

Africa and Marxism - No. 2 of a new series

Growth and the good relationship

Kenya's white paper
on African Socialism

BELLE HARRIS

WHAT IS *African* about "African Socialism"? The latest publication which uses this adjective in its title is the White Paper issued by the Kenya Government, entitled "African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya." Its emphasis is perhaps different from the other writings; it is no academic exercise, but a pragmatic statement giving long term guide-lines to the policies which *will* be taken to deal with Kenya's outstanding economic and political problems.

But, although it may possess less philosophical content it nevertheless enjoys a remarkable degree of unanimity with the official statements made by other independent African countries, all of whom say they wish to build the "new societies" on the basis of the principles of African Socialism — thus making all but one of the African political leaders declared socialists.

Independence threw into relief the age-old political question, "What kind of society do we want to live in?" In almost all cases (the possible exception being the Ivory Coast) the answer has been the desire to build a society based upon Socialist principles, thereby, incorporating a tacit rejection of the capitalist values associated with the former Colonial rulers and with the values present in the economic relations existing in South Africa and the Portuguese territories today.

The feeling has been that Capitalism is not the most appropriate system to obtain economic progress in their countries, even though it may well be the best system for raising the standard of living in the shortest possible time.

AND HEREIN LIES the basic dilemma, one that is expressed in the Kenya White Paper.

For African countries are now in the process of making a second choice, that is they are now deciding the type of Socialism which they wish to adopt. In its crudest form this choice is expressed in terms of Left and Right, or between Communism and the mixed economies of the social-democratic countries. In its more complex form it means making a decision as to who should provide the necessary capital: private and foreign investors or the people through self-sacrifice and denial, the one system yielding a "mixed economy" the other "state ownership of wealth."

The latest documents on African Socialism are, therefore, important. Although perhaps they do not contain the idealism of the earlier statements, they do contain a statement of intention. In Kenya's case the intention is to look to the Western form of Socialism, to achieve in the shortest possible time a rise in the standard of living by means of combining both private and state enterprise. This looking to the West should surprise no one who is familiar with Kenyan politics.

AFRICAN POLITICIANS HAVE been influenced by a trinity of common events. Tom Mboya the present Kenya Minister for Economic Development, who is said to have been the architect of the White Paper, is no exception. In childhood his tutors would have been Western orientated, his apprenticeship would be the experience arising from the struggle against foreign rule; his university would

be the world — visits to both sides of the Curtain, advice and presents from Peking and America, dealing with the economic realities of ruling a country which is more politically than economically independent. In his case he was obviously impressed by the American way of life. Others have found favour elsewhere or perhaps have chosen the best from all parts of the globe.

Thus, the ideas are at one and the same time international and African; nationalistic and socialistic; non-aligned; pragmatic and doctrinaire!

The African character of Socialism derives from shared experiences and Nkrumah's consciencism. There are several distinctions which encourage a departure from the general theory. An obvious example is that they have emerged from Colonialism with economies vaguely labelled "under-developed" but which break down to the reality of a low per-capita income, low expectation of life, non-industrial economies. As a result the core of African Socialism will be an overwhelming concern with the economic problems of *building* a modern economy rather than with the changing of an existing industrial economy.

Also, Colonialism left behind another heritage. Political independence was gained at a time when a significant proportion of wealth was (as it is now) owned by citizens of the former colonial powers and by other non-Africans. The understandable reaction has been to promote policies which will ensure that the "ownership of the means of production" is in African hands. This factor has been emphasised more than that wealth should be corporately rather than individually owned.

IN TURN, AS THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE took place against an external ruling class, so African countries have in the main reached independence with a united people, a classless society. There is certainly a lack of the group hostility that is so apparent in the West. African Socialists see it as their task to maintain this attitude. Hence, there will be a desire to preserve those traditional relationships of hospitality; of non-acquisitiveness; of social responsibility; rather than to revolutionise and hope for a completely changed attitude with the growth of the new economic order. For they still hope that the attitudes associated with capitalism — of "looking after number one," of forgetting the have-nots, will not have a chance to develop.

Other features of African Socialism are national and international in character, making for a Ghanaian, Guinean, Senegalese, Tanzanian and Kenyan concept of Socialism.

We are aware that Nkrumah regards as fundamental the Soviet and Chinese stress on industrialisation and State ownership. Senegal cannot conceive of a Socialist society which does not coincide with a para-religious feeling of what is sometimes called the Negro Spirit. Tanzanian Socialist society will be a society where there exists an ideal relationship between men, a code of behaviour, an "attitude" which will rule out exploitation, bribery and corruption. In Kenya Socialism will be a society which attempts to promote private enterprise which is not detrimental to the social good. This is a difficult task and it is the purpose of its White Paper to show how this will be accomplished.

The main features of Kenyan Socialism presented in the White Paper include: (1) mutual social responsibility; (2) a range of

controls to ensure that property is used in the mutual interests of society and its members; (3) diffusion of ownership to avoid concentration of economic power; (4) progressive taxes to ensure an equitable distribution of wealth and income.

Their aim is "to grow rapidly; to transform the economy from a subsistence to a market economy; to develop . . . land and introduce modern agricultural methods; to industrialise; to Africanise; to provide more employment opportunities; to have universal primary education; to expand secondary school enrolments; to build hospitals and health centres; and to relieve the housing shortage." The Paper goes on to point out that "to do all of these things quickly and simultaneously would require many more resources than the country possesses."

Therefore the White Paper is concerned with choices, with priorities. The following paragraphs indicate the main policies to be adopted.

1. . . development planning will ensure that the co-operative sectors grow rapidly to embrace a large enough section of our economy to establish a socialist basis for future development.
2. Nationalisation, since it does not always lead to additional resources for the economy as a whole, will be used only . . . when other means of control are ineffective and financial resources permit.
3. A system of traders' licensing will be considered to restrict certain types of trade and business to citizens with a deliberate bias, in the case of new licences, in favour of African applicants.
4. Immediate steps will be taken towards family planning education.
5. Lotteries and gambling pools will be nationalised or strictly controlled by the Government in order to ensure that gains from these sources are invested in Kenya.
6. Businessmen in Kenya, many of whom are Asian, who have sizeable

amounts of liquid assets will be encouraged to invest their savings either in their own enterprises or by making loans. . .

7. The tax structure will be reconstructed progressively.
8. A working party will be established immediately to consider and recommend on forms of land tenure throughout the country.
9. Priority will be given to producer co-operatives in making future agricultural development loans.
10. Measures will be investigated for controlling monopoly profits, discriminatory prices and unfair marketing practices.
11. Legislation for the control of rents and the prices of basic commodities will be introduced immediately.

Many will dismiss these policies as not being Socialist. It can be argued that they would not be wholly unwelcome in some countries which make no claim to being Socialist.

However, it is too soon to dismiss the White Paper as mere rhetoric, or as some have claimed as a means of putting the fears of overseas investors at ease — although it will probably have this effect. Judgement should take place later. The key as to how it shall be judged is to be found in the section headed "Welfare Services." What follows this heading are not details, but this statement "the bulk of Government development expenditure will be channelled into directly productive activities in order to establish a foundation for increased and extended welfare services in the future." In other words it is recognised that Socialism, even the Socialism of a Welfare State, will be a long time coming. It will be the Kenyan young of today who will have to decide as adults whether their parents have built a good foundation for such a society — one that includes the goals of socialism.

AT THE MOMENT NO AFRICAN country possesses sufficient revenue to provide these goals in the here and now. Brotherhood may exist but not brotherhood within a modern economy.

Unfortunately, this presents a basic contradiction, for the very drive for economic progress which is essential to the future existence of socialism causes, indirectly, tendencies which will be pulling African countries in the opposite direction — away from both the attitudes of traditional socialism and the necessary attitudes for the future. The necessity of finding immediate, expedient, solutions to pressing economic problems creates contradictions between theory and practice.

For African countries wishing to adopt socialism face a cruel dilemma. They need above all — capital. But where is it to come from? The per capita income is low, the average throughout Africa is less than £35 p.a. per head of population. To add to this only a small percentage — less than 5% in Tanzania — are wage or salary earners.

Governments must choose. They must decide to go directly to the people and appeal to them to sacrifice part of their small earnings, to curb their desire for greater consumption, so that revenue may be forthcoming to invest in publicly owned projects. Or they must find the capital from foreign governments and foreign companies — leaving the bulk of the nation's capital in private hands — knowing full well that alien values may well be brought into the country by the back door while loans and merchandise arrive through the front.

Most African countries faced with this choice have decided that since their people must put up a tremendous effort as it is even if

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Kenya

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foreign capital is obtained, they cannot be asked to carry the additional burden of self-denial.

Thus, as long as the opportunity occurs Ministers will ask for and accept foreign capital, which will have the tendency to produce the "mixed economy" even though in the long run it will be difficult to abide by the Socialist principle of a "fair distribution of the national wealth" if much of the wealth belongs to private companies.

The choice is not an easy one. It is a choice between raising the standard of living quickly and slowly tackling the question of ownership and distribution. Or, choosing the priority of having the most rapid rate of development possible now.

Have Socialists the right to criticise the Kenyan Government for making the second choice?

IT IS ON OTHER GROUNDS that I think the White Paper is open to word of caution in so far as it includes some statements which seem to be based on questionable assumptions. For example, it says that the "concept of political equality" i.e. where "each member of society is equal in his political rights and that no individual or group will be permitted to exert undue influence on the policies of the State . . . rules out in principle the use of economic power as a political base."

But history teaches one otherwise. Wherever there is a preponderance of wealth in private hands, where there are those who have much co-existing with those who have little, then political corruption takes place, unless there exists specific legislation to thwart it, such as Tanzania's intention in its new constitution to bar any

politician from using private wealth to influence the electors. The White Paper makes no mention of any such legislation and already there are sufficient indications to suggest that the political climate in Kenya is amenable to corruption.

The Paper, furthermore, makes another curious statement, that "individuals derive satisfaction not only from the goods they consume but also from those they accumulate. If human dignity and freedom are to be preserved, provision must be made for both activities."

This is a statement that John Locke of the 17th century would have been at home with — a statement that has always been open to cynicism. As everyone is aware people do not gain pleasure merely from accumulating, from putting more and more money into a box under the bed. It is the usage of the accumulated wealth that raises the important political question and it needs to be answered. Should people be allowed to accumulate if by so doing they create anti-social attitudes or act against the interests of the majority?

Apart from these aspects, the White Paper is a constructive paper providing as it does a new constitution for development. Its honesty will certainly help to fulfil its indirect purpose which is to create confidence in the Kenyan economy and thereby encourage a flow of investment into the country. For by no stretch of the imagination can it be said that Kenya is following the communist path of development — its path is barely socialist. But if by following this path it does encourage economic growth — then it is enough. Whether it will, at the same time, encourage the growth of a future socialist society, the growth of the good relationship between individuals, remains to be seen.



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