

# Julius Nyerere, African socialist

**I have turned "Black World" over to Kevin Anderson this month for the following in memoriam to former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere who died in October.-Lou Turner**

by Kevin Anderson

With the death of Julius Nyerere, the world has lost one of the foremost proponents of African Socialism. Nyerere's humanist vision known as UJAMAA influenced several generations of Africans as well as many throughout the world concerned with African liberation.

In the 1960s, as president of Tanzania, a federation of the former colonies Tanganyika and Zanzibar, Nyerere developed a creative view of African Socialism: "In socialist Tanzania, our agricultural organization would be predominantly that of co-operative living and working for the good of all. This means that most of our farming would be done by groups of people who live as a community and work as a community. A nation of such village communities would be a socialist nation" (UJAMAA: ESSAYS ON SOCIALISM [1968], p. 124).

This was the basis of what was called the ujamaa village. In so doing, Nyerere attempted to build upon pre-colonial communal traditions: "All land now belongs to the nation. But this was not an affront to our people; communal ownership of land is traditional in our country-it was the concept of freehold which had been foreign to them. In tribal tradition an individual or family secured rights in land for as long as they were using it. It became the family land when it was cleared and planted; for the rest of the time it was tribal land, and it reverted to tribal land if the family stopped working it" (UJAMAA, pp. 84-85).

Nyerere's UJAMAA represented the hopes of many in the 1960s who wished to carve out an independent socialist pathway sharply different not only from the acquisitiveness of Western capitalism, but also from the totalitarian forms of Communism in Russia and China. Rather than rapid industrialization, Nyerere aimed for a form of democratic socialism rooted in the village.

## CONFRONTATION WITH SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Raya Dunayevskaya pointed to these developments in her *PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION* (1973), terming them "a confrontation, not only with the economic realities of Africa, but with the self-development of Africans theoretically" (p. 244).

As these villages developed, Tanzania achieved the highest literacy rate in Africa (83%) and also experienced major advances in health care. The single party system Nyerere founded under the Tanzania African National Union (TANU) was hardly undemocratic, since open debate and competitive candidacies were permitted. Nor did Tanzania experience the pervasive corruption of so many post-independence African states.

Nyerere also took strong and principled international stands. Tanzania was in the forefront of the Frontline African States which supported the liberation struggle against apartheid South Africa, white settler-ruled Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), and Portuguese-ruled Mozambique and Angola. From early on, Tanzania also supported Congolese revolutionaries seeking to dislodge CIA-installed dictator Mobutu Sese Seko.

Tanzania welcomed Black revolutionaries from the world over, who debated various forms of Marxism and Pan-Africanism. One venue for these discussions was the Sixth Pan-African Congress, held in Dar es Salaam in 1974.

Nyerere did not hesitate to take stands against other African leaders and regimes. A recent in memoriam statement by the U.S.-based Black Radical Congress singled out his principled humanism and internationalism: "Nyerere demonstrated that killing Africans in any part of Africa should be of concern to all human beings, especially African leaders" (Condolence Message of Oct. 19, 1999).

#### INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONALIST

In 1967, Nyerere supported Biafra's war for independence from Nigeria. In 1979, he sent troops to help Ugandans to liberate their country from the murderous Idi Amin dictatorship. More recently, and from retirement, he spoke out forcefully against the genocide in Rwanda and supported Congolese rebels, first in the overthrow of Mobutu, and then in their efforts to oust their authoritarian and corrupt post-Mobutu ruler, Laurent Kabila.

By the late 1970s, Nyerere came into sharp conflict with the International Monetary Fund and other global capitalist institutions, which wanted Tanzania to adopt "free market" economic policies. Eventually, Tanzania was forced to give up many of its socialist-oriented policies. Earlier than this, however, Nyerere's turn to forced villagization, which he claimed was necessary for education and other forms of modernization, had begun to alienate many peasants, undermining from within the concept of UJAMAA.

As news of his death spread, tens of thousands of Tanzanians converged on the capital, Dar es Salaam, to pay tribute to one of the outstanding leaders of modern Africa. We too mourn the passing and celebrate the life of this unique African thinker and leader, who in his theory of UJAMAA developed an African version of socialist humanism.

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