

NEW SITUATION IN KENYA

Idris Cox

KENYA is in for a new stage of sharp struggles. This became clear following the 'little general election', the results of which were announced at the end of June. Contests took place for 20 seats in the House of Representatives (the Lower House), and for 10 seats in the Senate (Upper House).

The governing party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU) won 21 seats—13 in the Lower House and 8 in the Upper House—and the new political party, the Kenya People's Union (KPU) won 9 seats—7 in the Lower House and 2 in the Upper House. The results have been acclaimed a 'great victory' for KANU (which is led by President Kenyatta and Tom Mboya), and a serious defeat for KPU, the Opposition (led by Oginga Odinga, former Vice-President of the Kenya Republic, and former vice-chairman of KANU).

If this is a great victory for KANU, it is an extremely shallow one. The seats gained bear no relation to the votes won by the two parties.

In his post-election statement, KPU President, Mr. Odinga, said the results had not surprised his party:

The two-month-old KPU has polled a total of 78,287 votes as against KANU's 57,816 votes in the Senate seats. The two-month KPU has polled a total of 86,334 votes as against KANU's 72,584 votes for the Lower House seats . . . it is therefore evident from the total results that the majority of the voters in the by-election favour KPU as opposed to KANU. In the Senate a majority of 20,471 votes were cast for KPU over KANU; while in the Lower House a majority of 13,750 votes were cast for KPU over KANU. It is only an idiot or a mad dog that can claim that KANU as a party is more popular than KPU.

If the KANU leaders were genuine in their claim that they were letting the Kenya electors decide the issue, there would have been no other course than for them to admit defeat. Instead Mboya fatuously remarked after the results were announced: 'The KPU is dead. The voters buried it today'.

There is not the slightest prospect of this happening. The KANU leaders are not concerned with consulting the masses, but with forcing through a reactionary policy of co-operation with foreign imperialism, for which they are highly praised by spokesmen of imperialism in the United States, in Britain and in West Germany. This was the real issue of the 'little general election'. To combat the growing mass support for the progressive policy of the KPU, the

KANU leaders imposed all kinds of restrictions against the opposition party—restrictions even more vicious than those applied against the Communists in capitalist countries. Although no Communist Party exists in Kenya, and none of the KPU leaders are Communists, this did not prevent Kenyatta and Mboya from engaging in a vicious campaign of distortion in which they described their KPU opponents as ‘Communist plotters’ and ‘agents of foreign powers’, simply because they had opposed KANU’s tie-up with foreign imperialism and had instead urged for closer co-operation with the socialist countries.

During the election campaign KANU used the government’s apparatus for its propaganda against the KPU. While KANU had full use of the radio, KPU was completely banned from using it. The registration of KPU as a new political party was deliberately delayed until a few minutes before closing time for nominations. Just before the election took place a Preventive Detention Act was rushed through, which was aimed at intimidating anyone who dared to support KPU. The government threatened chiefs and civil servants supporting KPU; imposed bans on KPU meetings; banned many KPU election meetings, and arrested some of the KPU candidates before polling day. Hooligans were encouraged to attack KPU meetings, and accusations were made that the government had printed many duplicate voting papers.

In the midst of the campaign came the government’s decision to postpone the counting of the votes for a fortnight. The elections for the Lower House were held on June 12, and for the Upper House on June 26. Using this as a pretext, in the first round of elections the ballot boxes were held in government custody for two weeks, and the counting of the votes delayed until June 27. In the face of all these conditions, what is most surprising is that KPU was able to poll many more votes than KANU. If KPU had been allowed the most elementary democratic rights in the election campaign, it seems clear its total vote would have been even higher, and possibly more seats might have been won.

In the election campaign KPU concentrated on presenting a progressive alternative to the reactionary aspects of KANU’s policy. KPU condemned the restriction of democratic rights, the seizure of passports, the bans on meetings, etc., and demanded the practical application of all democratic rights guaranteed in the existing constitution. KPU attacked the blatant device of using the phrase ‘African Socialism’ by KANU, as a screen to hide a policy which in

practice had nothing in common with socialist ideas. The results of this policy were shown in the increasing grip of foreign capital on Kenya's economy, in the growing numbers of landless and unemployed, in the growth of a capitalist economy, and in the ever-growing gap between rich and poor.

KPU pointed out in relation to the land problem that only an eighth of the 8 million acres of European land had been taken over, and that more than half of this had been bought by Europeans—after lavish compensation of £25 million had already been paid to the former European settlers. Exorbitant prices were charged to Africans buying portions of land previously owned by Europeans, and most of them are now saddled with enormous debts. KPU's programme urged the distribution of *free* land to squatters and poor farmers, the taking over of more European land on the basis of encouraging co-operative farms, and the limitation of all holdings to prevent a new class of big landlords.

The programme reminded KANU of its own admission that in Kenya today there were fewer people in jobs than there were in 1960, and that over the past six years thousands of school-leavers had been unable to find employment. It also drew attention to the widespread corruption in the civil service; to the appointment in high positions on the basis of political subservience to KANU; to the higher fees now being charged for primary education, and to the fabulous sums being paid to higher civil servants at the expense of those in lower positions, who were doing the real work.

Despite the worsening economic situation Tom Mboya from time to time still releases a number of 'sunshine' stories about future prospects. His most recent effort was on June 13, when he forecast a rise of 8 per cent in the gross national product during 1966, and a large rise in the capital formation in Kenya. What he did not reveal was that the bulk of the expected 'capital formation' would come from foreign investment. In 1965 there were no less than 67 big British monopoly firms investing in Kenya, apart from those of the United States and West Germany. The British monopolies have world-wide interests, and their total share and loan capital and reserves amount to over £6,000 million.

Concerning the proportion of British investments in East Africa as a whole, the *Financial Times* of June 12, 1965, gave the estimate of the Overseas Development Institute in Britain, which was that an annual profit of 20 per cent was expected on a three-year matured investment. When it comes to those employed in private industry,

there is quite a different story. Early in June this year the Minister for Commerce and Industry gave an account of wages and salaries in Government and private employment. The average wage for 4,700 in Government employment was £1,532 per annum; for 8,000 Asians it was £737, and for 160,000 Africans it was only £165. In the private sector the individual average annual wage for 10,000 Europeans was £1,500; for 28,000 Asians it was £518, and for 165,000 Africans it was only £127. Even this low African average annual wage conceals the high figure for a tiny minority, for it was admitted that 99 per cent of African workers in the private sector got less than £120 a year. Despite this, Tom Mboya still urges an expansion of the private sector, which he complained was lagging behind Government investment. Not a word was said about the starvation level of wages in the private sector, or of the growing mass unemployment.

It is not surprising therefore that KPU is winning increasing support. True, this support does not yet present a serious challenge to the Government. The votes cast in the 'little general election' came mainly from the Luo region of Nyanza; and bearing in mind that Oginga Odinga himself is a Luo, it can be expected that the KPU's main stronghold would be in Nyanza. However, KPU also won two seats in the Wakamba tribal areas of Machakos and Kitui, and though Tom Mboya described these as 'freak results', in reality they reveal that dissatisfaction with KANU's policy was not confined only to the Luo people. And though Odinga's opponent was Walter Odede (Tom Mboya's father-in-law, both of whom are Luos), Odinga's vote was ten times greater than Odede's, and Odede lost his deposit.

Government spokesmen are now spreading the idea that they cannot recognise the KPU as the official opposition in the House of Representatives because it only has nine members. This is indeed a strange doctrine, since it was KANU who forced the 'little general election', and the results reveal that KPU's vote was greater than that of all the KANU candidates.

This result is even more impressive than it appears on the surface, for KPU's main leaders (apart from Jomo Kenyatta) were precisely those who built up KANU as a decisive force until it became the only recognised political party within a one-party system. These outstanding leaders are Oginga Odinga, Achieng Oneko (arrested along with Kenyatta in 1953) and Bildad Kaggia, who was kept in detention along with Kenyatta for several years.

Most of the people now grouped around Kenyatta constitute the

'band-waggoners', who played little or no part in the struggle for Kenya's liberation. When the real crisis comes in Kenya, these people are just as likely to change over to the other side, as did many of those people whom Dr. Nkrumah had trusted in Ghana.

Whether or not KPU becomes recognised as the 'official Opposition', it has already laid the basis for a growing mass movement which can stimulate the struggle for the basic aims of Kenya's liberation, for which so many sacrifices have been made.

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OF THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

W. H. Smart *

IF the programme of the Labour Government for strengthening the British economy and advancing the living standards of the people is to be successful, then a completely different attitude must be adopted by the Government towards the role of the construction industry in the economic and social life of the country.

This industry holds the key to our advance, as it is geared to the production of factories, commercial offices, docks, bridges, roads, houses, schools, etc. Without an effective construction industry our overall plans can be held up. Already the value of investment in the industry has risen from £2,000 million in 1960 to £4,000 million and it is estimated that in the next 3-4 years this will reach the figure of £6,000 million. Given a correct Government approach towards financing its schemes and for dealing with the cost of land, all of which are essential if cheaper costs of construction are to be realised, this would leave only the physical question of the efficiency of the industry to be dealt with as the organisational means of carrying through the programme.

The building unions have pioneered since the end of the first world war for some form of State control of the industry. This has been done by the policy of direct labour building by Local and County Municipal Councils and nationally through the Ministry of Public Works and Building. In 1950, at its conference in Ayr, the National Federation of Building Trades Operatives formulated its policy for the public ownership of the industry. It basically

* Mr. Smart is a member of the Executive Council of the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers.