

On Pilgrimage - December 1970

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The Catholic Worker, December 1970, 2, 5, 8.

Summary: Impressions of Tanzanian socialism with extensive quotes from the writings of Julius Nyerere its President. Sees similarities between Nyerere and Peter Maurin's ideals. Calls their New York house and farm a commune and school of non-violence. (DDLW #506).

When I was a little girl of twelve and broke my arm, my dear Aunt Jennie sent me a book a week. Since it was a fracture in three places, and my arm was stiff for a long time, it was a slow recovery and many a book came to me by mail. **King Solomon's Mines, She**, and various other tales about Africa and it was from them that I got my first sense of Africa. Of course later I read about Livingston's explorations and a good deal about South Africa, but one never has any real picture of a country until travel takes one there.

Certainly Dar-es-Salaam, the Arabic name for Port of Peace, was not Africa, not Tanzania, as one of the women I had met kept assuring me, too many times. It was just a coastal city with too many tourists, a few big hotels, good shops, and so on. But just the same, I **have** been to Tanzania.

It was a pilgrimage made because I had read an article by Julius Nyerere in **Cross Currents** in 1968 which showed the common sense, the vision, the assurance of a man of faith and hope in and for his fellow Tanzanians. Since then some of Nyerere's speeches and writings have been brought out by the Oxford University Press in paperback and should be available at most college book shops. I know that in New York one can get it at the Eighth Street book shop.

The Arusha Declaration reminds me of Peter Maurin "making points." He would have prepared some of the talks of this African leader in his phrased writings and given them to us to ponder in relation to the political and social system of our country.

Tanzania is a country in East Africa, south of the equator. Coming from Bombay by plane, we touched Nairobi, Kenya, which is just north, after a five-hour flight, then flew on another hour to Dar-es-Salaam. The East African Airways weekly plane proceeds on to Lusaka, capital of Zambia, whose president, Kenneth Kaunda, is another outstanding leader whom I have been reading about.

We passed the great mountain, Kilimanjaro, cloud-capped with three mushroom-shaped clouds. Tanzania has the highest mountain, (over ten thousand feet) and

the deepest lake, Tanganyika, (forty-seven-hundred feet deep) on the continent. The Congo and Zambia, and lakes and rivers bound Tanzania on the west, and south is Rhodesia and Mozambique, both white-dominated still, and west is Angola, where the struggle is going on between Portugal and her black colony. Tanzania is larger than France and Germany combined and more than six times the size of England.

One day Eileen Egan, who was my companion on this voyage, and I walked along the beach front of the Indian Ocean, which is the eastern boundary, and watched black men calking and repairing their dhows drawn up on the shore. The dhows are Arab coasting vessels made of hand hewn timbers, exceedingly ancient in appearance, with two great masts, the living quarters covered with matting. These fishing and cargo boats sail up and down the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea, and when they are at sea they look like huge-masted row boats.

The park at night is crowded with strollers and street vendors, but in the noon heat during the siesta, which begins at noon and lasts until three, many take their rest on the grass or on the shore. The population of the city is two-hundred thousand but it is wide spread and one does not get the impression of a crowded city. Ninety-five percent of the Tanzania population is rural, agricultural. There are more than a hundred and fifty

tribal languages. Swahili is the common language and most of the children growing up know it and two or three tribal languages besides.

Eileen and I put up at the Y.W.C.A., which was filled with African girls who also knew English; and some of them had gone to Europe and knew some of the European languages. There are ninety-nine Maryknoll sisters in Tanzania, working in clinics and teaching in the schools which they have started and which now have been taken over by the government. Over the years I have known many Maryknoll sisters. Sister Martina, who died July 20, helped us start our first house of hospitality years ago, in Los Angeles, and the leader of the house, George Putnam, became a Maryknoll priest himself and is now working in Kenya, the neighboring country. Sister Xavier, who was a dear friend in Stockton, California and in Chicago, gave me a tape after I returned of the talk Julius Nyerere gave to the Maryknoll general chapter last month. The sisters in the cloister hold us in their prayers.

One of the sisters in Tanzania, Mary Lou Rose, who made the woodcuts in the last issue of the **CW**, was staying in the Y.W.C.A. in a little apartment, and is engaged in illustrating a children's Bible with Tanzanian background. She has been traveling around Tanzania for the last eight years, working in villages, and learning much from the culture of the people.

But this is truly an African country, with less than one percent English or Europeans. The reason I am interested in it, and I think our readers, especially students, should be interested in it, is because of the political and economic policies of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, who was the first prime minister and is its first president by popular acclaim. He has just begun his third 5-year term.

Mwalimu means “teacher.” The English consider him a man who is a political genius.

In October 1959 Nyerere wrote, **“We would like to light a candle, and put it on top of Mt. Kilimanjaro, which will shine beyond our borders, giving hope where there was despair, love where there was hate, and dignity where there was humiliation.”**

At the time of the Kent State tragedy when students were demonstrating all over the United States, I was speaking at a State University. I attended one of the rallies on the campus. The scheduled speakers were speechless, the only action envisioned was violent action, to disrupt the “Establishment” and the action that did actually take place was the momentary blocking of a highway. I am in favor of demonstrations, certainly, but oh, the study which is needed! With what kind of social order do the students want to replace the Establishment?

There is a long section on religion and socialism in the Nyerere book emphasizing man’s complete freedom of religion. **“Man’s religious beliefs are important to him and the purpose of Socialism is Man.”** He goes on to point out that a secular society would avoid interfering with deeply held religious beliefs and customs. “The wearing of long hair, the erection of statues to the religious heroes or saints, the pouring of libations, the ban on music or dancing—all these things appear irrelevant to those who do not follow the religion concerned, but they are important to those who do. And because they are important to these believers, a socialist society will not interfere. It will not force people to cut their hair, nor allow others to be forced to wear their hair long. It will not prohibit libations, although it may ask that they be poured where they will not damage public property.

“It will not force people to dance, even if the society has agreed that its people should do a period of National Service which normally includes dance activity. It will protect the statues from willful damage. It will allow genuine conscientious objection to the bearing of arms, and so on. Always socialism will try to enlarge freedom, and religious freedom is an essential part of man’s liberty.”

“There is no theology of Socialism,” he goes on to say, although “the works of Marx and Lenin are regarded as holy writ in the light of which all other thoughts and actions of socialists have to be judged.” . . . “Indeed we are fast getting to the stage when quarrels between different Christian sects about the precise meaning of the Bible fade into insignificance when compared with the quarrels of those who claim to be the true interpreters of Marxism-Leninism!” But he adds that Marx was a great thinker and gave a brilliant analysis of the industrialist, capitalist society. But “it is unscientific to appeal to his writings as Christians do to the Bible and Muslims to the Koran.”

“Traditional Tanzanian society had many socialist characteristics—all were workers, there was not much difference in the amount of goods available to different members of society. It was a society in practice organized on a basis which was in accordance with socialist principles.”

He goes on to point out how much they can learn from others. “Why should Tanzania not learn from the agricultural communes of China? Their experience could promote thought and ideas about our own rural organization provided we go to learn, and proceed to think—not to copy.”

We visited the University of Dar-es-Salaam, which is situated on a high hill on the outskirts of the city. There are more than a thousand students. “One main aim of our educational system is to prepare all youth in primary and secondary schools, in universities and training colleges, to serve the people. They are required to serve the nation for two years. This is known as National Service and it is for all youth of the country. When they are out in the field or camps they are taught various skills such as carpentry and masonry, mechanics and agriculture.”

“The society has agreed that its people should do a period of national service” is the way President Nyerere put it in his talk on religion and socialism. As I understood it, it is not required of those students who do not have the opportunity or the capacity for college work. The period of training in camps is five months and after that students go to their jobs wherever they may be, and contribute sixty percent of their wages to the government to build up the educational system. In the field of education, Tanzania is spending twenty percent of the national income. In one year they graduated 320 teachers to go back and serve their area.

One student interviewed by the **Maryknoll** magazine talked of the need for a cultural revival in the rural districts. The most common music, he said, was Congolese and the blending of Congolese and Tanzanian music was very beautiful. “We open our eyes to other parts of the world, especially the teenagers who like English, American, Indian and Arabic music, as well as something most popular today, soul music which originated among Afro-Americans in the United States. Not only does it sound good,” he added, “but we feel we should take it enthusiastically, try to interpret it and have sympathy for our brothers in America.”

Three colleges, Makerere in Uganda, Nairobi in Kenya and Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania, have in the past made up the University of East Africa, and now Dar-es-Salaam is the University of Tanzania with all its own faculties.

The most striking and original feature of Tanzania is the plan to unite the people in the rural areas in **ujamaa** villages. (The last two vowels are pronounced separately, ujama-a.)

I have heard the word often and when I asked what it meant the young students defined it as a relationship—with love towards one’s neighbor—cooperating, but Nyerere

himself calls it “familyhood” and says it is also the Tanzanian word for socialism. The villages are modeled after the kibbutzim of Israel but adapted to African needs and capacities. After I returned from our round-the-world trip I found

an article in **The New York Times** about these villages which are voluntary but capture the imagination of the rural people, whose villages up to 1962 have been made up of separate, and even widely

separated huts. The correspondent of the **Times** calls the new villages socialistic communes. These villages number over a thousand, some with only thirty families and some with more than two thousand. There are said to be a million and a half small farmers on scattered holdings working along traditional lines, but for the most part the rural people are responding to the call of the government to a cooperative life and are building up ujamaa villages and getting schools and clinics, free veterinary service, seeds and fertilizer, and building up of a water supply. One village is described by the correspondent as looking like a progressive oasis in the bush. On one side of the road is a neatly painted school, a small clinic, and the office of the only political party, the Tanzanian African National Union, known as T.A.N.U. Across the way is a larger water tower, a carpentry shop, a dairy and a barn with tractors and harvesters, and there is also a small cashew-nut factory, recently opened.

Eileen and I drove through groves of cashew nuts, which grow as abundantly as the pecans of California. It was on an island where we went to visit Geraldine Munseri, who lives in an old fort which was built in the nineties. (Tanzania was a German colony until the First World War, then English and achieved its independence in 1961.) The fort is battle-scarred, but nevertheless is a very substantial dwelling, which is used also as a clinic. We drove around the island with Mrs. Munseri, through the paw-paw and cashew groves to some well-built centers and schools where we talked to Mr. Mhando, who was head of the MZIZIMA district council. He told us there were sixteen villages which were consolidated into four Ujamaa villages.

The island reminded me of one of the Florida keys I used to visit, where one of my Southern cousins worked in a coconut grove and it was like a colonial setup, what with the few whites with their separate school and separate hurricane shelters, which were equipped in vivid contrast to the buildings provided for the blacks. What a difference between the atmosphere which still is found in many parts of the South and that of this island and these people we were meeting every day!

Mrs. Munseri was very much a leader and coordinator, knowing as she did the more than two hundred women who came to her in groups of fifty with their children to be examined and inoculated and to attend classes of all kinds. Even the children in the primary grades are taught the cultivation of the soil, to start small gardens and care for animals. Mrs. Munseri has ten children of her own, and the little one who clambered up on my lap smelled of fish as though he had been playing around on the fishing boat, which was anchored near the house. The villagers are fishermen as well as farmers, and casava and sweet potatoes are grown, in addition to the nuts and fruits mentioned before.

While we visited around during the week I picked up some biographical details

about Nyerere and found that he was one of twenty-six children born to Chief Nyerere Burito of the Zanki tribe, which was one of the smaller tribes of the country. (His father had other wives, as the custom was, besides Julius Nyerere's mother.) Julius had his education in Catholic mission schools and attended Makerere College in Uganda. It was there that he became a Catholic. From 1949 to 1952 he went to the University of Edinburgh where he took his M.A. in history and political science. He was thirty years old when he began teaching in a village school at Pugu, 12 miles from Dar-es-Salaam. In 1953 he was made president of T.A.N.U.

There are a hundred and twenty tribes in the country, and "the more the better," Nyerere said once. "If only five, there would be clashes. My own tribe consists of 35,000 people and my brother is now the chief. If my brother wanted to be a nuisance to me, he could not be much of a nuisance." And he went on to say after he became president that when his relatives came to visit him they were treated as guests for two days, as was the Swahili tradition, and on the third day, "you put a hoe in their hands."

Nyerere is married, and his wife Maria was taking courses in political science while we were there (in addition to being the mother of eight children). She is a young and beautiful woman and shares her husband's responsibilities and plans. It was said that after their marriage, he sent her to Israel to study the kibbutz system and to learn how to run a poultry farm. As I understood it, there is now a poultry farm connected with the presidential residence.

I have written at length about Tanzania because Nyerere's ideas remind me of Peter Maurin's. The very titles of his speeches attract one and are provocative of thought: Unemployment is No Problem; Agriculture is the Basis of Development; The Importance and the Pleasures of Reading; Leaders Must Not Be Masters; Rhodesia in the Context of South Africa; The Role of Universities; The Power of Teachers; Education for Self Reliance; The Varied Paths to Socialism; The Purpose is Man.

So I repeat, this book is important and stimulating and contains what Peter Maurin would call a synthesis of Cult, Culture and Cultivation. It contains also what he liked to call a philosophy of work. It is also, in Peter's words, "announcing, not denouncing."

It was a most enjoyable visit, that short stay in Tanzania, and it is enjoyable to spread the news of it, and I am enjoying spreading the news of it, together with our other news of nonviolent social change, and of alternatives, such as the strong and steady movement of the organizing which is still going on among farm workers under the leadership of Cesar Chavez and the continuing non-violent movement of the Distributive Workers Union with its black leadership and its black members organizing the unorganized in the South.

News of Us

We too are living in communes, both in New York City, where our house of hospitality could be termed a commune, and here at the Catholic Worker Farm at Tivoli, both places schools of non-violence where young and old, workers and students, men, women and children numbering between forty-five and fifty, and guests bringing it up to sixty-five on many a weekend or holiday. A tribe indeed.

Stanley, who usually answers all our appeal mail, is recovering from a heart attack in our local hospital near Tivoli and different ones of us are sitting around trying to keep up with mail. As for my personal letters, what with speaking at various places last month and more talks coming up in December, I must ask our readers to forgive us if acknowledgements and answers to questions are late in coming. Be patient, and accept our nine-times-a-year **Catholic Worker** issues as long letters, letting you know the news of non-violent revolution in these parts, among these people. Jack Cook, one of our best writers, is out of jail and I hope will take time between talks and travellings to write about teaching in Allenwood Federal Prison and life in the hole at Lewisberg.

To all those who have answered our appeal and have been helping us catch up on bills we want to express our heartfelt thanks and to tell you that it is with love and gratitude that we hold them in our hearts when each evening we say our prayers on First Street and at Tivoli farm. May God bless and sustain us all.