Dear Historical Capitalisms & Social Theory Workshop,

This is a draft of an article that I hope to submit in the near future. It comes out of my book project, *Wealth is in the Soil: Decolonization and the Reinvention of Development in Twentieth-Century Malawi*. As the similar titles suggest, the article captures one of the major arguments of the book—that anti-colonialism and decolonization reshaped the development idea. I’ve been working on the draft on and off for the past few months, chopping down an earlier version that I presented at the African Studies Workshop this past March.

As I’ve started to wrap things up, the two issues that have weighed on me most are framing and structure. First, in terms of framing, the article has been a bit of challenge because it focuses mainly on two individuals, Dunduzu Chisiza and Walt Rostow, but makes much broader claims about changing development ideas. After many frustrating drafts, my sense is that the argument needs to be tightly wound around the two characters in order to work as an article-length piece. But I want to avoid an argument that makes it seem like it was all about Chisiza or Rostow, losing sight of the broader decolonization process and development initiatives of the era. Second, on structure, the three parts take somewhat different approaches to the material, and I wonder how well they work together. I’m thinking particularly of the final section, which I’ve written in a few different ways. Here I tried to make it more about “what happened,” so to speak, partly because the story itself might seem minor to some if there’s no sense of the wider political story.

Aside from those issues, I would love to hear about ways I might sharpen the argument (which is the one part I still definitely have left to do). And it would also be great to know whether the article gives you enough (or too much!) detail about Nyasaland/Malawi and the Central African Federation. My plan is to submit the piece to more general history journal, so I wrote it with a broader audience in mind.

Thank you for taking the time to read the piece.

Thanks again,
Geoff

PS: In case anyone happens to print out the paper, please note that it does include images.
Reading Rostow in a Rhodesian Prison: Anti-colonialism and the Reinvention of Modernization in British Central Africa
Geoffrey Traugh

In October 1960, a man named Kennedy L. Siwo wrote to Tsopano, a nationalist monthly known for its lively letters page, to complain about white colonists who claimed that Nyasaland, as Malawi was then known, would never be viable as an independent nation. Nyasaland, the colonists argued, was too small to be free. The territory was in fact physically small, more comparable in size to Britain than to any of its African neighbors. But when colonists described Nyasaland as “small,” they also meant the land available to farmers, the scale of local agriculture and industries, and the prospects for development more generally. They insisted that Nyasaland was better off as it was, hitched to the fortunes of its industrializing neighbors, Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia, as part of the settler-ruled, semi-sovereign Central African Federation (figure 1). “I think that is being stupid,” Siwo wrote. “Think of England,” he wrote, which was “only an island, much smaller than countries it supports” and “has not valuable minerals and does not produce much food to support its own peoples.” Siwo went on, “Nyasaland, I am sure, has a future more than that of islands. Once all its people get educated, set foot on geological work, on educating themselves, working hard on the rich soil for agricultural use, [and] gain political freedom the world at large shall realize that Malawi (so-called Nyasaland) is as big a country as the continent of Africa.”

An excerpt from Siwo’s letter appeared in the January 1961 edition of Tsopano, alongside a number of other letters and articles that made a similar case for the future prosperity of an independent Nyasaland. The issue reflected the spirit of 1960, known internationally as the “year of Africa,” in celebration of the seventeen African countries that won their independence that year. Siwo and Tsopano, however, were in no mood to celebrate. British officials continued to insist that Nyasaland’s future was with the Rhodesias, if not as part of the Central African Federation, then in some other regional grouping. The Federation was part of a longer story of efforts by settlers in the Rhodesias and Nyasaland to establish a “dominion” in Central Africa, an old-fashioned term for independence with white-minority rule. But the reason why London clung to a federal solution even as it became politically untenable had to do with a broader strategy for ending the empire.

British officials were concerned that many of their remaining colonies were too “backward” to become independent nation-states—some due to size, others a lack of resources, and even more with a combination of the two. Worried that these territories might look to London for aid if they became independent, the British government pushed for regional integration, so that they might turn to each other instead. Often times, the political framework was already in place. Back in the late 1940s, Britain had introduced a policy of political and economic integration across the empire, a move designed to increase the scale and diversity of colonial economies and to manage the political

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1 University of Stirling Special Collections (SSC) Peter Mackay Papers (MK) 2/3/2/6, “Nyasaland as Big as Africa,” Kennedy L. Siwo, 22 October 1960.
4 The concerns about “small” territories were particularly acute in the British Pacific. See Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
Figure 1: Map of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, from Wikipedia Commons.
aspirations of colonized people. British officials hoped that even if the empire had to leave, the new unions would stay. In the British Caribbean, it seemed for a time that the West Indies Federation would remain. Anti-colonial activists in the Caribbean took on federalism part of their own political project, much like their counterparts in French West Africa, who fought to remake the French Empire into an egalitarian, non-racial French Union. British Central Africa was different. There, federation meant “multi-racialism,” which in practice meant a white-minority government, elected by a practically all-white electorate, with sovereign powers over inter-territorial affairs (aside from defense) and a constitutional pathway to eventual independence. White federalists and their supporters in Britain called it “multi-racialism.” African activists, who uniformly opposed federation across the three territories, condemned it as “liberal apartheid.”

As far as British officials were concerned, by linking Nyasaland with the Rhodesias, they were simply bowing to the facts on the ground. They believed that industrialization—the mark of a “developed” economy—had already redrawn the map in Central Africa. Northern Rhodesia had the Copperbelt, which by 1960 had grown into a vast expanse of mines and cities that reminded visitors of nineteenth-century boomtowns of the U.S. West. Southern Rhodesia evoked comparisons to South Africa, both for its lucrative mining and manufacturing industries and for the tight-knit factions of white industrialists, merchants, and planters who vied for control over local politics. Nyasaland, meanwhile, was known regionally for its tea and tobacco, but as one anthropologist quipped in 1942, “the chief export from Nyasaland in the past fifty years has been men.” They left the countryside in droves—some officials claimed that whole villages had been emptied of men—in search of work abroad in the Rhodesias and South Africa. That rural-to-urban shift, which also occurred within the Rhodesias, did not necessarily alarm colonial officials. After all, colonial social scientists had taught that the pull of the “money economy”—the lure of wages, goods, and city life—would

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inevitably draw men from the villages. In Nyasaland, however, migration called the territory’s very future into question.

About four years after Siwo’s letter to Tsapano, in July 1964, Nyasaland celebrated its independence from Britain, becoming Malawi. This article examines how an eventuality that British officials and many colonial observers considered impractical at best came to be seen as an ordinary transfer of power. In recent years, historians of anti-colonialism and decolonization have turned their attention to the diverse political forms that emerged at the end of empire. They have been particularly interested in recovering the political possibilities that existed outside of the nation-state framework, from separatists who demanded new borders to internationalists who dreamt of a world without them. This article is similarly concerned with political alternatives, though it pushes the question in a different direction. In British Central Africa, observers roundly believed that decolonization would be “multi-racial” and within a federal framework. British officials could imagine an independent Southern Rhodesia or Northern Rhodesia. But in Nyasaland, the nation-state was the political alternative, a “radical” project of the Malawi Congress Party (hereafter Congress), the territory’s leading nationalist organization and implacable foe of federation. Nyasaland’s decolonization reveals that the nation-state form should be seen as one of the political possibilities of the era, alongside post-imperial federalism or Pan-Africanism, rather than the default option.

This article argues that anti-colonial activists in Nyasaland helped to expand the nation-state form to include small territories stuck in political limbo as empire drew to a close. It shows how Congress activists made an agrarian ideal into an argument for a new kind of modernization, one that flipped the framework from industry to agriculture, in making the case for Nyasaland’s independence. Leading the way was Dunduzu Chisiza, Congress’s self-taught development economist who, before his tragic death at the age of 32 in September 1962, seemed poised to join the likes of Léopold Senghor and Julius Nyerere as a voice of the new Africa. Chisiza, however, stood out from the rest. At a time when other African thinkers were sounding the alarm on neo-colonialism, Chisiza was an


14 Contemporary texts make this point most clearly. See, for example, Phillip Mason, Year of Decision: Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1960 (Oxford University Press, 1961).

enthusiast of Walt Rostow and U.S. modernization theory, which offered new nations a blueprint for a development “take-off.” Chisiza and Congress activists imagined Nyasaland as a future “Central African Denmark”—small in size, rural in character, and rich from what its people reaped from the soil. The article explains why Congress came to think of Nyasaland as a Denmark, how Chisiza adapted Rostow’s theory to British Central Africa, and how, after self-rule elections in 1961, the new Congress government was able to turn U.S.-inspired ideas into Western aid, side-stepping the Federal government and eventually forcing Britain’s hand on national independence. The source material is drawn from colonial archives, the contemporary development literature, and the British and colonial Central African press.

Chisiza and Rostow were an odd pair. Chisiza first encountered Rostow’s work in 1959, while he was in detention in Southern Rhodesia, where he and other Congress leaders were being held on charges of a conspiracy to murder Nyasaland’s white colonists. His first letters to Rostow had to be smuggled out of prison. Though there was never any “murder plot,” Chisiza was certainly a threat to the colonial order. That was not necessarily a problem for Rostow. As historians of development have shown, Rostow and other U.S. modernization theorists were generally supportive of decolonization and friendly toward agricultural development, which they saw as one part of an integrated strategy that also included industry and infrastructure, on the model of the Tennessee Valley Authority. And as Abou Bamba has argued for the Ivory Coast, modernization theory was politically pliable, capable of translation into vernacular forms that appealed both to populations hungry for change and to Western aid agencies. However, as this article shows, it is equally important to understand how anti-colonial thinkers reshaped the modernization idea itself.


19 US
modernizations theorists worked with the political borders of their day, often taking nation and state to be synonyms. But as the Nyasaland example reveals, by the early 1960s, the nation was precisely the issue at stake in what remained of the colonial world. Empires were full of would-be nations, but not all of them seemed destined to become states. It was anti-colonial movements in places like Nyasaland that transformed the modernization idea, expanding the framework to include the small territories on the margins of empire.

Denmark, or Ireland? Nyasaland’s Future without Federation

In April 1960, Kamuzu Banda, the president of the Malawi Congress Party, returned to the United States for the first time since 1937, when he left Nashville to continue his medical studies in Edinburgh. Banda arrived from London, where after several days of talks with the British colonial secretary Iain Macleod on the Nyasaland emergency, then entering its fourteenth month, and future constitutional reforms. The visit was part of a post-release tour for Banda, who had spent nearly all of those fourteen months in detention in Southern Rhodesia. Banda traveled to the United States at the invitation of the American Committee on Africa, an anti-colonial advocacy group based in New York City. Though Banda was familiar with the United States, he knew that most Americans would be unfamiliar with him or his home, Nyasaland. Banda introduced himself to American audiences in a short autobiographical article in Africa Today. The article described his childhood in Nyasaland and the twelve years he spent in college and medical school in the United States. He assured readers that those who called him “anti-white” or “the extremist of the extremists” had him wrong. And he insisted that they had his country wrong too. Nyasaland, he declared, could “become the Denmark of Central Africa.”

The Denmark comparison was a favorite of Banda’s. The country had been popular with progressive reformers in North America and Western Europe since the 1920s. They admired how Denmark—a small, agrarian country with none of the advantages of its larger, industrialized neighbors—had grown to become one of Europe’s wealthiest countries by the turn of the twentieth century. British reformers were particularly taken with the Danish cooperative movement, which introduced scale and machinery to smallholder agriculture, and with the Danish folk schools, which

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22 The Nyasaland emergency began in March 1959 and ended in June 1960. The Nyasaland government declared a state of emergency to preempt an alleged plot by Congress to murder local whites. Security forces arrested hundreds of Congress activists and killed dozens more in the early days of the emergency. Though a British commission of inquiry all but cleared Congress of the so-called “murder plot” in July 1959, colonial authorities refused to release the “hard core” Congress detainees or wind down the emergency order until early 1960, and only then after immense pressure from London. See Kings Phiri, John McCracken, and Wapulumuka Mulwafa, eds., Malawi in Crisis: The 1959/60 Nyasaland State of Emergency and Its Legacy (Zomba, Malawi: Kachere Books, 2012).

23 “Dr. Banda Praises Mr. Macleod,” East Africa and Rhodesia, 21 April 1960, 796.

offered instruction in national culture and the latest farming techniques for rural children and adults. Banda, who lived in Britain from 1937 to 1953, would have certainly encountered Danish enthusiasts as a member of the Labour Party, whose ranks included many prominent rural reformers. Banda later became one himself. “We must build many co-operative societies,” he wrote to one Congress branch leader in a 1957 letter, “so that everything we produce is bought through co-operative societies and not through European settlers or Indians.” “In this way,” Banda continued, “we can develop our country, just as Danemark.”

British officials, however, had their doubts about Nyasaland’s future. The territory had long been one of the poorest in the empire. That poverty was what convinced the British government to combine Nyasaland with the wealthier, industrializing Rhodesias to form the Central African Federation in 1953. By the time of Banda’s release, the Federation seemed poised for a break-up. African nationalists had opposed federation from the moment that Rhodesian politicians proposed it in 1949, and years of protests had crescendoed in emergency orders in all three territories in early 1959. Rhodesian settlers, meanwhile, had grown impatient with London and threatened to throw “Boston tea parties” if the Federation did not receive independence in 1960. A visit in early 1960 by a British advisory commission charged with deciding the Federation’s fate only enflamed the situation further. The British government eventually came around on Banda and Congress, who they believed might be more moderate than the Rhodesians after all. But the Colonial Office held out hope that the Federation could be salvaged in some form, if only for Nyasaland’s sake. Many of Congress’s erstwhile supporters in Britain were inclined to agree. One sympathetic economist compared the territory to another European country. Nyasaland, he wrote, was the “Ireland of Africa… poor, scenic, and with a ready supply of exportable labour.”

The analogy to Ireland had some truth. Nyasaland was small. The territory was only 46,000 square miles in all, 12,000 of which were water, and its 2.8 million people made it feel even smaller than that, too. Nyasaland was also “scenic,” or, in other words, overwhelmingly rural—only about 2.5 percent of the African population lived in towns—and lacking major industries or infrastructure that might spoil the view. And Nyasaland had not seen the same economic growth as the Rhodesias in the post-war era, or before that either. Rhodesian industries had powered British Central Africa to a 11.7 percent average growth rate between 1950 and 1958, making it one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Investors had also poured in over £100 million since 1953, a figure which

26 Malawi National Archives (MNA) Historical Manuscripts (ACC) D. M. Mkandawire Papers (DMM) 151/DMM/1/1, Hastings K. Banda to Daniel Mc. Mkandawire, 14 December 1957. The error is in the original.
27 Power, *Political Culture and Nationalism in Malawi*, 137-42.
29 Power, *Political Culture and Nationalism in Malawi*, 146-49.
included a £28.6 million loan from the World Bank—then its largest loan to date in Africa—for a hydro-electric dam project in Southern Rhodesia. Nyasaland arguably benefited from the Federation. Between 1954 and 1959, the territorial government enjoyed an annual net gain of £3.3 million on its current account thanks to Federal revenue sharing. But Nyasaland had largely remained a source of labor for its industrializing neighbors. Surveys estimated that at any given time, about 30 percent of Nyasa men were working abroad in the Rhodesias or South Africa, where they formed part of short-term, low-wage migrant labor force that had made colonial industries so profitable over the past fifty years.

However, the question in 1960 was what exactly these numbers meant for Nyasaland. To British officials and Central African settlers, the statistics spoke for themselves—Nyasaland was rural, poor, and would be poorer still without the Federation. They typically invoked the 1959 economic survey of Nyasaland, an exhaustive study written by a team led by T. D. Jack, a professor of economics at Durham University. The Jack Report concluded unequivocally that Nyasaland’s “economic development has been accelerated as a direct consequence of its federal association with the two Rhodesias and that the economic benefits which have been enjoyed have been substantial.” The report met with a knowing response in London—British officials had said the same about Nyasaland and Federation for years, and Jack only confirmed it. The reaction in Salisbury, the Federal capital, was ecstatic. The pugnacious Rhodesia Herald called the Jack Report “irrefutable” and sniped that “the Nyasa leaders who clamour for power (or ‘freedom’ as they call it) without bread might ponder how they would be able to control their millions of fellow countrymen when even their elementary needs could not be satisfied.” “Jack” became a regular name in the Nyasaland Times, the voice of Nyasaland’s settler community, and on the Federal Broadcasting Corporation, the public broadcaster in Nyasaland and the Rhodesias. By 1960, the tone had only sharpened. In mid March, Alec Douglas-Home, the British commonwealth secretary, and Roy Welensky, the Federal prime minister, both referred to Nyasaland as a “slum” in separate speeches to audiences in London and Salisbury.

Congress made precisely the opposite case—it was the Federation and the link with the Rhodesias that had left Nyasaland so poor. Congress activists had long drawn a straight line between prosperity in the Rhodesias and poverty in Nyasaland. In a message to the 1957 Commonwealth conference, Congress argued that the “alleged economic development” was in fact “the perpetuation of the

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36 For an important pre-federation survey of migration, see British National Archives (BNA) Colonial Office (CO) 525/214/6, Economic General Department, “Memorandum on the Economy of Nyasaland,” 31 October 1949.
41 For coverage of the speeches and the fallout in Nyasaland, see “Several Years Before Independence in Nyasaland,” Nyasaland Times, 18 March 1960.
theory of the master race at the expense of the Africans, the owners of the land.”42 Any mention of “development” raised hackles among Congress supporters, who took the term to mean the theft of African land and labor. 43 In the villages, men like Lupere Machaya of Mchoka, in Lilongwe district, Central Province, rallied his neighbors to oppose local development efforts, arguing that agricultural schemes were “only a trick of the European to get the Africans to do all the work and get the land in order before it is taken over by Europeans.”44 Friends of Congress also advocated on their behalf during the Nyasaland emergency. In his 1959 book, Dawn in Nyasaland, the English missionary Guy Clutton-Brock described the Federation as a “devouring economy,” with the “over-developing” Rhodesias (and South Africa) eating away at the fabric of Nyasa village life.45 The Church of Scotland and the Africa Bureau, two redoubts of liberal anti-colonialism in Britain, responded to the Jack Report by funding their own survey of Nyasaland. Their experts, the economists Arthur Hazlewood and P. D. Henderson, both professors at Oxford University, published a book-length reply to Jack in 1960, comparing the Federation to “the emperor’s clothes,” as Nyasaland would have likely experienced the same growth with or without the Rhodesias.46

As 1960 wore on, Congress won a few fights, but not the argument. In July, Banda and Macleod reached an agreement to end the emergency and on a new constitution, which granted the African majority the right to territorial self-rule within the federal framework, a form of nested sovereignty similar to the position of Scotland within the wider British state.47 They later set the date for the legislative elections—the first to include Nyasaland’s African population—for August 1961. The deal was unpopular with the colonial administration in Zomba, Nyasaland’s capital. In a speech to the Nyasaland legislative council delivered while Banda was in London, the financial secretary Henry Phillips made the case for federation, insisting that “this territory could not possibly stand on its own feet unless it were to see its economic and social standards reduced to a point which would surely be quite unacceptable even to the unsophisticated.”48 But attitudes had begun to shift. In October, the federal advisory commission released its report, which concluded that African opposition made the Federation untenable in its present form, and recommended that Britain consider the possibility of secession, to the shock of audiences in Britain and Central Africa. However, the commission also took pains to insist that the Federation could be reformed, arguing that a break-up “would bring hardship, poverty, and distress to many, and entail sacrifices for all.”49

After the October report, all eyes turned to the Nyasaland elections, which suddenly seemed like a referendum on secession. The Congress candidates barnstormed the country, speaking to huge

42 BNA CO 1015/1748, J. R. N. Chinyama, et. al. to Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference (except Roy Welensky), 15 June 1957.
44 MNA Agriculture (AGR) 17/4/1F 808, Tobacco Supervisor, AP&MB to District Commissioner, Lilongwe, 22 December 1958, “Mpingu Land Reorganisation Scheme.”
46 Hazlewood and Henderson, Nyasaland, 31.
47 For an overview, see John McCracken, A History of Malawi, 1859-1966 (Suffolk, UK: James Currey, 2012), 376-78.
crowds wherever they went. Their slogan was that a Congress government would make Nyasaland a “Central African Denmark.” Most Nyasas were likely unfamiliar with the details of Danish history, but they knew what Congress meant. They read or heard of stories in Malawi News, Congress’s organ, about the “wealth in the soil” and the need for cooperatives and hard work to realize it. Opponents of Congress found the whole idea absurd. One Federal minister claimed that “Nyasaland would beg without federation,” as the headline in the Nyasaland Times put it, and that the territory would become “a pawn in power politics and economics, to be shuffled around the international chess board by the Communists.

In the end, the 1961 election was never really a contest—Congress won with 98 percent of the total vote. Malawi News celebrated the victory, writing that Nyasaland “can and will forge ahead to Nationhood and to take its dynamic place in the New Africa.” Later that August, Banda hosted the U.S. assistant secretary of state G. Mennen Williams in Zomba. In a speech at a state dinner, he explained that he would seek foreign aid and investment from Britain, the United States, and Western Europe. Perhaps with the election still on his mind, Banda added that arguments against secession “could not bear scrutiny.” “Such desert countries as Libya and Somalia were independent,” he observed, “so why not Nyasaland with its maize, rice, groundnuts, sugar, tea, tobacco,” not to mention potential minerals. The British officials in attendance were likely not nodding along, however. Though Macleod and others congratulated Congress on its victory, they were not about to break-up the Central African Federation. Many in London believed that Congress’s dream of a Central African Denmark was just that—a dream, with no real plan or money behind it. They could not themselves imagine how the United States or other donors could replace the millions of pounds that Nyasaland received each year from the Federation, or what they would even invest in. London hoped that once the new nationalist government had to set its own territorial budget, with actual Federal monies and only promises from abroad, Congress might finally appreciate the wisdom of federation, too.

What Lies Ahead: Dunduzu Chisiza on Walt Rostow and African Independence

It was true that Congress’s imagining of a “Central African Denmark” was an unusual vision for a nationalist party in decolonization-era Africa. To critics of Congress, the comparison to Denmark, as well as the claims about the “wealth in the soil,” seemed like a lack of imagination, as if the only reason for Nyasaland’s poverty was a simple lack of trying to be rich. But there were in fact serious ideas behind the slogans. Decolonization was a moment of comparison. Anti-colonial nationalists appealed to the example of India or Ghana to demand their freedom. Empires weighed which of

54 On Congress’s resounding victory and the aftermath, see McCracken, History of Malawi, 378-83.
their colonies might be viable as independent states, and when they should set them free. The United Nations measured how colonies and new nations stacked up against the rest of the world. By 1960, development had become the sine qua non of freedom. Officials were not as concerned with where a colony ranked on any given table at the time, but rather where it might sit sometime in the future. That opened possibilities for unusual comparisons. Congress imagined Nyasaland as Denmark as they saw it—rural, prosperous, and egalitarian. But equally important was the comparison itself, which implied that Nyasaland was a nation like any other, and could therefore develop like any other nation.

The thinker behind this vision was Dunduzu Chisiza, Congress’s organizer-turned-economist. Chisiza did not take a typical path into the economics profession. He was born in Karonga district, in the Northern Province, in 1930, the son of a village chief and the last of 11 children. A talented student, he was educated at Livingstonia, Nyasaland’s top mission school. Like many young, educated Nyasas, Chisiza left home for work and to further his education abroad—first to Tanganyika in 1949, then to Uganda in 1950, and finally Southern Rhodesia in 1953. He was active in anti-colonial politics wherever he went. He returned to Nyasaland in 1956, after Southern Rhodesian authorities deported him for his role in the Salisbury bus boycott. Back home, Chisiza traveled the territory as an organizer for Congress, setting up new branches and helping to keep the affairs of older ones in order. He left briefly in 1957 on a scholarship to study at Fircroft College, an adult education institution in Birmingham, England, where he fell in love with economics. But Kamuzu Banda asked him to come home, and so he returned to Nyasaland in 1958 to become the Congress secretary-general. Chisiza only had the chance to return to his studies again after his arrest during the 1959 Emergency. He taught himself economics in Gwelo prison, where he was held on allegations of conspiracy to commit murder.

In all, Chisiza spent 18 months in detention in Southern Rhodesia. He was among the last of the detainees to be released. He and the other detainees adopted a faux academic title, “PG,” or prison graduate, to mark the months they spent studying in Gwelo. Chisiza certainly earned the distinction. In a profile by the British journalist Clyde Sanger, Chisiza estimated that he read 74 books just on development economics during his detention. “And each twice,” Sanger added, “sometimes rationing his reading in case he should run out before the next book came.” Sanger described Chisiza as relishing in the technical details. “He will tell you that he has been much influenced by a pre-war pamphlet in which Roy Harrod suggested a country’s ‘warranted rate of growth’ could be found by multiplying its ‘propensity to save’ by its ‘capital output ratio’,” Sanger explained, with a hint of amusement. Harrod, an English economist, was a forerunner in the field of development economics, and the pamphlet Sanger described was one half of what later became the Harrod-Domar model, which offered a model for generating economic growth in underdeveloped countries. Chisiza, though, was more enamored with U.S. economists, and with the modernization theorist

Walt Rostow in particular, who he wrote from Gwelo. After corresponding with Rostow, Sanger explained, Chisiza “became convinced that Nyasaland could reach its take-off point into self-sustained growth after ten years of independence.”

Rostow was as unusual an inspiration as Denmark for an African nationalist party. In 1961, Rostow was at the height of his fame. He had published his best-selling book, *The Stages of Economic Growth*, the year before, and had just left MIT, where he had taught since 1950, for a post as a foreign-policy advisor with the incoming Kennedy administration. He was an avowed Cold Warrior—*Stages*, for example, was subtitled “A Non-communist Manifesto.” But at the time, he was still known as an economic historian and public intellectual, and not one of the policy-makers responsible for the escalation of the Vietnam War, as he would be later. According to a 1960 editorial by George Shepperson, a Scottish historian of Nyasaland and friend of Congress, Chisiza and the other detainees encountered Rostow for the first time in the pages of the *Economist*, which published a revised version of his 1958 lectures at University of Cambridge across two issues in August 1959. The editors at *The Economist* described Rostow’s lectures, which he subsequently expanded and published as *Stages*, as “one of the most stimulating contributions made to economic and political thought since the war.” Chisiza thought the same, and wrote to Rostow immediately. Rostow later recounted receiving Chisiza’s first letter that August, and replying promptly, enclosing a copy of the full draft of *Stages*. Rostow exchanged a number of letters with Chisiza in 1960, impressed with Chisiza’s “active and probing response to *The Stages*."

*Stages* was a short but ambitious book that, in Rostow’s words, offered “a theory about economic growth and a more, if still highly partial, theory about modern history as a whole.” Rostow argued that every society could be categorized into one of five “stages of growth”—traditional society, the preconditions for take-off, the take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass-consumption. His theory of modernization rested on the third stage, “the take-off,” when “the forces making for economic progress, which yielded limited bursts and enclaves of modern activity,

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62 SSC MK 3/1/4, Clyde Sanger to Peter Mackay, 19 March 1961, enclosure: “Chisiza.” Chisiza and the other detainees requested books through the Detainees’ Welfare Committee, a solidarity group run by anti-colonial activists in Southern Rhodesia, including Peter Mackay, the editor of *T浸泡*. Mackay recounted his work for the committee, and the challenges of obtaining the books for Chisiza in particular, in his autobiography. Peter Mackay, *We Have Tomorrow: Stirrings in Africa, 1959-1967* (Norwich, England: Michael Russell, 2008), 46.


66 Chisiza had to contend with restrictions on correspondence, as well as the prison censor, so the letters, while not quite secret, passed through personal channels. Andrew Ross, then a young missionary and graduate student of Shepperson’s at University of Edinburgh, was one of the people responsible for handling the correspondence. Ross testified to the heft, physically and intellectually, of the exchange. Andrew C. Ross, *Colonialism to Cabinet Crisis: A Political History of Malawi*, edited by Jack Thompson (Zomba: Kachere Books, 2009), 90.


expand and come to dominate the society.” Rostow explained that to achieve take-off, a society needed to meet three conditions: an investment in productivity, a leading manufacturing sector, and institutions conducive to economic growth. He claimed that foreign powers created many of the pre-conditions for take-off, the second stage of growth, by incorporating traditional societies into the wider world of ideas, trade, and technology. But the real spark behind the take-off was “reactive nationalism,” which he described as “a most important and powerful motive force in the transition from traditional to modern societies.” It took a national elite to set modernization in motion, first by forcing out both foreigners and the old order to form a modern state, and then by revolutionizing domestic industries and institutions to compete in the modern world economy. Stages described how Europe, North America, and parts of East Asia had made that historic leap, and why Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and the rest of Asia might be next.

Rostow’s theory of growth was as much about the means as it was the ends of modernization. Stages was a book about economic transitions: when they occurred, why they occurred, and how they might be made to occur again. In describing the “how” of take-off, Rostow had Western audiences and policy-makers in mind, particularly in the United States, who he hoped to convince to open the spigot of aid for the developing world. And it worked—Stages earned Rostow public acclaim and the ear of US president John F. Kennedy. The academy was less convinced. Rostow’s academic critics took issue with his history, his methods, and his case studies, without necessarily disagreeing with the book’s central premise. Rostow himself confessed to working “with a sense of the considerable violence done to economic history.” All the same, Stages would not have been out of place in a seminar room either. Rostow’s stage theory was a kind of popular cousin of American modernization theory, then the dominant framework in the U.S. social sciences. Like other U.S. modernization theorists, Rostow took the nation-state as his unit of analysis and defined modernity as a bundle of attitudes, institutions, and industries that looked a lot like the Boston area he called home—cities and suburbs, smoke-stacks and department stores, mass transit and automobiles, and a distant countryside. What Rostow set apart, as Nils Gilman has argued, was how he equated modernization with economic growth, and with industrialization in particular, a position he shared with his fellow economists, but other fields criticized as reductive.

Rostow described the take-off as “defined by an industrial revolution” and “a return to a rather old-fashioned way of looking at economic development.” Stages could be read as traditional. Rostow’s take-off would have sounded familiar to readers acquainted with folk histories of the English industrial revolution, or for the more wistful set, of the Scottish enclosures. But behind those familiar stories were new ideas about economic growth. The leading economists of the time believed that growth occurred when the scales of production tipped from agriculture to industry. It was an idea present in the work of Colin Clark, whose path-breaking statistical studies of national income—a forerunner to gross domestic product—identified the source of growth as the shift in employment

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69 Ibid., 7.
70 Ibid., 39.
71 Ibid., 26.
72 For Rostow’s analysis of nationalism and the take-off, see Ibid., The Stages of Economic Growth, 26–35.
74 Rostow, The Stages of Economic Growth, 40.
75 Gilman, Mandarins of the Future, 190-202.
76 Rostow, The Stages of Economic Growth, 57.
from the farm to the factory. The same idea appeared in the important development models of the era. P. N. Rosenstein-Rodan’s case for “a big push” rested on the premise that industrialization made for sustained growth, and that policy-makers could develop the economy by concentrating investment in local industries that would provide jobs for underemployed rural men, goods for local and export markets, and a tax base for the state. W. Arthur Lewis turned the idea of a rural-to-urban shift into his immensely influential “dual economy” model, which showed that the key to growth was the transfer of surplus labor from subsistence agricultural sector to modern industrial sector, where entrepreneurs could use low-wage workers to accumulate capital, which the state could then tax and reinvest in development and social services. Rostow’s “industrial revolution” followed the latest development models rather than old-fashioned economic history.

Rostow was also concerned with how agriculture might create the pre-conditions for take-off. He styled himself as the voice of the peasant farmer, seeing small-scale agriculture as the embodiment of the liberal ideal of freedom and a bulwark against communism, an argument he originally made in his 1955 article, “Marx Was a City Boy or, Why Communism May Fail.” He made a similar argument in Stages, laying out how different agricultural products have and could contribute to new industries, and left open the possibility of a “leading sector” other than manufacturing. He was not alone in his interest in agricultural development. Other economists identified the same need for linkages between the agricultural and industrial sectors, imagining simultaneous “revolutions,” on the model of early capitalist Britain. However, development economists imagined that industrialization would come at the expense of the agricultural sector, both as a share of the national income and as a way of life. That transition was not necessarily something to mourn. Rostow—like Clark, Rosenstein-Rodan, and Lewis—anticipated that industrialization would create a leaner, fully commercialized agricultural sector, as in the developed world. It was nonetheless never entirely clear how and when this agricultural revolution would occur. Should planners welcome the exodus of labor from the countryside? Or was migration eating away at the social fabric and productive capacity of the agricultural sector? Should governments invest in large-scale, mechanized agriculture, along the lines of the U.S. Midwest? Or should it invest in small farmers, introducing simple farm technologies and organizing co-operatives, on the northern European model?

For Chisiza, Rostow was a revelation. He read Stages not as a theory of growth, as Rostow had intended, but a guide to modernization itself. Chisiza laid out his interpretation in a pamphlet, Africa—What Lies Ahead, which he began writing in Gwelo. Chisiza opened Africa with a question...
that he and other anti-colonial activists had heard many times before: “After independence, what?”

The pamphlet was Chisiza’s reply, and in it he offered his thoughts on what he saw as the problems of independent Africa, more than two dozen in all, from one-party rule, to poverty and unemployment, to the decline of spiritual life. The one through line of Africa was the idea that African nationalists must be modernizers. Chisiza described Africa as a continent in transition—peasants into workers, tribes into classes, the country into the city. African nationalists had not set these forces in motion, he argued, but as leaders of the new Africa, they would have to see the changes through. He explained that the particular character of the nationalist movement—intellectually, organizationally—did not matter. What did was that “the dominant element should be sold on the need to concentrate on the task of economic modernisation,” this being “Professor Rostow’s important observation.”

Chisiza advocated what he called a “pragmatic pattern of development,” a strategy that “discards the irrelevant and incorporates the best” of the East and West. He set out ten policy objectives—from raising living standards to providing social security—for new African nations.

Chisiza’s Rostow was an anti-colonial nationalist and a friend of the new Africa. It was certainly an unorthodox interpretation of his work. The actual Rostow criticized what he termed “xenophobic nationalism” in the colonies and post-colonial world, and wondered whether the burdens of overpopulation, unemployment, and communist subversion would sink the fortunes of new nations. He also had very little to say about Africa and its future, though that was perhaps for the best, given what happened after Rostow took an interest in Southeast Asia.

All the same, Chisiza was right to read Rostow as a sort of nationalist, both in his political outlook and in his method. Though he may have been critical of certain nationalist movements, Rostow still believed that nationalism was the “motive force” of history. And not only that, Rostow made the nation the unit of historical change itself. He described modernization as a move from traditional society to the nation-state, and in explaining that transition, he pushed nations—Britain, Sweden, Japan—forward and backward through time to compare how and when they became modern. The historical comparisons were rough, and quite possibly wrong at times, too, as Rostow himself admitted. But the effect was to show the many forms that modernization could take, and to extend those possibilities to the developing world. Rostow believed that new nations would find examples of take-offs to emulate if they looked for new comparisons—not just to the United States or Germany, but to Sweden, Switzerland, and Israel, as well.

Chisiza saw possibilities for Nyasaland in Rostow’s comparisons. He and others in Congress dreamt of making a Denmark in Africa—folk schools, cooperatives, rural industries. Rostow not only demonstrated that Denmark was the unlikely rural modernizer that Congress imagined, but also how a new nation might follow some version of the Danish take-off. In Africa, Chisiza took Rostow’s

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86 Ibid., 5.
87 Ibid., 23-24.
88 Rostow, The Stages of Economic Growth, 28, 139-43.
89 Rostow himself said as much in a lecture he delivered on the continent in 1960. Rostow, “Some Lessons of History for Africa.” This was the same lecture that he claimed Chisiza had inspired him to write.
90 This comparison comes through clearest in the original lectures. See “A Non-Communist Manifesto I,” 414.
92 Rostow, The Stages of Economic Growth, 39n., 41n., 63. Rostow was more enamored with the Swedish case, which he invoked frequently in Stages. But Denmark did appear often in the development literature that Chisiza likely read,
model further, too. For Rostow, politics was only one part of the package. Modernization also
demanded capital, markets, entrepreneurs, technology, and of course, actual resources that could be
the basis for the development of local industries. Chisiza read Rostow differently, arguing instead
that modernization began with a nation united by a political leadership committed to growth. For
Chisiza, then, it was the nation-state—not minerals, not industries, not cities—that made
development historically possible. The comparison to Denmark made that idea plain to the British
and to Congress supporters.

Chisiza also expanded the meaning of the “nation” itself. Rostow and other modernization theorists
wrote with countries such as India and Indonesia in mind. They, like British officials, expected
empire to give way to new state forms in the post-colonial world. There was of course the Central
African Federation, but also the West Indies Federation and the Federation of Malaya. All three of
these states would have been “nations” to Rostow, who used the term to describe to states generally,
as was common at the time. Chisiza, by contrast, used “nation” to refer to anti-colonial nationalist
projects that had obtained or aspired to the state. In doing so, he extended the modernization
framework to include colonial territories on the margins of empire, many of which still had
uncertain political futures.

Chisiza finished writing Africa in early 1961, in time for the August elections. The pamphlet
appeared when Nyasaland and the Central African Federation were making international headlines,
and commentators took note. The Economist, which had praised Chisiza for his “sophisticated liberalim” in an issue earlier that year, remarked on Africa in an April issue. His pamphlet shows
Mr Chisiza to be a conservative politician,” The Economist noted approvingly, adding that “none of
this sounds like the wild, ‘irresponsible’ politics so feared in Salisbury.” The reception in Central
Africa was different. In early August, a few weeks before the election, the Federal Customs House in
Blantyre seized a shipment of 500 copies of the Indian edition of Africa, all bound for local
bookshops. The offending article was likely the appendix, “A Message to the People of India,”
from a speech Chisiza gave during a visit to India earlier that year, in which he referred to the
Central African Federation as “a second South Africa” and personally warned prime minister
Welensky that “the death-knell tolls for [the Federation] and we shall not rest until we have obtained
its burial certificate.” By 1961, then, there were two images of Chisiza in the press: the conservative
acolyte of Rostow and the extremist who threatened to tear apart Central Africa. The two Chisizas
were irreconcilable in part because they both misunderstood what made Africa so radical at the time.

Chisiza’s ideas shaped the Congress campaign for the 1961 elections. The Congress candidates all
ran on a promise to do what seventy years of colonialism had not done—develop Nyasaland. The
party manifesto set out a long list of objectives and priorities, many of them lifted directly from
Africa. The real imperative, though, was small-scale agriculture, because, as the manifesto explained,
“any underdeveloped country at Nyasaland’s stage of economic development must first modernize

particularly in the work of agricultural economists such as Jacob Viner. See, for example, Jacob Viner, “The Economics
of Development,” in The Economics of Underdevelopment, edited by A. N. Agarwala and S. P. Singh (Delhi: Oxford
University Press, 1958). Chisiza requested a copy of The Economics of Underdevelopment, an important collection then and
now, while at Gwelo. See SSC MK 1/3/2, Campbell Booker Carter Limited to Peter Mackay, 28 March 1960.
95 SSC MK 3/1/4, Peter Mackay to Jane Symonds, 24 August 1961; “What Lies Behind It?” Malawi News, 10 August
1961.
96 Chisiza, Africa, 62.
its agriculture if a break with stagnation and a move towards self-sustained economic growth is to be made.”97 More concretely, Congress aimed “to make farming a source of income for the masses” and to intensify agricultural production by introducing new seeds, better methods, and cooperative marketing.98 It was a bold plan, one that envisioned a take-off before the fuel was in order. But Chisiza made optimists out of many observers. “Dr. Banda himself has a favourite phrase about ‘creating a central African Denmark,’” The Economist wrote in an article on the eve of the election. “With good soil and better rainfall than elsewhere in Central Africa, Nyasaland might succeed in achieving the great increase cash crop production which is necessary to prime any development.” And just as importantly, Nyasaland had Chisiza, who “at Her Majesty’s expense in Gwelo prison, read more about the economics of under-developed countries than probably anyone else on the continent.”99

A Typical Underdeveloped Country: Nyasaland and the Development Decade

The bit of optimism about Nyasaland in the business press was part of a broader rethinking of development in Africa in the early independence years, an opening that Chisiza and Congress were quick to capitalize on in making their case for independence. In September 1961, just weeks after the Nyasaland elections, U.S. president Kennedy called for the 1960s to be the “development decade” in an address to the United Nations.100 That December, the General Assembly took up John F. Kennedy’s words, declaring the 1960s the United Nations Development Decade. Though states differed on doctrine, they agreed on the need for new programs and institutions to funnel capital and technical expertise to the developing world.101 In Nyasaland, the newly-elected Congress government matched its development plans to new internationalist ambitions in the U.S. and at the UN, claiming the status of a “developing nation” to break apart the Central African Federation.

Congress looked outward to the world for aid in part because British officials made clear that it would not come from London. Congress moved into Government House in Zomba with intentions to spend big, and to spend now. During the campaign, Banda promised that in addition to ho-hum development work like agricultural extension classes, a new Congress government would find the funds for a national university, a 300-mile lakeshore road, and a hydro-electric dam on the Shire River.102 Some of that money would come from abroad. But most of it would have to come out of the budget, and that meant negotiating with the British and Federal governments, which together still held the purse strings in Nyasaland. British officials, for their part, saw the same need for development funds. Nyasaland officials drew up a plan in the waning days of the emergency, but by the time it reached London in mid 1960, the political situation had already changed.103 British officials wanted to work with Congress, not crush it. And so the British government put the funds on hold, distributing only the minimum necessary to balance the budget, so as not “to take

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98 Ibid., 15-16.
100 On the Kennedy administration and international development, particularly in Africa, see Amanda Kay McVetty, Enlightened Aid: U.S. Development as Foreign Policy in Ethiopia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
Nyasaland on as an open pensioner” before Congress came to power, as one senior official put it.\textsuperscript{104} London expected to use budgetary aid as a bargaining chip with the future Congress government.

Federal officials sensed that Congress’s problems could be their gain. After Britain asked Congress to scale back their plans, the Federal prime minister Roy Welensky stepped in with an offer of Federal funds for the hydro-electric dam at Nkula Falls. Welensky’s gambit, as the British high commissioner reported, was to use Nkula “as the ground for the coming struggle with Banda.”\textsuperscript{105} Were Banda to accept Welensky’s offer, it would look like a retreat on secession. But he could not exactly reject the money either. The Federal government had designated the Nkula dam a Federal project back in 1954. And by law, the Federal Loan Board would have to approve any loan applications. That meant Congress could not legally take responsibility for the scheme, even though the Federal government had done nothing but delay the project for seven years, all while it spent lavishly on completing the Kariba dam in Southern Rhodesia.

Hoping to avoid a showdown with Welensky, British officials counseled Congress to agree to a middle way. The Nyasaland governor, Glyn Jones, explained to Congress that because the Federal government controlled power, communications, and health, a policy of non-cooperation would make developing planning “almost impossible.” He advised Congress to accept Welensky’s offer, and wait for a political settlement on the constitutional issues.\textsuperscript{106} In London, Jones and others in the Colonial Office thought the situation might even be good lesson in the cost of secession, “bringing [Banda] and his fellow Malawi Ministers up against the facts of Nyasaland’s difficult economic situation.”\textsuperscript{107}

Chisiza, as the Congress government’s parliamentary secretary of finance, was in the thick of things. He was eager to agree to a budget so that he could turn his attention to development planning. Nkula made that impossible, as Jones had warned—Chisiza did not know how much he had to spend, or whether to plan with hydro-electric power in mind. After consulting with British officials, Chisiza recommended to Banda that they quietly accept the Federal monies, so that they could get on with other projects. Banda was reportedly incensed at the suggestion, so much so that some observers sensed a permanent rift between them afterward.\textsuperscript{108} Banda chose to confront Welensky instead, telling reporters at a press conference one day in late November 1961 that he “would rather see the whole of this Nyasaland starve to death than have a charity from Welensky.”\textsuperscript{109} Chisiza never went that far, but speaking as Congress’s chief economist, he had argued forcefully against cooperating with Federal authorities on development matters in talks with the British colonial secretary earlier that day.\textsuperscript{110}

Unable to live within Britain’s means, and unwilling to accept Welensky’s “charity,” Chisiza and Congress looked to the United States for aid. They knew that Washington would welcome them. Banda’s visit to the U.S. in 1960—the one where he spoke of a “Central African Denmark”—

\textsuperscript{104} BNA CO 1015/2417, Minute, N. D. Watson, 18 April 1961.
\textsuperscript{105} BNA CO 1015/2430, Lord Alport to Commonwealth Relations Office, 18 October 1961.
\textsuperscript{106} BNA CO 1015/2430, Glyn Jones to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 29 September 1961.
\textsuperscript{107} BNA CO 1015/2430, “Note of meeting held at the Colonial Office 3.15 p.m. 31st October, 1961.”
\textsuperscript{108} BNA CO 1015/2430, “Note by the Minister of Finance on Discussions with Dr. Banda about the Nkula Falls Project” [September 1961].
\textsuperscript{110} BNA Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 141/14244, “Note of a meeting held at Government House, Zomba on 30th November, 1961, with Non-Official Ministers and Parliamentary Secretary.”
included friendly meetings with U.S. officials and with representatives of the American Metal Climax, the majority shareholder in Rhodesian Selection Trust (RST), one of the giants of the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt.\footnote{“Dr. Banda Praises Macleod,” \textit{East Africa and Rhodesia}, 21 April 1960. On RST and the Federation, see Andrew Cohen, “Business and Decolonization in Central Africa Reconsidered,” \textit{Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History} 36 (2008): 641-58.} Congress made a show of their ties with the United States. Chisiza, for instance, prominently displayed a framed copy of Kennedy’s inaugural address in his living room for his guests to see.\footnote{The picture struck the correspondent for \textit{The Economist}, “Nyasaland’s Choice,” \textit{The Economist}, 12 August 1961, 638.} Opponents of Congress claimed that it was all hot air. In fact, the local U.S. mission was eager to work with the new Congress government, doing its part for Kennedy’s Development Decade.\footnote{“Emphasis Will Be Laid on Agriculture,” \textit{Malawi News}, 30 November 1961. For the view from the Colonial Office of the broader political issues in play, see BNA FCO 141/14243, N. D. Watson to Glyn Jones, 6 October 1961.} US officials also invited Congress leaders to Washington. Chisiza visited the United States twice, first in October 1961 and a second time in January 1962, to discuss development aid. He met with US officials with the Department of State and other agencies and, in October, a team from the World Bank. He also had the opportunity to meet with Rostow, who later said the two “met like long-lost brothers.”\footnote{Rostow, “Some Lessons of History for Africa,” 65.}

Chisiza’s visits to Washington yielded more contacts and promises, but no immediate increase in financial support for the Congress government. He made it clear to his U.S. hosts that Nyasaland would leave the Central African Federation, no matter the cost. In his October meeting with the World Bank, for example, Chisiza declared that Congress “would make every effort to achieve independence within the next year or two,” and asked for direct assistance with development planning, in preparation for a formal request for project loans in the coming months.\footnote{World Bank Group Archives (WBGA) Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (FRN) 1581033, “Nyasaland—Visit of Mr. Dunduzia [sic] Chisiza,” S. Noel McIvor, 20 October 1961.} The meetings in Washington were friendly, but inconclusive. “The general assessment of him here,” a British diplomat wrote of Chisiza, “is that he has read a lot of books, but his exposé of Nyasaland’s affairs and prospects has not been wholeheartedly accepted, nor have his assurances about the slightness of the economic effects of defederation been swallowed.”\footnote{DO 158/43, J. D. Hennings to K. J. Neale, 20 October 1961.} The meetings with Rostow were the bright spot. Rostow strategized with Chisiza about development planning, and made introductions for him in international development circles.

In between his visits to the United States and his travels to London for talks and to Europe for aid, Chisiza worked on what he considered to be the fullest statement of his ideas, the Nyasaland Development Plan. Chisiza’s plan was a point of contention between Congress and British officials. The British thought of the plan as a budget exercise. The plan drafted by local officials proposed a modest increase in spending, mainly to keep pace with the reoccurring costs of existing projects.\footnote{BNA CO 1015/2462, “Extract from the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Council held on Wednesday, 20th December, 1961.”} Congress countered that “the objectives of the Plan should be those contained in the Malawi Congress Party election manifesto”—meaning modernization, now—and that just as importantly, “overseas lenders would respond to a bold and imaginative Plan.”\footnote{BNA CO 1015/2462, “Executive Council Paper: Development Plan 1962/65,” [December 1961].} A commission led by Chisiza submitted a revised plan that envisioned £22 million in spending, backed by £10 million from Britain and £3 million from local taxes and bond sales, arguing that “this was the time for faith in
the future and not for caution. The revised plan certainly was not cautious—£22 million was double the amount that Britain wanted to spend, and the new £3 million figure was twenty times the size of the original local contribution.

Chisiza understood that the fight over the development plan was about more than the costs involved, even if that was the form it often took. He and others in Congress believed that Nyasaland’s wealth was in the soil, as a popular party slogan put it, and that if ordinary rural people had the means they needed to realize that wealth, then agriculture could be a source of abundance for the new nation. That was why Congress insisted they could raise £3 million in taxes and bond purchases from small farmers when the entire African agriculture sector earned an estimated £6 million annually. It was an ambitious accounting, but only because it took seriously the idea that development could begin with agriculture, as described but rarely developed in the standard models of the time.

Figures aside, the trouble for Congress was that, practically speaking, development planners had very little experience with truly agrarian economies. The working assumption behind the standard models was that a country had industries to develop, which meant economies like Brazil and India that had urban centers, industrial sectors, and a sizable domestic market to go along with their rural hinterlands. British officials believed that Nyasaland already had exactly that economy, just as a part of the Central African Federation. Rostow helped popularize the idea that new nations may take historically unique developmental paths. Not every country would have a Pennsylvania, he argued, in a reference to the U.S. industrial heartland that powered its take-off. But in Nyasaland’s case, independence seemed akin to rural Ohio voting to secede from the United States.

Chisiza believed that the problem was with the planners, not Nyasaland. He used his US contacts to secure a $50,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to host a symposium on economic development in Blantyre, Nyasaland’s commercial capital, in mid July 1962. The aim of the symposium was “to stimulate thought on some of the more fundamental development problems confronting underdeveloped countries, such as Nyasaland, in the expectation that a valuable pool of knowledge and expert opinion will thereby be established for the benefit of those responsible for economic development,” including, of course, Chisiza himself. Invitations went out to distinguished economists from around the world—Eugene Staley and William O. Jones in the U.S., Peter Bauer and Nicholas Kaldor in Britain, V. K. R. V. Rao and K. N. Raj in India. Chisiza, an organizer at

120 Hazlewood and Henderson, Nyasaland, 7.
121 Agricultural economists had plenty of experience with agro-industrial planning, both in the US and the Soviet Union. See Deborah Fitzgerald, Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). However, that agro-industrial ideal never had much of a hold in colonial Africa, in part because the few attempts at large-scale agricultural planning went terribly awry, with the Tanganyika Groundnut Scheme as the classic example. Hodge, Triumph of the Expert, 209-14. Colonial agricultural specialists tended to be quite critical of development economics, which they considered to be dismissive of African farmers and, more importantly, of their field.
125 For one of the earliest versions of the ever-evolving list of invitees, see BNA CO 1015/2498, A. McM.Webster to Mr. Fairclough, 19 January 1962, “List of Proposed Invitees to a Symposium on Economic Development in Africa to be held in Nyasaland commencing on 18th July, 1962.”
heart, wanted ordinary people to participate in the symposium, too. In the weeks and months before
the event, the local press featured stories about the attendees and development economics,
produced with the average reader or listener in mind. Malawi News, for example, carried a syndicated
article on Rostow and U.S. support for African independence.\footnote{126} Msimbi published a five-part series,
“Economics and You,” to introduce readers to basic economic principles they needed to follow the
discussion at the symposium.\footnote{127}

The Blantyre symposium was one part of a larger drama around the break-up of the Central African
Federation. The invitations went out as Banda and Welensky continued their war of words in the
press over the Nkula scheme. R. A. Butler, the head of the new Central Africa Office, tried to
appease both sides by publicly opening the possibility of secession, while also affirming the British
government’s support for some form of association in Central Africa. Meanwhile, a working party
drew up a proposal for an economic association in Central Africa, with a common market, a
common monetary system, and common services for power, railways, and telecommunications. The
working party left aside the question of secession, though they presumed that the territories would
be independent enough to refuse to join.\footnote{128} British officials did not try to force Banda or Welensky
to accept the proposal. Instead they tried to wait the situation out, hoping that time would impose
the solution that they could not. That delay meant that Chisiza had to move ahead with the
development plan without the final figures, all the while dealing with a steady drip of bad news from
London about what to expect.\footnote{129} Congress understandably feared “a repetition of the Jack Report,”
as Chisiza complained to Butler in a May meeting.\footnote{130}

In July, the Congress government was even more preoccupied with development matters than
usual—the release of the development plan, the Blantyre symposium, and the visit by British
advisory team were all scheduled for that month. Chisiza kicked off events with his presentation of
the development plan to the legislative council. He described the plan to the council as “an attempt
to translate the desires as well as the needs of our people into Development projects.”\footnote{131} The plan
mostly dealt with the particulars of the projects, which in the end amounted to roughly £12.9 million
in projected expenditure in part one, with a £4.7 million funding gap, plus another £6.3 million in
possible expenditure in part two.\footnote{132} Because of the number of projects and need for funds, the plan
looked like a “shopping list” for prospective donors and investors.\footnote{133} However, the plan was
visionary at times as well, because, as Chisiza put it, “nationalism, properly channeled, performs
economic feats which defy imagination and current economic theory.”\footnote{134} In the last chapter, Chisiza
returned to Stages, asking: “What is the Government trying to make of the Nyasa economy? What
state of economic affairs does it want to bring about ultimately: Is it Rostow’s ‘State of High Mass
Consumption?’” His reply was characteristically prosaic—all per capita income and possible

\footnote{126} “The United States and Africa: A Policy Planner’s View,” Malawi News, 10 May 1962.
\footnote{127} For the introduction to the series, see “Economics and You,” Msimbi, 12 April 1962.
\footnote{129} For an account of the politics of the numbers for the Nyasaland study, see BNA DO 183/42,
D. A. Scott to Sir Roger Stevens, 27 August 1962.
\footnote{130} BNA DO 183/127, “Record of a Meeting with the Secretary of State at Government House on the 16th May, 1962.”
\footnote{131} Proceedings of the Fifth Meeting of the Seventy-sixth Session of Legislative Council, First Day, 11th July, 1962 (Zomba:
\footnote{133} The “shopping list” was a deliberate strategy. See Phillips, From Obscurity to Bright Dawn, 148.
\footnote{134} Development Plan 1962-65, 40.
industries, with none of Rostow’s talk of refrigerators and automobiles. But Chisiza nonetheless offered a glimpse of what a Central African Denmark might look like.135

Chisiza hosted the Blantyre Symposium later in the month, which went on for ten days and drew packed audiences for the papers and a stadium of spectators for the closing dance festival.136 Most of the papers were technical, arguably to a fault, but the audience was invited to join in on the discussion, and often did.137 There were some sour notes, like when A. J. Brown, a member of the British advisory team and one of the presenters, delivered a paper defending economic unions, which met with an angry rebuke from Banda. “Even if we have to eat roots, as our ancestors did in times of famine, we will do that rather than not secede,” Banda declared in his closing speech for the symposium.138 But the real story of the symposium was Chisiza’s opening speech, in which he described the challenges ahead for new African nations. He invited his guests to take on those challenges with Africans, urging fellow nationalists to listen to “the good advice of foreign experts” and his visitors to “take time off to gain insights into our aspiration, outlook and problems.”139 That idea was captured on the cover of the symposium program, which featured a montage of Chisiza writing the Harrod-Domar growth model on a chalkboard and a drummer in traditional dress in the bottom corner, alongside the slogan, “Tradition and Training Mould the Character of Africa” (figure 2).

After the Blantyre symposium, Malawi News bragged that the visitors would “carry to their homes good impressions of this country and its people and we can be sure that more and more people will want to learn more about this little country which has had the courage and daring to be host to eminent economists of world reputation.”140 And it was true—the symposium received wide coverage in the press, and praise from some unexpected quarters as well, including the Times of London, the voice of the British establishment, which commended Chisiza for encouraging “frank speaking” about the “political barriers that African governments are setting up in the way of their own progress.”141 There had been a subtle but critical shift in how the outside world understood Nyasaland. For decades, Nyasaland had been the special case, the labor reserve to the Rhodesias, the territory stuck on the wrong side of the dual economy in Central Africa. Chisiza helped to make Nyasaland into “a typical under-developed country,” as he described it whenever he promoted the Blantyre symposium.142 Nyasaland’s challenges, he argued, were the same were Africa’s challenges as well, and not peculiar to “multi-racial” Central Africa, as federalists and their allies had long argued.

135 Ibid., 105, 106-08.
137 For the back-and-forth, including a spat over “jargon” in one of the sessions, see “Nyasaland Economic Symposium,” Malawi News, 27 July 1962. The author of the article was Thandika Mkandawire, who before he became an eminent economist was a young reporter for Malawi News. Kate Meagher, “Reflections of an Engaged Economist: An Interview with Thandika Mkandawire,” Development and Change 50 (2019): 516.
Figure 2: Nyasaland Economic Symposium Programme, from SSC MK 1/3/3/1 Nyasaland Economic Symposium, 18th to 28th July, 1962, Programme
In making Nyasaland a typical case, Chisiza and Congress capitalized on a broader shift in development thinking at the time. They pushed through the door opened by fellow anti-colonial nationalists—leaders like Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere—in arguing that independent Africa would create new forms of development. But they also benefited from a sense of disenchantment with industry-first development strategies after the disappointments of the 1950s. State-led efforts to build domestic industries, popular in Latin America in particular, drained the public coffers without growing the economy. Export-oriented primary producers, including the Central African Federation, generally avoided that fate, but still suffered from a global slump in the late 1950s.

Development economists were not about to give up on industrialization—economic growth was generally on the upswing in most new industrializers and, in any event, the less industrialized countries had not performed any better. But they were beginning to rethink some core ideas. For instance, the British economist Dudley Seers, who worked on industry-first strategies during his time with the UN in the late 1950s, argued in an influential 1963 article that the real “special case” was in fact the industrialized countries, and that economic thinking needed to match the diversity of actual economies. Though Seers’s main target was his former self, the criticism also applied to thinkers like Rostow who imagined every new nation passing through their own industrial revolution. Seers, then, switched the nature of the comparison, urging development planners to seek answers in comparisons between developing countries rather than comparisons to the developed world.

The economists who traveled to Blantyre were then prepared to see Nyasaland as the Congress government wanted: “a typical under-developed country.” It was not because Chisiza had persuaded them to fight for Congress’s cause. Rather it had to do with how Congress planned for the future as if they had already left the British Empire behind. That idea came through clearest in Chisiza’s development plan, which laid out a vision of a distinctly national economy, something that Nyasaland had arguably never had. And more than that, Chisiza had US dollars to back some of his projects. The money involved was modest, but it allowed Congress to “shop” projects to other investors and, more importantly, set a precedent for aid outside the Federal framework. The prospect of international aid helped change the political calculus for the British government. The economic advisory group concluded that while secession would have “grave” consequences for Nyasaland, the Congress government’s plans for local revenue and foreign investment were “not unrealistic.” That was enough for Butler, who was by then eager for an exit. In December 1962, he announced that secession for Nyasaland was on the table. A few months later, in March 1963, Britain dealt the final blow to the Central African Federation, agreeing to put up the £3 million for the Nkula Falls scheme, eliminating the little leverage that Welensky had left. Congress supporters, though, mainly looked ahead to independence, set for July 1964. The Rambler, a columnist for Malawi News, marveled at the new spirit in the villages, finding it “so impressive and touching to see the oneness of this Nation to develop this Denmark of Africa.”

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146 For the details on US funds, see *Development Plan 1962-65*, 99-100.
147 BNA DO 183/42, “Report by the Advisers to the First Secretary of State,” [October 1962].
149 For the Congress perspective on the Nkula affair, see “A Brighter Future For Investors,” *Malawi News*, 31 May 1963.
Conclusion

Dunduzu Chisiza did not live to see the changes that he helped bring about in the country that became known as Malawi after independence in 1964. He died in a car accident in September 1962, likely after having fallen asleep at the wheel. After his death, friends and admirers from around the world sent their condolences to the Malawi Congress Party. Potlako Leballo, the national secretary of South Africa’s Pan Africanist Congress, wrote from exile in Lesotho to praise Chisiza for having “exposed the leprous disease of Imperialism, Colonialism, and Neo-colonialism with an invaluably body of theory and a blue-print for the Union of African States.”151 Walt Rostow also wrote to express his “deep sense of personal loss” upon hearing the news of Chisiza’s death.152 Leballo, the anti-apartheid guerrilla commander, and Rostow, the quintessential U.S. Cold Warrior, could not have been any more different. But Chisiza would have likely been heartened to know that both took inspiration in his work, as he had spent the last years of his life trying to bridge the two political traditions they represented, anti-colonial nationalism and liberal internationalism.

At the time of his death, Chisiza’s vision for Malawi was still in the planning stages. Had he lived to celebrate independence, he would have seen some of the fruits of his labor—a new polytechnic university in Blantyre, paid for by the US; the construction of the Nkula Falls dam, funded by Britain; and the beginning of the mammoth Southern Malawi Project, backed by the UN and the World Bank. He would have also seen Kamuzu Banda tighten his grip over Congress and the country, leading to the Cabinet Crisis of October 1964, which ended with prominent Congress ministers fleeing into exile, and a failed guerrilla campaign by his brother, Yatuta, to overthrow Banda in October 1967.153 Banda went on to rule Malawi until 1994, when a pro-democracy movement forced him from power.154

Banda’s Malawi was no Denmark, but the country did enjoy steady economic growth from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, and, for a time, seemed like a model for the kind of market-friendly, agriculture-first development strategy that came into vogue in international development circles in the latter half of the 1970s, amid the global oil shock and concerns about the rural poor.155 In truth, that growth largely passed ordinary rural Malawians by, as cash-crop production gradually shifted from the small farmers who defeated the British to commercial estates with ties to Banda and his allies. By the 1980s, Malawi was mired in the same crisis as the rest of the African continent, and rural Malawians were forced to choose between a precarious life at home or poverty wages on an estate; a state ban on migration and regional wars had all but closed the routes abroad.156

153 McCracken, A History of Malawi, 429-45.
Given what Banda’s Malawi became, it can be difficult to appreciate how radical the idea of independence once seemed. British officials insisted that the country’s political future was with the Rhodesias, as part of the Central African Federation. It took the 1959 Emergency to shake Britain’s faith in federation, and even then many in London remained convinced that the alternative would be worse, most of all for Nyasaland. They kept the faith because of a broader belief in modernization, and specifically the idea of modernization as industrialization, which they saw as having already rendered the old borders irrelevant. Congress activists countered with their own idea of modernization, expressed in the image of Nyasaland as a “Central African Denmark.” Often times, these types of arguments—with African nationalists quoting the likes Rostow—have been interpreted as vernacular modernisms, or ways of particularizing the universal. This article has shown that for Chisiza and Congress, the argument went further than that. It was instead about reinventing the idea of modernization itself, of expanding the framework to include “small” territories on the margins of empire. The fact that within a few years of independence, Malawi became a favorite of the World Bank, and that no one questioned its independent status, is a testament to the success of Congress’s arguments. Certainly, as the story moved on, the disappointments of the post-colonial development drive shifted to the fore. Scholars should nonetheless not lose sight of how this agrarian imagination opened new political possibilities for Malawi and for the African continent, taking decolonization and development to places where the West would not.