

## THE PROBLEM IN EAST AFRICA

An informative talk by the Reverend Lyndon Harries, Lecturer in Swahili at London University, published in *The Listener*, December 18th, shows beyond doubt that the land question, and not the immediate outbreak by a murderous gang, is at the root of the troubles in Kenya. The Kikuyu form a fifth of Kenya's five million inhabitants and are among the most intelligent and enterprising. They are certainly the most politically conscious and restless under European domination. This is not surprising since "they have always before them, as other East Africans have not, the sight of white settlers cultivating land which they claim as their own." It was their misfortune to occupy land considered especially favourable for European settlement. This land was originally the subject of negotiation, but "the Kikuyu still maintain that originally they had simply leased the land to the whites, and that they did not realise that it was to be permanently alienated." (Such misunderstanding probably applies to the great majority of agreements by which Europeans, accustomed to absolute private property in land, have claimed to be the owners of land formerly in the possession of people to whom such a conception was unknown.) The Kikuyu land, although apparently unoccupied, was, in fact, the grazing reserves of the tribe, and this error was acknowledged by a previous Land Commission, in 1932. Meanwhile the Kikuyu, enclosed within the Reserve allotted to them by their white rulers, have been obliged to graze their cattle within a comparatively small area with the result that the land is turning into a dust bowl. This might have been avoided, as Mr. Harries suggests, if the Kikuyu had got rid of their cattle—on easy terms, perhaps, to those who had taken the grazing ground?—but this is no solution of the land question. In consequence of the impoverishment of their soil, large numbers of people move out of the Reserve to work for white settlers or to seek their living in the towns. But living costs are always rising more steeply than the rate of wages of labourers left without bargaining power, and the uprooting of so many families entails grave social evils for which Pass regulations and police measures afford no remedy.

Mr. Harries contrasts the situation in Kenya with that in Uganda which "is free from the problems arising from European settlement because white people are not allowed rights or titles to lands occupied or held by Africans, except with special consent of the Governor." In the most prosperous district, the kingdom of Buganda, "there is an African society which is variegated and urban. In other parts of the Protectorate the people are either self-cultivating peasants or pastoral people. Uganda is not unduly troubled by political tensions." Mr. Harries, however, might usefully have drawn attention to the discontent arising from the growing wealth of African landowners. Discrimination against Europeans is unjust and affords no real solution to the land problem.

Mr. Harries's B.B.C. talk was evidently intended to describe the situation rather than to advocate a solution, but after observing that "the problem here, as in Africa generally, is poverty and its consequences," he recommends the development of mines, the "creation" of secondary industries and of

schemes to promote large scale farming—all, presumably, with government assistance. These he hopes will raise the standard of life by "giving wide employment" and by providing "a large scale alternative to agriculture and the poverty associated with peasant farming." Such measures do not touch the land problem which Mr. Harries had previously shown to be the cause of the poverty. The recognition that all the people have equal rights to land and the application of the principle of land value taxation provide the obvious solution.

To assess the value of land apart from the value of improvements, deriving revenue from the value of land instead of taxing improvements, has been proved practicable in many countries including Kenya itself where the principle has been partially applied in Mombasa and in Nairobi and has been officially recommended for rural districts outside the Reserves. Its fuller development and application to all the land in the Colony would open vast new opportunities. The revenue it would provide would enable the Government to reduce or abolish other taxation at present falling upon production and to remove the poll taxes on mere existence. In consequence the costs of living and production would fall to an extent which could be described as revolutionary in spreading prosperity and allaying unrest.

Europeans, Africans and Asiatics alike would pay according to the value of their holdings, the holder who worked land well paying no more than a bad cultivator occupying a plot with similar advantages. This would tend to encourage good cultivation. In the better atmosphere that would develop as the effects of prosperity began to improve race relations, Africans would be more likely to listen to tactful advice on the subject of soil conservation.

This is the land policy under which all races can co-operate in equitable partnership towards the maximum development of Kenya's resources. It will not, of course, commend itself to those who believe that any change to be effective must be summary and dramatically coercive. But such changes seldom if ever touch the root of a social problem. Land value taxation touches directly the first of all human requirements—space on the surface of the earth.

(Contributed.)

## A DEBATE ON ALLOTMENTS

The great deal of valuable food being produced for the hungry people of this land by "entirely voluntary effort"—each ton of which saves a ton from being bought overseas—the health that is given and the recreation that is thus obtained warrants every possible encouragement of allotment diggers by Members of Parliament, said Mr. Gerald Williams (Cons., Tonbridge) during the adjournment debate in the Commons, February 12. He was glad that the Government had given a grant to the National Allotments Association and that it had enabled allotment holders to take advantage of the fertilizer subsidy. Even so, allotmenters had a number of grouses. Dog nuisance was one. During the war it had been deemed right and necessary to introduce a special Defence Regulation under which the owners of dogs that caused damage could be fined £5 or so. He knew