

**What has Federation really meant to the people?**

# *Partnership or Self-Rule in Central Africa*

*by H. J. Simons*

**A**FRICANS in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia opposed the principle of federation long before it became a reality in 1953. To them it spelt domination by Southern Rhodesia, rule by White settlers, and racial discrimination. They wanted to stay under the Colonial Office, which had promised them a share in government.

Six years of Federation have strengthened their hostility. The Devlin Commission found that it was deeply rooted and almost universally held by Nyasas. "They want above all else, self-government for the black people of Nyasaland such as they have seen happening in other parts of Africa. They think that under the British Government they may eventually get it, and that under federation they never will." Some observers believe that resistance goes further, and that many Africans now also distrust the British Government and think of independence.

The Administration complains that the African attitude is unreasonable, and blames it on self-seeking politicians and "aggressive nationalism." It claims that discriminations are being removed step by step in the march towards full partnership. African gains are being widely advertised.

## **FRUITS OF PARTNERSHIP**

Twelve seats are reserved for Africans in the Federal Parliament, as compared with six in 1953. An African holds ministerial rank in the Executive. Africans can get the same salaries as Europeans in the civil service. There are African doctors and Coloured and Asian teachers on these scales. Qualified African nurses can get the same salary as Europeans. Africans do skilled work in the copper mines and are said to be the most high paid African miners in Southern Africa. In some Southern Rhodesian engineering firms there are Africans able to earn the full grade wage of 5s. 4d. an hour. Southern Rhodesia's new Industrial Conciliation Act provides for open trade unions and apprenticeship schemes. Social as well as academic equality has been introduced into the University.

Some of the claims listed are promises, rather than actual performances. It is doubtful whether partnership has made much change in the life of the ordinary African. Federation may have speeded up development. The greater probability is that things would have been much the same, economically speaking, without it.

Nyasaland, though poor and backward, still offers her people more scope for advance in government service than does her far richer southern neighbour. No better test could be found than the state-owned railways, which are among the biggest employers in Central Africa. At the beginning of the year the Rhodesian Railways employed 6,190 Whites in the skilled and administrative grades (artisans, drivers, firemen, guards, clerks, foremen), but no Africans. Nyasaland Railways, in contrast employed in the same categories 962 Africans, 141 Asians and 61 Whites. The loaf is smaller, but the African's share is bigger.

South Africans, nevertheless, are inclined to feel that the Rhodesias no longer follow a course parallel to the Union's. There is a divergence, though its degree cannot be easily measured. The Union's rulers deny the reality of a common society. They treat Africans as aliens, and tell them to satisfy their ambition for progress and security in isolated, primitive reserves under tribal chiefs. No party of White supremacy has even contemplated a relaxation of colour bars. We have only apartheid. The Federation offers partnership as well.

### SHOW DOWN WITH CONGRESS

It is not contradictory that repressive action should be taken in both countries against people who want equality. This is the standard strategy of colonial administrations in periods of political turbulence. The political elimination of uncompromising opponents is supposed to strengthen the influence of traditional and more amenable leaders over the masses. As much could be inferred from the reasons given by Sir Edgar Whitehead, Southern Rhodesia's Prime Minister, for declaring a state of emergency on February 26th. The African National Congress, he complained, had carried out a "campaign of intimidation and boycott against moderate Africans who openly supported racial co-operation." It had tried to draw away the loyalty of the people from the chiefs; but "it was absolutely vital that respect for chiefs should be maintained."

The idea of building up a leadership of chiefs and moderates by putting the Congress out of action rests on the mistaken belief that it expresses the thoughts of only a small group of self-seeking agitators whose suppression would leave the great mass of people unmoved. The assumption cannot be put to the test of an election in the absence of a general franchise. Should the people support extra-parliamentary methods of protest, such as boycotts and strikes, they are said to have acted under intimidation or to have been misled by false propaganda. When applying repressive measures, in other words, colonial governments cannot afford to admit that the people have political understanding or that their leaders are true patriots.

We now know from the findings of the Devlin Commission that the Administration has acted on false premises, at any rate in Nyasaland. "We do not think," remarked the commissioners caustically, "that all the Congress leaders have more than the usual share of personal ambition! The Congress is not a minority organisation. It had the support of most Africans, as well as of the minority who are "just as well equipped as the average European" for "making a reasoned and prudent decision."

A movement of this kind cannot be broken up and eliminated. It can be driven underground, but only by the use of methods such as we in the Union, unfortunately, know too well. The Devlin Report described the position bluntly. "Nyasaland is—no doubt temporarily—a police state, where it is not safe for anyone to express approval of the policies of the Congress party, to which, before March 3, 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."

Opposition to government is treated as subversion in a police state. Opponents are imprisoned and deported without trial, political meetings are prohibited, organisations are banned. The authorities use intimidation to deter people from expressing their political feelings and to spy on one another. All these methods are being employed in the Federation. The Nyasaland Information Bulletin of May 6th, 1959, contains this revealing passage:

"Do you know of any member of Congress living near you who has not been arrested? Do you know of any group of Congress members near you who are plotting to cause trouble? If you do, you must tell the Boma, so that these wicked people can be arrested and removed from your area. Tell your District Commissioner or your nearest Government Officer the names of any Congress member who you know has not been arrested. You can either report personally to a Government Officer, or if you prefer to remain anonymous, send an unsigned letter to your District Commissioner or Police Officer, giving the name and address of any Congress member still at large. (There is no need to put a stamp on the letter.)

Arrests were made on the basis of informers' reports. 1,308 Africans were detained, of whom 622 were released by June 27th. Of those detained, 134 were sent to prison for periods ranging from six months to two years, many of them for being in possession of a Congress membership card, even though it had been issued when Congress was a lawful body. The cases of the 529 persons still detained (as at August 21st) will be reviewed at six-monthly intervals.

The Government's actions cannot fail to disrupt Congress, but will not stamp out of people's minds the things for which it stands. If some of the leaders, as the Devlin Commission found, advocated the use of violence in resisting unpopular laws and the police when enforcing them, the reason was that they suffered from "a feeling of frustration" because they lacked

adequate constitutional means for expressing their demands. Such means are even more meagre in a police state. The gulf between the people and the authorities will be widened.

## CONGRESS GAINS GROUND

This being so, the police state cannot last long. If its mainstay is the White population, which numbers a bare 250,000, Federation will not be able to govern the seven million Africans against their will. There is also the Imperial factor. Colonial policies may not loom large in British politics, but the balance of public opinion seems to disapprove of old-fashioned colonial techniques. Britain must also take note of anti-imperialist sentiment in the rest of the world, not least of all in Africa, as expressed for instance by Prime Minister Nkrumah in Ghana's National Assembly:

"The Government of the Central African Federation by her actions in connection with present events in Central Africa, is causing Britain to forfeit to a large extent the goodwill and confidence of the people of Central Africa. This action of the Federal government also puts us in a most embarrassing position. For, although we are a member of the Commonwealth, how can we stand aside and condone repressive actions against unarmed and defenceless Africans with the purpose of strangling their efforts to free themselves from foreign domination?"

The pressure has already had important results. The British Prime Minister has announced that the constitutional talks which are scheduled to take place next year will not produce dominion status for the Federation. He also gave an assurance that responsibility for Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland would not be transferred to the Federation. As the British Government hands over power, it will be given to the governments of the two territories. The number of Africans in the legislatures will be increased more and more until they form a majority. Only then, when the northern territories "stand on their own feet," will the Federation move towards full self-government.

To give effect to these undertakings, constitutional advances will have to be made at a much faster rate than has been thought likely. The police state will have to be dismantled, the ban on Congress lifted and the release of Dr. Banda and his lieutenants ordered. Africans will have to be fully represented by leaders of their own choice at the constitutional talks.

The authorities are evidently not in a mood to restore political life to the territories. It is true that Nyasaland is to be given a new Legislative Council in which Africans will have a majority among unofficial elected members (though the officials will still form a majority) and two seats in the Executive Council. But Mr. Chipembere and Mr. Chiume, the two members of Congress in the legislature, have been deprived of their seats by decree. And the Governor is not prepared to allow political meetings "in the near future." The vendetta against Dr. Banda and Congress shows no signs of abating.

In these circumstances the value of the assurances given by the British Government cannot be assessed. Major decisions are likely to be postponed until after the British have had their general election, and may be affected greatly by the findings of the commission appointed to prepare for next year's review of the constitution. The composition of this body as announced, with its preponderance of official and White settler representatives, will not inspire Africans with confidence in its work.

The kind of assurance that would make federation acceptable to Africans has not yet been given. If it were promised, it might make federation unacceptable to Whites in Southern Rhodesia and, possibly, Northern Rhodesia. It has not yet been found possible to satisfy both groups in any part of Africa, and we cannot say whether Central Africa will find a way out of the deadlock.

### REACTION IN SOUTHERN RHODESIA

A possible working basis for a settlement, some Rhodesians think, is contained in the Moffat Resolutions of 1954. Briefly stated, the formula is: a policy designed to remove from each race the fear that the other might dominate for its own racial benefit; a common franchise for all races; a period of transition with safeguards to protect the interests of either race; equal opportunities to progress for all people without distinction of race, colour or creed. The adoption of these principles would put an end to White supremacy. But will Rhodesian Whites agree to a settlement on such a basis?

It seems not. They remain unrepentant. They have no difficulty in rejecting those findings of the Devlin Commission that are favourable to Congress and in seizing on the passages that confirm their prejudices. Now they have the report of the Review Tribunal headed by the Acting Chief Justice, Mr. Beadle, to justify the emergency. The terms of this report leave little room for hope of a more tolerant attitude towards Congress and nationalist aspirations in the south.

When announcing the state of emergency, the Prime Minister explained that it had become necessary because of the policy of violence pursued by the Nyasaland Congress, and the danger of it spreading southward. His criticisms of the Southern Rhodesian Congress were surprisingly temperate. He said that it began in the second half of 1957 as a "comparatively innocuous body," finding out and exploiting grievances many of which were perfectly genuine. But its character gradually changed until it embarked on a determined campaign of propaganda against land policies and the administration. He had decided to remove the people who were causing the trouble, but he had high hopes that it would not be necessary to detain them for more than a month.

The state of emergency was officially terminated on May 20th. In fact, however, it was made virtually permanent by four statutes, some of them with a life of five years. They name the four Congresses in the Federation as unlawful organisations, authorise the detention of persons likely to

endanger public safety or promote ill-will between races, make it an offence to behave contemptuously or insolently towards a government official, prohibit meetings of more than 12 Africans without written permission, and "protect individuals against intimidation and boycott."

The review tribunal was set up to examine the cases of detainees. It presented a report which was tabled on August 12th. The tribunal recommended one detainee for unconditional release, two men for transfer "to an area prepared for their reception," and 22, including the vice-president and organising secretary of the S.R.A.N.C., for further detention. The remaining detainees will be reported on later.

The tribunal was far more critical of Congress than the Prime Minister had been when speaking under the stress of the "emergency." Yet it admitted that "the most cogent evidence" relating to the alleged subversive objects of Congress was given secretly, and not subjected to cross-examination. On the basis of this dubious evidence, it found that Congress had tried to arouse disaffection with the aim of altering the constitution by unlawful means. Congress was "committed to a policy of disregarding lawful authority, exciting racial hatred, organising general strikes and boycotts, intimidation and violence." But all these activities had only been talked about: "plans had not yet advanced beyond a discussion stage and individual Congress leaders were expressing their own views of what form the final plan would take." The tribunal thought—but "this is an opinion, rather than a finding"—that the declaration of a state of emergency might well have nipped the plans in the bud.

Such assertions, though easily made, can never be proved. Detainees and members of Congress have not been allowed to reply to charges in public debate or open court. The Beadle report—like the Ridley report, which reaches much the same conclusions about the Zambia A.N.C. of Northern Rhodesia—will be used to justify the Government's actions and maintain the Whites in their state of complacency. But it will not remove the African's feeling of injustice, nor will it instill confidence in partnership under federation.

Nothing less than the abolition of racial privilege and a wide diffusion of political power will serve the purpose. But party politics and a narrow franchise rule out such a course in Southern Rhodesia. The present government is no apostle of liberalism, but it stands to the left of its rival, the Dominion Party, which missed being the government last year by a margin of four seats and the vagaries of the preferential voting system. As in the Union, the White racialists set the pace. Should the Government make a serious effort to break down colour bars—and it has not shown any such tendency—the effect would be to strengthen the Dominion Party.

The African vote is not a decisive factor in spite of the common roll. It operates on a two-tier system. To qualify at the higher level, a person must be able to speak and write English, and receive an annual income of £240 or be in occupation of property worth £500. For the lower qualification, one must have an income of £120, two years of secondary educa-

tion and two years of continuous employment. The number of voters registered under the special qualification may not exceed 20 per cent. of the number of ordinary voters registered. It was estimated at the time of the general election that between 6,000 and 8,000 Africans were eligible, but of the 55,000 voters registered only 1,696 were Africans.

## BREAK UP OF FEDERATION

White supremacy is firmly entrenched. As long as it remains so Africans in the northern territories will oppose any transfer of power that would bring them under Southern Rhodesia's rule. They will insist on the fulfilment of the pledge contained in the Federal constitution, which reads: "The territories should continue under the special protection of Her Majesty to enjoy separate government so long as their respective peoples so desire." Alternatively, they will press for the break up of the Federation and a rapid advance to self-government with an African majority in the legislature.

The British Labour Party and progressive opinion seem to be committed to such a course. The extreme Right in Southern Rhodesia also want to pull out of Federation, but for the opposite reasons. They hope to insulate Southern Rhodesia from the waves of African nationalism that spread from the north. Some people think that the dissolution of Federation would extinguish the already dim hopes for African advancement in Southern and to a lesser extent in Northern Rhodesia. Welensky and his associates want to preserve Federation, partly for economic reasons, and partly to prevent what has often called "an orgy of nationalism" in the northern territories. In this confusion of cross-currents and clashing interests, the only thing of which one can be certain is that it will not be long before Dr. Banda and other Congress leaders in the north regain their liberty, and Africans come into their own in the government.

## WILL AFRICA BE FREE?

*Colonialism is being driven out of Africa. But formal independence, although it is an essential pre-condition, is not in itself the answer to Africa's needs. What economic path will Africa take? An examination of Ghana's Second Development Plan appears in the next issue of LIBERATION. Don't miss this important article. Introduce LIBERATION to your friends.*