



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Zambians campaign for independence, 1944-1964

1944

to: 24 October

1964

**Country:** Zambia

**Location Description:** *At the time this was the colony Northern Rhodesia of the British Empire*

### Goals:

The initial goals of the campaign were to prevent the amalgamation of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland to form the British-controlled Central African Federation. In addition, campaigners called for an end to racist discrimination against the black majority within the political, economic, and social spheres of Northern Rhodesia. However, towards the end of the 1950s, radical campaigners began expanding their vision for a more democratic and just future. They called not only for the disbanding of the Federation, but also for the formation of an independent state (Zambia) that would be free from European colonial domination.

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 048. Protest meetings

### Methods in 2nd segment:

### Methods in 3rd segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 010. Newspapers and journals › In 1953, Nkumbula and Kaunda begin publishing the Congress News
- 023. Destruction of own property
- 105. Establishment strike

### Methods in 4th segment:

- 016. Picketing
- 071. Consumers' boycott

### Methods in 5th segment:

- 016. Picketing
- 071. Consumers' boycott
- 124. Boycott of elections

### Methods in 6th segment:

- 016. Picketing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 071. Consumers' boycott
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

Defense

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

**Group characterization:**

- Black Africans of Northern Rhodesia
- clerks
- mineworkers
- students
- teachers
- tribal chiefs

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Kenneth Kaunda, Harry Nkumbula, Sikota Wina, Simon Kapwepwe, Northern Rhodesia African National Congress (NRANC), Zambia African National Congress (ZANC), United National Independence Party (UNIP)

**Partners:**

Not known

**External allies:**

Not known

**Involvement of social elites:**

Not known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Black Africans
- Clerks

- Students
- Teachers
- Tribal Chiefs
- Union Workers

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

- Northern Rhodesia African National Congress

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

- Supreme Action Council

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

- United National Independence Party
- Zambia African National Congress

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** 3 years 6 months

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

British Government, British Colonial Government of Northern Rhodesia

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

Arrests of campaign leaders in 1959 prompted extensive property damage, but it is not clear if demonstrators intended or caused physical harm to any opponents.

**Repressive Violence:**

Resistance leaders, including Kaunda and Nkumbula, were repeatedly imprisoned. Assaults, beatings, and the banning of opposition groups also took place.

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

6 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

The Federation was dismantled in, and the state of Zambia was officially formed on 24 October 1964.

Although support for the campaign diminished in the mid-1950s, it increased greatly until independence was won.

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In order to strengthen their hold on political and economic power, the white settlers of British-controlled Northern Rhodesia sought to unite the British colonial territories of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland during the late 1930s and 1940s. This was a response to the growing strength of African organizations (e.g. labor unions) in Northern Rhodesia, a development that prompted white European fears of African social and economic advance. In addition, the white minority of Northern Rhodesia feared the type of influence that black populist countries located north of Northern Rhodesia (e.g. the Belgian Congo and countries in East Africa) might have on white-ruled Northern Rhodesia. Thus, in order to maintain their political influence and economic power over the black majority of Northern Rhodesia, white settlers endeavored to strengthen their ties with white-controlled southern Africa by forming the Central African Federation.

However, black Africans in Northern Rhodesia protested against the prospect of such an amalgamation. Africans in Northern Rhodesia became increasingly afraid of losing land to the Europeans, and in terms of political representation, land ownership, trade union power, and pass-law control, Africans in Southern Rhodesia were less well off than in Northern Rhodesia.

In order to address this issue, black Africans of Northern Rhodesia sought the aid of local tribal chiefs, who were the traditional trustees of tribal land. In 1944, a senior Bemba chief argued against federation in the Northern Provincial Council in order to address his people's concerns, and increasing numbers of chiefs began to speak out against amalgamation. In addition to the tribal chiefs, the clerks and teachers who sat in the African Representative Council called for the formation of an expressly political body that could better organize for political action against the white settlers. This led to the creation of the Northern Rhodesia Congress in 1948.

As African nationalism continued to grow within the opposition, the Northern Rhodesia Congress was renamed the Northern Rhodesia African National Congress (NRANC) in 1951, with Harry Nkumbula as its president. The Congress' goal was to prevent the Federation from forming, and through a series of conferences held in Lusaka that brought together chiefs, congress leaders, and trade unionists, opposition leaders organized a Supreme Action Council that would plan and potentially order a mass action.

In March 1953, Congress President Nkumbula burned the British White Paper on Federation and made a national call for noncooperation with the federal government. He called for a two-day 'national prayer' that would take place in April, during which no Africans would go to work. However, the British colonial government, mining companies, and other big employers took steps to counter the upcoming general strike. Workers and all daily-paid Africans in the civil service were threatened with instant dismissal if they were to obey Nkumbula's orders and observe the strike. The government's tactic of worker intimidation largely succeeded, for African miners (except at Mufulira) and other workers did not observe the strike.

Despite this failure, the Congress took steps to appeal their case to a higher authority. In April 1953, with the signatures of 120 tribal chiefs, the Congress sent a petition to the Queen and to the British Houses of Parliament in London to protest the amalgamation of the territories. They argued that the black African majority of Northern Rhodesia had been excluded from the decision to form a Federation, citing that the vast majority of black Africans were not permitted to vote. However, their appeals went unanswered, and the British Colonial government continued to arrest, persecute, and intimidate leaders of the opposition. In addition, the Central African Federation was formed in August 1953, and popular support for the Congress dwindled.

Despite their failure to prevent the formation for the Federation, Congress leaders and other members of the opposition in Northern Rhodesia continued to challenge the Federation's legitimacy, and its policy of racial discrimination. Between 1954 and 1958, opposition leaders continued to encourage students, mine workers, and other black Africans to boycott and picket European businesses that discriminated against them and to practice noncooperation with the Federal government. Such boycotts and pickets would bring white businesses to a standstill for weeks, and the colonial government responded with beatings, assaults, and arrests. It also launched an investigation into the Congress, and members of the colonial government sought stronger legislation against boycotting and picketing. In 1955, Congress Secretary-General Kenneth Kaunda and Nkumbula were both jailed for two months for possessing prohibited literature, yet their arrest drew the public's attention to their organizing efforts and helped create an aura of martyrdom.

It was not until 1958, however, that popular support for Congress was fully revived. Two years of economic distress, (as a result of fallen copper prices), had increased the unemployment rate among black Africans, and had forced many into even greater poverty. In addition, an influx of young leaders into the Congress during this time brought a new, strong, and radical energy to the organization. These young leaders, including Kaunda, Sikota Wina, and Simon Kapwepwe, were committed to the idea of creating an independent African state that would be free of British colonial rule. This nation, they envisioned, would be named Zambia.

However, this vision clashed with the one held by other Congress members, including Nkumbula. In 1958, Nkumbula was in favor of taking part in the elections that would form a new constitution for Northern Rhodesia and allow about 25,000 Africans to vote, while the radicals sought to boycott the election. This division led to a split in Congress and to the formation of the Zambia African National Congress (ZANC), a new party that would be led by Kaunda, Wina, and Kapwepwe.

In 1959, amid spreading rumors that the Nyasaland African Congress was about to launch a 'murder plot' against white Europeans, the Federal government declared a state of emergency, banned the ZANC and NRANC, and jailed its leaders. However, these arrests only helped to fuel black African resistance, and prompted demonstrators to turn to property damage for two months. Shop windows were smashed in Lusaka, riots broke out, arson was committed, cars were damaged, and attempts were made to burn down the rest-house used by members of the African Legislative Council. Many people were imprisoned, including Kaunda, but in October of that year the United National Independence Party (UNIP) was also formed. Once he was released from jail in January 1960, Kaunda became the leader of UNIP.

As black African pressure continued to mount in Northern Rhodesia (as well as in Nyasaland), members of the British government began to realize that Northern Rhodesia would need a more rapid constitutional advance if it were to maintain its hold on the region. Pressure from Europeans in Southern Rhodesia, who were supporting the formation of a fully independent Southern Rhodesia, also prompted members of the British parliament to reconsider its stance. In December 1960, British colonial authorities invited Kaunda and other UNIP leaders to a conference in London to discuss the future of the three colonies.

In 1961, the Colonial Office proposed a constitution for Northern Rhodesia that would make possible an African majority in the legislature. However, this proposed constitution was revised after having received pressure from the Federal Prime Minister, Sir Roy Welensky, who feared that the concessions made in the proposed constitution would lead to Northern Rhodesia's secession from the Federation.

However, this proposed concession and its ultimate revision prompted UNIP to begin a stronger civil disobedience campaign throughout the northern and eastern parts of the region in 1961. Kaunda, who was greatly influenced by the work of Mohandas Gandhi and espoused an ideology of positive nonviolent action, urged campaigners to protest nonviolently. The campaign—which consisted of boycotts, pickets, rallies, roadblocks, and other acts of civil disobedience—was largely nonviolent.

As a result of the campaign, the colonial government revised the constitution once again in 1962, allowing UNIP to participate in the October 1962 elections. After a major election campaign, during which UNIP and Congress leaders traveled throughout the region for local community support, UNIP and the Congress won two-thirds of the total vote between them, thus gaining a majority of government seats. With opposition leaders now in government positions, the Federation was dissolved in 1963.

In early 1964, Northern Rhodesia held another election, which was based on universal adult suffrage. The results of this election gave UNIP a decisive majority win, Kaunda was elected Prime Minister, and Northern Rhodesia was granted full independence on 24 October 1964.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

: Kenneth Kaunda was largely influenced by the work of Mohandas Gandhi and the

concept of “positive action.” In May 1958, Kaunda traveled to India to meet those who had taken part in the non-violent movement that enabled India to secure its independence from British colonial rule. Kaunda continued to develop his ideology of positive nonviolent action during Northern Rhodesia’s campaign for independence. (1)

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**Additional Notes:**

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Aden Tedla, 26/01/2011

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