

REFLECTIONS ON EAST AFRICA

Jack Woddis

THE recent events in East Africa were a surprise to everyone. There are, of course, those who are only too ready with their explanations and slick slogans. Sir Alec Douglas-Home, for example, has rushed in blethering about a 'communist plot'. This nonsense has been well and truly punctured by those in a better position to know what actually happened. Jomo Kenyatta, Oginga Odinga (Kenya's Minister for Home Affairs), Achieng Oneko (Kenya's Minister of Information), Julius Nyerere and Oscar Kambona (Tanganyika's Minister for External Affairs and Defence), have all discounted this cold-war lie and condemned those spreading it. The Governments of Kenya and Tanganyika both issued official statements along the same lines. Oginga Odinga has stressed that :

The imperialist Press, especially the British Press, has attempted to place the whole responsibility on the Communists and those they consider to be Communist sympathisers. I strongly disagree with this claim, by which the British are trying to avoid responsibility for what took place in Zanzibar. It was the British who encouraged unjust policies in Zanzibar which were intended to make the minority rule over the majority. . . . The British imperialists, knowing that their underhand work had been exposed, tried to find scapegoats in the form of Communists and people like myself. . . . With regard to the events in Tanganyika and Uganda, we in Kenya should take these as a serious warning. British personnel employed in responsible places by these Governments failed to train Africans so that they could fill these places. Instead they used their privileged positions to suppress the Africans below them, thereby creating an explosive situation.

These wise and justified remarks from one whose immense popularity and prestige in Kenya makes him a constant target of attack from Tories and the capitalist Press in Britain, need to be taken to heart by all the national leaders in Africa's new States.

The existence today of thirty-four independent states is the creation of the African masses, who fought and sacrificed over several decades in order that their countries might be free. The African people did not struggle solely to have African Governments, African representation at the United Nations, a national flag and national anthem. Nor did they suffer in order that British officials could still occupy key positions throughout the State apparatus. Still less was the goal of independence intended to mean for them that African Ministers and Members of Parliament would have privileged remuneration while the workers and peasants would continue to live in poverty, often jobless and landless.

Kwame Nkrumah was quite right to warn the African Heads of State at last May's Addis Ababa conference: 'If, therefore, now that we are independent, we allow the same conditions to exist that existed in colonial days, all the resentment that overthrew colonialism will be mobilised against us'. The last four months have demonstrated the correctness of that warning. In Congo (Brazzaville), following a three-day general strike, accompanied by mass demonstrations in the capital when the workers tore down the prison gates and released the political prisoners, the puppet 'Abbe' Youlou and his government had to resign. In Cotonu, the capital of Dahomey, a four-day general strike and mass demonstrations by the workers at the call of their unions, caused a change of government. In Senegal, 50,000 people demonstrated against the government in protest against the killing by torture of one of the national leaders. And when the funeral took place, 50,000 again turned out and marched in the procession. In Congo (Leopoldville), strikes and demonstrations were followed by the arrests of trade union leaders, the dissolution of Parliament, the banning of the activities of Lumumba's MNC Party and Gizenga's African Solidarity Party, and the forcing of a number of M.P.s to flee the country; and now, armed units of the people are in action in several provinces against the American-backed Adoula Government. In Nigeria, a new party, the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party, has emerged as a challenge to the older-established parties who have made their country a haven for neo-colonialism; and last October, over 200,000 workers took part in a three-day strike for higher pay—the biggest and most united workers' action there since the days of struggle against British rule.

All these actions, irrespective of whether they were successful or not, reflect the growing anger and determination of the African people. Some African Governments, outstandingly those of Ghana and Algeria, are moving with their times, sincerely and energetically tackling the problems bequeathed to them by colonialism, and overcoming the new manoeuvres and plots of the imperialists. Such Governments have the overwhelming support of their peoples.

But there are other countries in Africa in which the Governments are either too hesitant or are downright collaborators of imperialism. Such governments are being jogged and challenged by the people; and in some cases, even overthrown. The whole pattern of neo-colonialism is increasingly coming under attack. Any hopes the imperialists may have had of the people being content solely with the status of independence, leaving imperialist cadres to continue

their activities in the new States, and allowing the foreign monopolies to continue their ruthless exploitation, are doomed to failure.

The governments in Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda cannot be put in the category of those who have made themselves the willing instruments of neo-colonialism. They are popular governments, based on mass support, and placed in power by the people's struggle for independence. They face immense problems—extreme poverty, widespread illiteracy, lack of trained personnel, mass unemployment—to all of which are sometimes added tribal conflicts. On top of it all they have to contend with the intrigues of imperialism. These governments and their leaders will have every sympathy and understanding from their people in tackling these difficult tasks.

But such immense problems can only be overcome if these national leaders put the interests of the masses first, and if they keep the edge of their effort directed against imperialism. The events in East Africa—mutinies or soldiers' strikes, call them what you will—should, as Oginga Odinga has said, be taken by the national leaders 'as a serious warning'. The people want to see a new life. They know it cannot be achieved in a single day. But they want their governments to pursue a course which day by day is visibly yielding results. And they want their countries fully under African control.

An indication of the seriousness of the problems and of the temper of the people is the events which took place in Kenya during the very week of the recent crisis, as described in the East Africa fortnightly, *Reporter*, in its issue of January 31. The Kenya Cabinet

was in urgent conclave, discussing ways to allay the rumbles of discontent from the country's unemployed. . . . Into Nairobi streamed reports of disgruntled forest-fighters who were still waiting for the Government to provide them with land or with jobs. . . . Meetings organised by the Kenya National Aid and Welfare Organisation . . . called on the Government to devote more time and money to providing more jobs. . . . In Nairobi, a crowd of 500 demonstrated outside Parliament Building demanding to see the Minister for Labour, Mr. Mwendwa, and asking for work of any kind—even if it would earn them 'only a few shillings a month'. Shouted one demonstrator: 'This is an uhuru Government. Those M.P.s with expensive cars should sell them and distribute the money to the poor'. . . . Across the way . . . 100 blind people demanded that a commission should look into their problems, and that the older folk among them should be granted Government allowances. From another union came an appeal to the Government to make it compulsory for employers (including Government departments) to take unemployed disabled people on to their staffs.

Summing up the lesson of these actions, the deputy general secretary

of the Kenya Federation of Labour declared: 'The people are desperate. The demonstrators are expressing the feelings of thousands and thousands of forgotten people in Kenya who every day go without food, have insufficient clothes and nowhere to sleep.'

These are the real issues behind the 'mutinies' in East Africa—not 'communist plots'. And if these are the reactions in Kenya, after only four weeks of independence, one can imagine the feelings in Tanganyika where, after two years, despite some positive measures taken by the Government, considerable criticism is being voiced, not only against the Government's slowness but against the Government's attitude towards the people and their problems.

The issuing by Julius Nyerere, in the first week of January, of his ill-judged circular to Ministries, armed services and Civil Servants, stating that the policy of 'Africanisation' was to end and that henceforth Africans would have no priority in the recruitment, training and promotion of civil servants, naturally aroused a storm of protest. A delegation to the President from the Tanganyika Federation of Labour declared that this 'would take the people back to colonial days'. But this action by the Government was only one of a series of rebuffs to the people.

The Tanganyika soldiers have been trying for nine months to get the Government to act on the question of pay and promotion. Yet, at the time of the recent crisis, one captain was the highest command post held by Africans in the armed forces. When the trade union leaders demand the nationalisation of the big foreign-owned enterprises, they are denounced by the Tanganyika Labour Minister, Michael Kamaliza, as 'enemies of the unemployed people'. When trade unions demand higher pay, they are rebuked by Government leaders and accused of 'holding the country to ransom', and of trying to gain advantages 'at the expense of the peasantry'. Yet, the Chesworth Commission Report on Minimum Wages, issued in March 1962, revealed that average cash earnings for all workers in Tanganyika were only 96s. a month, and for agricultural workers only 67s.; that workers in Dar-es-Salaam ate a 'once a day meal'; that of every 1,000 children born, 400 die before they reach 15; that a random survey of 99 workers in building, transport, commercial and catering showed no less than 93 of them with signs of malnutrition, caused mainly through poverty. Nearly a year later, in July 1963, the Government had just got around to considering recommendations for the minimum wage; these were, for non-plantation agriculture, 80s. a month, and for gold mining and tea, 91s. a month—in

both cases considerably below the Chesworth Commission proposals, and also below existing average earnings.

These realities cannot be brushed aside by accusations from Ministers that the trade unions are 'holding the country to ransom'. If the Government of Tanganyika—and this applies to the Governments of Kenya and Uganda, too—is to build up the country and advance to socialism, then it needs the utmost support from the working class and its trade unions. The heroic strikes of the workers were milestones in the national liberation struggle in East Africa. Many workers laid down their lives in the strikes in Mombasa (1939, 1944, 1947 and 1955), Tanga (1948), Dar-es-Salaam (1950 and again in 1958), on Tanganyika's sisal plantations (1957, 1958, 1959 and 1960), and Nairobi (general strike, 1950, busmen, 1958). All these historic actions were of utmost importance to the winning of national independence. That the organisations of the workers should now be treated in Tanganyika as if they were the enemy, and their leaders thrown into prison, is one of the most dangerous symptoms in the present situation. In Kenya, too, one finds the Minister of Labour warning trade unionists that if they 'abused' their freedom the Government would 'take it away'. Such talk and such a hostile attitude towards the claims of the workers will not solve a single one of the grave problems which have given rise to the recent explosions.

Nor will the calling in of British troops. The alacrity with which the British Tory Government rushed the troops out, their ill-concealed glee over their opportunity to 'recolonise', the pressure now being exerted to push through the East African Federation in conditions which could render it an imperialist creation, the open demands for military agreements with Britain and the maintenance of the British military base at Kamina—all this shows only too clearly the danger that these countries are now in.

The British imperialists are already preparing their plans for the next stage. *The Economist* (February 1, 1964), after its significant comment that 'With commendable foresight, the British forces were deployed in such a way that they were ready to go into action within minutes of being invited to do so', hastens to advise that 'the coming period will best be covered by a slow, pragmatic policy of helping to make sure that everything is securely pinned down before the troops are brought home'. This is what this journal terms 'enlightened neo-colonialism'! Anthony Sampson, writing in the same vein in *The Observer* (February 2, 1964), points out that 'To negotiate this retreat, while leaving some camouflaged military help, will call for

great skill from the Army, and from Duncan Sandys or his successor'. The menace to East Africa is obvious.

The quicker the British troops are withdrawn, the better will be the opportunity for the governments of East Africa to get down to the real job at hand—freeing their countries from the grip of imperialism, refashioning their economies and improving the people's lives. The mutinies have been a serious warning. The people are impatient. Their revolution is not yet complete.