

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CJP -4
The Unique Bereavement of Kenneth Kaunda

November 15, 1961
93 Cornwall Gardens
London, S.W. 7
England

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Kenneth Kaunda, President of the United National Independence Party of Northern Rhodesia, sat beneath the giant, life-sized portrait of Cecil Rhodes in Rhodes House at Oxford, and mourned the tribulation of his people. He had ostensibly come to England to participate in the September Oxford Conference on Tensions In Development, sponsored by the Council on World Tensions (New York) and the Overseas Development Institute (London). With the exception of Kaunda, it was a meeting of the "in" and the established. It included such names as Paul Hoffman of the United Nations, the Canadian winner of the Nobel Prize, Lester Pearson, the Indian Ambassador to the United States, B.K. Nehru, and the then British Colonial Secretary Iain Macleod. These sincere and dedicated men, many wearing the honors and scars of past devotion to the principals of independence and national development, had come to discuss tensions in general and in abstract. The presence of Kenneth Kaunda confronted them with the concrete, the specific, the urgent, and the immediate. For at the very time the Conference began its deliberations, the Protectorate of Northern Rhodesia was rife with raids, riots, rage, and reprisals.

In February of 1961 the new Constitution for Northern Rhodesia proposed by the British Colonial Office, had assured an African majority in the Legislative Council. With a population of 2,500,000 Africans, 75,000 Whites, and 6,000 Asians, this would seem to have been a sensible idea commensurate with the political and racial realities of life in Central Africa. But white settlers, lead by Sir Roy Welensky, Prime Minister of the Central African Federation of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, vigorously and successfully opposed this concrete response to the "winds of change". They rightly feared this constitution would assure an African-dominated government in copper-rich Northern Rhodesia and consequently, a rapid disintegration of the white-dominated eight year old Federation, a Federation widely touted as a racial partnership, but a partnership defined by its first Governor as similar to that between a horse and its rider.

In June of 1961, skillfully and powerfully aided by a small hard core of Conservative members of the British Parliament and House of Lords, Sir Roy and his followers secured modifications of the Constitutional proposals. These changes made it impossible for Africans to secure a majority in the Legislative Council. African response was predictably angry and bitter. Kaunda, whose party has around 400,000 members, blamed himself for having "had too much faith in the British Government".

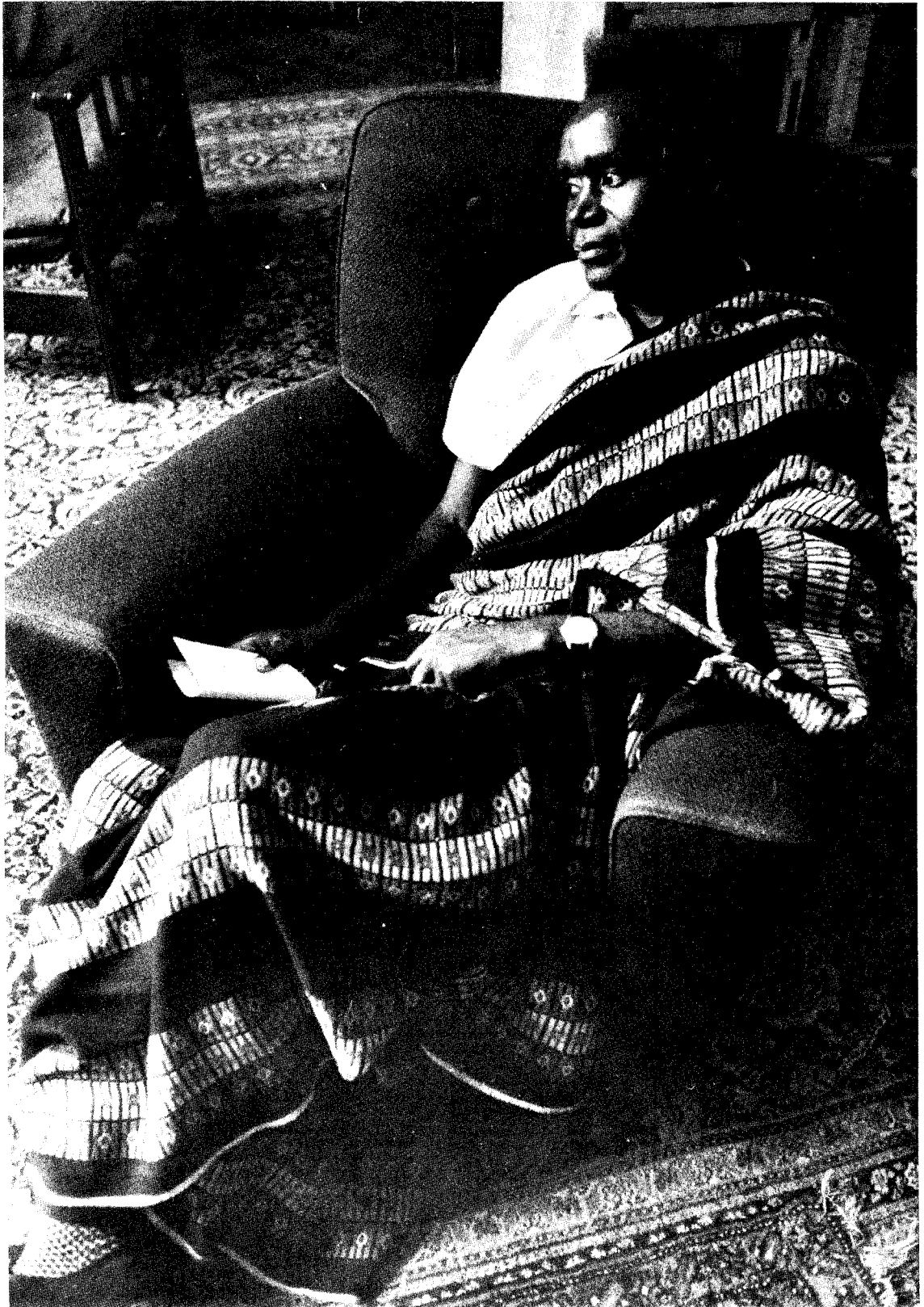
However, as a firm believer in a philosophy of non-violence, he again and again appealed to the members of his party to eschew violent action. For a while they appeared to listen, but then reports of arson, death, and revolt in Northern Rhodesia began to emerge. At least forty Africans had been killed by the Northern Rhodesian Police Force, forty-four schools had been damaged by fire, railways had been blocked, and communications disrupted. Of 1,895 Africans arrested as of September 7, 1961, 971 held membership cards in the United National Independence Party.

So it was that Kenneth Kaunda sat beneath the portrait of the great imperialist and spoke grievously and sorrowfully of the acts of violence of his own people, and of the failure of head and heart on the part of the British Government. His sorrow was compassionate, all-encompassing and tinged with anger, and his prestigious audience responded with generous and sympathetic applause. Some of them later suggested that the most significant practical accomplishment of the Oxford Conference was giving Kaunda's case a broad public hearing, and buttressing his views with the support of this international pressure group of formidable proportions. The coverage given to Kaunda's visit by the British press provided ample evidence that he had in fact received a broad public hearing. More on that later, but first something about the compassionate Kenneth himself.

Now the father of seven boys, he was born thirty-seven years ago in a Church of Scotland Mission in the Northern Province of Northern Rhodesia. His father, a Nyasa, was an ordained minister, who later became a teacher. Kenneth's mother was also a teacher, and it follows that this was his own early and initial career. Educated in schools in the Northern Province, he returned to his early home, the Church of Scotland Mission, to begin his work as a teacher. Later he taught in Tanganyika, and then worked in the Welfare Office in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. He returned to Northern Rhodesia in 1949 as an interpreter for the British Government. It was at this time that he first became deeply involved in politics.

He joined the African National Congress, and proceeded to organize a branch in the area of Chinsali. His complete absorption and organizational ability soon made him the leading political figure in the Northern Province, and by 1952 he was not only secretary-general of the Congress, but also editor of the Congress News Circular.

It was in these positions that Kaunda began his political and personal struggle against the white settler-dominated Federation, with the built in white rider, black horse partnership. However, African opposition was squashed and in 1953 the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was imposed upon the African nationalists of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland. There was to be a "testing period" of not less than seven and not more than ten years, but to Kaunda and his followers, it was a step away from the more desirable, if not loved, status of Protectorate under the British Colonial Office, and a step toward the creation of a "white man's country" in Africa.



Kenneth Kaunda
Photograph by Philip Jones-Griffiths
Courtesy THE OBSERVER

Facing the overwhelming fact of the actual imposition of the Federation, the attacks of the African National Congress in Northern Rhodesia were clouded by hopelessness and lost momentum. The Congress now began to concentrate its efforts on the more immediate, and personally galling, existence of the color bar in the Federation. Demonstrations and boycotts were the order of the day. Kaunda was soon in jail for having in his possession "banned documents".

Emerging from jail after two months, and possessing that time-honored African title, "Prison Graduate", he was now consciously determined to channel his life in such a way that prison for him would never again be a hardship. Drinking and smoking he rejected, and increasing standards of asceticism now prevail in his life. An extended stay in India, where he became ill with tuberculosis, confirmed the decisions and resolutions made during his imprisonment.

Finally recovering from his illness and returning to Northern Rhodesia, Kaunda decided the African National Congress was no longer carrying on the vigorous kind of fight he desired. He also discovered there were severe differences in tactics between himself and other Congress leaders. He resigned from the A N C and in 1958 formed the Zambia African National Congress. It was a short lived party, for Zambia was soon banned and its leaders banished to the deep recesses of the Northern Rhodesian bush. While Kaunda languished in the bush, his old illness returned and he almost died. Still sick and ailing, he was eventually brought to trial and convicted of having held an illegal meeting. He was sent to prison for nine months, but while there, he gradually recovered from his second bout with tuberculosis.

Released from prison he went right back into the social and political struggle. In January of 1960 he organized the United National Independence Party to replace the banned Zambia. As president of the party he took part in the February 1961 constitutional talks in London, in which the British Government had assured the representatives of Northern Rhodesia's 2,500,000 Africans a legislative majority over the representatives of the 75,000 member white community. Then came the June nerve failure of the British Government under shrewd, powerful, and sledgehammer blows of Sir Roy Welensky and his eminent British Conservative Party backers. They secured constitutional modifications which eliminated any chance of an African majority in the Legislative Council.

The pattern of reversal, impatience, reprisal, and violence was the source of bereavement and sadness that permeated Kenneth's words and demeanor at Rhodes House and throughout the days that I trailed him around England. He had truly taken the Gandhian heritage and made it a part of his being.

Change was to be brought about by persuasion, consent and the patient handling of human nature. It is to be done without coercion, and at the same time, without any compromise on essentials. Adherence to these

standards would result in something both remarkable and effective. Major changes in relation to all people - the masses, the whole country - would come about.

Leadership must be completely identified with the masses, even if it means falling behind and slowing down the pace of progress. The whole people must be carried forward with the leader, who must always seek to function within the social fabric in which the masses have been living for centuries. Gradual but revolutionary changes must be made without uprooting the people from their soil. Continuity with the past must be insisted upon, and the existing social system accepted as the basis for political and social strategy.

Indeed there is divine essence in the world and every individual possesses something of it, and can develop it. If means, tactics, and strategies do not violate that divinity, its carefully nurtured development can shake and shape the world.

These things being at the heart and soul of Kenneth Kaunda, it is no wonder that he mourned.

On the same night he made his presentation to the Conference, he left Oxford. He was off and about his people's business. In the weeks that followed he made speeches; was interviewed numerous times by television, radio, and newspaper reporters; met with members of the British Parliament; worked with the two man staff representing UNIP in London; dined with pacifists and nobility; held conferences with the Colonial Secretary; and turned down hundreds of political and social invitations.

In the midst of all this activity, as far as I could tell, he never, not once, seemed to waver from the severe ascetic course he had carved out in the days of imprisonment. In fact, he seemed casually aware, that his efforts in England might well land him in another Federation prison cell. His deep and abiding worry was that his followers at home would stop listening to him all together, and turn their frustration and rage into havoc and blood.

After a period of some initial arrogance and a rude declaration intimating Kaunda was responsible for the violence in Northern Rhodesia, the British Government of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan backed away from its stand that the proposed Constitution, modified under settler pressure in June, was a final document. Insisting the Government would not be intimidated by violence, the Colonial Office announced it was ready to consider further written representations on the constitution for Northern Rhodesia. Later in the month the British Government went a little further and announced that as soon as Northern Rhodesias constitution was settled, it would consider the resumption of the constitutional review for the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The white rider on his black horse was still not secure in the saddle.

All these things came about after Kenneth's return to Northern Rhodesia. There is no doubt in my mind, however, that out of his own integrity, intellectual strength, and devotion he secured a crucial victory for his people. Or more accurately, he has prevented Sir Roy and his white dominated Federation from winning a total and final victory. Now, however, the fight for Northern Rhodesia is still being waged within the British Colonial Office, and according to Kenneth, that's a far, far better place than in the minds and hearts of the white settlers of Southern and Northern Rhodesia.

It occurs to me that I may have created a rather severe, grim picture of Kenneth Kaunda. This is only because I have been discussing him within the framework of the severe and grim task which is so much a part of him. There is more. There is humor and laughter, and love for life, for his wife and children. There is the gay luncheon companion and the admired "gentleman" of an Oxford steward. There is the shy smile and the electric hair standing straight up on his head. There is the Kenneth who held my hand tightly as we said goodbye, and called me, "Friend". But still, most of all, there is the bereaved Kenneth Kaunda who said to me, "Charles, your people are suffering".

Sincerely,

Charles Patterson

Received New York December 18, 1961