that too few policemen have been assigned to the locations. They say that not enough men were available because of the large numbers needed for forest patrols and for garrison work in the Kikuyu Reserve.

African boycotters I talked with seemed to be badly frightened. They were not afraid of what would happen to them while they were on the busses. It was what might happen after they alighted in the locations. For this reason, attempts to get the Africans back on the busses by putting askaris on each vehicle failed.

The authorities were especially worried by the fact that not only the Kikuyu---roughly estimated at from 70 to 80 per cent of the city's African population ---but all of the many other tribes in Nairobi as well had been frightened into compliance. "If Mau Mau can intimidate all the tribes like this, what might they get them to do next? We may be in for serious trouble," a city official said to me.

Those who surmise that Mau Mau has switched its tactics point to the current military situation in backing up their argument. Mau Mau has been taking a heavy and continual pounding, with casualties reported officially at from 40 to 50 a week. The actual number of real and suspected Mau Mau members killed is anyone's guess, but it is much higher than the official figures. Patrols frequently fail to report such incidents. The bombing of forest hide-outs, though it has resulted in few casualties, is known to have had a devastating psychological effect on Mau Mau gangs, who at best have been conducting a spear-type war with some small modern weapons. Mau Mau, too, has been finding it increasingly difficult to get food and steal weapons.

There have been 42 surrenders---20 of them by men considered to have been hard-core Mau Mau---from August 23, when the surrender policy was announced till September 22, when the last tally was made. The authorities say that other Mau Mau members, tiring of the forest fighting, may have slipped quietly back to life in the reserves or in Nairobi. A government official told me that Dedan Kimathi has let it be known---for what it is worth---that he is recruiting. It would not be surprising if Mau Mau members are coming to realize that surrender or extermination are the only avenues open to them.

It is considered unlikely that the boycotts were decided upon by Mau Mau as a whole. Mau Mau is known to be loosely organized and it is thought that this would prevent any decision from the top. Gangs are believed to operate more or less independently, some under the direction of tough thugs eager to join in on any plunder, and others under the direction of forceful local political extremists. Men such as Kimathi and "General China" are thought to exert at best only a limited power, deriving their reputations as overall leaders from the fact they control larger gangs. The Kikuyu knew no chiefs before the British imposed the institution on them. Rather the tribe was governed by various councils of elders.

A seemingly more plausible possibility is that some elements in Mau Mau or African nationalists not necessarily closely allied with Mau Mau are behind the boycotts. The suddenness with which they were imposed suggests that some degree of organization existed to spread the word, as for instance a Mau Mau cell or cells in Nairobi. With the proscription of the Kenya African Union and the government's policy of allowing the formation of few African organizations, there are not many African groups other than Mau Mau in existence.

There are, however, the African trade unions, which have been fostered and encouraged by government. Unsubstantiated suspicions have been voiced in private and in public that one of the unions, the Transport and Allied Workers, have been behind the boycotts. Stricter regulations had been imposed a short time before on the city's taxis, driven by Africans. Taxi drivers, who in the past have had a considerable degree of organization and political consciousness, belong to that union. Therefore, the suspicions go, the boycotts may have been a retaliation for these regulations.

The regulations provided (1) that all taxis had to be painted with a broad yellow stripe from stem to stern on each side, (2) that the driver's photo had to be posted inside the cab and (3) that no more than one Kikuyu, Meru or Embu* could be carried in a cab.

* The Meru and Embu tribes, closely related to the Kikuyu, have also been affected by Mau Mau, though to a lesser degree.

Even though such identification of cab and driver is standard elsewhere, some drivers grumbled that they were being treated like criminals.

The first two regulations were designed to make it unwise for Mau Mau and "ordinary" criminals to use cabs in their operations. Although one reads almost daily in Nairobi's newspapers that a criminal "made good his escape on a bicycle," more speed than that would seem to be desirable from the criminal's point of view. Since few Africans can afford autos, a taxi is the solution. Some police officers say that cabs have been used in a large number of Nairobi's many crimes. But others disagree that cabs actually were used. As they bore no outer identification before, any small, black car automatically became a "cab," these police officers say.

Still another regulation which may have led to a retaliatory boycott, some people think, was one requiring all Kikuyu, Meru and Embu to paint their names and addresses in large letters on their bicycles.

The East African Standard said in a recent editorial: "It is suspected that they (the boycotts) may have been fostered by so-called 'trade unions' interested in transport." The nascent black unions, perhaps, if "innocent," fearful that the situation would be used to smash them, quickly issued public denials. I have been told by several sources that the Nairobi District Emergency Committee has recommended to the government that some transport union leaders be detained. So far nothing has come of the recommendation.

Though forced into these boycotts, Nairobi's Africans have plenty of grievances which conceivably could find expression some day in wholehearted passive resistance.

Wages are low. "Houseboys" earn 60 to 100 shillings a month (\$8.40 to \$14.00), with some provision for food and lodging in addition. Many own tiny shambas back in the reserves, tilled by their wives and children. These Africans have no ties to Nairobi, but hope to return home some day, either when they have managed the difficult task of saving a little money or when they are too old to work.

An educated, intelligent Kikuyu who teaches me Swahili makes only 300 shillings a month, or \$42. He says he often has done the work of Europeans earning as much as seven times his salary.

Presumably well-meaning executives of large firms have told me that economics and race prejudice together prevent them from raising African wages substantially. One executive said he has to employ six Africans, each earning £8 a month or a total of £48 (\$135.84), to do the work that one man would perform in England for £30 a month (\$84.90). "Labor isn't cheap here, it's bloody expensive because it's so inefficient," he said. But even if he found an efficient African who could do the work of all six, he could not raise the man's wage greatly because European and Asian employes then would demand that they be given that much more, the executive said.

Conditions are bad in the African locations. Kariokor, for example, was built just after World War I to house single men. There are a number of long, one-story brick structures, each divided into windowless nine by nine foot cubicles. Whole families live in these cubicles now, cooking their meals on charcoal braziers on the floor. Their only light comes through the door, or from a lamp if they happen to own one. There are communal water taps and communal lavatories. A blind man, relying on his olfactory sense, would have no trouble finding them. Tenants pay the city five shillings (\$0.70) a month for each bed. Conditions are better in some of the other locations, but in Pumwani they are much worse.

Those living in the locations are fortunate, though. It is estimated that thousands of Africans in Nairobi have no place at all to sleep. In officialese, this is described as a lack of "bed space." A friend said to me: "A lot of Africans will try to find night work because it's warmer sleeping in culverts and ditches in the daytime." A woman settler said she once went into her servant's quarters at night and found he was allowing more than a dozen homeless men to sleep on the floor of his room.

The government and the city administration are attempting to solve the problem by building more African housing. To charges that their efforts are inadequate, they point to the fact that Nairobi's African population continues to grow by leaps and bounds as more and more Africans pour into the city looking for work.

Conditions in Kariokor are about the same as those I saw in a village of Kikuyu forest squatters on Mount Kenya. These men, who are allowed to till the land in these Crown forests in exchange for working in the forest department---for which they still are paid a small wage---are considered better off financially than most Africans. Their huts were new as they had just been moved down from a higher area, where Mau Mau was operating. Yet the filth was about the same as in Kariokor and it was compounded by the fact that each hut held, in addition to the family, up to 15 goats for the night. A European police officer in charge of the village said to one of the Kikuyu men: "Why don't you get those filthy goats out of your hut?" The man looked shocked. "Bwana," he said, "it's a custom of the Kikuyu to keep goats in the hut at night! We catch hold of their breaths!" (Meaning, we keep warm from them.)

The point is that in Nairobi Africans have worked in European homes and hotels and have seen something better which they feel they are entitled to share in. The potentially explosive aspects of the boycotts were recognized by the authorities and on Wednesday, September 30 the first battalion of the Inniskilling Fusiliers, numbering 500 men, was speeded to Nairobi from camps in the Rift Valley. The Inniskillings, only recently arrived in the colony to bolster the fight against Mau Mau, became the first British battalion ever to be stationed in Nairobi. They set up camp in tents on the Racecourse as the Jockey Club of Kenya issued a quick announcement that racing would go on as usual. (This prompted the Standard to declare testily: "This is the kind of unrealism that causes Kenya and its British community to be misunderstood in the world outside.")

The troops quickly went into action. Truckloads of soldiers clad in jungle green and armed with rifles and sub-machine guns fanned out over the city. Some carried walkie-talkies for constant communication. Africans were stopped and requested to produce their identity cards. Those regarded as suspicious were turned over to police. On the first day, 139 were seized in this way. On the second day, the Inniskillings turned 124 Africans over to police. The Nairobi African Advisory Committee asked that the augmented force be continued.

By the end of the week a few more Africans were boarding busses. The majority still were walking, but police described this as a "very good omen." Nairobi relaxed a little bit, but "What next?" was still on everyone's mind.

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Of considerable political significance in Kenya was a seven-point "Statement of Policy" adopted on Sunday, September 27 by the Standing Committee of the Kenya Indian Congress. It represents the organization's answer to the "Nine Principles" drawn up by the European elected members of the Legislative Council and approved at the recent European Electors' Union Conference.* The Indian elected members of the Legislative Council participated in the formulation of the Indian statement.

Criticizing the European principles, the Standing Committee said they "fall far short of the essential requirements of the country and fail to take into effective account the culture and capabilities of the Asians and the progress made by the Africans in all walks of life, and their legitimate aspirations as to the part they must play in moulding the future of the country."

The statement said the interests of Kenya's other races were ignored in the proceedings of the Electors' Union Conference and added that this "proves the contention of the non-Europeans that transfer of power to the hands of the European community in this country will be against the best interests of the other races." The Colonial Office should not transfer any power "unless same is received jointly by all races under constitution acceptable to all."

* Reported in DER - 5.

"This Congress therefore believes," the statement said, "that immediate steps are necessary in the following directions to create conditions and promote an atmosphere in which all races could work together for the attainment of common objectives:

"(1) The strong feeling of grievance which prevails among the Africans, particularly the Kikuyu people, about land and which influences large numbers of them in their general attitude towards other problems should be remedied quickly.

"(2) The African should be given a sense of feeling that he will have all the necessary encouragement to progress in all walks of life.

"(3) An immediate declaration of an authoritative character should be made to ensure the due attainment of the above objective, with emphasis on ability and character and merits and getting away from the emphasis on race and colour which hitherto has formed the basis of policy.

"(4) Racial discrimination and colour bar should be completely removed from all employment under the State; and the right of access to all public and licensed places should be sanctioned and guaranteed by legislation without delay.

"(5) The educational system of the country should be changed as early as possible from its present racial compartments of European, Asian and African schools to schools open to all races but divided on the basis of high, moderate and nominal tuition fees.

"(6) A pronouncement should be made that in the next constitutional set-up, constitutions of the Legislative and Municipal bodies will provide for the return of representatives on a limited scale by a common electorate of all races based on a qualified franchise with reservation of an equal number of seats for each race as a first step in the right direction.

"(7) The Congress reiterates once more its unmitigated opposition to the idea of any political or commercial alliance of Kenya with the Central African Federation.

Aside from the question of genuine convictions, the statement represents a bid for a political alliance with Africans against the privileged and dominant European community. While most Asians have impressed me as no more interested in promoting African advancement than most Europeans, Asians are less color conscious. They too are discriminated against, though to a lesser degree. They seem to be less insistent on maintaining a position of superiority over the African---though not entirely lacking in this desire. At any rate they appear to be more inclined to yield to African demands.

Though the situation is said to have improved in the last 10 years or so, Asians are bitter over discrimination against them. At all-Asian social gatherings I have attended, the conversation inevitably turns to this topic. The resolution by the Electors' Union opposing further Asian immigration served to exacerbate this bitterness.

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It had been more than two months since a European settler was murdered and the European community was starting to recover a sense of security. But what had developed was shattered in late September with the killing of another settler, the 15th since the start of the Emergency. The victim was Rufino Beccaloni, a native of Rome. He was part owner of a garage in Nanyuki and lived with his wife and two children on a 100-acre farm on the northern slopes of Mount Kenya. He spent his nights at a nearby farm, guarding a woman settler. Returning home one morning, he was ambushed by a gang armed with rifles. A young Kikuyu with him was shot in the leg and feigned death. Beccaloni tried to use his shotgun, but he was too weak and the terrorists hacked him to pieces with knives. They fled up Mount Kenya's dense forests, taking with them Beccaloni's shotgun and .32 calibre pistol.

A few days later, a Mau Mau gang killed five loyal Africans---an agricultural officer, two agricultural department instructors, a chief's messenger and a tribal policeman. The attack took place near Nyeri and was the worst incident there in months. The agricultural officer, Luka Karima, was educated at Makerere College in Uganda and spent six weeks in Britain in 1951, studying British agriculture on a special grant. He also taught agriculture to African ex-servicemen at the Jeanes School in Nairobi. He was regarded as having had a

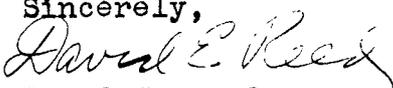
deep sense of mission in trying to improve Kikuyu standards of living through better and more productive agriculture.

A police patrol led by a European tracked the gang to a maize shamba. A Jaluo police corporal shot and killed two members of the gang and three askaris each killed one.

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Sgt. Jeremy Allen, 23, of the Kenya Regiment, who had been remanded on a murder charge pending a written summary of evidence, has been cleared. General Sir George Erskine, Commander-in-Chief, East Africa, said he found part of the evidence against Allen to be false. Neither was there considered to have been a valid case against two African askaris arrested with Allen. The three had been seized after an inquest into the deaths of two Africans who died while in custody. Charges against them resulted from information given to the Governor by Peter Evans, a British barrister.

A manslaughter case against Sgt. Jack Ruben, 24, of the Kenya Regiment, and Richard Keates, 46, of the Kenya Police Reserve, has also been dismissed. They had been accused of ordering the fatal beating of an Embu tribesman seized as a Mau Mau suspect. A jury found them not guilty of manslaughter, but guilty of assault causing actual bodily harm. Keates was fined £100 (\$283) and Ruben was fined £50 (\$141.50). Both were placed under peace bonds for a year, on their own recognizance. The judge said: "As far as I am concerned, I do not think I would have imposed a very much greater sentence even if the conviction had been manslaughter." He said he thought everyone realized the difficulties of reservists. Some were without proper training, they were shorthanded and they were in 'very difficult' circumstances."

Sincerely,

David E. Reed

Received New York 10/17/53.