

## Letter from Nakuru by William Shepherd

As the carefully nurtured illusion of political stability and national calm is blown to pieces, we *Kenya Watchers* know only too well where things are heading...and who is to blame. Mwai Kibaki, the decrepit but venal president in this tourist paradise rigged the recent elections with a panicked clumsiness that would have embarrassed even our fellow *Africa Watchers* in Zimbabwe and Nigeria. Rail Odinga, his chippy opponent, needed no excuse to call demonstrations that push Kenya ever deeper into the abyss. But these dreary protagonists have not been short of help.

Stanley Murage, permanent secretary at State House, orchestrated the rigging from his place in the shadows. Sam Kivuitu, chairman of the electoral commission, looked first drunk as the scale of the corruption became clear...and then terrified as, flanked by paramilitary police, he endorsed the doctored results. With an unseemly haste that soiled his office as chief justice, Evans Gicheru swore in Kibaki for a second term. And now a shock team is engaged with efforts, quite literally, to crush the opposition.

In the vanguard is Martha Karua, the justice minister. Famously abrasive and thin-skinned, she still bristles over a 2004 scandal when she was held up by armed robbers in the back of a car, in which she had been vigorously debating Uganda with a Catholic priest. Cheated their opponents may have been, but they are themselves by no means beyond scrutiny. Odinga's right-hand man, William Ruto, has a reputation as a bigot as violent as he is ruthless and corrupt. So where are the *Friends of Kenya*?



From Africa came John Kufour, a Ghanian John Major...but without the charisma. He left. The American ambassador, Michael E Ranneberger, first accepted the result. European colleagues said he looked like a fool so he changed his mind. But Washington likes Kibaki. He allows unfettered spooking on the bearded brothers next door in Somalia. When Jendayi Frazer, assistant secretary of state for Africa, arrived to mediate, Ranneberger flipped again: both sides had been rigging. After that he found analysts from Florida (of all places) to say the real result had been too close to call. Sadly the *International Republican Institute* chose the same moment to conclude that the opposition had scored a clear victory.

Then there is the *World Bank*. Like other foreign meddlers, it has a pile of money tied up in projects no one's reputation can afford to see scrutinized. Early on in the crisis, Colin Bruce, the bank's representative in Nairobi since 2005, declared in a confidential memo that Kibaki had won the presidential contest and rubbished *EU* monitors' reports of rigging. There is no truth in the rumours that Mr Bruce rents his home from the president's charming wife Lucy while the bank's office building is owned by one of a Mr Kibaki's golfing cronies.

There was a time when the Brits would have seen this coming, if only because UK companies were in the thick of most the dodgy deals. But stern phone calls was the best that *Whitehall* wonks could muster. There are spooks aplenty but they look after Somalia. Kenya barely features on their radar...other than when comparing notes on the merits of a holiday in Malindi versus a weekend in Lamu. And the real diplomats have been further usurped by the absurd *Department for International Development*. The current high commissioner in Nairobi, Adam Wood, is a former *DfID* man. As old-fashioned political reporting all but dries up, *DfID* is spending more money in Kenya while understanding less and less about the political realities.

Foreign minister Miliband and Africa minister Malloch-Brown are wise to the malign influence of *DfID*. But it has left Britain without an Africa policy and only embarrassment in places like Nigeria, where there is nothing to show for a billion pounds spent.

As for East Africa...once a pearl in the British imperial crown...it's all rather late. The region's problem can be traced back two centuries to when the British, French, Portuguese and Belgians...and Americans...divided up their Africans into house and field negroes...and chopped the Luo peoples living around Lake Victoria into Kenyan, Ugandan and Tanganyikan Africans. What to do?.