

# Nyerere of Tanzania

## by Ralph Tanner

94

Any understanding of this statesman's contribution to a new African ideology of reality and humanity in their political, economic and social doctrines has to be combined with an examination of the background from which he emerged.

Nyerere has been fortunate in inheriting problems which have not been as serious or restrictive of new policies as those experienced by the new presidents of Uganda and Kenya, even though there was the shared inheritance of colonialism, underdeveloped economies overwhelmingly agricultural and the shadows of a British style of administration too expensive for newly independent African states to maintain.

Tanzania's historical background is remarkably free of the problems which continue to bedevil the politics of its neighbours. Tribal differences are minimal and mostly within the Bantu group so that the state has no inherited splits in its structure. There is the national language of kiSwahili, dating from before the colonial period and structured into the administration first by the Germans and then by the British; it is a real medium of communication centred on the towns and as such has associations with politics and progress which have increased its utility.

The capital at Dar-es-salaam on the coast is not dominated by one tribal group and the state had no semi-independent federated kingdoms to cope with; the progressive Haya and Chagga are too small in numbers and too far from the capital to be in any position to dominate national policies. The numerically superior Sukuma and Nyamwezi had neither the economy nor natural leaders to achieve the Kikuyu and Ganda ascendencies in their respective countries.

The progress to independence was without violence—almost a procession of legal changes induced by a minimum of nationalist pressure on the British. The colonial régime had been restrained in its practices by the influence of the United Nations and the absence of a British rather than a European minority which led to the country not being closely administered. There had been no rebellion against the colonial régime after the 1905 Mau Mau outbreak against the Germans. No politician suffered imprisonment during the independence campaign and Nyerere's worst experience of the law has been a £25 fine.

The foolish attempt of the colonial government to give tacit support to the multi-racial United Tanganyika Party unified the Tanganyika African National Union without building up national animosities to fever heat; the former short-lived party was a useful paper tiger.

The country entered independence with a *de facto* one-party system as a natural political development and this position has never been challenged effectively. It is broadly based as a party rather than centred on an educated élite who in Tanzania had almost all entered the civil service where they were debarred from participating in politics by government rules. Its broad base possibly owed more to the widespread animosity to the colonial government's agricultural improvement policies than to independence as an ideal of relevance to the peasant majority.

With this background the country under the leadership of Julius Nyerere was able to enter independence without any need to take action on problems full of the pitfalls of political expediency. His very high personal popularity throughout the country, not noticeably higher in his own home chiefdom of Zanaki, has personally legitimized much of all that the state has achieved and attempted to achieve since independence. Like other major politicians who have received similar university educations both in their own countries and overseas, he took his first degree at Makerere University College, Uganda, and then a master's degree in history at Edinburgh University. After that he taught in a Roman Catholic secondary school not far from the capital. Perhaps this background of few serious political problems enabled him to develop his personality without the necessity of intrigue, forced compromise and arbitrariness which has been so noticeable in other newly independent African states.

One would like to think that there are other factors at work: his continued practice of his Catholic faith and a continuing marriage, combined with a family heritage of some quality. His brother, who used to be chief of Zanaki, is also a man of very similar intelligence and sensibility.

Despite the apparent unity of the nation, Nyerere has been preoccupied with its stabilization and furtherance from the first days of the new state. Perhaps it has been too easily established and he saw in it the seeds of a lethargy destructive of development. His directive to the Presidential Commission on the establishment of a democratic one-party state contained the ethical principles on which the state was founded: no discrimination and no propagation of group hatreds, and above all that each citizen shall have the duty to work.

This process towards statutory unification was interrupted by the army mutiny of January, 1964, which he described as a day of shame for the nation. This resulted in the government taking control

of the trades union movement, affiliated to the Tanganyika African National Union since 1958, and by the creation of the National Union of Tanganyika Employees with the two top officials appointed by the President and the government having financial control of its affairs.

His one party ideology has consistently developed from his earliest statements, as in 'the challenge of independence 1961' when he said: 'Is it seriously suggested that a government can be democratic only if it is rejected by nearly half of the people?', to the 1963 Tanganyika African National Union's Annual Conference when he said: 'Where there is one party, and that party is identified with the nation as a whole, the foundations of democracy are firmer than they can ever be where you have two or more parties.'

His reasoning for having one official party was that by having no official candidates at elections both parliament and administration would be revitalized, in so far as the consequent absence of any need for a party line in parliament would allow free discussion on the implementation of policies which would have been decided at the level of the National Executive of the party. Nevertheless he enjoined the Presidential Commission that there should be another principle, that of 'complete freedom for the people to choose their own representatives on all Representative and Legislative bodies' and that 'there shall be the greatest possible participation by the people in their own Government and ultimate control by them over all the organs of State on a basis of universal suffrage'. There developed the ingenious solution of two official candidates for each parliamentary seat for which there could be a free vote of the electorate. This did in fact revitalize political life at the grass roots level and resulted in the removal from parliamentary life of a number of prominent politicians.

While his style has always been anti-authoritarian—typified by his resignation from the premiership in 1962 in order 'to give the people new confidence in themselves'—he has acted sharply against the university students when they attempted to arrogate to themselves a special position of privilege. As a graduate and a secondary school teacher who resigned only because his political obligations were making regular teaching impossible, he has usually acted with great restraint in the affairs of the University College just outside the capital.

At one time there was considerable pressure from the party and a small group of left-wing academics that the Tanganyika African National Union should have a formal part in the teaching and non-academic life of the College, but, although a conference held to discuss this matter recommended that there should be a change in this direction, the President ignored these results and allowed the College to carry on with its own development without any direct outside pressures.

When, however, the students decided to demonstrate against their future obligation to perform two years' national service on reduced salaries after their graduation, he was ready for them and every participant was sent down from the College the same day without anything being said about the possibility of their ever returning; they were, however, allowed to return after one year if their conduct had been considered reasonable by their local party officials—a subordination which they must have found both grueling and pointed. Perhaps it has been amongst these undergraduates and their forerunners that there is the most dissatisfaction with the country's system of government and disenchantment with the personal image of the President. Possibly such people are more cynical and see in the informality of his contacts with the people a public relations stunt for the enhancement of his position rather than the natural expression of his personality.

He wrote on his doubts about the present system of education in a 1967 policy booklet, saying: 'The education now provided is designed for the few who are intellectually stronger than their fellows; it induces among those who succeed a feeling of superiority, and leaves the majority of the others hankering after something they will never obtain. It induces a feeling of inferiority among the majority, and can thus not produce either the egalitarian society we should build, nor the attitudes of mind which are conducive to an egalitarian society. On the contrary, it induces the growth of a class structure in our country.'

Class interests were not highly developed in the past. Their main form was opposition to the dominance of Indians in trade. This problem was solved by the development of the cooperatives initiated as a national movement before independence and the emigration recently of Indians who had not applied for citizenship. Much of Nyerere's actions, combined with his personal austerity, have been against the development of class differences particularly amongst the political élite.

His lead in cutting his own salary as President was followed by all his ministers and, while not puritanical, the party under his leadership wear austere costumes of a simple uniform cut and discourage members from participating in more Westernized amusements. Ministerial large cars have been given up by all senior officials and there are restrictions on the types of cars which are bought by government or on loans to civil servants. And when many youths carried out public marches for long distances in support of the Arusha Declaration, he did the same thing for over a hundred miles as his own contribution to the country's ideology of self-denial.

Conscious of the corruption and unpopularity of politicians in other newly independent countries, the famous *Arusha Declaration* of February, 1967, was aimed both at development and preventing politicians enriching themselves. In this document the Tanganyika

African National Union stated that no party or government leaders, including their husbands and wives, should hold shares in any company, directorships in any privately-owned enterprises, receive two or more salaries, or own houses rented to others. These are sweeping requirements which led to some resignations but which in the main have been complied with and remain the principles on which the nation's politicians have to conduct themselves.

It is only in his relations with the Zanzibar régime that he has apparently been forced into political actions totally alien to his behaviour on the mainland. The development of Zanzibar from its colonial and Arab subordination into its present state of arbitrary tyranny, has forced him into actions which taint both his private and public position. It is possible that he may not have the strength of mind and position to manipulate and oppose the situation there of law courts without appeal, political trials held in camera and the summary execution of politicians.

While his own austerity has become the example for a top level government wage freeze, he has stated that 'our job now is to make sure that the top wages of Tanzanians outside the Government sector also get involved in the high level wage-freeze'. And he continues: 'The number of people involved at this level is very small indeed. The real problem in Tanzania is not redistribution between the rich and the poor, but a fair distribution of wealth, and of contribution to national expenses, between the very poor and the poor, between the man who can barely feed himself and the man who can barely clothe himself.' He then points out that wage earners are a relatively privileged minority who have benefited much more than the peasant since independence.

His concept of democracy in action has always been much wider than in other countries aiming at socialism where widespread measures of compulsion have been introduced. He stated in his essay on progress in the rural areas that 'people must be allowed to make their own decisions, and therefore their own mistakes. Only if we accept this are we really accepting the philosophy of socialism and rural development.'

His combination of pragmatism and idealism is perhaps best shown in the *Arusha Declaration's* recognition of the limited alternative development strategies available to Tanzania, and how this can be turned to the country's advantage. He spoke on the Purpose of Man, saying this new policy was 'a rejection of the concept of national grandeur as distinct from the well-being of its citizens and a rejection, too, of material wealth for its own sake. It is a commitment to the belief that there are more important things in life than the amassing of riches, and that if the pursuit of wealth clashes with things like human dignity and social equality, then the latter will be given priority.'

His greatest contribution to his country and to pan-African

politics has been his policy that a country which is poor has to develop itself largely by its own efforts and not through any system of relying on the continuance of international charity. The Policy of Self-Reliance states: 'It is stupid to rely on money as the major instrument of development when we know only too well that our country is poor. It is equally stupid, indeed it is even more stupid, for us to imagine that we shall rid ourselves of our poverty through foreign financial assistance rather than our own financial resources. It is stupid for two reasons. Firstly, we shall not get the money. Secondly, even if it were possible for us to get enough money for our needs from external sources, is this what we really want? Independence means self-reliance. Independence cannot be real if a nation depends upon gifts and loans from another for its development.'

This rational concern for development policies in his own country which have a chance of success without humiliation, is just as clear in the major alignment of Tanzania's foreign policy based on a domestic policy of non-racialism. He has retained a British-born citizen as a cabinet minister and has intervened in cases where non-African citizens have been discriminated against, and while the title of the party remains the same, non-African citizens can be full members. He stated this in a 1963 speech in Washington when he said: 'It is true of course that the Union of South Africa is an independent country. But the policy of apartheid which it has adopted is in fact a particularly vicious, and particularly dangerous, form of colonialism. Racialism is based on the same assumption—that one man has the right to determine the limits of freedom for another simply because the latter is physically different in appearance: To the world it is even more dangerous than colonialism, because for all men everywhere racialism and group prejudice offer an easy escape from the real problems of life; it has a long history and appeals to the cowardice of men. We must face up to the world importance of this question. Whatever the provocation, or however great the rewards, a man cannot change his face or colour. For the sake of a cause a man may suffer all sorts of indignities to his person, or even his family, without loss of human dignity or self-respect; but what sort of a cause is colour? I cannot even choose it. And if I am humiliated merely for existing, then I have no alternative but to fight—with whatever weapons are available. Yet this sort of fighting prevents us all—the man who discriminates as well as me—from living a full life, or contributing to human progress. We are not disputing with another country about the organization of society; this dispute is about the humanity of man.'