

Kenya and Imperialism

Sources: compiled from various web sources 1998-9

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Early Western Explorers 1844 to 1884



A sketch of porters transporting goods in an expedition

European interest in East Africa at this time developed fast, although most of the contacts were being made in Zanzibar. Zanzibar was now the Omani Sultanate's headquarters instead of Muscat.

The Europeans also had interest in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) because it was the main source of the slave trade on the East Coast of Africa.

Uganda also became a source of interest since the source of the Nile was thought to be there. This was important for the European countries, especially from the time the Suez canal was envisaged. France and England were trying to conquer the routes to India and Asia. The power who controlled the source of the Nile, would have the control of Egypt and therefore of the Suez canal which was to become the vital route for trade with India and the rest of Asia. The canal was opened in 1869 and was under French control until the British bought the majority shares in 1881 from an Egyptian.

The campaign to abolish slavery worldwide was at its high in the middle of the century, and Britain was one of its leaders. Together with the altruism and Christian conscience of many of its supporters, it found ready ears among businessmen and politicians. Britain lost their interests in the United States and anti-slavery was now a weapon to attack the interests mainly of the Dutch and French colonies.

There was also a great push to the scientific study of Geography and this founded many expeditions to explore unmapped areas of the globe, mainly to Africa.

Within this context the first Europeans to adventure to the Kenya interior were three German missionaries of the Church Missionary Society, Krapf (encouraged by the Sultan to start his work in 1844 near Mombasa) who was joined by Rebmann, in 1846, and Ehardt in 1849. Rebman was the first to speak about the permanent snow covered peak of Mount Kilimanjaro, after he saw it on May 1848 in one of his evangelical missions. His statements aroused a lot of controversy in Europe where many scientist thought and declared it was impossible to have mountains with permanent snow on the Equator. To make matters worse for them, Kraft reported a second mountain with snow capped peaks on the Equator when in one of his trips up-country he saw Mount Kenya from what now is Kitui in 1849. Ehardt putting together stories of Arab travellers and what they had visited produced a sketched map of his trips showing the approximate location of the two mountains and of a vast inland sea which in Europe aroused the interest of discovering the source of the Nile scientifically.

Johan Krapf did an enormous work in the few years he could stay in his mission of Rabai. He had the merit of learning Swahili, made the first translation of the Bible into this language and wrote the first grammar and dictionary for it. To him we also owe the name of Kenya, which seems to come from an incorrect pronunciation of mount "Kirinjaga" which is the name of the mountain in Kikuyu language. He

left Kenya in 1853 due to ill health.

Richard Burton and John Speke, both British soldiers, decide to search out the source of the Nile. In 1857 they parted from Zanzibar and followed the Arab trade route from Bagamoyo to Lake Tanganyika. Due to recurrent illness they could not explore the totality of the lake. Speke though managed to see and name Lake Victoria from Nyanza. He had the hint it was the source of the Nile but he could not prove it. Burton, who had remained behind due to fever refuse to believe him and they become bitter enemies since then.



Burton and Speke

Speke got the support of the Royal Geographical Society and the British government and organised a second expedition in 1860. On his way up he was involved in many fights with Arab slave traders and local chiefs, since his caravan of 217 people appeared menacing. He was accompanied by his friend James Grant and was received by the King of the Bagandas, Kabaka Mutesa in what is now Kampala. After discovering the falls which they called Ripon Falls, now Owen Falls, they followed the course of the Nile up to Khartoum where they dispatched a message to London saying "The Nile is settled".

The most important explorer who set himself to open the paths of Africa to Europeans in order to preach, trade and lead Africans to higher levels of civilisation, was the missionary David Livingstone who from 1853 to his death in 1873 spent most of his time wandering around the slave trade routes looking for the source of the Nile. His reports on the brutalities he was witnessing moved Britain so much that he became a national hero. After not hearing from him for over five years a reporter, Henry Stanley, was sent to look for him. They met at Ujiji in October 1871 and they did some explorations together before Stanley returned to Britain.



Native farmers

After the death of Livingstone, Stanley was commissioned to finish the explorations Livingstone had started and find the southern most source of the Nile. He was a forceful man and with a caravan of 224 people he started his quest in November 1874. He reached Lake Victoria and travelled around it in a canoe which took approximately two months. He was received by the King of Buganda, Mutesa, and the King agreed to accept missionaries in his land of which Stanley informed London.

The letter of Stanley urging European missionaries to go to the court of the King of Buganda received a prompt response. In 1877 the first protestant missionaries arrived at Kampala from Britain. In 1879 Catholic missionaries also arrived to Kampala. This mission had the importance that it gave the European powers knowledge of the well organised kingdom of Buganda, and little by little, they discovered that the shortest route to the coast, though very difficult to travel, was the route through what is now Kenya. This route had been partially explored by the German, Dr. Fisher, who reached up to Lake Naivasha.

It was the route that Joseph Thomson was commissioned to explore by the Royal Geographical society. He started his trip in 1883 when he was 26 years of age. He travelled almost all around Kenya with a relatively small caravan. His affable relations with the Masai and other tribesmen he met, and the humorous style of his book "Through Masai Land" made an indelible mark in the way people saw the Masai and East Africa.

Businessmen tried from 1870's to convince the British Government to form a protectorate in the Coast of East Africa with the double aim of eradicating the slave trade and advancing the commerce with India and the mainland. William Mackinnon, who owned a steamship service to India, convinced the Sultan of Zanzibar to lease him all his coast territory but he did not find support in Britain. H.H. Johnston signed a treaty with local chiefs in what is now Taveta, and planted coffee and

wheat to prove the wealth of the area. He did not find the support from the British Council in Zanzibar and his 'treaty' was not ratified. He left his small colony in 1884.

Following the same trend Carl Peters and two other Germans, members of the new Society for German Colonisation, arrived in Zanzibar in disguise from where they moved to the mainland and quickly got many chiefs to sign treaties of alliance with Germany. They then returned to Germany and sought the German government to ratify those treaties, which greatly influenced what is called the "Partition of Africa"

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The Partition of Africa and the 'Lunatic Express' - 1884 to 1902

International Background:

The new nations emerging in Europe, mainly Germany and Italy, wished to be at par with colonial leaders Britain and France which created a struggle for colonial possessions world-wide and particularly in Africa.

The French and Belgian governments were alarmed at the expansion activity of the British and looked for support in the Germans. Chancellor Bismarck proposed to have a conference in Berlin in order to avoid war which was held in Berlin in November 1884. The powers represented agreed to divided Africa into 'spheres of influence'. The British were not amused by the challenge of other nations taking what they thought could threaten their world position. In 1885 Germany, through the work of Carl Peters had taken virtually control of what is now Tanzania. A protest from the sultan of Zanzibar was replied by the presence of German battleships at the port of Zanzibar.

The attraction: Uganda and Zanzibar

Now the British were ready to follow the advice of the businessmen Mackinnon and Johnston. Mackinnon confirmed the early treaties Johnston had signed around Kilimanjaro. The government approved those treaties and held a conference with the Germans in October 1886 to present a common front to the sultan of Zanzibar. In the treaty the British received the area north of an imaginary line from the mouth of the river Uмба to Lake Victoria, and the Germans the area south of that river.

In 1887 William Mackinnon formed the British East Africa Association to trade in the mainland and the Germans in that same year formed the Witu company.

In 1888 the company changed its name and was given the royal charter as Imperial British East Africa Company. The company pursued the annexation of the coastal ports in the north (Italy was also interested in these ports) which was achieved. The British Government then requested the Company to enlist Frederick Lugard, an ex-Indian army officer, to ensure that nearby Uganda also come under British authority.

At the same time that the British Government started talks in 1890 with the Germans to clarify the boundaries. In the agreement signed after the talks, Germany recognised Uganda as part of the British area of influence, accepted a British protectorate over Zanzibar and Pemba. Germany got the coast of Tanganyika, a strip of land on the shores of Lake Tanganyika

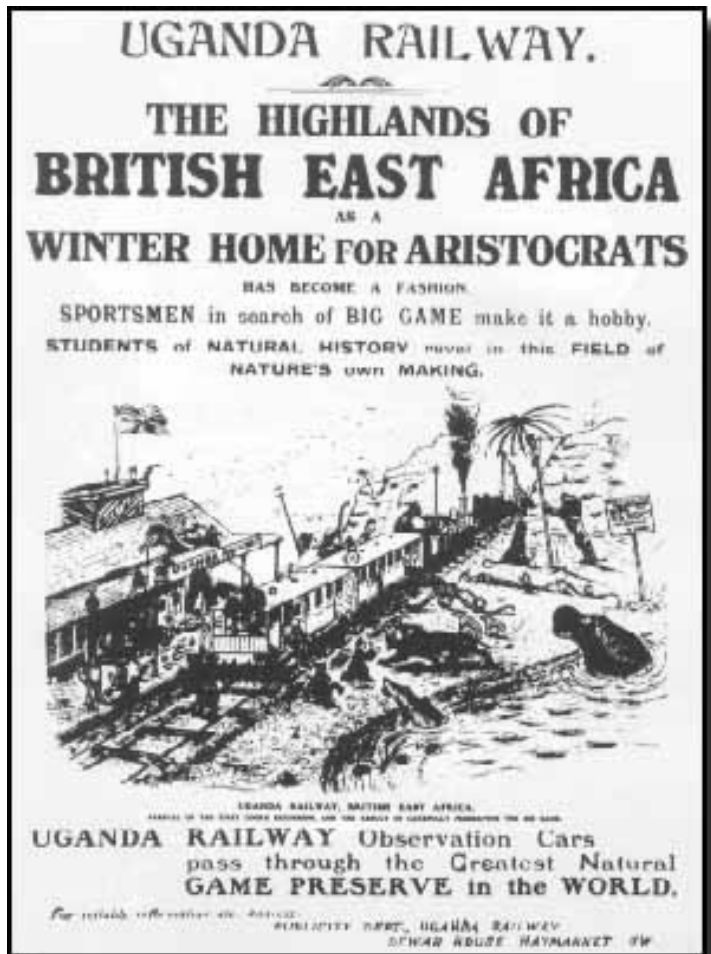
and islands in the North Sea. The partition of East Africa was completed. Now both companies set to exploit their territories.

Kenya: created by a railway....:

It was decided to build a railway from Uganda to the coast. The tract of land between the coast and the protectorate of Uganda was a wasteland for the British Government but it needed some legal protection and some administration to ensure easy transport to Uganda.

On 1st July 1895 the area from the coast strip to the Rift Valley was declared the British East Africa Protectorate. Uganda and the coast were the only points of attraction for the colonial powers in East Africa. They had few people, good land, and both economic and strategic importance. The land in between had such little interest that it was administered from Zanzibar. Its only value was that of providing the shorter route between the coast and Uganda. The travel, though, was difficult due to the aridity, lack of resources and lack of security, both because of wild animals and hostile tribes.

The Imperial British East Africa Company had the burden of keeping the route open. For this they had to have manned forts along the route. Each of these would require some 2,000 manloads a year. It is no wonder that Mackinnon advocated from the very beginning the construction of a railway. He surveyed the land and built a small track in Mombasa to entice businessmen and government officials to back his project. He did not succeed since it was only a 'lunatic' dream; a railway going through non existing towns, to non existing town, over 1,000 Km of inhospitable territory, to carry no wealth. Nevertheless in 1894 the madness was approved and the construction of the Lunatic Express began.



Construction of the railway

The construction was fast in spite of the delays due to malaria, man-eaters and looting and attacks from hostile tribes. The sleepers had to be made out of steel, since wood was eaten by hungry termites. The track had to go up to 1,150 metres, cross the Equator, go down the rift valley and climb it back in drops of 600 metres, and cross a 160 kilometres swamp. It was a human and engineering master piece which still surprises us to this day. On December 20th, 1901 the last key was placed on the shores of Lake Victoria by the wife of the chief engineer Ronald Preston.



The lunatic express

One of the first British administrators posted to Nairobi wrote that "it is not an uncommon thing for a line to open up a country, but this line has literally created a country". And he was absolutely right. The boundary with the Uganda protectorate was changed to place the entire railway line under a single administration, the main towns of Kenya except for Mombasa, had its origins in railway depots: Nairobi was an unhealthy swamp until the chief engineer decided it was the best place, almost midway, to have the central depot before climbing the escarpment. Nakuru, Kisumu and later Eldoret, also owe their status and growth to the railway. Many of the Indian artisans and labour imported to build the railway in absence of a local labour force remained after the completion of the line and became an important source of economic development and cultural and religious diversity which still characterises Kenya. The railway also gave the opportunity for Europeans to migrate to the new open land. At the beginning this was done only by pioneers or those who came to benefit from the hunting and adventure opportunities of the new land.

'Pacification' of the natives

But the railway also produced bitter fruits. It also resulted in the spilling of blood, African blood. To build the railway peace had to be maintained along the route and that meant that forts had to be built. It also had to be supplied and that meant that the company and its soldiers would either steal from the people whose land it went through or they would trade with them on unfavourable terms.

The Giriama, the Taita, the Kamba, the Kikuyu, the Kisii, the Nandi and the Elgeyo were all the receivers of brutal and vicious 'patrols' which many times ruthlessly killed men and women and exterminated their stock. These were the few tribes that resisted the intrusion of the railway into their land. The Nandi waged a memorable guerrilla comparing for over ten years against the best that could be brought against them until, in a final act of treachery, their leader, Koitalel, was shot during peace talks. The British paradoxically called it 'pacification' but there was nothing peaceful about it.

Pioneers and White Hunters 1902 to 1931



Joseph Thompson in a sketch from "Walk Through Masai Land"

The Railway: cash crops and settlement

The Uganda Railway dominated early British policy in Kenya. When the railway had been completed, the next step was to make it profitable. The only way to do this was to fill it with freight which meant commodities had to be exported through Mombasa. Unfortunately the land was not rich in minerals or other natural primary resources. Only farming on a large scale could provide the volume of freight needed for the railway to pay for itself. This need for production sparked a policy of luring visitors and settlers to the Kenyan highlands.

The good nature of land in the Kenyan highlands was praised by most of those who travelled to Uganda. The land also was largely uninhabited due to the tribal clashes of the period which usually left large areas depopulated and also because traditional pastoralism, the main economic pursuit of most tribes, required large grazing areas. The British government decided to offer land at very cheap rates for those interested in settling in Kenya. The response was not too enthusiastic at first since East Africa had little to offer but insecurity,

hard work, no comfort, no workforce and plenty of health hazards. Nevertheless some people ventured, these were the pioneers.

One of them, "Pop" Binks bought 160 acres not far from Nairobi. One of the conditions to get the free hold was to put into cultivation 16 acres each year. Binks tried this but his produce could not be sold for lack of market. Eventually he gave up farming and started a business in Nairobi.

The most determined and successful of all pioneers, and the one who soon became their leader was Baron Delamere. His ordeal is beautifully described in the book "The White Man Country" by Elspeth Huxley. Delamere happen to arrive in the highlands during a hunting expedition which started in Somalia. The highlands conquered his heart and he sold his state in England to make his home in Kenya. He invested all he had in making farming possible in Kenya. He tried all type of ventures, sheep, cattle, wheat, ... etc. and he more often failed than succeed. Nevertheless he managed to adapt many foreign products to the local conditions and moreover created a tradition of research which is prevalent nowadays in Kenya. Ultimately two crops prevailed: coffee and tea, both well suited to cultivation in the central highland area of Kenya.



An early settler

The impact on the natives:

The successes of Delamere started attracting more and more settlers, which meant more land to be taken from the tribes which originally used that land for grazing. In 1911 the Masai through one of his chiefs, Lenana, agreed to sell the rights to their land and be relocated in less fertile areas where they roam today.

By 1912 the Europeans settled in Kenya were only about 3,000. A special veteran soldier settlement scheme after World War I brought the figure up to over 10,000 who owned the majority of the very fertile land in the highlands.

In order to make farms productive the settlers required labour. Traditional tribesmen did not know wage labour and were not ready for it. Settlers got laws enforcing labour and the 'hut tax' to be able to get the labour they needed, which the tribesmen resented dearly especially the Kikuyu who lived in the heart of the highlands.

The Kikuyu had been expanding even before the Europeans arrived. Now they were confined to 'Reserves'. On top of the other grievances of the harsh tax and labour laws. There were also the racial barriers that were erected in the civil service, in business and in day-to-day life; the economic trap that was leading to increasing poverty from which the strict racial divisions prevented any escape.

White Settlers and the Mau Mau 1905 to 1960

The British had two camps regarding the future of the protectorate and later colony. Many of the settlers believed that the land they had so harshly developed, the roads, railway, towns, etc. which were being made, would belong to them and their children. Kenya will be a white country as Australia or New Zealand. Africans would always be what they were, good natured, loyal labour. In this extreme position were the likes of Sir Charles Eliot, E.G. Groan and Lord Delaware among many others.

The other camp was represented mainly by British civil servants. They believed that the protectorate would eventually be run by their own people. Amazingly enough Meinertzhagen who was the key man in suppressing the Nandi tribe wrote "the country belonged to African and their interest must prevail over the interests of strangers.". Similarly W. Churchill after an official visit to Kenya in 1907 wrote "discipline, careful education, sympathetic comprehension are all that are needed to bring a very large proportion of the tribes of East Africa to a far higher social level than that at which they now stand." Churchill expressed the government view which was reaffirmed in 1923's White Paper which clearly stated "primarily, Kenya is an African country (...) the interests of the African native must paramount".

After the First World War, Increasing number of Africans, mainly Kikuyus, started working in Nairobi, and were exposed to the urban life. African politics began then to thrive in the urban environment. By the early 1920s several African political associations had been started, including the East African Association, the Kavirondo Taxpayers Welfare Association and the Kikuyu Association. In March 1922 the first violence erupted in Nairobi when Harry Thuku was arrested and deported, with the result that 21 people were killed. This eruption of violence was the starting point in the long and arduous struggle for independence.

In the late 1920s Jomo Kenyatta emerged as a leader of the Kikuyu Central Association, by whom he was sent to England to represent African grievances in the seat of metropolitan power. In the 1930's protest grew and spread to other areas of Kenya with more associations being formed at district level.

The Second World War intervened but before its end the first national organisation was formed, the Kenya African Study Union, later renamed the Kenya African Union (KAU), to back up Eliud Mathu who on 5 October, 1944

had been nominated as the first African Member of the legislative Council.

Many of the African soldiers who returned from the war were disappointed. They had seen the world, they had been exposed to the heroism and weaknesses of many other races. They consider themselves as good soldiers as any other. Back in their home country they did not get any reward. They were even expected to get back to their ordinary rural life, which did not have the commodities and developments they had found in the barracks. They did not even have an opportunity for a better future. Discontent soon became widespread around Nairobi. Strikes and riots became common. The police fired on strikers. In 1946 a group of ex-army Kikuyus formed the 'Forty Group' and started organising violent opposition to the white settlers. They joined other groups and started robbing shops, collecting fire-arms, imposing oaths, and executing as traitors, those who were not ready to follow their fight for freedom. They called themselves the "freedom fighters".



Jomo Kenyatta

Kenyatta returned from Europe in 1946 and took over the leadership of KAU. For the next six years he tirelessly stomped the country to mobilise the people and educate them in the strategy and tactics of the political struggle ahead. He was seen by the Europeans as the mind behind the "Freedom Fighters" tactics, but he always refused being one of their leaders.

The "Freedom Fighters" based their operations in the forests round Mount Kenya and the Aberdares, from which they will launch raids to neighbouring settlers farms, loyalists and sometime police stations. In Nairobi they had many sympathisers who gathered information and money to keep the struggle. They were so successful that in October 1952 the British Governor had to declare a State of Emergency, asked for troops from Britain, and

arrested Kenyatta and 150 other African political leaders.

After several bitter years of fighting the whole might of the British and colonial army in the forests of Mount Kenya and the Aberdares, and after more than 13,500 Africans had been killed and another 100,000 Africans had been herded into detention camps, the British Government, imbued with Harold Macmillan's 'Wind of Change' speech, opened the negotiations that had always been inevitable, with the African leaders. The capture and subsequent execution of "General" Dedan Kimathi in October 1956 was almost the last blow to the Mau Mau.

Officially the State of Emergency was repealed in 1960, when the destiny of Kenya as an independent country was already in the makings of the British Government.

Winds of Change 1960 to 1963 (Uhuru)

After the Second World War, Britain saw the need to change its Empire into a Commonwealth of self-ruling countries. The initial goal was to give self-government but within the Commonwealth of Nations. This reflected the international politics of the Cold War between the United States and their allies against the communist Russia and China all of them trying to win over the alliance of the small nations to be in Asia, Africa and South America.

When Harold McMillan was appointed Prime Minister in Britain, the desire to save costs and boost the damaged British economy, inclined him towards releasing colonies that were a source of great expenditure and hardly gave anything in return. Kenya due to the State of Emergency against the Mau Mau, was clearly unprofitable.

He had the hopes for a peaceful and gradual transition towards decolonization. Nevertheless the pressure at home and in some of the colonies, increased the pace of the process. In 1959 the British government held discussions with four East African governors at Chequers to tentatively agree on the independence dates. They placed the date for Tanganyika as 1970 and Kenya and Uganda for 1975. Lennox-Boyd, who chaired the meetings was an advocate of a multi-racial society for the colonies. This in Kenya will mean the disappearance of the settlers privileges, an increase in African participation and a protection of the Asian minority. In Kenya, one of the settlers shared his view, Michael Blundel, who to the surprise and annoyance of many others founded the New Kenya Group to press for these policies in Kenya. Most settlers did not share the vision of a multi-racial society, not only in Kenya, but also in those countries in which the settlers had established themselves in great numbers like South Africa and Rhodesia.

Since 1954, the Colonial Office had created a Council of Ministers to replace the Executive Council created during the War. It would comprise three Europeans, two Asians and one African. Later in 1957 seven moderate African leaders were appointed as members of the Legislative Council. This measure was not enough since now the Africans were pressing for a proportionate representation. The following year this representation was enlarged to 14 and a new "Constitution" given by the Colonial Secretary Lennox-Boyd which was rejected by the African

members of the Legislative Council.

The African leaders were working on mainly tribal alliances which divided them but moderate people like Ronald Ngala, Daniel Arap Moi and Tom Mboya started joining forces and even seeking assistance of other prominent African leaders. In 1958 Tom Mboya joined Nyerere of Tanzania in forming the Pan-African Freedom Movement for East and Central Africa.

Under the action of the moderate leaders the African representatives agreed to boycott the Legislative Council in 1959 and demand a proper conference to discuss an acceptable constitution for Kenya. Harold Wilson, as prime minister, tried to convince white settlers of the need to integrate the Africans in their countries gradually and create a multi-racial society. He toured Africa in 1960 delivering his famous speeches of the "wind of change". He did not manage to convince many but he publicly stated a policy which was soon implemented, not only because of the British policy but also because of international pressure. The United Nations Assembly adopted a Declaration of the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and the United States, which J.F. Kennedy clearly advocated a policy that "Africa should be for the Africans" and followed it especially in those countries which were not in alliance with the Soviet Union. Another factor that pushed forward the independence of Kenya was the deadline placed to the Italian Government to release the protectorate of Somalia, which happened in 1960.



Announcing Independence

In January 1960, The British Government called a constitutional conference in Lancaster House. The African delegates presented

a united front demanding an early independence and the immediate release of Jomo Kenyatta. Their hopes were not immediately achieved but they got a new constitution which gave them 33 out of 65 elective seats, and the speeding of the transfer of 186,00 acres of land from white settlers to African farmers with funds given by the World Bank. Many settlers lost confidence in the future and quickly sold out their land and possessions and moved to greener pastures.

In 1961 elections to implement the agreements of the Lancaster conference took place. The Kenya African National Union party supported mainly by the Kikuyu and the Luo campaign for immediate independence, the release of Jomo Kenyatta and the redistribution of jobs and land to the Africans. A moderate party the Kenya African Democratic Party, led by Ronald Ngala, while demanding the release of Kenyatta was mainly supported by the smaller tribal groups that feared the predominance of the Kikuyu and Luo and who were more cautious in their political agenda. In the elections KANU won 19 seats, KADU eleven. The European and Asians had reserved seats. Nevertheless Ronald Ngala, leader of KADU, was the one asked to form government due to the refusal of KANU to form government until Jomo Kenyatta was released and because of securing the backing of the New Kenya Party of the white politician Blundell, the Asians and the government officials. KADU managed to obtain the release of Jomo Kenyatta in August 1961.

Jomo Kenyatta was elected to the Legislative Council the following year. He tried to unite the two African parties, but since he could not, he agreed to be the leader of KANU.

In January 1962 the second Lancaster conference took place to which Jomo Kenyatta, now the undisputed leader, attended. A new "Million Acres" land selling scheme was also implemented. A new constitution, this time for independent Kenya was agreed upon, and the calendar for independence agreed and elections planned for the following year.

In 1963 elections, KANU, thanks to the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta won 83 seats of the 124, which gave it the absolute majority. So it was that on 1 June, 1963 Mzee Jomo Kenyatta formed the country's Internal self-government administration amid scenes of unparalleled joy and enthusiasm from the people he had led so courageously and wisely and on such a long and arduous journey. The negotiations took a little while. There was much to sort out on the constitutional and administrative level. But now, at least, the future was clear and it was good to have a

short breathing-space and the chance to participate in the government before taking over full responsibility. But for sure there was no turning back.

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