

WHY WE RECOGNISED BIAFRA

By PRESIDENT NYERERE

LEADERS of Tanzania have probably talked more about the need for African unity than those of any other country. Giving formal recognition to even greater disunity in Africa was therefore a very difficult decision to make. Our reluctance to do so was compounded by our understanding of the problems of unity — of which we have some experience — and of the problems of Nigeria. For we have had very good relations with the Federation of Nigeria, even to the extent that when we needed help from Africa we asked it of the Federation.

But unity can only be based on the general consent of the people involved. The people must feel that this State, or this Union, is theirs; and they must be willing to have their quarrels in that context. Once a large number of the people of any such political unit stop believing that the State is theirs, and that the Government is their instrument, then the unit is no longer viable. It will not continue to receive the loyalty of its citizens.

For the citizen's duty to serve, and if necessary to die for, his country stems from the fact that it is his and that its Government is the instrument of himself and his fellow-citizens. The duty stems, in other words, from the common denominator of accepted statehood, and from the State Government's responsibility to protect all the citizens and serve them all. For States, and Governments, exist for men and for the service of man. They exist for the citizens' protection, their welfare and the future well-being of their children. There is no other justification for States and governments except man.

In Nigeria this consciousness of a common citizenship was destroyed by the events of 1966, and in particular by the pogroms in which 30,000 Eastern Nigerians were murdered, many more injured, and about two million forced to flee from the North of their country. It is these pogroms, and the apparent inability or unwillingness of the authorities to protect the victims, which underlies the Easterners' conviction that they have been rejected by other Nigerians and abandoned by the Federal Government.

Agreement

Whether the Easterners are correct in their belief that they have been rejected is a matter for argument. But they do have this belief. And if they are wrong they have to be convinced that they are wrong. They will not be convinced by being shot. Nor will their acceptance as part of the Federation be demonstrated by the use of Federal power to bomb schools and hospitals in the areas to which people fled from persecution.

In Britain, in 1950, the Stone of Scone was stolen from Westminster Abbey by Scottish Nationalists while I was still a student at Edinburgh. That act did not represent a wish by the majority of the Scottish people to govern themselves. But if, for some peculiar reason, the vast majority of the Scottish people decided that Scotland should secede from the United Kingdom, would the Government in London order the bombing of Edinburgh, and in pursuing the Scots into the Highlands, kill the civilians they overtook? Certainly the Union Government would not do this, it would argue with the Scots, and try to reach some compromise.

As President of Tanzania it is my duty to safeguard the integrity of the United Republic. But if the mass of the people of Zanzibar should, without external manipulation, and for some reason of their own decide that the Union was prejudicial to their existence. I could not advocate bombing them into submission. To do so would not be to defend the Union. The Union would have ceased to exist when the consent of its constituent members was withdrawn. I would certainly be one of those working hard to prevent secession, or to reduce its disintegrating effects. But I could not support a war on the people whom I have sworn to serve — especially not if the secession is preceded by a rejection of Zanzibaris by Tanganyikans.

Similarly, if we had succeeded in the 1963 attempt to form an East African Federation, or if we should do so in the future, Tanzania would be

overjoyed. But if at some time thereafter the vast majority of the people of any one of the countries should decide — and persist in a decision — to withdraw from the Federation, the other two countries could not wage war against the people who wished to secede. Such a decision would mark a failure by the Federation. That would be tragic; but it would not justify mass killings.

Security

The Biafrans now feel that they cannot live under conditions of personal security in the present Nigerian Federation. As they were unable to achieve an agreement on a new form of association, they have therefore claimed the right to govern themselves. The Biafrans are not claiming the right to govern anyone else. They have not said that they must govern the Federation as the only way of protecting themselves. They have simply withdrawn their consent to the system under which they used to be governed.

Biafra is not now operating under the control of a democratic Government, any more than Nigeria is. But the mass support for the establishment and defence of Biafra is obvious. This is not a case of a few leaders declaring secession for their own private glory. Indeed, by the Aburi Agreement the leaders of Biafra showed a greater reluctance to give up hope of some form of unity with Nigeria than the masses possessed. But the agreement was not implemented.

Tanzania would still like to see some form of co-operation or unity between all the peoples of Nigeria and Biafra. But whether this happens, to what extent, and in what fields, can only be decided by agreement among all the peoples involved. It is not for Tanzania to say.

We in this country believe

that unity is vital for the future of Africa. But it must be a unity which serves the people, and which is freely determined upon by the people.

For 10 months we have accepted the Federal Government's legal right to our support in a "police action to defend the integrity of the State." On that basis we have watched a civil war result in the death of about 100,000 people, and the employment of mercenaries by both sides. We watched the Federal Government reject the advice of Africa to talk instead of demanding surrender before talks could begin. Everything combined gradually to force us to the conclusion that Nigerian unity did not exist.

Tanzania deeply regrets that the will for unity in Nigeria has been destroyed over the past two years. But we are convinced that Nigerian unity cannot be maintained by force any more than unity in East Africa could be created by one State conquering another.