

# Neutrality of a Special Type: George Loft's Abortive Racial Reconciliation in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, 1957-1960

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## Abstract

In 1957, George Loft, an American Quaker, arrived in Southern Rhodesia (colonial Zimbabwe) as the field representative of the American Friends Service Committee. In his effort to help the region navigate a period of intense political change in a peaceful manner, Loft cultivated diverse contacts during three years in southern Africa. His attempts to ostensibly serve as a neutral facilitator generally rebounded to the favor of the white settler establishment. While Loft's often stumbling efforts to steer the region away from violent political conflict were unsuccessful, his shaky balancing act illuminates how quickly an already marginal space for compromise and cooperation across racial divides evaporated. It became virtually impossible to maintain a perception of neutrality. Beyond the evolution and views of the political characters he encountered, Loft's tenure offers critical context on the demise of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and the rise of Zimbabwe's armed liberation struggle.

**Keywords:** Zimbabwe, James Robert Chikerema, decolonization, racism, All-Africa People's Conference, Edgar Whitehead

Hardwicke Holderness, a liberal white parliamentarian (1954-58) in Southern Rhodesia (colonial Zimbabwe), authored a book, *Lost Chance*, which retrospectively pinpointed the late 1950s as a turning point that set that colony on a path toward violent conflict that pitted its powerful white minority against a discriminated black majority.<sup>1</sup> Terence Ranger, the British doyen of Zimbabwe's historiography who was resident in the colony at the time, similarly reminisced on the dramatic transformation he witnessed between 1958 and 1960.<sup>2</sup> For most of the 1950s, Southern Rhodesia, unlike its powerful neighbor, South Africa, proclaimed a policy of multi-racial 'partnership' and inter-racial cooperation. However, toward the end of the decade, as African nationalism garnered strength domestically and across the continent, this philosophy of ostensibly enlightened white dominance went into retreat.

One of the most politically connected individuals in Southern Rhodesia during this critical era was George Loft (1915-2010), an American Quaker. A Quaker International Affairs Representative (QIAR) of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) from 1957 to 1960, Loft labored to preserve this 'partnership' philosophy. His base of operations, Salisbury, was the capital of both Southern Rhodesia and the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, a grouping which also included Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland.<sup>3</sup> He operated extensively across all three territories. As QIAR, Loft routinely met with leading white politicians and bureaucrats, including multiple encounters with the Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister. On the other side of the racial divide, he regularly conferred with prominent members of the

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<sup>1</sup> Holderness, *Lost Chance*.

<sup>2</sup> Ranger, *Are We Not Also Men?* 161.

<sup>3</sup> Today's Zambia and Malawi, respectively.

anti-colonial nationalist opposition, Kenneth Kaunda and Hastings Kamuzu Banda, the first presidents of Zambia and Malawi, respectively, being the most notable.<sup>4</sup> Loft's mission, the breadth of his contacts, his positionality as a white male from the West who circulated in government and diplomatic circles, and his inability to maintain a perception of neutrality among either racial group makes him an exceptionally apposite individual with which to delve into the crystallization of the consequential and abrupt changes identified by Holderness and Ranger.

This study focuses on three groups that Loft strained to maintain harmonious relations with: Southern Rhodesia's anti-colonial nationalist leadership, white settler officials – especially Southern Prime Minister Edgar Whitehead, and political figures of Nyasaland – both nationalist and imperial. It also explores, in detail, two incidents that tarnished his reputation among nationalists in the Federation. Despite Loft's ultimately minimal impact, his unique tenure in Southern Rhodesia as an American operating across the political and racial divide offers valuable insights on the drivers and calculations of a dynamic political period. Loft himself, though ostensibly an impartial facilitator on the side-lines, was a white male in a society dominated by those of his ilk. He most readily related to those in his racial peer group. Unsurprisingly, his presence became enmeshed in controversy. His special type of 'neutrality' illuminates the estrangement of black nationalists from purportedly congenial white interlocutors. Foreshadowing Rhodesia's turn against the West with its Unilateral Declaration of

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<sup>4</sup> Stanford University, Hoover Institution (HI), George Loft Papers (GLP), Box 6, Folder 21, "SP-21", March 23, 1960; George Loft, "Our Time in Africa, 1957-1960", unpublished autobiographical sketch, April, 2007. Supplied by Jean Seiler in email to author, April 9, 2021.

Independence (UDI) in 1965, his role also agitated white settler officials once they realized he was not curbing black activism. His reception and treatment by these groups underscores the inherent biases and emotions that emerged because of the racism prevalent in Rhodesian society. Illuminating these local positions and transformations, rather than exploring the genesis of AFSC engagement in the Federation or Quaker activities in southern Africa, is the nexus of this work.

### **Historiography & Background**

A modest body of literature examines relations between the United States and Southern Rhodesia. Reflecting the prevailing power imbalance, it emphasizes the American perspective. Most scholarship highlights the post-1965 UDI era (thereby generally excluding Loft) and is overwhelmingly based on US-based sources.<sup>5</sup> Andy Deroche's wide-ranging study of US diplomacy in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe does commence in 1953 with the establishment of the Federation. However, it spans several decades, and while it generated an article on the American presence in the Federation, the bulk of his scholarship focuses on the post-Federal period.<sup>6</sup> LJ Butler has also produced a broad-brush study of American diplomatic views of the Federation from an elite, Washington DC-based perspective.<sup>7</sup> Ron Kraybill's chapter on religious actors in the Rhodesian crisis considers American Quaker engagement in some detail, but Loft goes unmentioned as the focus is the late UDI period.<sup>8</sup> However, Federal era officials were

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<sup>5</sup> For example: Horne, *Barrel of a Gun*; Lake, *Tar Baby Option*; Michel, *Black Africa*; and Mitchell, *Jimmy Carter in Africa*.

<sup>6</sup> DeRoche, *Black, White, and Chrome*; DeRoche, "Centrality of Race".

<sup>7</sup> Butler, "Demise of the Central African Federation".

<sup>8</sup> Kraybill, "Transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe", 233-244.

acutely aware of the US' own racial problems as well as the superpower's rising interest in Africa. Ian McLean, an opposition member of the Southern Rhodesian Parliament announced during legislative debate in early 1960, "the position of the United States of America must be clearly understood because it has become evident that the United States of America is playing a decisive part in framing the policy of the other Western powers."<sup>9</sup> Loft's full-time QIAR role in Salisbury denoted the extent of America's burgeoning post-war soft power.

His mission of racial reconciliation an abject failure, Loft infrequently appears on the periphery of the Federation's historiography, which foregrounds geopolitical and international economic considerations.<sup>10</sup> As a recent review essay by Ken Wilson notes, studies of liberalism in Federal era Southern Rhodesia have been dominated by Garfield Todd, a comparatively enlightened premier (1953-58) who fell from power shortly after Loft's arrival in the Federation.<sup>11</sup> Wilson calls for deeper investigation of establishment liberalism in Rhodesia during the late Federal era, noting "the poverty of scholarly understanding of societal change in the 1950s...."<sup>12</sup> Recovering George Loft's escalating travails elucidates how the colony's political environment swiftly transformed as the limitations of partnership clashed against rising anti-colonial nationalist fervor to shrink opportunities for genuine reform. This article is

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<sup>9</sup> *Debates of the Legislative Assembly* [Southern Rhodesia], column 2572, 17 February 1960.

<sup>10</sup> Passing mention of Loft can be found in: Butler, "Business and British Decolonisation", 469; Rotberg, *Nationalism in Central Africa*, 308.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, "Reappraising the 1950s".

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 489.

predominantly informed by Loft's personal papers, housed in the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. One of the few scholars to draw on this collection is Ruramisai Charumbira. However, she is primarily concerned with what his correspondence with detained Zimbabwean nationalists (much of which transpired after he left Salisbury) reveals about their political thought, rather than the insights on a changing political environment that Loft's fitful experience as a mediator on the ground offers.<sup>13</sup> The Loft archive is supplemented by material provided by Loft's family and interviews with three of his white contemporaries in the Federation. Additional external sources such as newspaper accounts and archival collections illuminating the activities of Loft and his target groups are also deployed.

Although his papers do not document any professional activities before 1957, it is evident that Loft had no previous experience in Africa. He had previously worked for the AFSC at its Philadelphia headquarters and been associated with the Quaker movement since the early 1940s, courtesy of his wife, Eleanor Riddle. He formally became a Quaker in 1950. Manhattan born and bred, Loft held an MBA from New York University and prior to his arrival in Africa most recently worked in the public relations sphere for the Atlas Powder Company in Delaware.<sup>14</sup> Following his resignation, the AFSC "approached" Loft with employment opportunities.<sup>15</sup> The Committee was a US-based organization which promoted Quaker values worldwide, primarily in the sphere of peace and tolerance. Loft was the first AFSC representative in the region, and with this lack of precedent, his distant employers granted him wide

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<sup>13</sup> Charumbira, *Imagining a Nation*.

<sup>14</sup> Jean Seiler, email to author, April 09, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

latitude to operate. There is little evidence from his papers that he had any substantial direction from the AFSC or that the organization's Quaker identity (or Loft's) significantly shaped the QIAR's priorities. Loft's vague mandate was mainly one of study and observation. He had three core objectives; only the last required substantive proactive intervention: (1) "study current trends," (2) "meet key actors," and (3) "contribute to racial reconciliation projects."<sup>16</sup>

In a written reminiscence prepared for friends and family, Loft elaborated:

There were several reasons for going to British Central Africa. In 1953, the three British colonies of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland had been combined into the Federation of Rhodesia & Nyasaland with the goal of creating a multiracial partnership. Quakers felt that if they could help to achieve this goal, it would not only be beneficial for the racial communities in the Federation, but also might encourage changed attitudes in neighbouring South Africa, where race relations suffered from the policy of Apartheid. Since there was already a British Quaker group resident in Salisbury...it was logical for us to base ourselves there.<sup>17</sup>

When Loft arrived in Salisbury on 13 September 1957, he encountered a white society at the zenith of its power. International partners recognised this growth and several foreign missions were established in Salisbury during the post-war economic boom, including a US consulate in 1951.<sup>18</sup> The creation of the Federation in September 1953 provided a further boost – access to Northern Rhodesia's substantial copper revenues. The white population increased significantly following World War II due to

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<sup>16</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 9, "Edgar Whitehead", March 19, 1958.

<sup>17</sup> Loft, "Our Time in Africa".

<sup>18</sup> National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), F236/CX 70/1/2, FHN Parry, "A Foreign Policy for the Federation: Part I", November 11, 1958.

unprecedented levels of immigration from South Africa and the UK.<sup>19</sup> As nationalism flared across Asia and Africa in the post-war era, this growth was accompanied by, at least in comparison to South Africa, progressive settler rhetoric on race relations. Loft's struggle to navigate that discourse reveals how superficial it was.

### **Nationalist Outreach: SRANC**

Loft arrived in the Federation one day after the formation of the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress (SRANC), regarded as the "first African national political party in the country."<sup>20</sup> The political scientist John Day wrote:

During its whole existence the [SR]ANC made its onslaught directly on the laws, policy and administration of the Southern Rhodesia Government. It did not try, like its successors, to apply indirect pressure by enlisting the assistance of foreign governments and international institutions.<sup>21</sup>

Although this was something of an overstatement, SRANC had limited international networks and presaged the development of a more militant anti-colonial nationalism. However, Loft's appointment as QIAR indicated that external observers like the AFSC perceived that the colony's black political class was on the precipice of that transformation. Loft's overriding mission on behalf of the AFSC was to serve as a facilitator who ensured that violence was averted and that the nationalists and settler government maintained an open line of dialogue. Loft's failure to accomplish this goal and his uneasy relationship with SRANC until it was banned in February 1959 illuminates how a fraught political situation became progressively unhinged. The

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<sup>19</sup> Sanger, *Central African Emergency*, 79; Mlambo, *White Immigration into Rhodesia*, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Mlambo, *History of Zimbabwe*, 145.

<sup>21</sup> Day, *International Nationalism*, 15-16.



activities of an external mediator like Loft became evermore peripheral to Southern Rhodesia's political struggle and the pretence of 'neutrality' became obsolete as divisions hardened.

A key figure behind SRANC's establishment was a white British social worker, Guy Clutton-Brock, then based at St. Faith's Mission in Rusape, a farming town east of Salisbury. He contributed to the development of SRANC's constitution, which he called a "moderate and conservative manifesto" and was a principal speaker at SRANC's launch.<sup>22</sup> SRANC did not begin to push for universal suffrage until 1958, when, according to Timothy Scarnecchia, it began to encounter increasingly overt white intransigence.<sup>23</sup> In his memoir, Clutton-Brock remembered the work toward the formation of the body as comprised of meetings, "ever gay and optimistic, [with] speeches filled with quips and laughter."<sup>24</sup> Members of the incoming SRANC executive wrote to a British Labour MP on the eve of the party's launch, emphasising their moderate views and willingness to respect the white settler presence, declaring: "we fully realise the vital importance of the contribution of Europe to development in Central Africa."<sup>25</sup> In his effort to bridge the racial divide, but simultaneously a reflection of his greater comfort with his racial peers, Loft encouraged the Rhodesian authorities to use Clutton-Brock as an intermediary to facilitate dialogue with nationalist

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<sup>22</sup> Clutton-Brock's, *Cold Comfort Confronted*, 78; "Southern Rhodesia Forms its African National Congress", *The Rhodesia Herald* [Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia], September 13, 1957.

<sup>23</sup> White, *Unpopular Sovereignty*, 59; Scarnecchia, *Urban Roots*, 91.

<sup>24</sup> Clutton-Brock's, *Cold Comfort Confronted*, 77-78.

<sup>25</sup> NAZ, MS 730/1, JRD Chikerema and PM Mushonga to James Griffiths, August 30, 1957.

leaders.<sup>26</sup> In this, as in so many of his endeavors, Loft was unsuccessful. The government of Garfield Todd was distrustful of Clutton-Brock and the social worker was detained for several weeks when a state of emergency was declared in February 1959 by Todd's successor, Edgar Whitehead (1958-62).<sup>27</sup>

Given Loft's initial reliance on Clutton-Brock and local whites as a conduit to SRANC, it is unsurprising that the QIAR's records indicate his contacts with SRANC officials took time to develop. His first significant meeting with members of SRANC's executive likely occurred in October 1957, over a month after his arrival in the colony.<sup>28</sup> Loft's introduction to James Chikerema (SRANC's Vice-President), George Nyandoro (Secretary), Paul Mushonga (Vice-Treasurer), and Edson Sithole (Secretary, Harare Branch) came via Stanley and Margaret Moore.<sup>29</sup> The Moore's, fellow white American Quakers resident in Salisbury, were active members of several iterations of nationalist groups in the colony, beginning with SRANC.<sup>30</sup> Their affiliation with SRANC was

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<sup>26</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 19, "SP-6", February 9, 1959.

<sup>27</sup> The National Archives of the UK (TNA), DO 35/7549, Metcalf to Kirkness, January 24, 1958.

<sup>28</sup> HI, GLP, Box 1, Folder 3, "Visit with Officials of S.R. ANC at Stanley Moore's", October 22, 1957.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Loft did not note Sithole's name but identified him by his position in SRANC. Sithole was Secretary of the branch, but throughout Loft's notes is mistakenly identified as the branch Chair. The Chair was Moses Ayema, who does not appear to feature in Loft's papers.

<sup>30</sup> Joshua Pritchard, "Race, Identity, and Belonging", 130. Stanley was employed by Barclay's Bank. The Moore Papers, deposited at the University of Oxford's Bodleian Library, are uncatalogued and were closed at the time of writing.

perceived as being sufficiently prominent as to warrant a raid of their residence by the Rhodesian security officials after the emergency declaration and SRANC's banning in February 1959.<sup>31</sup> Loft's notes of his early encounter with SRANC leadership demonstrates the uphill battle he faced to encourage SRANC to co-operate with local authorities. A modest amount of liberal, white-dominated infrastructure had emerged in the post-war and Federal era, pushing for greater dialogue across the races. Nyandoro had been active in the Inter-racial Association of Southern Rhodesia (IASR), one of the leading integrated civic groups.<sup>32</sup> Incidentally, he appears to have been the SRANC leader closest to Loft. The two jointly dined in Salisbury's city center and Loft helped Nyandoro obtain a passport that enabled the SRANC Secretary-General to attend celebrations marking the first anniversary of Ghana's independence, where he met pan-African luminaries like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, and Tom Mboya.<sup>33</sup> As Africa's political map transformed, Loft learned that the SRANC officials now found liberal civic organizations like the IASR and Capricorn Africa Society unacceptable. They also lacked confidence in the Constitution Party, a liberal multi-racial political party backed by Capricorn.<sup>34</sup> SRANC leaders referred to blacks who backed the Federation's undefined, aspirational 'partnership' policy of racial co-operation as

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<sup>31</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 19, "SP-12", February 27, 1959. There was no immediate precipitating event behind the banning and emergency declaration.

<sup>32</sup> Private notes of interview with Hardwicke Holderness conducted in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, by Larry Bowman, July 19, 1966.

<sup>33</sup> HI, GLP, Box 1, Folder 3, "George Nyandoro", March 21, 1958.

<sup>34</sup> Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICS), ICS 8/8-55 CAS 6, Capricorn Africa Society, "Quarterly Newsletter", September 1958.

“deviationists.”<sup>35</sup> Loft, alarmed by this dismissal, recorded that he “urged them not to condemn Africans who try to cooperate with Europeans.”<sup>36</sup> A condescending Loft noted that he conveyed, “prejudices cannot change overnight – so the African should be patient, while the white [government] pressed forward [with reforms].”<sup>37</sup>

Loft’s next significant meeting with the SRANC leadership only occurred in early March 1958, shortly after he attended his first major party meeting. The same cast of characters at the Moore’s was present, joined by Joshua Nkomo, SRANC’s President.<sup>38</sup> Along with Clutton-Brock and his wife Molly, he met the nationalist leaders at SRANC’s headquarters in Highfield, a black township in Salisbury.<sup>39</sup> Loft’s main goal was to facilitate a meeting between SRANC executives and HC Finkle, the Secretary for Native Education. At a meeting of the African Welfare Society, a white-dominated organization providing social services to blacks, Loft sat next to Finkle and learned that he was willing to meet with the SRANC leadership and discuss education policy. This was a comparatively dynamic sphere; the recently deposed Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister, Garfield Todd (1953-58), had significantly expanded educational opportunities for blacks and markedly increased government funding for black schools.<sup>40</sup> However, indicative of the extent of the gulf already in place, Loft

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<sup>35</sup> HI, GLP, Box 1, Folder 3, “Visit with Officials of S.R. ANC at Stanley Moore’s”, October 22, 1957.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> HI, GLP, Box 1, Folder 3, “Meeting with S.R. ANC”, March 5, 1958.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Zvobgo, “Policies on African Secondary Education”, 175.

recorded that Finkle was not particularly open-minded about a prospective encounter and “expressed doubt that they [SRANC] had a plan worth anything.”<sup>41</sup> Loft outlined seven reasons to justify his appeal to SRANC to meet with Finkle. The reactions of his interlocutors were mixed. Nyandoro, the former IASR member, supported engagement with Finkle. Chikerema, his senior in the party hierarchy was more circumspect. SRANC’s Vice-President noted that any decision to meet with Finkle should follow a more considered and inclusive deliberation of party executives. Chikerema and Nkomo both preferred to speak to a figure more senior than Finkle. SRANC sought not mere cosmetic reforms, but the integration of schools – a proposal that would be perceived as ‘extremist.’<sup>42</sup> Loft concluded the meeting by warning the SRANC leaders against the lure of inflammatory rhetoric. His meeting notes recounted:

GL told the ANC officials that they might feel the need to use emotional appeals for the African audience, but that these appeals might well scare the European population, on whom understanding and goodwill were important to the ANC; and that the Europeans were more likely to be convinced by reason, rather than emotional appeals.<sup>43</sup>

Loft wearily reflected upon the encounter. He expressed doubt that the visit had much impact and was surprised by Guy Clutton-Brock’s lack of enthusiasm for his proposals. Clutton-Brock backed Chikerema’s skepticism and interjected that his previous dealings with Finkle were ‘frustrat[ing].’<sup>44</sup> Loft’s tendency to avoid confrontation and embrace less confrontational paths for reform (perhaps the most significant contribution of his

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<sup>41</sup> HI, GLP, Box 1, Folder 3, “Meeting with S.R. ANC”, March 5, 1958.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Quaker identity to his mediation style), a departure from Clutton-Brock's unequivocal backing, made him significantly less palatable to the nationalists.

### ***First Crisis: Chikerema's Curse***

Loft encountered challenges in his attempts to form a productive relationship with SRANC almost as soon as he attended what was likely his first major nationalist meeting in early March 1958. The convocation was called in response to a recent cabinet revolt that saw Prime Minister Garfield Todd pushed from office.<sup>45</sup> The reasons behind the action remain disputed. However, per Loft's notes of the meeting, Joshua Nkomo represented the party's consensual view when he claimed that Todd was removed because he attempted to "apply [a] little trace of liberalism."<sup>46</sup> The most vehement remarks came from Chikerema. The SRANC Vice-President placed a curse upon Patrick Fletcher, Todd's Minister of Native Affairs, who was believed to be the cabinet member most responsible for the revolt. Loft's shorthand notes recorded that Chikerema "call[ed] on all the ancestral spirits in Central Africa to haunt [Fletcher] day and night."<sup>47</sup> The strength of the attack unnerved the whites in attendance. At a dinner party that evening at the home of Lawrence Vambe, the colony's leading black journalist, Eleanor Glyn-Jones, a white schoolteacher present at the SRANC meeting announced that "she had been 'disturbed to hear so little constructive talk....'" and cited

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<sup>45</sup> "African Congress Meeting to Discuss S.R. Crisis", *The Rhodesia Herald*, February 27, 1958.

<sup>46</sup> HI, GLP, Box 1, Folder 3, "S.R. ANC Meeting – Harari Recreation Hall", March 2, 1958.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

the curse as particularly unsettling.<sup>48</sup> Days later, Loft himself admonished Chikerema and other SRANC leaders for their incendiary rhetoric.<sup>49</sup>

The repercussions of the harangue became a lingering headache for Loft when the Rhodesian authorities charged Chikerema with criminal defamation. While the curse may have been the motivating factor, the charges against Chikerema, which resulted in a conviction, centered on his allegations in the same address that Fletcher had misappropriated funds earlier in his government service.<sup>50</sup> The case appears to have been a concerted attempt by the government to drive a wedge between SRANC and its white sympathizers. Alongside several other whites, John Reed and Terrence Ranger, both recent hires at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, who subsequently joined SRANC's successor, the National Democratic Party (NDP), were compelled to testify against Chikerema. Their testimony was highlighted in the colony's paper of record, *The Rhodesia Herald*.<sup>51</sup> The British High Commission in Salisbury reported, "it was a source of considerable satisfaction to the Rhodesian authorities" that their principal witnesses were two whites sympathetic to SRANC.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> As quoted in Scarnecchia, *Urban Roots*, 91.

<sup>49</sup> HI, GLP, Box 1, Folder 3, "Meeting with S.R. ANC", March 5, 1958.

<sup>50</sup> "Chikerema Declares He Led 'Prayer' for Sir Patrick", *The Rhodesia Herald*, July 9, 1958.

Chikerema's widow maintains that the allegations were accurate. Philda Chikerema, text to author, April 20, 2021.

<sup>51</sup> Ranger, *Writing Revolt*, 28-30; "Chikerema Declares He Led 'Prayer' for Sir Patrick", *The Rhodesia Herald*, July 9, 1958.

<sup>52</sup> TNA, DO 35/7549, Metcalf to Kirkness, July 25, 1958.

Chikerema wished to call Loft as a defense witness.<sup>53</sup> However, Loft was touring Northern Rhodesia at the time of the trial (possibly a contrived journey) and was unable to appear. Back in Salisbury in mid-August, Loft again conferred with Nyandoro, Chikerema, and Mushonga at the Moore residence. Nyandoro reported that the Rhodesian authorities' intervention had strengthened anti-white sentiments among SRANC's rank-and-file. Loft recorded his rather paternalist reproach to the colony's elite black political leadership: "it was a serious thing to have the Ranger position turned into anti-European propaganda, and it was the responsibility of Chikerema, et al. to make sure this did not happen."<sup>54</sup>

Loft continued to encourage SRANC to liaise with white officials, now pushing as interlocutor GCD Hodgson, the Director of the Office of Race Affairs, a Federal body. Nyandoro was considerably less enthusiastic about the prospect of co-operation with Hodgson than he had been with Finkle. He retorted that this would be counter-productive, the outreach would confine SRANC engagement to the low-level Office of Race Affairs, creating further distance between the party and the colony's white political leadership. Nyandoro would have been aware that SRANC's nationalist counterparts in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland traditionally enjoyed more success in reaching political elites in those territories.<sup>55</sup> Loft documented that he reiterated the

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<sup>53</sup> HI, GLP, Box 1, Folder 3, "Visit at Moore's with Nyandoro, Chikerema, Mushonga", August 12, 1958.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Channing Richardson, "Challenges to Federation in Central Africa", *Africa Special Report*, January 1958.



“importance of establishing as many contacts as possible with government.”<sup>56</sup> The tone and thrust of Loft’s position was somewhat remarkable. It likely increased the skepticism with which the nationalist leadership regarded nominal white ‘allies.’ At the time of their discussion, Chikerema had recently been convicted for statements uttered at a political meeting. Both Nyandoro and Mushonga had been charged with criminal offenses as a result of their political activity.<sup>57</sup> Loft’s gradualist approach disregarded the reality that Rhodesian officials were mobilizing a legal onslaught to disrupt SRANC’s activities. He seemed unable to grasp the immense gulf developing between SRANC and the government. Loft did, however, inquire if the AFSC could provide support for Chikerema to pursue higher education in the UK.<sup>58</sup> While praising Chikerema’s “intellect,” Loft asserted that “in other respects, he most needs the maturing and hopefully tempering experience of a year’s study among constructive influences.”<sup>59</sup> Loft’s interest in moderating Chikerema and his unwillingness to more directly bolster SRANC in the face of colonial repression was likely a consequence of his close contacts with the party’s erstwhile opponent, the ruling United Federal Party (UFP) and the bureaucrats like Finkle and Hodgson implementing its program of limited, incremental reform.

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<sup>56</sup> HI, GLP, Box 1, Folder 3, “Visit at Moore’s with Nyandoro, Chikerema, Mushonga”, August 12, 1958.

<sup>57</sup> “Congress Members to Stand trial in High Court”, *The Rhodesia Herald*, September 30, 1958.

<sup>58</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 18, “SP-26”, July 26, 1958.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. Loft ignores that Chikerema had already fulfilled this injunction, studying at the University of Cape Town in 1949 and 1950. Nothing ultimately came of the request.

### **Government Outreach: Edgar Whitehead**

Whereas SRANC officials earnestly sought greater contacts with the colony's most senior political figures, Loft readily enjoyed such access. He met with the Federal Prime Minister, Roy Welensky (1957-63), soon after arriving and had an exit interview of sorts with him shortly before his departure.<sup>60</sup> He was in even more frequent contact with Edgar Whitehead, the Southern Rhodesia territorial Prime Minister. At the time of Loft's appointment, Whitehead led the Federation's diplomatic mission in Washington DC, where Loft called on him.<sup>61</sup> Loft's interactions with these captains of state were vastly different in tone from his encounters with the nationalist leadership. Whereas Loft's communications with the nationalists were resoundingly paternalist, his approach to the Oxford-educated Whitehead was generally deferential.

In his first meeting in Salisbury with Whitehead in March 1958, shortly after he became Prime Minister, Loft primarily probed Whitehead's views on SRANC.<sup>62</sup> His papers indicate that he did not directly encourage Whitehead to meet with SRANC until November 1958.<sup>63</sup> Loft believed government opinion on SRANC was divided – did the Prime Minister think it advisable to strengthen the party's capacity? Loft documented that Whitehead preferred “to see the Africans move politically into the existing political parties (European dominated) and working within those parties to get their aims.”<sup>64</sup> This prompted Loft to explicitly ask Whitehead if he thought it was useful for the QIAR

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<sup>60</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 21, “SP-19”, March 15, 1960.

<sup>61</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 19, “Supplement to SP-14”, March 8, 1959.

<sup>62</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 9, “Sir Edgar Whitehead”, March 19, 1958.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., November 6, 1958.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

to continue to interface with SRANC. Whitehead responded affirmatively, on the condition that “there was any moderating influence which GL [Loft] could exert on them.”<sup>65</sup> Loft floated the idea of an advisory body that could support SRANC in its policy formulation, thereby making their agenda “worthy of government consideration.”<sup>66</sup> At this point the meeting was abruptly disrupted, but Loft secured a second audience with Whitehead just one week later. The Prime Minister tepidly backed Loft’s plan of technical support for SRANC, but again, according to Loft, expressed his desire that the aim of any such intervention should strive “to keep the [SR]ANC moderate.”<sup>67</sup> Curiously, aside from his initial meeting with SRANC officials earlier that month, Loft’s papers give little indication that he promoted the idea of advisory support to the party’s leadership. It is possible that Loft’s relations with SRANC were on such tenuous ground that he never found an opportune time to seriously discuss it. By February 1959, on the eve of the emergency and SRANC’s prohibition, Loft concluded that an advisory group was “improbable.”<sup>68</sup>

Emergencies were declared in both Southern Rhodesia (February 26) and Nyasaland (March 2). Hundreds of nationalist leaders from both colonies were detained. Within days, Whitehead summoned Loft for a terse talk. The Prime Minister criticized the QIAR’s failure to keep SRANC on a moderate track and informed Loft that he should no longer contact SRANC officials.<sup>69</sup> Loft found that the nature of his mission

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 9, “Sir Edgar Whitehead”, March 19, 1958.

<sup>68</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 19, “SP-10”, February 23, 1959.

<sup>69</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6 Folder 19, “SP-14”, March 8, 1959.

and attempts to maintain dialogue between the races transformed virtually overnight. He expressed this quandary to Whitehead, recording in his notes “that in the present confused situation, I was treading water, hoping for new light and inspiration regarding what I could usefully do...”<sup>70</sup> Whitehead offered no immediate guidance. In April 1960, shortly before the QIAR’s departure and days after Banda’s release from prison, Whitehead took a more explicit position, expressing his desire that Loft shift his interests to social development and away from political matters.<sup>71</sup> A Federal official conveyed similar sentiments from Welensky to Loft via the US Consulate.<sup>72</sup>

### **Second Crisis & Inflection Point: All-African People’s Congress Imbroglio**

Prior to the emergency, Loft’s rocky relationship with Zimbabwean nationalists was fundamentally ruptured following fall-out surrounding his role as an observer of the All-Africa People’s Conference (AAPC) in Accra, Ghana in December 1958. Loft served as an informant for the Rhodesian and Federal authorities and their associates of developments that took place there. This conference not only had critical implications for Loft personally, it unnerved the Federal and Rhodesian governments and energized nationalist activity. The AAPC is widely seen as a significant turning point in the overall radicalization of Africa’s liberation struggle; Loft himself believed that it prompted, in part, Southern Rhodesia’s emergency declaration, shortly thereafter.<sup>73</sup> Ali Mazrui has noted that the conference marked the beginning of an embrace of the use of

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> HI, GLP, Box 4, Folder 41, “Joseph Palmer”, April 7, 1960.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> HI, GLP, Box 7, Folder 6, “SP-16”, March 21, 1959.

violence against imperial control.<sup>74</sup> Loft expressed to a leading bureaucrat in the Federation's Ministry of External Affairs his view that the Conference would be "a turning point for African political action."<sup>75</sup> The official, Hugh Parry, a key Welensky advisor, was apprised in advance of Loft's intention to travel to Ghana and was supportive.<sup>76</sup> Following his return from Ghana, Loft briefed Parry on the conference and distributed detailed confidential reports on conference proceedings to various Federal officials and their associates.<sup>77</sup> A version of the report was eventually published.<sup>78</sup> Although the resulting article was unattributed, Loft could be identified as the author. The abridged report appeared in *East Africa and Rhodesia*, a British-based serial subsidized by the Federation's high commission in London and known for its pro-imperial stance.<sup>79</sup> The report proclaimed that the conference was full of "egotists." It was particularly pointed in its critique of Banda, who participated in the AAPC as the leader of the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC), the most vibrant nationalist group in the Federation.<sup>80</sup> Loft only learned of the publication when Banda's ire was disclosed to him by Clyde Sanger, an editor at the *Central African Examiner*, which then had

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<sup>74</sup> Mazrui, *Pax Africana*, 208.

<sup>75</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 19, "SP-6", February 6, 1959.

<sup>76</sup> HI, GLP, Box 4, Folder 41, "Joseph Palmer", November 7, 1958.

<sup>77</sup> HI, GLP, Box 4, Folder 22, "Hugh Nigel Parry", February 6, 1959.

<sup>78</sup> "Special Report from One Who Attended the Accra Conference", *East Africa & Rhodesia* [London, England], January 15, 1959.

<sup>79</sup> University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Killie Campbell Library, Philip Warhurst Papers, Box 18, "Review of Work in Hand and in Prospect by the Public Relations Department, Rhodesia House, and Voice & Vision Ltd," 31 May 1961.

<sup>80</sup> "Report from One Who Attended".

indirect ties to Welensky and the UFP.<sup>81</sup> The leak gravely undermined Loft's already strained credibility amongst anti-colonial nationalists.

This second crisis in Loft's relations with nationalists began after the QIAR dispatched a copy of his confidential report on the AAPC to David Cole, a public relations consultant and Welensky advisor.<sup>82</sup> Cole, in turn, unilaterally forwarded it to a number of press contacts, noting that the material was not for publication.<sup>83</sup> FS Joelson, editor of *East Africa and Rhodesia*, breached Cole's injunction.<sup>84</sup> Loft had carefully cultivated relationships with the press and media figures that helped the UFP maintain its dominance and was shocked that they forwarded his private dispatch. Loft probably first met Cole for lunch in mid-October 1957, about a month after arriving in Salisbury and before he established contacts with SRANC's leadership.<sup>85</sup> Loft was also in touch with a close Cole associate, Ian Hess.<sup>86</sup> Hess had deep ties to the political establishment and was the editor of the UFP newsletter, *Federal Outlook*.<sup>87</sup> While the *East Africa & Rhodesia* piece evoked a negative tone, Loft's overall appraisal of the conference for the AFSC was more neutral. He criticized the "rather chaotic" administration of the

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<sup>81</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 19, "SP-5", February 6, 1959; King, "The Central African Examiner", 144.

<sup>82</sup> Anthony King, "Identity and Decolonisation", 211.

<sup>83</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 19, "SP-5", February 6, 1959.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.; "Report from One Who Attended".

<sup>85</sup> HI, GLP, Box 2, Folder 4, "David Cole", October 16, 1957.

<sup>86</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 19, "SP-5", February 6, 1959.

<sup>87</sup> "'Outlook' Editor", *Federal Outlook* [Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia], Vol. 1, No. 6, December 1956.

event, was concerned by the push for overt support for violent methods, and found many of the attendees “bombastic.”<sup>88</sup> However, he was impressed by “the way the Conference recognized and overcame its many internal differences” and “had the feeling that these were men who were competent to plan and carry through the work which they had set for themselves.”<sup>89</sup> Loft was eager to convey his feelings on the import of the Conference to the Federal Government. On his first full day back in Salisbury upon his return, he met with Cole and expressed “hope” that he would secure an audience with Welensky to discuss his observations. Cole requested that Loft draft a memo on the conference for Welensky as a first step to obtain that access.<sup>90</sup> He dutifully did so, an act that spectacularly backfired.

On the same day, Loft met with Lawrence Vambe and Nathan Shamuyarira, the leading editors of the African Newspapers group, which published a stable of titles targeting a black audience in the Federation.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, the *African Daily News*, its premier offering, ran a series of anonymous columns, under the byline of “a Salisbury journalist who attended the conference.”<sup>92</sup> The paper was controlled by the white South African born Paver brothers, who routinely collaborated with the Federal

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<sup>88</sup> HI, GLP, Box 7, Folder 1, “Report of All-African People’s Conference Held at Accra, Ghana, December 8-13, 1958”, December 23, 1958.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 18, “SP-71”, December 21, 1958.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> “Impressions of the Accra ‘Freedom’ Conference”, *Central African Daily News*, December 15-17, 1958.

authorities.<sup>93</sup> Like the Joelson publication, these articles were negative in tone and undermined the Conference's pan-African aims. The unattributed 'Salisbury correspondent' praised the Nigerian delegation as being "more mature" than the Ghanaian contingent. The report derided the "childlike faith" that some Africans held in the benefits of independence and advised them to take a more cautious approach to African liberation.<sup>94</sup> These claims sought to subvert Nkrumah's assiduous efforts in Accra to encourage nationalists in the Federation to collaborate more closely.<sup>95</sup> While Loft's papers only address fallout from the publication of the *East Africa & Rhodesia* piece, it is likely that the columns in the *African Daily News* also stirred nationalist ire against the QIAR. Notably, in contrast to his urge to see Welensky, Loft's papers do not indicate any substantive attempt to link up with SRANC officials following his return from the Conference.

As Loft struggled to deal with the fallout around the article's publication, his anxieties over the Federation's political climate worsened. In early February, after several weeks leave in South Africa, Loft informed the American Consul-General that he felt "the situation here [Salisbury] had visibly deteriorated, and that I felt more discouraged than I have ever been before about the outlook."<sup>96</sup> Loft expressed the same sentiments to Parry, noting that "with every passing day, it becomes more difficult for

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<sup>93</sup> Dombo, *Private Print Media*, 21.

<sup>94</sup> "Impressions of the Accra 'Freedom' Conference", *Central African Daily News*, December 17, 1958.

<sup>95</sup> HI, GLP, Box 7, Folder 1, "Report of All-African People's Conference Held at Accra, Ghana, December 8-13, 1958", December 23, 1958.

<sup>96</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 19, "SP-5", February 6, 1959.



white and black to sit down with each other.”<sup>97</sup> In the run-up to the emergency declaration, Loft’s outreach appears to have been confined to liberal and moderate whites and their organizations. In a 45-minute meeting with Robert Tredgold, the Federation’s Chief Justice known for his moderate views, Loft sought to enlist him as an intermediary between SRANC and the government.<sup>98</sup> He met with Hugh Ashton, a white administrator known for his independent disposition and attended a meeting of the United Rhodesia Party (URP, which soon rebranded as the Central Africa Party).<sup>99</sup> The URP, on the center-left of Rhodesia’s establishment politics, emerged following Todd’s cabinet revolt and his subsequent fall-out with the UFP.<sup>100</sup> Loft’s greatest progress on the nationalist front came in a flurry of correspondence with Banda. The QIAR expressed contrition for the circumstances that led to the publication of his report on the AAPC in *East Africa & Rhodesia*. By the middle of February, the two had effectively reconciled. Banda assured Loft, “I hold nothing against you.”<sup>101</sup> The Quaker remained in Salisbury for over a year after the emergency, but his contacts with both black nationalists and white government officials in Salisbury were never the same. Nonetheless, a visiting American contemporary of Loft’s in the Federation recalls that in encounters following the emergency, the QIAR came off as “decidedly

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 19, “SP-10”, February 23, 1959.

<sup>99</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 19, “SP-11”, February 24, 1959; on Ashton see: Hutton, “Bulawayo Breaks Ranks”.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

pro-African.”<sup>102</sup> Loft met Michael Mawema, the President of the NDP, soon after the party’s formation in January 1960, but in contrast to his attempted cultivation of SRANC, the encounter appears as an afterthought in Loft’s reports to the AFSC.<sup>103</sup>

### **Nyasaland African Congress Outreach**

In this void, Loft turned the bulk of his efforts toward the situation in Nyasaland, which was characterized by more immediate and intense conflict. Jimmy Skinner, a Nyasa-based white hotel proprietor and NAC supporter recalls that Loft took a “keen interest” in developments in the colony, which had one of the most vibrant nationalist movements in Africa.<sup>104</sup> The Quaker’s frequent contacts with the imprisoned Nyasa nationalists were initially sanctioned by the Federal government.<sup>105</sup> The British Colonial Secretary also encouraged Loft to help keep the Nyasa nationalists peaceful.<sup>106</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the emergency declaration in Nyasaland, security operations resulted in approximately fifty fatalities.<sup>107</sup> Loft’s newfound focus on Nyasaland likely emanated from the confluence of the AFSC’s interest in non-violence

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<sup>102</sup> Robert Rotberg, email to author, March 3, 2021.

<sup>103</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 21, “SP-19,” March 15, 1960.

<sup>104</sup> James Skinner, email to author, June 25, 2021.

<sup>105</sup> Baker, *State of Emergency*, 230-231. However, Loft rejected Baker’s ascription “of prior direct agreement” between himself and Welensky regarding his contacts with Banda as overreaching: George Loft, “George Loft’s Comments Re: References to Him in Colin Baker’s Book”, undated personal notes, transcribed by Jean Seiler in email to author, April 09, 2021.

<sup>106</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 21, “SP-19”, March 15, 1960; Loft, “Our Time in Africa.”

<sup>107</sup> McCracken, *History of Malawi*, 354.

and the desire of the Federal and British governments to maintain stability in the colony. Loft's interactions with Nyasas detained for their political activities more closely resembled those of a traditional missionary engaged in humanitarian relief, thus fulfilling Whitehead's admonition to eschew political engagements.

Whites elsewhere in the Federation closely followed the situation in Nyasaland, believing that it held great import for developments in the Rhodesias. Clutton-Brock composed a book, *Dawn in Nyasaland*, which observed that "Nyasaland is the key point in Central Africa."<sup>108</sup> He justified his motivation for writing about Nyasaland from a base elsewhere in the Federation:

The case for the withdrawal of Nyasaland from the Federation and for its people to have free choice to associate with whom they will, depends much more upon the situation in Southern Rhodesia than on conditions in Nyasaland. It does not therefore seem inappropriate for one whose home is in Southern Rhodesia to write about the case for Nyasaland.<sup>109</sup>

Loft appears to have held similar views. He visited Nyasaland in May 1958, covering the breadth of the colony and conducting around 20 formal interviews.<sup>110</sup> One of his most prominent contacts was with Kanyama Chiume. Then a member of the Nyasaland Legislative Council, Chiume subsequently became independent Malawi's first Minister of Foreign Affairs. Loft was unsettled by Chiume's zeal and found him "intransigent."<sup>111</sup> Chiume informed the QIAR that under no circumstances would he have confidence in the Federation and complained about the US Consulate in Salisbury supporting black "stooges" linked to the UFP; Loft replied that he would take the latter

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<sup>108</sup> Clutton-Brock, *Dawn in Nyasaland*, 8.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>110</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 18, "SP-30", May 28, 1958.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

up with the American Consul-General, with whom he regularly consulted.<sup>112</sup> It is probable that this close relationship with an official American representative further undermined Loft's attempts to project neutrality. Chiume and Nkomo were among the most prominent nationalists in Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia to escape arrest following the emergency action.<sup>113</sup> The New York-based American Committee on Africa (ACOA), which more stridently supported African liberation than the AFSC, sought to sponsor them on a lecture tour of the United States. Loft, at Banda's behest, but in a move likely appreciated by Federal and Rhodesian authorities, unsuccessfully attempted to lobby the US Consulate to prevent the tour.<sup>114</sup> Outside of the Ghana AAPC where he encountered ACOA's Executive Director, George Houser, Loft had limited contacts with ACOA, a grouping he had mixed views on and called "sensationalist."<sup>115</sup> The cool relationship provides evidence of Loft's (and the AFSC's) intrinsic moderation.

On March 31, 1959, Loft met with Banda (in prison) and leading NAC members who had been detained and transported to Southern Rhodesia several weeks previously. Banda expressed concern about a number of personal matters, such as making payments on his Land Rover, and Loft promised assistance on all accounts.<sup>116</sup> He saw Banda again on April 6, and pledged to facilitate communications with a British MP the NAC

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Nkomo, *Story of My Life*, 83.

<sup>114</sup> National Archives and Records Administration II, USA (NARA) Record Group 59 (RG), Box 3235, 745.00/6-159, AmConGen, Salisbury to Department of State, July 23, 1959.

<sup>115</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 18, "SP-71", December 21, 1958.

<sup>116</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 19, "SP-21", April 13, 1959.

leader wished to retain as legal counsel.<sup>117</sup> Shortly thereafter, Loft met with Thomas Kellock, another lawyer representing Banda and the first of his legal team to arrive in the Federation from overseas.<sup>118</sup> Loft's dispatches to the AFSC obliquely note that shortly after these two visits with Banda he "had a meeting with one of the Nyasaland government officials in Salisbury."<sup>119</sup> Loft again consulted with Hugh Parry before leaving for Tunisia to attend the second meeting of the AAPC in January 1960.<sup>120</sup> All indications point to Loft assiduously keeping the relevant authorities apprised of his contacts and moving extra cautiously in the aftermath of the emergency. On Loft's third visit to Banda, in July 1959, further evidence indicates the QIAR was operating from a position favourable to the minority governments of the Federation and Southern Rhodesia. Loft informed Banda that "he had been trying to think of what kind of political arrangement might possibly keep Nyasaland in the Federation."<sup>121</sup> Loft's overt lobbying for the Nyasa nationalists to accept a continued place in the Federation clashed with the most fundamental tenet of their political program, as Chiume had previously expressed to the Quaker.

As Loft's outreach to Banda advanced, he cultivated parallel relationships with key colonial officials in Nyasaland. On a visit to the colony in late August 1959, he held a 90-minute meeting with the Governor, Richard Armitage.<sup>122</sup> He met with

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 21, "SP-19", March 15, 1960.

<sup>121</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 20, "SP-40", July 23, 1959.

<sup>122</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 20, "SP-50", August 31, 1959.

Nyasaland's Chief Secretary, Glyn Jones (Armitage's successor) in Salisbury and conveyed letters from Jones to Banda in prison.<sup>123</sup> Loft also held talks with Nyasaland's Federal MPs.<sup>124</sup> Loft engaged in a lengthy discussion with Welensky where the two discussed the potential roots of Banda's enmity with the Federal Prime Minister.<sup>125</sup> By the eve of Banda's release at the beginning of April 1960, Loft noted that he was aiming to visit Banda at least once a month.<sup>126</sup> However, his notes of these conversations do not reflect the 'intelligence-sharing' that prevailed in Loft's exchanges with white officials. Loft variously sought to moderate Banda, assist him with apolitical matters pertaining to his personal affairs, or bring books or gifts like a tie, to the dapper nationalist.<sup>127</sup> While it was probably not apparent to Loft or his white interlocutors at the time, this discrepancy belied the strength of Banda and the Nyasa nationalists. Their program of self-determination was clear and straightforward, they did not (at least vis-a-vis Loft) need to pursue the scheming and machinations that the settler authorities engaged in to delay majority rule. Their very imprisonment and the international opprobrium it generated magnified the pressure on Federal and Rhodesian authorities. Just over four years after Loft left the Federation, Banda became president of independent Malawi. Loft's reorientation to Nyasaland following the emergency was a

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<sup>123</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 21, "SP-19", March 15, 1960.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 8, "Sir Roy Welensky", March 23, 1960

<sup>126</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 21, "SP-21", March 23, 1960.

<sup>127</sup> HI, GLP, Box 6, Folder 20, "SP-78", December 3, 1959.

tacit recognition of superior nationalist strength in that colony and the likelihood of this outcome.

## **Conclusion**

In guidance to his successor, Lyle Tatum, Loft wrote:

The blunt, dogmatic approach won't work here. Rightly or wrongly, we must remain 'neutral' if we are to maintain links with the various sides to the local problems, and if we hope to be effective. And no one here particularly likes or trusts the neutrals; all groups, white and black and coloured, want people committed to their particular point of view.

Loft's advice, juxtaposed against his experience in Southern Rhodesia, points to the challenges of attempting to remain 'neutral' in a society characterized by inequality and discrimination. By the time Tatum arrived in Salisbury several months later, Loft and his contacts at the US Consulate mutually agreed that following pressure from the Rhodesian and Federal governments it was advisable for the new QIAR to focus on social development projects and avoid a political role.<sup>128</sup> The US Consul-General, Joseph Palmer, encouraged Loft to "ease off" his work during his final months in the Federation and informed the QIAR the Consulate had been told that if Loft had not been planning to leave, the Federal government would have declared him a prohibited immigrant.<sup>129</sup> Loft's tenure in 'partnership' era Salisbury represented the last period in which it would be possible for a private foreigner to openly operate, even if ineffectively, with a political mandate across the racial divide. Loft's experience shows that this space closed prior to the ascent to political power in late 1962 of the far-right Rhodesian Front and the dissolution of the Federation the following year.

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<sup>128</sup> HI, GLP, Box 4, Folder 41, "Joseph Palmer", April 7, 1960.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid; Loft, "Our Time in Africa".

Despite the hostility evinced by Federal authorities on the eve of his departure, Loft's 'neutrality' predominantly benefitted the settler establishment. It did not prevent him from willingly sharing useful intelligence with government officials. The journalist, Sanger, felt that the UFP government never supported Loft's reconciliation agenda, but wanted to know "if he had learnt things from their foes they had not heard from other sources."<sup>130</sup> The US consulate believed Federal officials were monitoring Loft's correspondence and movements.<sup>131</sup> Additionally, keeping the nationalists non-violent would have provided the UFP with space to enact reforms on its own terms, or stave them off altogether. Conversely, Loft's vaguely conceived ideas of technical support to the nationalists never got off the ground. The bulk of the tangible support he provided to detained nationalists revolved around prosaic matters, such as the procurement of study material. Loft's failed mission in Southern Rhodesia was predictable. Only an extraordinarily intrepid individual willing to take controversial and decisive positions not expected by a white Westerner would have had a markedly different experience. Loft, with no prior experience in Africa and a Quaker identity whose primary bequest appears to have been a reluctance to countenance bold actions, was no such figure. The terms of the white presence in the colony were set by violent imperial subjugation in 1893 and 1896-97. A supposedly 'neutral' approach by a lone American Quaker was inevitably subsumed by the force of decades of history that placed the inhabitants of the colony on a collision course.

George Loft's tribulations underscore the rapidity with which racial polarization in the Federation deepened, the superficial ideal of multi-racial partnership collapsed,

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<sup>130</sup> Clyde Sanger, email to author, March 6, 2021.

<sup>131</sup> HI, GLP, Box 4, Folder 41, "Joseph Palmer", April 7, 1960.



and Rhodesia's descent to UDI became fixed. Loft's reception by the political actors he sought to reconcile reveals that neither group trusted him, an alarming position for a neutral facilitator. This absence of trust made an untenable situation increasingly toxic. The insurgency that emerged in Southern Rhodesia in 1966 may have been avoided if Britain, the imperial power, had taken a more decisive position in its 'self-governing colony' a decade earlier. In the absence of such action, Loft was merely a highly connected protagonist, helplessly swept along by the current he sought to direct.

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No conflict of interest.

## **Notes on Contributor**

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