

A PROFILE OF ZANZIBAR

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EVERYONE outside of Zanzibar calls Zanzibar a joke; a fairy-tale, pantomime caricature of a colony, with an Arabian Sultan to provide the pomp and pageantry and a British Resident to wield all the power.

From 1890, when the United Kingdom exchanged Zanzibar with Germany for Heligoland, the territory remained a stagnant political backwater. By the end of the First World War the old Arab social and economic organisation, based upon slavery, was largely destroyed. (Although the dhows which sail up to the Persian Gulf and the Hadramaut with the trade winds are said still to carry an occasional consignment of slaves with their other traditional cargoes.)

In its place the clove growing industry has developed and now accounts for 85 per cent. of the total exports. The territory's only other sources of income are derived from coconuts and from tourists in search of the exotic.

It is difficult to take seriously a nation whose economy depends upon the aromatic smoking habits of the Indonesians and the apple-pie customs of the spiceless British.

The affable 80-year-old Sultan who died last year, had all the trappings of sovereignty, but power passed to the British when they placed his predecessor on the throne.

He lived in an icing-sugar white palace on Zanzibar's waterfront and drove through the town in specification-built Rolls Royces and Bentleys, painted bright red.

If His Highness ever passed you on his evening drive through the alleyway which is Zanzibar's Main Street, the best thing to do was to jump into the nearest doorway for road safety and bow low for courtesy. In return you were sure of a happy smile and a jolly wave.

For the old man's eightieth birthday in 1959, they brought over the escort vessel which is the largest third of the Royal East African Navy, and from somewhere they borrowed some marines and four jets for the day. In the evening there was a water-borne fireworks display in the harbour. The barge caught fire.

The Sultan, who was brought up as a Prince in an absolutist

slave-owning society, had obviously had great difficulty in adapting himself to changed conditions. As one politician commented to me on my last trip, "Reducing His Highness to a constitutional monarch is just about the one thing we can thank the British for." His middle-aged son who succeeded him has less prestige and is likely to prove far more manageable.

The British, who fill all the upper ranks of the Civil Service, live in a world which most people believe disappeared when the Raj left India.

Work at the Secretariat (a former palace, still known as the House of Wonders) begins about eight in the morning. There are complicated arrangements for taking a breakfast break, so it is best to arrive at ten if you have any business with a senior official. There is time for coffee, perhaps, then a drink before lunch at the Club. And that is the end of the working day.

During the fiasco over United States rocket tracking stations last July, the Nationalists alleged that Zanzibar was being dragged into the Cold War by the establishment of such stations on the island. As a result one project was removed to what was considered a more secure site in Southern Rhodesia.

The day the story broke, frantic cables passed between London and Washington. Moscow and Peking, overjoyed at yet another Western blunder, quickly collaborated to send out a stream of radio and press propaganda. But, according to reports, the Zanzibar Chief Secretary was not available for comment that day. After all, it was past midday when the whole affair exploded. He was out in the harbour, sailing.

All this would be merely funny if it did not involve the lives of 300,000 people. For most of its colonial rule, Britain has been solely concerned with removing slavery and the slave trade and with providing minimal administration.

Only in the past decade has there been any major effort to diversify the economy, to encourage co-operatives and to bring the mass of the people into the cash economy. For Zanzibar shares Africa's common curse: low productivity subsistence farming. Most of the island's inhabitants are peasant farmers like those on the mainland. Economic production is mainly in the hands of the Arabs, and they in turn are often in the financial control of the merchant Indian community.

Not until 1926 did Zanzibar have Executive and Legislative Councils; and then, of course, there were no members of the majority community, the Africans, in either. A few nominated

members were appointed from time to time, but Zanzibar had to wait for 31 years before it saw elections to Legco.

The Legislative Council (Elections) Decree of 1957 provided for the election of six of the twelve unofficial members, who made up under half of the chamber. Voting was for men only and there were the usual educational/property/income qualifications of colonial rule.

The immediate result was a shock for the Arabs. The Nationalist Party (Z.N.P.), which had grown from the political wing of the Arab Association, fought all six seats but won none. This should not have been so much of a surprise, since the election was fought on racial lines and four-fifths of the population is African.

Because of the large concentration of Indians in the commercial quarter of Zanzibar Town, the seat there was won by the Muslim Association, an Asian body. The five remaining seats were won by the Afro-Shirazi Party (A.S.P.).

The next result was apparently a shock for the government. The signs scrawled on the walls were no longer merely those expressing monarchist loyalty. "God Bless His Highness, Our Beloved Sultan" had to find room between "Uhuru 1960" and "Freedom Now". The Administration complained that by granting elections they had created a political Frankenstein.

In his report for 1958, the Police Commissioner attributed the increase in crime to the fact that his men were too busy keeping watch at political functions to attend to their proper duties.

"The main problem," he wrote, "was to keep the peace in the face of ever growing racial antagonism between the main political parties".

The Senior Commissioner reported:

"Traders, cultivators, labourers, fishermen, even housewives, were affected. Villagers in the rural areas argued among themselves. Funerals and religious ceremonies were boycotted by rival political parties. Women even pawned their clothes in order to raise the bus fare to political meetings. Such was the result of the first common roll elections for these formerly peaceful islands."

In spite of this, the government has now decided to step up the pace. It has realised that the dangers of fomenting political strife are to be preferred to the greater risks of delay.

In March 1960, Sir Hilary Blood was appointed as Constitutional Commissioner and asked to make recommendations

for political advance. He proposed that only three ex-officio members—the Finance, Law and Chief Secretaries—should remain in Legco. The British Resident should stay as President of the Executive Council, but a Chief Minister should lead the government in Legco. He proposed that Legco should contain 21 elected members, from single-member constituencies, all elected on a common roll. There would then be up to five nominated members and the three official Ministers.

His proposals were adopted with the—as it subsequently turned out—extremely significant alteration of an additional elected seat, to make the even number of 22 elected members. Elections were set for January 1961.

Since the last election, there had been a split in the Afro-Shirazi Party, and as a result the election was fought by three main groups, the Zanzibar Nationalist Party, the Afro-Shirazi Party and the Zanzibar and Pemba People's Party.

The divisions are based upon partly mythical racial groupings. The longest established Africans claim descent from invaders who came from the Persian city of Shiraz in the eighth century. An Arab, except for those whose two parents came from the North, is anyone who thinks he is. Colour and bone structure don't seem to matter. Africans are those who belong to strict tribal groupings and newcomers from the mainland.

In fact, of course, given Islam's lack of a colour bar, it is impossible for anyone whose family has been in the territory for more than a couple of generations to claim pure descent. This is true of the Sultan himself.

The A.S.P. was formed by the amalgamation of the African and Shirazi Associations, but had suffered a number of splits since it won the 1957 election. Sheikh Abeid Karume, a thoughtful but unsophisticated middle-aged man, usually dressed in the traditional African costume of the Coast, continues to lead the A.S.P. from a hut in the African quarter.

The main split in the party came when Sheikh Muhammed Shamte broke away to form the Zanzibar and Pemba People's Party. It began as a Pemba body and tends to represent the more traditional "Shirazi" view. It is difficult to know how much of the split was due to personalities, especially as the two parties rarely choose to disagree on broad political issues. The Z.P.P.P. made a show of objecting to Sir Hilary Blood's proposals, but when it came to the Legco debate was not very explicit about what it was opposed to in them.

The A.S.P. welcomed the Blood Report *in toto* and said it was just what the people of Zanzibar wanted. "I have not met one man outside Legco who is not satisfied with it," said Sheikh Abeid Karume in the debate, speaking through an interpreter. He is accused by the Nationalists of being in the pay of the government and of the Indian merchants.

The Z.N.P., on the other hand, is accused by the other parties and by the government of being a tool of international Communism.

Sheikh Ali Muhsin, West-educated, who lives in a modern house with several servants, leads the Z.N.P. He numbers Nkrumah and Nasser among his friends.

He agrees that fifteen leading members of his party have recently been on a trip to Peking. "When we accepted scholarships in Cairo we were accused of being Nasserists," he says, "and now our people are going to China we are called Communists. If we are offered education in America tomorrow, we shall accept it—and no doubt they will then call us imperialist lackeys."

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