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978-0-521-11072-3 - The Critical Phase in Tanzania, 1945-1968: Nyerere and the Emergence of a Socialist Strategy

Cranford Pratt

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1: Themes and perspectives

Political strategies during 'the critical phase'

Early in 1964 Amir Jamal, the brilliant Tanzanian Minister and close colleague of Julius Nyerere, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, entitled a major address 'The Critical Phase of Emergent African States'.¹ The contemporary years are, in his judgment, the critical phase. They are the years in which popular needs, aspirations and demands race ahead of the capacity of the economy and the government. In these years, the divisive forces within society are bound to be powerful. 'In the short run', wrote Jamal, 'the success of leadership will depend on the ability to deal successfully with all these contending forces. In the long run it will depend on the rate of economic and social progress. The critical test is one of being able to reconcile the short-term priorities with the long-term objectives.'²

The two parts of this book are respectively about the ways in which the colonial government and the independent government of Tanzania* hoped to cope with their immediate problems while also pursuing the long-term objectives which they had set for the whole country. This book is thus about *political strategies* for development in Tanzania between the years 1945 and 1968. It is about the ideas which were held by those in power in Tanzania on how the politics of Tanzania should be managed and its political institutions shaped so as simultaneously to meet the immediate requirements of government and to move the society towards the long-term goals which they had defined for it. It is concerned more with their views on how to initiate a transformation of Tanzanian society and on how to rule during that transforming process than with their views on what the society would be like once transformed.

To inquire into the political strategies of both the colonial and the

* Tanzania has had several official names during the period covered by this book. It was Tanganyika until 26 April 1964, when as a consequence of the union with Zanzibar it became the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar. A year later it became the United Republic of Tanzania. The practice which will be followed in this book is to use 'Tanganyika' when referring to events confined to the pre-1964 period and 'Tanzania' when referring to the post-April 1964 period. 'Tanzania' will be used when the reference refers to events, activities or institutions that both predate and postdate 26 April 1964.

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independent governments of Tanzania within the bounds of a single book is not at all to suggest that the winning of independence did not constitute a great advance, universally welcomed, by the people of Tanzania. The colonial administrators' perception of the interests of Tanzanians was encased within assumptions about the legitimacy of their own rule and was delimited in advance by the fact that they were members of a colonial service whose first loyalty was to the imperial power. They were not, and could not expect to be, supported by the increasing numbers of Africans who were taking an active interest in the politics of the colony. Moreover they had to accept that even the acquiescence of the countryside to their rule was rapidly declining. Though the colonial administrators felt a need to enlist popular support they could in fact permit popular participation within the political institutions of their rule only within narrow and ineffective limits.

In sharpest contrast, the nationalist leaders were an integral part of the African community, articulating and providing leadership for that hostility to foreign rule which was stirring throughout the whole country. The nationalists came to power with a popular support that was nearly universal. They assumed that that support would continue. Yet it quickly became clear that democracy, at least through the Westminster-type political institutions which the British had hurriedly created in the last years of their rule, was inappropriate and perhaps incompatible with the transformation which the leaders hoped Tanzania would be able to achieve. Political strategy, the question of how to hold the support and increase the commitment of the masses during the lengthy period of transition to a socially transformed and economically developed society, became an important concern for Nyerere and his colleagues.

Not every government has a set of ideas which can be called a political strategy. Many make little effort to place their activities in a long-term perspective. They have not articulated an integrated view of the longer-term consequences of their present pursuits. They seek to maintain order, to balance conflicting interests and to remain in power. They strive to maximize their own advantage and the advantage of those in political alliance with them. They do not seek to reform or to transform their societies. They do not have longer-term objectives with which the pursuit of their more immediate objectives must be reconciled. In sharp contrast to such governments, the several governments which have ruled Tanzania during the years 1945 to 1968 each had a clear, though different, perception of a different pattern of economic, social and political life for Tanzania. Each sought to initiate reforms which would begin to bring life in Tanzania nearer to its perception of how it wished Tanzania to develop. Each had clear ideas on how the politics of the country could be managed during this transition. They have all had, in other words, a political strategy.

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This distinction between ends and means, between the ideal society and the steps which must be taken to achieve it, obviously cannot be pushed too far. The character of its long-term objectives directly influences the strategies which a leadership chooses, and cannot be ignored in a study which focuses on the political strategy pursued by those with political power. Nevertheless this distinction between long-term objectives and the means chosen for the achievement of these objectives is useful, particularly in a study of the political ideas of men who actually exercise power. For these leaders, and for those whom they govern, the intellectual elaboration of an ideal society is likely to be less significant than decisions about the immediate policies which are needed to promote that idea. The ideals of many highly motivated leaders have been unrealized, not because of any intrinsic faults in their ideals but because of serious errors which they made when deciding how best to move towards their accomplishment.

Political strategies in Tanzania 1945-68

The political strategies which are examined in Part I of this book cover the last sixteen years of British rule in Tanganyika. Part II examines the strategies followed during the first seven years of independence. It concludes with an analysis of the reasons for the emergence of a strong socialist commitment in 1967 and of the political strategy that was integral to that commitment.

During the years 1945 to 1960 the colonial government, with an unexpected disregard for consistency, moved from one strategy to another, giving primary attention first to one and then to another of the pre-occupations which intermittently gripped it. The British administrators were an aloof and superior class, planning the fate of a people to which they did not themselves belong. This detachment did not mean that they diagnosed the needs of Tanganyika dispassionately or with exceptional insight. Each of the strategies followed by the British in Tanganyika was seriously misconceived. Each was flawed by the fact that the British officers who devised the strategies were still primarily the servants of an imperial government; each was flawed by the fact that too many of these officers were unresponsive to, indeed unobservant of some of the most acutely felt needs of Tanganyikans. In consequence, British policies in Tanganyika during the last sixteen years of British rule were marked by sudden fluctuations, by monumental misjudgments and by an absence of political imagination and sensitivity.

The primary focus of Part II is upon Nyerere's political strategy as it developed over the period 1958 to 1967. During these years, his assessment of the policies and institutions which were required in Tanganyika shifted dramatically. Initially, he had felt that Tanganyika had no choice

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but to accept a major dependence upon Britain and to continue the administrative, development and welfare policies which the first African government had inherited from the colonial regime. This strategy was abandoned in 1962. For the next five years, government policy was marked by a sustained effort to lessen Tanganyikan dependence on Britain, by a pragmatic search for solutions to political problems which compelled attention, by a preoccupation with economic development that was not governed by a consciously held doctrine, and by a recurring concern to assert an independent Tanzanian identity in foreign-policy matters. During these years there were few policy initiatives that can be said to have been consciously influenced to a major degree by the political ideas of the leadership. Nevertheless, Nyerere continued to seek ways to bring his fundamental values more effectively to bear upon Tanzanian society. However he was, to use his own phrase, still 'groping forward'.³ Only after a number of false starts did he come to a settled view of the economic and political policies which these values required.

By 1967 Nyerere had come to that settled view. In January 1967, he presented to the National Executive Committee of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) a new and major statement of party principles. The Committee endorsed this statement, which has since become known as the Arusha Declaration. Nyerere followed it with a series of important policy papers in which he discussed the foreign policy, the rural development policies and the educational policies which seemed to be required by this freshly reaffirmed commitment to socialism, equality and self-reliance. By mid 1968 TANU had initiated a major and continuing effort to give effect to these policies and to realize these basic values in Tanzanian society. The result was a government whose policies, style and preoccupations were quite different from those which Nyerere had accepted, not only in the period 1959 to 1962, when the government accepted a close dependence on Britain, but also in the years 1963 to 1966, when it sought a more complete independence.

The Constitution of 1965 and the socialist pronouncements of 1967 have not, of course, closed off creative policy-making nor brought to a halt the further elaboration of socialist ideology in Tanzania. These continue and they may in time take Tanzanian socialism into quite different directions from those which were set for it in the years 1965-7. Nevertheless the political, economic and constitutional reforms and pronouncements of these years are mutually consistent and constitute a coherent strategy. They represent a socialist position which is communitarian, egalitarian, democratic and liberal. It is communitarian in its opposition to private land titles and to the private ownership of the commanding heights of the economy, in its concern to limit the force of selfish acquisitiveness and to promote communal economic activity and a greater sense of mutual responsibilities. It is egalitarian in its wish to limit income

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differentials between the rich and the poor and to avoid the emergence of economic classes in the countryside. It is democratic in its insistence upon a system in which leaders are electorally responsible to the people and in which leaders limit themselves to argument, example and persuasion in their efforts to win popular acceptance of socialist objectives. It is liberal in its belief in freedom of discussion, its scepticism of intellectual elitism and its respect for the rights of ordinary men and women and for the worth of their contribution to public life.

The importance of Tanzanian socialism

Tanzanian socialism is of profound interest far beyond the boundaries of Tanzania for at least four forceful reasons. Firstly, the government has come to its socialist commitments by an unfamiliar path. Tanzania's present efforts to achieve a socialist transformation of its society is not a result of revolution, a military occupation by socialist forces or an electoral victory by a genuinely socialist party. There is no powerful inner ruling group which is united around a consciously held ideology to which each member is deeply committed. There is no aroused and militant peasantry, no powerful revolutionary working class and no prevailing expectation of revolutionary change. Tanzania is now committed to socialism primarily because its national leader came to the view that it was in his country's best interest to pursue development along socialist lines. Many developments made the country receptive to this initiative, but the ideology which emerged in 1967 and which has been of such importance since is not the product of the civil service, the party, the Cabinet or an intelligentsia. It is, to a remarkable extent, the work of one man, President Julius Nyerere. He has dominated the search for the institutions and for the major policies which will achieve a democratic and socialist Tanzania. The civil service and the other TANU leaders have each been responsible for new policies and for fresh initiatives. Nyerere's socialist initiatives would have been impossible without the loyalty and the devoted hard work of many civil servants and the support and cooperation of his political colleagues. Nevertheless, it has been Nyerere's developing perception of the nature of his country's needs which explains the decision of the party's National Executive Committee in January 1967 to reaffirm its commitment to socialism. It has also been Nyerere who has given detailed content to Tanzania socialism and who has made it central to the formation of policy since that date. A study of the emergence of a socialist ideology in Tanzania and of the political strategy required by that ideology is, to an important degree, a study of the development of the political thought of Julius Nyerere.

Nyerere's influence on government policies was all the greater because no body of African thinking on political matters had existed either inside

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the party or outside of it, to provide an alternative to his political ideas. At this time, there were very few Marxists or neo-Marxists in Tanganyika and fewer still who were Tanzanians. Many educated Tanzanians had been influenced by Western liberal ideas and by Christianity but little had been written to apply these values to national politics. As a result, Nyerere's thought was not subjected in these years to any continuing Marxian, liberal or Christian criticism and there was little local exposition of Marxian liberal or Christian alternatives to his views.

The role which Nyerere has played in Tanzania is not unique in the newly independent states of the developing world. In those newly independent countries in which the nationalists were united under the leadership of a single man, this national leader has tended to have enormous influence. His ideology, his aspirations and indeed his personal characteristics have been extremely important determinants of government policies and have had a major impact upon the character of political life in the first years of national independence. A plasticity has marked the thinking of the politically active in a number of newly independent states.⁴ Novel and sometimes highly personal ideologies which have been developed by leaders have received a remarkably swift if superficial general acceptance and have had a major impact upon government policies.

Nyerere has had such an influence in Tanzania. This influence, of course, has not been felt equally throughout the whole range of governmental activities. There have been many developments which are to be explained by quite different factors. Major crises have diverted his attention and the attention of his government from their longer-term objectives. There have been ideologically desirable initiatives that could not be undertaken because of the poverty of the country and its multiple scarcities of resources and trained manpower. There have also been important political limits to Nyerere's influence. On some important matters he has been unable to convince his colleagues of the wisdom of his views. There have been other issues in which his initiative has been blunted or diverted by politicians or by a civil service who have not understood or who have opposed his underlying purposes. Nevertheless, despite all these observations, it is surely true that Nyerere has had an extraordinary impact upon government policy and upon the nation's aspirations and its public ethics. Tanzania might well eventually have pursued socialism without his leadership but it is hard to imagine that without Nyerere Tanzanian socialism would have taken its present form or that Tanzania would have sought socialism in the ways it is now doing.

A second reason for the widespread interest in Tanzanian socialism is that Tanzania is a poor and predominantly peasant society which is attempting to find an egalitarian, socialist and democratic way to develop. With so many examples throughout the third world of the fact that a capitalist pattern of development results in severe class differentials,

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repressive regimes and actual impoverishment for a sizable proportion of the population, the Tanzanian endeavour is of global significance. It is all the more unique in that Nyerere is seeking to achieve socialism in Tanzania without coercion and with meaningful mass participation. How he has hoped to accomplish this, his political strategy in other words, is thus a central factor in the uniqueness of Tanzania's socialism.

A third reason for the interest that is being taken in Tanzanian socialism is that it is a socialist ideology which is genuinely indigenous to Africa. It is not a simple, nor indeed a sophisticated, application to Africa of ideas and techniques which were first elaborated in a European context. There are interesting parallels between Nyerere's position and the position of the early Marx and of some of the revisionist Marxist writings; there are also important parallels between his basic policies and policies in such socialist countries as Sweden, China, Cuba and Yugoslavia. But these are parallels, not determining influences. Nyerere and Tanzania are now paying more attention to these parallels and are learning from them; but the initial elaboration of the ideology was the product of one man's shrewd observation of Tanzanian realities and his sensitive assessment of her needs. Since that initial elaboration, Tanzania has become one of the very few states anywhere in the world which are pursuing independent paths to socialism.

A fourth reason why Nyerere's socialist ideology merits the interest which it has received is Nyerere's concern over the moral implications of the techniques which are chosen to achieve socialism. Marx has written of a 'crude communism in which the domination of material property looms so large that it aims to destroy everything which is incapable of being possessed by everyone'. Marx characterized this as 'universal envy setting itself up as a power' and commented:

[It] is only a camouflaged form of cupidity which reestablishes itself and satisfies itself in a different way. The thoughts of every individual private property are at least directed against any wealthier private property, in the form of envy and the desire to reduce everything to a common level; so that this envy and levelling in fact, constitute the essence of competition. Crude communism is only the culmination of such envy.⁵

This warning that socialists may be motivated by an envy which is but a more intensive expression of the very quality of capitalist society which Marx deplored may well be a particularly appropriate observation in regard to some socialist commentaries on Africa. Whatever the moral quality of life which is expected in the eventual communist society after the achievement of abundance, there is no chance that that abundance can be achieved in Africa for a very, very long time. If techniques of 'crude communism' are used to accelerate socialist change, if for example, the

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greed of men is aroused in order to mobilize them against class enemies, then the result will be an intensification of values which are opposite to the values envisaged for a socialist society. This will surely render more difficult the achievement of a genuinely socialist society. Moreover, if this struggle for socialism is likely to last for several generations, then any socialist who is concerned with the quality of the life which Africans will actually lead in this and in subsequent generations must be as concerned with the quality of life during the transition to socialism as he is concerned with the quality of life in the fully socialist society which he hopes to achieve.

Nyerere is such a socialist. He is striving to begin to realize *now* a society based, as he has said in one of his most reflective pieces, on the ethics of love.⁶ He is seeking to achieve meaningful political participation by peasants and workers *now*. He is striving to promote economic development while yet controlling the intrusion of acquisitive individualism and checking the emergence of class differentiation. He has thus shown a profound recognition of the importance of the way of life which Tanzanians are being encouraged to follow *now* as they strive to build a democratic and socialist Tanzania.

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2: British strategies and African nationalism in Tanganyika 1945–58

An introductory overview

The transition to independence in Tanganyika is often presented as a process in which the colonial government and the African nationalists agreed that the ultimate objective was the achievement of independence but disagreed over its timing.¹ If viewed in this way, the colonial government appears cautious and paternal and the nationalists impatient and brash. Margery Perham, for example, despite the fact that she supported the early granting of independence to the British African territories, nevertheless held this general view of the transition to independence. She wrote in 1961, 'I want to state with all emphasis my belief that once Africans had been fully stirred into racial self-consciousness and political awareness, *prematurely though this may be in their own interests*, there was little more that foreign rulers could do for them.'² Miss Perham would have preferred the development of African nationalism postponed until a later historical period. Had that in fact happened, she feels that these states would then begin their independence with a more numerous educated elite, more developed economies and greater national cohesion. However, once nationalism has become a powerful force, there is no real option but rapidly to concede independence. She applied this general point of view to the specific instance of Tanganyika:

Tanganyika had not only a heavy volume of precedent behind her to carry her smoothly forward to the celebrations of 1961. It had also the status of a trust territory under the United Nations and its destination was obvious almost as soon as it came to be seriously discussed. Even so, there is no more instructive illustration of the power both of external pressure and of precedent than in the way in which leisurely plans for self-government, which would also have preserved a place in the Constitution for the European and Indian minorities, were pushed forward with ever increasing speed to the culmination of complete African majority and one party rule.³

Those who take this general view of the transition to independence tend to attribute the rapidity and the cordiality with which it was