

CENTRAL AFRICA (III)

NYASALAND AND FEDERATION

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Congress and Federation

It was in the last quarter of 1944 that Africans from all over Nyasaland, conscious of the need for a representative political body, formed the Nyasaland African Congress. In the Preamble to its Constitution, Congress outlined its objects to protect the interests of Africans by protesting and struggling against any form of legislation which discriminated against black people, and, after registration by the Nyasaland Government on December 20, 1944, the organization quickly spread through the territory, uniting the African people from Portuguese East Africa to the Tanganyikan border, despite the state of emergency called into being by the Second World War.

Upon publication of the first London white paper in 1951, outlining the scheme to federate Nyasaland with the Rhodesias, Congress made clear its firm opposition to any form of closer association with Southern Rhodesia, a territory where white domination was deep-rooted and the African refused the right to participate in running the affairs of his own country. Chiefs and their people took the keenest interest in listening to what officers and supporters of Congress had to advise of the implications for Nyasaland if the Native policy of Southern Rhodesia were extended to the Protectorate. Nor was this shabby propaganda, but a justifiable analysis founded upon the facts obtaining in a country where racial discrimination fell within the framework of everyday life. And because it soon became manifest that Africans throughout the two northern Protectorates were profoundly opposed to Federation, the British Labour Government sent its Colonial Secretary, Mr. James Griffiths, to hear for himself from the African people of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

In the course of his visit in 1951, Mr. Griffiths met with representatives of Congress at Lilongwe and received from them a long memorandum, stressing the disadvantages that would accrue to the people of Nyasaland if the three territories were to be pushed into federation before the most thorough investiga-

tion of all the legal and administrative implications. Congress pointed out that Nyasaland would happily federate with Northern Rhodesia on its own, or, better still, with the East African territories of Tanganyika and Uganda. But it left Mr. Griffiths in no doubt of the opposition of Nyasaland to any link with Southern Rhodesia and requested him to report this to the British Government. At the conclusion of his meeting with Congress leaders, the Colonial Secretary admitted the intensity of antagonism to the scheme and announced that he would persuade his government to modify its white paper. And so another one was concocted, to entice Africans into believing that the white man was now walking an easier road than before and that Federation would end racial segregation as the African people had experienced it in Central Africa and, especially, in Southern Rhodesia.

Parallel to Congress, the Nyasaland Chiefs' Union had been formed to further the fight against Federation, and under Chief Mwase of Kasungu, himself a firm supporter of Congress, the Union inaugurated a Supreme Council together with Congress to co-ordinate the work of the two organizations and present a united front against the federal scheme. Opposition in Nyasaland was absorbing all levels as it encompassed all fears. The Africans were to lose their land rights, jobs occupied by Africans would increasingly be taken over by Europeans, and the colour bar would spread through every walk of life.

Having decided to take their opposition to the British people, three leaders of Congress and two from the Chiefs' Union went to London to acquaint and arouse public opinion. Their mission failed to swerve the Government, and a deputation of four Chiefs and two Congress leaders followed to place their grievances before the Queen. To the dismay of the whole of Nyasaland, they were not even permitted to see her. And during the final Federation talks in London, the three African representatives were chosen by the Protectorate Council under the presidency of the European Secretary for Native Affairs. Congress, however, instructed the three Africans to boycott the Conference, which they did in joint protest with the Africans from Northern Rhodesia. Congress influence was already being felt beyond its membership in official circles. And despite prosecutions, shootings and banishments, and the deposition of several Chiefs, opposition to Federation intensified. During the session of the Legislative Council which voted to accept

the Federal scheme, the African members walked out in protest.

But the British Government pressed on regardless, shamelessly violating the spirit of the treaties signed between the Chiefs of the country and Queen Victoria when Nyasaland was declared a Protectorate. When early in September, 1953, Central African Federation was imposed, Congress upheld the validity of the original treaties and claimed that it would never accept a scheme which had been imposed by force and in the face of national opposition.

As the Federal Constitution provided for two Africans from each of the three territories to represent African interests in the Federal Assembly, the Nyasaland Government summoned its Protectorate Council to choose two Nyasaland representatives. It could hardly call for popular elections, for the people of Nyasaland saw little point in sending Africans to the Federal Assembly while Chiefs were being deposed and members of the public prosecuted, imprisoned and exiled for refusing to co-operate with the administration on federal matters. The Council chose Mr. C. R. Kumbikano and Mr. W. M. Chirwa, and both have since sat in the Federal Assembly at Salisbury. Neither can regard his election as much of a victory however, for soon after they were chosen, the Protectorate Council sickened and died, and it has become increasingly difficult for them to tour the country and hold meetings with the people where they can put across a Federal point of view. God knows, few people would listen to them willingly, for they are held in the strongest suspicion by the people as a result of their Federal connection. And because they were chosen by a body administering government policy and no real African electorate existed in the country, Congress has considered it impossible to lend moral support to their election and remained adamant in its opposition to Federation. It has received the claims of the federalists that Federation would bring great economic advantages to Nyasaland with growing scepticism, for whatever advantages have accrued have certainly not been shared by the people of Nyasaland.

In 1954, Mr. Lyttleton (now Lord Chandos), the then Colonial Secretary, also came to see and hear things for himself. He met a Congress delegation in Blantyre and was told that Federation remained totally repugnant to the vast majority of Africans in Nyasaland. Chiefs from all over the Protectorate also declared their firm unwillingness to make the scheme succeed

and expressed the desire to see their country out of it immediately. Mr. Lyttleton had a headache and left unhappy.

Following the visit of Mr. Lyttleton, Congress branches approached the Head Office to take immediate steps towards contracting Nyasaland out of Federation. At the annual General Conference held at Lilongwe in April, 1955, it was unanimously resolved that Nyasaland should secede from Federation, and a cable was sent to the Colonial Secretary advising him of the decision and requesting the British Government to declare Nyasaland an African state. Impatience within the Congress movement grew rapidly, and at one time several officers in the organization contemplated withdrawing and setting up a more militant movement outside. And at the end of 1955, the Secretary-General resigned in protest against the delay in taking positive steps towards secession and the withdrawal of the two African members from the Federal Assembly, in accordance with the Lilongwe Conference resolution. But despite these setbacks, the influence of Congress and opposition to Federation steadily intensified, in the teeth of deportations and fresh prosecutions.

In January, 1957, Mr. A. T. Lennox-Boyd, the Colonial Secretary, visited Nyasaland and met a delegation of Congress leaders headed by the writer. Wherever he went, he encountered the same determination to boycott Federation and was asked to withdraw his factory from the territory because federal products could find no market anywhere in the Protectorate. "Away with Federation." "Freedom in Our Lifetime." "Declare Nyasaland an African State." "Release the Exiled." "Restore our Deposed Chiefs." "Self-Government for the Protectorate Now." These were the slogans which greeted and sent away the Queen's representative as he paced from one place to another in the city of Blantyre.

Fears of Developments before 1960

It was clearly set out in the Federal Constitution that no change could be made in the Federal structure before 1960. Yet the Federal government is agitating for "technical independence" immediately, and the impatience with which it is pressing for complete sovereignty at once fortifies the Africans in their belief that with the final sanctions of the Colonial Office withdrawn, they have much to fear. The speeches made by the Federal Prime Minister recently at home and

abroad portray his anxiety to turn Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia as soon as possible into provinces of Southern Rhodesia, where the Federal administrative machinery is already firmly established. The picture he has helped to paint is evident—cheap labour pools will be organized in the two northern territories to ensure a steady supply of labour to farmers and industrialists in Southern Rhodesia. The British government is being urged to take steps against 'black nationalism' because the Federal Prime Minister realizes that the Africans foresaw their destiny when they claimed that the Europeans were aiming at 'white supremacy' and not 'partnership' in Central Africa. The whole policy of 'partnership' has been made into a mockery.

Following up the official statements made by the governments of Britain, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland when Central African Federation was imposed, a reasonable man would believe that African representatives will be present at the Conference to review the Federal constitution. But looking closely at the top-level talks between the governments so far, one realizes that the governments concerned have no such intention. All discussions to date have taken place *in camera*, and no African has been admitted. African opinion has been represented by Europeans without any prior consultation, and the governors of the two Protectorates have attended meetings under the chairmanship of the Federal Prime Minister. It would appear that the much-heralded London Conference in 1960 will be attended only by Europeans who happen to be responsible for African affairs in their respective territories.

There seems increasing doubt, however, that the governments concerned will wait till 1960. The Federal Prime Minister has already visited Britain with his European Ministers for discussions with the British government on independence, and his government has already passed a franchise bill to amend the constitution, giving it powers to extend the Federal Assembly from 35 members to 59 and alter the franchise qualifications. It would be absurd to imagine that the European settlers in Central Africa intend sharing anything with the Africans. They have consistently refused to consider adult suffrage for Africans and busy themselves trying to convince the world that the African does not know how to cast a vote. They do not believe that what has happened elsewhere in the world can also happen here. South Africa is dedicated to a policy of

'apartheid', and the British people laugh and throw mud at that form of government. Yet at the same time they busy themselves with extending its practice to Central Africa. If the governments concerned imagine that they can trick African opinion by merely substituting one word for another, they are hideously mistaken. For who is a child to be taken in by a word? The hopes and the destiny of the Africans lie in building up political consciousness from Cape to Cairo, not in the traps laid carefully for them by their governors.

At the moment, Congress is concerning itself with the Africans who advocated Federation. There was never more than a handful of these, forced largely by circumstance to lend their open support to the scheme. And already they are in despair over the meaning they see has been given to 'partnership'. The scales have fallen from their eyes, and they realize that what was written into federal books is not what is being practised in federal houses.

Our Hopes — Self-Government

Before the advent of the white man in Central Africa, the people of Nyasaland enjoyed self-rule, and history will repeat itself. Independence was a clear promise made at the time the first British Consul entered the country to enforce British law and order. Treaties were signed between the representatives of Queen Victoria and the African Chiefs, permitting Europeans to stay in the country and undertake any business suitable for its development whenever agreed to by the parties concerned. And what has British protection and British justice accomplished for the people of Nyasaland?

In two major wars the Africans willingly gave their support to the British people, willingly sharing their dangers and sufferings. And still the country is ruled by an imported Governor and an Executive Council of five government officials chosen from government departments and two other Europeans. No African sits on this governing council of the country. Time and again Africans have told the government that the Executive Council was not working in the best interests of the African people and should allow no colour bar in its composition. Yet the Executive remains unchanged, composed entirely of European civil servants and settlers whose duty and desire it inevitably is to exploit the wealth of the country for their own welfare and that of their children.

Representing a population made up of 3,000,000 Africans, 6,000 Europeans and just over 7,000 Asians, the present Legislative Council consists of the Governor as President, 11 official members, 6 unofficial European members, and only 5 African members. Nor are these last popularly elected, but chosen by the less than 80 Provincial Council members, with the Provincial Commissioners as returning officers. All Europeans, of course, have the vote, and their representatives are elected democratically. The whole constitution is absurd, and Congress has agitated ceaselessly for its complete overhaul.

It is pressing now for immediate secession from Federation and rapid reforms towards self-government and ultimate independence for the country. Nyasaland must have a democratic government with adequate safeguards for the minority groups. Congress has no wish to expel any racial minority from the country and has made it abundantly clear to the British and Nyasaland governments that Europeans and Asians must remain on in the territory as equal citizens. But democracy must come to Nyasaland, as it came after a long struggle to Britain itself, and nothing less than an African majority on both the Legislative and Executive Councils will be acceptable. It is in the interests of the Europeans too, that this should be so. Co-operation between the races has always been in evidence in Nyasaland. Only now, since the imposition of Federation, is racial animosity stirring awake. If mankind is to survive under the sun, the people of Nyasaland, with peoples everywhere, must enjoy in peace its right to self-determination.