

**LACK OF ALTERNATIVE LEADERSHIP IN
DEMOCRATIC MALAWI:
SOME REFLECTIONS AHEAD OF
THE 2004 GENERAL ELECTIONS**
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ABSTRACT

This article, drawing on Malawi's experience with intra party politics, argues that quality, dynamic and visionary leadership is extremely vital in propping up budding democracies on the winding road to mature democracies. It is thus widely recognized that the success or failure of any organized group effort whether at organizational, community or national level is critically dependent on leadership, understood as a collective endeavour within a permissive and enabling framework. The major problem in most democratizing polities, however, is that leadership is essentially understood as rulership. This implies that leaders make every effort to ensure that decisions must either be made or reviewed at a single, known, predetermined and consistent position. Unless leaders extricate themselves from the perils of the centrist tendencies and work to facilitate participative governance, in which they primarily serve as agents or trustees for a broad community of persons, democratizing polities risk disintegrating into dysfunctional political entities along the way.

Keywords: leadership, rulership, third term, open terms bill, participative governance

INTRODUCTION

This paper argues that the lack of alternative leadership presents a serious constraint to the ultimate consolidation of democracy much as Malawi is, in the eyes of the international community, often flagged as a success story of democratic transition¹ (Wiseman 1995; Schmidt 2001). It has especially been

¹ Note that Malawi reverted to political pluralism after almost three decades of authoritarian rule under Dr. Banda in May 1994, following the June 14, 1993 referendum in which the majority of the people (63%) voted for the adoption of a plural political dispensation. The second multiparty general elections were held in June 1999, in which the United Democratic Front (UDF) was retained in power for a consecutive five-year term of office, which runs up to June 2004. For detailed discussions see Nzunda and Ross (1995); van Donge (1995); Englund (1996); Ott, Phiri and Patel (2000); and Phiri and Ross (1998). It must also be noted that the term consolidation is a problematic one. A democracy is considered consolidated when democratic norms and values (tolerance, respect for human rights) are internalized; all undemocratic niches have vanished; and democratic institutions

motivated by *the Open Terms Bill*² which sought for a constitutional amendment to allow for a limitless term of office for the President. Specially targeting section 83(3)³ of the Constitution, the rationale for the proposed amendment was that “the provisions of section 83(3) are considered to infringe upon the people’s power to elect into office of President the person of their choice and renew his mandate for as many times as they may wish him or her to serve them”. When the Bill was finally tabled in Parliament on July 4, 2002, it failed to secure the requisite two-thirds majority for it to be effected into law. Given that there are 193 constituencies, the Bill needed 128 votes for it to be legislated into law. Up to 59 MPs, all from the opposition, voted against the Bill whilst 125 MPs government including some prominent opposition MPs, for example John Tembo of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and Chakufwa Chihana of the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), voted in its favour, 3 abstained and 5 were absent.

For an emerging democracy to sustain itself, however, it is imperative that competing leadership groups, in whatever form, have to maintain themselves within a structure of ordered competition. It is in this regard that political parties provide an essential platform for the management of peaceful succession to power as well as for obtaining popular consent to course of public policy (Wiseman 1995; Rugalabamu 1998; Mutakyahwa 1998). This means that there is need to systematically create a pool of individuals from which new leadership might emerge. The inauguration of the democratic project in Malawi and, indeed elsewhere in the developing world, ignited hope for a crop of leadership that

(parliaments, parties, the judiciary) work effectively and according to democratic rules and norms.

² For the details of the Bill see, *The Malawi Gazette Supplement Containing Private Member’s Bill*, May 24, 2002. Even though the decision to table the Open Terms Bill was presented as the culmination of the irresistible demand from the constituents, the events preceding the tabling of the Bill invariably suggests otherwise. It was very much a climax of a systematically orchestrated strategy especially when one factors into the process a series of proposed constitutional amendments. These, among others, included the following: the amendment to abolish the Senate the second house of Parliament (passed); the amendment to bring non governmental organizations (NGOs) under greater control than has been the case (passed); the amendment to reduce the quorum from two-thirds to one third required to transact parliamentary business (passed but in a modified form). The required quorum to transact parliamentary business now stands at 50 +1%); the amendment to give power to the president to appoint Chief Executives, Mayors and Chairpersons of City, Municipal and District Assemblies (not passed); the proposal to equip the president with power to appoint up to 20 Members of Parliament as is the case in neighbouring Zimbabwe (not passed). For comprehensive details of the proposed constitutional amendments and related grievances refer to the Church of Central Africa (CCAP) Pastoral Letter “*Some Worrisome Trends which Undermine the Nurturing of our Young Democratic Culture*”, April 21, 2002, General Synod, Blantyre.

³ Section 83(3) states that the President, Vice President and the Second Vice President shall hold office for a maximum of two consecutive terms unless when they were elected to fill a vacancy. The period between the election or appointment and the next election shall not be regarded as a term.

would organize politics in a radically different and innovative manner but of course within the context of non-violent opposition and acceptance of the basic democratic institutions.

It has, however, in the last couple of years since the return to political pluralism, become increasingly apparent that Malawi's ultimate march to a functional democracy hangs in balance largely because of lack of alternative leadership. This is not only limited to the ruling but also to opposition parties, which, paradoxically, are described as *alternative governments in waiting*. Suffice it here to note that like many other democratizing polities, Malawi hardly experienced significant leadership turnover. Up to nearly two thirds of the incumbent leaders in the hitherto evolving democratic milieu are, in some way or another, remnants of the infamous Dr. Banda regime and, therefore, their legacy in structuring the dynamics of political contestation in the democratization process can hardly be ruled out (Mutakyahwa 1998; Chinsinga 2002; Englund 2002). Bakary's (1996: 12) description of the calibre of leadership in Benin in the wake of the democratization process is equally true for Malawi:

Thus appears as a sort of Jurassic Park, peopled with three species of professional politicians: the dinosaurs, or has been, who dream of once again becoming what they were or what they could not be; the wannabes and the others, in between, born again of democracy, who [re]appeared after[on set of the transition to democracy].

The underlying argument of this paper is that political parties in Malawi have failed to function as essential building blocks of the evolving democratic culture especially with regard to the *intra party* politics of leadership. All the major parties are, at least in some way, beset by perennial leadership problems, destructive power struggles, unorthodox voting practices, and domination by a single leader. As a result, they have inevitably degenerated into instruments of political patronage. The problem seems to be that the mere adoption of the liberal Constitution providing for the bill of rights, constitutionally guaranteed watchdog institutions, the existence of other parties besides the ruling party, and the birth of a couple of non state actors are mistaken for indicators of a mature democracy. This predisposition, however, overlooks the fact that the existence of a new set of institutions without any corresponding concerted efforts to cultivate, let alone entrench social values, beliefs, norms and attitudes to nurture their existence, makes democratising polities enormously susceptible to disintegrating into non-functioning political units altogether.

1. POLITICAL PARTIES IN MALAWI – A QUICK PROFILE AND OVERVIEW

One of the momentous events in the liberalization of political life in Malawi was the repeal of section 4 of the 1966 Republican Constitution⁴ in 1993. The repeal of this particular section of the Constitution, which allowed for the existence of the MCP as the only legitimate political organization, dramatically altered Malawi's political landscape. The space for political engagement and disengagement extended beyond the realms of the MCP and its appendages such as the Malawi Young Pioneer (MYP), Chitukuko cha Amayi M'malawi (CCAM), League of Malawi Youth and Women's League. The hunger by Malawians to exercise their political rights,⁵ virtually abrogated immediately after the adoption of the Republican Constitution in 1966, manifested itself in the rapid proliferation of political organizations. For instance, by the time the first multiparty elections were held in May 1994, the number of registered political parties rose to 136, of which 5 contested both the Parliamentary and Presidential elections in their own right. The rest forged an electoral alliance with the UDF, which consequently won the elections and constituted Malawi's second republic (Nzunda and Ross 1995; van Donge 1995; Englund 1996; Ng'ong'ola 1999; Phiri 2000).

Most of the parties have, however, withered away. Some got defunct because they could not simply support their own existence whilst others were systematically driven into oblivion⁷. The leaderships of these parties were quickly absorbed into the cadres of the ruling party and offered lucrative posts within the state administrative apparatus. Most of these parties virtually lack capabilities and skills to organize with broad national bases, which is very critical for their continued existence. The progressive exit of most parties, planned or otherwise, means that three parties, namely, MCP, UDF and

⁴ See section 4 (1), (2) *The 1966 Republican Constitution*, Government Printers, Zomba.

⁵ The 1964 Independence Constitution provided for an elaborate Bill of Rights, which was left out in the 1966 Republican Constitution. The justification was that the inclusion of the Bill of Rights in the 1964 Independence Constitution was systematically tailored to protect the interests of the white minority. It was further stated that the Bill of Rights was redundant since Malawi was already a party to the United Nations Charter on Human Rights and the inclusion of the Bill of Rights would engender unnecessary conflict between the Executive and the Judiciary. For comprehensive details refer to *The Proposals for the Republican Constitution of Malawi*, Government Printers, Zomba, 1965.

⁶ These included the MCP, UDF, AFORD, Congress for the Second Republic (CSR), Malawi Democratic Union (MDU), Malawi Democratic Party (MDP), Malawi People's Party (MPP), National Patriotic Front (NPF), People's Democratic Party (PDP), National Democratic Party (NDP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), Malawi National Democratic Party (MNDP) and United Party (UP).

⁷ Notable examples include Timu Mangwazu and Bingu Wamutharika who were the presidents for the MNDP and UP. They were made Minister for Housing and Physical Planning and Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of Malawi respectively.

AFORD⁸ have dominated the political arena since the return to political pluralism nearly a decade ago. They are the only parties that have had representation in Parliament. In the last two years, however, two new political groups have emerged. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA)⁹, registered as a pressure group but widely expected to transform itself into a party before the next general elections scheduled for 2004, is essentially a breakaway faction from the ruling UDF. The most recent political party to emerge is the Malawi Forum for Unity and Development (MAFUNDE). Formed on June 13, 2002, its interim National Executive Committee (NEC) has injected entirely new blood into the mainstream of Malawi's politics. None of the NEC members have had any political past with neither the three major political parties nor with the infamous Dr. Banda's dictatorial regime.

The growing body of empirical evidence, however, invariably suggest that the major parties have done very little to cultivate an atmosphere that would promote the consolidation of democracy, particularly in terms of propping up alternative leadership. They have failed to distinguish themselves as viable institutional frameworks for cultivating, practicing and promoting cardinal democratic ideals, norms and values, as illustrated in the case studies below. The case studies, therefore, attempt to illustrate the extent to which intra party politics has encumbered the potential development of alternative leadership to effectively propel the democratization project on a sustainable course in Malawi.

2. LACK OF ALTERNATIVE LEADERSHIP – THE CASE OF THE UDF

The virtual lack of space for political contestation under the aegis of the party's institutional framework has invariably inhibited the possible development of alternative leadership. In a remarkably stark contrast to its constitutional provision stipulated at its launch in 1994, UDF has never held a convention even in the run up to the June 1999 general elections. The party is expected to hold a convention every five years for the leaders to seek a fresh mandate to govern. The vacancies that have risen in the party administrative machinery, especially the National Executive Committee (NEC), have been filled by handpicked party faithfuls. This particular practice has essentially obliterated any semblance of a competitive atmosphere in which case upward mobility within the party's

⁸ Patel offers an interesting characterization of the major parties in Malawi as follows: undemocratic having held no convention ever since (UDF); perpetually in leadership crisis (MCP); and always wanting to jump on the side which holds the carrot. For details see *Wither MCP leaders*, The Weekend Nation August 28–29, 2001.

⁹ NDA was formed by Brown Mpinganjira who is widely believed to be the founder of UDF and was revered as the UDF's strongman and hence the most probable successor to Muluzi. He was joined by Peter Chiona, Grasham Naura, Lizzie Mpinganjira and James Makhumula all whom were members of the UDF National Executive Committee (NEC).

echelons has become the sheer prerogative of the President and an inner circle of his henchmen. The paradox is that the UDF senior party cadres do not have experience with *power politics in action* and yet they are expected to be harbingers of the evolving democratic culture and tradition. There is thus no way in which the values of competition, tolerance, trust, reciprocity, respect and deference to authority, very critical building blocks of the democratic tradition, can be cultivated and let alone entrenched.

The climax of the virtual absence of any meaningful space for political contestation within the UDF party was, as already alluded to above, the failed attempt to push for the open term of office for the President constitutional amendment. The events both before and after the *Open Terms Bill* was tabled and defeated in Parliament underlie serious deficiencies on the part of the UDF party institutional framework in a democratic milieu. It is important to note that the debate about the leadership of the party, and in particular, the *Third Term* as it was popularly referred to before being actually tabled in Parliament as the *Open Terms Bill*, has a fairly long history. The likelihood that Muluzi would step into the shoes of his compatriot, the former President of Zambia, Fredrick Chiluba, was imminent as early as 1999. Both the UDF national campaign director, Dumbo Lemani and the regional governor for the south, Davis Kapito, publicly declared Muluzi's candidature for the 2004 general elections arguing that there was nobody capable of assuming the reigns of leadership from him. Surprisingly, Muluzi neither supported nor disassociated himself from the sentiments of these senior party functionaries¹⁰.

The party cadres who demonstrated any semblance of resistance to the incipient bid for the *Third Term* of office were schematically dealt with. James Makhumula, then, the Treasurer General and the founding member of the party, was the first to be systematically ejected from the party for publicly expressing dissatisfaction with the leadership of the party by demanding for a convention¹¹. His sentiments were thus interpreted as mounting to opposition to the rapidly

¹⁰ President Muluzi never commented on the *Third Term* debate until towards the end of the year 2001 despite being urged to declare his stand by opposition parties, civil society and the donor community. See for example, *Third Term not for donors but for UDF*, Daily Times August 27, 2001 and *Muluzi speaks on Third Term*, The Nation August 27, 2001.

¹¹ It is important to note that proposals to hold a party convention have always been floated but each time they are shelved often on the pretext of the in availability of funds. The unfortunate development is that the majority of NEC members, which is the highest policy making body for the party, have not held their positions on trust of the people and as such they are more accountable to the President than they are to the grass roots. The paradox, of course, is that people look at the party and expect its own administration to be reflected in its management of the government business. The failure to hold any convention since 1994 does not certainly inspire confidence in the ruling party as the champion of democracy. The grass root members of the party have in fact already demonstrated their abhorrence of the undemocratic tendencies by voting out senior party officials at the party's primaries for the June 1999 general elections where they were at least transparent. See for example, *13 Members of Parliament including Cabinet ministers fall in elections*, The Nation, March 1, 1999.

simmering *Third Term* campaign. A commission of inquiry was set up to hear his case. He was found guilty of misconduct and his dismissal was recommended. The verdict of the inquiry was that “he was given a chance to defend himself and the party decided to remove him from his position as Treasurer General”¹².

The most surprising dismissal was that of Brown Mpinganjira exactly three months after Makhumula’s expulsion. In a cabinet reshuffle in November 2000, Mpinganjira was dropped out altogether. It was a big surprise because he was generally believed to be the power behind the throne. In parallels drawn with the MCP regime, his political stature was likened to that of John Tembo during the last years of Dr. Banda’s rule. This myth was further sustained by the belief that UDF was actually his brainchild propped up by his long time friend, Sir David Steel¹³. The official version of his dismissal pointed to his indulgence in corrupt practices, which they argued, was out of tune with the cardinal ideals of the UDF government.

Mpinganjira was, however, only arrested when he announced in January 2001 the formation of the NDA, whose declared intent was to fight the UDF’s planned unconstitutional bid for the *Third Term* of office for the President. In the course of a high profiled corruption trial, Mpinganjira described the corruption charges as sheer pretext. “The truth is that they want to lock me up so that they can achieve their aim of raping the Constitution”¹⁴. In a marathon trial, taken up by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DDP) instead of the Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) as is normally the case, the state failed to substantiate the corruption charges against him, hence he was subsequently acquitted. Since then, the NDA functionaries have not enjoyed any latitude of freedom to drum up support for their cause. Nearly all of NDA rallies have been characteristically violent. The notorious youth wing of the UDF popularly known as the Young Democrats¹⁵ allegedly orchestrates the violence.

While President Bakili Muluzi graciously accepted the outcome of the *Open Term Bill* debate in Parliament in the evening of July 4, 2002 in a special broadcast to the nation, the debate about his potential candidacy for the 2004 general elections still lingers on. The NEC, according to Cassim Chilumpha, UDF’s Publicity Secretary, not only endorsed the outcome but also the stance of the President with respect to the outcome. “Let us go by what His Excellency the President said and leave matters like that. It is up to the party to decide what

¹² See *Makhumula speaks out – may be UDF executive is full of dead wood*, The Nation, August 1, 2001 and *Makhumula out of UDF executive*, The Nation, September 18, 2001.

¹³ See *Presidency not my contemplation – I haven’t confided in anyone says Mpinganjira*, Malawi News, November 12–17, 2001.

¹⁴ See *Brown bites back*, British Broadcasting Corporation Focus on Africa, April–June 2001, p. 28.

¹⁵ See for example *Violence at Parliament*, The Nation August 3, 2001.

it does next”¹⁶. He even projected a party convention in September 2002, which would, in addition to sorting out the leadership of the party, also deliberate on the hunger situation, poverty, ignorance and governance.

However, at a meeting held on July 20, 2002, the regional and district executive committees contradicted the position of the NEC and endorsed Muluzi’s candidature for the 2004 general elections. It was agreed that the Bill be reintroduced in Parliament but in somewhat modified version. Firstly it should be introduced as a government Bill, and secondly it proposes that President Muluzi be allowed to serve for a third term and that subsequent amendments to section 83 in future should be done through a referendum.

We are not saying we should have open terms, no, that is not good. We have gathered information that those MPs who voted against the Bill at Parliament feared that if Muluzi goes, there will be somebody with an evil heart who will come as President to stay¹⁷.

The sentiments of the regional and district executive committees were indeed reflected in the redesigned *Third Term Bill*, which was scheduled for presentation by the government in the October 2002 session of Parliament but was, in the wake of mounting resistance, shelved indefinitely. The Bill gazetted on September 8, 2002 proposed to amend section 83(3) of the Constitution that any President of Malawi may serve a maximum of three consecutive terms and to add to the schedule of section 83 of the Constitution that in future it be amended only after any proposal to amend it has been approved by the majority vote of the people of Malawi through referendum¹⁸.

¹⁶ See *UDF convention on.....prepares for 2004*, Daily Times, July 15, 2002 and *UDF endorses Muluzi’s stand*, The Nation, July 15, 2002.

¹⁷ See *UDF endorses Muluzi as three regions meet*, Daily Times, July 22, 2002 and *UDF ponders on another term bid: NEC superseded by demand*, The Nation, July 24, 2002.

¹⁸ The proposal to retable the modified bill attracted criticism from civil society; the church, opposition parties and even among functionaries within the UDF. The magnitude of mounting resistance to the bill was borne in the dramatic shift in the once frantic mood of the President who, in an national address, – Prioritise hunger not 3rd term issues–barely days before the October sitting of Parliament urged MPs not to treat the *Third Term Bill* as a priority but instead focus on more pressing issues of national concern, namely, poverty, hunger starvation and the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. In this address, the President pointed out that, “at this time, when our people are starving, it seems irresponsible and hard-hearted to preoccupy ourselves with politics, especially when the next general elections are not due until 2004. This is the time the nation’s collective resources should be mobilized towards food production and correcting the ills of the economy”. For details about the amounting resistance to the Bill, see *PAC speaks on third term*, The Nation, September 11, 2002; *Donors talk on 3rd term*, The Nation, September 17, 2002; *I am the only leader-Tembo*, The Nation, October 1, 2002; *Forum to oppose 3rd launched*, The Nation, October 9, 2002; *Sonke axed from cabinet*, The Nation, October 8, 2002; *Ruling on demo today*, The Nation, October 22, 2002; *New twist to 3rd Term*, The Nation, October 16, 2002; *2 MPs petitioned over 3rd Third Term Bill*, October 24, 2002; *Churches hit back at government, politicians*, The Nation, October 24, 2002; *Third Term Bill still not a priority*, The Nation, October 29, 2002.

In addition to being an agenda of a few selfish politicians, the persistence of the *Third Term* debate smacks of tribalistic, ethnistic and regionalistic sentiments. This standpoint has a magnetic appeal especially based on the trend and pattern of the results of both the 1994 and 1999 general elections¹⁹. It is virtually tempting to argue that one-party system in Malawi has persisted but then on a regional basis. In the north AFORD is unrivalled, and there is a similar situation in the large parts of the centre (MCP) and south (UDF) (van Donge 1995). The imminent fear for the UDF seems to be that if the leadership of the party is competed for in a free and fair atmosphere and somebody from a region rather the south triumphs, the outcome could be seen by a disproportionate base of its loyalists as handing over the party either to the centre or north. The perception that parties belong primarily to particular regions in Malawi is indeed deeply entrenched, and even within regions themselves parties are perceived to belong primarily to certain districts and this is often reflected in the outlook of NECs. The key issue, nevertheless, remains that the future of UDF, especially in terms of leadership, is unclear. Whatever the outcome, it shall present a formidable test to Malawi's seemingly fragile democratic project.

3. LACK OF ALTERNATIVE LEADERSHIP – THE CASE OF MCP

The MCP is virtually in a dysfunctional state primarily because of an enduring power struggle involving Gwanda Chakuamba and John Tembo, the party President and Vice President respectively. To fully understand the genesis and the subsequent evolution of the power struggle, a quick historical glance at the political careers of the protagonists is absolutely imperative. They have both a high pedigree of involvement in Malawi's mainstream politics stretching back to the pre-independence days in the late 1950's and the early 1960's. While Chakuamba has a somewhat slightly longer political history, they both visibly emerged on the political scene after the famous 1964 Cabinet crisis²⁰. It, *inter alia*, led to a massive exodus of the opponents of Dr. Banda from both the party and government machinery, which led to the rise of a new generation of leaders who, among others, included Chakuamba and Tembo. The former was appointed the Minister for Community and Social Development whilst the latter

¹⁹ In the 1994 elections AFORD won 28 seats in the north, MCP 54 seats in the centre and UDF 76 seats in the south. The pattern in the 1999 elections was 33, 51 and 71 seats respectively as reported by Patel, N., (2000) "*Malawi's Second Democratic Elections: Process, Problems and Prospects*" Christian Literature Association in Malawi (CLAIM), Blantyre, Malawi.

²⁰ The 1964 Cabinet crisis was the ultimate manifestation of policy differences between Dr. Banda and his younger colleagues mostly Cabinet ministers. The younger progressive ministers, *inter alia*, wanted him to adopt a pro-socialist stance and accelerate the rate of Africanisation of the major posts within the civil service and not to introduce charges for health services. They argued that Dr. Banda's leadership style betrayed the underlying morals and ideals of the independence struggle.

steadily became very close to Dr. Banda and served him in various capacities until his death in November 1997. The omnipresence of Tembo in Dr. Banda's 30 year long rule is aptly summed up by Kaunda (1992: 6):

While Tembo has been in and out of formal political office a number of times, he [had] not at any time relinquished his control over the major economic and political institutions gluing together [state apparatus] and [had] on behalf of the life president been the dispenser of rewards and punishments ensuring the efficient operation of the [patronage] system.

Chakuamba's honeymoon with Dr. Banda's regime did not last. It came to an abrupt end about two decades later. In 1981, he was put behind bars charged with treason, an offence, which according to the penal code was and is still punishable by death. He was accused of plotting to assassinate Dr. Banda in order to take over leadership of the government. On the contrary, never did Tembo at any time completely fall out of grace with Dr. Banda. He remained loyal to him for over thirty years of his rule, during which he progressively became very powerful both within the party and government institutional set ups. In fact, in the closing years of Dr. Banda's regime, Tembo was in the international press described as "Malawi's strongest man especially when he was the Minister of State in the President's office"²¹. He was thus widely expected to take over the leadership of the party and government in the event of a leadership vacuum, which was becoming increasingly imminent given Dr. Banda's rapidly deteriorating health.

The theory of Tembo's automatic accession to the leadership of both the party and government was overtaken by events. It inevitably crumbled following the relentless waves of demands for political liberalization ignited by the famous March 8, 1992 Catholic Lentern Pastoral Letter, read in all its affiliate churches throughout the country, which for the first time ever, unequivocally criticized the government's policies on human rights, governance and economic development and called for urgent reforms²². The events that followed, *inter alia*, saw the release of political prisoners in 1992. This marked the second comeback of Chakuamba onto the political scene who joined the UDF whilst in prison but as an ordinary member.

In a surprise turn of events, Chakuamba was in the run up to the May 1994 general elections, invited to rejoin MCP as its Secretary General²³, then, the

²¹ See *Two sides of the MCP crack*, Malawi News, August 8, 2001.

²² The Pastoral Letter (Chingota, 1992) was published in March 1992 in Malawi under the title *Living Our Faith*. In September 1992 it was published under the title *The Truth Will Set You Free* (Church in the World No. 28): The catholic Institute of International Relations in London.

²³ The last person to serve as MCP's Secretary General was the incumbent President Bakili Muluzi before he was systematically forced to resign from active politics to concentrate on his business enterprises.

most second powerful position within the party hierarchy which had been vacant since 1982. He readily accepted arguing that there was “nobody who can resist such influential positions – *mipando yonona*”. For MCP, the recruitment of Chakuamba was certainly a strategic ploy to consolidate its visibly fragile support base in the southern region in a desperate bid to retain power. The June 14, 1993 referendum had, *inter alia*, shown that the support for MCP had considerably waned outside the central region. Taking Chakuamba on board as the second most powerful in the chain of command would, therefore, boost the stakes of the party in the May 1994 electoral contest. As subsequent events indicate, the party cadres, particularly John Tembo, probably thought they would simply use Chakuamba as a stepping-stone and systematically shovel him out of the driving seat in the process.

In an extraordinary party convention convened on 15th February, 1994, Dr. Banda was endorsed as MCP’s presidential candidate with Chakuamba as his running mate²⁴. The party’s Constitution was also amended to allow for the creation of the post of vice president, which Chakuamba assumed by virtue of being Dr. Banda’s running mate. At this convention, Tembo was retained as the party’s Treasurer General. When Dr. Banda finally died on November 25, 1997, Chakuamba became the party president. His accession to the party presidency, however, marked the turning point in MCP’s intra politics. Tembo could no longer disguise his leadership ambitions not only for the party but also for the country.

In the run up to the 1999 general elections, he schematically ignited debate about the party’s presidential candidate. He argued that Chakuamba could not simply by virtue of being party president qualify as an automatic presidential candidate. A convention was, indeed, held on January 25, 1999 in Mzuzu during which Chakuamba was reaffirmed as the presidential candidate edging Tembo by 430 to 199 votes²⁵. Tembo was voted the party’s vice president with 330 against 293 votes for his challenger, Dr. Hetherwick Ntaba. In the contest for the vice presidency, about 77 delegates abstained.

The convention did very little to put to a virtual rest the differences between Chakuamba and Tembo especially in the context of the MCP-AFORD electoral alliance whose underlying objective was to eject the UDF from the driving seat of government. It was further championed as a strategy to reunite the country following the 1994 general elections which laid bare the divisions of the country along regional lines. Consequently, at the launch of the alliance, it was emphasized that, “the north, the centre and the south will return to one nation under the alliance. We cannot afford to have a divided nation along regional lines because of selfish leaders like Muluzi”²⁶. However, the question of Chakuamba’s running mate became a pretty vexing issue.

²⁴ See *New blood in MCP executive committee*, The Daily Times, February 15, 1994.

²⁵ See *Its Gwanda*, The Daily Times, January 25, 1999.

²⁶ See for example *Alliance for unity–Chihana*, The Daily Times, April 12, 1999.

The talking point was Chakuamba's appointment of Chakufwa Chihana as his running mate sidelining Tembo who insisted that by virtue of his position within the MCP power hierarchy was an automatic choice. Similar sentiments were expressed by the Electoral Commission, which contested the constitutionality of Chakuamba's appointment of Chihana as a running mate in the High Court. In what was certainly a landmark judgment, the High Court upheld the appointment of Chihana as the presidential running mate for the MCP-AFORD electoral alliance. The verdict appeared, at least momentarily, to have pacified the MCP to an extent that both Chakuamba and Tembo publicly professed their commitment to working together for the good of the country under the aegis of the MCP-AFORD electoral alliance. At a joint rally to kick-start the campaign for the electoral alliance, Tembo said; "I am happy to report to you that we have resolved what you have been hearing on the radio and newspapers that there were differences in the party. While our enemies were celebrating over our differences, we were busy looking for solutions to our problems"²⁷. He further characterized the MCP-AFORD electoral alliance as the only hope for Malawians and often argued, "the resolution of our differences would be meaningless if people did not go to register and vote out the UDF"²⁸.

However, the debate about the leadership of the party resurfaced in the wake of the poor showing of the MCP-AFORD electoral alliance at the polls. This time around, the argument of Tembo was that there was need for new leadership for the party following its defeat in the June 1999 polls. To strengthen his case, the defeat of the MCP-AFORD electoral alliance was construed as a vote of no confidence in its leadership. He argued that this was the case because the alliance created considerable confusion among the people to an extent that they had little choice but to defect to the devil they knew better, that is, the UDF. In Tembo's view, therefore, it was imperative for the party leadership cadres to seek fresh mandate through a convention in order to pave way for visionary leadership to reinvigorate the party from the grassroots in readiness for the 2004 electoral polls.

In an attempt to gain sympathy of MCP loyalists, Tembo accused Chakuamba of abdicating the responsibility entrusted to him as party president by concentrating on the leadership of the MCP-AFORD electoral alliance, which he contended, threatened the continued existence of the MCP. Seemingly unperturbed, Chakuamba branded Tembo's accusations as tantamount to a strategic ploy to usurp the party's leadership through underhand tactics. This time, especially that the elections were over, there was very little that they could do to conceal their differences. They both openly acknowledged that the party

²⁷ See *MCP resolves differences*, The Daily Times, March 15, 1999; *Alliance campaign kicks off*, The Daily Times, March 22, 1999; and *MCP-AFORD will solve it*, April 6, 1999.

²⁸ See *Alliance only hope for Malawians says Tembo*, The Daily Times, April 28, 1999.

“was split over leadership style and hoped that a convention would solve the problem”²⁹.

A convention was consequently sanctioned for August 6, 2001. According to the party’s constitutional requirement, the venue for the convention rotates among the country’s three administrative regions. Since the party’s 1994 and 1999 conventions were held in the centre and north respectively, the south was hence an automatic choice for the August 6, 2001 convention³⁰. As the date for the convention approached, however, the venue for the convention became a subject of contentious debate. In particular, Tembo’s faction, in a hastily convened regional conference, recommended the switch of the convention venue from Blantyre to Lilongwe at the party’s national headquarters. Dr. Peter Chiona, who was the chairperson for the convention as well as the party’s second vice president, announced the change of the venue. It was argued that the decision to change the convention venue was taken in the interest of security of the delegates. In support of the decision taken by the regional conference, Tembo reiterated that their security was indeed at stake as “everyone who will vote for me will have their heads cut off”³¹.

The unilateral decision by the regional conference to switch the convention venue from Blantyre to Lilongwe resulted in MCP holding parallel conventions, one in Lilongwe and another in Blantyre. These conventions were held despite legal remedies by each faction to restrain each other from proceeding with the conventions. Each faction was thus determined to proceed with their convention as illustrated in the remarks of Chakuamba and Tembo respectively:

I will accept the views of the people if people elect me as president and shall respect their views and continue with MCP ... I am available if nominated as president and I will accept the presidency and I believe I have a chance.³²

The Lilongwe convention elected Tembo whilst the Blantyre one elected Chakuamba as party president. They both registered landslide victories at the conventions they supported. This meant the party had effectively two presidents as each faction declared its convention legitimate. The constitutional requirement regarding the venue of the convention notwithstanding, the events in the run up to the August 6, 2001 parallel conventions demonstrated the extent to which regionalism is an important force in Malawi’s politics. The security threat orchestrated by the Tembo faction was hardly genuine. They simply feared that Tembo could not win the presidency if the convention was to be held in Chakuamba’s power base. Neither could Chakuamba bow down to the

²⁹ See *MCP officials admit the party is split-convention only hope*, Malawi News, July 29 – August 4, 1999; *Tembo, Ntaba in war of words*, The Nation, July 25; and *Leader of Opposition – court says Chakuamba*, The Nation, October 23, 2001.

³⁰ See *Two conventions, one party*, Malawi News, August 5–12, 2000.

³¹ See *Tembo, Ntaba in war of words*, The Nation, July 25.

³² See *Two conventions, one party*, Malawi News, August 5–12, 2000.

demand to switch the convention venue for arguably the very reason. The constitutional requirement while genuine veiled the underlying regionalistic tendencies at least from a less critical vantage point.

The aftermath of the parallel conventions has had far reaching implications on the political careers of both Tembo and Chakuamba. The major outcome has been the dramatic change in their politicking strategies. They are both determined to put to an end each other's political careers through various means, which have included strategic parliamentary alliances, the courts and the party machinery itself. The prominent item on the agenda of each faction was the spirited attempt to secure the legitimacy of their conventions. They both took recourse to the courts urging them to rule in their favour. Thus, the point of contention in the legal showdown, which dragged as far the Supreme Court of Appeal, was for courts to decide which of the parallel conventions was legitimate. Both the High and Supreme Court of Appeal declared the parallel conventions illegitimate in which case the status quo was upheld³³. In either case, it was emphasized that the leadership crisis in the party should be resolved through a common party convention. The courts' decision did not make the political atmosphere in MCP any better, especially because at this very time Chakuamba was serving suspension from Parliament for continued disrespect for the head of state. While the election case was in still in court, Chakuamba and Chihana boycotted parliamentary sessions graced by the head of state. By virtue of being the Vice President of MCP, Tembo was elevated to the position of the Leader of Opposition. However, even though Chakuamba was reinstated as party president, the Speaker of Parliament declined to recognize him as the Leader of Opposition the court injunction stopping Tembo from acting as the Leader of Opposition notwithstanding.

The immediate reaction of Chakuamba was to expel Tembo including some of the leading members of his faction – Kate Kainja and Bester Majoni – on the recommendation of the NEC of the party. Tembo and his colleagues contested their expulsion in court and were subsequently reinstated as members. They in turn took advantage of the Defection Bill, which had just been legislated into

³³ See *MCP leaders should fight at a convention*, The Daily Times, November 3, 2001. The High Court judge ruled that both conventions were illegitimate. He therefore declared that the status of the party hierarchy in which Chakuamba was the president and Tembo the vice should prevail until a common convention was held. This, however, created further problems because at this time Tembo was the Leader of Opposition following the suspension of Chakuamba for continued disrespect for the head of state. The MCP-AFORD alliance contested the results of Presidential elections and Chakuamba and Chihana vowed never to attend any parliamentary sessions not until after the election case was over. They argued that their attendance would imply they recognized the legitimacy of the President. The problem was that for Tembo the status quo meant that he continues serving as the Leader of Opposition where as for Chakuamba, the status quo meant reclaiming the post of Leader of Opposition from Tembo besides serving as the party president. See for example, *Judge's order on MCP raises confusion*, Malawi News, August 11–17, 2001; *JZU disappointed*, August 28 – November 3, 2001; and *Speaker cannot be sued: JZU might remain leader of opposition*, The Daily Times, September 6, 2001.

law to get Chakuamba out of Parliament. The law emanating from the Defection Bill prohibits the association of groups with political objectives. They accused Chakuamba and his chief political associate Ntaba of associating with AFORD and NDA politicians, which was contrary to the underlying spirit of the Defection Bill and asked the Speaker of Parliament to declare their seats vacant, which he promptly did³⁴. The Speaker's order was challenged in court and Chakuamba and Ntaba reclaimed their seats in Parliament.

The latest development in the power struggle was the unilateral convention which the Tembo's MCP faction held on June 22, 2002 at the Natural Resources College in Lilongwe. The convention, which elected Tembo as the party President, proceeded despite an injunction by the Chakuamba faction restraining them from holding the convention. It is on this basis that some sections of the Tembo faction have sanctioned him as the party's presidential candidate arguing that "Tembo voted in favour of the Open Terms Bill not to pave way for the incumbent President but to show that he is ready to face any candidate from any political party in the country including President Bakili Muluzi"³⁵. The new dimension to the legal battle triggered by the power struggle is that the Chakuamba faction wanted Tembo and the leading members of his faction commuted to prison for contempt of court which the courts did but with an option of fine to the tune of MK 200,000 which Tembo and his accomplices paid.

The litany of court cases whose verdicts are not adhered to underlies the virtual failure of the efforts to resolve the leadership crisis through various institutional means. The leadership of the party hangs in balance especially after the *Open Terms Bill* was tabled in Parliament. Most members of the Tembo faction are virtually disgruntled because of Tembo's apparent support for the *Open Term Bill*³⁶. While Chakuamba has hanged on to the leadership of the party outside Parliament, Tembo has systematically entrenched his leadership of the party inside Parliament. For example, to underlie his authority as Leader of Opposition and MCP, he reshuffled the shadow cabinet of the party in which members of the Chakuamba faction were sidelined altogether³⁷. In the process of tightening his grip on power inside Parliament, he has inevitably realigned his faction with the ruling UDF as evidenced in his fervent support for the *Open Terms Bill*. The position of Tembo on the *Open Terms Bill* has created confusion even among his own loyalists who, in concert with some members of the

³⁴ See *Gwanda and Ntaba no longer MPs*, The Daily Times, July 13, 2001.

³⁵ See *Court stops convention – Chakuamba granted injunction, plaintiff free to seek variation*, The Daily Times, June 19, 2002 and *MCP split over 2004 candidate*, The Nation, August 2, 2002.

³⁶ See *4 to testify against JZU: MCP claims to have evidence Tembo took bribes from UDF*, The Daily Times, July 12, 2002 and *JZU said to be losing support*, The Daily Times, July 23, 2002.

³⁷ See *Tembo changes shadow cabinet–sidelines Chakuamba*, The Nation, June 20, 2001.

Chakuamba faction, are calling for new leadership for the party³⁸. Neither Tembo nor Chakuamba should contest for the presidency of the party. They argue that if both Chakuamba and Tembo still want to be involved in the politics of the new look MCP, they should do so in an advisory capacity. The conviction of Tembo and the imminent conviction of Chakuamba portend a possible end to the enduring destructive power struggle in MCP because the Constitution disqualifies people with a criminal past within the last seven years from seeking public office³⁹. If Chakuamba is convicted, this might give room for new leadership to emerge in MCP, but with less than one and half years away from the next general elections, it would require a very charismatic leader to reorganize MCP into a formidable political force. It would be a problem for leadership of this stature to emerge because the enduring power struggle between Tembo and Chakuamba virtually suppressed the possible development of alternative leadership. The focus of the intra party politics has been almost exclusively on the showdown between Tembo and Chakuamba with the rest of the party members as either mere spectators or followers.

4. LACK OF ALTERNATIVE LEADERSHIP – AFORD

AFORD was probably the most popular political organization to emerge when it operated as a pressure group at the onset of the democratic transition in 1992–1993. Its popularity was largely a result of the bold step taken by its leader Chakufwa Chihana to openly confront the authoritarian one party leadership at a time when it was a great risk to do so even in one’s wildest imaginations. In support of the Catholic Bishop’s Lantern letter, Chihana returning from a conference in Lusaka, Zambia on April 6, 1992 planned to announce publicly his commitment to campaign for democracy and human rights, which landed him in detention. This apparently transformed both Chihana and AFORD into symbols “both internationally and within for the need for radical political reform in the country” (Nzunda and Ross 1995: 5). In the early days of the political transition, Chihana was, therefore, synonymous with freedom especially because he demonstrated willingness to sacrifice his life for the good of the great bulk of oppressed and virtually helpless Malawians.

The stakes of AFORD in the politics of Malawi have, however, progressively diminished over the last couple of years. AFORD should have,

³⁸ See *MPs want Tembo, Chakuamba out*, The Nation, July 12, 2002.

³⁹ Chakuamba who is yet to be tried was arrested on charges that in collaboration with his personal assistant, they forged a memo outlining Muluzi’s strategies to win opposition MPs to vote for the *Third Term Bill*. This offence is, according to the penal code, tantamount to treason and if convicted, Chakuamba like Tembo, will under the provisions of the Constitution, not be eligible to contest for any public office. See *Gwanda arrested*, The Nation, October 21, 2002 and *Gwanda arrest sparks debate in Parliament*, The Nation, October 22, 2002.

especially given the symbolic importance Chihana enjoyed at the onset of the transitional epoch, ably entrenched itself as a potent political force in the country. On the contrary, the party is rapidly drifting into disarray to an extent that it may eventually disintegrate into a dysfunctional political entity altogether. The major constraint facing the party is what contemporary theorists would characterize as the '*founder's syndrome*'. This is to say that the leadership of the party is equated to the party itself. Put differently, AFORD is synonymous with Chihana and Chihana is synonymous with AFORD.

This kind of atmosphere has invariably inhibited the progressive development of potential leaders within the party since all major decisions for the party have essentially been an exclusive domain of Chihana often without or with nominal input from the NEC. The yawning gap of authority between Chihana on one hand and his counterparts on the other within the NEC has been substantially inimical to the possibility of any meaningful interaction between them. They have not interacted as equals in which case Chihana has exercised unfettered authority in deciding on strategic policy decisions for the party. This has had significant implications to such an extent that the cumulative effect of Chihana's unilateral decisions has gradually but steadily made AFORD lose its appeal as the harbinger of democracy in Malawi.

The decisions that Chihana has made in his capacity as the leader of AFORD stretching back to 1992 have substantially eroded his stature as a visionary leader. They have instead reduced him to a sheer opportunist. He has thus aligned and realigned AFORD with either UDF or MCP as and when he sees it fit primarily to satisfy his own political ambitions. Immediately after the May 1994 general elections AFORD went into a parliamentary coalition with MCP to "preserve national unity and security"⁴⁰ which collapsed about a year later. In July 1995, AFORD entered into a coalition government with UDF as a junior partner arguing, "We fought for political liberation together". This coalition government characterized by many political analysts, as '*marriage of convenience*'⁴¹ did not last as was widely projected. Chihana pulled out of the coalition government deal accusing the UDF led government of systemic corrupt practices.

The decision to pull out of the coalition government portended the turnaround not only in AFORD's intra party politics but also the image, stature and integrity of Chihana as a leader. Some members of AFORD appointed as Cabinet ministers protested against Chihana's decision and stuck to their

⁴⁰ See *Eating your own vomit*, The Herald, July 12, 1994; *Mgwirizano wachinyengo*, The Herald, July 13, 1994; and *Alliance with hidden agenda*, The Nation, July 13, 1994. Prior to the general elections, Chihana had described MCP as the party of death and darkness and entirely ruled out any possibility of corroborating with MCP. For detailed discussions refer to Nzunda and Ross (1995).

⁴¹ See *AFORD ditches MCP*, The Nation, June 11, 1994. It must be noted that immediately after the 1994 general elections UDF approached AFORD to enter into a coalition government but declined. However, the offer to become junior partners in a coalition government a year later was accepted on the very same conditions on the table in 1994.

posts⁴². In the run up to the 1999 general elections, Chihana, as already alluded to above, struck yet another alliance deal with MCP in a bid to dislodge the UDF from power. The electoral alliance failed to achieve its objective but nevertheless survived somewhat longer after the general elections. Prior to the tabling of the *Open Terms Bill* on July 4, 2002, Chihana was reportedly negotiating a government of national unity (GNU) with Muluzi and Tembo's MCP faction⁴³.

The terms of negotiation for the GNU clearly underlined not only the problem of lack of alternative leadership but also the selfishness of the incumbent party leaders. The GNU could only be affected if AFORD and Tembo's MCP faction supported the amendment of section 83(3) of the Constitution to allow a limitless term of office for President. The simmering waves of protests against the idea of establishing a GNU eventually fragmented the party into two factions led by Chihana and his Vice respectively. Chihana unilaterally relinquished nearly all those AFORD functionaries who publicly protested against the GNU initiative of their positions within the party's administrative apparatus barely a month ahead of a long overdue convention to decide on new office bearers⁴⁴. In fact, Greenwell Mwamondwe had already declared his interest to contest for the office of the party President. When the convention was finally convened in May 2002, the split among the senior party cadres could no longer be concealed. The Vice President, Du Mhango, alongside those demoted, boycotted the convention which, as expected, gave Chihana a fresh mandate as the party leader unopposed.

The convention also debated and took a stand regarding AFORD's position *vis a vis* the proposed *Open Terms Bill*. The convention resolved not to support the proposed constitutional amendment. However, barely days after the convention, Chihana, in stark contrast to the resolution of the party, unilaterally endorsed AFORD's support for the proposed constitutional amendment. The relations in the party were, as a result, further strained. Those who publicly campaigned for the adherence to the party's position as espoused at the convention were either slapped or threatened with suspensions from the party⁴⁵.

⁴² These included the late Matembo Nzunda, Mapopa Chipeta, Mervin Moyo and Reverend Banda. A special convention was convened to decide the fate of those who remained in the coalition government popularly referred to as label ministers. The convention resolved that "any AFORD member who shall remain in Cabinet after the abrogation of the UDF/AFORD coalition shall be said to have defected or crossed the floor". See for example, *Speaker sued*, The Daily Times, December 17, 1996; *AFORD resumes case against speaker*, The Star, December 29, 1996; and *The speaker must resign*, The Star, December 30, 1996.

⁴³ See *Tembo faction not involved*, The Daily Times, August 27, 2001 and *Chihana, Muluzi in secret talks ...as MCP/AFORD alliance crumbles*, The Daily Times, November 12, 2001.

⁴⁴ See *Shake up in AFORD, Gondwe, Mwamondwe, Kandodo demoted*, The Nation, December 2001.

⁴⁵ See *Suspended AFORD members challenging party president*, The Daily Times, July 4, 2002. Those suspended included Dan Nswoya, the secretary general and Manifesto Kayira, the publicity secretary.

The eventual defeat of the bill in Parliament has, therefore, left AFORD heavily divided and without any clear sense of direction.

While the seemingly progressive minds within the party are calling for the immediate resignation of its leadership, Chihana and a group of his sycophants are determined to hang on⁴⁶. They have, in fact, intensified their efforts to align AFORD with UDF in a GNU. The current trend of events risks AFORD stepping into the shoes of MCP whose institutional mechanisms have virtually been suffocated to perform any meaningful function. The fact that as the leader of AFORD, Chihana, has more or less acquired the status of life presidency which, in the present dispensation is highly detested, remains the major stumbling block. There is, thus, as a matter of urgency, need for leadership with a vision, capable of putting in place broadly based policy strategies that would resuscitate AFORD's political vigour by quickly getting it out the cocoon of political parochialism.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is little doubt that all the major parties have invariably degenerated into platforms for select selfish individuals. Their institutional frameworks have become highly manipulable in order to gratify personal aggrandizement. The parties have thus turned into instruments of patronage targeting particular constituents, not for their intellectual merit but for their help to maintain themselves in power. More important, however, is the fact that leaders have failed to distinguish themselves as genuine democrats. A mark of a democratic leader is magnanimity, as for example, demonstrated by Nelson Mandela of South Africa. He thus encourages followers to become leaders, steps down, gives others a chance and advises them (Wiseman 1995; Mutakyahwa 1998).

The Malawi's scenario paints a different picture altogether. MCP is deeply embroiled in a perennial power struggle; AFORD has fallen prey to the founder's syndrome; and UDF has schematically inhibited succession debate by promoting the *Third Term* debate despite the defeat of the *Open Terms Bill* in Parliament. The incumbent MCP publicity secretary, Nicolas Dausi, has aptly summed up the current status of political parties in Malawi. In a recent interview he described the confusion raging in the major parties as:

⁴⁶ See *Chihana told to step down*, The Daily Times, July 10, 2002 and *Chihana cannot be forced to resign*, The Daily Times, July 15, 2002. Chihana's support for the Open Terms Bill was evidenced not only through his personal vote when it was debated in Parliament but also managed to coax Khwauli Msiska to move the motion for the Bill to enhance the credibility of the Bill in the eyes of the constituents of the proposed constitutional amendment. The AFORD Vice President had this to say; "I ask Chihana and the national chair Mughogho to resign immediately or be removed disgracefully by the NEC. These two plus the eight MPs have betrayed the party, the constituency and the people of Malawi who believe in democratic principles".

... resulting from greedy leaders. They take parties as their personal bedrooms where they can turn beds in whichever direction they want. They seem not to realize that parties belong to members and supporters who also aim high.

Free and fair competition, the hallmark of democratic tradition, is virtually non-existent in all the parties. UDF has never held any convention since 1993; all the conventions MCP has had were characteristically truncated; and AFORD has held only one convention that, for all intents and purposes, was highly symbolic, and yet in a democratic milieu leaders have to renew their mandate to govern through conventions which also give new aspirants the opportunity to contest for positions. Thus conventions accord parties a new lease of life since they are a strategic forum for assessing parties' performance and, therefore, rethinking the way forward.

In the broader context, however, the experiences of the parties in Malawi are generally characteristic of African politics, especially with regard to the interpretation of victory. "The game is for keeps. One must win by any means necessary. The transition in the eyes of many African politicians is a battle for control over the state's coercive apparatus" (Monga 1997: 165). The way forward, at least on the basis of Malawi's experience, is to reorient the general understanding of leadership without which the transition is likely to remain fragile and potentially reversible. To achieve quality, dynamic and visionary leadership, "organizations must remain subordinate to constituting rules which gave them life and which must remain the prerogative of the people as a whole" (Wunsch 1990: 275). It is thus imperative to embrace the participative governance strategy, which thrives on procedures, rule of law and institutional arrangements fashioned in the context of free and fair contestation and dispersion of power refreshed by elections at reasonably regular intervals.

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