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Culture

Information uprising

Never Be Silent by Shiraz Durrani

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Email Printable

JOHN PATEMAN learns how revolutionary publishing was central to the Mau Mau struggle against imperialism and oppression.

This important book is well researched and scholarly, but at the same time written in a popular and accessible style. It tells the inspiring story of the successful Mau Mau resistance movement against imperialism and colonialism in Kenya and how publishing and information were central to this struggle for freedom.

Each chapter follows a common pattern so that the evolution of publishing can be traced through different historical periods and situations. The emergence of an African nationalist movement between 1884-1922 is illustrated through examples of settler, colonial government, church, south Asian and African publications.

The different currents and tensions within these groups is evidenced via their respective publications. For example, the divergence between settler and colonial interests and the support given to the emerging nationalist movement by south Asian publications.

After 1922, there was growing convergence between nationalist and working-class politics and this was seen in the growth of trade unions and their publications.

Militancy on the streets and in the workplace was mirrored by increasingly radical literature, which encouraged the African masses to rise up and overthrow both their colonial and class oppressors.

The striking thing about this little-recorded episode in the history of British imperialism is the sovereignty and independence of the liberation struggle.

Revisionist capitalist historians would have us believe that all independence movements in Africa were organised and financed by international communism.

At the core of Never Be Silent is the hidden history of the Mau Mau revolutionary struggle, the establishment of liberated territories, the Mau Mau communications strategy, oral communications, revolutionary publishing, preparation for the armed phase and the establishment of a people's press.

The Mau Mau were highly organised and carried out their intelligence gathering operations under the very noses of the colonial regime.

Mau Mau seemed to be everywhere in Kenya and the authorities became increasingly desperate to control the situation. This led to the declaration of a national emergency in 1952, after which many publications were closed down, only to re-emerge under a different title.

The aims of the Mau Mau were clear and articulated via a sophisticated communications strategy and a well organised leadership. When it became obvious that armed struggle was the only way forward, these actions were well planned, targeted and carried out. The colonial response was swift and savage, leading to mass arrests, torture, executions and random violence.

What we would now call crimes against humanity and genocide were perpetrated against the Kenyan people, crimes for which there should be both justice and reparations.

No amount of reprisals and arbitrary actions could deflect the Mau Mau from their mission and it strengthened the resolve of the masses who rallied behind their leaders. After such an inspirational model of self determinism and focused intent, it is all the more shocking and shameful that the work of Mau Mau was ultimately undone by the post-independence ruling class in Kenya. Neo-colonialism is always a



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more damaging and insidious offspring than its odious parents, colonialism and imperialism.

But reading this book does not leave you with feelings of disappointment and defeat. Far from it. You come away feeling energised and ready to use the valuable lessons of Mau Mau in today's struggles.

As Durrani concludes, "People struggling to change their society always find ways of establishing their own system of communicating with the people they lead and by whom they are led. Their mission of revolution, of change, of peace, of social and economic justice requires that they should never be silent."

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