

PM-D Presentation for Panel 1 March 4 2011 ‘Mwalimu: the Man and his ideas’

“I arrived in August 1991 from my posting in India into a very hot, dusty, small Dar es Salaam airport on the far sandy edge of the city. We lurched home over and around enormous potholes to our new family home overlooking the Indian Ocean. The picture of Julius Nyerere was everywhere. I left in July 1994 returning to the airport over paved roads, new businesses going up along the road, and boarded the plane through a shiny new airport. By 2005 on my first return trip, everything looked shiny – high rise office buildings, new shops, traffic jams, massive new slums without power and water service and an even shinier newer airport almost within the city. The picture of Julius Nyerere, the still respected father of the nation, was still everywhere.”

So who was this Julius Nyerere? Julius Kambarage Nyerere was born in 1922 in Butiama, on the eastern shore of Lake Victoria. His father was the chief of the small Zanaki tribe. He was 12 before he started at a boarding school to which he had to Musoma 26 miles away and now a booming mining town on Lake Victoria. With the encouragement and help of the Catholic missionary priests who educated him he went to what was then the prestigious university of East Africa – Makerere where he trained as a mwalimu, or teacher, a title he gave himself for the rest of his life. After teaching for three years he went on a government scholarship to study history and political economy for his Master of Arts at the University of Edinburgh where he encountered Fabian socialist thinking which informed his developing vision of African village socialism in a future independent Tanzania.

On his return to Tanzania in 1953 he brought together different nationalist factions into a single entity he called TANU (the Tanganyika African National Union) of which he became President entered the Legislative Council in 1958 and became chief minister in 1960. A year later Tanganyika was granted internal self-government and Nyerere then became premier. Full independence came in December 1961 and he was elected President in 1962. He stepped down as President in 1985 but remained chair of the ruling party until 1990.

The power of Julius Nyerere over active politics did not fade with his formal retirement. He sat in his modest home on the Bagamoyo Road and contemplated the welfare of the nation like a brooding lion. His signature aging yellow Mercedes was seen around the capital. When gossip of corruption in the senior ranks of the government was growing exponentially through 1993 and into 1994, that gossip also included wondering what Nyerere would do. Could he, or would he intervene, and if so, how? The gossip reached a crescendo when a calming intervention by Nyerere in support of the public good was deemed essential and inevitable. The diplomatic community talked of nothing else during that period only wondering when and how. Suddenly early one morning the yellow Mercedes was seen crossing the Selander bridge on the way to the Bunge. The city stopped – the doors of the Bunge were closed behind him and Nyerere told the assembled members that corruption had to cease. The power of Nyerere was such that his intervention calmed the rising tension and gossip and ultimately led to the beginning of some control over the temptation arising from the new wealth coming in with massive foreign assistance.

In Canada Julius Nyerere was highly regarded by Pierre Elliot Trudeau who oversaw Canadian public investment in Tanzania and CIDA support for the work of many Canadian NGO's such as CUSO. The result of those decisions are the long lasting personal, aid and now massive business ties

between Canada and Tanzania. The legacy of that relationship is one of the themes of today's celebration.

While the legacy of Julius Nyerere is the subject of the next panel and I do not want to steal their thunder, I was asked to say something of his ideas. I would like to touch briefly on **the model of socialism** which he created and implemented for Tanzania. His was only one of several models of socialism which African countries put in place in the years following independence to compensate for the loss of colonial capital and capitalists. Not to be forgotten is that socialism was also the political philosophy of the decade in Europe as well as here in Canada – some of you will recall 'The Just Society' slogan in the 1968 election.

The basic ideas which Nyerere brought together in his political model were informed by his childhood, his years in Edinburgh, his Christian faith and his nationalism.

His implementation of **equality** as he had known it growing up in a poor isolated village was within the framework of fairly heavy handed guidance of the village by the village elders. After a period of inter racial tension he carried this experience of equality into the foundations of the new country of Tanzania in imposing the principle that all second generation Tanzanians born in Tanzania were equal citizens – blacks, browns, yellows, reds, pinks, and whites. The legislation to put this in place did not come through until many Brits and Asians had left the country – particularly members of the civil service which took with them the skills and experience badly needed in bringing to birth a newly independent country. Not even among the black indigenous citizens in Nyerere's years as President was there egalitarian harmony with the imposition of a one party political system and an anti capitalist economy. You may hear more about that during the day if you ask about life on the ground in the days of the ten cell system, or about the forced resettlement of many poor small villages into larger more efficient collectives. Keep in mind that government implemented resettlement is not unknown to Canadians who saw the same policy in Newfoundland under Joey Smallwood, and again in the far north under the federal government. Equality is a loaded word, some are always more equal than others.

Mwalimu was against the accumulation of personal wealth – his guiding vision was that **wealth was meant to be communal as in a family (ujama) at the basic level of African social organisation**, which in the Africa of his day was **the village**. He regarded wealth accumulation as the product of human exploitation. "Socialism is an attitude of mind ... a belief in the oneness of man and the common historical destiny of mankind. Its basis, in other words, is human equality." (*Bukene*, 87) He did not accumulate wealth for his family – to this day his children live the lives of very ordinary Tanzanians. He was unique in this respect among his fellow leaders of post independence Africa.

Nyerere did not believe in wealth accumulation, and therefore did not create a capitalist model of collective agricultural production. He also did not see any need to develop and exploit Tanzania's abundant mineral wealth with foreign investment. I remember him saying that the wealth of Tanzania was safely in the ground and could await harvesting for a time when Tanzanians could do it for themselves. The result was that by 1984 Tanzania was a very poor country with few exports and burdened with a comparatively high foreign exchange debt to cover the costs of imported fuel. By then the rural schools and clinics were hardly functioning, city people were often hungry if they did not have small garden plots, the hospitals, including the national teaching hospital Muhambili, had no money for drugs or dressings; even the power and water systems worked sporadically, etc etc etc. Apart from the duty free stores for those who had access, the small shops, or dukkas, were pretty

empty of basic finished food and household items until after April 25 1994 with the end of apartheid in South Africa.

Nyerere was a teacher imbued with the spirit and **vision of self reliance** at the communal and national level. After the break with British capital in 1965 he radically nationalised the Tanzanian economy in the two page Arusha Declaration in 1967. This was the document which gave substance to the global myth of the pre-eminent role of government in creating social justice in the 1970's. He also believed that education had to work for the common good, and that education was meant to foster co-operation and promote equality within the context of the realities of what was largely rural village based life. His education policies were based on the belief that primary education was sufficient for everyday life, that examinations and grading were not terribly important, and that education should integrate theory i.e., basic literacy and numeracy, with the organisation and practice of self-reliant and productive work.

Nyerere was **a practicing Christian** who saw and followed the ideal of Christ as a selfless political revolutionary fighting against the injustices and hypocrisies of the self interested foreign and local powers of his day. Like Christ he saw himself as motivated by his love for his colonized uneducated people and not by the wealth and power which his political leadership could have brought him.

By 1991 when I came the younger members of the cabinet had begun work on plans for re-investment in basic infrastructure including social infrastructure and by 1994 when I left the first wave of both small and massive private foreign investment was underway, and with that the accumulation of more debts and more corruption which Nyerere had so greatly feared.

When I made my final formal call on him before I left he said to me that while his economic policies may have failed his vision for a self reliant egalitarian united nation had not.

J K Chande's autobiography *A Knight in Africa: Journey from Bukene* is a very easy and informative read on what it has meant to be a Tanzanian caught up in the transitions from independence to socialism to a market economy.