

‘Bogey Bogey Stuff’: Gold Coastism, Federation, and White Backlash in Southern Rhodesia, 1951-1956

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the apprehension white Rhodesians evinced toward the transformation of the Commonwealth and initial signs of African decolonisation, especially in colonial Ghana. Whites informally dubbed these undesired changes ‘Gold Coastism’. Rhodesia’s ruling party weaponised these fears and argued that a Central African Federation would preserve British influence and forestall African nationalism on Southern Rhodesia’s borders. As it became clear this Federation would not significantly obstruct black African political activity, white fears of Gold Coastism accelerated. This resulted in a concerted push for independence and anti-British sentiment in Rhodesia earlier than the scholarship generally acknowledges.

Keywords: decolonisation, imperialism, nationalism, pan-Africanism, Godfrey Huggins, Kwame Nkrumah

Introduction

In 1953, the British colonies of Southern and Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (contemporary Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi) became associated as the Federation of

Rhodesia and Nyasaland (hereafter the 'Federation'). This coalition realised the longstanding expansionist ambitions of the white settlers of Southern Rhodesia the polity's dominant member (Wetherell, 1979). This Federation, which endured for 10 turbulent years, offers some of the most convincing evidence that post-war 'British imperial withdrawal was a complex and intermittent process that ebbed and flowed over time' (Martin, 2006, p.1). Thus, somewhat paradoxically, as the establishment of this Federation heralded the consolidation of white settler power in southern Africa, African anti-colonial nationalism in west Africa, especially the Gold Coast (colonial Ghana), was gaining strength.

In 1951, as the push for Federation accelerated, the first ever general election in the Gold Coast resulted in a predominantly black government and Kwame Nkrumah became Prime Minister the following year (Arnold, 2020, p. 170). These seemingly contradictory directions exerted a significant impact on the political thought of Southern Rhodesia's white settlers, who enjoyed effective autonomy from the UK and administered the colony. Unpacking this interconnected relationship offers valuable insights on the subsequent trajectory of white settler unilateralism in Rhodesian politics as well as the drastic transformation of the Commonwealth more broadly.

This article explores the repercussions of the rise of Ghanaian political authority and African decolonisation in Southern Rhodesia in the period between the 1951 Gold Coast election and Ghana's independence in 1957. Among white Rhodesians, 'Gold Coastism' became shorthand for decolonisation or movement toward African majority rule. The historiography typically highlights Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa as the transnational catalyst for federation and associated imperial anxieties (Mlombo, 2020, pp. 168-183). This article positions Gold Coastism as another critical international dimension. The account is informed most significantly by the proceedings

of legislative debates and newspaper accounts, but unpublished material features as well.

Following a background and literature section, two critical developments are considered. Firstly, Gold Coastism informed Rhodesian debates on the Federation's creation. Secondly, once the Federation came into existence, backlash against Gold Coastism drove an abortive push for independence by the Federation's settler rulers. Both items infrequently feature in the historiography, but they provide critical context on Rhodesia's 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), which constituted one of the most serious and long running challenges to the Commonwealth.

Context on Gold Coastism and White Backlash in Southern Rhodesia

Although Pulosof and Rivett (2019) rightly argue that among wider society, 'few whites imagined that their world and its future was in any danger in the 1950s', Rhodesia's political class was alarmed by the Gold Coast's strides toward independence throughout the decade. In October 1951, the Chief Secretary of the Central African Council, an associative body of the future Federal constituents, noted Southern Rhodesian 'fear of the development of Gold Coast ideas'.¹ This gathering apprehension ensured that Gold Coastism informed Rhodesian debates on Federation and contributed to attempts by white Rhodesians to obtain independence from Britain. Federation also became intrinsically associated with elements of Gold Coastism as the Federal Parliament reserved seats for black MPs, the preamble to its Constitution promoted 'multi-racial 'partnership', and it created institutions like an African Affairs Board, all perceived as exerting a liberalising influence.

Ghana's influence on liberation struggles across sub-Saharan Africa have been the subject of significant scholarly interest. Ahlman (2011) and Grilli (2018ⁱ) examined

Nkrumah's specific contributions to southern African liberation struggles. Grilli (2018ⁱⁱ) and Thompson (1969) explored Ghana's foreign policy in Africa in-depth. Explorations of Ghanaian influence from the Rhodesian perspective, while routinely acknowledged, have received scant attention.

The nexus of this scholarship overwhelmingly takes Nkrumah's independence day proclamation that Ghana's 'independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent' as its starting point (Nkrumah, 1961, p. 107). The importance of the conferral of Ghanaian national sovereignty, rather than the decolonisation process leading up to it, is further reinforced by African nationalists. Joshua Nkomo, one of the leading figures in Zimbabwe's anti-colonial struggle, reminded the readers of his autobiography of 'just how important Ghana's independence early in 1957 was to all Africa' (Nkomo, 1984, p. 75).

Ghanaian independence did mark the advent of a more confrontational brand of pan-African nationalism, with Nkrumah hosting the first conferences of the Independent African States and the All-African Peoples' Congress in 1958. However, the emphasis in the historiography on Nkrumah's pan-African interventions following independence minimises the continental impact of the historic gains of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) prior to its assumption of sovereign state power. Nkrumah's rapid ascension in the early 1950s from Gold Coast jail to Prime Minister was exceptional at the time but became a template across Africa over the next decade.

While the masses of white settlers of southern Africa may have felt empire was secure, post-war changes across the Commonwealth nevertheless unsettled white Rhodesians. The independence of India in 1947 and other Asian countries during the first post-war wave of decolonisation in Asia brought a new cohort of settlers popularly known as 'Bengal Chancers'. Major anti-colonial nationalist movements were

established in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia in 1944 and 1948, respectively. Perceived threats to UK hegemony and the Rhodesian ruling class of British stock following the electoral victory of the Afrikaner dominated National Party in neighbouring South Africa in 1948 were posited by Hyam (1987, p. 169) as the ‘nearly monocausal’ explanation for the Federation’s establishment. A necessary reconsideration by Murphy (2006) rejects this characterisation as overly one-sided and describes the Federation’s creation as a British concession to post-war white nationalism (p. 71). However, Murphy’s focus on the British role in the Federation’s creation draws his attention away from the forces behind this surge of settler agitation. Cohen (2017), in the most recent monograph on Federation, reflects a popular contemporary view when he ascribes the Federation’s genesis to economic considerations, primarily settler avarice for Northern Rhodesia’s copper deposits.

Political changes to the south and the desirability of economic consolidation were invoked as significant selling points in favour of Federation. Pro-Federal propaganda noted that recent developments in South Africa were not ‘altogether as hoped’ and that following the electoral defeat of Prime Minister Jan Smuts, a leading Commonwealth statesman, there was no longer any hope of Southern Rhodesia joining the ‘Union [of South Africa] on anything like equal terms’.² This propaganda also stressed that ‘the economies of the three territories are both complementary and interdependent’ and that Federation was necessary for ‘the maximum development of the region’.³

However, the fixation on these two facets has created a gap in the historiography. The Southern Rhodesian voter was flanked by propaganda stoking an aversion to Apartheid alongside rejection of Gold Coast ideas. However, the latter was more pronounced. Rhodesian officials were relatively circumspect about outright

condemnation of their powerful southern neighbour. They were less hesitant when it came to repudiating the policy of the Colonial Office in the Gold Coast and linking it to gathering nationalist activity in the region.

The decolonisation and security impetus driving the Rhodesian push for Federation was stressed in some of the contemporaneous work on the body, but its prominence in the scholarship has since receded (Leys, 1960, p. 11). This may be in part because British officials considering federation were more attuned to its potential to deflect South African influence. However, white Rhodesian fear of post-war African nationalism outpaced concerns over Apartheid.

In 1948, Godfrey Huggins, the Southern Rhodesian (1933-53) and later Federal Prime Minister (1953-56), spoke of the need to keep states with ‘no European guidance’, such as Liberia, away from Southern Rhodesia’s borders (quoted in Leys, p. 12). In his memoir, Roy Welensky, the second Federal Prime Minister (1956-63) wrote, ‘in Southern Rhodesia Europeans feared the imposition of “Gold Coast ideas”’ (1964, p. 53). When the Gold Coast, a colony hitherto superintended by Britain began strides toward independence, Huggins and his colleagues were perturbed. They worried that a domino effect in nearby colonies like Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, home to more broad-based anti-colonial nationalist movements than Southern Rhodesia, might ensue unless white influence was reinforced. As the Federal Minister of Justice reminisced:

It was obvious that if federation were rejected the Colonial Office would accelerate the pace of the northern territories [Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland] toward a Gold Coast type government with majority rule, and this would generate pressures inside Southern Rhodesia which might jeopardise the continuance of civilised rule (Greenfield, 1978, p. 131).

Thus, even before Kwame Nkrumah began to flex Ghana’s pan-African muscles, Gold Coastism stoked white unease in Southern Rhodesia. Alongside economic concerns and

the ascent of Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa, Rhodesia's rulers positioned Federation as a means to stem the 'wind of change'.

Gold Coastism and the Federation's Founding Geopolitics

Huggins' inimical Liberia comment was not an aberration; it reflected a deep-rooted pan-African worldview. In late 1949, amidst the early stages of the final push for federation and before the CPP's historic election feat, the Prime Minister reiterated, 'I do not relish the prospect of an independent Native state as a neighbour'.⁴ Later, when asked by a journalist about the consequences of self-government in Ghana after Nkrumah ascended to Prime Minister, Huggins responded, 'it could mean that the Europeans would be pushed out of Africa altogether'.⁵ Just two months after the CPP electoral breakthrough, Southern Rhodesian civil servants negotiating the framework of Federation in London privately recorded that one of its key strategic advantages was its ability to 'eliminate the possibility of a 'Gold Coast' territory being created to the north of us'.⁶

Although rarely the subject of contemporary historical inquiry, Huggins was one of the longest serving Commonwealth Prime Ministers at the time of his 1956 resignation (Gann, 1985, 723). Although he did not represent an independent nation, from 1944, he represented Southern Rhodesia (and subsequently, the Federation) at Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences.⁷ The colony's unique position as a *de facto* member of the body made Huggins and the Rhodesians particularly sensitive to the political advancement of other British colonies on the continent.

As the leading Rhodesian politician on the international stage, Huggins played a significant role in laying the groundwork for white Rhodesian backlash against Gold Coastism and Africa's unfolding transformation. His Private Secretary, 'Buster' St.

Quintin, recorded that early in his premiership, Huggins ‘c[a]me to the conclusion that Southern Rhodesia was too small economically to survive as a British state between an Afrikaner Nationalist South and a Black North’.⁸ Consequently, St. Quintin notes that efforts to create a body to counter these pressures came to ‘dominate’ Huggins’ thinking.⁹ This conviction received new impetus with not only the National Party victory in South Africa in 1948, but also following the CPP victory in 1951 which engendered concerns that Nkrumah’s success might cascade across Colonial Office administered territories throughout the subregion.

Huggins thus began to manipulate both his electorate (and British officials) by invoking the rise of two supposed intrinsic threats to white Rhodesian stability: white domination from the south (Apartheid) and black domination from the north (Gold Coastism).¹⁰ Given Huggins’ prior support for Southern Rhodesia’s amalgamation with South Africa and the significant degree of legalised discrimination in both territories, the black domination threat had the most resonance (Gann & Gelfand, 1964, p. 60). Huggins’ internationalist condemnation of black African political activity in the early 1950s established a strand of thought that permeated Rhodesian politics.

In a 1952 legislative debate on the White Paper which outlined the terms of the Federation, a swathe of Rhodesian parliamentarians articulated anxieties about rising African political activity. Garfield Todd, Huggins’ successor as Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister (1953-58) announced that ‘universal franchise...could and would lead, I believe, to universal chaos’.¹¹ He did not sound markedly different from his future political nemesis, Desmond Lardner-Burke, the UDI era Minister of Justice who placed a then considerably more liberal Todd under house arrest in the 1960s. Lardner Burke shared his ‘greatest fear...that...the European will be forced out of this country’.¹² Ian Smith, the Prime Minister of Rhodesia at the time of UDI believed the Federation’s

provisions for black parliamentary representation aligned with Gold Coastism.

Although he subsequently became more supportive, Smith initially felt Federation would 'jeopardise the future of the European in Southern Rhodesia'.¹³

Rhodesia's white political leaders of all stripes were effectively opposed to Gold Coastism. However, they differed in their response to it. Huggins and the ruling United Party upheld a vision of pro-active contribution to empire. Huggins and Welensky (the leading settler politician in Northern Rhodesia) became the President and Vice-President, respectively, of the United Central Africa Association (UCAA), a pro-federation lobbying body that merged with the Southern Rhodesian branch of the Capricorn Africa Society, a white-dominated conservative pan-African body that sought to uphold British influence in southern and east Africa (Rotberg, 2019, p. 102). They were also the lead signatories to the May 1952 Salisbury Declaration, an imperialist document produced to advance the campaign for Federation (Youé, 2004, p. 362).¹⁴ This document articulated a *raison d'être* for the continued white domination of the region. It stressed, 'the British in the East and Central African territories have, at this time, a special responsibility to the British Commonwealth of Nations and to Africa and its peoples (Wilson et al., 1952, p. 21). The Salisbury Declaration was a diplomatic rebuttal to the success of the CPP in the Gold Coast. As the failure of Huggins' tactics to thwart decolonisation became increasingly evident, white Rhodesia's relationship with the UK and the Commonwealth became less tactful.

The approach of the conservative opposition, which won out over the mid-term, generally opposed federation and an internationalist approach to combat Gold Coastism. Their position was consistent. The Liberal Party, which secured a plurality of seats at the 1946 general election but failed to constitute a government, opposed the Central African Council, a weaker regional body.¹⁵ In response, Huggins charged that they

were 'isolationists.... only interested in their own little funny affairs'.¹⁶ The right-wing opposition began to advance a 'Southern Rhodesia First' policy. This discourse was popularised by the short-lived Democratic Party, which opposed Federation.¹⁷

The June 1952 debates on the White Paper in the Southern Rhodesian Parliament saw an epic tussle about the potential of the Federation to thwart Gold Coastism. Ray Stockil, the leader of the opposition declared that Federation was too late to halt the diffusion of Gold Coastism. In fact, he felt the Federation's commitment to multi-racial partnership might accelerate its spread.¹⁸

A host of MPs invoked the west African colony during the debate. Leslie Cullinan, a United Party MP who backed federation, urged his colleagues to 'take the big view that this is going to be a great thing, not only for us, Africa, but for the whole of the British Commonwealth.'¹⁹ Continuing his address, he declared:

We must not forget that unless we now wish to take the plunge [federation] there will be a trend in the years to come when we will have what has been happening on the Gold Coast and Nigeria, happening on our border. To me there is no doubt that it will spread south unless it is prevented now and unless within the foreseeable future we can get together and put up something which is an answer to that position, I believe that we on our northern borders will have a great deal of trouble which will spread into our own country.²⁰

Others piled on affirmation. Patrick Fletcher stated:

We regard the West African system [Gold Coastism] as a menace to Central Africa...we believe that the best interests of Black and White alike, the best interests of the Commonwealth...can best be served by developing and perpetuating the Rhodesian pattern in Central Africa. We have some justification for the belief that it is within our capacity to make a great contribution to race relationship [sic] on the African continent.²¹

While Rhodesian politicians were divided on the viability of Federation as a means to halt concessions to African nationalism, there was a consensus that the position of the British empire on the continent was in retreat. This was diagnosed as an

existential threat. Rhodesia's political class correctly discerned the grave implications that African decolonisation posed to their domination at a relatively early date.

However, the United Party MPs, as evinced by their recurring positive references to the Commonwealth, failed to perceive the extent to which this tumult would rupture their relations with the UK. Critically, the Gold Coast example was then still relatively isolated and full-fledged independence remained several years away. Political advancement in the Gold Coast was mitigated by other British actions, such as the repression of Mau Mau in Kenya.

While Gold Coastism's challenge to white rule in Rhodesia was correctly forecast, there was no corresponding realisation that the traditional imperial partners would shortly, as a result of the swift transformation of the membership of international institutions like the Commonwealth and the United Nations, also contribute to efforts to isolate Southern Rhodesia. This went undiagnosed, in part, because while white Rhodesians were attuned to Gold Coast developments, their focus was superficial. Edgar Whitehead, Todd's successor as Southern Rhodesian Premier (1958-62) served in the Gold Coast during World War II and styled himself as the parliament's resident expert on west Africa.²² The year after the Federation's establishment, the Rhodesia National Affairs Association hosted a talk by a South African professor on 'The Development of the Gold Coast'.²³ In 1955, Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister Garfield Todd made a brief stopover in the Gold Coast (Woodhouse, 2018, p. 145). However, efforts to monitor changes in the west African colony while Britain still maintained formal sovereignty were relatively isolated.

The failure to perceive the extent of the revolutionary implications of the diffusion of Gold Coastism across Africa rendered the United Party view on Federation as a device to halt African nationalism a successful selling point. Halting Gold Coast

ideas became a key component of campaign propaganda used by pro-Federation forces at the April 1953 referendum in Southern Rhodesia on the Federation's formation, as well as the first Federal election in December 1953. A talking point in a UCAA handbook for pro-Federation canvassers noted, 'without Federation, Gold Coast Policy will come to Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (with or without Britain's approval) and we shall be unable to prevent it spreading south'.²⁴ Another UCAA publication advised that Federation was 'essential...to strengthen and consolidate the power of the British Commonwealth'.²⁵ Despite the recent example of Asian decolonisation, Nkrumah's ascension was sufficiently anachronistic in the early 1950s that Southern Rhodesia's rulers were able to simultaneously condemn British policy in the Gold Coast while also appealing to local whites' obligations to the Commonwealth.

Pro-Huggins forces received a gift in the Federal election campaign when their main opponent, the Confederate Party, called for the creation of microstates within the Federation under limited black authority (Dvorin, 1954, p. 381). Confederate candidates were consequently forced to defend this position and deny that their policy would facilitate Gold Coast states.²⁶ This was quite the tactical accomplishment. The critique that Stockil and the right levelled against Huggins and Federation prior to the referendum was turned against them.

The forces backing Federation were not averse to political chicanery. Huggins and his rebranded Federal Party repeatedly attacked their opposition as appealing to the electorate's sordid fears, while they engaged in similar tactics. According to his aide, St. Quintin, during the course of the Federal election campaign Huggins rubbished Confederate claims that the Federation would empower black political figures as 'bogey bogey stuff'.²⁷ A UCAA pamphlet adorned with ghouls sarcastically invited voters to 'see within' if they 'don't believe in BOGIES'.²⁸ Meanwhile, Federal Party candidates

like Welensky, appealed to white fears of black domination, criticising the Confederates for pursuing a liberalising Gold Coast policy that would empower African nationalists.²⁹ Concurrently, the Prime Minister squeezed his opponents by pursuing the white domination aspect, linking the Confederate campaign ‘to a straight plank of segregation or apartheid’.³⁰ This was a wide base of attack and in the short-term, a profitable one. The Confederate Party won just one seat.

However, these tactics had significant repercussions. Right-wing whites charged that the new polity would be ‘the thin end of the wedge for bringing to Southern Rhodesia the Colonial Office policy of returning Africa to the Black proletariat’.³¹ As Ghanaian independence approached and African states experienced constitutional reforms that promoted majority rule, Huggins and his allies faced significant constraints of their own making.

The settler push for Federation stimulated unity among Southern Rhodesia’s anti-colonial nationalists, resulting in the formation of an umbrella group, the All-African Convention, to oppose Federation (Ranger, 1960, p. 29). By the mid-1950s, there were signs that the Nyasaland African Congress, the foremost nationalist movement in the Federation, was gaining strength (Power, 2002) and a new nationalist group, the City Youth League, was established in Salisbury in 1955 (Mlambo, 2014, p. 145). Huggins needed a clear demonstration that the Federation was preventing the regional spread of Gold Coastism. The attainment of Federal or Southern Rhodesian independence was the ultimate means to justify Southern Rhodesia’s alignment with the ‘Black North’ as a protectionist measure.

Early Ramifications of Gold Coastism on Settler Unilateralism

The decisive UDI break with the UK came on 11 November 1965. However, although neglected in the historiography, Rhodesian moves for negotiated independence flared for nearly two decades prior to the illegal UDI seizure. Like the Federation's formation, these calls were grounded in the international post-war environment that saw the advance of nationalism and decolonisation.

One of the first attempts came in June 1948 when ARW Stumbles of the Liberal Party called for Dominion status in parliament.³² Huggins believed an independence bid would thwart his efforts to amalgamate the Rhodesias. He responded, 'it is premature to approach the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations'.³³ In lieu of agreeing to push for independence, the legislature unanimously resolved to appoint an exploratory committee.³⁴ Little action followed and in May 1950 Stockil rose in parliament, asking that the colony seek independence.³⁵ Huggins again expressed concern, retorting, 'we are not ready yet'.³⁶ The result of this debate was much the same as that two years previously; parliament agreed to form another ill-fated exploratory committee prior to approaching the UK.³⁷ The drive for Federation gathered momentum soon thereafter and the independence bid fell away (Young, 1967, p. 33).

However, the opposition's ability to pass a version of both motions illustrated white Rhodesia's desire for independence. As decolonisation incrementally approached the Federation, disquieted whites became increasingly perturbed by Britain's imperial retreat. It was not a viable political strategy in Southern Rhodesia to speak forcefully against Dominion status. It was no coincidence that Huggins, the colony's leading international statesperson with the most political capital to expend, expressed the

strongest reservations. However, as black rule accelerated across Africa, Huggins and the Federal Party realised the independence issue was becoming an albatross that weakened their hold on power.

In early 1956, Huggins began to negotiate 'independent status for the Federation' with Alec Douglas-Home, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations. Their written correspondence began cordially. Both parties agreed that the discussions would remain private.³⁸ Huggins was frank in his reasons for pushing for sovereignty. He noted that independence was the 'least of our worries', but it was 'essential' to 'avert what would otherwise be a grave state of affairs by about 1958, caused the strength of the largely European electorate, if places like the Gold Coast are given self-government and we are not'.³⁹ He confided that black opposition to the body in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland was 'getting worse instead of better'.⁴⁰ Externally, he spoke of the need 'to preserve this part of Africa for the Commonwealth'.⁴¹ In an interview after his retirement, Huggins confirmed that his 1956 independence bid was motivated by concern that Ghanaian independence would weaken his position among the Rhodesian electorate.⁴²

Although Greenfield, the Federal Justice Minister, saw April 1957 as the highwater mark of relations with Britain, Huggins' independence request the previous year, motivated by Gold Coastism and the anxieties of the white electorate, was a clear precursor to the ultimate UDI rupture.⁴³ A British newspaper leaked news of the Federation's 'higher status' bid.⁴⁴ With the approach in the public domain, criticism of Britain's refusal to acquiesce to Rhodesian demands began to be expressed overtly. Shortly before assuming the Federal premiership, Welensky, then Deputy Prime Minister, launched a scathing public attack in Southern Rhodesia against the British

refusal to grant the Federation more autonomy. He warned, 'need I say that what has happened on the Gold Coast cannot be and is not being ignored here'.⁴⁵

In August 1956 the Federal parliament resolved that it 'fully supports the Government in its endeavours to obtain independent status within the Commonwealth'.⁴⁶ In debate on the resolution, Huggins reiterated that his approach was influenced by 'the rapid advance of other territories, other Commonwealth countries, the unexpectedly rapid advance'.⁴⁷ The Prime Minister made his distaste for 'Perfidious Albion' clear. He derided the recent independence of Sudan at the beginning of the year and stated that 'self-determination...has no application to Africa'.⁴⁸

Huggins' parliamentary address concluded with an overt UDI threat:

We have complete control of our own Defence Force. I only hope we shall not have to use it as the North American colonies had to use theirs, because we are dealing with a stupid government in the United Kingdom...Our job is to consolidate our position economically, to advance our people....and when we are strong enough...nobody can stop us doing what we like.⁴⁹

The abrasive address received applause from the chamber. Huggins publicly opposed UDI during his retirement and his biographer noted that future historians 'will find it hard to deny his positive qualities' (Gann, 1985, p. 728). However, his administration's decision to manipulate fears of Gold Coastism and appeal to white backlash was a dress rehearsal for white Rhodesia's refusal to accept the wind of change, a rejection that cost tens of thousands of lives. Ironically, as Huggins conceded, immediate backlash against Ghana's independence was more limited than he anticipated.⁵⁰ It took further manipulation of African decolonisation and changes in white settler colonies before the electorate decisively swung toward far-right unilateralism (Marmon, 2021).

Conclusion

In his memoir, the Federal Chief Justice noted that independent Ghana became a country ‘constantly held up in Rhodesia as an example of oppressive government’ (Tredgold, 1968, p. 229). The independence of a host of sub-Saharan African nations that promoted pan-African nationalism significantly impacted southern Africa’s political trajectory. Ghana’s impact was particularly pronounced given its strong support for African nationalism and its symbolic position as the first country to enter the Commonwealth under black majority rule. However, its influence predated the attainment of sovereignty. The rise of the CPP in the Gold Coast from 1951 had a profound impact across Africa well before Nkrumah fully consolidated state power.

Rhodesia’s political leaders forecast that the end of European empire in Africa and the transformation of the Commonwealth threatened their continued dominance. They ultimately responded in an isolationist manner, breaking away from nominal British control and strengthening ties with South Africa and imperial Portugal. Such links have been well-covered in the literature (de Meneses and McNamara, 2018). However, this ‘unholy alliance’ was an alignment born of necessity. The initial response to decolonisation was an internationalist position. The United Party sold federation on the grounds that closer ties with the ‘Black North’ would forestall the southward spread of Gold Coastism and re-energize Britain’s imperial commitment.

When this policy proved ineffective, Rhodesia’s inexorable descent to UDI and civil strife unfolded. Huggins’ attacks against Gold Coastism and the UK boxed in his party and Rhodesia’s political class more generally. They animated local anti-colonial nationalists and prevented international partners, like the Commonwealth, from taking the Federation’s commitment to multi-racial partnership seriously. The assault against

Gold Coastism did not initially involve a categorical condemnation of Britain's Africa policy. However, as more African countries made strides toward self-government, that critique eventuated. While there were some liberalising gestures in partnership era Southern Rhodesia, Huggins' invocation of Gold Coastism – the adoption of the condemnation of self-determination in Africa as a core political tactic – constricted reforms from going beyond the cosmetic. As Edgar Whitehead declared during the debate on the Federation's White Paper, 'it is utterly impossible for us to consider the question of the kind of government that has been set up in the Gold Coast'.⁵¹ By the mid-1960s, the strength of decolonisation was such that UDI was widely accepted by white Rhodesians as the best means to preclude that development.

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