

Tanganyika's independence struggle

By PIUS MSEKWA

DEPUTY CHAIR OF THE RULING PARTY CCM AND FORMER SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY



PIUS MSEKWA was the Speaker of the National Assembly of Tanzania between 1994 and 2005, and chaired the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's Executive Committee from 1999 to 2002.

Julius Kambarage Nyerere, or as he was often known, Mwalimu (the teacher) was the father of the nation of Tanzania, and has been variously described as a humanist, politician, thinker, and statesman. Mwalimu Nyerere was all those things, and much more. He was an ardent believer in peace, and a unique mobiliser of people. He was a devout Catholic, but a strong believer in the separation of religion from politics. He was a modest man in his personal life, and hated pomposity in his official status. These were the ideals that dominated his entire life as a leader: first as President of TANU from July 1954; as Prime Minister of Tanganyika from May 1961; President of the Republic of Tanganyika from December 1962; and President of the United Republic of Tanzania from April 1964. He continued in office as Chairman of CCM until 1987. Abundant literature is already available on all aspects of his leadership contributions, not only to Tanzania, but also to Africa as a whole. Indeed, the post-colonial history of Central and Southern Africa is closely associated with his name, because of his intense commitment and immense contribution to the liberation struggle against colonialism.

This article will focus mainly on the portion of his leadership work relating to the struggle for the independence of Tanganyika, and his skilful use of his immense powers of persuasion to mobilise the people of Tanganyika and prepare them adequately for independence. He did so by establishing the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) in 1954; which become the mechanism for mobilising and uniting the people of Tanganyika in their demand for independence.

I have had the rare advantage of working in very close proximity to Nyerere for many years. Hence, much of the material in this presentation comes from my own personal recollections of his actions and/or pronouncements.

The struggle for Tanganyika's independence

With regard to his work in the struggle for the country's independence, Nyerere stated in his independence address to the United Nations General Assembly on 14th December, 1961, that "Because Tanganyika was a Trust Territory under British administration, this was a great help in my work to achieve independence for the country, namely, peacefully and through non-violent methods." That statement is evidence regarding one of his outstanding personal characteristics, modesty.

Tanganyika was not the only Trusteeship Territory in the Region. There were several others, whose Trusteeship status notwithstanding, did not follow Tanganyika's path to independence. We will return a little later to this aspect of Nyerere's modesty.

Mwalimu Nyerere's personality and ideals

Mwalimu Nyerere's other outstanding characteristics that guided his actions as a leader, included a selfless commitment to national unity.

In his farewell address to the Tanzanian Parliament on 29th July, 1985, just before his retirement from the presidency, Mwalimu said: "One area to which I accorded the highest priority during the whole of my leadership period was the building of a nation which was truly united, and based on respect for human equality and dignity. I made this very clear in my inaugural address to the National Assembly in December 1962, as I had already done the year before in my independence address to the United Nations General Assembly. Looking back now on my 25 years of leadership, I can say with great satisfaction that we have succeeded in achieving this basic and fundamental objective. We now have a Tanzanian nation that is united, and which respects the dignity of every human being".

He was also an ardent believer in human equality and the dignity of the human being, and consequently hated colonialism and oppression.

Mwalimu Nyerere seemed to believe that all other Tanganyikans shared his own commitment to equality. This is revealed in his own subsequent assessment of the factors that provided the opportunity for his success in the struggle for independence. He said: "It is never really difficult for people to acknowledge their own human equality with other men; and it is easy to demonstrate the denial of that equality inherent in a colonial situation, and the consequent structure of social privilege". It is debatable whether that was indeed the feeling of all Tanganyikans at that time. Nevertheless, he was entirely successful in mobilising them to realise and accept that colonialism was a denial of human equality.

Further evidence of his total commitment to the principle of human equality can be seen in his independence address to the United Nations General Assembly: "The basis of our actions, both internal and external, will be an honest attempt to honour the dignity of man. We believe that all mankind is one,

and that the physiological differences between us are unimportant in comparison with our common humanity”. This statement was followed by relevant action very quickly after he assumed office.

At the very beginning of his leadership of the country, a number of people were arrested and remanded in a cell at a police station in the village of Ilemela, near Mwanza, allegedly for failure to pay poll tax. Because of the exceedingly crowded conditions in that cell, one person died as a result of suffocation. When the news reached Mwalimu Nyerere, he not only ordered the immediate release of all those who had been arrested, but he also abolished the poll tax itself, in order to avoid a repetition of a similar inhuman incident.

Another example of his humanitarian approach took place in January 1964, when he gave temporary residence in Dar es Salaam to the deposed Sultan of Zanzibar. The British government had agreed to give political asylum to the deposed Sultan, who was camping on a ship somewhere in the Indian Ocean. While making the necessary arrangements for the Sultan’s transfer to his asylum home in Britain, the British government requested the government of Kenya to give temporary residence to him and his large entourage, as life on the small ship was becoming unbearable. Kenya refused. The British government then put the same request to Tanzania. Mwalimu Nyerere the humanist and respecter of human dignity, quickly agreed. The Sultan landed and stayed in Dar es Salaam until the day of his departure to the United Kingdom.

Mwalimu Nyerere believed in non-violence to achieve his goals, but he was not sure whether his commitment to wage the struggle for independence by peaceful means would convince the people of

Tanganyika. He once said: “It was necessary for TANU to start by making the people understand that peaceful methods of struggle for independence were actually possible, and could succeed. Their uncertainty was due to their unpleasant memories of the previous Hehe and Majimaji wars, in which fellow Tanganyikans had been beaten and ruthlessly suppressed by the Germans. Therefore, as realists, they wanted to know why TANU thought that we could win even without guns.” But through his immense powers of persuasion, Nyerere was able to convince them on that point.

He held strong religious beliefs, but Mwalimu was committed to the principle of the separation of religion from politics to maintain national unity. Unwaveringly religious, Mwalimu Nyerere was a devoted and practising Catholic. It is probably this factor which made him a strong advocate of equality and the respect for human dignity, and nurtured his advocacy for peace and his utter dislike of violence. During the struggle for independence, he worked very closely with Muslim colleagues, both at the grassroots and national levels. For example, of the four delegates from Mara Region who were selected to attend the inaugural meeting of TANU in 1954, he was the only Christian. The other three were all Muslims.

Furthermore, during the pre-independence period, all schools were owned and operated by Christian or other non-Muslim Institutions. Mwalimu Nyerere realised the dangers which lay ahead because of the segregation imposed by this Christian-based structure of education. Hence, as soon as he obtained the power to do so, as head of the independent government of Tanganyika, he promptly nationalised all non-government schools to give equal opportunities to all Tanganyikans, Christians, and Muslims alike,

Mwalimu believed in non-violence to achieve his goals, but he was not sure whether his commitment to wage the struggle for independence by peaceful means would convince the people of Tanganyika



Julius Nyerere’s independence struggle was based on his vision for the country

He was also an ardent believer in human equality and the dignity of the human being, and consequently hated colonialism and oppression

unhindered access to these schools, thus implementing his sincere commitment to human equality.

As I've said, Mwalimu Nyerere was a very modest man. This is best illustrated in a story that he himself once told a group of us. During one of his trips to New York to appear before the Trusteeship Council, he met a friend who offered to buy him some shoes. They went to a shoe shop, and Mwalimu selected a pair of black shoes. His friend encouraged him to choose a second pair, but he declined. When his friend asked why he did not want a second pair of shoes, Mwalimu replied: "because I have only one pair of feet."

Even after assuming the office of President of Tanganyika in December 1962, among his earliest instructions, issued in July 1963, were directives against pomposity. He said the following in a Presidential circular: "On Saba Saba day, I was obliged to speak out publicly against the growing tendency to confuse dignity with what I consider to be sheer pomposity". He then cited examples of what he meant by pomposity in that context, referring to the "unwarranted singing of the National Anthem every time the President arrives anywhere, even at informal functions". He also referred to the closing of the streets of Dar es Salaam hours ahead of the appearance of the Presidential motorcade. "The President of Tanganyika is fast becoming the greatest public nuisance that the city of Dar es Salaam has ever had to put up with" he declared, and promptly ordered an immediate stop to this pomposity.

Mwalimu Nyerere effectively translated his personal ideals and beliefs into practical political management and

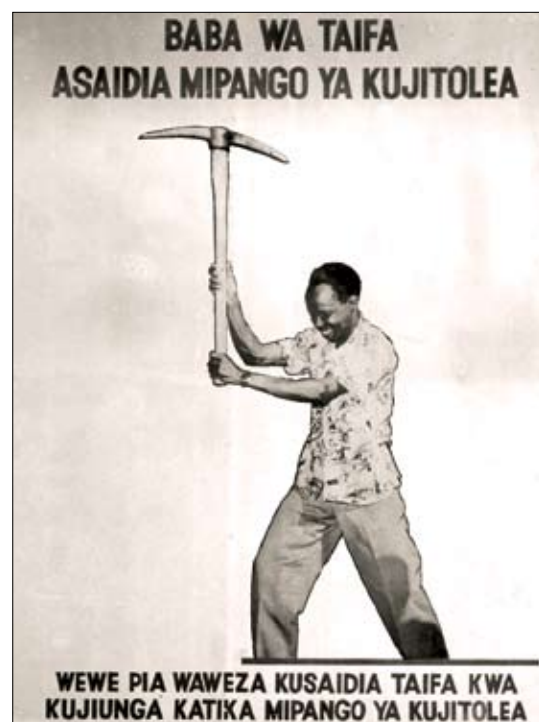
operational tactics, and they also became his instruments for political mobilisation. TANU membership was initially restricted to Tanganyika Africans only. But soon after independence, its membership was made open to all persons, irrespective of race. TANU became a mass party and a formidable tool for the fast-track development of the country and its people. Nyerere used his immense powers of persuasion to mobilise large sections of the Tanganyikan community to join and participate fully in the struggle for independence.

Two examples may be cited here that illustrate Mwalimu Nyerere's exemplary powers of persuasion. The first is his success in convincing the delegates to the TANU annual conference of 1958 to make the difficult decision of accepting the tripartite vote, which had been imposed by the British administration. The TANU delegates were almost unanimously opposed to the tripartite electoral rules, and actually wanted to boycott the relevant elections.

Mwalimu Nyerere had been forewarned about the strong opposition to this particular issue among the delegates, so he went to Tabora fully prepared for the battle to convince them. He first asked the conference to agree to his proposal that he should not chair the conference during the discussions on that agenda, so that he could have the freedom to present his views and to argue with fellow delegates without appearing to take advantage of the authority of the Chair. When that was granted, he proceeded to argue the case for accepting the new electoral rules, and to take part in the elections, instead of staging a boycott. It was an uphill task for him, but he was able to succeed. The product of his success was the famous Tabora resolution of 1958, which is believed to have substantially changed the history of Tanganyika's road to independence.

A further example of Mwalimu Nyerere's ability to argue his case was his success in influencing the United Nations Trusteeship Council regarding the recommendations of the 1954 United Nations Visiting Mission to Tanganyika. The Visiting Mission had recommended that a time-table be drawn up for Tanganyika's independence, and had suggested further that this could be achieved within 20 or 25 years. This section of the report was rejected by the Administering Authority. TANU received information to the effect that the European Press was also campaigning strongly for its rejection. Therefore TANU decided to send Mwalimu Nyerere to New York to argue against that campaign and to try to influence the Trusteeship Council's decision on that matter.

Although Nyerere's endeavours did not result in the setting up of a time-table for that purpose, the fact that independence was achieved a mere seven years later, (and not the 20 to 25 years which had been suggested by the UN Visiting Mission), is clear testimony to Mwalimu Nyerere's immense powers of persuasion. E



Nyerere's poster motivating people to work