

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DH - 19
A Light on Kilimanjaro

March 5, 1963
New Africa Hotel
Dar-es-Salaam, Tanganyika.

Mr. Richard H. Nelte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nelte:

To one newly arrived on this coast from West Africa, the most striking thing about Julius K. Nyerere, President of Tanganyika, is the photograph on Page 3 of this newsletter. It is an official picture, used widely on posters and on the 1963 calendar of the Tanganyika African National Union, the governing political party. Probably it means little to Americans used to seeing pictures of politicians wielding all sorts of unlikely tools. But in Africa Nyerere's choice of this photo is a profoundly important symbol. To my knowledge, no West African chief of state has had himself photographed using an agricultural tool: certainly none uses such a picture as his official symbol (and even Nyerere is said to have hesitated over its use). In West Africa, the visual symbols of government all too often seem to add up to this: mobilization for the masses, Mercedes for the ministers.

Nyerere's picture is part of the myth of "self-help", or "nation-building", the program through which he hopes to develop Tanganyika and create in its people a sense of nationhood. Self-help is the term used in English-speaking Africa for what is called human investment in Guinea: mobilizing underemployed people to give free labor on projects of community interest which the state does not have the means to finance. A brief stay in Tanganyika does not justify passing any judgements on self-help, which in any case is less than a year old.

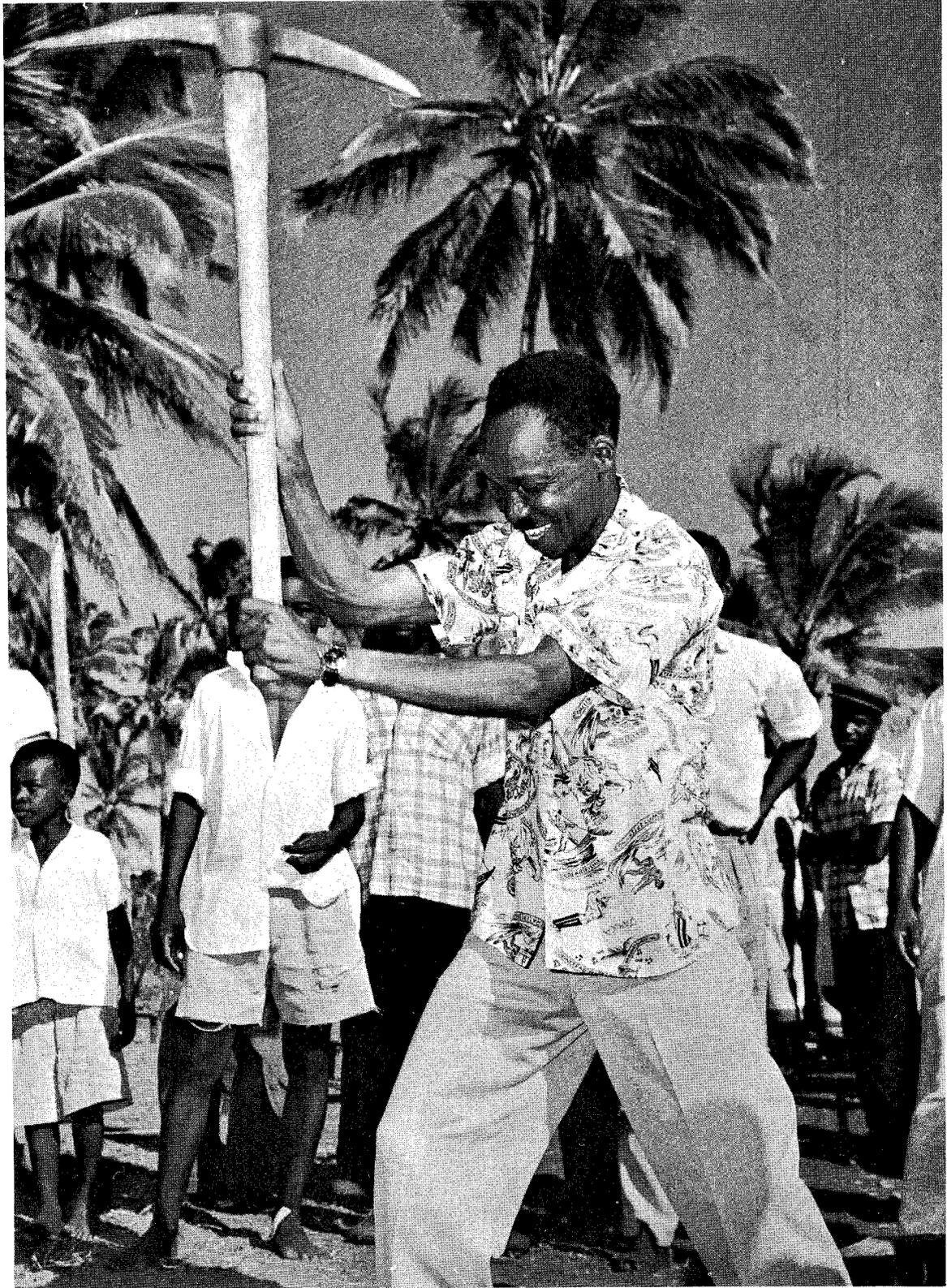
But the Guinean experience shows how self-help can fail. After Guinea became independent in 1958, human investment was ballyhooed as the key to the nation's development. Today little is said about it, few accomplishments are visible, and Sekou Touré has minimized its importance. The published statistics of what human investment has done are widely believed to be fabrications; if one-half the claims were true Guinea would have plenty to boast about.

What went wrong? The theory seemed valid enough, but in fact human investment was in the hands of government officials whose motives and interests were far different from those of the villagers who did the work. People were dragooned into giving their labor for projects that rarely improved their lives and that did not respond to their needs as they saw them. At times they were forced to build a party headquarters or even housing for officials or the military; buildings started in a burst of

enthusiasm were left unfinished or unused. The officials would choose something that showed, usually a building, rather than those less visible improvements, for example in agricultural productivity, that might have enlisted peasant support. (See DH-16 for a description of what the government has done in a typical bush town.) As Touré himself says, the people, once disappointed, are much harder to mobilize a second time. There is an ugly contrast between demanding unpaid labor from underfed peasants to save money for the government, and a government that wastes what money it has on foreign embassies, luxury buying and high-level corruption. Touré is aware of his government's faults - his speeches provide the liveliest criticism of present-day Guinea - but he seems powerless to control the capital city of Conakry, let alone the bush. Though self-criticism is official doctrine, the government propaganda machine spends an inordinate amount of its time discussing world issues or denouncing foreign devils (with some reason, it must be said, for the interventions of France and the Soviet Union are certainly responsible for many of Guinea's troubles).

Once the euphoria of independence is gone, self-help in Tanganyika may go the way of human investment in Guinea. If, as the critics say, many self-help projects are wasted - dams that do not hold water, roads that lead nowhere or fall apart at the first rains - the people of Tanganyika are likely to become discouraged and resistant to government projects. (A certain percentage of failures is understandable, but a certain percentage of successes is necessary if self-help is to become self-sustaining.) What is interesting today is the degree to which Tanganyikan leaders are aware of the dangers - perhaps because they have seen what has happened in West Africa. A self-help official and a TANU leader I spoke with both mocked the grandstanding and corruption of Ghana and Nigeria; Tanganyika is different, they argued, because it does not have as large an educated class intent on imitating European ways. The self-help official, C.D. Msuya, said that self-help projects must be originated in the village itself; the government should only intervene to discourage a project it cannot sustain - the building of a school, for example, if no teacher is available. The government's regional studies give great emphasis to the villages' "felt needs". Vice President Kawawa said, at a self-help seminar in January: "We cannot expect them (the people) to show interest in our big plans unless we have first supported their little ones. If people want water for their cattle it is no good first giving them a school".

Nyerere himself is trying to prevent the division of his country into educated urban elite and rural mass - that is the meaning of his photograph. At every opportunity, Nyerere participates in self-help projects, and not just while the photographer is there; and he sees to it that his ministers do the same. His public image is simple, and the pomp and circumstance of West Africa are notably



lacking here. His speeches - notably his address to the National Assembly in December after a year of independence - are masterpieces of clarity and realism.

At the same time, there is a growing concentration of power here in the hands of TANU, the government party, and therefore in Nyerere himself. Strikes have been banned, and the trade unions, including the agricultural workers union, largely eliminated as an independent force. Recently there has been talk of making participation in self-help compulsory; it is already a crime to oppose it. The one-party system, already a reality in practice, has been made doctrine by Nyerere. His reasoning is that the banning of other parties will make possible free debate within TANU. Party officials say that individual election contests between TANU members will be encouraged; but whether factions representing differing interests will be allowed is another issue. The barrier between the party and the civil service is being eliminated. All power is being concentrated in TANU on the theory that TANU represents the will of the people. This, too, is the theory of the PDG in Guinea: its statutes are democratic, and, unlike a Communist party, it seeks to enlist the entire population as members. But, as Sekou Touré has frequently complained, the PDG has not in fact acted to defend the popular interest; despite its paper powers, the elite governs unchecked. Nyerere seems to be aware of this problem: last year he left office for ten months to devote full time to organizing TANU.

On October 22, 1959, two years before Tanganyika became independent, Nyerere said:

"We, the people of Tanganyika, would like to light a candle and put it on top of Mount Kilimanjaro, to shine beyond our borders, giving hope where there was despair, love where there was hate and dignity where before there was only humiliation."

Such a candle is, perhaps, easier to light than it is to keep burning once the original fuel of enthusiasm is spent. And the winds on Kilimanjaro are strong: a light that depends on one man is easily snuffed out. (Nyerere wept when he heard of the murder of Sylvanus Olympio, whom he greatly admired.) But today Nyerere's candle seems brighter than any in West Africa.

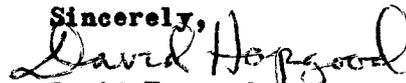
Sincerely,

 David Hapgood

Photo courtesy of Tanganyika Information Service