

THE CONGO AND NIGERIA

A Study in Contrast

The mess in the Congo shows how dangerous it is to give these people responsibility.

Of course when Nigeria gets independence in October it will go the same way as the Congo.

HOW OFTEN have expressions of opinion such as these been heard in South Africa during the past few months! The disregard of the histories of the two countries which they display is serious, because the false analogies which are drawn with our own racial problems may adversely affect our efforts to solve them.

It was said a generation ago that the Europeans in South Africa were a colonial power comparable at that time with Britain, France, Belgium or Portugal, with one great difference — that our colonial peoples were within our boundaries instead of at a comfortable distance outside them. While such a comparison may be disputed in some quarters it has enough validity to warrant a brief comparison of the policies adopted by the different powers.

The avowed aim of Britain and France, at least from the beginning of the present century, was to bring their African colonies to a state of self-government within the shortest reasonable time.

Training Africans

The Belgians, however, considered that political development should not be regarded as the primary aim but rather as one that would follow economic development in the course of time. Consequently they trained Africans to be competent artisans but very little else. Only fifteen Belgian Congo Africans have been awarded university degrees in Europe, while to the hundreds of Nigerians who have done so must now be added the growing stream who are taking London University degrees at Ibadan University.

It was only in 1900 that an arbitrarily defined chunk of Africa was named Nigeria and became a classic example of "indirect rule" — a system originated by Lord Lugard under which indigenous social organizations were used to carry out the functions of

the central (British colonial) government. In 1922 came the first big step along the road from indirect rule to independence. A Legislative Council was created with an official majority but with nineteen unofficial members; of these, ten were Africans, including four who were elected. In 1946 the Legislative Council was given an African majority, as were the three newly created Regional Houses of Assembly. The present federal constitution dates in broad outlines from 1954.

At the lower levels of government the old system of indirect rule steadily grew into a modern system of democratic administration. The bodies through which this was achieved were legion: village, town and district councils, divisional and provincial education

by—

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committees, provincial development committees, the cocoa advisory committee, the cotton marketing board and many more. The Councils were part of the machinery of Native administration — the tools of indirect rule but with limited legislative powers of their own — and were composed entirely of chiefs and councillors, acting at first under the supervision of white administrative officers. The other bodies were creations of the central government and at first they had a majority of Europeans, mostly civil servants but with a fair sprinkling of bank managers, commercial agents, and (in the case of educational bodies) missionaries. As time went on African majorities became the rule, and even the practice of having a civil servant as chairman was abandoned.

Membership of these public bodies changed periodically, so an increasing number of people obtained first-hand knowledge of the techniques and the difficulties of modern administration, including financial control and the need to employ experts with technical "know-how". This did much to still the incipient cry: "Throw out the white man, we can do it just as well". It also intensified the demand for higher education. Most important of all, it created a reservoir of

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persons from whom members of the higher legislative and executive bodies of an independent Nigeria could be recruited.

It was inevitable that at first the choice of Africans was limited to the small class who had adopted European ways of life. With the rapid expansion of secondary education, however, the net was thrown wider and it brought in some of the "bad boys" and "agitators", many of whom have developed into useful citizens. Banning them would not have had the same effect.

In the Belgian Congo there was little more school education than was needed to meet the needs of the ruling power, and no thought was given to training for self-government until 1959, by which time it was too late. It must not be forgotten, however, that forty years ago it was commonplace to speak of two hundred years as the minimum time necessary to bring African colonies to responsible self-government, and

it may be argued that if history had allowed this period of time the slow Belgian method would in the end have proved the wiser. For it must not be assumed that everything in the Nigerian garden, where the growth of many of the plants has been forced, will be for ever lovely; personal and tribal jealousies are inevitable; the country is poor in minerals and in soil fertility; the average standard of education is still low; and the incidence of bribery in all walks of life equally high. But in spite of a shortage of qualified Nigerians to fill the top posts there will be no general breakdown in administration, and there is no reason to expect any deterioration in race relations, which are now probably better than they have even been.

The short reply to the criticisms quoted at the beginning of this article is therefore: it is dangerous not to train Africans for responsibility, and equally dangerous not to confer responsibility upon those able to shoulder it. Nigeria will *not* go the way of the Belgian Congo.



"Well, anyway, OUR end's all right."