

# LABOUR IMPERIALISM AND EAST AFRICA

By G. PADMORE

[*The following is the concluding portion of the article the first part of which appeared in last month's issue.*]

## *Opposition of the Colonists*

**T**HE political dissatisfaction of the British colonists in East Africa is merely a reflection of their economic interests, which has its basis in the fact that the major industry of these whites is big-scale agriculture, the development of which depends upon cheap native labour.

As has already been pointed out, the Colonial Governments in this section of the Continent have always given direct assistance to the Europeans in procuring Negro labour for their farms and plantations through the enactment of some of the most repressive anti-labour legislation to be found in any part of the world. Nevertheless, these colonists have come to realise that the safest way to safeguard their economic interests which is coming more and more into conflict with that of British finance-capital on the one hand, and the agrarian interests in other sections of the world (Canada, Australia, Argentine, Brazil) on the other, is to get complete control over the political affairs of the amalgamated colonies, or at least to secure a majority of unofficial members on each of the local Legislative Councils. If this could be achieved, the colonists will be in a position to control political power and thereby wield a dominant power in questions affecting native policy, such as the administration of the Reserves, the framing of legislation and ordinances affecting labour "contracts," native taxation, the disbursement of finances for native education, public health, &c., &c.

With such power in their hands, the Africans would be even more brutally exploited than they are to-day, under more definite slave conditions without having to brook any interference on the part of the local representatives (Governors and Commissioners) of the Imperial Government.

The entire political outlook of these European landlords was glaringly expressed some years ago by one of their representatives in the Legislative Council of Kenya, who told his constituents during a campaign speech that

*you will never solve the labour problem until you have control of the country. When you have that, you will immediately solve the problem.* (East African Standard, November 27, 1926.) (Emphasis mine—G.P.)

There are additional reasons which give rise to the present agitation on the part of the colonists, as for example, indirect taxation and the Indian problem—(which is a demand on the part of the Asiatics for the establishment of a common electoral roll with the Europeans)—two phases of East Africa politics which space prevents us from discussing.

However, the Colonial Office, because of the economic interest of the Imperial bourgeoisie, will not be in the position to grant self-government to the settlers, and has openly indicated this by the terms laid down in the *White Paper* which deals with the methods to be adopted in bringing about closer union of the colonies. Notwithstanding the hypocritical phrases of Lord Passfield, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, that the reason why the “Labour” Government will not grant political control to the settlers is because “paramountcy” of native interest must be maintained, the real economic and political reasons are obvious.

Furthermore, to make a concession of self-government to the colonists at this time would mean the further disintegration of the Empire and would weaken Britain’s stronghold over Africa. The present position in which British finance-capital finds itself impels the imperialists more and more in the direction of greater political dominion over the African colonies. They are compelled to adjust their imperialistic policies according to their economic needs.

It is in this light that we must view the present situation in East Africa, and not be misled by any pseudo-humanitarian phrases of the Social-fascist minister, Lord Passfield, or his like, who talk glibly about His Majesty’s Government’s trusteeship of the natives, while at the same time they adopt the most terroristic methods of suppressing every manifestation of native political awakening. For instance, the *Kikuyu Central Association* has not only been suppressed, but the “Labour” Government through the enactment of recent legislation has made it a criminal offence for natives to collect money for purposes other than religious. The purpose of this is to prohibit the organisation of native political and trade union organisations. This is how MacDonald, the hangman of the Second International, aids in crushing the revolutionary struggles of the colonial toilers.

The whole scheme of amalgamation, therefore, is being put into effect by the “Labour” Government in the interests of their imperialist masters, who, finding themselves more and more within the throes of the world capitalist crisis, reserved the right to exploit East Africa more intensely than they have done in the past. They will do this by investing millions of pounds sterling in developing the mining resources (there are no mines at present) and railroad transportation, as well as building electric and power plants, docks, warehouses, &c., &c., by which means the British bankers and industrialists who control the basic industries of

England will be able to find an outlet for their surplus finance-capital and a market for heavy commodities (steel, locomotives, cement and other building materials). A loan of £3 million has recently been floated in the London money market for railroad construction in Kenya.

Such a scheme of capitalist exploitation necessitates the creation of a "free" labour market so that the African natives will be able to sell their labour power to the capitalists. Here is just where the conflict over native policy arises, for in contradistinction to "free" labour, the landlords of Kenya would like to develop a slave system along the same lines which have already been instituted by the Anglo-Boers of South Africa. That is why there is such a close ideological kinship between these East African landlords and the South African nationalist party (who represent the agrarian class), which arises out of their common economic interests, that can be fittingly summed up in the simple words: "*free land and black labour.*" Because of this identity of interest, Hertzog, the leader of the South African Nationalists supports the East African landlords against British finance-capital.

#### *German Imperialists Protest*

The other direction from which protest comes against the proposed federation is from the German imperialists and their social fascist mercenaries. The new German imperialists and their social fascist hirelings have always entertained the hope of regaining "their" colonies, especially Tanganyika, the largest and most important of Germany's pre-war colonial possessions. During the 1930 elections, the fascists held a Congress at *Wartburg*, where plans were discussed for recovering the African colonies. The following resolution was adopted and despatched to Brüning, the German Chancellor, Dr. Curtis, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and to the German Delegate to the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations:

German East Africa, is of all the German colonies, the most valuable. It is completely indispensable to the economic future of Germany. Former German Africans (whites—G.P.), united at *Wartburg*, ardently desire one day to return there. They look to the Government of the Reich to display the greatest energy in preventing the fusion of East Africa with the neighbouring British colonies, in guarding its character as a Mandated Territory and in bringing about its return to Germany.

Since then the German Association, an affiliated body of over a thousand Fascist and Social Fascist organisations, presided over by Dr. Heinrich Schnee, who was the last Governor of German East Africa and now a member of the Reichstag, issued the following manifesto under the title of "*Threatened Violation of German Rights,*" appealing to their followers to continue the struggle against Great Britain. The document reads:

By the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was robbed of her oversea possessions. The German colonies were placed under administration by Mandate, which by the Covenant of the League was to be carried out by a trusteeship by the Powers entrusted therewith. They must exercise this trusteeship as Mandatories of the League of Nations and in its name. The Mandate system is now most seriously threatened by the intention of the British Government to incorporate German East Africa in the British Empire. This, the largest and most valuable of the German colonies was handed over to England as a Mandated Territory. Recently the English Government in a "*White Paper*" put forward proposals which amount to the fusion of the East African Mandated Territory with the adjoining English colonies of Kenya and Uganda. A Committee of the English Parliament is to consider the matter. Furthermore, the White Paper has been communicated to the Permanent Mandates Commission in Geneva, so that that body may have an opportunity to consider and express an opinion upon it. The projected fusion of German East Africa with the neighbouring British Colonies is incompatible with the Covenant of the League. It would mean the first step in the illegal incorporation in the British Empire of German East Africa—a land twice as large as Germany and offering extraordinary favourable possibilities of development. The sharpest protests against this British action must be made by the German people, protests against the violation of Germany according to the Treaty of Versailles and of its rights as a member of the League of Nations, against the destruction of the Mandates system in regard to the largest Mandated Territory in Africa, against the illegal annexation in fact of German East Africa by England. The German people must combine in general defence of their rights and the idea of justice.

Even Rothermere, in order to gain the alliance of Hitler in drawing German fascism into an Anglo-German bloc against the Soviet Union and bolshevism, proposed that the clamourings of the new German imperialists be granted and Tanganyika returned to the Reich.

After his return to England from Germany in 1930, Rothermere wrote the following article which was syndicated throughout his chain of newspapers :

Twelve months ago, I strongly urged upon the British Government to return to Germany all those African colonies. . . . I again emphasise the desirability of such a restitution. . . .to hand back to Germany some of her former African colonies would be a gesture of friendship which would cost Britain nothing.

However advantageous this gesture might appear to certain sections of the British bourgeoisie, we can rest assured that Germany's protest will fall upon deaf ears.

The resentment of the white settlers has been editorially expressed in the columns of *East Africa*, the official organ of the European planters, as follows :

What can be said of so sweeping and indefensible a suggestion (Rothermere's) as that " to hand back Tanganyika Territory would be

a gesture of friendliness which would cost Britain nothing." It would cost us dear in every sense. *It would provide Germany with a submarine and air base in the Indian Ocean. It would cut the heart out of the British Eastern African Dominion now in the building. It would break the all-red route between Cairo and the Cape* which a few months hence is to be traversed weekly in each direction by an Imperial air mail service. *It would preclude the rational development of the British territories to the north and south by increasing the difficulties of administration and communication.* It would be a breach of faith with the British and foreign settlers, traders and investors who have established themselves in Tanganyika under the assurance that the territory shall remain under British administration. *It would anger, and not without reason, our Belgian allies, the development of whose vast resources in the Eastern Congo and Ruanda-Urundi is mainly dependent upon Tanganyika's central railway. It would force British and Belgian Africa to bear increased expenditure on defence against possible German aggression.* (Emphasis mine—G.P.)

The British imperialists, knowing the critical conditions in which they are in, are not in a position to grant this demand of the German nationalists. For, as we have already pointed out, the present imperialist policy of Great Britain is to consolidate her present economic position by means of tariffs, rationalisation on the workers in England through wage cuts, abolition of social insurance, unemployment; and at the same time intensifying the exploitation of the colonial masses.

The imperialist struggle over the East African colonies, however, affords us another glaring example of the sharp contradictions among the capitalist States; all of which are influencing international politics making for new imperialist wars and an attack upon the U.S.S.R.

#### *Hypocrisy of the "Labour" Government*

The "Labour" Government, bombarded from all quarters—inside and outside Parliament, by the colonial and certain sections of the English press, by the German imperialists, the colonists, the Indians and the natives—has attempted to find a temporary solution for the conflicting problems in East Africa by appointing a Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament for the purpose of hearing evidence and discussing the *White Papers*. In this way the "socialists" hope to shift the responsibility for final settlement of the controversy upon the Committee. This action shows the hypocritical character of the MacDonald Government. At the time when the *White Papers* were first published, the Colonial Office stated that the Memorandum on Native Policy was the final statement of attitude of the "Labour" Government in respect to the natives, therefore the document would not be laid before the Joint Committee, whose only function would be to consider and recommend the methods to be adopted in bringing about constitutional changes, if any, in Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika. But under pressure of certain representatives of British imperialism with agrarian interests

in East Africa (the Earl of Plymouth), Lord Passfield has since decided to open the *White Paper on Native Policy* for discussion before the Joint Committee. This shows up the whole fraud of the "Labour" Government, which merely attempts to use the natives as political pawns.

*The African World* of December 13, 1930, commenting on this *volte face* of the Social Fascists, says :

*Lord Passfield has been forced to bow before the storm. His statement that his memorandum on native policy will automatically come before the Committee is received with relief in Kenya, in view of Lord Passfield's frequent refusals to consider that course.*

This will enable the "Labour" Government to manœuvre and arrive at a compromise by making certain minor concessions to the colonists, especially on questions directly affecting their economic interests, such as guaranteeing an adequate supply of labour for the plantations. Such a concession would guarantee security for the planters and their children, a point which Sir Edward Grigg, the recently returned Governor of Kenya, in his evidence before the Joint Committee emphasised as the crux of Kenya politics.

*The African World* goes on to remark that *it is now felt that there is a strong probability that the Joint Committee will be able to record the principle of "paramountcy of native interests" on which the memorandum was founded in such a way that it will be generally acceptable.* (Emphasis mine—G.P.)

Now what does this mean? It means that the Joint Committee will be afforded the opportunity of relieving the tension and saving the face of the "Labour" Government by doing as follows: (1) Withdrawing all the safeguards which the *White Paper on Native Policy* originally purported to give the natives; (2) abolishing the statement "paramountcy for native interests," originally used in the Duke of Devonshire's Memorandum issued in 1923 and repeated in the White Paper of the "Labour" Government; and (3) denying the Indians the institution of a common electoral roll with the Europeans.

Assured of these concessions, the delegation of East African landlords, under the leadership of Lord Delamere, which journeyed to London in 1930 to protest against the proposed amalgamation scheme and the "radical" native policy of the "Labour" Government agreed to abstain from carrying on agitation and pressing their demands for the time being so as not to embarrass the Government which requires a breathing space in order to enable all of the parties of British imperialism to concentrate on the Round Table Conference, and at the same time give the "Labour" agents of imperialism an opportunity of side-tracking the question of the common roll for Indians in Kenya, a demand which might have evoked a certain amount of support from among the Indian delegates at the Conference.

Furthermore, such a manœuvre afforded the colonists' delegation an opportunity of taking the initiative of presenting a compromise platform to the Colonial Office as the basis for discussion when they return to London to give evidence before the Joint Committee this year.

As a result of this agreement the delegates went back to East Africa in November, 1930, and, after reporting to their respective constituencies, issued the following statement which appeared in the *Times* of December 6, 1930 :

Lord Delamere with the agreement of his colleagues has proposed that Kenya should seek an agreement with the Imperial Government on the following basis : (1), the Memorandum on Native Policy to be withdrawn by the Imperial Government ; (2), consideration of the constitutional issues of closer union to be indefinitely postponed ; (3), the Kenya settlers to agree not to press for any immediate step forward in the constitution of the colony, that is, the temporary withdrawal of the claim for an unofficial majority of the Legislature.

We can rest assured, that whatever is the outcome of this controversy, the millions of brutally-enslaved Negroes of East Africa will continue to be the victims of British imperialism on the one hand, and of local capitalists and plantation owners on the other.

#### *What Must Be Done ?*

Therefore it is absolutely necessary for the revolutionary movement, especially in England, to carry on a systematic campaign exposing the villainy of the social imperialists as well as the so-called "lefts"—Maxton, Brown, Leys, Horrabin, &c., &c., who, while pretending to criticise the "Labour" Government's policy in East Africa with "left" phrases, objectively aid MacDonald and Passfield in tightening the yoke of British imperialism over the natives. Every opportunity must be utilised to mobilise the British workers in support of the following demands of the African toilers :

(1) The absolute independence of the East African colonies from the yoke of British imperialism.

(2) The confiscation of the lands owned by the European settlers, to be divided up among the native agricultural labourers.

(3) The abolition of all forms of forced labour and the policy of expropriating peasants and communal lands.

(4) Immediate abolition of all forms of taxation—Head, Poll, Hut—as well as the system of finger-printing and the carrying of the kipandis (pass). The abolition of all forms of repressive labour and racial legislation.

(5) The immediate removal of the ban against the *Kikuyu Central Association* and all other native political and labour organisations.

(6) The guaranteeing of civil rights—the right to organise, freedom of assembly, of press, and of speech. The right of natives to enter into collective bargaining and to strike.

(7) The introduction of the 8-hour day.

(8) The immediate enactment of labour legislation—insurance for the unemployed, sickness, accident, old-age and death benefits, the protection of women and youth.

(9) The establishment of free universal primary and secondary education for native children and special courses for adult workers.

(10) The abolition of the policy of militarising natives by means of service in the King's African Rifles and Labour Battalions, all of which form part of the preparation for a new imperialist war and the attack by British and other capitalist countries on the Soviet Union.

In order to carry out the above programme a great responsibility falls upon the shoulders of the organised militant workers in Britain. It is essential systematically to explain the situation in East Africa, pointing out how the natives are being robbed and exploited by all capitalist elements in Africa.

The British workers need to understand that the struggle of these colonial toilers for freedom is an inseparable part of the common struggle against the British imperialists who, by means of their ruthless policy of colonial exploitation, are able to extort super-profits and bribe the English social-fascists and trade union bureaucrats, who, in turn, aid them in finding an escape from the crisis by pumping new life into a decaying capitalist system through the active participation of the "Labour" Party, the lackeys of British imperialism.