

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JCB-22

Nyasaland: Transition to the
African State of Malawi

July 14, 1963

3 Richmond Close, Highlands
Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia

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

Dear Mr. Nolte:

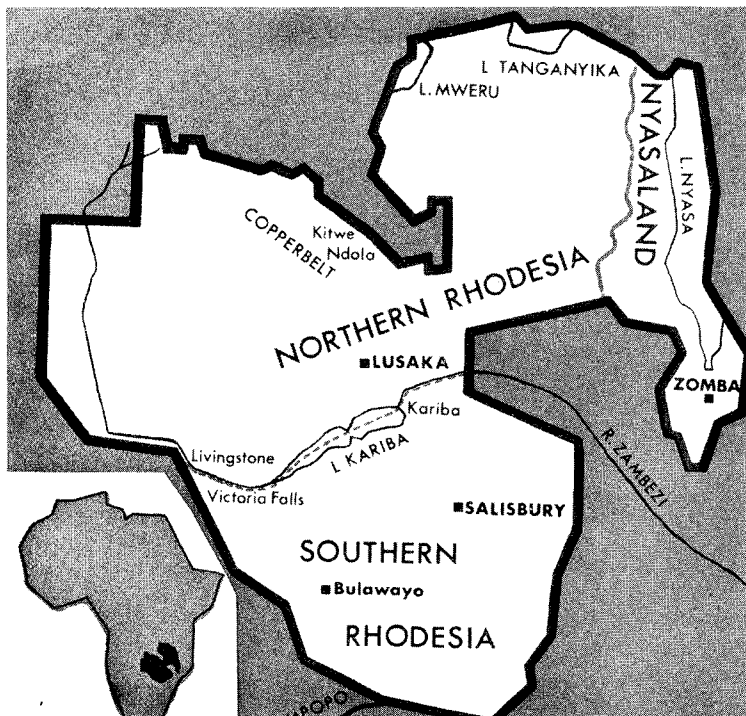
On Friday, June 28th, a European man, a girl and a boy were beaten up by the white-jacketed bodyguards of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Prime Minister of Nyasaland, because they didn't pull off the road in front of his procession.



This hasn't been the first incidence of violence since this small corner of the now-defunct Federation was granted self-rule. A Coloured political leader was seriously beaten by Dr. Banda's bodyguards when he tried to see the Prime Minister; opposition African political leaders have been threatened and attacked (one has disappeared completely); just three weeks ago it was reported that Indians living in Chiromo, 62 miles south of Blantyre, had to flee from terrorization by some 300 red-shirted Youth League members of Dr. Banda's Malawi Congress Party. But this was the first time that Europeans have been attacked and it sent a shiver of panic through the European community, just awakening to the fact that they no longer control the country.

Harvest of discontent?

In the light of Nyasaland's history, however, it may seem strange that such an attack hasn't happened before. Nyasaland was carved out of Central Africa by colonial-minded Englishmen in the last half of the 19th Century and the British Imperial Government formally took it over as a protectorate in 1891. A primitive country in resources, it had little to lure the English settler (its 1963 population: 9400 Europeans, 3,000,000 Africans). But Europeans have dominated the country administratively and economically. They have been the masters and the Africans the servants, a society of paternalistic segregation which kept the Black man "in his place".



In 1953 the joining of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland into a Federal Government entrenched White domination of the territories, and African nationalists in Nyasaland saw federation as the barrier that must be broken if they were to gain control of their own country.

Leaders of the Nyasaland African National Congress, now the Malawi Congress Party, asked Dr. Banda to come home from Ghana, where he was practicing medicine, to take over the leadership of their struggle. When he arrived on July 5, 1958, he dedicated himself to the death of the Federation



Dr. Hastings Banda
on a Malawi poster

Africans and Indians, Dr. Banda pushed for self-government and the right to break away from the Federation. This right was promised him in 1962 and this year is all his. Self-government came into effect on February 1st, this year. Dr. Banda became the first Prime Minister and talks on the dissolution of the Federation have just been completed at Victoria Falls. Complete independence for Malawi (the new name which will replace 'Nyasaland') is scheduled for the end of the year.

"We have won," Dr. Banda said. "We have defeated the European settlers. And," remembering, no doubt, the treatment of the African in the past, "any European who cannot accept an African Government and treat Africans with respect is no longer welcome."

But even today many of the Europeans in the country act as if they were still living in another age. They have not been able to accept the fact that most of the continent is now ruled by African governments. They are shocked at how quickly Africans have taken over the country. To them it is out of place for an African to be driving with an escort down the highways and dining in the best hotels. It annoys them.

While awaiting African friends in the lounge of a hotel in Blantyre I shared a table with a European farmer who filled my ear with attacks

and total independence for the Malawi people. As his campaign grew in intensity he and over 100 others were imprisoned ("detained", say the British).

Recounting this event later, Dr. Banda said, "You know what they did? They picked me up in my pajamas, put me in their stupid plane and took me to their stupid prison in Gwelo (Southern Rhodesia). Then someone in Salisbury made a big speech in his so-called Federal Parliament and said 'I have finished Banda'. Had he? Well..."

When the Malawians had their way

It was not long afterward that the British Government, feeling the winds of change, formed a new constitution and in the election of 1961 the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) candidates won an overwhelming victory. With wide support among

on America and the UN for driving the European out of Africa. As he began a lecture on the foibles of Africans my friends arrived. He stammered, grew red, and left. For the next hour we were the main attraction in the hotel. It was as if no African had ever sat there before and my friends took great delight in their notoriety. It was hard to believe that Africans ruled this country.

In another hotel English settlers, bitter over the break-up of the Federation, talked about their fears of an African government. "I don't think they really understand us at home." These people are certainly not "at home" in the country where they live. Every news item that came over the small radio at the end of the bar proclaimed that their world was coming to an end. The 15 minute newscast that evening mentioned:

- that Civil Servants in Nyasaland called a meeting to protest against the attack on Europeans and to demand protection of their rights;
- that Sir Roy Welensky, Federal Prime Minister, had deplored the worsening of race relations in Nyasaland;
- that a European was found shot in the Congo;
- that the Federation would be dissolved by the end of the year;
- that Kenya would become independent by December;
- that the East African Federation was going ahead successfully;
- that Zanzibar will be getting independence soon;
- that the United States is planning to speed up integration.

Glumly those around the bar shook their heads in dismay and ordered another drink.

The new Ministers are extremely sensitive and protective of their newly acquired positions. They passed an edict stating that all cars must give way to the Prime Minister, whose car is usually preceeded by an MCP (Land Rover) with blinking lights and a siren. It was a call for courtesy to the leader of the country. It was also a practical consideration since some of Nyasaland's roads are too narrow for cars to pass safely at speed.

As a news item, this was reported objectively in the conservative Sunday Mail, published in Salisbury. "It is understood here that the practice of pulling aside for the Prime Minister's car is not such a novelty and has something of a precedent in old British Colonial custom. This same treatment was accorded to the Governor when he travelled and the cars pulled over on the road when he passed." Most Europeans saw the matter quite differently. An editorial in the same edition reflected the "settler" attitude. "The comic-opera edict has been proclaimed that Europeans and Africans must give way to Dr. Banda's car - an edict that Dr. Banda, having lived so long in London, must have known would make him look ridiculous."

Some Europeans just ignored the ruling. There were reminders and finally Dr. Banda warned that such insults would not be tolerated. Finally his bodyguards took his statement literally and set the

European community in an uproar.

Mr. Kanyama Chiume, Publicity Secretary for the Party and Government Minister for Education and Social Development, reiterated his party's attitude when he said, "One bad individual can spoil the name of a community. So it is in the case of those Europeans who show deliberate insolence and rudeness to the Prime Minister, either on the road or otherwise. It will be wrong for anyone to think that the cultivation of good will is a one-way street, the sole duty of Africans. Any European or foreigner who behaves rudely to the people of this country is a danger to racial harmony and deserves the extreme condemnation of all who want racial peace."

The Indians, men in the middle

While it is surprising that there haven't been more incidents against Europeans, what really comes as a shock is the fact that most of the attacks fall on the hapless Indians and Africans.

Most of the Indian community in Nyasaland are Moslem and businessmen. They profess allegiance to the African Government and consider themselves to be Malawian. They try to avoid trouble and do not cross the political powers of the country.

But just as the Europeans look down on the Indians, the Africans, leaders as well as the rank and file, have little respect for them. They look upon the Indian's present attitude as an attempt to be on the right side. They believe the Indians would quickly change if a stronger power came along. Even Indians with political stature, like Mr. Sattar Sacranie, legal advisor to the Malawi Congress Party, are mistrusted and despised. Mr. Henry Masauko Chipembere, Minister of Local Government and right-hand man to Dr. Banda, describes Mr. Sacranie contemptuously as "too clever". "He talks so fast and smoothly that we have often agreed to things before we fully understood what they were all about."



Mr. Sattar Sacranie

Even moderate-speaking John Msonthi, Minister of Trade and Industry who has just returned from a visit to India, told me he disliked Indian control of local trade. "They are not one of us. They send most of their money out of the country, back home. But they are very clever. They are able to get around most financial restrictions....."



Mr. Henry Chipembere, Minister of Local Government, Mr. Kanyama Chiume, Minister for Education and Social Development, and Mr. John Msonthi, Minister of Trade and Industry, share the platform.

African party members have increasingly intimidated Indian merchants and have forced them to support the party if they valued their businesses or their lives. And now they say "the Indians grovel before us trying to win favors. How can we respect people like that?" One Government official condoned the violence against the Indian community: "Perhaps the Youth League acted unwisely and rashly but it is difficult to control fully their strong feelings (about having been pushed around for so long) and perhaps it is the best and quickest way for non-Africans to understand that we will not be dominated by anyone in any way."

The party quickly quieted the recent incident in Chiromo and Indians, including one who was reported to have been attacked, have appeared on a public platform with Dr. Banda to say that "all is well" and that reports of their troubles were exaggerated. Perhaps the Southern Rhodesian Indian leader was right when he described the situation in Nyasaland as "normal". "This sort of thing always happens to us in the period of transition in any country."

One Country, one Party - Malawi

Neither Europeans nor Indians can join the Malawi Congress Party, although some believe they are members. Chipembere assured me that only Africans could claim membership in the ruling party. When I told him I had talked with Indians who claimed to be members he said that if they had membership cards they had them by mistake or

fraud. I told him that some MCP local officials had invited me to join. He claimed they were just "overly friendly". "When I got out of prison," he continued, "Chiume and I went to the Doctor and asked him about membership policy and he told us it had not changed, only Africans can be members."

"If we allow Europeans in they may easily work their way to the top in the party or in the Government because of their better education. If we allow Indians in they may be able to do the same because of their wealth. We are not White or Indian haters, we just do not want to be dominated. We want to rule ourselves."

Theoretically it is possible for non-Africans to participate in the election of Local Government Councils but recently when an Indian woman was elected, Chipembere, as Minister of Local Government, had her removed because her election was a "dangerous precedent".

There is no room for a newspaper that criticizes the Government or reports unfavorable facts. And certainly no dissident African voices are allowed. The doors of Government are closed for Africans who received their experience in local government under the British administration: their loyalties are in question. Even chiefs who support the MCP are suspect because they once served English masters and because they stand in the way of a unified state. A number of un-cooperative chiefs have already been deposed. When I suggested to Chipembere that at this rate the country would soon be without any chiefs, he agreed, that was the idea.

All this is excused by a hearty defense of the one-party state. Sattar Sacranie explained, "A one-party system is not necessarily undemocratic. At this time we can't afford the luxury of an opposition. We must unify our people to work for the country as a whole. We have to overcome tribal divisions and traditional loyalties. Our democracy comes within our party system. At our meetings we discuss and criticize, make proposals and decisions which are passed along to the Prime Minister and the Executives of our party."

"You must not judge us by your Western ways but by our own; our problems are very much different and more complicated than the way you see them."

"Dr. Banda is not undemocratic. If he were, the present trend of unity might be something to worry about."

What about Dr. Banda, the "Lion of Malawi"?

Although Dr. Banda has repeatedly emphasized that there will be no special privilege for Europeans in Nyasaland he has been considered

by many to be a moderate man who wants to build a multi-racial country with all races cooperating under the leadership of an African government. Liberal Europeans appear to be with him but wish he would make a strong statement against the use of violence. He has never openly ordered violence, but many of his statements have offered excuse to some of his more rabid followers to excesses in his name.

While I was there he was busy conferring with heads of his party about the uproar the violence against Europeans and Indians had caused. As far as he was concerned the reported incidents occurred at a most unfortunate time, just as Mr. Butler, the British Colonial Secretary, was conferring with delegates from the Rhodesias and Nyasaland on the break-up of the Federation. Sir Roy Welensky (JCB-21) took advantage of the situation to make the most of his dying political power and said that if the Nyasaland Government could not maintain law and order he would send Federal troops in to protect Europeans and Indians. Nothing could be more calculated to infuriate Dr. Banda than the insinuation that his Government could not adequately run the country. He saw it as an attempt to stop Nyasaland from becoming independent. But he said nothing. Instead the Governor General, Sir Glyn Jones, made a statement that the reports had been over-emphasized and that there was no breakdown of law and order in Nyasaland.

Then, just as everything seemed to have been smoothed over, Dr. Banda came out with a scathing attack against Sir Roy, the panicky British Civil Servants who petitioned Mr. Butler to have the British Government intervene to maintain law and order, and against reporters who first made the episodes public. Two were warned to leave the country ("Or we'll eat you alive," announced Chiume).

The time lapse between the incidents and his public statement raised the question of whether Dr. Banda was really in control of the party or the tool of his two lieutenants, Chiume and Chipembere.

They were among the major leaders who called Banda home and they have publicly proclaimed their loyalty to him. They extoll his wisdom and guidance ("There is nothing between Dr. Banda and God," says Chiume, "except atmosphere.") and they have denounced any reports of inter-party differences.

They may be loyal followers but they appear to have more control over the party machinery than the Doctor. Chipembere holds a semi-court every day where the common folk bring their problems and he helps them. Both men exert a powerful influence over the decisions that are worked out in the Prime Minister's chambers and some European admirers of Banda blame them for the racial extremism and violence.



Mr. Chipembere and Mr. Chiume
off to the United States

This view is countered by Chipembere's statement, "If I attempted to move against this great man I would be crushed in less than an afternoon and my political career would be finished. But it is inconceivable that I would do such a thing. Without the Ngwazi we would have nothing."

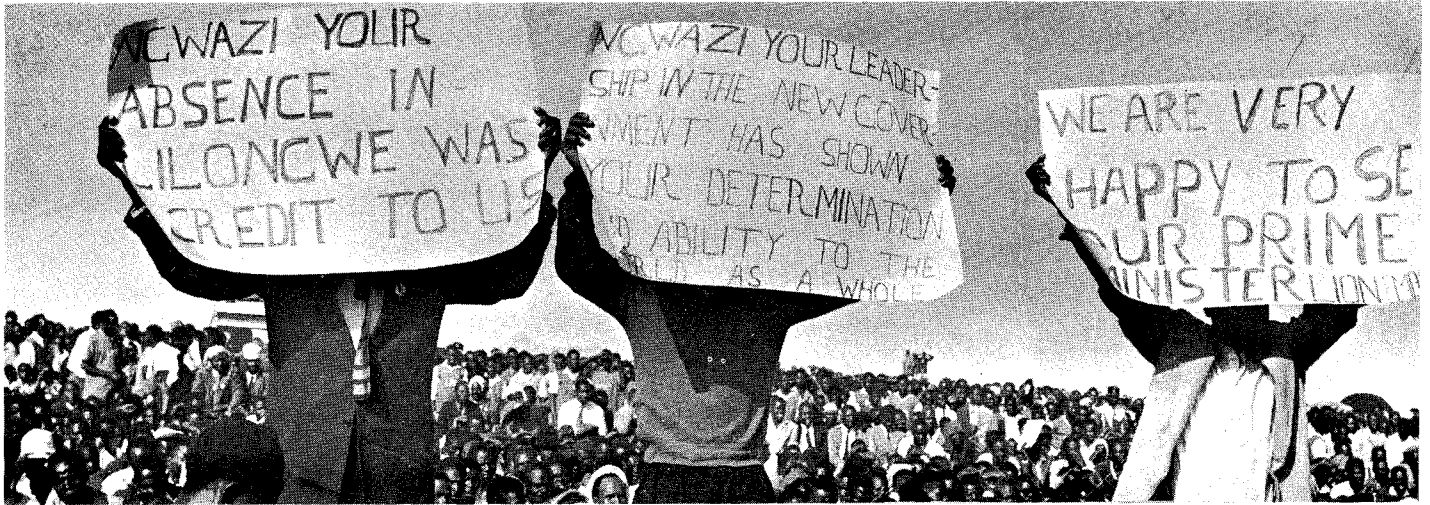
Dr. Banda, speaking at his inauguration as Prime Minister, also asserted, "They brought me here to lead them, therefore I must lead. I am not going to be a rubber stamp....everyone who knows the political realities of this country knows that there is only one leader."

It is possible that Dr. Banda has been caught up unwillingly in the policy he has so long articulated while demanding African independence. He can't very well denounce publicly the actions of his followers who, in their rabid African nationalism, have reacted violently to the past and present arrogance of non-Africans. Any such statement of moderation might be interpreted by his followers as an indication of softness, or of Indian or European influence. He is popular now because he stands for what the people want. He may feel that his popularity is not strong enough to

voice moderation to the over-exuberant pro-African feelings of his followers. When he spoke out on the "attack on Europeans" crisis, he sounded rather like a politician from a segregationist state reassuring his electorate than like a reasonable Head of State.

Whether it is true that the Prime Minister's intemperate statements have been the result of hurt pride, whether he was merely supporting the policy of his two aggressive lieutenants or paliating his party, or whether what happened was by his order and a true indication of where he stands, they raise doubts about where the country is going.

And the "present trend of unity" does cause grave concern among people of all races in Central Africa. UNIP officials in Northern Rhodesia told me Dr. Banda had become a dictator and they made it clear that while they also believed in a strong one-party state,



Nyasaland was not the example they had in mind.

Moderate Africans (supporters of Mr. Nkomo) and liberal Europeans in Southern Rhodesia are also upset about the trend in Nyasaland. They realize that 11 reported cases of violence in a year do not indicate a lack of law and order. They know that the Malawians are usually a happy and friendly people and that much good is being done there. But the wild language, the threats, the breakdown of democratic method and finally the increased tempo of violence there have made the road to independence in Southern Rhodesia much more difficult. European fears have been further hardened, making a violent conflict more probable and a non-racial state less likely.

Sincerely yours,

James C. Brewer

Pictures courtesy of the Nyasaland Information Office

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