

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JBG-10  
Tanganyika Chief

c/o District Commissioner  
Biharamulo, Lake Province  
Tanganyika Territory  
East Africa  
3 September 1950

Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 18, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Chief Salvator Ntare, Chief of the Rusubi and Paramount Chief of the entire Biharamulo District, is an Institution of British Colonial Policy. If you have travelled before in the East you will recognize him on first sight as a standard type of tribal aristocrat, the sort of man kept in power by British colonial governments throughout many parts of the empire. His relaxed, easy manner, his calm features, an unwrinkled yet authoritative handsomeness of face along with a flaccid weakness of body, are the distinctive markings. Like the rajahs of pre-independence India, his greeting and handshake are tendered with confident politeness, telling you that though his skin is dark he is, at least, your equal. But his fat hand has a weak grip; when I first felt it I could not avoid the notion that the flabbiness was not only indicative of Ntare's poor physique. To me it seemed symbolic of the current impracticability of the traditional concept of Indirect Rule.

In this District of nearly 5,000 square miles with more than 50,000 natives, Ntare is the senior Native Authority, legally recognized by natives and British alike. Europeans, when they meet him on the street, greet him politely; natives halt, bend sideways and clap their hands under their right ear in the traditional gesture of obeisance.

He wears tailored European clothes and owns a new English automobile, his only item of native dress being a three-headed black palm cane emblematic of his paramount chiefship. He does not speak a word of English, differing in this respect from the majority of his Indian and Malayan counterparts. The silver cross of the converted Catholic is hung round his neck, though he has considerably more than one wife.

Again in the standard pattern of the young rajah, Ntare's favorite diversions are women and elephant shooting. The latter is undertaken in the grand manner, with a huge safari outlay including among its equipment a number of large tents, deck chairs and other camp furniture, and an especially designed eight man litter, by means of which he can be borne on silk pillows through the forest. His safari does not move out until his network of game scouts has located an elephant carrying tusks of trophy weight, in an area of adequate feed so that it will not move on and necessitate lengthy sporing.

When not out after elephant, which keeps him busy for only a month out of the year, he remains at his European-type home near Biharamulo and (according to all the male and female gossips around) he does practically nothing beyond enthusiastically pursuing the first of his hobbies. The European males on this side of Lake Victoria are disgusted, appalled, and envious; their wives are horrified, shocked, and interested.

As the Paramount Chief and the personification of British authority, policy states that he and his native councilors should actually govern the area, with only advice and assistance given by the District Commissioner. Tanganyika Native Authority Memo No. 1 makes this very plain, explaining the need for rehearsing natives for their promised future role of self-governing officials. But hidden in the text is a clause which could render void the entire statement: the D.C. can intervene when chiefly and council functions are not being properly carried out - and for all practical purposes it is the D.C. himself who decides when.

In fact (as outlined in my earlier newsletter No. 8) Ntare never seems to put a hand on the helm. In the various District offices which he legally should control and operate, he is seldom even seen. The Native Treasury, the Courts, the Agricultural Office - all do their business without his help and apparently without his knowledge. Papers are sent up to his house for him to sign, and that is all. The first time the D.C., who then was newly assigned, asked him to perform a routine Native Authority task, he quickly learned Ntare's method of escaping work. In answer to the D.C.'s written request that he go to one of the sub-districts to inspect a government-sponsored charcoal making installation, Ntare wrote a note saying that he was ill. A week later he wrote a note saying that his wife was ill. Two weeks later he sent word that his automobile was inoperative and would the D.C. please provide transportation. Subsequent experience, the D.C. says, proved this to be a standard procedure, with notes delivered at precisely the same intervals. Not very subtle.

This first task, which Ntare finally consented to perform after being provided with accommodations on the rear of a motorcycle (buddy-seat) driven by a Catholic White Father, resulted in a report which whitewashed all the characters involved in a considerable "waste of government funds," according to the D.C. A similar current duty, heading the Native Authority Finance Committee, is being similarly neglected. By virtue of his senior position the Paramount Chief should head the Committee; actually, Ntare has merely sat in on the meetings while a younger sub-Chief presided. Whenever he would be asked for an opinion on one of the matters being discussed, Ntare would always stutter and scratch his head, so that even my pidgin understanding of Swahili would reveal that he had not been following the discussion. He gives every proof of not wishing to cooperate with the British and of disinterest in the present local government setup; and he gives every

appearance of a total lack of interest in his own peoples' affairs. In the experience of the present D.C. he has never once attempted to influence the course of a criminal or civil case against an African. It would seem that he had completely un-identified himself with both government and the well-being of his tribe, preferring to live in isolated hedonism on his government stipend of 600 pounds per year.

Going by every surface symptom, then, one has every reason to sympathize with the present District Commissioner in his view that Ntare is useless or worse, and so profoundly stupid as to preclude any hope of change for the better. Certainly I should be ready to agree that he is useless, from what I have seen of Ntare myself, in the Commissioner's office and the committee room. But in regard to the accusation of stupidity, things are not so clear-cut; and I should now like to violate the resolve I made before starting this letter that I would not waste space in blame-placing or in value-speculations.

In the first place, Ntare is descended from a line of Chiefs who ruled with some degree of competence, even under the Germans. For a while chiefly qualities most needed were those of war-making and skill in Machiavellian inter-tribal intrigue. The Rusubi have not always been a simple and undecisive people, and often in the past they have been clever enough to hoodwink even the Germans. (An important chief once staged a mock funeral to successfully convince the German administration that he had died, continuing to run his tribe secretly until he felt safe in proclaiming his live state and openly resuming rule.) It would take a detailed anthropological survey to reveal whether surface indications, on which the D.C. now bases his conclusions, really mean anything.

I accepted the D.C.'s "stupidity thesis" until the one day I spent elephant shooting with Ntare. When we were on a hillside, looking down into a river-forest more than a mile away, his eyes - which blur and hesitate in reading an administrative memo - first spotted the elephant. His ears, which could never follow the conversations in the committee room, were keen to pick up the first distant tree-cracking sounds of the herd. His judgement - a quality never hinted in his dealings with the D.C. - was present and operative during the hunt. When the spoor disappeared in a maize of older tracks he dismounted from his litter, looked at the ground, catching the slant of tilted grass-blades, and pointed the right path. When the party drew near the elephant he supervised the stalk with a skill and an authority which would have done credit to a combat platoon leader. All of the lassitude and apathy left him; he was the keenest and the quickest to react of the entire party, which included two government game scouts of proven ability.

In the second place, no mere white man is going to tell just how Ntare regards his "responsibilities" or the matter

of 600 pounds annually from the Trustee Government. To his earlier relatives, it was a bribe meant to maintain the peace; later on it was a mouthpiece-fee and a means of getting past accusations of direct, tyrannical rule. It is one thing for the British to say they are anxious to have Native Authority brought to a politically-responsible stage, able to judge right and wrong and to make independent decisions, but it is another thing entirely to make a sophisticated native aristocrat believe this.

(I am not saying that Ntare is "sophisticated"; I don't believe he is; my interest is in the overall implications these speculations have for all Tanganyika Native Authorities, for all Indirect Rule.)

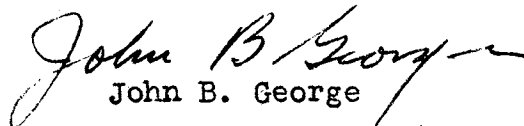
In the third place, we have the British. It is a cliché, among many intellectuals of my acquaintance, that "if I am to be other than self-governing, I should prefer my governing authority to be British." (Though I am by no means ready to concede the blanket validity of such a statement, the records of the French and the Portuguese in colonial government might bear it out.) British policy, of course, is currently nothing more than the stated ideals of the Labor Government, compounded (in Tanganyika) with the past influences of the League of Nations and the current alterations caused by the United Nations and its Trusteeship Council. British practice, however, is a different matter, and it is different for two main reasons: (a) Tanganyika administration, giving broad discretionary powers to the most minor white administrative officials, leaves it to individual Britons to create policy and determine practice on their own: Government practice in Tanganyika thus owes much to British tradition and individual psychology rather than to announced ideals; and many administrative officers, with Oxford-Cambridge backgrounds and aristocratic parentage, have little respect for the Labor Government and its ideas - to a large degree they are "independent operators". (b) The indefinable reverence, on the part of the British, for that figurehead of conservatism known as the Constitutional Monarch: British experience with kings has been pleasant in recent history, and the British tend to minimize the dangers of attempting to apply the concept on foreign soil. At the same time they show inclination to over-emphasize the need of primitive man for a king or emperor institution. In a rapidly changing order, where a people are, technologically speaking, being jumped several centuries inside a few decades, the institution of kingship lends itself to gross misuse. Japan provides an excellent example; and the psychological implications might be the same for a tiny tribal kingship in Africa despite the obviously unfitting analogy. In Japan the existence of a king made it unnecessary for many of the institutions of democracy to develop. In a District like Biharamulo, Tanganyika, with the combined impediments of a king-institution and the strong, patriarchal hand of British colonial government, no native resident really needs to learn to think independently. In

default, the native knows only too well, Government will do his thinking for him. In Tanganyika, Government does everything.

Ronald Smith, my friend, is the District Commissioner. Ntare's uselessness has him bewildered, because all possible successors appear equally bad. But still he keeps thinking in terms of another chief, another king-institution. He points his finger at odd clerks, dock workers, truck drivers, saying without guile that each would make a better chief. But the alternative of no chief at all does not occur to him, even while he is deploring the almost total lack of "public opinion" or "factional interest" or other things that make democracy possible.

The dark-skinned son cannot walk; the leg, dangling useless alongside the crutch, remains thin and spindly long after the bone has mended. And the white stepfather goes on buying new crutches.

Sincerely,

  
John B. George

Received New York 10/6/50.