

Interview with Mike Lynk

The Tanzanian experiment

Mike Lynk is a former Dalhousie student who recently returned from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania where he was studying for a year. He was interviewed late last year.

Tanzania is widely known as a leader among 3rd world countries in its attempts to overcome underdevelopment, and particularly in its effort to minimize income disparity. Could you elaborate.....

Lynk: There are several distinctive features of Tanzania that have become known to people interested in social change and the Third World.

The first is its unique attempt to minimize rural-urban disparity. Most third world countries are largely agrarian based; that is, most of their population lives in the countryside, earns its living by farming and is desperately poor. Tanzania is no exception to all this. Ninety-five per cent of its population lives in the countryside, and I would guess that at least ninety per cent of those earn their living directly off the land. At independence, Tanzania's peasants mainly grew subsistence crops. The tiny enclaves of cash crops were destined either for the cities or for the rural market. The ultimate effect of this was to leave very few benefits for the farmers. Among the peasants themselves there was disparity, with a few farmers earning a great deal of money from the cash crops, and most, earning next to nothing.

In order both to minimize class

by it remains in the country.

For all these reasons, Tanzania is in the vanguard of social experimentation.

Why is it, that Tanzania has been able to introduce such seemingly progressive and equitable innovations where so many other 3rd world countries have either failed or not attempted to do so?

Lynk: The best way to answer that is to look at the historical conditions that Tanzania found itself in by the mid-60s. It had first been colonized by the Germans at the turn of the century. They lost it to the British after the first World War and it was ruled as a British trust territory until 1961, when independence was granted. Throughout the colonial period there was little in the way of industrialization or even extensive agricultural cash-crop growing in Tanzania. It found itself, at Independence, to be a very poor country with a great many resources, but all of them very poorly developed. It hoped in its first four or five years of independence to be able to achieve development through massive investment of Western capital and foreign aid. The leaders took stock around 1967, and in looking back over the first six or seven years of independence found that, not only was foreign investment far below expectations but also, that it was the wrong type of investment. Private capital was invested mostly in get-rich-quick schemes that

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differences in the countryside and to ensure increased production of cash crops, Tanzania has since the late 60s begun its innovative program called UJAMA, which is the Swahili word for 'familyhood.' It means essentially that peasants are regrouped from individual landholdings scattered around the country into more modern villages where they share such facilities and provisions as water, food and clothing. They also attempt in a collective manner to grow cash crops destined to earn the villages more money.

As well, Tanzania is innovative in its foreign policy. It has become known as a leader among third world countries in pushing for a new international economic order which would guarantee a more equitable pattern of wealth distribution between rich and the poor countries.

Thirdly, Tanzania gained renown through the issuing of the Arusha declaration in 1967. Its aim was to cut down conspicuous consumption among party, military, and government leaders. It's an all too familiar pattern among 3rd World countries that a tiny, self-perpetuating elite indulges in such consumption, while the great mass of the people remain in conditions of desperate poverty. Tanzania has attempted to ensure that party, military and government leaders are answerable to the people from whom they earn their livelihood.

Lastly, Tanzania is becoming a hot-house of sorts, for its attempts to set up small scale industry.

Most industry in the 3rd World is of the large scale capital intensive variety, imported from western countries. In the end, such industry adds little in term so employment, wealth or technological knowledge. Tanzania is attempting to reverse this age-long process by setting up small scale industries with locally manufactured machinery. The skills of learning how to build and operate this machinery are directly acquired and assimilated by the Tanzanians themselves, and the bulk of the wealth produced

were of little benefit to the Tanzanians. Intertwined with this realization was the basic humanism (I guess you would call it), of the leader of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere. He has written a version of what he calls African 'Socialism' which attempts to reach back into the roots of precolonial Africa in order to rebuild actual societies that were known before the Europeans came.

It's probably a combination of these two factors, the lack of Western capital to develop the country, plus the ideological foundations of socialism that made the Tanzanians realize that the only way in which they were going to achieve development was through the people depending upon themselves. In



Mike Lynk when he was Community Affairs secretary at Dalhousie.

other words, they began to follow a socialist path realizing that to follow the capitalist path in Africa would only mean dependence upon foreign capital: That foreign capital's first interest would not be to the benefit of Africa, but rather the enrichment of Europe and North America.

The Tanzanian experiment with its brand of socialism is almost 10 years old, beginning with the Arusha Declaration in 1967 - what lessons does the Tanzanian experience offer to other developing countries?

Lynk: There are both positive and negative lessons which we can glean from



Mike Lynk and friends on the way to Mt. Kilimanjaro, Tanzania.

the Tanzanian experience. First of all, on the positive side, I think the Tanzanians are correct in arguing that the only way in which their country is ever going to develop is through self-reliance. This means decreasing the part which foreign aid and foreign investment plays in the country's industry and agricultural sector. But it also means something much more fundamental. It means removing the colonial mentality inherited from the British. This mentality has left the Tanzanians, and the people of almost every 3rd World country, with a sense of inferiority. It has given them a desire to imitate the industrial technology of the West, its culture, religion, dress, everything. In substance, it leaves the Tanzanians without a sense of innovation, without confidence in their own culture, their own achievements and their own history.

As well, I think the Tanzanians are correct in stressing the need for the resources of the country, both industrial and natural, to be placed in the hands of the people. While nationalization provides no guarantee that Tanzania will ever become developed, it is, I believe, and they believe, the necessary prerequisite for development.

On the negative side, I think we can point to some of the Tanzanian dealings with transfer of technology. Large-scale, capital-intensive units are still being built without adequate planning and without adequate information as to their ultimate impact on and benefit to the people.

We can also see, I think, the negative effects of foreign aid, which has tended to enrich the donors far more than it has enriched the Tanzanians themselves.

Thirdly, the experience of the Tanzanians can teach us that the raising of production levels in agriculture is not simply a matter of better tractors and more fertilizer, or a greater amount of capital invested. It also requires a transformation of people's attitudes towards each other and towards the society in which they live. It is, above all, a political question; the people will only begin to actively take part in collective agricultural production when they believe that the benefits of their work are being felt by those who help in the producing.

It's interesting to note that the Africans and you believe that foreign aid isn't always necessarily a benefit to the country that is receiving it. Could you cite an example where Canada, which

has given foreign aid to Tanzania, has exploited that country?

Lynk: That's a good question. That's a really good question. One of the worst myths prevalent in the West is that aid given by the Western capitalist countries to the 3rd World is a marked example of the benevolence and generosity of our countries. I think very few things could be further from the truth. For, by and large, aid tends to benefit the donor countries far more than it does the recipients. An example of this is the building by Canada of a new bakery in Dar-Es-Salaam. Previously Dar-Es-Salaam's bakery needs were met by approximately 10 bakeries employing around three hundred people. The New Canadian Bakery will only employ 60 people, it being built as a capital-intensive project. In addition, all of the machinery was to come from Canada, which means that if and when the bakery breaks down, not only will Dar-Es-Salaam be without any bread (its new bakery will have put all the rest of the bakers out of business) but production of bread will be delayed until the parts can be obtained from Canada. In addition, the cost of the equipment purchased from Canada was twice that of the same equipment of the world market. And the final anomaly, which adds insult to injury, is that the machinery can only grind and mill Canadian wheat. So the Canadian farmer has now found himself an assured market in Tanzania. That's just one example.....

Another more commonplace example which has not been severely recognized or criticized as yet is the quality of the world bank aid being given in Tanzania. The World Bank, particularly in the years since the Arusha Declaration in 1967 has more than quadrupled its presence in Tanzania to the point where it holds 30% of Tanzania's external debt and as such, exercises a great deal of influence over the decision-making for coming industrial and agricultural policy decisions in the country. The World bank is an institution set up by the major capitalist countries in order to speed up the export of capital for the benefit of private firms and multinationals.

Some of the examples in Tanzania can help illustrate this case. Recently there has been a move by the World Bank to speed up agricultural processing industries in underdeveloped countries in order to ensure that the supply of cash crops stays ahead of demand which will ensure low prices.

In Tanzania the World Bank is setting up major tobacco, tea, coffee and sugar projects all with the aim of exporting

“They had far more patriotism and nationalism than I'd even seen here.”

these on the world market. Not only is this maintaining the orientation of Tanzania's economy towards primary export crop economy but it is little different from the colonial economy left behind by the British. It is also introducing the most modern capital intensive, labour saving techniques into these countries to help in the processing of the tea, cotton, and so on. This means that there is very little stimulation of the manufacturing sector in Tanzania since most of the machinery is imported from abroad. Consequently Tanzanian manufacturers gain very little expertise which restricts the advance of their own industrial technical skills. Lastly this means a great loss in foreign exchange by these countries. This process, if anything, is going

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