

CENTRAL AFRICA PRISON-HOUSE

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WHEN in the second week of January the British Prime Minister heard his host the Ghana Prime Minister proclaim the need for a 'union of independent African States' to enable them to stand up to the imperialist powers and his belief in the principle of 'one man, one vote', it was a programme of true democracy in a country that had gained its political independence. When in the third week of January he reached the Central African Federation it was to encounter shams and pretences that are the very opposite of democratic. All the apparatus of bourgeois democracy is present: a federal parliament, a prime minister (now the Right Honourable Sir Roland Welensky) and even a leader of Her Majesty's Opposition. But the whole set-up is bogus. The dictionary definition of 'bogus' is: 'an apparatus for counterfeit coining'. This exactly describes the sham nature of the Federation, which so far from being a voluntary union of states on a democratic basis is set up only to hide a reality that is undemocratic, dishonest, reactionary and tyrannical.

To prove this we need take only the simplest figures of this 'Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland'. In the seven-and-a-half million population, Africans outnumber the Europeans by twenty-five to one. In the 'Federal Elections' of 1958 the European voters outnumbered the African voters by eighty-eight to one. This falsification of democracy is effected by a very simple trick. Africans have a right to vote—*provided they fulfil a property qualification plus educational standard*. For example no African may vote unless his income is over £120 a year: the average wage of employed Africans (official 1956 figures) is £70 a year: therefore most Africans are not allowed to vote at all.

Now observe the election situation in the three constituent parts of the Federation. In Northern Rhodesia there are 72,000 Europeans and 2,220,000 Africans: in the elections of March, 1959, there were 20,566 European voters and 7,617 African voters. In Southern Rhodesia there are 207,000 Europeans and 2,420,000 Africans: in the 1956 elections there were 49,854 European voters and 560 African voters. In Nyasaland, where there are only 8,300 Europeans amongst 2,690,000 Africans no general elections have been held.*

*Certain Africans were chosen from provincial councils but though the Europeans in Nyasaland have franchise rights the Africans have none.

This bogus 'Federation' with its sham 'democracy' has now gone on for seven years ever since the British Tory Government here, breaking previous pledges, set it up in 1953. The Labour Party here were against it and their representatives opposed the Bill in parliament. But if the Labour Party were opposed, it can be imagined what was the feeling of the Africans upon whom it had been imposed. The African National Congress in each of the three territories denounced it. The more they saw of this 'Federation', the stronger grew the demand for secession; strongest of all in Nyasaland. All this was well known. A parliamentary delegation of four Conservative and three Labour members, unanimously reported after their visit to Central Africa in August, 1957, that 'Opposition was to be found strongest in Nyasaland'; and the Governor of Nyasaland himself, Sir Robert Armitage, declared:

The African is reluctant to accept federation because he cannot believe that he will ever be allowed to play a role equal to that of the European. He distrusts both federation and the movement towards greater independence for the federation, because he insists that this means a continued and fiercer domination by the White man over the Black. (Federation News Letter. April 19, 1958.)

Meantime Welensky had gone on to demand 'Dominion Status' by 1960 for his white settlers' 'Federation' (under the Act the 'Federation' was to be confirmed—or modified or rejected—after seven years' operation and before nine years elapsed) and this confirmed all the Africans had feared. The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (in its Synod of Blantyre, Nyasaland) underlined this at mid-summer, 1958, in a report—which in March, 1959, was adopted by the Committee of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland:

It is difficult to understand how the Federal Government can demand and work for Dominion Status in the near future. This is the cause of one of the greatest fears amongst Africans. They see their country becoming a 'Native Reserve' on the South African pattern, and various statements made by European political leaders had aggravated this fear. (East Africa and Rhodesia. July 3, 1958.)

Finally, less than five months after Dr. Hastings Banda, as the most distinguished son of his people, had been called back from London to lead the struggle for democracy as president of the Nyasaland African Congress, an article by him appeared stating:

Sir Roy Welensky's demand for Dominion Status in 1960 confirms our original fears that federation was desired by the European settlers as a means of gaining mastery over us, as they have done over our brothers in Southern Rhodesia and the Union of South Africa, and to drive the nail into the coffin of any possibility of African States in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. (*Ghana Daily Graphic*, December 18, 1958.)

Dr. Banda was completely correct in his estimation and completely justified in the standpoint he took and in the campaign he carried through—for all of which he has now been eleven months in prison without trial. Meantime repression in Nyasaland was intensified (Amended Police Ordinance Bill of December, 1958): the police were being mobilised: and from Welensky's 'Federation' government troops of the Royal Rhodesia Regiment were sent across the border into Nyasaland. Was there a deliberate purpose here to provoke disorder and so provide a pretext for declaring a state of emergency? However, this may be, the disturbances in Nyasaland increased, naturally enough: and by February, 1959, the Africans were insisting, in action, on free speech and free assembly.

That was just a year ago: and everyone will remember what followed: how in Southern Rhodesia the Governor there proclaimed a state of emergency on February 26, 1959: outlawed the African National Congress and threw hundreds of its leaders into concentration camp or prison: how Governor Armitage proclaimed a similar emergency on March 3: and how on the evening of March 3 Lennox-Boyd wound up the House of Commons debate by talking wildly of an alleged African plot to massacre Europeans. Then came the wholesale arrests, the ban on the Nyasaland African Congress, and the shootings. Not a single European was killed: but more than 50 Africans were killed.* It is still fresh in the memory how the mounting protests here compelled Lennox-Boyd a month later, on April 7, to appoint Mr. Justice Devlin and three colleagues to be a Commission of Inquiry on 'the recent disturbances in Nyasaland and the events leading up to them': and how he hoped, it was clear, to get away with it by this means. And how, on the contrary, the Devlin Report, issued in July, was damning for the Government, if only for the verdict or true word on its first page that Nyasaland was 'a police state':

Nyasaland is—no doubt only temporarily—a police state, where it is not safe for anyone to express approval of the policies of the Congress party, to which before 3rd March, 1959 the vast majority of politically-minded Africans belonged, and where it is unwise to express any but the most restrained criticism of government policy. (Cmnd. 814, July 16, p.1.) Then remember how Lennox-Boyd and Macmillan haled the wretched Armitage to London, said 'Read that and write some sort of answer—and write quick' and then had the further effrontery to publish the poor fellow's laboured reply as a Government White Paper (Despatch by the Governor, Cmnd. 815). But this did not avail them much: and so in the House of Commons when the

*See *Nyasaland Massacre* by Hugo Rathbone in *Labour Monthly* of April, 1959.

matter was coming up for debate they strove to avert criticism by announcing on July 21 yet another commission, an Advisory Commission on the Federation of Central Africa, to be headed by the respectable Lord Monckton. But the first twenty of the membership of this body was not announced until well after the October General Election, until Lennox-Boyd was out of the Government, until November 24 when it was also intimated that half-a-dozen more seats would be filled later, half from the Government and half from the Labour Party. Then remember the dreadful thing that happened to Macmillan. A Sunday newspaper, *The Observer*, callously blew the gaff by showing that every one of the twenty had a record that was, to say the least, very unlikely to inspire majority African opinion with much confidence in them. The Government were very hurt about this newspaper article: 'it was not fair', complained Leader of the House Butler. But worse was to follow. The strong opposition of back bench Labour members to the Commission as constituted and the objections to the way that Macmillan appeared to have been already committed by Welensky made it clear that the offer of vacant seats on it was just a parliamentary trap. The Labour Party refused to participate: and as a result still more sections of African opinion are now likely to boycott the Monckton Commission. Finally, the Government ruefully sought to mend matters by appointing to the vacant seats a brace of former members of the Labour Party, Lord Shawcross and A. Crawley, for whose record when they were in the Labour Government the Labour Party have little respect. There the matter stands at present.

Behind all these recent happenings there is a longer history of deep significance. Just a hundred years ago the execution of John Brown of Harpers' Ferry sparked off the struggle that brought the American Civil War between the South (slave states) and the North. It was the attempt of the South to extend slave-holding into new territories that brought the crisis to a head. For a slave system seeks always to expand to new territories. So today in the Union of South Africa the *apartheid*, the modern form of slave state, seeks expansion. The white settlers have been its apt pupils in Southern Rhodesia. They too have passed repressive laws against their African majority. They too wanted to seize upon new territories to the north.

Originally the white settlers of Southern Rhodesia had the choice in 1923 between becoming a self-governing colony or becoming a new province of the Union of South Africa. They chose the former but remained on good terms with the *apartheid*-mongers then

headed by Prime Minister Dr. Malan whose followers were usually called the Malanazis. The Malanazis had dreamt of a new slave empire stretching from the Transvaal to the Equator: so that there was some ill-feeling between them and their younger rivals some ten years ago when the Southern Rhodesian whites revealed that they had a similar dream. Indeed, Dr. Malan was furious at the Southern Rhodesian whites for 'jumping his claim'. But these quarrels were like the quarrels between the German and Austrian fascists a quarter of a century ago and could easily be compounded even now in a joint conspiracy to enslave all the lands to the north.

At first, when the white settlers bluntly proposed to annex the two Protectorates of Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia, they called it 'amalgamation'. When this was rejected in 1938 and again after the war, they devised in the early 'fifties the scheme for 'Federation'. The scheme by that time had a double object: first to lay hold on the extremely rich copper ores and other minerals of Northern Rhodesia, and second to get cheap labour from the people of Nyasaland. It was a plan to grab both material riches and human beings.

Now in 1960 the hour of decision comes nearer. The struggle is apparent to everyone. The land-grabbing, undemocratic, colour-bar, low-wage system storming up from Southern Rhodesia encounters the National Liberation Movement led by the dozen African independent states. Central Africa is a focus of this conflict—wherein the British people can play their part not only by the boycott of the original *apartheid*-mongers in South Africa but by demanding the repeal this year of the 1953 Federation Act.

Meantime anxiously watching it all the giants of finance capital (which still holds its economic domination over the whole of Africa) are extending their grasp also in the rich agricultural and mineral tracts of Central Africa. No longer is it the preserve of the old Chartered Company which ruled and exploited from the time that two of the territories were defiled by the name of the unprincipled adventurer Cecil Rhodes. Some two-score of the biggest British firms and banks like Unilever and Barclays Bank are entrenched there: while United States capital has also begun its penetration. The same forces of monopoly capital that exploit the British workers are the blood-suckers in Central Africa. The trade unions there and the trade unions here in Britain are up against the same adversary and the democratic struggle for the right of Africans to be free politically merges in the class struggle of both Africans and British for emancipation.