

rhodesian history

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RHODESIAN HISTORY

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WHITE WORKING-CLASS DISUNITY: THE SOUTHERN RHODESIA LABOUR PARTY*

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IN THE LITERATURE currently available on the Southern Rhodesia Labour Party (S.R.L.P.) and cognate trades and political organisations operating during the Second World War, the theme of white working-class disunity has received less scrutiny than the more spectacular theme of conflicting attitudes towards race, as epitomised in the controversy surrounding the African Branch of the S.R.L.P.¹ Whilst that issue was the overt and immediate cause of the disintegration of the party before the 1946 general election, it also served as a convenient pretext for fission, thereby obscuring a long history of rancour and discord due to personality differences, party organisation and policy considerations, which was of equal significance. Doris Lessing deftly summarised the motives underlying the manipulation of the African Branch as a politically emotive issue in her partisan but perceptive interpretation of H. H. Davies's² behaviour at the abortive reunion conference at Gwelo in 1945: 'The issue that was fought out on the surface was the question of the colour bar. This was exactly as Mr. Davies had intended, because whenever racial questions are discussed reason flies out of the window, and people become unbalanced.'³

From its inception at the Labour fusion congress of January 1944 to its virtual demise in the election of April 1946, the S.R.L.P. was subject to continual assaults from within as well as from without; for by its very origin, the S.R.L.P. was heir to a long tradition of bitter rivalries. At the beginning of the War, H. H. Davies and Jack Keller,⁴ two foundation

* This article is based on a lecture delivered to the Central Africa Historical Association Conference held in August 1970.

¹ The main documentary source is the group of papers deposited by the Southern Rhodesia Labour Party and collected together as 'Correspondence and Other Papers' [SR9 1] in the Historical Manuscripts Collection of the National Archives of Rhodesia; many of these papers in fact are of the original Rhodesia Labour Party to which the S.R.L.P. was heir. The principal secondary sources are C. Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, in which the account is marred by certain factual inaccuracies; I. Henderson and P. R. Warhurst, *Revisions in Central African History*, Salisbury, Central Africa Historical Association, 1965, Local Series No. 15, in which Labour's failure in two post-war elections is discussed; *The Labour Front*, a monthly published by the S.R.L.P.; *The Labour Era*, an infrequent publication of 'The Labour Party' (later, the revived Rhodesia Labour Party); D. Lessing, *A Ripple from the Storm*, London, M. Joseph, 1958, in which there is an account of the fortunes of the S.R.L.P.

² Harry Herbert Davies (1878-1957); b. Wales; arrived in Southern Rhodesia in 1920 and became an estate agent in Bulawayo; represented various Bulawayo constituencies, 1928-48; Minister of Internal Affairs 1939-43.

³ SR9 1/4/3 [Policy: Jan. 1938 - Dec. 1947, General: Feb. 1944 - Dec. 1947], Doris Lessing to *The Rhodesia Herald*, 15.xii.1945 (not sent).

⁴ Laurence Walter Keller (1885-1959); b. London; Organising Secretary, Rhodesia Railway Workers Union 1920-45; represented (Bulawayo) Raylton, 1928-58; Minister without Portfolio 1940-43.

members of the original Rhodesia Labour Party (R.L.P.) who both represented Bulawayo constituencies in the Legislative Assembly had accepted Huggins's offer to join the Government; but they had done this without reference to their National Executive Committee and their action was approved only after considerable misgiving. Then, following the precedent set by Winston Churchill a month earlier, Huggins in June 1940 invited Labour as a whole to participate in a National Government, but amended the details of his offer during the negotiations and insisted upon a common parliamentary caucus. When a special R.L.P. Congress rejected the proposals, Davies, Keller and a third Member, Thomas Kimble, resigned from the R.L.P. and set up a new party under the somewhat exclusive title, 'The Labour Party', which accepted the Prime Minister's terms.⁵ Keller justified his action: 'I have only done what has been done by greater leaders than myself who are situated in the Old Country.'⁶ Not unreasonably, the R.L.P. pointed out that its pledge to help the war effort and to offer constructive criticism conceded the substance of Huggins's call for national unity; whereas in view of the Government's large majority, a National Government might prove as fatal to the R.L.P. as the British precedent had to Ramsay Macdonald's followers, or might lead to 'constant irritation and disagreement' in the councils of state.⁷ Rational arguments, however, were overshadowed by the personal animosity that permanently soured relations between the two Labour factions. Acceptance of office by Davies as Minister of Internal Affairs and Keller as Minister Without Portfolio evoked charges against them of political opportunism and the betrayal of socialist principles; Keller, in particular, was often goaded into making intemperate outbursts in the House matched in their virulence only by the occasional display of childishness emanating from one or two of the more outspoken R.L.P. Members.

This factionalism also mirrored the traditional rivalry between Bulawayo and Salisbury. Bulawayo, the trade-union centre, and the Midlands were the stronghold of Davies, whilst the more cosmopolitan administrative centre of Salisbury and its ally, Umtali, remained loyal to the R.L.P. Thus 'The Labour Party' based on Bulawayo and the trade-unions maintained the exclusive white socialist policy of the pre-war R.L.P., as summarised in its *Statement of Policy*: 'In the white areas . . . the native will be confined largely to the performance of the unskilled work.'⁸ Its essentially pragmatic outlook was directed more towards immediate problems confronting the white artisan, such as social security and the preservation of 'civilised' standards

⁵ For a detailed account of this complicated episode, see SR9 1/1/1 [Branch: Aug. 1938 - Nov. 1947, General: Aug. 1938 - Sept. 1942], Mrs. G. Maasdorp to J. D. Collins, 24.vi.1940; her comment that, 'Mr. Davies committed the Party to more than he should' in his negotiations with Huggins suggests that the Labour split was due to a basic misunderstanding. The interpretation of 'The Labour Party' differs in certain particulars, and is outlined in *The Labour Era*, 27.x.1945; see also *Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly Debates*, 20, c.2144, 19.ii.1941.

⁶ *Debates*, 20, c.1322, 13.viii.1940.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 23, c.1117, J. B. Lister (R.L.P. Member for Umtali South), 26.v.1943.

⁸ *Statement of Policy* . . . , Salisbury, for Rhodesia Labour Party, [1938] p.7; a copy is in SR9 1/4/1, Policy: Jan. 1938 - Dec. 1947, General: June 1938 - Nov. 1943.

in the face of mounting African economic competition, than towards the more theoretical implications of socialist philosophy.

In contrast, the R.L.P. now dominated by the 'Salisbury wing', as Leys calls it,⁹ had embarked upon a critical re-examination of its former assumptions, impelled by anti-fascist propaganda.¹⁰ Although orientated towards contemporary events in Europe at first, discussions inevitably turned to the application of socialist principles to the Southern Rhodesian racial situation; and a spate of resignations occasioned by personality clashes removed most of the conservative elements from the 'Salisbury wing' during 1942. Thus by the end of the War, the 'radicals' had formulated a policy approximate to that of an orthodox Western social democratic party, which attempted to reconcile ideology with the intractable reality of a rigidly-stratified society.

On 20 February 1942 the Huggins Ministry easily survived a Motion of No Confidence with the assistance of Davies's Labour Party group, but at the cost of the secession of four Government Members, two of whom, E. P. Vernall and F. D. Thompson, at length joined the R.L.P.¹¹ Thus by April 1943 the two Labour parties had ten Members in a House of thirty; and together with 'cross-bench' Members, they constituted a potentially serious, though as yet fragmented challenge to the disintegrating United Party. The initiative for Labour reunification nevertheless emerged from an extra-parliamentary source.

Branches of the R.L.P. began appealing to the Executive to take action, and then the Trades and Labour Council, spokesman for the majority of the Colony's trade unions, invited the R.L.P. Executive to participate in the National Rhodesia Labour Collaboration Committee, an *ad hoc* body on which the Trades and Labour Council was to have a majority of seats.¹² The R.L.P. decided to participate in these unity discussions in the growing hope of office after the War, in view of the trend to the left in Western politics. Then in the midst of these talks, Davies and Keller were expelled from the Cabinet on 12 October 1943 after attending a separate caucus of their party in defiance of the terms under which the National Government had been established. Whereupon the Labour Party's four Members crossed the floor to the Opposition Benches, and the path was now clear for Labour unity.

Agreement in principle was reached before the end of 1943, and the inaugural Congress of the new Southern Rhodesia Labour Party held on 9

⁹ Leys, p.185.

¹⁰ From as early as 1938 a Current Affairs Group, a characteristically middle-class informal association of R.L.P. intellectuals and certain outsiders, had studied Left Book Club publications; information from Mr. R. Isaacson, interview 21.ix.1970.

¹¹ *Debates*, 21, c.3555, 20.ii.1942. Leys, p. 186, incorrectly gives 1943 instead of 1942, as the date for Vernall's joining the R.L.P., and makes no mention of Thompson. Their 'crossing the floor' was due more to personal differences with Huggins than to ideological or socialist beliefs.

¹² Mrs. Maasdorp, the party's General Secretary, commented in a letter to the British Labour Party: 'Now we are hoping, on the insistence of the Trade Union movement, to achieve union at an early date, and to associate the industrial with the political section', SR9 1/5/2 [Miscellaneous, General: Dec. 1943 - March 1947], 28.x.1943.

January 1944. The party was entirely 'political' in organisation, as the Trades and Labour Council had sought no direct representation on its Executive — a decision it regretted later. The draft S.R.L.P. constitution was ratified at a later Congress. Membership was to be open to all those over the age of eighteen, irrespective of race, and the principal policy sub-clause quoted that of the 1918 British Labour Party constitution, with slight emendation:

To secure for all people by constitutional means the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of public administration and control of each industry and service.¹³

The specific goals established for a post-war socialist government were defined in another document, the *Short Term Policy*, a moderate programme modifying and limiting the doctrinaire aims of this sub-clause of the constitution, and drawing inspiration from the not dissimilar British Labour Party blueprint. It prescribed such objectives as a State Bank, the nationalisation of transport, free and compulsory education for all races, a national housing scheme and a comprehensive system of social security. James Lister, S.R.L.P. Member for Umtali South, captured its Utilitarian spirit in his assertion that 'the number of happy homes contained within its borders' was the only true criterion of a nation's greatness.¹⁴ Only one sub-section of a programme for Africans, which affirmed African workers' right to organise, can be deemed radical. Others have a familiar ring: 'Fresh avenues of employment will be opened up for Africans in the service of their own people'; education was to have 'emphasis on teaching and training that will best fit him to become a responsible and self-respecting citizen'. Nevertheless, the general emphasis placed upon the need to stimulate black economic and political advance in white areas was a new departure from traditional Labour policy.¹⁵

A real problem facing the new party, was the severe difficulty of organisation at the 'grass roots' level, because of vast distances and far-flung membership. District branches tended to become moribund between elections, and exigencies of war such as petrol-rationing aggravated this propensity. Labour suffered from a further disadvantage in that 'working-class' branch officials and delegates lacked the comparative freedom of their employers and other self-employed persons such as farmers to absent themselves from work and attend national meetings.

The R.L.P.'s solution to these problems before the War had been the creation by its Honorary Organiser, Col. Walker, of a highly-centralised

¹³ SR9 1/2/2 [Congress: June 1928 - March 1947, General: May 1944 - March 1947], 'Minutes of the Annual Congress . . . held . . . 23-24.ix.1944'. The relationship of these two-clauses was the subject of an editorial in *New Rhodesia*, 23.xi.1945.

¹⁴ *Southern Rhodesia Labour Party. Short Term Policy*, Salisbury, for A. A. Draper 1946; *Debates*, 25, c.2016, 27.vi.1945.

¹⁵ *Short Term Policy*, section 9, 'Native Policy'; this was drafted by Macintyre.

though broadly-based machine to govern the affairs of the party between annual congresses and to co-ordinate its activities. This body, the National Executive Committee, was now incorporated into the 1944 constitution of the S.R.L.P. and renamed the National Executive Council (N.E.C.). Its central role in the organisation and history of the S.R.L.P. has been overlooked by previous commentators, who have focused their attention on personalities and policies to the exclusion of institutions. The N.E.C., situated in Salisbury, comprised ten officials (its R.L.P. predecessor had had fifteen), all the Members of Parliament, and one representative for each Branch. As meetings were held usually at monthly intervals, it was not feasible for the representatives from outlying branches to attend, and so such branches were able to be represented by proxy.¹⁶ These proxies were nominated by the N.E.C. on behalf of the branches concerned, subject to their subsequent approval, from members living in and around the capital. Likewise, as a matter of administrative convenience, Congress drew on this pool of Salisbury members to select most of the ten N.E.C. officials.

Thus, although Congress was in theory the sole determiner of policy, the N.E.C. had ample initiative in this sphere; it not only directed day-to-day administration but also established the principal guide-lines for the formulation of policy. Congress accordingly became an approbatory, rather than an innovating body; and in effect the affairs of the S.R.L.P., as of its predecessor, the R.L.P., were conducted by a powerful standing committee, over which the liberal 'Salisbury wing' exerted an influence out of all proportion to its numbers.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the N.E.C.'s centralised machinery and the proxy system enabled party officials to maintain close liaison with branches, permitting a hitherto unparalleled degree of democracy in day-to-day decision-making, without the sacrifice of administrative efficiency. Draper's¹⁸ justifiable assertion that the S.R.L.P. was the first Rhodesian political party to sustain a permanent structure of functioning branches is corroborated by the large

¹⁶ SR9 1/2/2, S.R.L.P. Constitution, section 6.

¹⁷ An illustration of the undemocratic consequences of this distribution of power is the special R.L.P. congress of August 1940 that had rejected Davies's resolution to accept Huggins's coalition offer. A majority of branches (directly represented at annual congress) voted in favour of the resolution, but the ballots of N.E.C. officials, most of the Members of the Legislative Assembly and three proxies voting in defiance of their branches' wishes reversed this to a final tally of 24 to 15, SR9 1/2/1, Congress: June 1928 - March 1947, General: June 1928 - Aug. 1940, Minutes of Special Congress 18.viii.1940. Reasons of distance necessitated a dual representation of branches at Congress, directly by elected delegates and indirectly by their N.E.C. alternates, both of which groups had full voting powers. This right of the N.E.C. to vote at Congress became a grievance of the Davies faction, *The Labour Era*, 27.x.1945. Thus after the final Labour split of January 1946, the revived Rhodesia Labour Party restricted such prerogatives to 'duly appointed delegates' specifically excluding members of the Executive and of the Legislative Assembly from voting at Congress 'unless selected by a branch as a delegate', *ibid.*, January 1946.

¹⁸ Alexander Aitkin Draper (1892-1967); b. Scotland; arrived in Rhodesia in 1912 and became a farmer in Bromley and later an estate agent in Salisbury; President of S.R.L.P. 1945-48.

number of branches and paid-up members active during a time of national and world crisis.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the weaknesses of the new party were not slow to appear: indeed, they were explicit in its making. At the inaugural Congress, 'The Labour Party' delegates were outnumbered four to one, a circumstance indubitably responsible for Keller's impulsive walk-out and his later allegation that it had not been 'truly representative'.²⁰ This was the harbinger of further contention. Accustomed to the more easy-going methods of 'The Labour Party', the Davies faction was exasperated by the insistence of the N.E.C. upon proper office procedure in administration. Its delay in registering Davies's own branch, Hillside (Bulawayo), on the legitimate ground that the twelve required membership forms had not arrived at headquarters, was interpreted as a personal affront,²¹ particularly as the N.E.C. had registered the African Headquarters branch without hesitation.

Mrs. Maasdorp, the General Secretary, Col. Walker, the Hon. Organiser, and Macintyre, the Parliamentary Leader, were the principal targets of this animosity. As an assistant to Walker, Mrs. Maasdorp²² had been instrumental in transforming the pre-war R.L.P. from an amateurish political group into an efficient and professional party. Her zeal, dedication and burning sincerity, her long record of community service for all races, and her essential humanitarianism flavoured with a dash of moderate socialism had exerted a notable formative influence over the political philosophy of the 'Salisbury wing'. Before reunion, Walker and Maasdorp had been assailed by certain elements in the R.L.P. who sought their resignation, and at no stage could their relations with 'The Labour Party' group be regarded as cordial. But the venom of this group was especially reserved for Macintyre,²³ a trade-unionist turned businessman, whom they despised as a typical working-class *arriviste*. The R.L.P. majority on the joint Labour caucus established immediately after the departure of 'The Labour Party' Members from the Huggins coalition had ensured that Macintyre as leader of R.L.P. Members should retain that position in the still provisional S.R.L.P.. This choice was to have fateful consequences. Within a week, Davies and his colleagues deserted their new allies because of the leadership controversy and voted for

¹⁹ SR9 1/2/2, statement made at the Annual Congress, 16.ix.1945. Twenty-five branches were registered after the first Congress, and 822 paid-up members were on the books in January 1945. The largest branches were located in Davies's strongholds like Selukwe, Shabani and Raylton. By the 1946 election, the membership had been whittled down to approximately 300.

²⁰ SR9 1/5/12 Miscellaneous, Summary of Events: March 1945 - March 1946, Chronological Statement of Events, 11.i.1944.

²¹ See correspondence between Mrs. Maasdorp and A. J. Davies, Hillside Branch Secretary, SR9 1/1/4 [Branch: Aug. 1938 - Nov. 1947, General: Nov. 1943 - June 1947].

²² Gladys G. F. Maasdorp (1886-1960); b. Cape; arrived in Southern Rhodesia in 1920; a physical training teacher; active in many community service organisations, including the Federation of Native Welfare Societies; Mayor of Salisbury 1942-43; Hon. Secretary of the R.L.P. and later of the S.R.L.P., 1938-44.

²³ Donald Macintyre, b. 1891 in Glasgow; active trade-unionist in South Africa and later became a business-man in Bulawayo; Mayor of Bulawayo several times; represented various Bulawayo constituencies 1938-53; Minister of Finance in Federal Government 1953-62; knighted 1961.

the Government in a Motion of Confidence on 20 October 1943. Conceivably the crisis might have been avoided had both Davies and Macintyre stood aside for an uncommitted third candidate. Several branches had urged this, and continued to do so; but the fate of Walker, in a similar position as leader of the revived R.L.P. in 1946 indicates that the issues dividing the Labour movement transcended personalities.

A Bulawayo North branch meeting held in August 1944 served as a battleground in the most literal sense for the many abrasive personalities in the S.R.L.P. At an earlier meeting held to elect delegates for a forthcoming congress, the Chairman, a supporter of Davies, unconstitutionally ruled that only those members who had joined the party more than three months beforehand were entitled to vote, and refused to reverse his ruling later when the N.E.C. drew attention to his error. The Branch Secretary, H. H. Davies Jnr., neglected to destroy the ballots after the meeting, and on impulse the next day checked the return against actual votes cast. He admitted to a subsequent party enquiry²⁴ that his action had been motivated by surprise that a meeting attended largely by former supporters of 'The Labour Party' had nevertheless elected half the delegates from the Macintyre ex-R.L.P. faction — an incredulity that reflected unfavourably upon the genuineness of Labour reunification. Claiming that the scrutineers had made an error, and that the ballots showed all four Labour Party candidates had been returned, the Secretary requested an emergency meeting.

Further irregularities took place at this next meeting on 14 August. The Chairman asked all those present to come forward and identify their papers, thus destroying the secrecy of the ballot, and declined to hold fresh elections even when it was discovered non-members had voted. The ex-R.L.P. members, led by Macintyre, criticised his conduct, and succeeded in passing a vote of no-confidence in the Chair amidst taunts and threats of physical violence. The Chairman ignored the vote, at length declared the meeting closed and on his way out struck Macintyre who promptly retaliated.²⁵ After the meeting, an anonymous circular received wide circulation in Bulawayo, alleging that:

Mr. MacIntyre [sic] and his Party faked the count of the ballot so that their particular candidates should be elected. Unfortunately for the plotters this fact was discovered and a recount was called for. It should be obvious to all Labour supporters that we can never have a United Party until Mr. MacIntyre and his gang are ejected from the Party.²⁶

As it turned out, however, it was the Davies-Keller group that left the party, within a month, ostensibly over the question of the African Headquarters Branch.

²⁴ The 'Lazarus Enquiry' appointed by Congress in September 1944 to investigate the affairs of the Bulawayo North Branch. The Chairman, a Bulawayo attorney, was not a party member. Relevant papers are in SR9 1/5/2.

²⁵ Leys, p.185 appears to confuse Davies jnr. with his father in this episode; Davies snr. in fact acted as a restraining influence and prevented a general brawl.

²⁶ SR9 1/5/2, Exhibit A for the Lazarus Enquiry. The authorship is unknown and the Davies faction denied any knowledge of it.

Originally the first initiative to bring educated Africans into closer contact with party politics seems to have come from certain groups in the pre-war R.L.P., curious about Charles Mzingeli's past activities in the then defunct Independent Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Rhodesia.²⁷ Prior to the general election of April 1939, Mzingeli received circular letters from both the United Party and the Rhodesia Party, inviting him personally to apply for membership. But after discussion with its organiser, he and R. Mfazi, another I.C.U. man, decided to join the R.L.P.. Mzingeli has consistently maintained that George Walker raised the matter first, an opinion borne out by manuscript sources.²⁸ Indeed, Labour's traditional attitude to the black worker caused Mzingeli some initial misgiving, and his final decision was rather an act of faith in the Labour involvement as a whole, 'wherein the ideals of true democracy, irrespective of race and colour, would be a fundamental and guiding principle.'²⁹

An informal group of African members, resident in Harare, was accordingly established in 1939; after a probationary period of two years, their application for branch registration was approved by the N.E.C. in September 1941, on condition that literacy was to be a prerequisite for membership, and that the Branch, termed the 'African H.Q. Branch', should serve all Africans in the territory. Limited by this first condition, the Branch grew slowly; in July 1942 there were eighteen paid-up members, and only thirty-one early in 1944, seven of whom were voters.³⁰ The relatively high entrance qualification restricted membership to educated Africans, who sought such élitist goals as the relaxation of the Pass and Liquor laws for enfranchised African voters, and the right of skilled Africans to become 'employees' under the terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act.

The Branch was beset with petty rivalries and jealousies; Mzingeli and his allies did not hesitate to purge their more vociferous opponents, and these in turn lost no opportunity to criticise and condemn Mzingeli's conduct of Branch affairs. On several occasions, the N.E.C. was requested to adjudicate disputes between Branch members: 'The general lack of education is a vast handicap and tends to place power in the hands of a few who may not be the best leaders and who are themselves very vulnerable because of the mistakes they make'.³¹ In retrospect, the S.R.L.P. Propaganda Committee's later assertion that the Branch had been 'conducted during the whole period

²⁷ For the early history of the I.C.U., see T. O. Ranger, *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia 1898-1930*, London, Heinemann, 1970, ch. 7, 8. The I.C.U. became defunct about 1937 but was to be revived in 1946 as the Reformed I.C.U.

²⁸ University of Rhodesia, History Department Tape-Recordings, Interview with Mr. L. C. Mzingeli of Harare, Salisbury, 15.ix.1970; I have greatly benefited from this discussion. SR9 1/1/1, Maasdorp to Mzingeli, 27.x.1938.

²⁹ [Rhodes House, Oxford] [Fabian] C[olonial] B[ureau Papers], LXV, Rhodesia (Southern), Political and Constitutional, Mzingeli: 'A Brief History of the African Branch', Sept. 1944.

³⁰ SR9 1/1/6 [Branch: Aug. 1938 - Nov. 1947, African Headquarters: Nov. 1943 - Nov. 1947], 'List of African Voters, 1/10/42-31/12/43'; Application for registration, 22.i.1944.

³¹ F.C.B., LXXI, Southern Rhodesia Correspondence, 1939-47, Maasdorp to R. Hinden, 23.x.1946.

of its existence in an exemplary and orderly manner'³² seems merely fatuous, although stranger still is the failure of its enemies to have exploited this extravagant claim, attributable perhaps to general ignorance and indifference concerning the Branch, save as an emotive issue to stir up the party rank and file.

Although the 1941 Congress ratified its registration, there had been abundant signs of half-heartedness manifest in some quarters about bringing the Branch into party politics. Mrs. Maasdorp put the case for African participation to a reluctant Macintyre: 'Surely it is better for them to be guided and led that [sic] to be open to undesirable influences?''³³ This somewhat ambivalent argument, playing on the Rhodesian socialists' fear of Bolshevism while appealing to his paternalist, better inclinations, eventually carried the day. The N.E.C. purposed the Branch's role to be that of an advisory body for the party leadership on subjects pertaining to the general welfare of the black population, and a channel for the expression of African opinion. Had the *raison d'être* for its existence remained within these narrow functional limits, it is unlikely that much trouble would have arisen. But few at the time foresaw the wider consequences of African involvement in white men's politics: the implication of direct black representation at Congress and on the N.E.C., and the prospect that Africans might constitute a majority in the party in the not too remote future; and when the new S.R.L.P. had to face this prospect three years later, the reaction to all this was sharp and irrational.

Party officials later maintained that the initial registration had inspired no adverse comment. This statement was incorrect,³⁴ but such disapprobation as was expressed paled to insignificance in comparison with the furore succeeding the Harare Hall meeting of 12-13 February, 1944. This fateful gathering of fifty Africans and thirteen Europeans and Coloureds, comprising the annual general meeting of the African H.Q. Branch, would have received little attention from the public had not Mzingeli pressed the N.E.C. to accept the offer of *The Rhodesia Herald* to 'cover' it in their columns. The N.E.C., dubious of the objectivity of the 'capitalist' press pointed out that this would be contrary to normal procedure governing branch meetings, but relented to the extent of agreeing that a report could be submitted afterwards to the newspaper, provided all speakers' names were suppressed. This maladroit compromise created an unfortunate and unnecessary atmosphere of devious secrecy; a few mornings later, the general public was alarmed to read that an unnamed white speaker at a 'Native Branch . . . Conference' had promised a multi-racial audience that, 'If the Africans organised themselves and showed themselves to be in earnest, the Government would have

³² SR9 1/4/3, Propaganda Committee Statement, n.d. [1946?].

³³ SR9 1/1/1, 21.x.1941.

³⁴ See for example F.C.B., LXV, 'Short History of the R.L.P./S.R.L.P. by A. Draper, n.d. [February 1946?]; this appears to have been based on the chronological account in SR9 1/5/12. But see S. Blount's letter protesting against the registration, *The Rhodesia Herald*, 19.ix.1941; SR9 1/5/2, S.R.L.P. press statement.

to alter the clause of the Industrial Conciliation Act defining an "employee", which at present meant a European employee'.³⁵ The unintended mystery engendered wild and unfounded rumours of 'aliens behind the scenes', stirring up trouble amongst Africans while young Rhodesians served their country overseas.³⁶

Notwithstanding all this agitation, the African H.Q. Branch was re-registered with the new S.R.L.P. on 2 March 1944. The controversy caused by the Harare Hall meeting may have distracted attention from this step, which went unremarked at the time; it may also explain why those opposed to it later maintained that the registration had been a backstairs affair. *The Rhodesia Herald* joined the attack, remarking that, 'It has still to be explained why so much secrecy should have surrounded the formation of that Branch.'³⁷ However, the storm did not break within party ranks until 24 March and bears the hallmark of a crisis specially manufactured for the occasion. On that day, Thomas Kimble, S.R.L.P. Member for Gatooma, publicly announced without prior intimation to the N.E.C. his intention to resign over the issue of African participation in party politics. A proposal that Kimble should be summarily deprived of membership for so criticising the party³⁸ was forestalled by his letter of resignation, accepted with alacrity despite Davies's protests.

Kimble's departure was the first crack in the façade of Labour's new-found unity. The Gatooma branch rallied to his defence, condemning the African branch registration as a mere 'vote-catching stunt'.³⁹ The N.E.C. was accused of authoritarian behaviour, although in this context it is relevant to quote the judgement of early Communist Party discipline that 'severe punishment is not necessarily indicative of effective control'.⁴⁰ Over the next six months the African Branch controversy simmered, branch secretaries repeatedly warning headquarters that the party was being steadily eroded away. Publicly, the N.E.C. temporised over the issue, stating that it was 'a question of policy which can only be changed by Congress'.⁴¹ In private, it capitulated to Davies's request that the registration should be reconsidered, and after extracting a promise from all parties to abide by a legal opinion, approached L. M. N. Hodson for this purpose in April 1944. Hodson discounted Davies's argument that the registration had been unconstitutional, but remarked that Congress appeared to have the right to rescind it, thus opening the door for future assaults.⁴² The reservation may account for the

³⁵ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 18.ii.1944; cf. Doris Lessing's draft notes of the meeting which do not contain the important phrase 'have to' of the newspaper version, SR9 1/1/6.

³⁶ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 25.ii.1944, letter from 'Rhodesian'.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.iii.1944.

³⁸ Section 3(4) of the 1944 Constitution stated that, 'no member shall adversely criticise the Policy of the Party except within the Councils of the Party.' After Kimble's departure, this provision was made more stringent.

³⁹ SR9 1/1/4, W. P. Cape (Ag. Hon. Sec., Gatooma Branch) to [Maasdorp?], 25.iii.1944.

⁴⁰ H. Pelling, *The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile*, London, Black, 1958, p.19.

⁴¹ *The Labour Front*, April 1944, p.3.

⁴² SR9 1/5/2, 'Ex parte S.R.L.P.', delivered 3.v.1944.

N.E.C.'s failure to employ Hodson's opinion in later propaganda, and the imputation that the African Branch had been foisted on the party by under-hand means gained wider currency.

On 22 September 1944, Davies and Keller resigned from the party twenty-four hours before Congress was due to assemble; once again, the N.E.C. received no prior warning, and the rebels gave the widest publicity to their defection. Davies and Keller thereupon revived 'The Labour Party' in order 'to regain the respect in which Labour was previously held'.⁴³ The new party excluded Africans from membership, and Davies revived Labour's pre-war African policy: opposition to the permanent urbanisation of Africans in white areas⁴⁴ and further safeguards for white artisans against competition from cheap labour. The dissentients took with them a third Member of the Legislative Assembly, two entire branches and the best part of two others — all four the largest in the party. By February 1945, overall membership of the S.R.L.P. had dropped by a third, and with the exception of Macintyre's all branches in Bulawayo and the Midlands had become moribund.

The proceedings of the S.R.L.P. Congress at Salisbury on 23-24 September, however, indicate that in spite of the departure of 'The Labour Party' grouping, there were still many opponents of the African Branch remaining in the S.R.L.P. Five resolutions were put, ranging from outright disaffiliation (Bindura) to one reducing the status of African delegates to that of observers (Bulawayo Central). A supplementary resolution, presented by Riversdale (Enkeldoorn) and proposing 'Social security for both races in their own areas' was a bizarre hybrid of segregationist and socialist philosophy. Four of these resolutions were rejected, and the fifth the N.E.C. amended to limit the number of African branches to one, a step taken to allay disquiet that the 'Salisbury wing' intended to swamp the party with black members. Congress approved this alteration by 28 to 11, and it was appended to the Constitution.⁴⁵

The African Branch itself was not content to remain a passive spectator in the debate over its future. Mzingeli supported the N.E.C. 'one branch' amendment, perhaps motivated by the consideration that his position as an established and recognised African leader might be jeopardised if other African branches were set up. His squabble with W. D. Ntuli, who advocated an autonomous Bulawayo branch,⁴⁶ may be plausibly explained along these lines; on the other hand, his counter-argument that such action 'might lead to trouble and might be exploited by unscrupulous individuals'⁴⁷ suggests that Mzingeli was not only aware of the party's predicament but also anxious lest another African branch, operating in an area remote from N.E.C. sur-

⁴³ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 22.ix.1944.

⁴⁴ *Debates*, 24, c.2691, 28.xi.1944.

⁴⁵ SR9 1/2/2, minutes; see also correspondence of the various branches, SR9 1/1/3, Branch: Aug. 1938 - Nov. 1947, General: Feb. 1943 - Dec. 1944.

⁴⁶ For details of this controversy which started in 1943, see SR9 1/1/6.

⁴⁷ SR9 1/1/2, Branch: Aug. 1938 - Nov. 1947, General: Sept. 1942 - April 1944, [Maasdorp's] minutes of joint meeting [with the African Branch], 10.xi.1943.

veillance, might bring African members and the party as a whole into disrepute. At a later stage in the debate, Ntuli abruptly shifted his ground and recommended that the African H.Q. Branch should voluntarily withdraw from the party. So strong was the desire to foster African participation in white politics that the Branch resoundingly defeated this somewhat opportunist proposal. Ntuli lost further sympathy when it transpired that he had voted against the 'one branch' amendment at the September 1944 Congress, contrary to Branch instructions.

Still optimistic about its chances, the S.R.L.P. now began to make preparations for the post-war general election; moribund branches were revived, enthusiasm re-kindled, policy formulated and clarified in response to the campaign of invective conducted by 'The Labour Party', which was extending its position. In March 1945, a mass meeting of Labour supporters at Que Que voted unanimously to sink their sectional differences in a third party, the Que Que United Labour Front, led by a former official of 'The Labour Party'. The N.E.C. promptly condemned this move, but the hitherto aloof Trades and Labour Council now re-entered the political arena, encouraged by the Que Que initiative, and determined to create an effective workers' movement against the United Party. The annual congress of this body agreed in principle in April to the setting up of a Labour (later Workers') Representative Committee, which would select parliamentary candidates in the trade-union interest, and financed by a 'contracting in' political levy.

'The Labour Party' being predominantly trade-unionist⁴⁸ welcomed this initiative, and Davies declared that, 'no success would come to the Labour Party in this country until it was controlled by the trade unions'.⁴⁹ This rather fulsome flattery earned its reward in July, when Arthur North resigned the Chairmanship of the S.R.L.P. after Macintyre and Lister voted in favour of removing the 'closed shop' principle from the revised Industrial Conciliation Bill,⁵⁰ an action construed as antagonistic to white artisan interests; Lister's speech in the debate, and in particular his reference to trade unions in which there was no 'democratic control',⁵¹ did not endear him to the Trades and Labour Council. Spurred on by the British Labour victory of 26 July, a further Congress of trade unions (at which 'The Labour Party' but not the S.R.L.P. was represented) adopted the constitution of the 'United Labour Party' and resolved that it should be submitted to the two Labour Parties and the Que Que United Labour Front for approval. North took pains to reassure the labour movement that the United Labour Party was intended to be the nucleus of a labour front, and not a fourth party.

⁴⁸ Of its Executive of 15 members, 11 were active trade-unionists. There was a considerable overlap of membership between the Trades and Labour Council and the various Labour parties.

⁴⁹ SR9 1/5/14 [Miscellaneous, Trades and Labour Council: June 1945 - Oct. 1947], Minutes of Trades and Labour Council, Annual Congress held at Bulawayo, 7-8.iv.1945.

⁵⁰ *Debates*, 25, c.2537, 18.vii.1945.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, c.2514, 17.vii.1945.

Opinion in the S.R.L.P. was uniformly hostile to these proposals, and both advocates and opponents of the African Branch were united on this issue. Macintyre dismissed the United Labour Party as 'a further effort to disrupt the movement'.⁵² Exception was taken to the presentation of the constitution as a *fait accompli*, and not as a basis for discussion; it was noted that political parties would have to dissolve themselves before seeking admission, as no provision had been made for affiliation; branches were to have little local autonomy; a colour-bar clause had been inserted into the constitution. But the most objectionable feature was the notion of 'sectional control' implicit in the document. Each trade union was to have two delegates at Congress, each branch only one: the Trades and Labour Council's nineteen affiliated trade unions would thus command a floor majority. The Executive Council, consisting of three trade unionists, three branch representatives and two other delegates elected from the floor would similarly be under the thumb of the industrial section. The left-wing intellectuals of the N.E.C. of the S.R.L.P. doubted whether trade unionists always made good socialists, and interpreted the U.L.P. scheme as an attempt to impose an industrial dictatorship over the movement. Congress shared to the full this distrust of sectional control and unanimously rejected the Trades and Labour Council proposals on 16 September 1945.⁵³

This action of the S.R.L.P. saved 'The Labour Party' from having to make a painful decision on its attitude to the proposed U.L.P., and enabled Davies's group to pose as the trade unions' champion, and denounce the principles of the S.R.L.P. as 'based apparently on the same foundations of commercial and industrial segregation as marked the operations of the Italian Fascist Party'.⁵⁴ Such brave words, however, did not greatly help the United Labour Party. A thinly-attended Trades and Labour Council meeting convened at Salisbury on 14 October to debate the details further, evinced little enthusiasm in the venture; several delegates pointed out that their trade union constitutions prohibited party political activity. Nothing daunted, the indefatigable North tried again. To ensure a better attendance, he chose the trade union centre of Bulawayo as the venue for another meeting; however, this second conference on 17 November attracted scarcely more delegates than the first. The idea of a United Labour Party was given a final airing, and then laid to rest with few to mourn its passing.

North then produced an alternative plan, a refurbishing of the Trades and Labour Council initiative of 1943: he announced that the Council would be pleased to act as an 'honest broker' at unity discussions between the executives of the S.R.L.P., 'The Labour Party' and the Que Que Labour Front. Leaders of the various parties were summoned to the conference and asked to express their views. Macintyre consented to the suggestion, subject to his

⁵² SR9 1/4/3, Macintyre to Mrs. E. A. Strobel (Hon. Gen. Sec., S.R.L.P.), 4.ix.1945.

⁵³ SR9 1/1/8, Branch: Aug. 1938 - Nov. 1947, Salisbury City: May 1942 - Jan. 1947, United Labour Party Constitution, 3.ix.1945 (under letterhead of the Trades and Labour Council); SR9 1/2/2, Minutes of S.R.L.P. Congress, 16.ix.1945.

⁵⁴ *The Labour Era*, 27.x.1945, p.4.

Executive's consent. After some hesitation, Davies also agreed, reiterating his conviction that, 'The Trades and Labour Council should have a very big say' in any re-united Labour party.⁵⁵ All three parties ultimately signified their willingness to meet North's officials, and a conference was scheduled for 8 December at Gwelo.

During the interval, two events occurred that substantially reduced the chances of re-unification. The first of these, the African railway strike of late October and early November 1945, occasioned initial alarm and hostility, although sympathy swung towards the strikers after the publication of the Tredgold Report;⁵⁶ meanwhile, vague rumours that the S.R.L.P. had fomented the strike gained wide credence.⁵⁷ Secondly, shortly before the Gwelo negotiations, 'The Labour Party' published its constitution, a document that further widened the Labour split. That the Davies faction hoped to win over from the S.R.L.P. those who were disaffected with the so-called dictatorship of the 'Salisbury wing' was evident in the provision for a decentralised party organisation, comprising five area committees, occupying an intercalary position to the central executive and themselves, and a National Executive Committee on which branch representatives were to have all the seats except four.⁵⁸ 'The Labour Party' subsequently explained that the Colony's 'sparse population' and widely-separated 'main centres' necessitated this type of structure.⁵⁹ It implied a greater measure of local democracy at the regional level, and had the party been able to call upon the services of a sufficient number of 'leisured' branch officials, 'grass roots' control might have been feasible at the national level. In practice, however, this variety of party organisation represented a step backwards to the *ad hoc* methods of the 1930s, and enabled a handful of personalities at the centre to pursue their own course, largely independent of rank and file opinion. A further clause in this new constitution specifically excluded Africans from membership. The party Chairman, J. Fairlamb, affirmed that Labour's pre-war conception of the African's role in white areas as 'the hewer of wood and the drawer of water' would be sustained, although endeavours should be made to improve his working and living conditions.⁵⁹

When negotiations began at Gwelo⁶⁰ on 8 December they were charged with a singular note of urgency, as it was clear that this would be the last opportunity for the sundered movement to unite if it were to make a bid for the postal vote of Rhodesians on active service overseas,⁶¹ a vote Labour

⁵⁵ SR9 1/5/14, Minutes of the Trades and Labour Council Meeting, Bulawayo, 17.xi.1945 (wrongly dated June.)

⁵⁶ *Southern Rhodesia. Report of Commission . . . to Investigate . . . the Strike amongst the African Employees of the Rhodesian Railways . . .*, Salisbury, Govt. Stationery Office, 1946. See also R. Gray, *The Two Nations*, London, O.U.P., 1960, p.284.

⁵⁷ *The Labour Front*, January 1946.

⁵⁸ *The Labour Era*, 1.xii.1945.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, January 1946.

⁶⁰ A shortened and fictionalised account of these proceedings can be found in the last chapter of D. Lessing, *A Ripple from the Storm*.

⁶¹ A deadline of 14 December had been set for the registration of political parties seeking this vote, *Southern Rhodesia Government Gazette*, 9.xi.1945, Proclamation No. 31.

believed would be given to them. This sense of urgency may have been responsible for the accusation of bad faith afterwards made against the S.R.L.P.. Long before the executives of the three parties and the Trades and Labour Council met at Gwelo, it had become plain that the price for unity would not only be the African Branch, but also the end to the Salisbury left-wingers' control over policy. On the first day a sub-committee of seven on which the S.R.L.P. had only two representatives, Draper and Mrs. Maasdorp, was appointed to hammer out a framework for agreement.⁶² At the committee's first session, 'The Labour Party' delegates undertook to tolerate African membership, but the Branch itself would have to be dissolved. According to her report delivered to the S.R.L.P. the next day, Mrs. Maasdorp dissented from 'The Labour Party' compromise at all sessions of this *ad hoc* body and of a subsequently-appointed 'sub-committee of thirteen'; however, her notes on the discussion bear the following cryptic, ambiguous annotation: 'We gave way on everything else on the understanding that the African membership would be retained (the Party might have accepted the dissolution) . . .'.⁶³

Whatever exactly happened at this meeting, the possibility of compromise was imperilled when the sub-committee reported back to the conference after its first session. Davies retracted the undertaking his representatives had given, pleading that there had been a misunderstanding. After protracted negotiations in committee and open session lasting well into the evening, the assembly drew up a list of nine points for submission to each Labour party.⁶⁴ Several of these constituted major concessions from the S.R.L.P., offered in the vain hope that the other side would give way on the African issue. The S.R.L.P. was to have only six of the nineteen members of a Provisional Executive; Macintyre was to stand down as leader in favour of Walker; the choice of location for the party headquarters was to be left to the Provisional Executive, and in all likelihood would be Bulawayo; all funds were to be pooled — a major sacrifice, as the S.R.L.P. had amassed a large election treasury. However, there was no agreement over the African Branch, except that two alternative courses of action should be submitted to each party for approval.

This key issue had polarised the inter-executive conference, the hitherto outwardly impartial North now siding with Davies and the Que Que Labour Front against the S.R.L.P. and its insistence upon principle. At length, Col. T. Nangle, the Que Que leader, had proposed that, 'the African Branch should be dissolved and that a liaison committee be appointed . . . to co-operate with the African members of the party': a return in substance to the

⁶² The others were two: 'Labour Party'; two: Trades and Labour Council; and one: Que Que United Labour Front.

⁶³ SR9 1/4/3, S.R.L.P. Propaganda Committee, n.d. No formal minutes of the committee's deliberations are available. The minutes of the open conference, entitled 'Minutes of the Meeting held at Gwelo, 8th December, 1945 . . .', are in SR9 1/2/2.

⁶⁴ SR9 1/2/2, 'Recommendations put forward to Congress by Special Committee, n.d. [9.xii.1945].

1939 position. Nangle's resolution was set down as an alternative to 'The Labour Party' proposal that no more Africans should be admitted to membership. A rider was added to the effect that the whole 'question of African members and African branches' should be referred to a later Congress. This somewhat confusing formula, which represented a softening of the early intransigence of 'The Labour Party', was accepted on the understanding that if either alternative was approved by all concerned, a united labour party would be set up forthwith under the revived name of the Rhodesian Labour Party. It was later maintained that Draper and Mrs. Maasdorp had accepted this as a *quid pro quo* for the de-registration of the African Branch, and North expressed his astonishment when Mrs. Maasdorp moved the rejection of these terms the next day.⁶⁵ In the absence of complete documentation, it is impossible to establish the degree to which the S.R.L.P. delegates might have wavered on this point of principle.

Mrs. Maasdorp's speech to the S.R.L.P. Special Congress the following day, 9 December,⁶⁶ was long and passionate. She warned the delegates against the studied vagueness of the liaison committee's proposed formula, and concluded with the declaration that, 'Unity can be bought at too great a price.' James Lister supported her views, adding that as five out of six of North's officials present at the previous day's negotiations were known supporters of 'The Labour Party', the nine points represented nothing but a Davies *diktat*, and the prescribed composition of the Provisional Executive would entrench his followers in an unassailable position over the party. A heated debate ensued, in which a Midlands dissident asked if Congress were 'to stand here today in the interests of 30 [black] representatives as against 4/5ths of the European workmen of the country'. Finally, the matter was pressed to a ballot, and the terms rejected by the narrow margin of 17 votes to 12; four non-branch officials on the N.E.C. voted against the platform, a portent of future trouble for the S.R.L.P.

Despite the collapse of the re-union conference, the pressure for Labour fusion remained unslackened during the last days of 1945, as election day drew nigh. Several perturbed S.R.L.P. leaders clandestinely approached North and asked him to sustain his efforts; accordingly he wrote to each of the Labour parties on 22 December, proposing yet another joint conference at Gwelo, and a postal ballot of all members on the question of the African Branch *versus* 'a non-political African Council . . . under the guidance and advice of Europeans.'⁶⁷

Whilst the Davies party somewhat reluctantly agreed to this, the S.R.L.P., incensed at North's remark that its Special Congress at Gwelo had not been truly representative of its rank and file opinion, rejected the suggestion out of hand on the grounds that only Congress could reverse a decision it had

⁶⁵ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 4.i.1946.

⁶⁶ SR9 1/2/2, Minutes of the Special Congress at Gwelo, 9.xii.1945.

⁶⁷ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 24.xii.1945.

made earlier. Furthermore, by precluding free and open discussion, a secret ballot savoured of the methods used by 'Nazi leaders in Germany'.⁶⁸

North's persistence had not, however, been in vain. On 28 December, Walker of the S.R.L.P. publicly recanted his error in supporting the left-wingers at Gwelo⁶⁹ and, backed by a second S.R.L.P. member of the Legislative Assembly, E.P. Vernall, asked Draper to re-open the negotiations. An emergency meeting of the N.E.C. of the S.R.L.P. was convened on 30 December. The detailed Minutes of this meeting attest to the widening crack that North's endeavours had induced in the 'Salisbury wing'.⁷⁰ On behalf of his branch (Salisbury South), Walker moved that a postal ballot should be held, declaring that the African masses were not yet 'fit' to take part in politics. When it became clear that the radicals had mustered a majority of accredited delegates present, he suggested that the rules be suspended to allow non-accredited observers, most of them favourable to his cause, to vote. Draper ruled this out of order, and Walker substituted an amendment calling for a round-table conference on the 'nine points'. This was narrowly lost by a single vote⁷¹ in favour of a motion calling for an electoral pact and a post-election joint conference, neither of which materialised.

Shortly after the New Year, Walker submitted his resignation from the N.E.C. and from the S.R.L.P., and publicly requested all members of the labour movement to contact him. Salisbury South and six other S.R.L.P. branches joined him, accompanied by E. P. Vernall and another S.R.L.P. Member, A. W. Whittington. Walker explained his conduct in a letter to Draper: 'I am sorry that through the dictatorship of a clique of your party, I felt impelled to resign in order to save the Labour movement from oblivion.'⁷² After a series of discussions with North and Nangle, he made peace with Davies at Bulawayo, and was given the largely nominal position of leader in the Rhodesia Labour Party which they now revived on pre-war lines. On most issues he gave way; he repented of his share in the making of the African Branch, agreed to the exclusion of Africans from membership, and endorsed the R.L.P.'s adoption of the decentralised organisation of 'The Labour Party'. In point of fact, he had voluntarily become the prisoner of 'The Labour Party' group; and after losing his seat in the 1946 election, left Davies in undisputed control. Meanwhile, despite this severe loss of branches and members the S.R.L.P.'s morale remained high; purged of traitors, the party was now truly united and firm in purpose, and expected success at the forthcoming elections.⁷³

⁶⁸ SR9 1/5/14, E. A. Strobel to A. T. North, 31.xii.1945.

⁶⁹ SR9 1/1/4, 'Minutes of a special meeting of Salisbury South Branch', 28.xii.1945.

⁷⁰ SR9 1/5/14, 'Minutes of a special meeting of the National Executive Council . . . 30th December 1945'.

⁷¹ Eight votes to nine; six of the branch delegates voted for, and four against. Gwelo which was not 'financial', was represented by an observer, and Doris Lessing was not permitted to vote *in absentia* on behalf of Mashaba. Both branches supported Walker, and so Draper's ruling was of crucial importance to the later history of the Labour movement.

⁷² SR9 1/4/3, Walker to Draper, 19.i.1946.

⁷³ *The Labour Front*, February 1946.

In the event, neither the S.R.L.P. nor its R.L.P. rival received much cheer from the election results of 25 April 1946. Overall, Labour's combined vote was down by a third compared with the 1939 returns.⁷⁴ Only Lister and Macintyre were elected for the S.R.L.P., which in all won 1 540 votes (5,61 per cent). These two successful candidates may in fact have won their seats in spite of the declared policy of the party; for the 'best man' principle seems to have played a large part in determining votes and they were probably elected on the basis of their personality, honesty and political consistency. The defeat of all those recently seceding from the S.R.L.P. who stood for the revived R.L.P. gives added weight to this contention. The Davies grouping of the revived R.L.P., however, fared better, obtaining three seats and securing 4 583 votes (16,69 per cent of the total). Huggins's United Party won a further mandate, although not an absolute majority; but the Liberals displaced Labour as the official Opposition.⁷⁵

The election campaign had been hard-fought and often bitter, the African Branch issue offering opportunities for the expression of race-prejudice that were not always overlooked. The Liberal Party published a cartoon depicting a black 'cookboy' informing his indignant 'madam', '*Mena funa hamba lo blanch meeting ka lo Labour Party* (I want to go to the Branch Meeting of the Labour Party)'.⁷⁶ Rumours were rife that the S.R.L.P. wanted to lower the franchise, add thousands of Africans to the voters' roll and establish more African branches. Shortly before polling, an attempt was made to identify the Party's policy towards Africans with that of British Labour and the Fabians, already a *bête noire* to most Rhodesians. At a Raylton public meeting, the S.R.L.P. candidate was subjected to an interrogation as to whether members of his party would 'sit down to dinner with a native, or let a native marry their daughters.'⁷⁷ Sometimes speakers unwittingly provided ammunition for their opponents; Macintyre's comment that his party would select immigrants on the basis of 'character' rather than colour was later used as evidence that, amongst its other sins, the S.R.L.P. wanted to flood the country with Indians. The R.L.P. campaigned on the pre-war platform of its namesake; it warned that if the permanent urbanisation of Africans were continued, 'then the present civilised standards will disappear and the European must go to other lands.'⁷⁸ An anonymous trade-unionist wrote to the Press that the 'Friends of the Soviet Union' now dictated the policy of Macintyre's party, and had been responsible for the Gwelo failure.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ G. C. Passmore and M. T. Mitchell, *Source Book of Parliamentary Elections and Referenda in Southern Rhodesia 1898-1962*, Salisbury, Univ. Coll. of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Dept. of Government, 1963, Source Book No. 1, pp. 147, 156.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.156; one seat, Lomagundi, however was transferred from the Liberal to the United Party after a recount (see *Government Gazette*, 15.vii.1946, Proclamation No. 26). The final state of the parties therefore was: U.P.: 14; Liberals: 11; R.L.P.: 3; S.R.L.P.: 2. I am grateful to Mr. D. Hartridge of the National Archives of Rhodesia for this point.

⁷⁶ *New Rhodesia*, 17.viii.1945.

⁷⁷ *The Bulawayo Chronicle*, 3.iii.1946.

⁷⁸ *The Labour Era*, April 1946.

⁷⁹ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 21.xi.1945.

The 'Salisbury wing' interpreted this stirring up of race-prejudice in socialist terms. In Draper's words, it represented 'the last dying kick of a rotten, played-out system and a most convenient political weapon which lesser minds simply cannot resist.'⁸⁰ He thus equated the capitalist system with racialism, and by the same token, he condemned the R.L.P. which had 'no socialist objective and debars Africans from membership.'⁸¹ But the views of S.R.L.P. candidates on the Africans' future reflected the characteristic amorphousness of rank and file feeling, and sometimes diverged from those of the 'Salisbury wing'. A few of their statements, particularly those emanating from party standard-bearers in rural areas, must have caused the N.E.C. 'radicals' acute embarrassment. One candidate reassured his farmer constituents that the party did not have 'visions of a social equality between the two races'; he added that, 'Genetic reasons alone are sufficient to rule that out.'⁸² Another devoted the best part of his manifesto to promises of further government assistance to cattle-breeders, and did not mention the African once.⁸³

This would appear to validate Henderson's contention that the S.R.L.P. was 'often lukewarm';⁸⁴ on the other hand, party headquarters did make a stand on liberal principles, promising 'to translate into actuality, through Parliamentary action, the high principles of the Atlantic Charter.'⁸⁵ More specifically, it developed the generalised aims of the *Short Term Policy* into a practicable programme for African material and political advance. However, this programme received little publicity, and even less emphasis on the hustings. Some candidates tended to be apologetic and sought to escape criticism by avoiding such disputatious matters. Those of braver mien cited Rhodes's dictum of 'equal rights for all civilised men' in support of the African Branch, but it seems that S.R.L.P. candidates largely remained on the defensive throughout the entire campaign.

Finally, why was the S.R.L.P.'s performance at the polls so poor? As Leys remarks, the disunity of the labour movement disenchanting the electorate,⁸⁶ while the emergence of the old-style *laissez-faire* Liberals, standing well to the right of the United Party, bestowed an aura of centrism upon the outgoing Government. This the United Party exploited in their campaign slogan, 'Neither Socialist nor Capitalist — the People's Party.'⁸⁷

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.i.1946.

⁸¹ F.C.B. LXV, 'Short History of R.L.P./S.R.L.P. by A. Draper', n.d. [February 1946].

⁸² SR9 1/3/2, Elections: July 1939 - May 1946, 1946 Election: March 1945 - May 1946, E. Harben's circular to electors in Marandellas constituency, n.d. [1946].

⁸³ *Ibid.*, M. Olds's circular to electors in Western constituency, n.d. [1946].

⁸⁴ I. Henderson 'British working-class immigrants to Rhodesia . . .', in *Revisions in Central African History*, 40.

⁸⁵ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 22.ii.1946.

⁸⁶ Leys, p. 186. Leys's further explanation (*ibid.*, p.187) that recent immigrants 'more readily voted for the United Party' can hardly apply to this election, as immigration had virtually ceased during the War whilst the fore-runners of the post-war flood from Britain could not have been resident long enough to gain admission to the voters' roll; see Section 8(1)(a) of the Electoral Act (No. 23 of 1928) which requires six months residence.

⁸⁷ *United Party Newsletter*, February 1946, No. 9.

The plethora of four political parties and ninety-nine candidates raised the spectre of an indecisive result, and the conviction was widespread that a vote for the S.R.L.P. would be in effect a vote for the Liberals; this may have induced many waverers to vote United Party and ensure the continuance of stable government. The S.R.L.P., whose prospects had been earlier over-estimated by an otherwise hostile press,⁸⁸ nominated only eleven candidates,⁸⁹ thus depriving itself of the opportunity to win a majority in the Assembly. Lister's assertion that, 'We are not putting many candidates in the field, but if we have not got the quantity, we have the quality'⁹⁰ did not compensate for the fact that a vote for the S.R.L.P. was perforce a vote against a clear-cut election result. Accordingly, the R.L.P. with its fuller state of twenty-three candidates was a stronger contender in the electoral stakes, as evinced by its larger share of the poll. But relative numbers of candidates and stable government aside, the S.R.L.P. lost simply because its African policy was 'premature . . . and of course, suicidal.'⁸⁴ In any case, Labour as a whole constituted only one of several white groups in a country where the proportion of European voters in managerial positions was relatively high, and the S.R.L.P. represented but a single small segment of a single interest group. Accordingly, liberal forces could not prevail in the Colony until the burgeoning professional and commercial sectors of the European population were prepared to accept certain progressive elements in the party's policy, such as African membership of political parties, a process that commenced in the next decade.

In conclusion, several main threads can be drawn from the tangled skein of congresses and conferences, fusions and fissions, accusations and counter-accusations that make up the history of the Labour movement in these three crucial years. These are: the role of the African Branch as compared with other factors in the fostering of Labour disunity; the attitude of the white trade-unionist to these squabbles, as epitomised by the part the Trades and Labour Council intermittently played in the events described above; the failure of the Rhodesian electorate to follow Britain's example and return a post-war Labour government, and the general relevance of socialism to the Colony's situation.

First of all, to what extent did the African Branch and African membership contribute to Labour's splitting asunder? Davies's position was based on the firm conviction that it was contrary to the interests of both races that either should continue, especially as it had the undesirable effect of according Africans direct representation on the party's councils. From this precept, all else followed. Can the failure to unite at Gwelo therefore be attributed solely to the existence of the Branch? This point of view was sedulously cultivated in the Press and elsewhere during the election campaign. Yet such an

⁸⁸ The Argus Press supported the United Party; see editorials in *The Rhodesia Herald*, 19.iv.1946; *The Bulawayo Chronicle*, 25.iv.1946.

⁸⁹ Leys, p.186 gives an incorrect figure of sixteen.

⁹⁰ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 21.iii.1946.

explanation savours of over-simplification. Admittedly, the contemporary climate of race relations rendered it inevitable that the Branch should become the main bone of contention, a convenient Aunt Sally for the Labour dissentients.

Nevertheless, one forms the impression that the S.R.L.P. by default allowed its opponents to concentrate their attacks on the Branch, and so relegate the other points at issue to a relatively minor status. Hence Macintyre's lament at the N.E.C. emergency meeting following the Gwelo negotiations: 'We should never have been put in the position that all that mattered was the African question — we should have had a counter proposition which they in their turn would have had to reject.'⁹¹ Ironically, the S.R.L.P. had sometimes shown tepid enthusiasm for the Branch and African advancement generally. The famous Atlantic Charter motion of October 1943 for example had been introduced by two liberal members of the United Party, W. H. Eastwood and L. B. Fereday, and the S.R.L.P. had contributed little to the ensuing debate.⁹² Indeed, an examination of the speeches of S.R.L.P. Members leaves one with the feeling that party representatives were concerned rather with the workers' conditions in England and Attlee's victory at the polls in 1945: tangible evidence of the attachment to 'Home' that still characterised most Rhodesians of British origin.

Amongst the other factors contributing to Labour disunity, pride of place should be given to personality clashes, a phenomenon epitomised by a war-time Minister: 'we are so small, we are so governed by petty jealousy, by petty spite, we know each other's business so much and that influences things so much'.⁹³ The dispute within Labour ranks crystallised around the personalities of two ambitious men, Davies and Macintyre, who became leaders of rival factions in the movement. Labour's career between 1940 and 1946 was essentially a story of the struggle for power between these two men, each becoming the figurehead for impersonal and opposing forces operating within the labour movement.

Traditional antipathy of the trade-unionists to intellectuals and socially-mobile elements added a further dimension to the conflict, as expressed in a remark made at a 1945 trade-union meeting: 'We don't want clever, brainy men, or men who want to climb to the top of the working-class movement.'⁹⁴ This type of sentiment helps to explain why the S.R.L.P. lost the support of most European artisans before the 1946 general election, and why the Trades and Labour Council endeavoured to create a party dedicated to its cause. Unlike the British Labour Party,⁹⁵ the S.R.L.P. made no provision for direct trade union representation on its Executive, a factor indubitably responsible

⁹¹ SR9 1/5/14, N.E.C. Minutes, 30.xii.1945.

⁹² Debates, 23, c.2302 ff., 20-29.x.1943.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 21, c.3724, J. H. Smit on his resignation from the Cabinet, 11.ii.1942.

⁹⁴ SR9 1/5/14, Minutes of the Trades and Labour Council meeting, Bulawayo, 17.xi.1945.

⁹⁵ See *European Political Parties*, ed. S. Henig and J. Pinder, London, Allen and Unwin, 1969, p.407.

for its drift towards doctrinaire and largely academic socialism, and the growing disenchantment of white workers with socialist solutions. G. D. H. Cole's comment, that workers' associations 'still think more in terms of bettering the position of their members under capitalism than of fighting to make an end of capitalism',⁹⁶ exactly describes the post-war situation in Rhodesia. To the average white trade-unionist, who feared economic competition from skilled and semi-skilled Africans, the machinations of the middle-class, 'intellectual Salisbury wing' represented left-wing deviationism of the most extreme and irresponsible kind — irresponsible because it seemed to jeopardise his economic standing and his very presence in the Colony. The strong resentment stemming from headquarters' disproportionate power in the party's council was a further factor contributing to the Labour split.

The war had brought full employment and prosperity to European working-classes, a process that accelerated after 1945 with the expansion of secondary industry and the application of Keynesian economics, ultimately leading to the collapse of Rhodesian Labour.⁹⁷ That the implications of this were not fully understood or appreciated in certain Labour circles is exemplified by Lister's confident prediction that once the initial post-war boom had run its course, there would be a downturn in the world trade-cycle similar to that of 1920-1921.⁹⁸ Presumably he expected that a depression would furnish new recruits to the Labour cause and so assist in the defeat of an incumbent capitalist administration. In practice, the Colony's continued economic progress reduced the income gap between white working and middle-classes and steadily undermined the labour movement's source of support. However, the S.R.L.P. Papers indicate that some members had correctly interpreted these unfavourable signs; at the end of 1946, Doris Lessing remarked that the economic upturn had 'made it easy and natural for the weaker and the more uninformed members' to drift away from socialism.⁹⁹ Labour parties were powerless to halt this drift, and Labour as a political force faded out during the early 1950s, having failed to mobilise the truly proletarian elements of Southern Rhodesia, the Africans.

Finally, two general but important questions: first, did the S.R.L.P. fully realise what consequences the implementation of socialist doctrine would have in Rhodesia; and second, was the socialist philosophy of the 'Salisbury wing' immediately relevant to the contemporary situation? The answer to both quite simply must be 'no'. Infused with idealism, the radicals handled essentially theoretical concepts, unconscious of their implicit capacity for rapid, almost revolutionary, change. The Atlantic Charter's reference to 'the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they shall live' indicated an aim far in advance of the political convictions of the

⁹⁶ G. D. H. Cole, *Fabian Socialism*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1943, p.150.

⁹⁷ Leys, p.186.

⁹⁸ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 21.iii.1946.

⁹⁹ SR9 1/1/4, [Notes taken by C. J. Oliver] at N.E.C. meeting, 15.xii.1946.

'Salisbury wing'. The Rhodesian reality was outlined with candour by a member of Huggins's party: 'The Europeans could not have the standard of living they have today if it were not for the fact that we have a big native population who are doing a very great proportion of the work of this country. I have never heard the racialists make any very strong demand that the interests of those natives should be considered in these magnificent socialist dreams that they put forward'.¹⁰⁰ Socialism of even the most moderate variety found only thin soil for its roots in Rhodesia; the majority of its principles were irrelevant to the most pressing problems of a stratified multi-racial society. The chief legacy handed to the white 'progressives' of the 1950s was in socialist terms an incidental, yet in Rhodesian terms the most contentious aspect of the S.R.L.P.'s policy — the participation of Africans in European politics. Its socialist heritage has found no inheritor.

¹⁰⁰ Debates, 25, c.1285, 6.vi.1945.

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