

African Socialism

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Tom Mboya

AFRICAN SOCIALISM

THE WORD "socialism" is so much in current use that it is worth pausing a little while to inquire what this popular word means. Here in Africa we have States and Statesmen wedded to the idea of "African Socialism" as the goals of the economic and social policies of their governments. President Nkrumah of Ghana has declared that the establishment of "African Socialism" is the target of his government. Over in Asia the ruling Indian Congress is pledged to establish a "Socialistic Pattern of Society" in India.

What is socialism and what is African socialism and what does it mean to us in terms of our short and long term objectives in economics and politics ?

Before answering these questions I would like to take a short detour and examine the basic facts about the current African political situation. I am doing this because I am convinced that only by putting it in its temporal context will it be possible for us to understand fully the nature and significance of this term "African Socialism".

Today Africa is experiencing a critical social, political and economic transition. We are emerging from colonial rule to political independence; we are immersed in a massive transition in which we are seeking new identities at personal, national and international levels. Africans are struggling to build new societies and a new Africa and we need a new political philosophy — a philosophy of our own — that will explain, validate and help to cement our experience. In and around the world today there are millions of people and hundreds of nations engaged in a similar venture; the aims they have in view are not very different from our own, but we differ in tradition and background; their position and perspective vis-a-vis the challenge to be faced is not the same as we have. We are thus cast for our own role and we either live up to it or not.

We have already made very positive beginnings for in the concept of Pan-Africanism, with its insistence on African brotherhood, non-alignment vis-a-vis ideological Power Blocks, the African personality, democracy, etc., we have a set of values and beliefs which give meaning and direction to our political demands and objectives.

You all know that Pan-Africanism is a movement based on our common experience under the yoke of colonialism and is fostered by our sense of common destiny and the presence of traditional brotherhood. I strongly believe that in the field of economic relations we can similarly be guided by the traditional presence of socialist ideas and attitudes in the African mental make-up. When I talk of socialist attitudes those of us who have grown up under the intellectual climate of the Western world will no doubt be thinking of socialism of the Western type. There are, of course, others who will be thinking in terms of a Marxian brand of socialism. As a matter of fact, there is such a tragic orgy of confusion in parts of this continent over this and other concepts that I do wish our people would sit back and

think for themselves a little bit. We have Africans who call themselves socialists — "African Socialists" — but if you scrutinise their thought processes you discover that they are so blindly steeped in foreign thought mechanics, and in their actions they adopt standards which do great violence to the concept of African brotherhood. These so-called "socialists" peddle and parrot foreign slogans and allow themselves to be swept away by emotions which have nothing to do with the noble aspirations of our people. It appears to me that although Africa is getting rid of Western Colonialism and is still fighting against its hangover, known as neo-colonialism, there is yet another fight to be waged — the fight against intellectual imperialism. This fight must be waged now, side by side with the fight for economic independence. It is because of this stark reality that I value the concept of "African Socialism" so much.

When I talk of "African Socialism" I refer to those proven codes of conduct in the African societies which have, over the ages, conferred dignity on our people and afforded them security regardless of their station in life. I refer to universal charity which characterised our societies and I refer to the African's thought processes and cosmological, ideas which regard man, not as a social means, but as an end and entity in the society.

THE ORGANIC TRADITION

It might be argued from what I have just said that African Socialism stands in a class by itself. This is not true. The basic tenets of socialism are universal and we are either socialists by these basic principles or not at all. I have said earlier that socialism is a mental conditioning or an attitude of mind established in order to achieve rational relationship and harmony in the society. In the Western socialist tradition, this mental attitude has taken roots from the thoughts and experiences of the people dating back to ancient times. It began with Aristotle's dictum that man is a social (political) animal which has no potency and no life outside the society. From this dictum has risen a host of economic, social and political thoughts. For example, because man is a social animal his economic plight and destiny is bound up with the functions of the society in which he lives. Therefore every member of a society has certain obligations to the society in which he finds himself and conversely, every society has certain responsibilities towards its members. Also, it occurred to those people that the society is an organic thing with individuals playing the role of cells in the organism. From this premise the inter-dependence of members of the society has been inferred. Thus in the society the rich are rich mainly because the society has made it possible; similarly the poor are poor mainly because the society has made it possible. Therefore if, in any society, a group of individuals control the land, capital, skills and other means by which members of the society make a living, and if they use these means to achieve selfish ends, then an abnormal situation develops in the social organism. The society being an organic thing

if any groups own and control the means by which the others live, the latter literally become slaves, for "he owns me who owns the means by which I live." Furthermore, by constitution, the society is organic and no member of it is independent enough to stand on his own — as a matter of fact "no man is good enough to be another man's mater". Therefore, the best and the most rational way of running a society is to do so in such a way that there is equality of sacrifice in all walks of life, and in such a way as to give to each according to his needs and take from each according to his ability.

This is why in the general concept socialism stands for equality of opportunity, security of income and employment, equality before the law, the rule of law, individual freedom, universal franchise, state regulation of economic life, state control of vital means of production and distribution, etc.

SONS OF THE SOIL

In the African tradition we find an attitude of mind which very closely approximates these which I have just mentioned, though they spring from a different stimulation and promise. In Africa the belief that "we are all sons (and daughters) of the soil" has exercised tremendous influence on our social, economic and political relationships. Arising from this belief is the logic and practice of equality because "we are sons (and daughters) of the soil". Also, arising from the same belief is the practice of communal ownership of the vital means of life — the land. The hoe became the symbol of work, every able-bodied male and female worked. Laziness was not tolerated and there were appropriate social sanctions and ethics to encourage hard work and industriousness. Poverty existed but it was not due to man exploiting man. The social, cultural and economic gap between the rich and the poor was not great, partly because wealth *per se* did not confer as such social and political power on the wealthy people as it does under Western society, and because the operation of kinship helped to spread out the income of the wealthy. There was equality of opportunity — everyone had land and hoe at the start of life. The acquisitive instinct, which is largely responsible for the vicious excesses and exploitation under the capitalist system, was tempered by a sense of togetherness and rejection of graft and meanness. When I think of African socialism I also have in mind those ideals and attitudes of mind in our tradition which have regulated the conduct of our people with the social weal as the objective. I think it is worth while emphasising the fact that these ideals and attitudes are indigenous, and that they spring from the basic experience of our people here in Africa and even here in Kenya. It was not difficult to learn and practise them because they were expressed in the language of the soil which our people understood and not in foreign slogans. They represented an honest attempt to do and practise what was in the best interests of the Africa.

What, then, is the significance of these attitudes vis-a-vis our aims in the economic and political fields in Kenya?

THE KENYA DESTINY

In Kenya, as in the other East African countries, we are committed to one economic destiny, based on an East African Common Market, harmonised financial, fiscal and social policies, etc. The objective of the com-

mon approach of the policies themselves being the achievement and maintenance of the highest possible rate of increase in the standard of living of all our people, the creation of the necessary conditions to this end and the enhancement of freedom and maintenance of order. I would like to submit that without basic loyalty to Kenya and East Africa, the achievement of these objectives can be an impossible proposition. In this respect I would like to point out that the positive attitudes I have just mentioned provide the best mental and human framework in relation to these aims. If we have accepted the challenge of development it would be a contradiction if we adopted conflicting attitudes.

Under the guidance of our socialist tradition I would like to see the Kenya of today transform itself along the following lines.

Since over three-quarters of Kenya's population depends on agriculture and since agriculture is the largest single contributor to Kenya's gross domestic product, the expansion and modernisation of agriculture and relative production must be given priority with three aims in view — first, to expand the employment vane and possibly more food for the country's population; second, to diversify our export crops and expand their production to enable the country to earn more foreign exchange as it is these earnings which will determine to a large extent the volume of imports which can be made available for economic development in other sectors; third, to accelerate rural development; fourth, to lay the foundation for industrialisation by expanding the domestic market through processing, for export, most of the primary products which we now export in the raw state and through manufacturing for the East African Market.

Up to now Kenya's agriculture has depended mainly on European Settler capital, skill and enterprise based on unequitable land tenure. We must rapidly move away from this type of development. Our current experience shows that this concentration on European agriculture (and on the few Asian-owned plantations) together with the concentration of primary industries in Nairobi and in the settled areas, are responsible for the serious problems we are facing today. Today Kenya is facing balance of payment difficulties; the employment structure of our country is unequal and unstable; urbanisation is growing apace and there is haphazard human movement in the country; the discrepancies in the living standards of urban and rural people are widening and there is widespread frustration and social dislocation. We must do something immediately to harmonise the progress of various sectors of our economy and to involve the bulk of our working force in the task of economic and social development. We must stop the present under-utilisation of our rural labour; the present low land and labour productivity prevailing in our rural areas has to be done away with and our rural folk must be helped to live decently. There are several measures we must adopt to achieve these goals — we must encourage better farming methods to start with; we must promote and finance greater investments in agriculture to achieve more rapid progress; invest in irrigation, flood control, land reclamation, provision of agricultural machinery and equipment, research and in improving communication. The devastating droughts and floods of last year have taught us a lesson for they hit our poor rural people harder than anybody else. Side by side with the above measures all efforts must be made to extend vocational training to our agricultural labour

force. Agricultural Co-operatives must be encouraged and land reforms, aiming at increasing efficiency of agriculture, to secure social justice and promote economic development must be launched. In doing all this we must exploit to the full the experience and knowledge already in the hands of our farming communities and augment it with all kinds of agricultural research.

Agricultural development alone is not enough, the development of trade and industry must be accorded second highest priority and the aims of our policy in this respect must be to encourage the establishment and growth of industries which would contribute directly and materially to economic growth; enable our people to participate increasingly in the ownership, direction and management of our industry and trade.

There are various ways in which we can achieve these aims; our government should participate directly in the vital industrial undertakings; it should provide funds for training local entrepreneurs and to enable them to participate in industry. Our government should establish a Development Bank to offer loans to industries and to organise the flow of foreign capital. The government should provide services like research, etc., to industries. Lastly, through fiscal policies, social legislation and appropriate monetary policies, the government should stimulate private investment while at the same time offering the wage earners and primary producers security of income and employment.

In order that agriculture, industry and trade may bear fruits, we must have a transport system which co-ordinates their functions. To begin with, our investment in transport must aim at eliminating wasteful arguments between road transport and railway, etc. Secondly, roads should be re-aligned in pursuance of a policy of balanced regional development. The educational policy should aim at two targets — first, to expand the rate of literacy and deepen the sense of our Kenya and East African citizenship. Second, provide and improve the quality of manpower needed for rapid development. This calls for the expansion of educational facilities at all levels — primary, secondary, technical education, teacher-training and University education. In the fields of health we should tackle the problem in various directions. Health education should be promoted, more doctors and nurses should be trained; there should be more collaboration with the other East African countries in the field of research. Of course, more capital will have to be spent on putting up more hospitals and clinics. Each district should have a well-equipped hospital to help reduce over-crowding in the major hospitals. Mobile health teams for the rural areas should be established and so on.

GROUP RESPONSIBILITIES

There is no end to what our government can do to promote rapid development. But government alone cannot be entrusted with this heavy task. I have pointed out that in African Socialism the society has an obligation too. In the African society of today (and tomorrow) there are several groups of people, i.e. intellectuals, businessmen, journalists, co-operatives, trade unions, etc. These groups can and should play their part in the development of the country. I have already outlined elsewhere what I think should be the role of the press and journalists in a developing country like Kenya*. I have a few words to say about

the other groups. I begin with the intellectuals. Our intellectuals face a grave challenge; I hope they realise it. I have already pointed out that foreign orientation — Eastern or Western — is artificial; we have a tradition and a human base on which to build a philosophy of life. I have already pointed to the Socialist outlook in our tradition. Will the intellectuals pick up the threads and help us defeat intellectual imperialism? The challenge of developing Kenya needs well-trained intellectuals and technicians who are also interested in politics whatever their professional expertise; it needs shrewd economists and sharp-witted, actively enquiring minds with a sense of responsibility — people who can help us to separate the realities of development from the wild dreams of men in travail — men with practical acumen and a strong devotion to the well-being of our country, which stops short of doctrinarianism and fanaticism. Will these be forthcoming?

Now for our businessmen. This group of people are needed to share in the task of development as industrialists and in commerce both in the rural and urban areas. But will they evolve business ethics suitable to this situation while at the same time adhering to the standards of efficiency, initiative and thrift which will enable them as a group to help Kenya make the maximum use of its resources in the context of economic planning? Will they contribute towards the establishment of industrial democracy?

The trade unions have a duty too. The wage-earner has a vital stake in the whole development of Kenya and the desire of organised workers of Kenya to play a decisive role in the economic development of the country is worthy of encouragement. Workers as workers know best where the shoe pinches; our trade unions should be independent enough and should enjoy freedom of association to defend the interests of their members. But as we are committed to economic planning our unions must perform their functions while observing certain obligations. In this context the co-operation of the trade unions should be called for to accelerate the process of capital formation and to lay the foundations of industrial development. The crucial factor is leadership. If our unions are led by patriotic intelligent and dedicated men who understand the long and short term economic implications of the policies of the unions, then all will be well. I know that trade union leadership, like political leadership, confers power on the leaders, but in the context of African Socialism power — all power — must be used for the good of the society.

To return to my thesis, I would like to submit that the challenge we face demands one loyalty and a unified approach. In view of this I would like to remind you of the superiority of traditional African Socialism. It gave members of the society a secure and relatively adequate livelihood, and it gave them a full opportunity to share in the making of the conditions upon which their happiness depended. Each member of the society was able by his own and by collective efforts, to produce for himself the means of self-fulfilment. I commend it to you and to our people in our search for means of rationalising and humanising our efforts to plan our society for economic and social growth.

Let us go abroad to ask for loans and technical skills, not for ideals and ideologies. We must come forward ready to build from our own resources, energy and sweat the Africa of our own vision and dreams, and not the bluer prints of the West or the East.

*See *Transition* 4, — EDITOR