

Nyerere: the teacher

INTERVIEW WITH MZEE RASHID MFAUME KAWAWA

FORMER VICE PRESIDENT AND FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF TANZANIA



MZEE RASHID MFAUME KAWAWA

was the first Prime Minister under Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's Government. He served the country in different cabinet portfolios throughout Mwalimu's presidency. He may be considered among those politicians who worked most with Mwalimu. He retired from politics in 1994 and now lives with his family in Kiluviya Village, in the outskirts of Dar es Salaam.

How did you meet Julius Nyerere for the first time?

I first met Mwalimu at Tabora in 1948 when I was a student. He was a teacher then. That day we had a debate, with our teachers as the main speakers. The title for that day's debate was "Wealth is Better than Education," and Mwalimu was on the opposing side. I remember how elaborate he was in convincing everybody that education was better than wealth. When I heard in 1954 that he and others had formed TANU to fight for independence in Tanganyika I did not hesitate to join the party.

What made TANU's approach to independence unique?

We had tremendous support from the public. This support enabled TANU to go into the deepest rural areas, even where there was no transport. We went from coastal areas to the mountains, and everywhere crowds followed us. They were ready to sleep anywhere; and the men would guard us in the forests. This showed the whole world that the time for the independence of Tanganyika had come, and that TANU had the mass support needed to lead the country.

Nyerere was later critical of the new generation taking over, saying that they were more interested in getting rich. What would Nyerere make of the political elite in Tanzania a decade after his death?

Mwalimu's leadership philosophy was based on what our party put into the Arusha Declaration. For him it was like the Bible or Holy Quran. We have never found anything wrong with the 1967 Declaration. If you read the Declaration now, you will find leadership codes. The codes meant nothing more than separation of public office and private business. Mwalimu used to remind us that you cannot have a fair balance between public office and personal business; there will always be a conflict of interest. The Arusha Declaration also called for self-reliance through the creation of co-operative farm villages and the nationalisation of factories, plantations, banks, and private companies.

But a decade later, despite financial and technical aid from the World Bank and sympathetic countries, this programme had completely failed. Why?

The Arusha Declaration did not fail; it lacked domestic and international support. We faced serious challenges on the international commodities' markets. Fluctuations of prices for our commodities in the world market tended to hold us back. Domestically, the young men we trusted to

manage the co-operative unions were being tempted with corruption. In that way, the co-operatives failed to replace the private sector. At the time we thought we had made progress through the co-operatives, but we found serious mismanagement that us to unbearable debt burdens. TANU, and later the CCM Government, found itself with the burden of paying debts owed by co-operative unions.

Mwalimu had a permanent leading role as Chairman of the Front Line States. Why do you think Nyerere was chosen to lead the leaders of Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique, Angola, and Zimbabwe?

Firstly it should be remembered that Mwalimu had immense powers of persuasion. He had the charisma needed to coordinate his counterparts. But one should also recall the zeal and commitment for African independence among Tanzanians. Our youths were ready to join their brothers in southern Africa, who were fighting for their independence. We have people who died in Mozambique fighting for the country's independence from Portuguese colonial rule. Mwalimu had influenced our people to the point of considering that our freedom should wait for the independence of other African countries. The Father of the Nation made Tanzania play a leading role in independence struggles in southern Africa.

What was the anti-colonial movement's greatest contribution to humanity?

The first thing the anti-colonial movement did was to show the world that Africans were ready for independence. They also sent a message to the colonial masters that we could join hands and fight against colonial rule. But the most important thing was opening up the African continent to the whole world. We no longer had spheres of influence that could stop any country doing business with us.

How would you like Mwalimu Nyerere's legacy to be cherished today and what made him great?

We have to prioritise agriculture. I am glad the Tanzanian Government has launched a project to develop agriculture. We need to facilitate distribution of farm implements, development of irrigation, plantation and the use of modern technology. Our agriculture should move from hand-to-mouth level to commercial agriculture. He was never selfish. He always put Tanzania first. His country was his priority. His desire was simply to make our country the best place to live. **F**