

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

Malawi in Crisis

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5kz1w9bn>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 1(2)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

Chipembere, Henry B.M.

Publication Date

1970

DOI

10.5070/F712016356

Copyright Information

Copyright 1970 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

MALAWI IN CRISIS: 1964

by Henry B.M. Chipembere

Because of various restrictions and limitations, Henry Chipembere, exiled former Malawian cabinet minister, has never before had occasion to publish his account of his country's critical upheavals in 1964.

It is, therefore, with great pleasure that UFAHAMU now serves as a vehicle for that account.

In Malawi today there are thousands of detainees and political prisoners, that is to say, men, women, and youths detained without trial for criticizing the government or the Malawi Congress Party which, under the Constitution of the Republic, is the only body legally recognized as a party (1). Several men face trial for their lives in a new set of specially created courts which operate outside the normal judicial structure of the State and whose establishment has precipitated the prompt protest-resignation of several otherwise pro-government British expatriate judges and magistrates. There is tight censorship of letters and news, both incoming and outgoing, and a complete muzzling of the press. Many of the country's best brains are abroad in political exile, having fled from a government-inspired campaign of persecution of men of high education and independence of mind, or having decided to insure their own physical safety and intellectual freedom by remaining abroad after completion of their advanced courses of training; not a few of these are here in the United States and Canada. The army and the police, both commanded and completely dominated by British-born officers, some of whose services in Malawi date back to the colonial era, while others are men specially recruited from Britain in recent years, are in a perpetual state of alert. The British officers, but not the Malawian officers, have been given a blank check for times of emergency. They can act first and seek approval of their action later; "acting" in this context, includes such deeds as opening fire on any crowd of Africans considered hostile to the government of Malawi's President H. Kamuzu Banda. The Young Pioneers, a group of carefully selected members of the Youth League of the Malawi Congress Party, have been given immunity from arrest for any acts of violence or law-breaking committed in defense of the "security of the State", a term which embraces within its meaning such things as the prestige of the President and the popularity of the Party.

Certain religious sects, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and a number of small fundamentalist millenarian groups, have been proscribed because they were considered politically dangerous; many of their members were clubbed to death. The people have been reduced to such a degree of resignation that it is easy to mistake their apparent acquiescence for acceptance of the regime's undemocratic methods and anti-African policies.

As early as 1966, before the enactment of more repressive legislation by the Banda regime, the International Commission of Jurists, an independent organization of distinguished jurists which enjoys consultative status with the United Nations and UNESCO, accused the Malawi Government of making "inroads on the fundamental Rule of Law principle" (2). Now, four years later, a "neutral" Swiss newspaper in an article otherwise eloquently laudatory on President Banda's policies, admits that the fortunes of the four million people of Malawi are "exclusively in the hands of its President" who rules "with the mailed fist" (3).

But the entire country is a powder-keg which requires but a small spark to start off an upheaval that will be no less tragic and destructive than the recent Nigeria-Biafra conflagration. It is common knowledge that beneath the deceptive superficial "loyalty" of the people there runs a bitter undercurrent of disenchantment and resentment. Occasionally it has boiled over into such overt acts as the razing to the ground of the northern radio station in Karonga two years ago when the President declared his own tribal language, Chewa, to be Malawi's national language and banned the use of all the other six Malawian languages in schools, radio broadcasts, public meetings, newspapers, periodicals, and books. It also manifests itself in the people's refusal to cooperate with the government in such matters as payment of poll tax, fees for renewal of membership of the Malawi Congress Party, and donations to voluntary funds launched by the government. But for the most part the people prefer to appear to acquiesce. Consequently, you have in Malawi a quiet but tense situation which the *Sunday News* of Tanzania, then a British-owned newspaper but now nationalised, once described as "the calm before the storm" (4).

The Short-Lived Unity and Goodwill of 1961 to 1964

All had been well in Malawi since August 1961, when the country, then still known as the British Protectorate of Nyasaland, achieved an African majority in the Legislative Assembly, and Dr. Banda, as leader of the victorious Malawi Congress Party, became Chief Minister in a cabinet politically,

though not numerically, dominated by Africans. One and a half years later, on February 1, 1963, the country received Responsible Government with a cabinet drawn entirely from the Malawi Congress Party and presided over by Dr. Banda, as the party's leader. He was now officially given the title of "Prime Minister".

I was made a member of this cabinet after being released from colonial political imprisonment for that purpose. What I have written in this paper is, therefore, drawn largely from personal experience in that position. I hope, therefore, that I can be extended the indulgence of dispensing, to a degree, with those scholarly footnotes which are crucial for credibility in this type of journal in America!

From the very start, we the leaders of both the government and the ruling party, with Dr. Banda heading the campaign, had appealed for peace and calm as well as for hard work. We stumped the entire length and breadth of Malawi to impress upon our people that in order to have any meaning, political independence required economic independence. We could stand on our own feet economically only if there was development, which in turn called for hard work in economically profitable activities, as well as political stability. With chaos and conflict there could be no prosperity. The people's response was magnificent. With a national enthusiasm that surprised all visitors to Malawi, the people participated in all government-initiated development projects, putting in more hours of work, more toil, and more sacrifice than we had asked of them. Voluntary communal projects sprang up everywhere. It was a touching experience. Malawi peasants, most of them living in grinding poverty, gave their last penny to contribute to the expenses of building a school for their children or a dispensary to help fight malaria and those worm diseases which have long sapped the energy and vitality of Africa's people.

This splendid demonstration disproved the forebodings of South Africa's and Rhodesia's prophets of doom who had predicted that calamity would follow the grant of self-rule to Malawi's black people. It confounded Sir Roy Welensky, premier of the African-hated Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland which was then having its last breath, and his few disciples, including a then obscure, but rising Rhodesian racist fanatic named Ian Smith.

The most impressive and immediate successes were in the field of adult education in which thousands of people, in a few months, became literate and could read their own letters and newspapers. Education generally made great gains at all levels. Emphasis was on technical education and advanced

studies abroad. The civil service was dominated by British expatriates, some of whom had no sympathy with African aspirations and often sabotaged some of our policies. We wanted to be able to replace them with Africans imbued with the right national spirit. So the number of young men sent overseas for study was increased more than tenfold. This was in addition to internal crash programs of training.

Labor legislation was reformed to ensure that African workers ceased to be oppressed and exploited. Recruitment of labor for Rhodesian tobacco farms and coal and chrome mines was abolished and a bold start was made in the vital task of persuading the people to stay in Malawi and till our fertile land and to stop selling their labor to Africa's enemies in the south. The local courts were reorganised and democratized; hereditary traditional rulers were removed from the courts and replaced by men selected for their ability and integrity. Cooperative societies sprang up everywhere. There were many cases of poor management and bad accounting resulting from lack of experience and years of British reluctance to train enough men for these tasks. There were also some cases of dishonesty and misappropriation of funds. But cooperative development as a whole received a great impetus from the whole upsurge of national enthusiasm and hundreds of thousands of people became members of cooperative societies of one type or another.

The emancipation of women began in earnest. Preference and priority were given to girls in the competition for places in schools of various types. The Department of Social Development organized classes for women all over the country in which were taught not only subjects relating to the kitchen, but also various other ways of improving themselves and of participating fully in the life of the nation.

Agriculture had the place of honor among the list of priorities. Farmers were given crash courses of training, and prices for the peasant's crops were improved to give him an incentive for harder work. Abroad, Malawi embarked on a vigorous campaign of making new friends and establishing contacts with other African states. We did not identify our country with either of the two cold war blocs. We were not going to inherit other people's quarrels. Moreover, we saw our role as that of helping to bring about reconciliation between any quarreling nations and not that of exacerbating the strife by backing one side against the other.

This was the political scene in Malawi when full independence came on July 6, 1964. The nation was one vast extended family; unity and goodwill prevailed among our people.

But two months later, the country was plunged into a period of internal conflict and commotion which, with brief and minor pauses, has continued to this day.

What had happened?

Events Leading Up to the Cabinet Crisis of 1964

Early in September, 1964, a dangerous split occurred in the Malawi cabinet. I will trace the origin, development and interplay of the various forces which led to this episode. I will endeavor to be objective, but I must give my version of the story as I know it at first hand. For a different version and perspective, one can go through any of the books and articles listed at the end of this paper (5).

Dr. Banda had never been lacking in frankness in his dealings with those of us who worked close to him. He had never been slow to criticize or rebuke when he thought we had made a mistake. But such criticisms had always been made in private. To everyone's surprise, towards the end of 1963, he developed the habit of doing so in public, and the tone and content of his remarks were often so belligerent as to constitute an attack, challenge, or denunciation of his own cabinet. The first of these open attacks was made on October 27, 1963, during a ceremony at a party rally held in the city of Blantyre's Central Stadium. The Municipal Council of Blantyre was honoring Dr. Banda by granting him "the Freedom of the City". (This practice is a legacy of colonial rule, one of Africa's many blind and meaningless borrowings whose European historical origins have no relevance to Africa). On this occasion, Prime Minister Banda devoted only a few minutes to matters concerning the city and spent nearly two hours attacking his own cabinet ministers. He declared repeatedly that he was the boss and that the ministers could not dare, either individually or collectively, to challenge his leadership. If they did, he could crush them all. We were at a loss to know what had caused the outburst which was later relayed in full by Radio Malawi. My two closest friends in the cabinet suggested that the fury must have been caused by my absence at the rally which the Prime Minister may have regarded as a "boycott" of the honor that was being conferred on him. But there had been valid reasons for my absence, reasons which I stated to the Prime Minister the following day and which he accepted.

A few weeks later we began to have some idea of the cause of these attacks on us. A colleague of mine and I were visiting a number of neighboring African countries. In one of these, we learned from intelligence sources that

the British administrative and intelligence officers who surrounded Dr. Banda felt insecure in their positions as long as those of us who were regarded as radicals were in the cabinet. They feared that we would soon demand that their posts be Africanized - i.e., that they should be replaced by Africans about whose political loyalty and dedication the government could be absolutely confident. The officers also believed that we were potentially, if not actually, communist sympathizers and would lead the country into the communist camp. So they were striving to work for our dismissal from the cabinet. To achieve this, they were systematically sowing seeds of suspicion and distrust in Dr. Banda's mind. They were shadowing us and were covering every meeting we addressed. Intelligence reports submitted to the Prime Minister concerning our activities and speeches were written in a way as to make the Prime Minister believe that we were, to borrow one of his favorite phrases, "building ourselves up" at his expense, trying to project an image equal to, or higher than, that of the Prime Minister.

The report we got in the other African state was so well substantiated that it left us in no doubt about its accuracy and authenticity. Among other things, it cited a meeting I had addressed in my home district a few months earlier, and stated how my remarks at that meeting had been distorted in an intelligence report subsequently compiled and submitted to the Prime Minister by British security officers. That the Prime Minister was receiving distorted reports on his ministers became more apparent during the months that followed, as he stepped up his campaign to get his own cabinet discredited in the eyes of the people.

But nothing could have been more untrue and more mischievous than any allegation that any member of the cabinet was disloyal to Dr. Banda at that particular stage. He had no reason at all to fear that anyone of us might harbor ambitions to replace him. Dr. Banda was very much our senior in age, roughly thirty years older than all but one of the ten of us, and had not only done very well during the anti-colonial struggle, but was also doing well at this stage. We were all determined to give him all the support and loyalty he needed to fulfill his duty of leading our young nation to full independence and to prosperity. It is, of course, true that by the beginning of 1964 we were already unhappy with his policies and his increasingly authoritarian methods, but we hoped to be able to persuade him to change, and it was only after failing to get him to change and after the final parting of the ways, which came in September, 1964, that we began to think in terms of getting him removed from power.

Apart from the effect of reports concerning our activities submitted to the Prime Minister by British officers, there was one factor which played a major role in influencing his attitude towards us. It was his feeling of political insecurity. He had shown signs of it since his arrival in the country in 1958, and we had believed that with time and with his rise to the position of Head of Government he would acquire more self-confidence. But the tragic feeling did not diminish. Andrew Ross is right when he says that Dr. Banda, as a man who had been absent from the country for over forty years lacked a political base in the Malawi society, and was acutely aware of it (6). He had since 1958 repeatedly claimed that he did not fear any of his subordinates, that he was sure of his popularity, that he was the people's only choice for a leader, etc. The frequency with which he made these assertions gave us cause to believe that he was not sure that they were valid, and there were many things to confirm this belief. For instance, he gave orders that he alone could be mentioned in political songs and slogans, no ministers walking or motoring with him should join him in waving to cheering crowds (an order which was stretched to absurdity: two years ago, a visiting African head of state riding in an open car with President Banda was told by Dr. Banda not to acknowledge the cheers of the crowd because "the people are cheering for me, not you"). He also ordered that when he is absent no one should act for him; if the cabinet meets in his absence, the chairmanship should rotate among the ministers. There were many such orders issued by party headquarters, or directly by Dr. Banda himself. Since his arrival and election to leadership in 1958, he had always seen us not as his colleagues or as loyal followers, but as actual or potential rivals and had consistently striven to strengthen his own position in relation to us. Some of his public attacks were part of an attempt to "cut us down to size".

British expatriate officers knew their Banda. They had studied him thoroughly during the anti-colonial struggle and knew his merits and weaknesses. They were aware of his feeling of insecurity and his fear of us, his colleagues. They played on these weaknesses and made him more and more frightened of us.

Another group that knew its Banda was the strata of party leadership immediately below us. Some of these were men of considerable social standing. They had been active in the struggle for self-rule; some of them had had spells in colonial prisons with us for their political activities. They were generally a little older than us, but they had not been appointed to the cabinet because they lacked education. Our party was at this stage determined to prove to the British

government and to British officials in Malawi that we had men who could hold their own in any discussion on economic, international and other issues against the British colonial officials who would be working under us.

But some of the men who had been left out of the cabinet were disgruntled. They believed that we had kept them out. They, of course, wielded much power within the party. Since we tended to be preoccupied with government work, which was in any case our full-time work by the terms of our appointment, and since the Prime Minister was not keen that we should have much to do with party activity that might make us too powerful for his liking, these men did most of our work both at the party headquarters in the town of Limbe (now established in Blantyre proper) and in the regional and district offices of the party. Others were given posts in the various statutory boards and government corporations. They all had direct access to the Prime Minister.

Since they knew the Prime Minister's fears and anxieties about his ministers, and wanted to ingratiate themselves to him with a view toward promotion, they tended to tell him what they knew he wanted to hear about us. They told the Prime Minister grave distortions of our speeches. On one occasion, I was able to gain access to a handwritten report which had been prepared by a member of the party's Youth League on orders of someone higher in the party hierarchy and submitted to the Prime Minister. It purported to be a report of my speech during a tour of one of the administrative districts. I could not recognise my own speech!

The Prime Minister always declared that he did not want to see the development of cliques or factions among the leaders immediately below him. While one must concede that as far as the party generally was concerned, he did admirable work in maintaining unity and authorized stern action against any evidence of nascent factionalism, the same cannot be said about his attitude towards members of his cabinet. He seemed to delight in any internal clashes among us. There was much evidence of the all-too-familiar strategy of pitting us against one another. He would praise one minister lavishly, and make insinuations about his colleagues so that the Prime Minister's desire to arouse mutual jealousy among us became clearly discernible. On one occasion, the transfer of one department from one minister to another was publicly explained by the Prime Minister by saying virtually that the latter was more efficient than the former. For a long time we believed that any act of disfavor by the Prime Minister toward one of us was the result of intrigue by one or more of our colleagues, and the Prime Minister did nothing to discourage this feeling. At one time he was asked to mediate between two groups of

ministers which had clashed. After listening to each side, he walked away from both groups, uttering not a word aimed at bringing about reconciliation.

This desire to see disunity immediately below him fitted into the general pattern already discussed above. The Prime Minister, with his persistent sense of insecurity and his groundless fear of his ministers, was trying to forestall any possibility of our uniting against him. He was sure we could topple him if we "ganged together", to borrow another one of his favorite phrases. As we shall see, it was partly this unfounded fear of us that was to impel him to make public remarks that sparked off the 1964 cabinet crisis.

The Prime Minister's campaign to get us discredited in the public eye was stepped up and intensified towards the middle of 1964. In this phase, I was singled out for particularly vicious attacks. Although he seldom mentioned names, most intelligent people knew I was the target of the hostile remarks and came to express their sympathy and to urge me to be patient and not to react. The reason for my being singled out for these vicious attacks was that I had in the country what Pike has described as "a considerable personal following" (7), and what Chimwene Wanga calls a "very great popularity throughout the country, and especially in the South" (8). In politics generally it is not safe for anyone close to the top to have a personal following, but in Malawi politics it is fatal. It is the one thing Dr. Banda cannot tolerate and will use any means, fair or foul, to stamp out. It took long for me to realise that Dr. Banda resented my having a personal following. When I discovered it, I emphasized to the closest of my followers that, for the sake of national unity, their loyalty must be to Dr. Banda first, and not to me. I was speaking to the converted. Most of them realised, but were still bitter about his attacks on me.

Dr. Banda himself was not helpful. He constantly warned that my "so-called friends" were opportunists seeking personal favors and not true friends. This I could not accept. Most of them were men Dr. Banda had never seen, let alone met, while I had known at least some of them for many years and had come to respect their integrity and their dedication to the country's cause. They were, in fact, political admirers rather than followers. I had been associated with a radical stand in Malawi politics and had twice been jailed by the British for this. In varying degrees, all men who had been victimized by the British were regarded as martyrs or heroes and had equally varying numbers of political admirers. No special qualities or merits were required to attract such a following. Indeed, I expected most of my

following to disintegrate as time went on and as memories of British persecution faded.

The Fateful Chileka Airport Speech of July 26, 1964

Independence Day, July 6, came and went. Soon after it, Dr. Banda went to London to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference. On his return, he stopped in Cairo to attend a Summit Conference of African Heads of State. The date of his return to Malawi, July 26, had been widely publicized, and there was a large crowd to welcome him at the Chileka International Airport. All members of the cabinet were present, as were all leading party officials and singing groups of women and youths.

When Prime Minister Banda was invited to address the crowd, he returned to the now familiar theme. He attacked "certain politicians", "especially ministers". He said that now that the country had become independent, a number of foreign embassies would be established in Malawi. Some of them would try to subvert the Malawi state and would do so through Malawi politicians. There were in Malawi ambitious and corrupt politicians who could be easily bought with money to accomplish this end. He called upon the people to watch all African politicians, especially ministers. Any politician seen frequenting the office or home of any foreign diplomat had to be reported to him. In particular, he appealed to members of the Youth League and the Women's League of the Malawi Congress Party to become his eyes. When they had any report to make to him on any minister or other politician they could come directly to him. They did not have to send their report through any minister or other leader. They had nothing to fear; he would protect them against any grudge any politician might bear against them. He reminded the people that between him and them there was a firm bond. He had saved them from the colonial yoke and in return they were giving him their unswerving loyalty. He trusted them and they trusted him. While he trusted them, he could not trust the politicians. The links between him and the people were direct.

It was a speech intended to sow distrust, contempt, and dislike for the ministers among the people. A few youths applauded the speech partly as a matter of duty and partly because now a method of blackmailing ministers into giving them favors had been created. But the larger part of the crowd greeted these remarks with silence and sad faces. The more elderly people felt that it was in bad taste for the "Ngwazi" (champion, conqueror, etc.) to attack his fellow leaders in public. The villagers wondered what kind of a

chief this was who insulted his own counsellors in the presence of strangers.

Now Dr. Banda had gone too far, and we decided to have a meeting to discuss what action should be taken to bring to an end these public attacks. We found ourselves to be unanimous in our feeling that the Prime Minister was wrong in thinking that these attacks did harm only to the political image of his ministers; the damage was, we felt, being done to the reputation of Malawi as a whole and to its government, in particular. The attacks betrayed a lack of internal cohesion. They also portrayed the Prime Minister as a man who did not understand the fundamental principles underlying the cabinet system of government. He had appointed us to, and was retaining us in his cabinet because he had confidence in us. He was free to dismiss us if he felt that he could no longer trust us. By retaining us in his cabinet, and at the same time publicly expressing distrust for us, he was exhibiting a state of mental confusion that ill-becomes the head of a sovereign government. Perhaps he did not want us in his cabinet, but lacked the courage and self-confidence to dismiss us and hoped that the people would make his task easier by demanding our dismissal. Whatever his motives and reasons, he was, by his behavior, undermining his own reputation, and we considered it our duty to save him from himself by bringing these points to his attention.

We were also unanimous in our feeling that the Prime Minister's attacks on us would adversely affect discipline in our departments and in the party. Some of the members of the Youth League were persons working under us in our various departments while some of the members of the Women's League were wives of people working under us. Four of us in the cabinet were at the same time members of the Central Executive Committee of the Malawi Congress Party and were therefore men in authority over the two Leagues. One of us, indeed, was chairman of the Disciplinary Committee of the party. What would be the effect of the Prime Minister's order that the members of the Leagues should spy and report on us? There was going to be a collapse of discipline in both the government departments and in the party, and we would soon find that our orders were being disregarded by the young men supposed to carry them out.

Finally and above all, the national morale of our people was being undermined. They were proud of the crew that Dr. Banda had selected to help him pilot the ship of state. It had been widely praised as among the ablest cabinets in Africa. Not a small part of the enthusiastic support that ministers got in their various departmental projects was due to the people's pride in it. Boys and girls in the high schools

were referring to it as "a Cabinet of Geniuses"; such was the national morale. This was the team that the Prime Minister began to tell the nation was corrupt and not trustworthy. If he continued, we would lose much of the people's enthusiasm without which development activity could not maintain its existing pace.

We decided to seek an immediate audience with the Prime Minister. He was extremely reluctant to see us as a group and suggested that we come one by one. His eternal fear of people "ganging together" manifested itself once more. When he finally agreed to receive us, we were frank and courageous. We pointed out to him all the implications and likely consequences of the type of speech he had made at Chileka Airport on his return from Cairo. After much prevarication, he said that although he did not agree that he had been wrong to make that type of speech, since we had objected to it, he promised that he would not make such a speech again in future.

This part of the story marks a turning point both in our relations with the Prime Minister and in the political history of the country. We had not only discovered that it was possible for us to overcome our differences and rivalries which Dr. Banda had tried to fan, and that we could unite on a matter of principle, but we had also discovered that when and if we united in pressing him to change his wrong methods and policies, it was possible for us to get him to change. The fear of a violent reaction from him disappeared, especially since during the discussion he had, to our surprise, lost his poise in the face of our barrage of arguments and objections against his Chileka speech and had consequently been at times incoherent.

We resolved that in future we must not allow the Prime Minister or any other person or any issue to divide us, and that to insure lasting unity among ourselves, all our decisions must be made after thorough discussion among us.

We made two other significant decisions. One was that since our own excessive praising and glorifying of the Prime Minister had contributed in no small way to his feeling that he knew everything and need not consult anyone, in the future we must "tone down" our praise of him. Another decision was that we should use our new strong position and psychological victory to get him to change certain specific aspects of domestic and external policy. The second and much more bitter clash, which was to lead to the final split, was over these policies. What were the specific things we objected to? I can only give a brief summary of the main ones.

Dr. Banda's Domestic and Foreign Policies

Internal Policies:

1. Dr. Banda quite bluntly rejected the principle of consultation. In several public pronouncements, both in Parliament and outside, he declared that he made and would always make all the decisions. He said that consultation merely confused a man: you listened to many conflicting opinions and often ended up more confused than you had been before. Thus, decisions affecting our ministries were sometimes made without consulting us and often behind our backs. What we found even more frustrating was that while consultation with us was rejected, the Prime Minister quite frequently consulted British expatriate officers.
2. It was agreed that if we were to develop Malawi, a certain amount of sacrifice or tightening of the belt was necessary. We had supported the introduction of a graduated tax based on incomes, and were ourselves paying the highest taxes among the African people. The Prime Minister had suggested a 25% reduction in our salaries and we had accepted that. We had gone further and demanded that we cease having free housing and must, therefore, pay rent, and at a higher rate than that paid by our people in the civil service. But the Prime Minister had gone even further. He had decided on a drastic reduction of the salaries of all African civil servants. He had appointed a British expert by the name of Thomas Skinner to make a survey of the salary structure in the African civil service, and it was the Skinner Report which made the "recommendation" for the reduction. But the Skinner Commission was a farce. It "recommended" what the Prime Minister had already told us he was going to do! Using the same arguments that British officials had used for many years before his return to Malawi, Dr. Banda declared that such benefits as government-provided housing were wrong for African civil servants, but right for European civil servants! He argued that African standards of living did not justify the existing "inflated" salaries! But, in fact, an African's salary, under the extended family system, was shared with all his uncles, nephews, etc., in addition to his parents and wife and children. Relatives would come to the town from the village to spend weeks with their salary-earning cousin and leave him in heavy debt. Moreover, African standards of living were not as low as Dr. Banda imagined them to be. He had in mind the Malawi society of 1915, the year he had left the country to stay abroad for forty-three years. Many African civil servants had children in fee-paying secondary schools. But what caused even greater resentment among us and the African civil servants was the fact that the salaries of the European civil servants had been raised just a few months before,

admittedly partly through an increased British government contribution to their salaries. But the effect of reducing African salaries so soon after raising European salaries was to widen the gap between European and African incomes.

3. This discrimination between Europeans and Africans was characteristic of the Prime Minister's way of life. At his party residence in Blantyre he had a living room in which he received only Europeans, including officials working under us. Africans were invariably received in the inferior living room, except for selected visiting dignitaries. When an African visitor had a call of nature, he was shown the toilets at the servants' quarters; a European was shown the bathroom inside the residence. At one time, he told one of us: "I trust Englishmen; they never lie."

Dr. Banda, the man who had declared on the day of his arrival in 1958 that he had come to bridge the gap between the races was doing things which merely widened that gulf.

4. Another demonstration of Dr. Banda's lack of understanding of African life caused by his prolonged absence from Malawi, and by the aloof and aristocratic life he led, was given when he imposed hospital fees on the people who had throughout the colonial era never been made to pay for government medical services. The amount he imposed was small, but considering the people's per capita income of fifty dollars, and the long distances most of them had to walk to the nearest hospital or dispensary, the three-Malawi-penny fee was a heavy burden which prevented many people from taking their fever-stricken children to a dispensary. The dire poverty in which the people lived was unknown to Dr. Banda, whose leadership philosophy is that: "familiarity breeds contempt. A leader must live above the people. He must be different from them. They are proud of him when they know that he is someone different and exceptional." I am not quoting him verbatim, but I doubt if I have said anything he would deny having said.

5. But while these sacrifices were being demanded of the people in the name of "tightening the belt" for the sake of development, life at the Prime Minister's official residences was full of luxury. The Prime Minister had a large number of attendants and "guards" paid from national coffers. Wherever he went he was accompanied by a large convoy of vehicles, each carrying several youths fed and paid from national money. He had several expensive cars. He had ordered the putting up of more official residences, and at least two places were already being cleared or surveyed for that purpose. (He now has more than five official lodges in addition to a four and

one-half million dollar one for which funds are already being raised and which is going to be the most expensively built state palace in Africa. How strange this is, since by per capita income, Malawi is the poorest country in Africa!

6. It was unanimously recognised that through British reluctance to train Africans for the assumption of responsible positions in the public service, there were not enough Africans with the skill and experience to replace all European officials as soon as we took over the government. But Dr. Banda had himself often said that the best way to train a man to do something is to let him do it, "even if he burns his fingers" in the process. "The best way to learn how to swim is by swimming and not by climbing mountains." So it had been agreed that we would Africanise all those posts for which able Africans were available; we had begun to do so gradually, but steadily. Suddenly, Dr. Banda changed his mind and was beginning to prefer extensive retention of British colonial officers, many of whom were, to say the least, hostile to the very concept of African independence and sought every opportunity to frustrate our national aspirations.

External Policies: East-West Non-Alignment, White Regimes of Southern Africa, and Relations with other Independent Black African Countries

1. In the field of external relations, the Prime Minister had gradually begun to abandon the non-alignment policy that had been agreed upon and which had been one of the party's main planks during the election campaign of 1961, featuring prominently in its manifesto. Before independence, he had not caused great concern, apart from some criticism of communism made during a purely academic debate of the Zomba Debating Society. Indeed, he had begun to establish contacts with Communist China through the Chinese Embassy in Tanzania to neutralise the effects of Malawi's too strong history-rooted western links. After independence, however, the balance was no longer maintained, with Banda leaning more and more to the West.

2. What also caused concern was his growing friendship with the segregationist minority regimes of South Africa, Rhodesia and Mozambique (Portuguese). Malawi's geographical position necessitated a certain amount of caution in our relations with these regimes, but it was not necessary for Malawi to become a political or military ally of these enemies of Africa. Malawi needs continued Portuguese permission to use the Mozambique Railways and port of Beira for her external trade, and it is true that thousands of her people go to South Africa and Rhodesia to seek work. But it is a mutual benefit set-up.

Portugal cannot close her railways and harbor to Malawi's massive fee-paying traffic without doing harm to her own economy in Mozambique, nor can South Africa and Rhodesia expel their thousands of Malawi workers, some of whom are highly skilled and experienced, without wrecking their own economies. It is not necessary for Malawi to become a puppet of these regimes. It soon became clear to us that Dr. Banda was merely too much of a European in his outlook to keep away from the white company that Southern Africa had to offer. During his forty-three years abroad, he had ceased to be an African in everything but skin color.

3. This was confirmed by his attitude to the Organization for African Unity and to the other African states. He had the greatest contempt for them; his treatment of some of the visitors these African states sent was rather discourteous. He scoffed at the OAU's efforts to liberate Southern Africa, and not only refused to take part, but actually tried to undermine Africa's morale for this struggle. He refused to give even that limited degree of asylum and assistance to African refugees from Southern Africa which the United Nations permits. The Malawi government's relations with the other African states are now, of course, at their worst. No black African state has any embassy in Malawi, while there are embassies from practically every west European country and the United States. Besides, South Africa, Portugal, Nationalist China, Israel, and Japan have embassies in Malawi; but no African state has (9).

Dismissal of Cabinet Members

All the above-mentioned policies of Dr. Banda were discussed by us after our successful protest against his Chileka Airport speech, and we decided that when the opportunity occurred, we should press him to reverse them. While all these things were happening, two members of the cabinet ceased to be members. One was John Msonthi who had been given his letter of dismissal a few days before independence, but had been allowed to stay on until after Independence Day. He was quite a favorite of the Prime Minister, but he tended to incur his master's displeasure on all sorts of petty matters, some of them purely personal. It was also alleged that as Minister of Trade and Industry, he had been implicated in a scandal over the grant of trading licenses to Asian traders. By the time we made our protest about the Chileka speech, he had already left for his home village. We believed that the Prime Minister's aim in dismissing him was to drop a hint of what he wanted to do to the rest of us. Msonthi was a kind of guinea pig; Dr. Banda was trying to gauge the likely consequences of dismissing a minister.

The resignation on August 5th of Colin Cameron, the only European member of the cabinet, was a symptom of the deteriorating political situation in the country. It appears that Dr. Banda had had a Preventive Detention Bill in draft for some time, ready to get it passed by the cabinet and subsequently by Parliament at any opportune moment. It was an instrument to enable him to jail without trial any persons he considered dangerous to the security of Malawi. Colin Cameron, the Minister of Works, Transport and Communications, was a man of exceptionally high character and deeply dedicated to the well-being of the people of Malawi. During our struggle for self-rule, he had been virtually ostracized by the white community in Malawi for defending Africans facing political charges in the colonial courts. He was responsible for the acquittal of many Africans who might have been jailed on trumped up or distorted charges. When Dr. Banda introduced the draft of the Detention Bill, which was no doubt intended for detaining the by now critical and therefore, to him, "dangerous" ministers, Cameron severely criticised it. Dr. Banda declared that he was determined to go ahead with it, and that those who did not like it could resign; Cameron, with tears of deep sorrow rolling down his cheeks, declared that he had spent the last few years fighting this very type of injustice committed by his own British people on the people of Malawi. He could not support it when it was perpetrated on the Malawi people by their own government. He was resigning. With those words he left the cabinet chamber.

We who remained in the cabinet had not decided that we must force a showdown with Dr. Banda on the bill. It was a tricky and delicate issue. The people were still bitter about men like Charles Matinga, Manoah Chinwa, Matthews Phiri, Chief Chikowi, Chief Makanjira, and several others who were regarded as traitors because they had sided with the colonial rulers during the country's freedom struggle. There had been widespread demands that these men be punished. Those among them who were chiefs had been deposed, but it had been difficult to punish those who were businessmen, farmers, etc. Indeed, in private, Dr. Banda had always told us that he would detain some of these men after independence. If we had opposed the bill, Dr. Banda would have gone to the people to denounce us for interfering with his intention to make the country safe by punishing the "Capricorns" (Malawi term for pro-colonialist men). Dr. Banda would have had an easy victory over us and we would have been unable to have a confrontation on more favorable issues. We therefore merely pressed him to temporarily withdraw the bill so that the more harsh parts of it could be studied thoroughly and if necessary amended. He agreed to this request. This in itself was a victory. At no time had we ever made Dr. Banda withdraw a measure on which he felt strongly. We were further encouraged

in our determination to get him to change his policies.

In mid-August I left the country to attend the Third Commonwealth Education Conference in Ottawa, Canada. While I was away, a cabinet meeting took place. My colleagues felt that the hour for a courageous attempt to save Malawi for the people of Malawi and for Africa had come. They aired their views on the things listed above. A heated debate ensued; tempers were lost. Instead of the usual three hours, the meeting lasted seven hours and reconvened several times during the next few days. Dr. Banda was committed both internally and internationally to his various policies. He would have had to let down his Portuguese, South African, and Rhodesian friends as well as the British expatriate officers whom he had promised to retain in their jobs for many more years. So he offered to resign rather than accept the demands.

Malawi at this stage still had a British Governor-General representing the Queen. His functions were purely ceremonial and his powers purely advisory. The man who then filled the post was Sir Glyn Jones. He had been a liberal and had played a part in hastening the coming of self-rule. He was a much respected man among the people, but was now ineffectual. He disagreed with Dr. Banda's dictatorial ways and had himself on several occasions been treated by Dr. Banda rather like a junior officer. When Dr. Banda came to tender his resignation, Sir Glyn took a line which illustrates the inappropriateness of applying European concepts, unmodified, to African situations. He told Dr. Banda that at least on the need for consultation, the ministers were quite right, but urged him not to resign. He said that in such a situation what the Prime Minister had to do was to call Parliament and to seek a vote of confidence. If he were defeated, he could and should resign; but if he won, he could continue with his policies and compel the ministers to resign if they still disagreed with such policies.

What the Governor-General did not realise was that Parliament in Malawi was a rubber stamp of the Prime Minister. As head of the Malawi Congress Party, he had nominated all that party's candidates for election to Parliament. Except for the few men whom he could not have dared to leave out of the list of candidates because they were popular in their home districts, all Malawi Congress Party candidates owed their nominations to him. Since the opposition parties had all disbanded, and the Malawi Congress Party candidates had all been elected unopposed, Parliament was full of members who owed their seats to Dr. Banda. They could not conceivably pass a vote of no confidence in him; they were too grateful to him and were looking forward to the day when their loyalty would be rewarded with elevation to the cabinet.

After seeing the Governor-General, the Prime Minister sought advice from men within the party; he saw a few men from the layer of leaders just below us - a group to which reference has already been made. For obvious reasons, they strongly advised him not to resign and instead to expel the ministers. (It is ironical that one of these advisors, Gomile Kuntumanji, is, at this writing, in Dr. Banda's jail, after rising to the position of virtual second-in-command and heir apparent. He faces capital charges for allegedly masterminding a recent wave of mysterious murders which lasted one and one-half years and nearly wrecked the government (10)). Dr. Banda immediately dismissed three ministers: the late Augustine Bwanausi (Planning and Development), Kanyama Chiume (External Affairs), and Orton Chirwa (Justice). Three others resigned in sympathy with our dismissed colleagues. They were the late Yatuta Chisiza (Home Affairs), Willie Chokani (Labor), and a man who had recently been reinstated in his post after the July dismissal already referred to in this paper: John Msonthi (Trade and Industry). The Minister of Finance, John Tembo, whose niece was the Prime Minister's private secretary and nurse as well as housekeeper, and who was consequently one of the Prime Minister's favorites, did not resign. In fact, he had withdrawn from the growing controversy at an early stage and was a staunch supporter of the Prime Minister. When I returned from Canada after receiving an urgent cable from my colleagues, I immediately resigned my post as Minister of Education.

As advised by the Governor-General, the Prime Minister now summoned an emergency meeting of Parliament to seek a vote of confidence. For the reasons I have already stated, he got it without difficulty. The debate on the motion lasted two days; I arrived in time to take part in the second day. The motion was couched in words that merely confirmed the need for unity and discipline in the Malawi Congress Party. We supported the motion, but criticised the Prime Minister severely in the debate on it, repeating our main objections to his policies. The Prime Minister was quite a good parliamentary debater, although he tended to be more at home before an excited crowd of supporters and admirers. But as an orator he was no match for some of his ministers. On the first day of the debate, he had arranged for a system of loudspeakers to relay speeches to the large crowd outside, hoping to win it over to his side, but the oratory of my colleagues who spoke on the first day was such that the crowd heartily applauded their speeches and was silent when the Prime Minister and members of Parliament supporting him spoke. Of course, the crowd in Zomba, as in most other places, was in sympathy with our demands, and its applause reflected this sympathy as well. At the end of the day, the Prime Minister ordered the dismantling of the loudspeaker system, and it

was not set up again on the second day. But to make sure that our speeches were read by as few people outside Malawi as possible, he ordered that no copies of the official verbatim report of the debate (Hansard) leave Malawi. A few were "smuggled" out, but most overseas libraries which have other Malawi Hansards do not have the issues covering this debate (i.e. Hansards for the 8th and 9th of September, 1964).

During the days that followed, efforts were made by various persons both black and white, including the Governor-General, to bring about reconciliation. But they were frustrated by Dr. Banda's insistence that certain "ex-ministers", as we now began to be called, should be excluded from any reconciliation talks and that we should stop making public speeches stating our side of the story while he toured the country denouncing us as traitors. We rejected these conditions. The result was that his supporters and ours, after listening to the conflicting versions of the causes of the split, began to clash and fight in the streets of Zomba, the capital city, and in the suburbs of Blantyre, the chief commercial city. By now the Governor-General, after officially learning that Parliament had given the Prime Minister a "vote of confidence", advised the army and police, which were, and still are at this writing, commanded by Britons, to support the Prime Minister - not that the advice of the Governor-General was necessary in order for the British-controlled army and police to act in support of the Prime Minister. In a controversy which centered on such questions as Africanisation of their own jobs and abolition of inequality between black and white, the choice for the ex-colonial British officers was an easy one. They were inevitably going to back the man who stood for preservation and perpetuation of the European's privileged position. They carried with them the then politically insulated and uninformed African soldiers.

With the intervention of the army, the fate of the confrontation became a foregone conclusion. For the time being at any rate, we had lost the battle. In African politics, especially in the decade of the Sixties, any man who was supported by the army stayed in power or rose to power; he who was opposed by the army stayed out of power, if he was lucky! If he was not, he stayed elsewhere - in jail, or in exile - or in a cemetery.

But the seeds of internal strife had been sown. Even more than before, Dr. Banda feels rather insecure in his position. All our leading supporters who did not succeed in escaping to Zambia or Tanzania are detained at the notorious Dzeleka Camp. Their continued detention embitters their many relatives and friends and leads to more agitation

against the government which has been turning to places like South Africa and Portuguese-controlled Mozambique for protection. It is a vicious circle which can only be broken by Dr. Banda admitting his mistakes and courageously accepting a return to the 1964 set-up.

Footnotes

1. Republic of Malawi Constitution Act, 1966, Chapter IX, Section 98 - (1).
2. *Times of Zambia*, October 18, 1966.
3. *Swiss Review of World Affairs*, June 1970, pp. 18 and 20.
4. *Sunday News*, February 26, 1967, p. 6.
5. John G. Pike, *Malawi: A Political and Economic History*, London, Pall Mall Press, 1968, Chapter 5, pp. 161-172; Edwin S. Munger, "President Kamuzu Banda of Malawi" (ESM-1-'69), *Fieldstaff Reports, Central and Southern African Series*, Vol. XIII, No. 1 (1969), pp. 21-22; John McCracken, "African Politics in Twentieth Century Malawi" in Ranger, T.O., (ed.), *Aspects of Central African History*, Evanston, Northwestern University, 1968, pp. 206-8; Chimwene Wanga, "The Littlest Revolution", in *Africa Today*, (April, 1965), pp. 5-9; Andrew Ross, *Dr. Banda and the Revival of Tribalism in Malawi*, a monograph prepared for the History Department of Edinburgh University, 1966; *Malawi Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard) September 8th and 9th, 1964. Read speeches by the Prime Minister and by Messrs. Chisiza, Chokani, Bwanausi, Chirwa, Chiume, and Chipembere; Robert I. Rotberg, *The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa*, has a postscript and a footnote on this event. The postscript and a footnote on Dr. Banda's age have caused both the book and its author to be banned from entering Malawi.
6. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
7. Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
8. Chimwene Wanga, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
9. *Diplomatic and Consular List of the Republic of Malawi*, No. 7, (July 1, 1969), pp. 1-2.
10. *Malawi Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), March 24, 1970.

HENRY B. MASAUKO CHIPEMBERE received his high school education in Malawi and at Rhodesia's Goromonzi School. He received his B.A. in Politics and History at Fort Hare University in 1954, after which he entered Malawi's nationalistic political movement. As a representative of the Nyasaland African Congress, he was elected to the Legislative Council (later Parliament). He became General Treasurer of the nationalist movement under Hastings Banda, and later was Banda's Minister of Local Government and subsequently Minister of Education.

After his falling out with Dr. Banda in 1964, which Mr. Chipembere describes above, he went into exile, narrowly escaping arrest by Banda. Subsequently, he obtained an M.A. at UCLA in 1966, after which he returned to Africa where he taught at a TANU school, Kivukoni College, Tanzania. He is now working for his doctorate in African History at UCLA, while teaching Modern and Contemporary African History at California State College, Los Angeles.