

**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT  
LABOUR DAY—1ST MAY, 1981**

My Fellow Workers of Kenya,

I am glad to have this opportunity to greet and address you all on what is called Labour Day. This is an anniversary, recognized in most parts of the world, which is really a kind of tribute to the dignity of human striving. Today I want us to pause and think for a few minutes about the meaning and objectives of human effort.

The first point is that there is nothing strange about the idea of work, and that should never be represented as a burden. In modern times, opportunity to work has become depicted as a human right, for men and women everywhere. It is something shared by and within all communities, in the sense that a working life is something universally experienced and understood. All sensibly directed work is creative, in terms of the output achieved, or the function that is performed. Moreover, complex modern societies can only be sustained when all these end-products, put together, meet the required needs. This in turn means that, apart from being a right, work is also a duty for each and every person in the society.

I want to pursue this argument a little further. In some regions of the modern world, and especially where powerful trade unions have become political instruments, the word "worker" is commonly employed as a kind of slogan. There is a widespread tendency to put people in different categories, deliberately trying to distinguish between "the workers" and everybody else. Examples of this, however motivated, can be seen both in the East and in the West. And my message to you now is that we in Kenya must reject any effort to have people segmented or stratified in such a manner. For the truth is that, in the kind of society we have evolved and wish to maintain, we are all in the same boat.

Just think for a moment about the facts of life as applied to our own surroundings and experience. We are all of us workers today, in whatever setting or sector of human activity. We all

have to earn a living, in a competitive arena, and we all have to rely upon the services and provisions which make societies functional rather than chaotic. And so we must all produce something or achieve something, in order to put some vital fuel into this social machinery.

Beyond this, in our Republic, any theory about workers being on one side of a fence, with everybody else on the other side, can be quickly demolished. All the people involved in production, from farms and factories, are workers in the ordinary meaning of that word. But apart from being producers, they are also consumers of goods or commodities produced and distributed by other workers, and they utilize services provided by yet another group of workers who might be doctors, or administrators, or engineers. Everyone is contributing to society, in all the different ways which spring from background, or talent, or opportunity. Furthermore, all of us, as workers, are also citizens and parents, knowing a common and equal concern for the future of our children and the welfare of the nation as a whole.

There is an important conclusion that we must draw from all this. Here in Kenya, we should actively discourage any ideas about artificial differences within society. The whole nation—producers and consumers, citizens and parents, young and old—must move forward in harmony. We do not need to anticipate, or to measure ourselves by, the historical experience of any other regions. Instead, we can, and must, fashion our own destiny.

Against that background, let me return, briefly, to a point I made earlier about using this occasion to reflect upon the philosophies of human effort. As you all know, our Republic is confronting a number of harsh economic difficulties. One of these emerges directly from the continuing high rate of population increase. Quite simply and obviously, in order to feed such a rapidly expanding population, we must contrive to produce more and more from the land. Then, there is the serious question of jobs and housing, education and health services, for all these people. If society is going to be able to make all these provisions, then we must all of us inject more into the processes of creating wealth

by working harder in response to nationwide impulses of purpose and understanding. I would like to add that all of us Kenyans must now accept and practise family planning.

Many economic difficulties, as I have explained many times, are beyond our control. But here again, we are not entirely helpless in the face of external challenge. Much can be done to reduce the damaging impacts of global inflation, through domestic effort. By this I mean a more calculated and determined application of discipline and skill, to step up productivity in every sector. The more self-sufficient we are, the less the effect of external forces.

We must therefore increase productivity. How do we do that? There are, of course, many factors involved. But whether in agriculture or in manufacturing and service industries, one critical need is for the up-grading of skills. This is now being encouraged by means of public policies and initiatives, but it also has to emerge from human ambition, and—in particular—those who are at present classified as semi-skilled should never be satisfied with such a status.

I know that many of you listening to me today would be only too happy to regard work as a right, and to play a part in social effort. The volume of unemployment in Kenya is still a most serious problem. It is a consequence—in part—of the rapid rate of increase in our population which is also responsible for the predominance of younger people in our society. My Government is constantly searching for new ways to meet this situation, and we are examining many ideas which might help us to overcome what is an inevitable array of economic and practical constraints.

But one fact, which some have called ironical, has in my view become wholly unacceptable in the context of national needs and responsibilities. This is the fact that, today, there are plenty of job opportunities in the rural areas, and some of our plantation industries frequently report that they are frustrated by an acute shortage of labour. At the same time we have thousands of young Kenyans unemployed and loitering in the streets of urban centres. Our school-leavers, and others within the ranks of the unemployed, must simply come to respect the value and the dignity of manual work. There is no point now in ever more people, especially young

people, flocking to the cities and the urban areas in search of other jobs. This only means depriving the rural areas, whose development is essential for the development of the nation as a whole, of strength and vigour which are badly needed. We must reverse this whole trend, in the cause of promoting rural development. And as one means of so doing, I urge employers—throughout all the farming and plantation industries—to offer terms and conditions of service which are more attractive.

My dear countrymen, as you know, the Government is trying hard to ensure increasing job opportunities. As one measure, many opportunities to learn crafts and skills have already been created, for school-leavers, in Village Polytechnics, Industrial Training Centres and other programmes. Plans are now being formulated to increase student intake, and expand the scope of this training. This is not only a social obligation, but also a vital means of keeping pace with the needs of an economy which is becoming more complex. But the development of manpower at all levels involves the private sector also. In this connection I have noted with satisfaction that nearly a score of training establishments, operated by private industry, are at present catering for more than six hundred students every year.

I will now conclude with a few remarks related to our principal Trade Union body. It is my wish that the forthcoming COTU elections should be conducted in an orderly, peaceful and fair manner. The new COTU leadership should then take all responsibilities very seriously, showing an appreciation of our economic realities.

In our experience since independence, the most vital foundation of all nationwide development has been political stability. But to keep up the whole momentum, there must also be working stability in every economic sector. If there are industrial disputes, these must be resolved by using the provisions and processes provided in the law. Reason is always far more valid than emotion. With this in mind, it is my hope that union leaders will organize more advanced training for shop-stewards, not just in the machinery laid down for the handling of disputes, but in every aspect of sound industrial relations.

Finally, let me urge all Kenyans, who are all workers, to move forward in dedication to our nationhood and in total countrywide harmony. In working even harder for ourselves and our country, let us all recognize that the Nyayo philosophy of love, peace and unity is also the right strategy in achieving our objectives.

*NYAYO!!!*