

MICHAEL HOLMAN

TOWARDS THE LIGHT

WE HAVE TOMORROW: STIRRINGS IN AFRICA 1959–1967

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By Peter Mackay

(Michael Russell Publishing 356pp £20)

IT IS HARD not to feel an ache of sadness for what might have been in central Africa as one reads this remarkable and moving memoir of a life bravely lived in pursuit of values universally held. How ironic that the author, now in his eighties, should be ending his days in Zimbabwe, a failing state led by a man whose name is today synonymous with tyranny, yet whose original noble cause Peter Mackay vigorously promoted.

Much of the period covered in *We Have Tomorrow* seemed pivotal at the time. In South Africa, apartheid was tightening its grip; to the north, the rumble of independence was drawing closer, and colonial rule was coming to an untidy, sometimes violent end. Could the Federation of Southern and Northern Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe and Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi), created in 1953, offer a non-racist alternative to the horror of what was happening in the south and the uncertainties of majority rule?

The hope proved no more than wishful thinking. Ten years later the Federation broke up, not least because of African opposition to the concept of white minority partnership, which was seen as a European rider on a black horse. On 11 November 1965, the Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith hammered the nails into the Federal coffin when he unilaterally and illegally declared the colony independent from Britain. This also marked the end of the dreams and hopes of a remarkable group of men and women, for whom the lure of this beautiful trio of countries had been irresistible and inspirational.

Most had come from Europe. Their ideologies were mixed. Some were socialist, some were revolutionaries, one or two were paternalists. They numbered no more than a handful out of the scores of thousands who left war-exhausted Britain for an easy life in the colonies, but who tried hard and risked much to turn their vision of a decent society in the heart of Africa into reality.

These immigrants included the radical Italian economist Giovanni Arrighi, one of a group of lecturers at the

country's new multiracial university, among whom were also numbered John Reed, one of the outstanding Chaucer scholars of his generation, and the South African John Conradie, who was to spend thirteen years in a



Yatuta Chisiza with Mugabe, 1962

Rhodesian jail for his part in a plot to arm nationalist guerrillas; Margaret Barnes, editor of the *Gwelo Times*, and Eileen Haddon, editor of the *Central African Examiner* and the magazine *Dissent*; the liberal MP, Maureen Watson; the courageous Oxford-educated lawyer Hardwicke Holderness; and British army officers turned political dreamers, of whom the best known was Colonel David Stirling, founder of the Capricorn Africa Society with its non-racial philosophy.

Looking back one wonders whether their hopes had already been doomed by the country's first influx of white settlers in the 1890s, who arrived with very different motives: to make their fortunes. The fate of the region was determined by the expropriation of the country's best farm land, creating a legacy that remains at the heart of Zimbabwe's politics today.

Mackay himself emerges as a man of exquisite decency, a character from the pages of *The Boy's Own Paper*, with adventures to match. He was born into an upper-middle-class family; his grandfather was a minister of the United Free Church, and his father a major in the Gurkha Rifles. He was educated at Stowe, where he was – inevitably – head boy. After leaving Stowe, he joined the army, where he became the youngest captain in the Brigade of Guards.

All this we learn from an introduction by Professor Terence Ranger, the distinguished Africanist who was among the band of academics. Mackay's account begins with him arriving in Rhodesia, initially intending to farm but ending up as editor of an agricultural journal. A meeting with David Stirling proved seminal. It marked the start of a lifetime of resistance to white rule and to authoritarianism in all its forms, of having fun and being

subversive in all three Federal territories, forging friendships with all the leading African nationalists.

Mackay's very British qualities shine through. When officers from the Rhodesian Special Branch search his home in the Salisbury suburb of Avondale, he notes that 'a more agreeable aspect of the intrusion' was to 'offer tea to the searcher – and have it accepted'. Or this dry line

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