

RHODESIAN LIBERALS IN DILEMMA THE ROADS TO UNION

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IN the last issue of *Africa South*, Mr. Dennis McWilliam reached a gloomy conclusion in writing about the Central African liberals. From the depths of his despondency he made a last paragraph effort to point out the two things he thought might save the day in the Federation; the emergence of the multi-racial Constitution Party and the crucial role which the British Government has still to play in the affairs of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

Such is the speed of the disintegration of hope in Central Africa that even before *Africa South* was on the bookstalls the Constitution Party had fallen to pieces, with the northern and southern sections careering off in different directions—both bound for oblivion—and there was the beginnings of a backdown on the part of the British Government in its plan for a new constitution for Northern Rhodesia in which African influence would be substantially increased.

The unmistakable conclusion is that reaction has set in, that there is no sign even on the most distant horizon that anything will stop it gathering force, and that the first hairline crack in the Federal state which began with the defeat of Sir Edgar Whitehead at the Hillside by-election and led to the annihilation of Mr. Garfield Todd and his United Rhodesia Party, has now become a visible rent.

An increasing number of people, Black and White, right and left, are now beginning to discuss not "if" the Federation will break up and "whether" Southern Rhodesia will become a fifth province of South Africa, but "when" the break will be and "how long" before the Limpopo ceases to be a border to the South.

A curiously paradoxical situation is developing. An increasing number of European reactionaries and the gathering electoral driftwood, are working towards the same ends as the combined forces of African nationalism, in the shape of the three African Congresses of the Federation. Mr. Garfield Todd was the first European of any stature to comment upon this trend. In an address to Asians in Bulawayo at the beginning of August—with

the bitter sting of his election defeat still smarting—he declared: “Let us not delude ourselves. It is not only Northern Africans who are calling for a breaking up of the Federation, but also Southern Europeans, and there are amongst us today many who would like to see the southern half of the Federation separated from the north and eventually amalgamated with the Union of South Africa.”

There was always a hard core of white nationalists—mainly Afrikaaner migrants to farming and mining—who advocated union with South Africa. But to-day they have been immeasurably strengthened by more and more “ordinary” people who, not particularly illiberal in themselves, argue that there will never be sufficient Europeans in the Federation to make a “stand” against the African (present figures: 8,000,000 Black doubling themselves every 20 years and 260,000 White, with immigration down to 15,000 this year) and that “sooner or later it’s going to be Black against White so we may as well join the Union and reduce the odds.”

In this expanding philosophy we have the most tragic thing in Africa to-day: a thinking in numbers, a resignation to the irreconcilability of Black and White and a drawing off by the Europeans into a camp of insularism to await the showdown.

At the time Mr. McWilliam wrote his article there was real hope of the Constitution Party being able to gather sufficient of both races, plus the Asians and the handful of Coloureds, who believe that partnership can become more than an 11 letter word in a dictionary. The party got off to a modest, but auspicious start beneath the tall blue gums on the lawn of the Federal Assembly’s greatest elected liberal, Dr. Alexander Scott, uncle of the African nominated representative for Northern Rhodesia, Sir John Moffat.

But hardly had the party been formed than things began to go wrong. This has been the continuing pattern. The association of David Stirling, founder of the Capricorn Africa Society, immediately became an embarrassment in the North, where Capricorn is still associated in the minds of Africans with the act of Federation. Then an untimely attack was made by one of the party’s executive upon the African Congress at the very moment other members of the executive were working to persuade the Congress leaders that in the Constitution Party could lay the greatest hope of the Africans to some form of realistic political representation.

The more realistic leaders of the party saw that if it hoped to attract thinking Africans—or, indeed, any Africans—then it was bound to draw upon Congress members, and that meant at least the tacit approval of the Congress leaders. Congress was naturally wary of endorsing anything involving European organization and it was only the stature of Dr. Alexander Scott—“the only White politician in Central Africa we would trust further than we could throw”—that stopped Harry Nkumbula condemning the Constitution Party from the outset. As it was, Mr. Nkumbula turned cool when the spokesman attacked Congress and thus the negotiations broke down.

In such unpublicized incidents is history made.

As it was, Congress let it be known that any African who joined the party would be ostracised, or worse. The Africans who applied for membership after that could literally be counted on one hand.

The only African of any calibre who joined the party was Safeli Chileshe, one of the four African M.L.Cs in Northern Rhodesia. But in a matter of a few months he was back in the Congress camp and out of the Constitution Party.

At this stage of the party's history it was struggling to keep alive in Northern Rhodesia, barely more than an off-shoot of Capricorn in Southern Rhodesia and non-existent in Nyasaland.

Less than six months after its formation, the party in the North split into right and left wings and this resulted in the Rev. Colin Morris, the young “political parson” who had incurred Federal Cabinet wrath by describing partnership as the biggest confidence trick in history, resigning from the party's executive.

And here the paradox developing in Central Africa becomes grimly humorous, for Morris, one of the most articulate champions of the African since Father Trevor Huddleston left the Union, found himself lining up with the right-wing reactionaries who wanted the Federation broken up. Morris said breaking the Federation was the only thing to safeguard African interests; the reactionaries said breaking the Federation was the only thing to safeguard European interests.

Meanwhile, the Southern Rhodesia branch of the party offered allegiance to Garfield Todd, just beginning to stir after his three-month sojourn on his farm after the general election. Such an offer was a considerable compromise with the Constitution Party's earlier avowed principles.

Something similar was happening in Nyasaland where a new

party, the Commonwealth Party, had come together, comprised of a number of leading liberals of all races. But within a month of its emergence it was making overtures to the United Federal Party, and then finally fell apart on the eve of the general election campaign opening.

The new constitution which had been announced by Mr. Lennox Boyd for Northern Rhodesia after the inevitable failure of all sides to find anything like common ground during their London talks, was generally greeted by liberals as a considerable advance, doubling, as it did, African representation in the Legislative Council and creating the first two African cabinet ministers south of Dar es Salaam.

But there were such petulant outbursts from United Federal Party spokesmen from Sir Roy Welensky downwards that Mr. Lennox Boyd appeared to be wavering and announced that his mind was "not closed" on the matter.

What part the British Home Secretary, M. R. A. B. Butler, may have had in this change of heart can only be imagined, but there was something decidedly unsavoury about the way the Federal Prime Minister beat a path to the British Minister's holiday retreat in the Eastern districts of Southern Rhodesia with his protestations. And there was general relief at the reception he appeared to be greeted with by Mr. Butler who might, perhaps, have been expected to tell him that the matter had nothing to do with him and that anyway, he was on holiday. Instead, Mr. Butler made statements which, although cautious, lit hope in the breasts of the United Federal Party, and for that matter the Dominion Party too, that he would bring pressure to bear upon Mr. Lennox Boyd when he returned from London.

In the face of developments such as these, it is hardly surprising that the African National Congress in Southern Rhodesia—until now almost a benevolent institution by comparison with the congresses in the two northern territories—announced their intention of waging "social war" in the Colony, and among the resolutions passed at the annual meeting of the southern congress in September was a call to the two African M.Ps. from Southern Rhodesia to resign their seats in the Federal Assembly.

So we are coming full circle in Central Africa, with Black nationalism spurring on White nationalism which in turn provides yet more fuel for more Black nationalism. And into this tragic whirlpool are drawn many people of all races who are normally outside race arena politics.