

## REVIEWS

# A tribute to the Mau Mau

■ **Kimaathi: Mau Mau's First Prime Minister of Kenya** by Shiraz Durrani. Vita Books 1986. Available from Larkin Publications. BCM Box 5909, London WC1N price £3.50 (inc p&p)

Kenya and Algeria were, in the 1950s, the two countries at the forefront in the battle for emancipation from colonial rule in Africa, in what were perhaps the bloodiest and most heroic struggles on the continent. The official hero of the Kenyan struggle, Jomo Kenyatta, who became the first prime minister of the country when independence was achieved in 1963, had been imprisoned very early on in the struggle, as one of the leaders of the resistance to British rule.

What in fact had happened was that the fight for the emancipation of Kenya, led by the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA, popularly referred to as 'Mau Mau', the name of the oath members had to swear upon joining) had, independently of Kenyatta, laid the foundation for the victory over colonialism. The struggle of this army had been so fierce that the British eventually had to give the country independence, even though the KLFA had been forced out of the struggle in 1956. With the radical faction gone, the British could then ensure that the

'moderate' Kenyatta came to power, making compromises with the former colonial power and establishing the most stable and Western-oriented country on the continent. Neo-colonialism took over from colonialism. The story of the KLFA and its leader, Dedan Kimaathi, is told in this booklet.

The official histories of this period, in particular those concerned with the period from 1952 to 1956, tend to portray the freedom struggle as barbaric, sinister and awesome, focusing on, amongst other things, the Oath of Unity which members had to swear upon joining the KLFA. It is a key virtue of this book that it brings out the fact that the KLFA waged a highly organised, consistent and dedicated struggle for national liberation. The demands of the movement were simple: 'Land (and all other national resources) for the people of the country and Freedom to enjoy the products of their labour and to decide their own destiny. The term "Army" emphasises the method to be used in achieving Land and Freedom - through an armed revolutionary struggle.' (p6) The barbarity was wholly on the side of British colonial rule, which used every conceivable method in order to crush the



resistance. The simple facts speak volumes: more than 30,000 Kenyans murdered during the uprising, compared to 100 settlers and Europeans and 2,000 collaborators; hundreds of thousands interned and uprooted.

What was most impressive about the struggle, and this is clearly brought out by Durrani's study, is the high level of organisation, both politically and militarily, of the KLFA. It adapted to illegal struggle when banned in 1950, and to armed struggle after the declaration of Emergency by the colonial authorities in 1952. It was able to procure and produce arms and ammunition; to supply intelligence on the strength and movements of enemy forces; to establish underground hospitals for the

treatment of wounded guerrillas. As similar struggles from Vietnam to Ireland have shown, these are valuable lessons which it will be necessary to learn again and again. Perhaps the supreme moment of the struggle came when the Kenyan parliament was formed in 1954, 'the first legitimate African government of Kenya' (p31), with Kimaathi as prime minister 'The events of 1954 in Kenya were a herald of the events to come in all the colonies: the final independence from colonialism as a result of fierce struggles...' (p35).

The Kenya Land and Freedom Army was finally defeated, outnumbered by the Security Forces with their superior weapons. But in the process it had changed the balance of power in the country. Without its courageous struggle, independence for Kenya, and presumably for many other African and third world countries, would have come much later and at even greater cost. This booklet, along with such classic accounts as D Barnett's and K Njama's *Mau Mau from within*, is a fitting tribute to the pioneers in the struggle against imperialism and their martyred leader, Dedan Kimaathi.

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