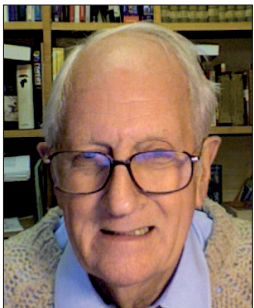


The modest ways of Julius Nyerere

By **DEREK INGRAM**

CO-FOUNDER OF THE COMMONWEALTH JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION (CJA)



DEREK INGRAM is considered to be one of the leading writers on the Commonwealth and is co-founder of the CJA with Patrick Keatley. He has been deputy-editor of the London *Daily Mail*, founder and editor of the Gemini News Service and has written several books on the Commonwealth.

The first thought that comes to mind when I think about Julius Nyerere is that he was always such fun to meet. I talked with him many times during the hectic days of decolonisation in Africa. An early encounter came when Nyerere was visiting Lagos within months of Nigeria's independence in 1960. Its first leader, the unassuming Sir Abubakar Tafewa Balewa, had arranged a light programme for him, and when I called he asked me in to lunch.

A day or so later we sat together on a plane to Accra. He said that when we arrived in Ghana it would be quite different – all pomp and ceremony and a busy schedule. How right he was. As he stepped down on to a long red carpet a uniformed Kwame Nkrumah fervently embraced him and together they inspected the ranks of bright red uniformed Ghanaian troops, exactly as Nyerere had forecast half an hour before. I watched from the plane window and the film I shot lies in a tin somewhere at home unopened to this day.

Nyerere, with his infectious chuckle, ivory-handled cane, and Charlie Chaplin moustache, was never to be underestimated. As independence approached for Tanganyika, and Commonwealth leaders, who included the South African foreign minister, were about to gather for their summit in May 1961, he wrote an article in the London *Observer* saying his country would not stay in

the Commonwealth after independence if South Africa continued to be a member. His move stepped up the pressure on South Africa and led to its withdrawal a few days later.

As with so many African leaders of that time, or politicians at any time, for that matter, Nyerere's grander policies did not always work out. But his promotion of Swahili as a major African language was one of many that paid off and remains an important legacy. Wisely, he always argued that it was not to replace or be at the expense of English, which he said was "the Swahili of the world."

Nyerere's huge legacy was to create a united Tanzania and a region of stability in a post-colonial Africa that has produced far too many areas of turbulence.

His personal example was as a leader who always lived modestly, never wanted to drive about in big cars with huge escorts or to live grandly. The visitor to State House in Dar es Salaam would find no fancy furniture or lavish decoration. Nyerere had grown up simply and went on living in the same way.

His faithful personal assistant Joan Wicken rode to State House each morning on a bicycle or scooter until in later years her back had become so painful he told her he must buy her a little car to get to work in.

Just as it had been when he took the road to power, he never wanted pomp around him. **F**



Nyerere playing the drums with his son Madaraka watching