

# LAND ROBBERY IN KENYA

by Idris Cox

*Idris Cox is a leading member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. He has made a study of African problems and has written this article specially for "The African Communist".*

October 20 this year is the tenth anniversary of the "state of emergency" declared in Kenya by the British Government. In the course of three years (1952-55) nearly 14,000 Africans were killed, more than 82,000 detained in concentration camps, and over 1,000,000 put under curfew in 845 villages surrounded by barbed wire.

The "emergency" was seized upon as a pretext to rob the Africans of more land. Trade unions were illegal, wages and conditions were lowered, and unemployment increased. The rapid growth in the number of African landless families brought more hunger and poverty. The situation in October 1955 was far worse than in October 1952.

After the armed struggle ended early in 1956 the "state of emergency" still continued until January 1960. This was to enable British colonial rule to find new methods to maintain its grip in face of the inevitable advance towards African majority rule. Africans are now the majority in the Legislative Council, and it was expected that Kenya would achieve political independence this year. This would have been the first major step towards solving the land problem, transforming Kenya's backward economy, and raising living standards. But the last act of Mr. Reginald Maudling as Colonial Secretary, after his visit to Kenya early in July, was to destroy these hopes.

On his return to London Mr. Maudling declared that new elections in Kenya would be postponed to 1963. After a period of internal self-government (with real power in the hands of the British Governor) there would be still another constitutional conference. This time-table means that the British Government do not intend to concede independence until 1964.

The second blow delivered by Mr. Maudling was to announce a new plan to purchase one million acres of European mixed-farming land in the White Highlands in the next four years. It is claimed this would provide for 70,000 African landless families. One is entitled to doubt this claim, for the purchase of 250,000 acres in 1962 is not expected to provide for more than 5,000 African families. At this rate only 20,000 will be provided for. Moreover, the existing "land reform" schemes yield a cash income of only £40 a year for the African farmers.

Equally serious is the fact that this free hand-out to the European settlers is the first charge on available funds from the British Government for the economic development of Kenya, so urgently needed to transform its backward economy and raise living standards. As usual the interests of the white settlers come before those of the Africans.

### **HOW ROBBERY BEGAN**

Land robbery is one of the most shameful and sordid aspects of British colonial history. It started with the European annexation of African land sixty years ago. It is now ending with the handing out of huge fortunes to the European robbers at the expense of the African people. So it is worth while at this stage to give a brief history of the colossal land robbery of Kenya.

The British annexation of Kenya took place in 1892. It was done mainly through the medium of the British East Africa Company (later to become the East Africa Syndicate), a vast trading monopoly which was sanctified by a Royal Charter. Within ten years began the process of robbing the Africans of their land—chiefly the Kikuyu people.

The first Crown Lands Ordinance was in 1902, and in the next thirteen years more than 6,000 square miles (nearly four million acres) of Kenya's best land was taken over by the British Government and handed over to British firms and white settlers. By 1934 no less than 16,700 square miles (nearly eleven million acres) had been taken from the Africans and reserved for Europeans—more than half the first-class land in Kenya. But only ten per cent is being cultivated!

Total land area in Kenya is 225,000 square miles. More than 150,000 square miles is described as "unsuitable" for agriculture, being mainly waterless and semi-desert. Apart from this there are still over 5,000 square miles of "Crown Land", not divided either among Africans or Europeans.

Of the remainder, 16,700 square miles are reserved for 2,800 Europeans in the White Highlands, and 52,000 square miles of poorer land for the Africans. For nearly 7,000,000 Africans it works out at one square mile for every 134 Africans. In the White Highlands about 6,000 square miles are mainly forest reserve, not suitable for farming land, but in which Europeans have grazing and timber rights. The remaining farm land of 10,645 square miles (nearly seven million acres) works out at  $3\frac{1}{2}$  square miles (or 2,240 acres) for every European farmer—470 times the average for each African!

### EXTENSION OF ROBBERY

In 1901 there were only 13 European settlers, but in 1905 there were 886. Among the first recipients of land reserved for Europeans were 350,000 acres for the East Africa Syndicate; 100,000 acres for Lord Delamere ("father" of the white settlers), and 220,000 acres for other European settlers. In 1920 the East African Land and Development Company acquired 310,000 acres. During the next 31 years it sold at highly inflated prices all but 300 acres. It paid dividends of 100 per cent in the years 1947-50, and 33 per cent in 1951.

Before 1914 total land on lease to Europeans was over 5,000 square miles, leased in blocks of between ten and 500 square miles, and at a rental of only  $1\frac{1}{4}$ d. an acre. The Crown Lands Ordinance 1915 provided leasehold land for 999 years at a rental of only  $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. an acre. This rental was not increased until after 1945, and is now little more than 4s. an acre.

The number of European settlers in the White Highlands rose from 886 in 1905 to 1,183 in 1920, then to 2,107 in 1932. The figure dropped to 1,915 in 1940 but rose again after the second world war to its present level of 2,800.

Of the seven million acres of cultivable land in the White Highlands 3,600,000 acres consist of European ranches and 800,000 acres of European plantations. The remaining 3,600,000 acres are European mixed-farming land, of which 880,000 acres are not being cultivated. In contrast there are 150,000 African landless families in the White Highlands alone. In the year ending June 1961 they increased by 20,000. In Kenya as a whole there were 300,000 unemployed in June 1962, a quarter of the working population, and their numbers are increasing at the rate of 15 per cent every year. (*Financial Times*, 24/7/62).

When the Kenya "emergency" was declared in October 1952

there were 20,000 unemployed in Nairobi, the capital. Now there are over 40,000 unemployed, and nearly as many in Mombasa, the port town on the east coast (*London Times* 7/8/62). This is only part of the price Africans in Kenya have to pay for British colonial rule and European robbery of their land.

### **KEEPING AFRICANS DOWN**

From the beginning of British colonial rule Kenya has been under the domination of white settlers. As early as 1905 Sir Charles Eliot, East Africa Commissioner during 1901-4, declared that: "The interior of the Protectorate is a white man's country". Lord Delamere told the Labour Commission in 1912 that if the African was to become a leaseholder of a sufficient area to establish himself "then the question of obtaining a satisfactory labour supply could never be settled". As recently as 1949 the white settlers published their "Kenya Plan" in which they advocated "a landless African population which would be obliged . . . to earn their living by working for others".

For sixty years everything possible was done by the British Government to increase the economic and political grip of the white settlers. In the early days of European land annexation they advanced no less than £17 million in loans between 1920 and 1930 (when mass unemployment was rife in Britain) to construct railways to transport the produce of the Highland farmers at less than cost, and also constructed trunk roads for this purpose.

After the first world war European syndicates and settlers engaged in wholesale land speculation, the big farmers buying up the small farms and selling them again at inflated prices. In this way the big European settlers exploited not only the Africans but also the small European farmers.

Of the five million acres occupied in 1934 by 2,000 European farmers about 280 (14 per cent of the total) had possession of 40 per cent of the total acreage. Twenty years later the biggest European settlers had an even stronger grip on the White Highlands. The biggest estates are the European ranches and plantations (more than half the White Highlands) and these are left untouched by Maudling's proposals. They are so profitable that even Maudling's inflated valuation will not satisfy the European firms and settlers!

### **BIG SETTLERS ON TOP**

The last agricultural census in 1954 revealed the strong grip of the big settlers in the White Highlands. More than half the

European "commercial" farms (about 1,600) were between 500 and 2,000 acres and many settlers have more than one farm. There were 762 farms of over 2,000 acres and these included ranches and only partly-developed land. The remaining farms were on a much smaller scale—477 between 200 and 500 acres each, and 462 under 200 acres each.

The 1954 census also threw light on the nature of the cultivated and uncultivated land in the White Highlands. More than 46 per cent was classified as "agriculturally unproductive" and 44 per cent used only for grazing, which means that only 10 per cent was used for crops. Of the land classified as "agriculturally unproductive" 24 per cent was forest, 11 per cent undeveloped or unused, and 11 per cent was classified as "waste, buildings, etc."

Of the 3,163 cultivated holdings in the settled area 527 were plantations and 316 were ranches. All these are European-owned, and are excluded from Maudling's latest scheme. The plantations included 351 producing coffee, 60 producing tea, 43 producing sisal, 38 producing wattle, and 35 producing sugar. The remainder (nearly three million acres) is the mixed-farming land, a third of which the British Government now proposes to purchase at highly-inflated prices.

### MAUDLING SPEAKS FOR SETTLERS

It may be argued that the Maudling scheme is a genuine attempt to embark upon the first stage of taking over European land to provide farms for the landless Africans. Nothing of the kind! To begin with there is nothing original in the Maudling plan. All that Maudling has done was to borrow the proposals from the European settlers and financial circles in Britain and present them in a revised form as his "solution".

After the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) broke its pledge not to form a government until Jomo Kenyatta was released it joined hands with the Europeans in April 1961 to form a minority government. Soon after it started discussions with the British Government about purchasing European mixed farms for landless Africans, the total value of which was put at £45 million (*Daily Telegraph* 21/11/61).

One of the Tory diehards, Mr. Patrick Wall, M.P. proposed in the House of Commons early in April (three months before Maudling announced his scheme) that the British Government purchase one million acres of European land in Kenya for £30 or £40 million. Early in May *The Times* reported that a sum of £30

million had been mentioned as the purchase price for all European mixed farms, and claimed this "would be between £15 and £25 million short of their theoretical value". Then it revealed the secret that "negotiations were still at a delicate stage, but were understood to have made encouraging progress" (10/5/62). White settlers put forward many varying estimates of the value of their mixed-farming land, from £45 million to £75 million—according to what they expected to get for it!

Nor could Lord Delamere keep this secret for long. At the end of May he made the proposal that 50 per cent of the mixed-farming land should be purchased in the next three years for £30 million. When Lord Delamere welcomed the announcement of the Maudling scheme next day as "an excellent practical start for a solution of the problem" there was an outcry of protest from many European settlers that the price proposed was too low. This led *The Times* and other British newspapers to criticise the European settler "extremists".

It was not long before the European settler "extremists" made a sharp rejoinder, and in doing so revealed that the Maudling scheme was under discussion as early as last March. In their letter to *The Times* (6/8/62) they pointed out that:

"The plan for a really large settlement scheme for Africans in the former White Highlands was in fact jointly put forward at the Lancaster House Conference in London in March 1962 by the Kenya Coalition Parliamentary Group, the Kenya National Farmers' Union and the Convention of Farmers' Associations. The only change from that plan is that the time of purchase originally put forward was three years instead of the present five and that a total of two million acres should be bought in five years".

### INFLATED LAND PRICES

Five years was the original term proposed by Maudling. His successor Duncan Sandys now speaks of one million acres in the next four years. Neither of them mentioned the purchase price, but Mr. Bruce McKenzie, Kenya's Minister of Agriculture, has intimated it will be £18 million. Two members of the Kenya Coalition Party (the voice of the diehard settlers) Mr. L. R. M. Welwood and Mr. David Cole were invited to London early in August to put forward their arguments that the price proposed is too low.

Whatever the final price which the British Government will pay for European mixed-farming land it is obvious that the settlers are

intent in forcing it up to the highest limit. For decades the buying and selling of land among Europeans in Kenya has forced land values up to an extremely artificial high level—far above their real value. The European settlers are fighting to the last ditch to push them up still higher. An example of inflated land values in urban areas is the fact that land value in Nairobi, the capital, went up from £4 million in 1945 to £48½ million in 1959, in the comparatively brief space of fifteen years.

Mr. Norman Leys, in his well-known book on Kenya, published in 1926, gives an earlier striking example of one farm of 640 acres in Kiambu being sold by the Government in 1903 for £85. Two years later it was sold to another farmer for £640. This farmer bought machinery and made improvements estimated to cost £5,000 and in 1913 the farm was sold to a rich buyer for £17,500—200 times its original price! No wonder the author remarked that: “No supporter of the existing system would dispute the fact that most of the 10,000 square miles of alienated land was alienated in exchange for sums that were ridiculously trivial compared with the prices prevailing in the free market at the time of sale” (p.167).

The minimum price now proposed for European land in the White Highlands is £18 an acre. And this for land which the white settlers procured in free grants or for a maximum of a few shillings an acre. Though the settlers are no longer a majority in the Legislative Council it is clear that they are desperately striving to maintain as many of their privileges as they can.

Early in 1955, in the last stages of the armed struggle in Kenya, the European settlers were confident they would reserve the White Highlands for themselves forever. At a meeting in the Nanyuki district they declared:

“The sanctity of the White Highlands is an ideal for which we are prepared to fight if necessary, and therefore issue a solemn warning to the Government of the United Kingdom that any move on their part to alter existing conditions under which land therein is only available to European ownership and occupation will be met by all means at their disposal”. (London *Times* 31/1/55).

### **NEED FOR AFRICAN UNITY**

Since then big changes have taken place. Africans are a majority in the Legislative Council. Though the Europeans and the British Government are doing everything possible to halt and postpone the achievement of Kenya's independence they recognise it must

come. So they do their utmost to divide the ranks of the African liberation movement, to encourage the KADU minority to conspire with the Europeans to obstruct the Kenya African National Union (KANU) led by Jomo Kenyatta, which has the overwhelming support of the Africans.

Within the existing Kenya Cabinet of eleven Ministers there are still four Europeans, though the Africans outnumber Europeans by a hundred to one. The Europeans are in key positions, and are still striving to maintain the privileges of the white settlers. Sir Michael Blundell (who has always been the chief instrument of British colonial rule) exercises a deadly influence within KADU, and was the chief architect of KADU'S regional plan to divide Kenya, and the main author of various schemes to pour millions into the pockets of the white settlers who stole the land from the Africans.

Because Africans are now in a majority in the Legislative Council it would be a grave blunder to conclude that European minority domination has now been destroyed. The Europeans are still fighting to maintain their privileges by new methods. They still have close relations with the British Government. Some of them still have a big influence on African leaders, especially within KADU. They have not given up their old strategy of divide and rule, and still hope to maintain their grip on Kenya.

That is why it is so essential for every possible step to be taken to unite the African liberation movement in Kenya, to press for new elections on a democratic basis, to break the influence and economic grip of the European minority, and to advance towards early independence in Kenya.