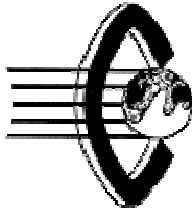


Address by Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere, Former President of Tanzania and Chairman of the South Centre, at the Quinquennial General Conference of the Association of Commonwealth Universities. Ottawa, Canada: 17th August, 1998.



Leadership and the Management of Change.



Photo: Andrew Balfour

Mr. Chairman; Your Excellencies: Ladies and Gentlemen; and Friends.

You have asked me to speak on "Leadership and the Management of Change", and I have been foolhardy enough to agree. But I must make it clear that I have no theory of leadership or of management either. By profession I am a trained classroom teacher. But through an accident of history I found myself at the head of the Liberation Movement of my country, and later at the head of its Government. So I speak to you from my own experience only; it has been long, but still limited. It does not include leading a university!

Change has, throughout history, been a constant part of human experience. But today change is more rapid than ever before; its implications are very comprehensive, and yet its first approach is often imperceptible. Who in an isolated village in Africa could have foreseen the economic and social effects which would follow from the first appearance there of a tin bucket? How many people in a developing nation to-day realise that a financial collapse in a far country may affect their whole livelihood? And how many will recognise the underlying cause of the consequent changes when they do take place? For any society, and for every individual, adapting to change at the present speed is very difficult; yet avoiding change is impossible.

Decades ago, as President of my country, I told Tanzanians that the choice before them was to change or be changed. I was wrong. There was no choice. They had to change, and would still BE changed.

In retrospect, I think that the burden of Leadership was easier for my generation than it is for the leaders of to-day. The demand for change was coming from us - the leaders and people alike. We were speaking on behalf of a united society in demanding an end to the visible, and thus easily understood, alien control over our lives.

Very few of the leaders of the Independence Movements understood that political freedom could be virtually negated by ever-increasing external economic power over us. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana was probably the first of us to realise that fact, with his much derided talk of "neo-colonialism". But even he said "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else will be added unto you".

The present generation of leaders have not only to deal with the effects of the economic realities about which most of us knew very little, they have also to do so when the expectations of the people are higher than the general understanding of what is happening and why. It is not easy to explain to the people why the prices they receive for their cotton, coffee, or copper seem constantly to decrease, while the prices of the things which they need to buy are always going up. How do you explain to an ordinary worker why with the same amount of money he bought more rice yesterday than he can buy to-day? And even if you could explain it, it is not explanation which the people want. They want rice at an affordable price and they want their leader to do something about it.

It was in the wilderness, on the way to the promised land of milk and honey, when the People demanded water, food, or simply a change of food, that Moses experienced the pain of being told that things were better in Egypt. When he cries to God "Lord: What shall I do with these People? In a moment they will be stoning me!" The answer was water from a rock, or manna from Heaven, or quails from somewhere. In the wilderness of globalisation and liberalisation our god or goddess is the callous and uncaring Market.

Yet leadership today is very much about water, food, jobs, shelter, education, and community. It is about organising our communities, and rallying the people to the kinds of action which will increase the supply of these goods and services to the people - all of the people. The people are not fools. When the rains fail, or El Nino causes the floods, they do not blame their government. What they do demand is that their government brings emergency food supplies, or helps them to rebuild a bridge, or do other things by which they can overcome the disaster. But they will not accept an excuse for inaction by the leaders on the plea that the IMF wants their Government to give first priority to the servicing of their country's Foreign Debt.

Organising our societies to achieve post-independence social and economic objectives was bound to be difficult even without the pressures of globalisation and the strictures of the international financial organisations.

The call for freedom from an external power unites all the victims of the system: rich and poor; educated and uneducated; Christian and Moslem; Brahman and Harijan; Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo. Everybody wants their nation to be free, and fights for it, or supports those who do.

Unfortunately however, the call to mobilise our resources so that everyone in our countries can have clean water, education, health care, and a means of earning a living, is in practice not unifying. For in almost every one of our countries there is a rich and powerful minority which is more concerned to defend their own wealth and privilege - and indeed to increase them - than it is worried about the sufferings of the poor.

Tanzania had been independent for a very short time before we began to see such a growing gap between the Haves and Have-nots of our country. We were - as we still are - a very poor country. We did not have a well-developed money-making private sector. Our privileged group was emerging from the political leaders and the bureaucrats, who had all been poor under colonial rule but were beginning to use their new positions in the Party and the Government to enrich themselves. This kind of development would alienate our leadership from the People; yet our overriding need was for the whole nation to work together to fight against what we had named as our three Enemies: POVERTY, IGNORANCE, and DISEASE.

So we articulated a new National Objective. In the Arusha Declaration of Socialism and Self-Reliance we stressed that development is about People - ALL our People, and not just a small, privileged minority. We laid down a Code of conduct for our Leaders. And we set out to try to achieve those objectives.

We had already adopted a highly sophisticated and successful democratic Single Party System. Obviously it was not based on the Westminster model, nor the US model. Nor was it based on the Kremlin model either. We did not extol it for others to follow; but it worked for us. It increased the accountability to the people of our MPs and Ministers while emphasizing the common interests and concerns of all our citizens. That was our objective.

The Arusha Declaration and our democratic single party system, together with our national language, Kiswahili, and a highly politicised and disciplined National Army, transformed what had been a motley of more than 126 different tribes into a cohesive nation. That achievement goes a long way to explain the political stability which my country still enjoys today. That stability comes under ever-increasing strain as inequalities of wealth and power within the country get greater and as our economic woes persist.

A wise Englishman once said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Our single party system eventually became complacent, bureaucratic and corrupt. We had to change. We are now experimenting with a multi-party system. We have also, wrongly in my view, abandoned the Arusha Declaration. We are now experimenting with Free Market Capitalism. The rest of my remarks, therefore, are about our problems as we are trying to manage Democracy and Capitalism in to-day's international climate and imbalance of power.

In the days of the Cold War, the leading countries of the West created and supported a whole lot of corrupt dictators all over the Third World. The Marcoses, the Somozas, the Papa Docs, the Bokassas and the Mobutus of the Third World were all creatures and proteges of Western democracy. It is even said that when elections were proposed for South Vietnam the Americans opposed the idea. They feared that if the elections were free and fair the Communists would win them!

The Cold War is now over; and refreshingly the same Western Countries have now become great champions of democracy and democratic elections everywhere in the World. But now it has become their turn to preach a kind of "scientific"

democracy. Democracy is being trotted out as if it is something that can be cloned like Dolly the sheep, and used anywhere and everywhere. We disagree and argue in vain that we must manage our own democratic development and change. For democracy to work properly, we argue, it must shape its mechanisms to suit the culture, the conditions and current circumstances, and also the nature and purposes of a nation and its people. That is how democracy has developed in all the Western countries. American democracy, British democracy, Canadian democracy, Swiss democracy etc. are all democracies; but they are not clones of some original prototype ? they're different. Democracies in the countries of the South should be allowed to develop their own institutions and characteristics. The people of Burundi, for instance, do not have to be apologetic about wanting to devise a democracy which suits Burundi. What is important is that it should be a democracy, but a democracy that is acceptable to the People of Burundi, and which serves their best interests.

But on top of dogmatic democracy we have now to contend with dogmatic capitalism also. Once again it is the turn of the capitalist world to insist on a kind of scientific capitalism which every country must follow. It is called: laissez-faire, free-market capitalism. Its preachers believe that it is both feasible and rational to ask Burkina Faso, and China, and India, and Russia, and Poland, and Brazil, and Tanzania, and Laos and Fiji to clone American capitalism. But once again this is absurd. Do we really have one capitalism in the capitalist world of to-day? Are German capitalism, French capitalism, Italian capitalism, Japanese capitalism, Korean capitalism all clones of American and British capitalism? Have they developed in the same way? The answer is clearly no. For once again in real life no country operates a pure laissez-faire capitalism. Why then, are capitalists of the South not being allowed to develop their own forms of capitalism?

Mr Chairman: this Association of Commonwealth Universities is, like all Commonwealth associations, a consultative body. It enables members to share their problems and to discuss possible ways of managing them It promotes and facilitates schemes of co-operation or mutual help among all, or any group of, its members. But the ACU exercises no authority over them and no power has been delegated to it. And although you learn from one another, no university is trying to turn all the others into clones of itself. Your inequalities of resources and experience are known but merged into mutual respect. The ACU promotes the separate uniqueness as well as the equality of all members.

There are something approaching 200 sovereign nation states in the world, and even more economic and social units. Each of them is in some way different from all the others. But unavoidably they affect each other. So international organisations and functional institutions have been created. Some of these international bodies do necessarily have executive functions, and thus have delegated power.

Unfortunately, those international institutions which do have executive power have all been established in a manner which increases rather than decreases the relative POWER in the world of the already most powerful nations and economic units. This is especially true as regards organisations concerned with finance and trade, where voting on the governing boards is based on the wealth and trade of members.

Thus, these theoretically independent and objective functional institutions are, in reality, controlled by a cabal of the wealthiest, the most developed, and the most assertive national governments of the world. The I.M.F., the World Trade Organisation, and the World Bank, have become a smokescreen under the cover

of which the major developed nations use their immense economic power in their own exclusive interests.

There was a time when a developing country leader could say "No" to the IMF or World Bank. But no leader of a highly indebted poor country, or a financially troubled Indonesia or South Korea, can with impunity say "No" today. His country will be crucified! So a time comes when the leader is forced to accept a neo-colonial status for his country in return for a financial bailout from its international creditors. This is the case today in many African countries.

As strong states have become less inclined to risk the lives of their soldiers in overseas adventures, it is now mostly economic power which they use to secure their own interests and international purposes. That pressure is often explained to their own people in the name of supporting human rights and democracy. Good people often support such pressure on those grounds. They do not realise that abuses of fundamental human rights are - not infrequently - the direct result of South leaders trying to maintain political stability while they force IMF medicine down the throats of their people! The result may be what are called "IMF bread riots". If these are put down by force or by political sleight of hand, the dissatisfaction of the people may fester and break out later into general social unrest or even civil war.

But leadership cannot be about telling people what to do and then (if they don't like it) forcing them to do it by the use of the Police or the Military. And in any case to use force against hungry people who are protesting against an increase in their poverty should be considered obscene by any modern society.

Indonesia had for years been quoted to African developing countries as an example of "how to develop". We were urged to copy it. In vain we pointed to the different circumstances of the African and South-East Asian countries; in vain we pointed out that none of the so-called "Asian Tigers" had developed through following laissez-faire capitalist theory.

Yet now that Indonesia has become the victim of international currency speculation and its President has been forced to resign, we are hearing the usual explanations for its failure: it was a corrupt and dictatorial state which denied human rights to its people, and which stifled their initiative by smothering their freedom. It is now quoted to us as an awful warning rather than an example!

The relentless and single-minded drive by the rich and powerful to globalise and liberalise; to privatise every public enterprise; to deify the Market; to weaken our governments and make it impossible for them to intervene decisively on behalf of the poor and powerless: all this will, no doubt, succeed in creating immense wealth and power for a minority of countries and a minority of citizens in every country. But it is also creating massive poverty and hopelessness for the majority of the countries of the world and their citizens.

This cannot be a good recipe for peace and security in the world; for genuine peace and security within nations and between nations is a result of justice. If peace in the world is to become a possibility, the governance of international institutions must be based on some kind of appropriate democracy - on some basis of accountability to the people of the world. As the world becomes increasingly one, its governance should become increasingly democratic and just. It is not moving in that direction. On the contrary, governance at the international level, when it is not simply chaotic is becoming increasingly arrogant, authoritarian and unjust. A nation so governed cannot have peace and

stability. Nor does it deserve to have peace and stability. A world so governed cannot be an exception.

Thank you.