Government Publications relating to
African Countries prior to Independence

Government Publications relating to
Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1963
and to the Federation of Rhodesia and
Nyasaland, 1953-1963

Introduction to the
microfilm collection
by
Andrew D. Roberts

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MICROFORM ACADEMIC PUBLISHERS
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In 1889 Cecil J. Rhodes, who had made a fortune in the South African diamond industry, formed the British South Africa Company and obtained for it a charter from the British government to administer territories north of the Limpopo river. In 1890 the Company's Pioneer Column established Fort Salisbury in Shona country, in what from 1898 was officially called Southern Rhodesia. The country's gold mines proved less remunerative than Rhodes had hoped but together with good farmland attracted a fairly steady flow of white immigrants: by 1911 the white population numbered 23,000. (In 1936 it was 55,000 and in 1956 178,000 when the black population was about 2 million.) In 1923 the whites achieved self-government and the territory became the Colony of Southern Rhodesia; from 1925 its relations with Britain were channelled through the Dominions Office. From 1953 to 1963 it was part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. In 1965 the Government of Southern Rhodesia made an illegal unilateral declaration of independence; in 1980 the territory became the independent state of Zimbabwe.

The government of Southern Rhodesia was always radically different in form from those of African territories controlled by the British Colonial Office. This difference is reflected in its publications, since these were not obliged to conform to procedures established by the Colonial Office. Government Gazettes were published by both the British South Africa Company administration and by the Government of Southern Rhodesia, but neither regime published annual Blue Books, nor did they produce any continuous series of annual reports covering the whole business of government. The situation is further complicated by the fact that for the ten years of Federation one must take into account the publications of the Federal Government (which in any case was based in Salisbury) as well as those of the Southern Rhodesia Government. Like other colonial territories, however, Southern Rhodesia was the cause of numerous Command Papers for the British Parliament; indeed, some of these are among the most important documents for the colonial history of Africa.

The microfilms are arranged in three groups. The first covers the period from the year of the British South Africa Company's charter up to 1923, when Southern Rhodesia achieved self-government. The second group continues up to the creation of the Federation in 1953. The third group concludes with the demise of the Federation in 1963.

Strictly speaking, there was only one serial publication produced in Southern Rhodesia before 1923 by the government as a whole (as distinct from departments or the Legislative Council, created in 1898). This was the Gazette, which comprised the usual miscellany of legislation, public notices advertisements. Since the Company was responsible, as an administration, to the British High Commissioner in the Cape Colony (and subsequently South Africa) proclamations concerning Southern Rhodesia were issued under his authority from time to time, and these duly appeared in the Cape government's Gazette (which is included in another microfilm publication in this series).

Such proclamations, together with those of the Company's Administrator and other government notices, were initially published in Southern Rhodesia's first newspaper, the Mashonaland Herald and Zambezi Times; this is not included in the present series. The first issue of the Company's own weekly Government Gazette appeared on 5 October 1894; from 22 February 1895 to 29 September 1899 it was distributed as a supplement to the Rhodesia Herald.

The rest of the material produced by the Company which is included in this collection cannot properly be called government publications: they were printed for restricted distribution by the Company in its capacity as a business which happened to have special responsibilities to the British government. In accordance with normal business procedures, the Company's directors produced reports and accounts more or less annually; these naturally make some mention of its work as a government but are mainly concerned with its various commercial activities. A fuller picture of Company government is provided by the four volumes which it produced between 1892 and 1897 of Reports on the Company's Proceedings and the Condition of the Territories within the Sphere of its Operations. These cover the initial phase of white settlement in Mashonaland and the conquest of the Ndebele in 1893. In 1896 the Ndebele and numerous Shona chiefdoms rebelled against Company rule and were not finally subdued until the following year: hence the Company's Reports on the Native Disturbances, 1896-1897. For the next few years the British government kept a closer watch than hitherto on the Company, which between 1898 and 1902 issued four bulky volumes of Reports on the Administration of Rhodesia, 1897-1902. The volume for 1898-1900 has a long appendix which includes
much descriptive material intended to reassure businessmen, prospective settlers and British politicians that the Company's administration had now been placed on a regular footing and was fully in control of the country. Excluded from the present series are two categories of printed material dealing with the Company's commercial operations: three long reports to shareholders on mining in Rhodesia (Northern as well as Southern) in 1899, 1900 and 1902; and the ten memoranda, some as long as a book, written between 1909 and 1915 for the Board of Directors by the Company's General Manager, H. Wilson Fox.

To some extent, the lack of Blue Books, and of general annual reports for all but a few years, can be made good by using other types of material. In 1903 Southern Rhodesia joined the South African territories in a customs union, and from 1906 to 1929 details of the country's external trade were included in annual statements on trade and shipping issued by South African government departments.

The Company's administration generated occasional public interest in Britain as well as routine parliamentary activity. There are thus several relevant Command Papers, and these include a good deal of official correspondence, chiefly in 1893-4 (before and after the Ndebele war), 1902 and 1904 (African labour, and the possibility of introducing Chinese labour) and 1917-20 (African reserves).

The achievement of self-government in 1923 did not add much to the range of material relevant to the collection. The principal innovation to be noted here is the occasional publication of an Official Yearbook of the Colony of Southern Rhodesia. This appeared in 1924, 1930, 1932 and 1952; each contains much reference material for earlier years. They summarise much of the content of annual departmental reports and include statistical information concerning government revenue and expenditure. For the period from 1923, the latter is listed under several departmental headings, and there are also some basic trade statistics. Annual statements of Southern Rhodesia's external trade continued to be published by the South African government up to 1929; from 1930 to 1946 they were published by the Southern Rhodesia government's own department of statistics, which also produced its own Statistical Yearbooks in 1938 and 1947; these largely fill the gaps left between the Official Yearbooks of 1932 and 1950. From 1947 to 1953 the annual statement of external trade was published by the Central African Statistical Office, an agency of the Central African Council; this body had been created in 1945 to co-ordinate government policies in the Rhodesias and Nyasaland on matters of common interest. For a fuller picture of government finance than the yearbooks provide, it is necessary to turn to the annual reports of the Auditor-General; these will be included in a further microfilm publication on departmental reports.

After 1923 the concern of the British government in Southern Rhodesia per se was for the most part with constitutional change and legislation specifically affecting Africans. Its right to veto the latter was never used; the occasion did not arise since such legislation was discussed in draft with the Dominions Office. Between 1923 and 1953 only two Command Papers were concerned exclusively with Southern Rhodesia. One, in 1928, arose out of the Native Juveniles Employment Act of 1926 and the Native Affairs Act of 1927 (which extended the judicial powers of white civil servants over Africans). The other Command Paper included the proposals (adopted in 1937) of the Southern Rhodesian prime minister, Godfrey Huggins, to increase his government's independence of Britain, chiefly by eliminating the role of the British High Commissioner in South Africa as a 'watchdog' over the administration of Africans in Southern Rhodesia. However, Britain took much interest in Southern Rhodesia in the context of plans to strengthen links between British territories in east and central Africa. Thus the present series includes Command Papers relating to the Parliamentary Commission which toured Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and East Africa in 1924, the Hilton Young Commission which visited East Africa, the Rhodesias and Nyasaland in 1928, and the Royal Commission chaired by Lord Bledisloe which visited the Rhodesias and Nyasaland in 1938. The latter was cautiously in favour of yielding to settler pressure for closer union between the Rhodesias, while recognising that their demands for outright amalgamation could not be met until Southern Rhodesia's policies concerning Africans were much closer to those of Northern Rhodesia, which was still under the control of the Colonial Office. After the Second World War the issue was revived, and from 1951 it generated numerous Command Papers, including official reports on conferences, regional surveys and enquiries; these culminated in the federal scheme which was adopted in 1953.

For the years 1953 to 1963 the present series includes the Government Gazettes both of Southern Rhodesia and of the Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland. From 1954 to 1963 statistical reports on Southern Rhodesia were subsumed in those for the Federation as a whole. The Central African Statistical Office (from 1959, the Central Statistical Office) published not only an annual statement of the Federation's external trade; it also published cumulative statements of the national accounts and balance of payments of Northern
Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia. The last edition, published in 1964 and covering the whole period from 1954 to 1963, is included here.

The Federation had been imposed upon central Africa despite widespread opposition in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The long-term effect of Federal policies, which broadly favoured the white minority in Southern Rhodesia, was to aggravate this opposition, to such a point that by 1960 the future of the Federation was seriously in question. The tensions provoked a spate of Command Papers. It has been decided to include in the present series all those concerned with the Federation and its constituent territories, whether or not they specifically concern Southern Rhodesia. Thus the collection here includes not only the report in 1960 of Lord Monckton’s Advisory Commission on the review of the Federal Constitution, with its voluminous appendices, but also the celebrated report in 1959 of the Devlin commission of enquiry into political unrest in Nyasaland, as well as various papers relating to constitutional change in Northern Rhodesia.
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