

From despotism to democracy: the rise of multiparty politics in Malawi

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Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda instituted what was probably the most repressive, corrupt, predatory and violent political system in Africa. Through a combination of bribery, intimidation, election malpractices, and the suffocation of civil society, Banda not only closed all democratic openings inherited at political independence in 1964, but also erected the structures of a corrupt and highly repressive one-person and one-party state. There was hardly a separation between public and private funds as Banda himself owned almost half the economy. Trade unions were not allowed. The so-called parliament was a joke set up and manipulated by Banda to give the veneer of democracy. A backward moral code was imposed and the activities of all sectors were monitored. Press and academic freedom did not exist under Banda, the country did not even have television services! Those who dared oppose the 'life president' or dared to show some interest in succeeding him were either assassinated, forced into exile, or simply jailed.¹ A notorious culture of sycophancy was created to sing the praises of the *Ngwazi* or conqueror. His special security apparatus, the Malawi Young Pioneers, along with an array of spies and paramilitary units, were used to intimidate civil society and harass Malawian exiles abroad.²

By 1970 Dr Banda had total control over the political system. Elections to parliament were under his direct control. He could dissolve parliament and dismiss his cabinet at will. Anyone desiring to compete in parliamentary elections had to first seek Dr Banda's approval. As a result, parliament [was] turned into a socializing forum where, once a year, the members of parliament gather to get to know each other and to shower with praises the "wise and dynamic leadership of Dr Banda." Policies formulated elsewhere [were] approved with little meaningful debate or constructive criticism by the parliament.³

There were pockets of opposition, though most of these were located outside the country and often ineffective, especially in the context of solid Western tolerance and support for Banda's dictatorship. It is difficult not to agree with Denis Venter that 'For all intents and purposes Malawi was not even a one-party state: it was a one-man state, a political despotism in which the state apparatus was answerable to only one man. The result was a climate of fear almost unparalleled anywhere in Africa, even in countries wracked by violence.'⁴ Under Banda, the state was largely 'irrelevant' to the needs of the people; violence was part of the popular culture; the institutions of the government were inefficient; and behind

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the facade of growth statistics (largely the results of foreign aid and the activities of the foreign-owned plantations), was a world of fear, decay, poverty, disease, intolerance, ethnic and regional antagonisms, and a weak, unproductive and illegitimate elite: ‘the Malawian state was a strong and authoritarian, one-party state, dominated by a small, autocratic and dictatorial political clique and characterised by ‘top-down’ flow of policy directives and government decrees—an archetype of the “Leviathan” state. In this respect, the ministerial and parliamentary structures were purely nominal and had the facile function of rubber-stamping and rationalising handed down policies.’⁵ It is the context above, characterized by deepening economic crisis, repression, and the asphyxiation of civil society that we examine the process of political liberalization, and the politics of the opposition in Malawi.

Dismantling despotism: the march to multiparty democracy

Several factors forced political liberalisation on Malawi in spite of Banda’s initial resistance and refusal to acknowledge on-going changes in the world, Africa and the southern Africa region. There were already too many cracks in his repressive political set-up to isolate it from the monumental rejection of and challenges to one-party, one-person, and life-presidential arrangements.

First, the economy was in deep trouble. Inflation was around 22% at the end of 1993. Unemployment, crime and hunger had reached unprecedented proportions. The drought of 1992 made matters worse as displaced peasants migrated to the urban centres. The introduction of the IMF- and World Bank-supervised structural adjustment programme in 1980 unintentionally facilitated the march to multiparty democracy through the unequal distribution of the pains and costs of adjustment. The badly run monetarist policies of the programme further impoverished the already poor, alienated them from the state, its institutions and custodians, and forced them not just to adopt coping strategies but to resist the state, which they saw as being directly responsible for their poverty. Adjustment forced the people to ask new questions beyond Banda and his repressive rule and to seek solutions in the message of the opposition. In short, economic crisis and vulnerability to external pressures made it easy for lenders, donors and investors to put pressure on Malawi to meet political conditionalities.

A second point had to do with pressures from donors who withheld new foreign aid. Until the rapid changes in the global order, Western donors were very ‘comfortable with Banda’s strict, paternalist, Protestant style, his cultural conservatism and his friendliness towards the West...Because of his pro-Western policies, Banda’s regime got off rather lightly.’⁶ The changes in South Africa in particular left Banda high and dry without support from the apartheid regime. In Mozambique and Angola, steps towards multiparty democracy also reduced Banda’s relevance to rebel organisations like RENAMO. In 1993 donors froze \$74 million in aid to Malawi. The UK and the World Bank played a major role in this regard by refusing further economic assistance until human rights were respected and a political liberalisation agenda was announced. During a visit to Malawi in 1992, the Vice-President of the USA, Dan Quayle, made it clear to Banda that relations, especially economic relations with the USA would be

reviewed if human rights were not improved and steps taken to open up the political landscape. For an aid-dependent economy like Malawi, this had immediate repercussions for the government's ability to keep projects afloat and buy political support and loyalty. The situation was not helped when the EC in March 1992 openly condemned Banda's human rights record and closed style of governance. The UK government was very direct in insisting on good governance, respect for human rights, political liberalisation and accountability. To show that it was serious in its new postures, the UK government cut aid to Malawi in half. Norway terminated its aid programme to Malawi, citing gross human rights abuses as the main reason. This action immediately jeopardised a \$22 million telecommunications project. When Malawi asked donor nations and the World Bank for nearly \$800 million in balance of payments support, it received an unprecedented shock when the donors meeting in Paris responded by 'suspending all new aid, except for drought and refugee relief, expressing deep concern about the lack of progress in the area of basic freedoms and human rights and linking new aid to "good governance".' Though the donors claimed that it was not their intention to dictate or determine a 'specific system of governance' for Malawi, they made it obvious that clear signs of political liberalisation were required to do business as usual.⁷ The donors only pledged \$170 million to support drought and refugee programmes of a total aid package of \$270 million required by Malawi.

Amnesty International released a highly damaging report on Malawi in which it revealed that detainees were badly treated and that hundreds had been illegally held in over-crowded prisons. Specifically, Amnesty pointed out that about 258 persons were kept in detention cells meant for one and were kept in leg irons. The report also revealed that feeding was poor, detainees were frequently flogged, and subjected to all forms of torture including electric shocks. The Amnesty report also indicated that many prisoners had died from 'ill treatment or medical neglect'. The Amnesty report was supported by the Southern African Human Rights Foundation (SAHRF) in a March 1992 report.⁸ This and other chilling accounts of the brutality of Banda's government in a rapidly changing post-cold war global order encouraged Western diplomats, investors, lenders and donors to impose political conditionalities on Malawi.⁹

Third, the church in Malawi played a major role in forcing Banda to recognise the pressures for change. On Sunday 8 March 1992, the country's eight Catholic bishops (six Africans and two Europeans) released a pastoral letter entitled *Living Our Faith*, in which they denounced the corruption, indiscipline, repression and human rights abuses in the country. The letter addressed the 'growing anger and resentment' in the country, and noted that: 'Academic freedom is seriously restricted, exposing injustices can be considered a betrayal, revealing some evils of our society is seen as slandering the country, monopoly of mass media and censorship prevent the expression of dissenting views'.¹⁰ The priests also complained about the detention, often illegally, of hundreds of Malawians and the harsh treatment detainees received in prison. It was the very first of such actions coming from the Church and it stunned Banda. The letter ignited protests against the government across the country for the first time and, in Zomba, the police opened fire to disperse rioting crowds. The bishops were

immediately ordered to report to Banda within two days and effectively restricted from leaving Blantyre. They were accused by the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) of 'seeking to disturb the peace, stability, progress and hard-won freedom which has been achieved under the wise and dynamic leadership of Ngwazi'.¹¹ Though Banda had them all arrested and interrogated for eight hours, on 10 March, the message of the letter, which was read in all churches, was already out.¹² The letter and the government's response to it attracted the attention and interest of the Vatican and one of Malawi's major aid donors, the UK, to issues of human rights and instability, even the potential breakdown of law and order in the country. People began to realise that Banda's regime was not God-ordained and once the religious leaders had condemned it, ordinary citizens had a spiritual responsibility to work hard to change the system. In August 1992 the Livingstonia Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) set up a committee to support the calls for a referendum on multiparty politics and to provide support for other pro-democracy constituencies. In addition the Christian Council of Malawi (CCM) released an open letter in support of the growing popular demands for a referendum. The letter was endorsed by its 17 Protestant churches. The Ecumenical Council of Malawi, the Muslim community, and other independent churches joined the campaign for multiparty politics and this gave ordinary citizens the courage to stand up to Banda.

A fourth factor which encouraged the political liberalisation of the Malawi landscape was the role of the foreign-based opposition which had been constrained by division, suspicions, harassment and poor leadership.¹³ However, these people were often united in their commitment to getting rid of Banda's dictatorship. The Socialist League of Malawi (LESOMA), led by Attati Mpakati, had a large following in Zimbabwe and was quite active until its leader was 'mysteriously' murdered in Harare, in March 1983. Until then he had operated from Zambia but was deported to Zimbabwe. LESOMA had announced the creation of a military wing which was to be trained in Cuba and had dedicated itself to the overthrow of the Banda regime. The Malawi Support Committee was supported by trade unions and Labour parliamentarians in the UK. The Malawi Freedom Movement (Mafremo) counted among its eminent leaders persons like Orton Chirwa, who was arrested in 1982, charged with treason and sentenced to death. This sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in June 1984. This did not deter the activities of Mafremo, which remained a major source of concern for Banda. It organised an unsuccessful guerrilla attack in northern Malawi in 1987 but did nothing as drastic after that. Kanyama Chiume's Congress for a Second Republic (CSR) was the weakest of the exiled groups but was noted for frequent criticisms of Banda and thus gave publicity to the crisis of governance within the country. The activities of the numerous exiled opposition frequently drew scathing attacks from Banda.

A fifth point relates to the growing confidence of local opposition forces. Students at the university of Malawi embarked on several strike actions to protest at human rights abuses. When the Catholic bishops released their pastoral letter criticising human rights abuses and repression in Malawi, the students led the open riots and demonstrations against the government. They capitalised on the opportunity to openly call for the introduction of multiparty politics. Riot

police dispersed them with gun fire at Zomba and the Banda government promptly closed the university. In the midst of deepening economic crisis, civil servants, including workers in hospitals as well as teachers in the country, called a strike in late 1993 bringing the machinery of the state to a halt. Electricity supply was disrupted when workers in that sector also joined the strike. When workers at the SUCOMA sugar plantation set the sugarcane field on fire in support of their strike action, the police moved in to confront them. The strikes forced the government to grant a 35% pay increase to public servants. Unaccompanied by increased production, the pay rise simply fuelled inflation, thus further worsening the already declining standards of living. The pay increases to the public servants encouraged those in the parastatals to make similar demands. Workers at Air Malawi, the Reserve Bank of Malawi, Malawi Railways and the National Bank of Malawi embarked on strikes which quickly spread to the rural communities, especially to the tea, coffee, rubber, tobacco and sugar estates. As Denis Venter has noted, 'these strikes and demonstrations marked a rite of passage for the country. At last the people had found their voices and one could sense that a major psychological barrier had been swept away. In fact, the crack had widened in the granite edifice of the Malawian regime and the process of change now seemed almost irreversible.'¹⁴ While the strikes reflected a new bold attempt at challenging Banda's dictatorship, they did not immediately lead to the emergence of a strong and unified labour movement.

Finally, Malawi's exiled pro-democracy movements were able to maintain contacts with local underground opposition organisations, and to force Banda to agree to multiparty democracy. Following a four-day conference (20–23 March 1992) in Lusaka, Zambia, which was attended by about 80 opposition activists operating as the United Front for Multiparty Democracy (UFMD), the decision was reached to distance the new opposition from the old breed of politicians who had effectively identified with Banda over the decades. Disagreement over strategy led to the creation of the Interim Committee for a Democratic Alliance (ICDA), with the primary objective of operating *inside* Malawi and pushing the struggle for political liberalisation to the maximum possible. The new organisation was also mandated to consult and where possible forge alliances with popular organisations and constituencies in the country in order to create a broad-based movement.

Following the meeting, Chihana returned to Malawi from exile in 1992 to confront Banda. He read a speech at the airport calling for multiparty democracy. He was arrested that very day and taken into detention. The news spurred Malawians, especially in the major cities, to embark on mass demonstrations against the government calling for multiparty politics, the release of political detainees and an end to one-party rule. On 6 May 1992 workers at David Whitehead's textile factory initiated a strike and called on other workers to join them. This ability to challenge a Lonrho boss was like challenging Banda directly, since both were in business together. The strikes and protests became violent, especially after the police shot at the protesters. This was followed by the destruction of property and the looting of shops, especially those belonging to the Press Holdings. Some MCP offices in the districts were destroyed. It soon became clear that the strikes were mostly political in nature. The demands

included not just the immediate release of Chihana but also the introduction of multiparty politics. In October 1992, the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) was set up to 'press for an end to (Banda's) dictatorship'.¹⁵ The AFORD announced that it would 'campaign openly through peaceful and lawful means for democratic reform'.¹⁶

Though Banda had boasted after the March release of the pastoral letter by the Catholic bishops that 'if exiled dissidents returned to Malawi, they would be "meat for crocodiles"',¹⁷ the political landscape had been significantly altered and Malawi was never going to be the same again. In response to the protests and growing demands for political liberalisation, Banda, who was clearly insensitive to these demands, dissolved parliament and called new elections to 91 of the 141 seats. In the June 1992 elections under the usual single party, Banda regulated and manipulated the process. It was embarrassing to Banda and the MCP when the exercise recorded the lowest voter turnout in the country's political history.¹⁸ The elections, which also witnessed the defeat of almost half the parliamentarians, including those nominated and endorsed by Banda, sent democracy signals to Banda. But he was still not ready to give in. In July he had Chihana rearrested and this sparked new demonstrations as well as louder calls for democracy. Chihana's eventual sentencing to two years imprisonment with hard labour in December 1992 led to further public demonstrations. The death of Orton Chirwa in prison forced Banda to release his wife Vera in early 1993. This served as another rallying point for pro-democracy activists. Journalists picked up courage to attack Banda and draw his attention to the on-going democratisation agenda around the world. While he was able to censor the media and silence intellectuals, Banda could not control the cellular phones and fax machines which were effectively used by the opposition to disseminate information within and outside the country. Eventually, Banda was forced to amend the constitution through parliament for a referendum on multiparty democracy. In his New Year's Eve Message to Malawians, Banda, the 'life president' of the country, announced that a referendum on the introduction of multiparty democracy would be held on 15th March 1993. The opposition complained about the short time available for campaigns as well as against the constraints of Banda's dictatorship—which mandated the need for a police permit to organise and hold rallies. The latter was important given the total control the MCP had over the police and security forces. In fact, the Young Pioneers were still busy flogging and intimidating pro-democracy activists and their supporters. They had no regard for constituted authority and during Chihana's sedition trial, they attacked AFORD supporters and threw stones at Chihana's lawyer, Bazuka Mhango. Several AFORD members were arrested for identifying openly with the party or for possessing its membership cards. The United Nations became concerned about the liberalisation process and convinced Banda, through a letter from its secretary-general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to change the date for the referendum from March to June 1993 to enable its monitors to attend. The UN also recommended the use of one ballot box instead of two to assure complete secrecy; equal representation of all opposition parties and the MCP on the Referendum Commission; free and equal access to the media, and improved relations and dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition.

Though Banda had invoked the usual discredited arguments against multiparty politics—he was ‘father’ of the nation, democracy would increase tribalism and regionalism, it would lead to waste and intolerance and so on, most voters supported multiparty democracy. By an overwhelming majority, 63.5% of Malawians supported multiparty politics. Voter turnout was 67% or 1 993 996 of a total of 3 133 448 voters who participated in a country with 4.7 million registered voters. 1 088 473 votes were cast in support of continued one-party rule while 70,979 votes were spoilt and not counted. When the results of the referendum were announced on 16 June, ‘Malawians poured on to Victoria street in Blantyre making V for victory signs and chanting “the cock is dead”’.¹⁹ A 14-member committee was set up to identify required constitutional amendments, and on 29 June 1993, parliament amended section 29 of the constitution, effectively terminating the one-party state and the monopoly of the MCP, legalising political parties and paving the way for multiparty politics. The army, which had somehow managed to maintain its neutrality, disarmed, the Young Pioneers as they had become unusually aggressive and violent towards opposition elements.

The 1994 multiparty elections

The three major parties that contested the May 1994 elections were the MCP, United Democratic Front (UDF) and AFORD. Other minor parties—the Malawi Democratic Union (MDU) led by Harry Bwanausi, the UFMD, led by George Kanyanya, the CSR, led by Kanyama Chiume, the Malawi National Democratic Party (MNDP) led by Tim Mangwazu and the Malawi Democratic Party (MDP) led by Kamlepu Kalua—emerged but made no impact on transition politics. They won no seats in parliament. There were five candidates in the presidential race, including Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who had ruled the country since 1964. Only three received any serious attention: Banda, Muluzi and Chihana. The campaigns were bitter and dirty. They did not address critical issues and programmes: ‘The campaign turned out to be disappointing, mainly because the contestants failed to address serious issues and seemed rather short on constructive ideas. This caused the editor of the *Financial Post* to describe the debate in the run-up to elections as “sadly lacking in substance”’.²⁰ Though the UDF and AFORD had worked together during the referendum campaigns, they were like bitter enemies during the real electioneering campaigns. All the parties were involved in making promises they knew they would not be able to keep if voted into power. Jan Kees van Donge has noted that there was a seemingly pathological fixation on ‘the murky past of MCP, rather than a vision for the future’ among the parties and that ‘personality issues dominated the campaigns and...none of the leading personalities could command a clear moral lead over the others’; this was a major obstacle to ‘securing national appeal’.²¹ This might sound absurd because of the record of Kamuzu Banda. Yet it is a clear reflection of how, in 30 years, Banda had succeeded in soiling virtually every political elite in Malawi; those who had managed to escape his regime of graft and repression have been unable to cultivate a rigorous and credible national constituency. In fact, until early 1992, Chihana was not well known in Malawian politics, having being in exile

and only able to communicate with underground groups within the country. He remained in jail in Malawi until a day before the 14 June 1992 referendum on multiparty politics.

Bowing to pressures from donors (who had suspended all aid except that for humanitarian purposes) and to internal pressures, Banda made several concessions to civil society, even going against decisions reached at the September 1992 MCP convention in Lilongwe. These included his announcement of a referendum, the establishment of a Presidential Commission on Dialogue (PCD), and a National Referendum Commission (NRC), and the creation of a Public Affairs Committee (PAC) with the churches and the two leading opposition movements represented. This was an open concession to the opposition and a dramatic change from the earlier style of politics in Malawi. Other concessions included the change in the membership of the NRC on the insistence of the PAC, as well as agreement on a final date for the referendum. In fact, just a few months after the Lilongwe Convention, the opposition parties, which had been selling membership cards to the public, were allowed to hold rallies and to campaign openly for multiparty democracy. Following the referendum and victory for multiparty politics, a National Consultative Council (NCC), made up of representatives from the various pressure groups, was established. The parties rotated the chairmanship of the NCC among themselves, although its meetings were closed to the public. A rather still-born National Executive Council (NEC) was later created from the NCC. The National Electoral Commission, under the chairmanship of Judge Msosa of the Supreme Court, played an active role in pushing the process ahead and avoiding delays invoked by the parties to serve narrow interests. For instance, Judge Msosa disagreed with the government on the earlier tradition which had barred the army and police from voting in elections.

The UDF, which had operated underground in Malawi for a while, was launched in October 1992. It was led by Bakili Muluzi, a successful businessman who had been a top member of the MCP. The UDF dedicated itself to unseating Banda and returning Malawi to the people. Its leadership included powerful ex-MCP politicians like Aleke Banda, Edward Bwanali and virtually all the dismissed or disgraced ministers of the previous Banda cabinets. It was without doubt the conservative alternative to the more militant AFORD. The party nominated Muluzi because he was well known and had been part of the Banda regime but had fallen out of favour with the life president. Its major problem in the run-up to the election was how to convince Malawians that it was really a major departure from Banda and the MCP. The UDF was accused of being 'has-been opportunists, since many of its leaders had once been Banda's henchmen in the ruling Congress party'.²² Muluzi, the UDF presidential candidate had served as MCP secretary general until 1982. Its publicity secretary had served Banda as minister for health until he was sacked in 1991, while its vice president, Aleke Banda, had acquired a notorious reputation as head of the much feared Young Pioneers. In reality, the only reason they had come together in the UDF was that they had been marginalised from the political and power arrangements of the Banda regime. AFORD capitalised on this fact and frequently referred to the UDF as 'Malawi Congress Party "B"'.²³ AFORD also made a lot of capital out of the fact the UDF leader had been convicted of petty theft and sentenced

to a six-month prison term over two and a half decades ago. They tried to show that he was morally bankrupt and lacked the credibility to inspire the youth and the nation. The UDF of course, tried to turn this around by contending that, irrespective of the past, if one did the right thing and took the right decisions, one could become a leader, even president of a country! It in turn attacked the AFORD as a bunch of inexperienced elements who lacked national credibility and acceptability. In its campaigns, it also drew the wrath of the MCP, the Young Pioneers and Banda.²⁴

UDF campaigns were the most focused. They were able to draw on their past experience and from a deep understanding of the inner workings of the Banda government. They were able to show that they were not in the opposition for the sake of just being an opposition but from a desire to distance themselves from a regime and system they had initially helped to construct. According to van Donge, 'UDF was the most explicit party on policy measures but their proposals were more aspirational than concrete: labour migration to South Africa should be resumed; and universal free primary education should be reintroduced'.²⁵ The party also promised to cut government expenditure drastically and to increase expenditure on social services. It subscribed to a continuation of the World Bank-supervised structural adjustment programme and it promised to support medium scale businesses, especially those which had been marginalised from the MCP power structures. The UDF promised a transparent and efficient government and to respect human rights.

The AFORD on the other hand was led by a veteran trade unionist who had experience as a grassroots organiser. Chakufwa Chihana had been head of the Southern Africa Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC) and was known as a committed human rights and pro-democracy activist. He had offended the 'life president' in 1964 and was restricted to Rumphi in the north as punishment but was taken out of the country by a Catholic priest, where he immediately launched his trade union career in Kenya. His militant trade union activities earned him a deportation to his home country, where the MCP government promptly threw him into detention. Released in 1978 after seven years in prison, he proceeded to Europe where he took courses including a stint as research fellow at the Peace Research Institute in Oslo. This was followed by an academic position at the University of Botswana until he became secretary-general of the SATUCC. He returned to Malawi in 1988 to run SATUCC, which had relocated to Lilongwe. He was forced to leave the country shortly after and did not return until 1992 in the face of great odds. He likes to regard himself as an intellectual and as someone whose praxis emanates from a thorough understanding of theoretical issues.

While in exile, Chihana had spent time making contacts with exiled opposition elements and building the structure of AFORD. Launched in September 1992 inside Malawi its leadership included well respected politicians like Harry Chiume and Reverend Aaron Longwe. Within a short time, cracks had appeared within the ranks of the opposition, especially within AFORD. Chihana was 'accused of dictatorial tendencies and of driving around in presidential motorcades'.²⁶ Its leadership has been described as a 'fluid group of people' which found it difficult to work together as the movement was 'plagued by quarrels and

resignations'.²⁸ As soon as AFORD was launched, the MCP branded it a northern organisation because Chihana was from that region. This was also an attempt to cast aspersions on its national credibility and to marginalise its ideas. In spite of Chihana's popularity as a committed pro-democracy activist, and in spite of the fact that his arrest on his return to Malawi had sparked riots in several cities, he could not translate the 'clean' image of the movement into widespread national acceptability. It is almost unbelievable that Chihana 'failed to get the necessary signatures to stand as presidential candidate' in Malawi despite his 'popularity'.²⁸ According to van Donge, the party also had problems with getting enough signatures for many of its parliamentary candidates and could not find suitable and credible candidates to run on its platform in most of the constituencies outside the northern region.²⁹ The AFORD remained isolated in the northern region.

The AFORD subscribed to the structural adjustment programme and, in a rather strange campaign style, Chihana refused to 'address social and economic issues' and this affected his ability to build a broad national base.³⁰ The party promised to reconstruct the economy, attract investors, promote rural development and education, improve infrastructure and respect human rights. In spite of the numerous strike actions which preceded the elections and the support from workers, AFORD did not launch any critical attack against the IMF and World Bank or against the structural adjustment programme.

The MCP had its own problems. After losing the referendum election, Banda and the MCP 'sobered up'. This humiliation, which was openly and loudly celebrated by Malawians, contributed significantly to a willingness to make concessions to the opposition. In spite of Banda's record of corruption, intimidation, human rights abuses and brutality, his nomination by the MCP as its presidential candidate demonstrated to the opposition that the MCP had no other really credible candidate to present to the nation. The party had problems convincing Malawians that it was not the same terror they had lived with since 1964. Though Banda tried to invoke his age and experience, and pretended to have seen the light of democracy and thus become a changed person, Malawians found it difficult to believe him. The party did all it could to reflect the new reality in Malawi: it denounced some of its previous policies and actions and even had its newspaper the *Daily Times* run a story on Orton Chirwa's wife Vera, who at that time represented the painful experiences of those who had been detained under Banda, for her work at the Legal Resource Centre. The pastoral letter which had incurred the wrath of Banda was now praised and described as a 'blessing' for drawing the attention of the party to the need for urgent reform and to support calls for change.

Ironically though, Banda had very strong support from the central region, his home base. This was the only region where there had been a strong vote in favour of one-party rule during the referendum of June 1993. In its main strategy the MCP invested time and resources in strengthening its hold in the central region, in the hope that, if the UDF and AFORD split the votes in the other regions, it might just emerge as winner in the elections. However, Banda, in spite of his age, visited all the country's district twice during the campaigns. The party also brought in some new faces in order to split the opposition vote, extend its

influence beyond the central region and present a reformed image. Gwanga Chakuamba, a down-to-earth politician who was from the Lower Shire in the southern region, was the party's biggest catch. He had been charged with plotting to assassinate Banda and was jailed for 13 years in 1980. On his release he had declared and vigorously campaigned for the opposition UDF, which had recruited him in prison. Demonstrating a rather fickle commitment to party loyalty he abandoned the UDF, joined the MCP, and was appointed secretary general. When Banda went to South Africa for brain surgery, he chaired the Presidential Council which acted as a sort of interim government. Chakuamba had also served as head of the notorious Young Pioneers before he fell out of favour with Banda and this put a negative mark against his record. John Tembo, who was hated by most Malawians, including the army, for his extensive powers under Banda, remained a leader of the MCP and this alienated those who had wanted to support the party, at least while there was hope that the frail and ailing Banda was soon to pass away. The MCP showed its desperation in retaining power when it sought support from the Kenya African National Union (KANU) by recruiting the services of six 'strategists' who had come to Malawi posing as election monitors. With Arap Moi's record, especially in the Rift Valley of Kenya, the opposition had reason to worry.

The MCP also enjoyed the privilege of incumbency. It had the support of the media and the Malawian Broadcast Corporation (MBC) did not hide the fact that it was still fully behind the incumbent president. It also had unrestricted access to state funds as well as to the resources of Press Holdings: Banda did all his campaigns in his capacity as president of the republic. This enabled him to command the loyalty of the security forces and the respect of the public. Compared to the opposition, the MCP has been described as more 'resilient' and 'more disciplined than its rivals'.³¹ The security forces were employed to intimidate the opposition and to prevent or disrupt their campaigns. In February 1993, while campaigning in the north, Banda banned all opposition rallies in the region because he did not want his message challenged and he wanted to show his strength in the region as leader of the country. Many MCP officials, especially at the local councils, did not believe that Banda could be defeated. Hence city councils in Blantyre and Lilongwe, for example, prohibited opposition rallies and meetings on 'public property' as a way of demonstrating loyalty to Banda. AFORD supporters in particular were subject to harassment, as when Reverends John Mwambira, Willie Zingani, Aaron Longwe and Peter Kaleso were prevented from addressing public meetings. It took a court order to declare such actions illegal. While discussions were still in progress about creating the relevant institutions for multiparty politics, the Banda government banned the newspapers of the two leading opposition parties, the *Malawi Democrat* and *UDF News*. They were unbanned only after the opposition abandoned further talks with the government. Compared to the opposition parties, the MCP had all the resources to make a significant impact on the elections.

There were no ideological issues in the campaigns. Though press freedom had been relaxed and the press law amended, thus eliminating the life imprisonment penalty for offending the government, and also allowing individuals to set up private newspapers, there were still several constraints on the free press and

the ability to express opinions which the sitting government did not like. The establishment of the *Financial Post* and the *Michiru Sun* contributed significantly to alternative outlets for news dissemination. Unfortunately, none of the parties really presented the electorate with a focused and holistic agenda for rebuilding the nation, mobilising the people, meeting their basic human needs, and placing Malawi on the path to self-reliant growth and development. In spite of the early enthusiasm showed by the public for the transition to multiparty politics, the poorly focused, opportunistic and superficial campaigns of the opposition discouraged and frustrated many Malawians. The hunger for raw power was all too evident as the driving factor behind the politics of the opposition. Many Malawians were amazed at how soft and conciliatory the opposition generally was towards Banda. Even Vera Chirwa who had been detained for 12 years along with her husband was exceedingly conciliatory, reflecting on the 'good times' they had with Banda in the past which were only 'spoiled' not by Banda but by 'others'.³² Because the opposition spent so much time attacking each other and arguing over mundane and irrelevant issues, they had no time either to unite or effectively erode the support base of the MCP in order to defeat Banda decisively. While Banda's appalling record did provide juicy material for campaigns, these amounted to nothing but superficial and often diversionary and sensational interpretations of why it had been possible for someone like Banda to have emerged in the country, succeeded in suffocating civil society, imposing himself as a ruthless dictator, surviving for three decades, and even having the courage to present himself for election in spite of the on-going changes in the global system. Van Donge might have overstretched it by suggesting that during the campaigns, 'there was simply not much political capital for the opposition in rallying against Kamuzu—there was too much popular respect, admiration for his intelligence etc—while to be seen with him—for example, at the presentation of presidential nomination papers—was an asset which he distributed carefully'.³³ Certainly, the numerous strikes and demonstrations, the humiliating referendum vote, massive support for opposition parties, and the fact that Banda's rallies could not draw a quarter of the crowds drawn by the UDF and AFORD, demonstrate that the people were fed up with the dictator who had toyed with their lives and mortgaged the future of the country in a cocoon of backwardness. If the opposition failed to explode the myth of invincibility and vulnerability, and if they failed to cultivate the fact that the Banda–Tembo–Kadzimira triumvirate as collectively responsible for the Malawian disaster, it was more a reflection of their poor strategies, weaknesses, inexperience and limited resources, and the fact that they were fighting an entrenched incumbent. All the parties were involved in acts of intimidation and violence, although the MCP and remnants of the Young Pioneers were more guilty of these charges than all the others. The UN Joint International Observer Group (UNJIOG) confirmed these acts of intimidation as well as bribery in the efforts to win support from the electorate. The Independent Electoral Commission also confirmed the observations of the UNJIOG. The MCP was accused by the electoral commission of 'stealing or illegally purchasing voter registration cards in at least nine of the country's 24 electoral districts', while the opposition were accused of 'transgressions, including being engaged in turf wars'.³⁴

Bakili Muluzi won the presidential election with 1.4 (47%) million votes. Banda came second with 996 363 (33%) votes, and AFORD leader Chihana came third with 552 862 (19.5%) votes. The MDP leader Kamlepo Kalua had 15 624 (0.5%) votes. The parliamentary elections followed a similar pattern, with the UDF winning 84 seats, the MCP 56 and AFORD 36. The elections were declared by monitors to have been free and fair as most of the 2066 voting centers recorded no violence. Voter turn out was heavy, three million of a total of 3.7 registered voters. In a country of seven to eight million people with about half the population below voting age, this was an outstanding demonstration of public enthusiasm for multiparty democracy. To be sure, the desire to get rid of Banda and his dictatorship and developments in South Africa contributed significantly to the enthusiasm to participate in the elections.

None of the three leading candidates performed significantly outside their ethnic and regional enclaves and the campaigns and election results clearly reflected that. The UDF performed well in the South and Muluzi hails from there. While Muluzi performed brilliantly in his home district of Machinga by scoring 91% of the votes, he only managed 43% in Nsanje, largely because of the influence of Chakuamba of the MCP who comes from that region. The MCP did well in the central region (Banda's home base) although the other parties, especially the UDF, made significant inroads, restricting Banda to only a 24% vote in Nteceu. The AFORD swept the seats in the north, Chihana's home base, where he received between 85–92% of the votes. While ideological issues did not feature seriously, personality issues were often overplayed. The UDF benefited mostly from redirected support from the MCP. AFORD made practically no inroads into the strongholds of the MCP and UDF. Although, on a broad scale, regional loyalties influenced the voting pattern, there were also ethnic disparities which mediated the over-arching influence of regionalism.

From populism to opportunism: the politics of opposition movements

The opposition in Malawi is similar in several respects to the opposition in other African states. They often start off united and appearing to have some vision, and as being genuinely committed to democracy. Given the harsh political and economic conditions in which the people had lived for decades, and the clearly deteriorating living conditions, the message of change, hope, life more abundant, an end to corruption, nepotism and repression drew extensive support across ethnic, regional, religious, class and gender lines. In Malawi, within a short span of time, the opposition had squandered public goodwill and could not remain committed to its originally declared agenda. It is easy to concede that it took a lot of courage to challenge, even criticise, Kamuzu Banda. In fact, many of the pro-democracy leaders suffered personal hardships to remain on the frontline of the struggle to unseat the life president. The path to change was certainly not easy, as the police and security forces, especially the Young Pioneers, trying to please the president unleashed a reign of terror on all opposition activists. John Tembo, who was regarded as the heir apparent, saw the new movements as a direct challenge to his political future and an open effort to deprive him of his 'inheritance'. His strong relationship with the RENAMO rebels in Mozambique,

who were seeking a new role as political normalcy was being negotiated, evoked fears of a possible pre-emptive strike against the pro-democracy forces by Tembo. Further, the Young Pioneers became over zealous in rounding up opposition elements and detaining them illegally as long-term detainees were set free from prison and replaced with new ones. The rate of arrest and detention was so massive that 'there was not enough room, and scores of detainees [had] to be held under guard in tents set up near Blantyre jail'.³⁵

Following the May 1994 election in which Chihana performed badly, the AFORD leader easily demonstrated why he was in politics. The hunger for power and political relevance and visibility was so strong that he immediately initiated negotiations for power with the UDF. According to Muluzi, 'immediately after the elections, Chihana wanted to be executive vice president. AFORD wanted eight ministries.³⁷ But we asked on what basis?'³⁷ Muluzi reminded Chihana of his terrible performance in the elections and that there was no basis to make such demands. Failing to get what he wanted, Chihana made an alliance with Banda's MCP! Before announcing this 'unholy' alliance, Chihana urged the UDF government and Malawians to eschew attacks against Banda and to accord him the respect he deserved as father of the nation. With its leader's new line of pro-MCP dialogue, AFORD began to benefit from the financial power of the MCP: 'AFORD's biggest financial problems disappeared overnight. Air Malawi's case against Chihana ceased to be mentioned, and neither was there any further mention of his debts to Hardware and General Dealers, a subsidiary of Press Corporation.'³⁸ Many Malawians could not believe it when the MCP and AFORD signed a 'memorandum of understanding' in which they pledged to cooperate in parliament. The newspapers were full of lamentations at the announcement, including open allegations that Chihana had been bribed by Banda. This was the same Banda and MCP that had jailed Chihana twice, forced him into exile, terrorised the country, ruined the economy, and suffocated civil society for three decades. By forging an alliance with the MCP, AFORD denied the ruling UDF a majority in parliament, almost precipitating a political stalemate. The pain for most AFORD members was, however, unmistakable:

The pact was a bitter pill to swallow for many Aford members, who saw themselves as the true champions of democracy in Malawi and the natural enemies of the MCP. Veteran northern politician, Machipisa Munthali, who spent twenty-seven years in detention under the MCP government, publicly expressed disgust with the alliance; and the Reverend Peter Koleso, who led Aford's delegation in coalition talks with the government, defected to the UDF. Dr Mapopa Chipeta, one of the brightest young politicians in Aford, also fell out with Chihana over the issue but remained loyal to the party. However, the MCP was buoyant because for it the pact has proved to be an escape route from political marginalisation.³⁹

The hopes of the MCP for a lasting alliance with AFORD did not last long. Once again, demonstrating his fickle political philosophy, Chihana abandoned the MCP-AFORD alliance to enter into a new alliance with the UDF after a new position of vice president had been created for him and five cabinet posts reserved for him and some AFORD leaders. Chihana was also made minister for irrigation and water development.⁴⁰ Of course, this new alliance which combined the UDF's 84

seats with AFORD's 36 gave the new government a comfortable majority.⁴¹ At the ceremony at Sanjika Palace in Blantyre, Bakili Muluzi declared that the new alliance was 'inspired by an idea of togetherness so that the country can be united to forge ahead with its development efforts'.⁴² Muluzi stated that the alliance would help 'guard democracy' in Malawi and show the people that individuals from different political platforms could indeed work together. The question is: how different is AFORD from the UDF? Chihana also declared at the ceremony that the alliance was designed to bring peace and make it possible for the government to improve the well being of the people of Malawi.

Van Donge has argued that it is essential to go beyond issues of 'political opportunism and politicians being for sale' in order to understand these 'shifts in position' on the part of Chihana. He called for an appreciation of 'the pertinent challenge faced by any political party in Malawi: how to overcome regional confinement'.⁴³ This might be so, but it begs the question. Did Chihana just realise that his power-base was mostly in the northern region? What strategies have been put in place to actually develop and nurture a national appeal? Is Chihana so naive as to assume that an initial alliance with Banda would demonstrate to Malawians that he had a national spread and influence? How do we reconcile the struggle for power and the preparedness to abandon one for another if the position/price was right and attribute such political prostitution to the search for a national identity? If Malawians continue to accommodate and rationalise such actions from leaders who defined themselves for decades as pro-democracy leaders, then it is likely to continue and without apologies. A serious pro-democracy/opposition party must begin by identifying its strong and weak points, map out an agenda for extending its influence and programmes to areas where it has little influence, distinguish itself as an alternative party through its programmes, be ready to make concessions which do not compromise those principles and programmes, and not see elections and the capture of power as the ultimate goal of every election. Malawi's opposition movements are basically opportunistic movements and have not put in place any serious agenda for genuine democratisation—a deepening of the transition processes beyond mere liberal democracy and the massive involvement of the people in decision making.

Conclusion: Malawi after Banda

The UDF government has tried as much as possible to distance and differentiate itself from the Banda regime and the MCP. It has declared its priorities to be in the areas of improved health care delivery, education, infrastructure and poverty alleviation. It has tried to clean up the corrupt customs service and the police, though with only limited success. Ghost workers are being fished out of the public services and over K33 million (the national currency is the Kwacha) was saved in two months. Trade unions are enjoying unprecedented freedom and new ones are being organised. There is a strong desire to operate the government on a cash basis only rather than on credit. Revenue collection has been stepped up while there is a genuine desire to control inflation and generate employment. Free primary education has been introduced to address the problem of illiteracy,

which still affects about 60% of the population. But we must recall that the UDF inherited a terribly deformed and mismanaged economy from Banda and its very limited achievements thus far are testimony to the contradictions of its inheritance and agenda for reconstruction and recovery. Nonetheless, Malawians are quickly discovering the fact that 'democracy alone is not enough' and there is a growing feeling that there is a 'lack of sense of direction', in the new system.⁴⁴

One of its earliest actions was the release of political prisoners, the commutation of outstanding death sentences to life, and the closure of some of the country's most scandalous prisons at Dzeleza, Nsanje and Mikuyu. The government pledged to respect press freedom and, unlike in the past, journalists have been invited to State House for free dialogue with the president. A 'Truth Commission' to investigate human rights abuses in the past has been set up. As Muluzi declared, 'we want to know what happened in the past. We will forgive but we must know the truth.'⁴⁶ Listing some of the 'atrocities' of the 30-year rule of Banda, President Muluzi identified the following:

- i) Prisoners were chained to the floor and left to die in a prison in Nsanje district after which their bodies were thrown into a crocodile-infested river.
- ii) A whole village of Moslems was arrested in Mangochi district and thrown into prison and fed on rats.
- iii) Members of the Jehovah's Witness sect were forced into exile and children of the sect were forced to sleep with their mothers and fathers.

According to Muluzi, one of the reasons for the Truth Commission was to expose those who were responsible for the atrocities in order to prevent 'murderers' from being voted into office.⁴⁶ To this effect, Kamuzu Banda, John Tembo and the country's so-called 'official hostess' Cecilia Kadzamira were arrested and brought to trial for the murder of four politicians in 1983 along with three police officers. None was convicted although the officers remain on trial. The UDF has been cautious about this for fear of opening up a case that might consume some of its own leading members who had been part of Banda's brutal rule. Citizens have been suing the government for past atrocities and winning huge cash settlements which could easily bankrupt the cash-strapped government. In mid-1995 the government announced that it had paid out about K500 000 'to those who had suffered, honouring the 1994 election promise to redress the wrongs of Dr Banda's regime'.⁴⁷ Muluzi himself complained bitterly that, 'The government is willing to pay, but where do we get the money from? So many people are coming to make claims against the past atrocities of the Malawi Congress Party and my government has to pay for those sins.'⁴⁸

In less than a year in office, unemployment had grown to 'chronic' levels and inflation had skyrocketed to 80%. In fact, by January 1995 inflation had reached 96%, although it was cut in half by the end of the year. The minimum wage has not been raised and it is not enforced. The ability of Malawi to service its foreign debt was already in doubt by the end of June 1995. The government has been unable to respond effectively to deepening socioeconomic crisis in the country. The crime wave has increased to unprecedented levels. The murder of army commander General Manken Chigawa by armed robbers in April 1995 was one

of the numerous indicators of violent crime in the major cities.⁴⁹ Even the home of the inspector-general of police was burgled. To some, the rise in crime was the direct result of the democratic opening because, under Banda's rule, criminals were summarily punished by his numerous kangaroo courts and some were detained indefinitely. Under the new system, the rule of law and due process are respected and criminals are entitled to bail. Beyond this however, is the economic desperation that is driving thousands into extra-legal ways of making a living. Some members of the armed Young Pioneers—now disbanded—still retain their weapons and have been using these to commit numerous crimes. Added to the continuing disruptive and criminal acts of remnants of the Young Pioneers and Mozambican refugees, is the fact that the police are not properly trained, are poorly paid and poorly equipped. Many have no vehicles and accommodation problems persist. Corruption is also rife within the forces as wealthy individuals easily bribe their way out of crimes committed against the state.⁵⁰ Muluzi has called on all Malawians to support the government in its efforts to contain the crime wave in order to avoid a 'security breakdown'.

There has also been a major national debate on the constitution. The government circulated a provisional document in the three languages of Chichewa, Chitumbuka and Yao and followed this up with a constitutional conference in February 1995. One major debate arising from the report of the conference was on the creation of a second parliamentary chamber—the senate. Though the UDF had favoured a single chamber, the conference approved the creation of a senate. Muluzi had argued against it because it would be too expensive to operate and maintain. However, he had a large cabinet, with many irrelevant ministerial appointments. More importantly, it was strange that a price was being put on democracy, checks and balances and the containment of tyranny. The conference had recommended that, to save money to run the senate, ministerial positions should be reduced from 34 to 24. A decision on the creation of a senate chamber has now been reserved for 1999. It also recommended that both the president and vice president should be elected, rather than the current practice where the vice president is appointed by the president. Another recommendation was that no person running for either position should have been convicted of any crime in the previous seven years: Muluzi had been convicted of petty theft as a young man and this did not directly affect him, although it did draw attention to that blot on his record. The conference felt that the office of the second vice president, currently occupied by AFORD leader Chihana, was not necessary and should be abolished. Of course, this position had been created to 'attract' Chihana into an alliance with the UDF. Parliamentarians who wanted to join another political party had first to resign their seats in parliament and subject themselves to by-elections on the platform of the new party. This recommendation was designed to limit political prostitution and promote party loyalty and discipline. Appointed ministers were expected, according to Article 88 of the constitution, to declare their assets fully within three months of their appointment, and the death penalty was retained in spite of pressure from international human rights organisations. In contrast to the Banda days, the traditional courts would, however, have no jurisdiction over crimes involving the death penalty. Jurisdiction over murder cases has been reserved for the high courts in Lilongwe

and Blantyre. The latter recommendation was obviously influenced by the unprecedented crime wave, something which was new to most Malawians.

The delay in establishing a senate has angered many organisations and the opposition. This means that the checks and balances which the senate would have provided would be absent and it is clear that the AFORD–UDF alliance wants to continue to enjoy its parliamentary majority and ability to get bills through parliament with ease, as it had done with the Press Trust Bill on 7 November 1995. By appointing Chihana to a vice-presidency that was not provided for in the constitution, many Malawians also feel that the UDF, if not checked early, could develop into another one-party system, intolerant of constitutional provisions and the rule of law. Indeed, Muluzi has been slow in erecting institutions which are necessary to check political excesses, the abuse of office, and to facilitate the consolidation of democracy, such as the law commission, the human rights commission and the Ombudsman. These are provided for in the provisional constitution and are completely within the president's gift.

Under Banda, corruption was more or less officially sanctioned provided it did not directly offend the 'life president'. This tradition had been somewhat mediated but remains rampant: 'Old political habits are proving hard to break. Multi-party politics under president Bakili Muluzi's United Democratic Front-led coalition have inherited much of the character of the old one-party state. Growing accusations of corruption and constitutional manipulation reminded people of the Banda era.'⁵¹ Many political appointments have not been based on merit and the UDF's slogan of 'Poverty Alleviation' has quickly become 'Pocket Alleviation' or 'Personal Poverty Alleviation' as UDF politicians have become corrupted. Muluzi's ministers are widely perceived to be as corrupt as Banda's and, like Frederick Chiluba in Zambia, the president has been quite reluctant to reprimand them. Sam Paso, the education minister enabled private businessmen to make a K36.3 million profit when he spent K45.9 million on notebooks. Though he was called to appear before an inquiry, he was not relieved of his position for such a reckless use of public funds. Rather, Paso was redeployed to the health ministry. In a recent report by Transparency International (TI), the Berlin-based group noted that the degree of political openness in Malawi had certainly increased under the UDF–AFORD government but also that there was an 'explosion of corruption'. It noted that this explosion has permeated every sector and class of society as 'Mafia groups' operate in both the public and private sectors.⁵²

In May 1995, AFORD and UDF parliamentarians were each paid K50 000 (about US\$3300) out of the 'poverty alleviation' account. This payment, which was done behind the back of Aleke Banda the finance minister, was allegedly to be used to maintain their constituencies. In fact, in a sign of confusion and lack of transparency and consultations within the government, information minister Brown Mpinganjira initially announced that no such payments had been made. Muluzi had to acknowledge publicly that the parliamentarians had received the monies but could not explain why only AFORD and UDF parliamentarians had been paid (and MCP members left out) with money that was genuinely meant for the 'poverty alleviation' programme. Without doubt the MCP has capitalised on this scandal to show how corrupt and unreliable AFORD and UDF politicians are

and it had made a major dent in the government's credibility. At a personal level, Muluzi, in spite of his MCP background is perceived to be fairly honest but many of his supporters, and the MCP has made much of this, point out that, by remaining in Banda's Sanjika Palace in the capital, rather than the less opulent State House in Lilongwe, he was being corrupted by the perks of office and reminds most Malawians of the wickedness and ruthlessness which the Palace had represented under Banda. Moreover, in a rather strange development, Muluzi has issued K200 notes with his photograph and has retained some banknotes with Banda's photo as well. Many ministers have embarked on irrelevant and unnecessary foreign missions which have drawn criticisms from the media and public. In early 1996 the parliament passed a bill allowing ministers and parliamentarians to bring goods into the country duty free! The implications of this unnecessary policy can easily be imagined. When a K200 million loan facility was set up for the Development of Malawi Traders Trust (Dematt) to 'encourage small businesses', Muluzi sent a list which 'included ministers, MPs, and other top government officials',⁵³ to Trust officials who promptly rejected it. This was reminiscent of the Banda days when programmes meant to strengthen small investors and businesses were appropriated by the political and economic elite.

In the context of expectations which had been raised to the maximum during the campaigns, the implementation of painful adjustment policies have only deepened alienation and anger against the new democratic government. This 'crisis of expectation' is eroding support for the democratic enterprise and making governance even more difficult. The World Bank itself has admitted that in the implementation of adjustment 'the rural poor have been extremely hard hit'.⁵⁴ It has belatedly called for safety nets to protect the poor and vulnerable. This might already be too late, as democracy and the removal of Banda from the scene have not helped the living conditions of the poor majority in any significant way.

If the UDF government is unable to make a significant difference in the lives of Malawians, it will not just lose credibility but its democratic enterprise will be seriously endangered. The people will measure its success by the extent to which the new government is able to make a visible difference in their lives. Given that the Banda government had spent only 11% of its last budget on social services, the challenge is tough but it should not be difficult to see whatever difference the government can make.⁵⁵ AFORD has squandered its initial credibility by jumping from one alliance to the other and by its involvement in the 'poverty alleviation' scandal. Yet, while Chihana cannot count on a major political future in Malawian politics, local, especially grassroots AFORD members will continue to do well. There are still some credible Malawians residing abroad. If they return to take over the leadership of AFORD, they might yet rebuild it into a formidable political party with national spread and credibility.

If the UDF is able to maintain an open political system, it can gradually incorporate AFORD into its fold. Yet Muluzi cannot overlook the army which, while dedicated to Banda, had been opposed to the Young Pioneers, the Mobile Police Force, and to John Tembo and Cecilia Kadzamira. It had also refused to act against pro-democracy activists in the days of Banda. The height of its

resentment against the Young Pioneers was demonstrated in 'Operation Bwezani' in 1993 when junior officers took to the streets of Lilongwe, killing Young Pioneer members who had initiated a massive attack against pro-democracy activists. While this uncoordinated and unplanned response to the Young Pioneers significantly advanced the struggle for democracy and severely dislocated the Young Pioneers, it also directly involved the military in politics. Such an increasingly politicised military can be expected to play a more interventionist role if politicians and political parties fail to deliver. There were rumours of a coup against the UDF government in April 1995 though no arrests were made. But Muluzi did threaten to launch another 'Operation Bwezani' in response to a growing crime wave. This simply means a further politicisation of the army. In April and May the Mobile Police and Army raided several locations in Lilongwe and Blantyre in search of 'illegal arms'. This confirmed fears that a coup plot had actually been uncovered and that the crime issue was overwhelming the government, hence the involvement of the army. Some soldiers have been arrested for plotting against the government and the UDF government is still scared of a possible mutiny in support of Banda. The fact, however, is that a too frequent involvement of the army in political and social operations will only draw it into the vortex of the country's politics.⁵⁶

Press freedom and other liberties have increased significantly. There are over 20 newspapers in the country today engaged in the struggle for relevance, survival and acceptability. This is certainly a major departure from the past.⁵⁷ Muluzi is more open to the media and relates well to scholars and students, unlike Banda who had clearly lost touch with the people and was immersed in the world of sycophants. However, the corruption issue mentioned earlier and some cases of human rights abuses continue to cast a shadow on how open the UDF government is willing to be and how much it is willing to invest in strengthening civil society. The MBC remains the main mouthpiece of the government, functioning more or less the way it had done under Banda. Recently, one of its reporters was sacked for raising the issue of why MCP parliamentarians had not benefited from the scandalous 'Poverty Alleviation' largesse. Only one religious radio station has been licensed so far, thus protecting the monopoly of the state broadcasting service. There is as yet no indication of a serious commitment to the mass education and mobilisation of the people and to their involvement in decision making. Though newspapers now proliferate, many are owned by powerful politicians and ministers or their business associates. Some 'journalists still find it difficult to exercise independent editorial judgement. The country's only two newspaper printing presses are owned by politicians: one by Banda himself, the other by a UDF cabinet minister.'⁵⁸ The media, especially the state broadcasting corporation, continue to play the same sycophantic role they had played under Banda: the news begins and ends with Muluzi or some important minister: 'Before it was Banda, Banda, Banda—every day. Now it is Muluzi, Muluzi, Muluzi. Every presidential arrival and departure is on the air.'⁵⁹ Melinda Ham and Mike Hall believe that most of Muluzi's overtures to the media are 'superficial', even opportunistic, because 'Banda's legacy is strong. Under his rule, almost every institution was subservient to the ruling party and to him personally. The political culture he created

is deeply entrenched. A whole generation of journalists worked under strict censorship, trade unions existed in name only, lawyers were afraid to take action against the authorities, and those who spoke out against human rights violations were detained, tortured, and murdered.⁶⁰ They contend that it will take a long time, new institutions, mass education, strengthening of civil society and the institutionalisation of democracy to alter the social and political landscape. Muluzi recognises this predicament:

In a country which has been under oppression for 30 years, it will be difficult for this democratization to filter into the villages. Some villagers do not even understand that there has been a change. We have to do a lot of civil education and tell them what their rights are. The constitution must be published in local languages. It will take time for the people to appreciate the change.⁶¹

Simplistic, even patronising and paternalistic populism will not be enough. The UDF will need to attack the structural roots of the Malawian crisis. As Denis Venter has rightly argued:

Alarm bells are already ringing: for most Malawians, the outcome of multi-party politics has fallen woefully short of expectations...riding Malawi of Dr Banda seems to have been the easy part; but now comes the difficult part—to erase the stains of the past, press on towards a new era of social justice, peace and prosperity in the Second Republic and yield the fruits of independence promised but not delivered to a restive electorate that naively believes that the new-found democracy is a magic wand which can produce miracles.⁶²

The state which had been employed in the oppression and brutalisation of the people will need to be reconstructed to serve the people. Clearly, the UDF and the other opposition movements, including the reformed MCP, have opened the way to a new political future in Malawi. However, the really difficult struggle for good governance, accountability, social justice, popular participation, rural development, gender equality, respect for the environment and human rights is only just beginning.

Notes

¹ Melinda Ham & Mike Hall, 'Malawi—from tyranny to tolerance', *Africa Report*, Vol 39, No 6, 1994, p 56.

² Denis Venter, 'Malawi: the transition to multi-party politics', in John Wiseman (ed), *Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, London: Routledge, 1995, p 155.

³ *Ibid*, p 35.

⁴ Venter, 'Malawi', p 155.

⁵ *Ibid*, p 156. Venter notes also that the Malawian state was 'predatory' and it entailed a 'mutually reinforcing political and economic system in which the dominant minority of the political elite and their economic agencies preyed on the populace for their own benefit and at the expense of the absolute welfare of a majority of the population and long-term development goals'.

⁶ Venter, 'Malawi', p 159.

⁷ *Ibid*, pp 160–161.

⁸ Quoted in 'Malawi—Anger builds up', *Africa Research Bulletin*, March 1992, p 10509.

⁹ See Melinda Ham, 'Loosening the reins?', *Africa Report*, Vol. 38, No 1, 1993, pp 29–31.

¹⁰ Quoted in *ibid*.

¹¹ Ham, 'Loosening the reins?'

¹² *Ibid*.

- ¹³ Venter, 'Malawi', p 157.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 159.
- ¹⁵ 'Malawi—democracy poll date', *Africa Research Bulletin*, 1992, p 10818.
- ¹⁶ 'Malawi—new pressure group', *Africa Research Bulletin*, September 1992, p 10719.
- ¹⁷ 'Malawi—anger builds up'.
- ¹⁸ Turnout nationally was a mere 40% and in the main commercial cities it ranged between 10% and 20%. Designed to give the impression that political liberalisation was already in place and to convince donors to resume aid to the country, the referendum failed to convince lenders, donors, and pro-democracy agitators.
- ¹⁹ 'Malawi—the old man and his chickens', *BBC Focus on Africa*, Vol. 4, No 4, 1993.
- ²⁰ Venter, 'Malawi', p 176.
- ²¹ Jan Kees van Donge, 'Kamuzu's legacy: the democratization of Malawi', *African Affairs*, No 94, 1995, p 235.
- ²² 'Malawi—the old man and his Chickens'.
- ²³ The AFORD was not entirely 'MCP free' because Rodwell Munyanyembe, a founding member of AFORD had served as MCP secretary-general and cabinet minister.
- ²⁴ Melinda Ham, 'Malawi—Banda's last waltz', *Africa Report* Vol 38, 3, May–June 1993, p 19. Mlombwa Phiri, the MCP chairman for Dedza actually killed a police commander for not resisting multipartyism. He was condemned to death for his actions.
- ²⁵ Van Donge, 'Kamuzu's legacy', p 235.
- ²⁶ 'Malawi—the old man and his chickens'.
- ²⁷ Van Donge, 'Kamuzu's Legacy', p 246.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p 237.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ Venter, 'Malawi'.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p 176.
- ³² See *BBC Focus on Africa* Vol 4, No 3, 1993, p 61. When Banda was hospitalised for a 'shrunken brain' in South Africa, the leaders of the UDF and AFORD sent messages wishing him well and a speedy recovery. Such moves, well intentioned and good in themselves, also convinced the public that Banda might, after all, not be that bad.
- ³³ Van Donge, 'Kamuzu's legacy', p 264.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ 'Malawi—Banda's days numbered?', *Africa Research Bulletin*, September 1992, p 10720.
- ³⁶ Aside from the 'executive' vice presidency which Chihana demanded for himself, he also wanted seven other ministerial portfolios, including agriculture, justice, works and supplies, a 43% quota of deputy ministers, as well as a quota of parastatal and diplomatic positions. For a party that came a distant third, these were rather ridiculous demands. Chihana knew that the demands were selfish, hence his party insisted that such a deal should not be made public. The UDF demanded that any deal had to be made public and disagreement on this and other issues scuttled possibilities for an initial deal.
- ³⁷ Melinda Ham & Mike Hall, 'Building Democracy' Interview with President Bakili Mulzi, *Africa Report* Vol 39, 6, November–December 1994, p. 61.
- ³⁸ Van Donge, 'Kamuzu's legacy', pp 249–250.
- ³⁹ Venter, 'Malawi', p 179.
- ⁴⁰ Following a major cabinet reshuffle in mid-1996, Muluzi dismissed Chihana from his cabinet. The new cabinet did not include a second vice president. Though Chihana announced that he had resigned from the cabinet and government, his political credibility had been eroded. This will certainly have some effect on his party's political fortunes.
- ⁴¹ It is possible that, by forging an alliance with the MCP, the UDF became thoroughly marginalised in parliament. This certainly prompted Muluzi into making far-reaching concessions to AFORD to lure it away from an alliance with the MCP, to the extent of creating an unconstitutional position of second vice-president. Yet, if that was the AFORD strategy, the cost was too heavy for the pro-democracy front. Whatever the end result, it demonstrated crass opportunism and emphasised raw power at the expense of deepening the democratic struggle. At the end of the day, neither the UDF nor MCP will have any respect for Chihana and the AFORD.
- ⁴² 'Malawi—coalition government', *Africa Research Bulletin*, August 1995, p 11943.
- ⁴³ Van Donge, 'Kamuzu's legacy', p 243.
- ⁴⁴ 'Malawi—democratic pain', *Africa Confidential*, Vol 36, No 2, June 1995, p 6.
- ⁴⁵ 'Malawi—Banda pleads "Not Guilty"', *Africa Research Bulletin*, July 1995, p 11923.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ See 'Malawi—army commander killed', *Africa Research Bulletin*, April 1995, p 11829. The murder forced President Muluzi to postpone his scheduled trip to Kuwait. In late April, Lieutenant-General Owen Muluni was promoted to the rank of general and made commander of the army.

- ⁵⁰ 'Malawi—crime wave', *Africa Research Bulletin*, May 1995, p 11859.
⁵¹ 'Malawi—bad memories', *Africa Confidential Record*, Vol 36, No 25, December 1995, p 4.
⁵² Reported in *ibid*.
⁵³ *Ibid*.
⁵⁴ *Ibid*.
⁵⁵ Ham & Hall, 'Building democracy', p 60.
⁵⁶ *Ibid*.
⁵⁷ Andrew Meldrum, 'Malawi—new actors, same play', *Africa Report*, Vol 39, No 4, 1994, p 53.
⁵⁸ Ham & Hall, 'Malawi: from tyranny to tolerance', p 57.
⁵⁹ Kalera Mhango, editor of *New Voice*, quoted in *ibid*.
⁶⁰ Ham & Hall, 'Malawi: from tyranny to tolerance', p 57.
⁶¹ Ham & Hall, 'Building democracy', p 60.
⁶² Venter, 'Malawi', pp 180, 183.

Religion State & Society

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Religion, State & Society is a unique source of information and analysis for individuals and institutions involved in a wide variety of ways with communist and formerly communist countries. It is still the only English-language academic publication devoted to issues of church, state and society in these countries. Responding to the new situation in Russia and Eastern Europe, the journal explores its conviction that the experiences of religious communities in their encounter with communism will be central to the evolution of the new Europe and of the Western world in general in the next century. Tackling social, cultural, ethnic, political and ecclesiological problems is in future going to be a cooperative effort, in a way hitherto impossible, involving the religious communities of both East and West. Religious communities in Western Europe, the USA, Australasia and Latin America will have much to learn from the way in which their counterparts in the East have tackled such problems in the past, and vice versa

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