

LIGHT ON CENTRAL AFRICA

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IN the midst of the swift movement of African peoples into independence, the constitutional arrangements of the present 'Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland' as I write are being elaborately and expensively discussed at a Conference in London as if the Whites involved were unaware that they are sitting at the edge of the precipice over which all White domination in Africa is tottering.

What is the origin of this Conference? Seven years ago, three colonial territories (the first, Southern Rhodesia, a self-governing Dominion, prosperous for Whites and dominated by Whites with outlooks and habits scarcely different from those of their neighbour Dr. Verwoerd;* the second, Northern Rhodesia, a protectorate with few White inhabitants and overwhelmingly rich in copper; and the third, Nyasaland, a protectorate, again with few Whites and producing—like Ireland or Slovakia half a century ago—substantially nothing but cheap exportable labour power), were forced, against the wishes of the Africans, who were approximately 96½ per cent of the total population, into a Federation completely dominated by the Whites. Elaborate pretences put forward by the Whites, including those in the United Kingdom, both at the time of Federation and subsequently, that the Africans were not hostile to Federation, were generally known at the time to be as false and fraudulent as most other statements by colonialist politicians; and, as we shall see, their falsity is fully confirmed by the 'Monckton Report' which I discuss below.

The Constitution of the Federation provided that its position must be reviewed at a Conference to be held not less than seven years nor more than nine years after Federation; hence the Conference mentioned above, which began its sittings on December 5, 1960, as this article is being written. The three African leaders represent 1,000,000 members organised in the parties of the three territories. They are Dr. Hastings Banda (Malawi Congress, of Nyasaland), Mr. Joshua Nkomo (National Democratic Party, of Southern Rhodesia) and Mr. Kenneth Kaunda (United National Independence Party, of Northern Rhodesia). They made it clear

*The Monckton Report states: 'In Southern Rhodesia there is a large volume of European opinion hostile to Federation. Many believe it will bring about a too rapid increase in the political power of Africans. . . . (There is a) number who, rather than surrender this domination, might prefer union with South Africa'. (*Report of the Advisory Commission on the Review of the Constitution of Rhodesia and Nyasaland*. Cmnd. 1148. Paragraph 44.)

in a press statement on the eve of conference that they were only coming to it on conditions, and

with the intention of burying what they regard as the corpse of the Federation. *(The Times, December 5, 1960.)*

How long it will sit, and whether it will break up or run its full course, with or without useful results, cannot yet be seen; but it is already clear—and is an indication how far the tide of African advance has already swept forward—that the leaders of the African parties in each of the three territories, acting together as a team, holding the initiative, and ready and able to walk out of the Conference if it does not behave itself, have already won the important point that the reform of the present Constitution of at any rate the two Northern territories must be discussed at the same time as the Federation Conference; they have of course also established that secession will be an item, and one of the most prominent items, in the Federation Conference.

The U.K. Government had meanwhile, in July, 1959, appointed a Commission, commonly called 'the Monckton Commission' after its chairman, Lord Monckton. 'to advise the five Governments' (*i.e.*, those of the U.K., of the Federation, and of each of the three territories) 'in preparation for the 1960 Review on the constitutional programme best suited to the achievement of the objects contained in the Constitution . . . including the Preamble'. The Preamble piously proclaimed the ideal of 'partnership' between Whites and Africans under a Constitution as heavily weighted against the Africans as could well be imagined—indeed, it can scarcely be imagined in the atmosphere of today. The Monckton Commission recognises expressly the Africans' standpoint that 'federation was for the benefit of Europeans only' and that 'partnership in their view has been a sham'.*

What, in essence, is the result of the Commission's work? To start with, it states quite clearly that African opposition to Federation, already strong in 1953, 'has grown more intense'.

31. The old grounds of opposition remain. To these, new grounds have been added during the last seven years; and developments, both within the Federation and outside it, have lent strength to that opposition . . . the citizens of the Federation will have seen independence come to one of their neighbour states which cannot by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as more experienced politically. . . .

*When the Monckton Report was discussed in the Legislative Council, Sir John Moffat stated: 'There will be civil war in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland within a year after the federal review conference if federation in whatever form is continued against the will of the people'. *(The Times, November 10, 1960.)*

32. These events occurring outside the borders of the Federation have had a powerful effect within. It is inevitable and natural that the prospect of independence, seven years ago unthinkable remote, should now appear to many Africans to be a right from which they should be no longer debarred. . . . So long as Federation seems to them to block their way to rapid political progress, so long will their hostility to it continue to grow.

(Having stated that, it is true that the Report nevertheless adds that there is less African opposition in Southern Rhodesia, but recent events in that dominion, with the government of Sir Edgar Whitehead taking ever harsher measures against the African population, refute the Commission on that point.)* The Report goes on to show, as already mentioned, that 'partnership' has been as much of a sham as any realist could have foretold. It insists that Conference will have to discuss secession, and recognises that 'the strength of African opposition in the Northern Territories is such that Federation cannot, in our view, be maintained in its present form'. But it goes on to propose that the Federation shall nevertheless be maintained with a new name and a large number of alterations in the distribution of functions, and some improvements in African voting rights (falling of course far short of that equality and justice known as 'one man one vote'). It seeks to justify this recommendation on the ground that Federation has brought great economic advantages to the territories. These are of course advantages for Whites in a White-dominated economy, and the argument of 'benefit to the natives' is a familiar colonialist argument; but here again the facts refute the arguments of the Commission,† and show that the Africans are in many respects worse off than they were before.

The events before the Conference opened showed the intensity with which the battle for Central Africa would be fought. Mr. Macmillan and Mr. Macleod will do all they can to hold on to Federation in one form or another, and possibly even attempt to fall back on an East and Central Federation. They are astute enough—if Sir Roy Welensky and Sir Edgar Whitehead are not—to grasp that, for British imperialism to keep any influence in this part

*In disturbances in Southern Rhodesia since July, 96 Africans were shot. Under Whitehead's Vagrancy Act 1,500 unemployed were rounded up and held in detention camps. There was the Law and Order Maintenance Bill; the detention of 43 African leaders continued after twenty months; the sentence of four years hard labour on Michael Mawema, former President of the National Democratic Party. So great was opposition of the African people in Southern Rhodesia, indeed, that the Federal Chief Justice, Sir Robert Tredgold, resigned in protest against Whitehead's panic emergency legislation.

†The separate report, *Survey of Developments Since 1953*, prepared by Federation Officials, and issued as an Annex to the Commission's report, certainly provides considerable hard facts which go to challenge the protagonists of the 'economic advantages' theory. This claim is also rejected by two African members of the Commission, W. M. Chirwa and H. G. Habanyama, in their Minority Report. Since they were regarded by the main African parties as 'stooges', it may be imagined what the African national organisations think of it.

of the world, arbitrary White rule must end and some sort of agreement be reached with the leaders of the African national parties.

Clearly, the right to secede must be provided, and the separate territorial constitutions must be revised, to secure democratic government on the basis of majority rule, as the African parties demand. They are clearly determined upon democracy *now* through 'one man one vote', upon secession *now*, not in some hypothetical future. There will be some hope for peaceful development in the whole area, *if and only if* the Whites realise that it is no longer practical politics to think of maintaining White domination in Africa, and that the only question—an interesting and profoundly constructive question, vital to their futures—is how Whites can now live useful lives and make useful contributions to society in communities where political power has passed to the African majorities.*

It will be interesting to see how these African territories will develop in the direction of federation when they are masters of their own future. They may well freely federate many territories to make a huge, well-balanced economy. One thing is clear; that the Africans and not the Whites will decide what is to be done, and will do it.

*When Sir Edgar Whitehead proposed to prevent the National Democratic Party choosing to be represented at the Conference by its own president, Mr. Joshua Nkomo, he argued that Nkomo was not qualified, having been in exile for two years. Nkomo reminded Sir Edgar that he had been two years in Washington, before returning to take over the Premiership.

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