

Class and State in Tanzanian Development

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Andrew Coulson, *TANZANIA: A Political Economy*. (New York: Oxford University Press; Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1982), 394 pp.; paperback \$6.95.

Coulson's book is a major contribution to the already extensive literature on Tanzania, and should be welcomed as such. It is an important work of synthesis, and makes available in a single volume a coherently argued radical view of the political economy of modern Tanzania, which will serve as a counter-balance to such accounts as Pratt's.¹ As a possible text-book for use in university classes its many virtues include an extensive 21-page bibliography, 56 statistical tables by my count, and five maps. The work is clearly written and is organized on an essentially chronological schema in twenty-six shortish chapters with five sub-chapters (misleadingly called "appendices") inserted at appropriate points.

Andrew Coulson writes of his work that "for those who know little about the country, it will serve as an introduction, combining a historical outline, statistical information, and advice on where to read more" (p. 5). For such readers, certainly, the book can be counted a success, for it is informative, clearly written, and well documented, with several maps and with the extensive bibliography supplemented by a critical chapter on "Further Reading," organized around the themes dealt with in the preceding chapters. Thanks to a full index, the book can be used as a handy single-volume reference source on modern Tanzania.

Tanzania is among the most intensively studied countries in Africa, both by foreign scholars and by Tanzanians themselves. The results of this activity, whether in fully published format, or as mimeographed reports or papers, constitute a body of literature impressive in its quantity, if not, perhaps, always in its quality. For "Tanzanian studies" are African studies writ small: in general, a subject area as yet underdeveloped, unsophisticated, immature. The underdevelopment reveals itself in the way, for example, that African academic structures copy the institutional framework of metropolitan universities and colleges; the lack of sophistication in the shortage of creative inter-disciplinary and interregional contact; and the immaturity in the way in which debates around historical and social science questions often collapse into counter-assertion and ad hominem polemics.

In this context, the publication of major works of synthesis is warmly to be welcomed as a sign of growing confidence — and competence — in the social sciences in African countries. For Tanganyika we have John Iliffe's impressive history of the mainland up to independence,² and now Andrew Coulson has published a comprehensive political economy, following a volume of readings on contemporary politics.³

1. Cranford Pratt, *The Critical Phase in Tanzania, 1945-1968: Nyerere and the Emergence of a Socialist Strategy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

2. John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

3. Andrew Coulson (ed.), *African Socialism in Practice* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1979).

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The book is ostensibly organized around what Coulson calls a "convenient" periodization of five main epochs, borrowed from J. Forbes Munro.⁴ In outline, this consists of the pre-capitalist period (pre-1500); mercantile capitalism (1500-1800); early industrial capitalism (1800-1870); maturing industrial capitalism (1870-1945); and a "gradually more integrated" world economy from 1945 onwards. In practice, of course, Coulson's chapters on the pre-colonial period constitute only a brief introductory section of some twenty-odd pages, before we arrive at the colonial conquest, in the period of "maturing industrial capitalism." The book then maintains a straightforward chronological schema, progressing from sections on the colonial system through the nationalist take-over and the fruits of independence to the final and gloomily titled chapter, "Harsh Realities." Each of these general parts is divided into several short chapters and appendices, the latter consisting of thematic treatments of such topics as the TAZARA Railway or the Rovuma Development Association. Much of this material will be familiar to readers of Coulson's earlier articles on the Tanzanian economy and on agriculture and industry.

What, then, of Coulson's problematization of all this information? In a key chapter on the Tanzanian state he writes that he has "avoided describing the country as socialist or non-socialist, or using the terms 'class' or 'the state' in any rigorous way" (p. 317). He follows this admission with a discussion of the class structure of contemporary Tanzania, in an attempt "to identify classes which do *not* control the state (emphasis in the original)" (p. 318). In this way he eliminates a capitalist bourgeoisie, the workers and peasants (including kulaks), and the petty bourgeoisie in the classic sense of the small traders, clerks and teachers. The petty bourgeoisie in the sense of the civil servants and party functionaries present, according to Coulson, a different kind of problem: that is, of its location in the process of production, its relationship to the means of production, and its means of reproducing itself. Coulson is clearly unhappy with Shivji's famous formulation of a "bureaucratic bourgeoisie,"⁵ and does not, in the end, take a defined position on this question. Yet we do not necessarily have to accept the idea of the bureaucratic ruling stratum as a fully fledged class to be able to use it as an analytical category. The process of the consolidation of power by such a stratum has been described in a powerful passage by Paul Sweezy, which is directly relevant to this problem. Sweezy identifies general political demobilization, increasing adherence to a centralized power structure, and greater reliance on market relations to solve economic problems as three of the main characteristics of this phase, but points out that "[t]he logical end of this process... has nowhere yet been reached (and of course may never be reached)..."⁶ It seems to me that this intermediate position, focusing on the process, provides a much more useful starting point for concrete analysis than a debate around the actual position of such a bourgeoisie.

Coulson admits, in the middle of his discussion of this question, that "the concept of 'class' used so far has been sociological (or descriptive) and largely static: it has related classes to the existing economic structure but not to the accumulation of capital" (p. 324). This seems to imply that a new concept of class

4. J. Forbes Munro, *Africa and the International Economy 1800-1960* (London: Dent, 1976).

5. Issa J. Shivji, *Class Struggles in Tanzania* (London: Heinemann, 1975).

6. Paul M. Sweezy, "A Reply," in: Paul M. Sweezy and Charles Bettelheim, *On the Transition to Socialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 29-30.

will now be introduced, but when he then examines the accumulation process in Tanzania, Coulson simply asserts that

“the Tanzanian ruling class ... was not a class of accumulators; it had little experience of industrial production and marketing; it had no experience of large-scale agriculture, and little faith in small-scale agriculture ... ” (p. 326).

He characterizes the Tanzanian leadership as authoritarian and the ruling class as “almost uniquely unsuited to bring about economic transformation” (p. 327). He argues that its *unplanned* allocation of resources, often to unproductive projects, prevented the development of a strong local industry and agriculture which might have served to improve living standards generally. This is all true as far as it goes, but it seems to me that it remains an analysis firmly rooted in the same descriptive concept of class which Coulson has explicitly rejected in the brief autocritique quoted above.

Why did the ruling “bureaucratic bourgeoisie” accept and even support the Arusha Declaration, with the subsequent salary cuts, tax increases, and limitations on the right to own shares or houses, or to be involved in business activities? Coulson follows von Freyhold⁷ in arguing that it was “because they were persuaded that it was in their broader class interest” (pp. 330) to do so.

The book is most convincing when dealing specifically with the effects of policy on the economy. Thus Coulson’s chapter on agricultural policy from 1961 to 1967 (pp. 145-167) is a veritable chronicle of disaster. The chapters and appendices on the Rovuma Development Association, the State Trading Corporation, and on Ujamaa and villagization are succinct and useful. Coulson’s brief and anecdotal treatment of the political role of the University of Dar es Salaam (pp. 224-230) is disappointing, however, and the ambiguity of its position as an elite institution also acting as a center for leftist critiques of government policy is never really confronted. Unfortunately, social services in general (health, education, housing, cultural questions) are only treated in a cursory fashion in a general chapter on social class and social services. This is a pity, since an analysis of the ideological role of culture and education in the reproduction of the ruling classes is of the first importance.

Coulson draws on nine years experience in Tanzania, both in the civil service and in the university, to enrich his account with specific examples. His basic line of argument is that the so-called “transformation approach” and other similar policies which were tried, were an effort doomed from the start: this pessimism permeates the whole book. His knowledge of the secondary literature is impressive, and he deploys statistics to good effect. The book is under-theorized; it is a narrative account of the Tanzanian economy, but as we have seen, it side-steps some of the central problems of socialist transformation. Despite these criticisms, all students of contemporary Tanzania are certainly indebted to Coulson for this work, which must find a place on the shelves of anyone with more than a touristic interest in East African affairs, or in practical questions of development policy.

7. Michaela von Freyhold, “The Post-colonial State and its Tanzanian Version,” *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 8 (1977), pp. 75-89.