

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JBG-26  
Ruben's Duka

F.O. Marangu  
Moshi, Tanganyika  
East Africa  
16 August 1952

Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

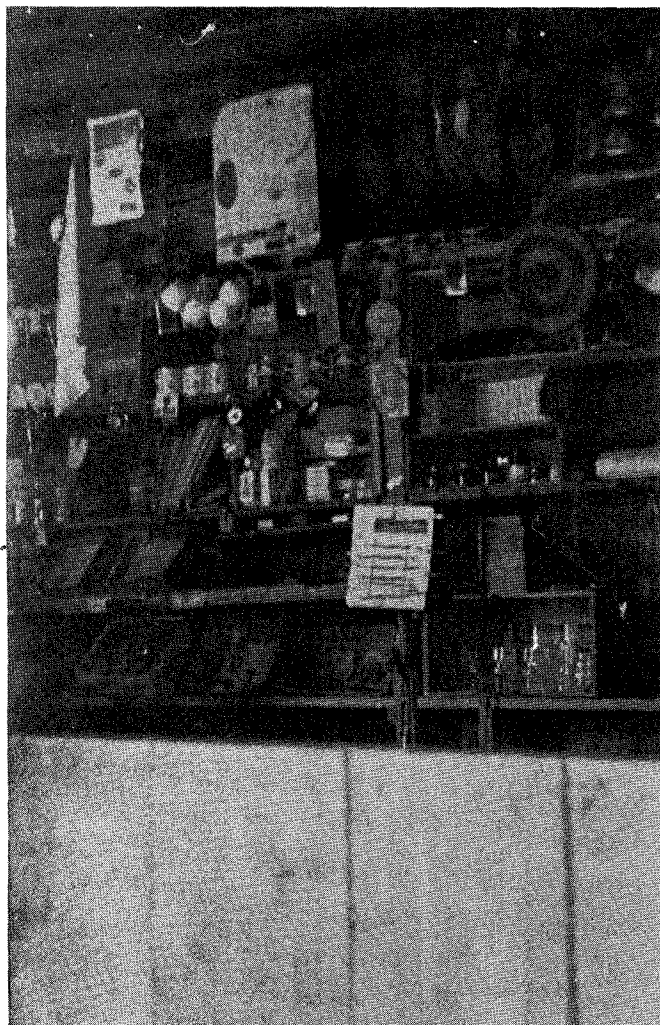
During the intermittent showers, that keep the banana leaves dripping, and other green things on the mountainside glistening wet, a Chagga traveller on the Himo-Rombo Road can halt at the side, set down a heavy headload of maize or grass,<sup>1</sup> and find comfortable shelter on the baraza of Ruben's duka. The baraza or porch is roofed with galvanized iron, as is the entire duka, and a broad window with a wide sill is cut into the sheltered wall. The sill has been polished smooth by innumerable leaning elbows, as have the rough boards around it. The boards are firmly nailed; the frame structure of the duka is solid. There are only a few cracks, gaping now, but they will close up during the rainy months, when the unseasoned, shrunken boards will swell back to size. The boards were cut only a few miles away, a little higher up on the side of Kilimanjaro, and because nowadays more lumber is needed than is cut they were sold and quickly used. African carpenters are used to sawing green wood, which clogs the teeth of a saw, and to seeing the sap ooze round the head of a driven nail.



The wives put down their loads of corn - unshucked, tied by the ear stems in concentric bundles - and lean on the wall. The men kick off muddy sandals and squat in circles, chatting or playing cards with the noisy enthusiasm of

a catfish row crap game. All loiter and dawdle, no sale is hurried, the bartering arguments are mellowed with laughter, and all are welcome whether they buy or not. There are very cheap and routine items (like snuff at four East African cents or safety pins at two cents)<sup>2</sup> but during many hours watch I have seen no one make a token purchase to justify a half hour's leisurely waiting out the rain. The people are made welcome as a business gesture - perhaps - but they are also welcome because of the basic politeness of the Chagga tribe.

The older duka put up a year and a half ago includes a showroom with the owner's living quarters attached. A new addition provides a third room, pushed outward from the building's left side. The native carpenter still hammers on



the side of this new wing, and only the old room is used for store stock. This room is only ten by eighteen feet, but there is an ingenuity - so true of general stores the world over - that defies this confinement of floor space. Pieces of rope and wire hang from the ceiling, their knotted and bent lengths adorned with tin oil lamps, hinges, coils, padlocks, balls of twine and spools of thread, large safety pins. Empty beer cases, stacked one on top of another, make up high shelves behind, and by peering through the festoon-display one can make out stacks of sardines, tinned beef, candy in jars, loaves of bread, bottles of ink, packages of needles and buttons.

Ruben's patrons live in Marangu mangiate (chiefdom) and are members of the Chagga tribe which inhabits the southern and eastern sides of Kilimanjaro. Coming here after travel in other East African areas I was struck by their healthy, well-fed appearance and their better clothes, comparing with the Baganda and superior to the Bahaya of Uganda and western Tanganyika. They eat more meat than most African tribes, and their banana staple is nutritionally varied, with beer brewed from finger millet, with corn, potatoes and sweet potatoes.

Their dress, to European eyes, seems an improvement in taste as well as quantity. The men wear European style clothes, khaki trousers or shorts and shirts on weekdays, often with shoes. On Sunday they wear suits or sportcoats (cut and colored flashily) and slacks, with shoes. A lot of clothing is bought second hand; and I have recognized one garment, now in great vogue, as the blue-lapelled wool coat of the U.S. Junior R.O.T.C. uniform which I wore in high school. East Africa as

a whole is a market for used clothes and obsolete uniforms from clothes-rich America and Australia, and despite the nearness to the equator the climate calls for wool almost as much as for cotton.

The clothing worn by the women gives little protection from the mountain chill. It is very colorful, consisting usually of a simple cotton dress or sarong with an even more brightly colored scarf or shawl draped over. The shawl is often so large that it is worn, not ungracefully, in the manner of a sari. The material is cotton, silk, or rayon; wool would be more comfortable but seldom is used. Often there will be a concentric pattern or a single large round print on the sarong. When this is so, invariably the point of chromatic interest is centered on the lady's rear, effectively calculated to pull, as she walks past, at the eyes of the men. To esthetic advantage, Chagga women usually are barefoot.

These men and women are dependent for pocket money on the cash crop, coffee, the fine Arabica which does well in a wide band round the mountain. They are seasonably rich and poor, before and after the selling times. So the store gets a fluctuating business, and during the off season must make the classic country store choice between extending credit or reducing sales and losing friends.

Ruben runs this store during his spare hours, keeping a mtoto, or adolescent hireling, there during his absence. His main job is that of head boy at the Marangu Hotel, 200 yards away on the other side of the road, and savings from his salary of some 70 shillings per month, along with his earnings as a country plumber and primitive sanitary engineer, accrued to become the capital supporting the store, an amount of about 2,500 shillings.

Ruben isn't especially worried about succeeding in the sense of making a lot of money. He enjoys his store and the company it provides. He likes to be thought of as a local business man, and likes a small profit to supplement his pay as hotel headboy and plumber. His small banana plot, too, does not supply enough, and he needs additional food (for himself and his family of one wife and four children). His agency of the carpenter work gives him a measure of supervisory authority and makes him respected by his fellow tribesmen. It also causes him to be regarded as useful by the local European farmers and hotel keepers.

Ruben and the other African duka owners on Kilimanjaro (some 1,300) are a new and unusual group in East Africa. In most areas, Indians own and operate all of the country dukas and have a monopoly of the retail and wholesale country trade. Here, however, almost all Asiatics were driven off the mountain by 1946, and Africans have replaced them. (A few Indians still operate stores on the mountain, and these are located on European or Mission holdings.) The way in which this was done does not seem to be known among the Europeans I have talked with, but the story, according to my acquaintance Mr. O.M.J. Lema, Manager of the Chagga General Trading Company, was that the Chagga presented a petition to the administration. They asked the white officials to investigate the ability of the natives to run the dukas, and after a few Chagga owned stores had been inspected and approved, no Indians were permitted to renew their licenses.

Since then the Chagga duka owners have apparently been fairly successful. One explanation is that they cannot help succeeding with no Indian competition in this comparatively wealthy area. Another explanation, suggested by a District

Officer, is one Chagga trait which is very unusual among East Africans. The Chagga do not go overboard in extending credit to family members and clan associates. I asked Ruben about this, and he spoke philosophically in pidgin Swahili: sema centis badu, shauri mingi; centis sasa hivi, shauri kidogo: I say money later, much argument and trouble; money now, small argument.

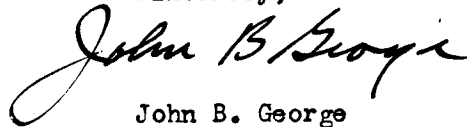
What does this reveal regarding the progressiveness of the Chagga tribe? Does it demonstrate an ability to fend for themselves under changing conditions? They are - unlike most other tribes - politically and economically aggressive. They possessed sufficient tribal unity and organization to win from the government this monopoly of retail trade on the mountain. And - freed from competition - they have proved that they can satisfactorily handle small retail stores, a competence unusual among East African natives. But the Chagga are not now - as often so glibly stated - competing successfully with Indians.<sup>3</sup> And they would probably not continue in business if Indians should be permitted to return to the mountain. The locals who have a choice now of buying from African or Indian - the truck drivers and local Europeans who are able to travel to Moshi to shop - will not buy more than an occasional safety pin, or a loaf of bread when the road is muddy and impassable, from Ruben. They go down to Moshi and deal with the Indians, and with the European stores.

Moreover, the wholesale and jobber relations of the duka owners indicate a continued dependence on Indians. The duka owners buy more from the Indians, often at prices set by the Indians, than from the Chagga General Trading Company (the old Chagga Traders Cooperative Society), an embryo native wholesale house with offices in Moshi. The government has given the trading company a local monopoly of sugar for African consumption, thus guaranteeing a small profitable business to encourage the company, and, from time to time throws further sops to keep it going. But the Company's Manager, Mr. Lema, told me, with a helpless shrug, that the Indians still had every edge. "They buy in huge lots, they are alert always watching the market, and they operate on a very small profit. We have not had the capital for large-lot buying, and have had to ask our members to subscribe it. (Ruben, for example, does not feel able to subscribe to the Company since his duka is not large and his capital less than 5,000 shillings.) They have complained often because, when the goods we had ordered finally arrived,<sup>4</sup> they would sometimes be available at Indian stores at a lower price." He went on to tell me that so far the company had dealt mainly in cloth, had never handled a wide stock of duka knick-knacks, and had never operated its own delivery system or had outside sales arrangements. The shrugging continued as he talked, but he said there would be hope of meeting Indian competition for a few items after the Company had gathered a little capital.

Despite their tribal patriotism and government encouragement, the people on the mountain have not been able to cast off their economic dependence on local Asiatics. But the little African owned stores fill a need, even if their ownership is determined by uneconomic tribalism. In the age-old tradition of the country general store, owned by a local, they provide an element of familiar sympathy, so lacking when the store owner is a foreigner, and each one lends its bit of rustic charm to the mountain slopes. The clean swept clay of Ruben's baraza, the inside smell of new lacquer or paint on jar lids and boxes, the dusty accumulations of slow-selling tinned goods and the rusty bits of hardware recall to me an old boyhood haven. Once I saw a little Chagga boy, probably

truant from school, trading some eggs for a piece of barley sugar, and I thought of how, some twenty-five years ago, I used to track snow into a general store in our rural Midwest. I would be carrying several dead cottontails, pot-shot with a .22 rifle and frozen stiff; and my presumptuous bartering with the owner for several sticks of horehound or peppermint would amuse the adult loiterers and checker players round the potbellied stove. Kilimanjaro Mountain is a long way from Brookfield, Missouri. But in an unscholarly way I sensed a kinship, warm and real, between this African lad and almost any American farm boy a generation back.

Sincerely,



John B. George

1. It is now the season for maize or corn harvesting. The corn is grown some 3,000 feet down on the mountainside. It is the duty - and a traditional privilege - of the Chagga women, sometimes assisted by children, to carry the corn up to the banana-coffee belt where they have their houses. The grass is for stall-feeding cattle which are kept in special huts because of the shortage of grazing land. Eventually these cattle go blind in the windowless grass huts.
2. The East African Shilling, worth about \$.14, is decimalized into cents.
3. The Chagga leaders realize this. The "Incentives Committee" for the Northern Province, which includes Moshi and three other Districts, made up of several chiefs and including an Indian businessman member, included the admission in their report, published in the East African Standard of 8 August 1952.
4. Deliveries of goods from the United Kingdom require as much as seven months, though paid for in advance.

Attached is a review of a recent pamphlet entitled Federation and the African

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Review of a Pamphlet by N.H. Wilson, Abel Nyirenda and T.J. Hlazo, published by Capricorn Society, May, 1952, Federation and the African: The case for Federation of the two Rhodesias and Nyasaland from the African Viewpoint.

Since May of this year onward there has been circulated throughout United Kingdom and East Africa a "Confidential" pamphlet published by the Capricorn Africa Society and entitled Federation and the African, with a subtitle, condemned in some quarters as highly misleading, - "The Case for Federation of the Two Rhodesias and Nyasaland from the African Viewpoint." (Federation of these Central African territories would be the first stage of a later federation including the East African territories of Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda.) Because this pamphlet summarizes much of the thinking behind the Capricorn Society, and certain other groups now lobbying for federation, it should be read by interested scholars. It was to be republished by the Capricorn Society July 15th.

The capricorn movement for federation is basically powered by Europeans, but has received some support from educated Africans. The form of federation it proposes has been described in Kenya as the only possible means of protecting European interests - or in some cases of insuring European survival - in areas of native numerical majorities. This pamphlet, however, purports to express the African point of view, and to say in effect that the only sensible course for natives is to endorse the declarations of the Capricorn Society, which envisage further industrialization and a stimulation of the inflow of European immigration into the territories.

The first and second chapters state objectives, and seek to establish the great industrial potential of the East-Central African area. After making the challengeable statement that "it is about the same size ... as the U.S. and has about the same potential wealth;" they indicate that its sparse population and lack of indigenous skills and capital makes the area a power vacuum, inviting invasion. Three great forces - "Communism," "Asiatics ... from India," or a "partnership of Africans and immigrant Europeans working together ... for the benefit of both" are seen as alternate means of filling this vacuum and integrating Capricorn Africa usefully into the world economy. The conclusion reached is that the partnership with immigrant Europeans affords an only solution, and that only through such a partnership can the wealth per individual be increased and the "full ideals of Western Civilization" be realized. Africans who wish to share European culture and living standards would be given every opportunity: those wishing to remain tribal would be protected in that status in tribal reserves.

Chapter III discusses the Race Relations Policy put forward, with its economic aspects following in Chapter IV. Distinction from the Apartheid concept is claimed and that concept is attacked; the Capricorn Society's ideal is to "allow the productive capacity of every man to be realized to the full ... if a gifted electrical engineer has a black skin, that skin

does not prevent the community from having the full benefit of his talents; and if a man with a white skin has no capacity above what is needed for a street scavenger, that white skin does not prevent him from using his lowly gifts, does not compel him to pretend to be a skilled craftsman and so bring down the average standard of production of skilled craftsmen."

In Chapter V the distinction between Federation and "amalgamation" is made, and the continued autonomy of the territorial governments, including their native agencies, is promised. Chapter VI consists of a list of questions and answers, largely concerned with guarantees against discrimination.

The conclusions in Chapter VII express the great urgency of a Federation agreement being reached at once. The danger of delay is said to be that Central Africa will either fall headlong into the Union or will "lapse into inertia, depression and decay ..."

Appendices give (1) the text of the Salisbury Declarations with a rather impressive list of signatories largely Europeans of distinction in the dependent areas; (2) the "statement on partnership" of the Northern Rhodesian Government; (3) the definition of the "Two Pyramid" (socio-economic distinction or grading of individuals) as against the South African concept of Apartheid; and (4) an article on Civilization, Culture and the African which argues, in terms of the lag of "culture" behind "civilization," the need for continued tutelage of African populations by European monitors.

The pamphlet gives the foreigner a good picture of the attitudes of a large number of Europeans here in East Africa, and in a local sense it represents an increasing softening of European opinion, as witness the newly admitted possibility of a European doing menial work in and black and white society. It will be attacked by Africans as selling them out to Europeans; by Asians as promoting a black-white conspiracy against the brown-skinned in Africa; and by many Europeans (officials more than settlers) who feel its conditions have no hope of acceptance by an African majority. The unofficial approval of the Governor is said to have been secured, but the District officials with whom I have spoken condemn the pamphlet as unrealistic, unacceptable to the East African native authorities. In the Rhodesias the reaction may not be identical, but every East African native I have heard from regarding the pamphlet, has said outrightly that he considers the pamphlet raw European propaganda.

*John B. Gray*