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BRIEF COMMENTS ON RECENT EAST AFRICAN EVENTS

by
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Events of the last two weeks have attracted world attention to East Africa. A coup has taken place in Zanzibar, and disturbing military mutinies or the threat of them have taken place in Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika. Voice has been given to popular impressions that the Zanzibar coup was masterminded by the Communists and that the military revolts are something like a recreation of events in the Congo. Although it is much too soon after these occurrences to make anything like a thorough analysis, nevertheless it might be worthwhile to make a few observations.

The Zanzibar Coup

The dynamics which led to the overthrow of the Zanzibar Government which had been independent for only 34 days, is not found by looking to international communism. Rather it is found in the centuries-old antagonisms between the African and Arab populations of Zanzibar. Of the some 300,000 people living on the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba, approximately 45,000 are Arab, 18,000 are Asian, and most of the rest are African. The Arab invasion of Zanzibar took place as long ago as the 7th Century. With the exception of two centuries of domination by the Portuguese after 1498, the Arabs were in control of the island until modern times. The slave trade flourished in Zanzibar. The Sultan of Muscat moved his capital to Zanzibar in 1832 to be able to supervise and more readily profit from the slave trade. The period of the British protectorate began in 1890 in an agreement with the Sultan.

The Zanzibar Nationalist Party, founded in 1955, and the Afro-Shirazi Party, established in 1957, have been the major contending political organizations. There was a history of only four elections prior to independence. In the first elections in 1957, the Afro-Shirazi Party took five of the six elective seats in the Legislative Council. The Z.N.P. elected no one. In 1961 there were two elections. The first, held in January, was inconclusive and no government could be formed. In the second elections held in June, the Afro-Shirazi Party elected 10 members to the Legislative Council, the Zanzibar Nationalist Party also elected 10, and the Zanzibar and Pemba Peoples Party elected three. Of the popular vote however, the ASP had 45,172, while the ZNP had only 31,681. The remainder of 12,411 went to the ZPPP. A coalition of the ZNP and the ZPPP led to their formation of a government in spite of the fact that the ASP had, with its mass African following, polled a majority of the popular vote. The last elections before independence came in July 1963. The ASP polled 54 percent of the popular vote, but only elected 13 members to the Legislative Council, while the coalition of the other two parties filled 18 seats.

These statistics tell some of the story of the frustration of the African majority in Zanzibar. Although through the ASP the Africans have polled a majority of the popular vote, they have been unable to form a government because of the gerrymandering of the election districts. The rioting and killings which accompanied the recent coup on January 12th was not the first time that open conflict had broken out

between the Africans and Arabs. The elections of June 1961 also led to widespread disorders and violence. 66 were killed, 320 injured, and 6,000 rendered homeless at that time.

What can be said about the extent of Communist involvement in the coup? Of course a great deal that is said now must be based on conjecture. However, it is interesting to note that in the period prior to independence in Zanzibar, it was the Zanzibar Nationalist Party rather than the Afro-Shirazi Party that was looked upon as leaning toward communism. It was the ZNP that set up an office in Havana in 1961. In an editorial in the London Times of June 3, 1961, the ZNP was called more fervently nationalistic and more strongly anti-British than the "moderate Afro-Shirazi Party." An editorial in the Kenya Weekly News of June 9, a British-oriented publication, also looked upon the ZNP as left-leaning and even mentioned that 22 Zanzibar Nationalists were training in Communist China. There was a representative of the ZNP who in his testimony before the Committee on Colonialism at the United Nations was most anti-American in his statement, and said that the United States was using its centers in Zanzibar to penetrate the political movements which were genuinely representative of the people. On the other hand, Mr. Karume, the head of the ASP and the President of the new revolutionary government, was always looked upon as a friend of the United States.

These facts might as easily lead one to the conclusion that the coup was anti-communist in character as that it was communist-inspired. Actually, it is unsound to try to make a case either way. The assumption must be made that the inspiration for the coup arose out of the dynamics of African nationalism, and the traditional conflict between the Africans and the Arabs.

But it would also be a mistake to assume that Communist elements are not interested in the events as they unfold in Zanzibar. There is no reason to question that leaders of both the ZNP and ASP have visited Havana, Moscow and Peking, although such visits do not make them Communists. It is not difficult to imagine that funds have been made available from Communist sources for various political leaders and that there have been some Zanzibaris who received training in guerrilla tactics in some Communist countries. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the success of the coup will depend on the mass support for it, and this must be found in the ranks of the Afro-Shirazi Party which over the years has shown itself to be genuinely nationalist rather than ideologically Marxist in its orientation.

Colin Legum, the veteran African reporter, in an article in the January 19 issue of the London Observer says that President Karume is the real strongman of the revolutionary government. He is a veteran African nationalist who speaks no English and has been closely allied with the policies of President Julius Nyerere in nearby Tanganyika.

The actual coup in Zanzibar seems to have been engineered by an unknown, John Okello, who originally came from Uganda. He seems to have spent some time in Cuba. In fact, he went there on a scholarship provided by the ZNP leadership. He actually commanded the forces that ousted the ZNP government. But he has no mass following of his own.

Now that the Afro-Shirazi Party is forming the government there might very well be a struggle for leadership, but the dominant figure at present is Karume. Abdulla Kassim Hanga is Vice President. He studied at Lumumba University in the Soviet Union and married a Russian girl. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is Abdul

Raman Mohammed Babu, the former leader of the Umma Party. This party split off from the ZNP. Babu has had close relations with the Chinese, having served as a correspondent for the New China News Agency.

The overwhelming evidence in looking at the coup in Zanzibar is that if it is to take on a Communist character, that struggle still lies ahead. It was not the coup itself which was evidence of Communist control.

The Military Revolts

Although the military revolts in Tanganyika, Uganda and Kenya are signs of instability, they are not analogous to what happened in the Congo. In the Congo there was not only a military power vacuum, but also a political power vacuum. This is not the case in the three East African territories plagued by trouble with their small military contingents. Although this may not mean that troubles are at an end in East African countries, the crisis may be much more temporary than present events might indicate. The three leaders of each of the three East African countries has overwhelming mass support. There is no rival to President Nyerere nor his Tanganyika African National Union. Although there is opposition to Kenyatta's Kenya African National Union, the recent elections reflect massive support for his leadership, and the same is true of the Uganda Peoples Congress and its leader, Prime Minister Milton Obote. There is no comparison with the anarchistic political situation in post-independence Congo where there were more than a dozen political parties and where political leaders trying to gain a national following arose in many sections of the country. The central government there did not have massive support throughout the country, and no one political party could claim the loyalty of a very large group.

The military revolts may produce other results and other actions not yet foreseen, but it is difficult to see how they can lead to the splintering of political loyalties such as took place in the Congo. Rather, the events of the last few days in East Africa reflect the fact that even a tiny army unit with limited military equipment can challenge a government and a political movement that has no other effective police powers to support it. They further indicate that racial frustration is still very much a fact of life in territories which have been under white domination and colonial rule for so long. It is established that protest against white officers was partly responsible for the flare-up. And finally they indicate that economic frustrations have dynamics of their own and can at times lead to rather senseless forms of protest action. The achievement of independence had not led to an increase in the soldiers' base pay.

These events in East Africa will lead to a reappraisal by the various governments as they strive to achieve political and economic stability. But there is no evidence that the governments and their leaders will be further inclined to relinquish any of their independence, to forces East or West.