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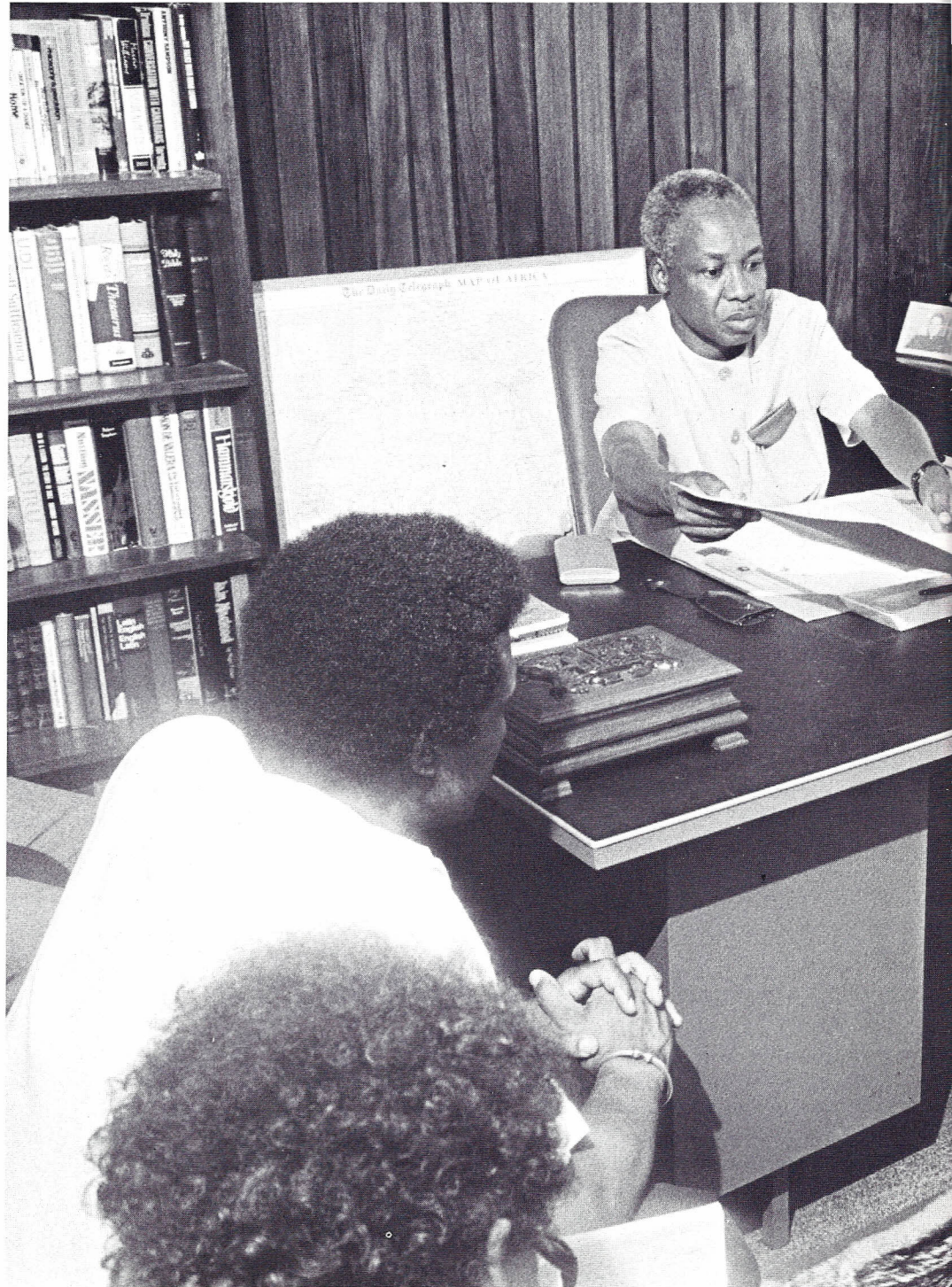
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President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania (center) receives report of the Science, Technology, Education and Culture Committee from Dr. Neville Parker, Committee vice chairman and assistant professor of engineering at Howard.



A Meeting With Nyerere

By Alma Robinson



A group of scholars and scientists from Howard University told President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania at a private meeting during the Sixth Pan African Congress that they are ready to "get it on" with an international, multidisciplinary organization to provide technical assistance to Africa. 17

President Nyerere responded without hesitation: "If you people can organize to that end, I am not going to wait until Africa makes up its mind to make up my mind." The meeting generated "a spark of hope" for the corps of technologists, who were somewhat disappointed with the results of the Sixth Congress. They were unable to convince the governmental representatives to sanction their long-range goals of setting up a Pan African research and consulting institution. Some governments expressed fear that such an organization would be a breeding ground for CIA-type infiltration.

The President had invited the Howard group, a select five, to his private residence for talks in his office and tea on the veranda. It is a small house, white concrete of an open block design, about five miles from Dar-es-Salaam in suburban Msasani. The wood-paneled office, decorated sparsely and filled to the ceiling with books, was small and dim in the afternoon sunlight.

As the meeting progressed, it became apparent that Nyerere's aim was not only to find out what he could do as President of the Congress, but also to give the group confidence in its mission. President Nyerere, whose affectionate title Mwalimu means teacher, often smiled and joked, but never lost the good listener's sincere interest as he stirred and stimulated the Howard team. His responsiveness took form in his dancing eyes, his uninhibited hands, his spontaneous laughter and his candid expressions.

As he urged the team to "develop your ideas in Dar-es-Salaam," projects, approaches and images bubbled up:

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The group could serve as a clearing-house to recruit Black doctors from the United States to work in Tanzania, suggested Dr. Don Coleman, director of Urban Systems Engineering at Howard.

Dr. Neville Parker of the Department of Civil Engineering said that Howard students could be put to work on specific problems, such as transportation systems and food distribution models.

Dr. Coleman suggested that helicopters may be useful in areas without access to roads.

Or donkeys instead of trucks, Parker countered.

During the exchange, computers were mentioned as an example of the equipment that the Tanzanian government owns, but cannot use effectively because of the lack of trained personnel. When the minister of education mumbled that his staff is trying to "harmonize" the computers, President Nyerere poked at his computer "illiteracy."

"Harmonize them? We decided to get rid of them because we can't program them," he cracked.

But why not computers for satellite medicine? queried Dr. Alyce Gullattee, a psychiatrist who teaches at the Howard College of Medicine. To the chagrin of the Americans, President Nyerere confessed his ignorance of the concept—as easily as he had exposed his minister's failings earlier.

Dr. Gullattee explained that the use of computers could enable one physician to service up to 300,000 people in a wide area. Hooked up with audio-visual equipment, computers could help read electrocardiograms and perform other diagnostic tasks, she suggested.

A Pan African institute could analyze problems of water and mineral resources. Turning to a map of Africa behind his chair, the President complained: "I have all this water at Lake Victoria and not a single acre of irrigation." Pointing to the

Arab countries to the north, he added: "Those fellows have been irrigating since before Jesus Christ was born."

The organization could also monitor experimental programs undertaken by "overzealous American universities," according to Dr. Gullattee. Such projects have tried out new vaccines and other medicines on unsuspecting Africans, she said. "Perhaps the suspicion isn't great because there are other rewards," she commented.

President Nyerere, whose encouragement was constant, inserted one warning:

"One of the difficulties you encounter in Africa is European prejudice second hand. Europeans think they know everything. It doesn't matter what you do in the U. S., you can go to the moon, but Europe is the center of everything. Their qualifications are better than your qualifications, and the Africans believe it absolutely. They have to believe it to believe they are good. 'How can you have so many universities,' the African asks. 'They can't be all good.' Then if you are an American Black, that's double. Black Americans, they were told, are no good."

Clearly the prejudice stems from ignorance, the President mused, and perhaps the Congress which brought over 200 Black Americans to Tanzania would give the Africans a chance to see that "you people are just like we are." His own encouragement and welcome to skilled Black Americans was unabashed: "You have people who are frustrated, who don't know what to do with themselves. Send them here, send them here."

The Howard team, which has met regularly during the past year, is the nucleus of the Association of Scientists and Technologists for Pan African Development. As conceived by Dr. William Douglas, a Howard-trained metallurgist who is president of a publicly owned cable television company in Gary, Ind., the Association would sell its skills to African governments for a price. "One should not lose income," Dr. Douglas commented. "On the other hand, we don't want to replace

white exploitation with Black exploitation."

In addition to consulting on technical problems, the Association's plans include printing an international journal, holding seminars and honoring outstanding scientists and technologists. The Association's most basic aim is, however, to connect resourceful people who don't know each other.

"We would like to turn to each other but we don't know who we are. We are suspicious of each other and there are so few Black scientists and technologists," said Dr. Fletcher Robinson, a dermatologist practicing in Washington, D. C.

The Sixth Congress was one occasion for this group to launch its ideas and to try to recruit new people for the venture. One find was a nuclear physicist from Zimbabwe who now works in Kenya. While some people were disappointed that the Congress itself did not sanction development of a Pan African technical center, Dr. Robinson said he felt that the aims of the group were not dependent on the Congress. President Nyerere, too, indicated that he wouldn't depend on the Congress, largely a collection of governmental officios, for a go-ahead signal.

"Their governments, their governments," President Nyerere cackled, laughing and smacking his desk with his palm. "Government people are not going to commit themselves. This idea will not materialize here. You can do no more than plant it here. Those who are serious will take it up. It will take time."

For his part, he reaffirmed that Tanzania is ready, and said that he would try to sell the idea of a multi-national technical institute to the Organization of African Unity.

After returning to Washington, Dr. Robinson declared: "I feel a terrific obligation to do something now. He's [Nyerere] a very inspirational person and he was pleased with us. A spark of hope was generated during that meeting." □

Alma Robinson, formerly a reporter for the Washington Evening Star, is a third year law student at Stanford University and a stringer for Newsweek.