



## PROFILE

# Dick Hall

**R**ICHARD SEYMOUR HALL is a man who for the last few years has been caught between two worlds. While European right-wing extremists have attacked and condemned his policies and actions, some African nationalists have dubbed him "a neo-colonialist stooge."

Better known as Dick Hall, the 39-year-old Oxford graduate was largely responsible for founding the *Central African Mail*, the weekly newspaper published in Lusaka. During the political campaign leading to the independence of Zambia the newspaper provided an outlet for African nationalist views and gave its support to the United National Independence Party.

So closely has Dick Hall been associated with UNIP that it is a surprise to hear him say: "I have never been a member of the party. The need for absolute commitment in African political parties is such that a journalist cannot afford to become a member. In the political battle between 1960 and 1964, the *Central African Mail* supported UNIP as the biggest political party, but it was not so much a case of supporting UNIP as facing facts."

His part in the "battle" made him unpopular with many Europeans. "People would not talk with me," he says. "Some of them would cross the street to avoid me. Some parents would not let their children play with mine. I did not like it but you must accept that sort of thing. One thing I feel strongly about is the idea that I am a stooge of UNIP. I am not. I never have been . . ."

Dick Hall is a complex character. There is the tough, uncompromising journalist who says: "I am a tremendous believer in the right of the Press to speak its mind."

There is the idealist who keeps peeping through the cracks in the carefully maintained journalistic facade. There is the Dick Hall who studies history in his spare time and has a yearning for the quiet and fulfilment of academic life. And there is a little boy with a stutter and a mischievous sense of humour who manages, now and again, to slip between the legs of the other Dick Halls and come to the fore.

Physically he suggests the university don more than the journalist. Five foot ten inches tall, medium set, with a high domed forehead and hair that grows over his ears, he wears thick-lensed, horn-rimmed glasses and speaks with a quiet, somewhat high-pitched voice. His manner is nervous and often on surface appears diffident. Dick Hall is, however, a man of decided opinions.

He was born in Margate, Kent, the son of a master mariner in the Merchant Navy. On his mother's side his great grandfather was a town constable of Oxford. "I still have the rattle he used," Dick Hall says.

Part of his boyhood was spent in Sydney, Australia. "The kids were tough, I remember that," he says with a chuckle. "We were used to running about bare-footed. I remember an English emigrant boy coming to school in shoes. We were disgusted. Outside the school we stripped off his shoes and sent him home crying . . ."

But his childhood was not all laughter and games. The young Dick Hall suffered from a stutter — "I was left-handed, and some fool tried to make me write with my right hand," he recalls. It may be that this small boy was tougher than he needed to be to cover up his deficiency.

On returning to Britain Dick Hall's life followed the pattern of many boys of his

age. He attended Hastings Grammar School, Sussex, passed his school certificate and emerged to make his way in a country at war.

"I got a job on the local paper in 1942," he says, "for 7s. 6d. a week and 2s. 6d. cycle allowance. Hastings was being bombed and I got used to seeing bodies dragged out of ruins. Our office windows were frequently blown in during the air raids . . ."

It was a period during which youths grew up quickly. "Most of the grown men were in the services," he recalls. "That meant I had to tackle every kind of job that came up. It was good experience. The first time I went to report a juvenile court, a policeman mistook me for one of the offenders and tried to line me up with the rest . . ."

In 1943 he joined the Royal Navy and for 15 months served in a destroyer in the Mediterranean. "We used to patrol off the Yugoslav coast," he says. "It was not very exciting, but it gave me a great liking for the Mediterranean which I still have. The most alarming thing was being bombed by mistake by the Royal Air Force . . ."

In the Navy he worked long hours on codes and cyphers in bad light and this led to a deterioration in his eyesight. "Everytime I went ashore I got stronger lenses," he says.

His sense of humour bubbles out as he talks about his disastrous interview as a candidate for a commission.

"I was all spruced up and wearing shiny new shoes. I entered the room, stepping out smartly to make a good impression, and my new shoes skidded on the highly polished floor. I slid across the room and ended up with a terrific crash against the table, at which some very senior officers sat. It was not a good start. I was a flop and I never did get a commission."

In 1945 he returned to civilian life and took up his job on the newspaper. One day he called on a local clergyman whose





opinion of the Press was not very high. "A young man like you ought to be doing something better than journalism," said the clergyman. "You ought to go to university."

Dick Hall agreed, at least about going to university. It was something he had been thinking about for a long time. He sat down and wrote to Keble College, Oxford, was called for an interview, and went up to university to read English.

But Dick Hall the undergraduate did not leave Dick Hall the journalist behind. Far from it. They went together. The journalist bug had bitten too deeply to be discarded easily.

"I was a stringer (representative) for the *Sunday Express* and Associated Press while I was there and I got roped in to work on various university magazines," he says. "It was good fun although we did have one nasty moment on one of the magazines. We decided to carry out an investigation into the sex habits of female undergraduates and one of the questionnaires went to an elderly woman lecturer by mistake. She was not amused . . ."

Many things happened while Dick Hall was at Oxford. He got married and while he was sitting his final examinations his wife Barbara gave birth to the first of their five sons.

"I took part in a lot of athletics," he says. "Mostly high jump and cross-country. On one occasion I ran against Roger Bannister in a mile race . . . He finished a very long way in front of me."

So far there was little to suggest the emergence of the crusader but Oxford had one lasting effect on Dick Hall's character. It crystallized his resentment against privilege.

"I have always been suspicious of the Establishment," he says. "There were a lot of young men from the Establishment at Oxford. They were charming, but to me they represented a class of people who

enjoyed unearned privileges and I find that distasteful . . ."

He emerged from university with an Honours degree in English, a love of university life . . . but still, basically, a journalist.

"I got a job on an encyclopedia," he recalls. "I stayed with it four weeks — two weeks' work, two weeks' notice. It was too dull for me. While I was there they moved from SE to SU. When I left I knew everything between the two . . ."

His next job was with the *Daily Mail* in London where he worked on the "foreign desk". He has had two spells with the newspaper interrupted by a period on a London magazine. "When I got to the *Mail* my editor was convinced that I knew nothing and determined to teach me how to write English," he says wryly. "For three months I got nothing in the paper. I learned to write 'English' and after that it was all right . . ."

While on the *Daily Mail* that he joined the Liberal Party and became local secretary for St. Albans during the 1949 general election.

All this time Africa meant little more to him than, say, the Far East.

### Came to Zambia by chance

"I came to Zambia by complete chance," he says. "One night going home after a row in the office I saw an advertisement for a journalist to work on an RST mine newspaper. I applied and got the job."

"Before I left the *Daily Mail* my 'foreign editor' said: 'Northern Rhodesia? There is going to be a massacre there.' I told him, 'Well it should be a good story' and off I went."

He worked at Mufulira for two and a half years as editor of the *Mufulira Magazine*. While there he went on holiday to Zanzibar.

"A stocky man came to see me because



he had heard I was a journalist," he says. "He told me how fond he was of the British Empire and asked for help. I thought of James Johnson, the British MP, and wrote his address on the back of a menu. Johnson came out later and advised my visitor and took up his case. The man was Abeid Karume, now Vice-President of Tanzania." He adds with a grin: "I have always felt that I gave him a beginning . . ."

It was on the Copperbelt that Dick Hall took the first of the steps that brought him into the limelight. For someone with his social conscience the Europeans seemed a privileged community.

"I began to get a twitch about the racial situation," he says. "But I did not start the *African Mail* through idealism: it was more through realism. The need for a newspaper





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to present the African viewpoint was obvious.

"Sir Stephen King-Hall, the journalist and writer, visited Mufulira and I tried to interest him in starting a paper. When he returned to Britain he talked to the Hon. David Astor of the *Observer* about the possibility of financing such an undertaking but David Astor was not interested at that stage. Later Anthony Sampson came to stay with me and I argued the case with him. I left Mufulira to join the Government Information Department in 1958 and at the end of the following year David Astor agreed to put up the money.

"At the same time the late Alexander Scott was talking about a 'wee' paper in Lusaka. I would not agree to his terms because I did not think there was enough capital. I brought him and David Astor together . . ."

When the *African Mail* was started Dick Hall became managing editor — he is now editorial director of the paper and of the *Zambia Financial Mail* — and found himself plunged into the heart of the

African nationalist political campaign.

"Everyone in Britain thought I would be jailed," he says. "Joe Grimond, the Liberal leader, promised to take up my case in the House of Commons if it happened. It did not although I once had a writ served from Sir Roy Welensky about some 'nasty' things we had said about him. It is the only letter I have had from a Prime Minister. It was not followed up."

It is an interesting reflection of Dick Hall's character that he appreciates Welensky's capabilities even if he opposes his politics. "He has a blind spot towards Africans," he says. "But I believe that if he had been born elsewhere, say Australia, he might have become one of the greatest figures of the Commonwealth. I believe too that if, at the start of Federation, he had brought the African nationalist leaders together and asked what they wanted and tried to work with them the Federation might just have made it . . ."

His years in Zambia have been hectic and it is difficult to understand how Dick Hall found time to write anything but newspaper material, but he has. On the eve of Independence he published a biography of the President, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, which has been criticized as being too

effusive. He rejects the criticism and makes no attempt to conceal his admiration of the country's leader.

He has just completed a history of Zambia which will be published in April or May, this year. "I have always been interested in African history," he says, "and I have been collecting material for a long time. In 1960 I wrote an article of about 30,000 words on the BSA mineral rights but that was not published."

Today Dick Hall is in the position where he can pause and look round. "I have an urge to get out of the battle line and do a bit of thinking," he says. "It has been a great experience and a hell of a good story but I would not want to go through it all again. I used to be very interested in medieval English philology. If at some time or other I were to be offered a post in a university for a year or so I would be quite happy to accept."

He sees his future as tied up with Zambia and says: "There is a lot of emotion to be worked out but there are great prospects for this country. The great challenge in Zambia is not political — it is economic. I believe there is a future here for my children if they wish. I shall certainly take out Zambian citizenship."