

A Footnote for Historians

"WIND OF CHANGE"

Harold Macmillan's Prime Ministerial Tour of Africa, 1960

A Note by James Robertson

A contribution by Sir David Hunt to Alan Clark's recent television series on the History of the Tory Party has prompted me to write this note.¹ It is on how Harold Macmillan's prime-ministerial tour of Africa in January/February 1960 – to Ghana, Nigeria, the Central African Federation (of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland) and South Africa – came to be known as the "Wind of Change" tour. More specifically, it is on some of the behind-the-scenes details of how Macmillan came to say:

- in his speech in Accra on 9th January, "The wind of change is blowing right through Africa This rapid emergence of the countries of Africa gives the continent a new importance in the world"; and then
- in his Cape Town speech to both Houses of the South African Parliament on 3rd February, "The wind of change is blowing through this continent, and, whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must all accept it as a fact, and our national policies must take account of it."

In Chapter 6 of his recent book on the Nyasaland crisis of 1959/60² Colin Baker records that a number of people have claimed credit for introducing "the wind of change" into these speeches. In particular, he reports David Hunt, the Commonwealth Relations Office member of the PM's party,³ as claiming that generally speaking it was he who put together the speeches for the tour, that the PM was content to take his advice on wording, and that, as nobody had paid attention to the "wind of change" phrase when the PM had used it in

¹ It was in the third of four programmes in the series, broadcast on Sunday 28th September 1997.

² Colin Baker. *State of Emergency: Crisis in Central Africa. Nyasaland 1959-1960*, Tauris, London, 1997. [Link to Google Books version](#).

³ Among those accompanying Macmillan on the tour were: Sir Norman Brook, Secretary of the Cabinet and the PM's principal adviser; Tim Bligh, the PM's principal private secretary; David Hunt from the Commonwealth Relations Office; and myself from the Colonial Office.

Accra, he (Hunt) thought it might as well be used again in South Africa.

People's memories about significant events in which they have had a part are notoriously subjective. My memory differs from Hunt's in some particulars.

As Colin Baker reports,⁴ the public records show clearly that, in the preparatory drafting process for the PM's speeches, the theme of the wind of change blowing through Africa, and the actual phrase "wind of change", was first introduced in one of the Colonial Office drafts. I wrote those drafts. As I did so, I felt with some sense of excitement that "the wind of change" conveyed the dynamism of African aspirations. I also recognised that those responsible for the government's relations with the white communities in East, Central and Southern Africa might not want the PM to use it.

The public records do, in fact, show that when the PM's party left London for Africa on 5th January only one of the drafts for the four main speeches which we took with us included any mention of the wind of change. That was the draft for Ghana, where it was expected that the phrase would do no harm. The draft speech for Nigeria, and in particular those for Central Africa and South Africa for which the Commonwealth Relations Office was responsible, made no reference to it.⁵ So how, between 5th January and 3rd February, did the wind of change come to be included in Macmillan's Cape Town speech? My memory on that is clear.⁶

On one of our flights between leaving the Central African Federation and arriving in Cape Town, Norman Brook asked me to help him to redraft the Cape Town speech. Finding the existing draft banal and anodyne, the PM had asked Brook - in whom he had great confidence - to reshape it fairly radically. Without causing the South Africans too much offence, he wanted to leave them in no doubt about the importance, to both Britain and South Africa, of the

⁴ Op. cit., pages 189, 190.

⁵ Ibid., page 190.

⁶ I have not yet looked at the public records and I do not know if they tend to confirm it or not.

changes taking place elsewhere on the African continent. Brook had formed the impression that I was competent and useful - after the tour he arranged for me to transfer to the Cabinet Office to work with him there - and in the 'plane we worked well together. Among the ways we sharpened up the Cape Town speech was by including the "wind of change" theme. I remember experiencing a modest sense of triumph at that. On 3rd February I took a personal pleasure in hearing the words from the PM's mouth.

Before concluding, it may be useful to recall the background. The Conservative government's policy had aimed to preserve Britain's commercial and kith-and-kin interests in central and southern (and east) Africa by supporting white interests there. The Central African Federation had been seen as a means towards that end. The Commonwealth Relations Office, as the channel for the British government's dealings with the South African government and with the Federal and Southern Rhodesian governments in the Federation, followed that line. On the other side, black Africans aspired to independence. The sympathies of the political opposition in Britain were with them. The Colonial Office, responsible for the administrations in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (and East Africa), and for the wellbeing of the inhabitants of those territories, took the African viewpoint seriously. Many of the younger people in the Colonial Office, like myself, sympathised strongly with it.

Macmillan had already begun to contemplate a change in the balance of British policy in Africa - a shift in favour of the growing power of black Africans. One sign of this had been his appointment of Iain Macleod as Colonial Secretary after the Conservative election victory in October 1959. Another had been Macmillan's decision to visit Africa himself. Now his first-hand impressions during the tour were pushing him further in that direction. This may partly explain why sometimes, as the tour progressed, Macmillan (and Brook and Bligh) appeared to have reservations about advice from the Commonwealth Relations Office angle.

Claims by officials to have put their words into the mouth of "the great man" are normally of little importance to anyone but

themselves. But sometimes, as perhaps in this case, the conflicting memories of those behind the scenes who contributed to significant events, may have a historical interest - especially if they help to bring out the shifts in policy that were taking place at the time and the accompanying tensions within the policy-making community.

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