

Nyerere's Socialism and its Limits

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The greatest influence on Nyerere's political thought was no doubt his reflections on the position of a small insecure tribe such as the Zanaki, where the chief has ultimate responsibility for the future of his people. The next greatest influence was the progressive Roman Catholic theology he encountered at St Mary's Tabora, which stressed the obligations of all to work for the greater good, especially those who are privileged or who have special wealth or talent. After that, Nyerere was influenced by the debates about democratic socialism in the British Labour Party of the 1950s which he encountered at Edinburgh, and then, back in Tanganyika, in his discussions with intellectuals such as Colin Legum and Joan Wicken, particularly about the role of the state in alleviating poverty and inequality. These external influences were anti-communist and non-revolutionary, centred around the provision of a welfare state, with nationalisation as a measure of last resort. It is interesting and probably significant that some of Nyerere's most serious early writing was on the position of women in the writings of John Stuart Mill (written at Tabora) and on the racial situation in Africa (written in Edinburgh).

Nyerere brought these influences together in the 1967 Arusha Declaration which in the first instance was about reducing the privileges and extra earning opportunities of the "bureaucratic bourgeoisie" (this is the term used by Issa Shivji and others – though never by Nyerere himself – to describe the educated elite in Tanzania who inherited opportunities to make decisions and sign contracts and so became the class that could accumulate capital). This was at once followed by nationalisation of the banks, sisal estates and key industries, and then a few months on by the other two key policy papers, *Education for Self-Reliance* and *Socialism and Rural Development*.

But economics was not Nyerere's strongest discipline. Despite his Edinburgh university education, there are few references to Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Keynes or even Arthur Lewis in Nyerere's writings. Had he looked at the problems his country faced more in economic terms, perhaps the nationalisations would have focussed more on generating surpluses for investment, and the rural policies would have given more stress to crop and livestock production and less to living in villages. As it turned out, the real benefits of

villagisation were that villages made it more possible to provide education, health services, and water. Paradoxically, and unfortunately, the structural adjustment policies imposed on Tanzania in the 1980s (admittedly when there was a genuine structural imbalance following the rise in oil prices compared with the prices and quantities of agricultural exports) made it impossible to resource the gains in primary education and health which were achieved in the 1970s.

In the rural areas in the crucial 1967-9 period it was never fully clear what the people were expected to do, beyond living in villages and cultivating an area collectively. As a result some of the terrible mistakes made in other countries were avoided. Tanzania did not create collective farms on the Soviet model, and most production continued to come from individual plots. There was no Great Leap Forward with every village and enterprise given a production target. Nor did it involve elimination of a kulak class, nor a cultural revolution in which rural cadres turned against bureaucrats and administrators. Conversely, many villages were laid out by outsiders who were seldom able to draw extensively on local peasant knowledge of how to minimise risks, lessen threats from pests and predators, make the best use of different soils, and protect against soil erosion or over-intensive use. Agricultural production, the key to survival and prosperity in most villages, largely had to look after itself in the years which followed.

Many large factories subsequently failed, some because it was cheaper to import what they produced than to buy the local products. But in the 1990s other factories and crafts prospered, especially when there was demand for their products in the ever expanding cities, above all Dar es Salaam. Relatively high prices for foods enabled the country to more or less feed itself, despite its population more than doubling. René Dumont, the French agronomist who at Nyerere's invitation visited Tanzania in 1967 and commented in detail on how agriculture was being developed around the country would have approved of most of what has happened in recent years.

So how far does Nyerere's "moral socialism", as Cranford Pratt called it, provide the basis for a modern African state? In one sense clearly not: the basis of Tanzania's recent growth is unashamedly capitalist and individualist. But there are important legacies: an independent-minded judiciary, a willingness to talk about and tackle corruption, the commitments to primary health care and education now again affordable, better roads and transport. This has

taken place alongside the greater exploitation of minerals and the development of tourism – which are now the major local earners of foreign exchange.

If Tanzania is to continue this growth, in the difficult circumstances of a world recession, it will have to invest what resources it can muster with great care, and avoid waste and failed investments. It will need factories that make what its people want and need, and sell them at affordable prices, exporting surpluses to neighbouring countries. It will need to reward food production and ensure that improved seeds and chemicals are available, especially if global warming leads to even more unpredictable rainfalls and threats of desertification. It will need to seek out and develop niche markets for agricultural products overseas which pay high prices, such as the market for flowers, as well as to save energy and invest in renewable sources of energy, and continue to develop the infrastructure of roads, power supplies, telecommunications and water. It will have to accomplish all that without letting too much of its surpluses leak out of the country through exploitative or corrupt deals. So of all Nyerere's slogans and ideas it is the need for self-reliance that is incontrovertible – with the paradox, as in Tanzania in the years after the Arusha Declaration and to a certain extent today – that a country that can demonstrate self-reliance will also be very attractive to aid donors and investors.