

MONCKTON AND CLEOPATRA

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WHEN Dr. Nkrumah and his friends use that evocative phrase, "the African Personality", I often wonder if they are including in their thoughts that most remarkable African of them all, Cleopatra.

I thought of her myself, recently, in a rather odd context. I had just put down the 175-page British Government Blue Book which bears the title "Report of the Advisory Commission on the Review of the Constitution of Rhodesia and Nyasaland." The world knows it simply as the Monckton Report.

It has made world headlines; it is the basic working paper of the Federal Constitutional Review in London; it has produced—in the course of a couple of months—almost as many columns of comment as has the Queen of Egypt, in all her glory, down the centuries.

There are other resemblances in the situation: we can only guess at the cost of Antony's expedition to Africa; but we know the cost of Walter Monckton's exactly. It is recorded in a careful footnote on page two (as we might expect of the chairman of one of Britain's largest banks) and it came to precisely £128,899.

Certainly, in at least three respects Antony's African affair and the recent adventures of the Monckton Commissioners are remarkably the same. Both enterprises required Afro-European co-operation; in both cases Europeans came to learn much more than they had known previously about Africans and to respect them. And in both episodes, whether the onlookers approved or disapproved of what took place, it is a plain fact of history that the world could never afterwards be quite the same place again.

This is the salient fact of the Monckton Report: the course of history has been changed. And that, of course, is why Sir Roy Welensky and most of the other 297,000 white Rhodesians are so upset about it.

They must wish now that they had never agreed to the commissioning of the expedition. For the significance of Lord Monckton's expedition is that he has shifted the landmarks in Rhodesian politics; he has re-set the political limits. What were

once the dark and trackless marshes of African nationalism have been placed squarely upon the political map of the Federation. An English Viscount and his 24 fellow Commissioners have been there and survived. Sir Roy, perhaps, would have us think that all 25 of them inhaled some of the dangerous marsh gases and came back badly infected. But these are their conclusions:

"Federation cannot, in our view, be maintained in its present form. . . . No new form of association is likely to succeed unless Southern Rhodesia is willing to make drastic changes in its racial policies. . . . It appears only too likely that those who merely cling to their familiar positions will be swept away."

And most revolutionary of all:

"No new arrangement can succeed unless it obtains the support of African nationals."

That sounds dangerously like the principle of African consent, the principle which Labour and Liberal spokesmen pleaded for at Westminster in vain in the weeks when Federation was being hustled through the British House of Commons eight years ago.

It is the mark of the statesman, as opposed to the politician, that he does not accept political landmarks as they are but sets out deliberately to change them when he feels that the time is historically right.

This was what Roosevelt did when he galvanized a nation by saying that "this generation has a rendezvous with destiny" and when he went on to sweep away dozens of accepted landmarks in his celebrated 'Hundred Days'. He snorted disapproval of opponents who wanted to feel the public pulse in opinion polls—and tailor their legislative programmes accordingly. FDR's instinct was to get to a microphone first, and see what the polls said afterwards.

Walter Monckton did not take on such a dramatic, free-swinging role when he went on his expedition to Africa. Nor was he asked to do so. But his shrewd, lawyer's mind recognized the psychological advantage which was there for the seizing by the Chairman of such a Commission. No one would *instruct* him to re-define the limits of the political scene in Central Africa; but it was his right and perhaps his duty to do so, if those limits seemed to require re-definition.

The original limits had been broadly specified by Parliament. Now, after seven years of "partnership", the white settlers who hold power had shaped the Rhodesian political landscape to suit themselves. They had chosen to mark off large tracts for

their own use, some tracts for the people they call "natives", and to put other tracts beyond the palings of political propriety—all those dangerous marshes marked "Full Adult Suffrage", "No Colour Barriers", and so on.

It was Lord Monckton's sovereign right to take a close look at the limits which usage had imposed and to suggest new ones. What is remarkable is that he was able to do so—defining African needs and aspirations understandingly—even though he and his fellow Commissioners had not been able to do quite such a thorough job of exploring the African marshes as they might have wished. After all, as they confess readily in their Report: "*In both northern territories the African nationalist political parties organized boycotts of the Commission on the grounds that the terms of reference did not appear to permit the break-up of the Federation to be considered.*"

Mr. Joshua Nkomo, the newly-elected leader of the National Democratic Party which represents the bulk of African nationalist opinion in Southern Rhodesia, has since said that in his territory the boycott of the Commission was equally effective.

So the Monckton Commissioners did not hear or see at first hand the powerful movement—what Mr. Nkomo recently described to me as "the irresistible river of African nationalism"—but they were able to judge its force fairly well from such evidence as they gathered by their own efforts. But did the Commissioners really judge all the realities of the new Rhodesian landscape correctly, and set political limits wide enough to contain these realities?

The African nationalist answer is clearly—No!

This apparent ingratitude must seem to the man who in this country is described as "the ordinary decent taxpayer" as one of the most puzzling things about the Monckton Report. Here is a document which quite plainly inflames all the political dinosaurs of the white settler community; surely it is on the side of the angels and must be right?

Mixed into this is the deeply entrenched British affection for the middle way; the so-called love of compromise. I remember vividly stepping off the plane when I came home last time from Central Africa—it was at night—and being confronted by a neon sign advertising sherry: "Not too dry, not too sweet, but just right".

Well, that sort of thing may meet British tastes in politics, but it simply will not satisfy the realities of the situation in

Africa. And the Commissioners appear to make an elementary miscalculation. In reporting on the attitude of Africans in Southern Rhodesia towards Federation, they claim to find what they call "*a clear distinction between this attitude and that of Africans in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland.*" Africans in the southern territory, the Commissioners say, believe that close association with the large African majorities in the north will strengthen their position in relation to the Europeans.

It is here that the Report seems on weak ground, and most in danger of misleading British opinion. It was this section of the Report that drew the first and hottest comment of African nationalists on the day after publication.

In London the point was seized on by Mr. Nkomo's assistant, Mr. T. G. Silundika.

"We resent most strongly the fabricated conclusion by the Commission that Africans in Southern Rhodesia favour Federation and did not boycott the Commission. It should be recalled that in 1952 Mr. Nkomo was sent to London by the African people to oppose the formation of the Federation. One of the main reasons given by the Whitehead regime for banning the A.N.C., then led by Mr. Nkomo, was that it opposed Federation. From its inception the present National Democratic Party has declared for a policy of breaking up Federation. In line with this, the N.D.P. announced and carried out its total boycott of the Commission.

"The Africans who are referred to as favouring Federation are the few who receive regular payment from the Government in order to support white supremacy. African resentment is because of the stinking policies of the Southern Rhodesian Government since 1923. The Commission suggests shifting the capital of the Federation from Salisbury; instead it should suggest effective measures to do away with this type of government in Southern Rhodesia forthwith and leave Salisbury in peace."

Here then is a classic example of the difficulty for the visitor of appreciating the African point of view. With all the goodwill in the world the Monckton Commissioners cannot see that the Africans of the southern territory are doggedly opposed to Federation as well. They assume, by white man's logic, that Mr. Nkomo and his fellow nationalists will want to keep links with their nationalist colleagues in the north so as not to be so easily overwhelmed by the relatively large group in Southern Rhodesia—some 200,000—making up the main community of white settlers in the present Federation.

I put this argument to Mr. Silundika recently and here is his reply:

“We don't wish to deal with the Southern Rhodesian Government any more; we ask only for the same privilege that is being given to our fellow-Africans in the two northern territories—that of dealing directly with the Colonial Office. The British Government has a clear duty—to suspend the Southern Rhodesian constitution which has not been interfered with since 1923, and to resume the same direct rule from Whitehall as there is in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. Are we different? Should we be denied this elementary protection? As for leaving Federation now, we think we can deal better with the European settlers when they can no longer call on support, including the economic resources, from the north. When we have separated and achieved self-government in each territory, then we might be prepared to come together and see if we could negotiate political union.”

And so here is a very real weakness in the Monckton Report—for lack of sufficient evidence the Commissioners have misjudged African opposition in one territory and miscalculated the course which African nationalists there wish to take.

Were the African leaders wrong in their decision to refuse to appear before the Commission? On balance, probably not. The most powerful piece of evidence of all was the implicit, silent evidence of the African boycott. The Commissioners may have seen a few African witnesses coming before them in each territory, but it must also have been borne in upon them that there was a vast, invisible multitude that was not coming forward to the witness box, and that this included all the principal spokesmen for African nationalism. The most stunning piece of evidence of all was the one which was never actually given.

What about the other boycott—the decision by the Labour Opposition in Britain not to take part in the Commission's work? That too seems, on balance, to have been an apparently negative gesture that produced positive results.

The very fact of Labour's objection—that the Commission would be prohibited by its terms of reference from considering secession—seems to have spurred the Commissioners into proving that they were not as bound as their Labour critics were trying to make out.

Equally important is the fact that “left-wing” has become such a pejorative term now in the white communities of

Southern Africa, that it is probably a good thing Labour cannot be identified in any way with the radical suggestions contained in this Report. It is the sort of irony that Gilbert and Sullivan would have approved of thoroughly—that Viscount Monckton, backed up by such stalwarts as Lord Crathorne, Sir Lionel Heald, Mr. Justice Beadle of Southern Rhodesia, and Professor D. C. Creighton, a true-blue Canadian conservative—should be putting their names to such a list of critical comments and radical reforms.

Had some of Mr. Gaitskell's nominees been involved, this would most certainly have taken a good deal of the sting out of the Report. The very fact of "left-wing" participation would have enabled Rhodesian dinosaurs to claim that the document was biased and valueless. That lucky chance has clearly been denied to them. There it stands, a splendid new landmark upon the African landscape, the product of a team that was Tory-led and Tory-dominated.

The recommendations have been far too well publicized for me to go into them again here in any detail. However, it might be useful to summarize them:

1. Secession: The Report says that the new Federal constitution should include such a right, which might prove a valuable safety valve—"there are cases where to grant the right to secede is to ensure States will never exercise it".

2. Racial Discrimination: "This has to be recognized as one of the important factors preventing political development."

The Report recommends legislation against the colour bar in industry, government and social life.

3. Safeguards: For both individuals and groups, these could be guaranteed by a Bill of Rights on the Canadian model and Councils of State on the Kenya one.

4. States Rights: There should be reallocations of function giving a greater degree of responsibility to the member territories, with tax revenue adjustments accordingly.

5. African Political Rights: An immediate shift in power in the Federal parliament, giving Africans parity either 'de jure' or 'de facto'. Franchise to be broadened, bringing far more Africans onto a common voters' roll.

6. Federal Organisation: Because of African antipathy to the white supremacist reputation of Salisbury, the Federal capital should shift, with the legislature holding its sessions in

each territory in turn. The name Federation—"which has become a serious political liability"—must be changed.

7. Economic Aid: Britain should provide much larger funds because present political uncertainties have made it hard for the Federation or its territories to attract fresh investment capital in sufficient quantity.

The real contribution of the Monckton Commission, however, is something much larger than these details, important though they will be as the politicians get to grips with them in the bargaining at Lancaster House in London. What the Commissioners have done is to show white Rhodesians that it is they, and not the world, who are out of step. Perhaps the lesson has not been immediately accepted there, but it is percolating into a nation's consciousness, nevertheless.

Here was a real wind of change, blowing in from the outside world. I remember thinking as I watched the great blue-and-silver Britannia touch down at Salisbury Airport on a sunny February afternoon with its load of experts, including some from Canada and Australia as well as Scotland, England and Wales, that this was something that could not happen at the present time in South Africa. There they either seek to stop the wind or pretend it does not exist; here, at least, in the Federation they were brave enough to invite it in and let it blow.

Those who know the real gale force of African nationalism will find a few mild hints of it in the Minority Report which is part of the blue book. Mr. Wellington Chirwa and Mr. H. G. Habanyama are regarded by many of their fellow Africans as 'stooges', but in fact they have stated a good number of the objections which would have been put by African nationalists had they not decided to boycott the proceedings.

These two men call for a referendum as being the only practical way to determine what the Africans of all three territories actually do feel about Federation. They say that the break-up of political federation need not be the end of everything; economic co-operation along the lines of the East Africa High Commission should be perfectly feasible. This is all the more remarkable because Mr. Habanyama is a schoolmaster who was one of Sir Roy Welensky's Federal appointees on the Commission; he and Mr. Chirwa are supposedly African "moderates".

Yet they speak boldly and critically of the "fantastic difference" between European and African wages—in some cases the

rate may be twenty times larger for the white man—and say pointedly that the authorities show little sign of trying to close the gap. And they say there should be an African majority in Federal and territorial legislatures and that the continuance of Federation without African consent could only mean “dictatorial rule”.

The conclusion is inescapable: if a Tory majority in the Commission, and a “moderate” African minority, can say such radical things, is it not just possibly the bitter truth that radical changes are needed? And although the British love a compromise, they will not find it in the 175 pages of this blue book but somewhere between that and the extremes of African opinion; in other words, somewhere left of Monckton.

Not long ago I got an insight into how settled a white settler can be when I was sitting at one of the tables in the forecourt of the New Stanley Hotel in Nairobi. Chris Chataway, the British Conservative M.P., had been speaking at a meeting about the way political feelings were moving in Britain today. Two white Kenyans who had been to hear him were discussing the meeting. Whether they realized which party Mr. Chataway belongs to I do not know; I can only report that one of them summed up his feelings in the line: “My God, I didn’t realize until this evening just how left-wing these fellows can be.”

I would tie this up with an incident in Salisbury, when I had tried to make arrangements for a lunch-time meeting with an educated African friend. We had often lunched together in London, but I discovered now that he could not come to my hotel for a drink or a meal, that we could go to no restaurant and no bar in the whole of town except the one recently-emancipated hotel where the colour bar is down. Eventually, as we settled down there to our meal, he listened to my account of touring the Federation and then spoke about my “double handicap”. He said: “Before you arrived you knew how political events are moving in the outside world—which the average white Rhodesian does not. And now you have probably spoken to more articulate Africans in the three territories than the average white Rhodesian will do in his whole lifetime. So now you’ll never be able to see his point of view.”

Perhaps the Monckton Commissioners will be able, with their official cachet, to drum into the lucky white Rhodesians with their high standard of living and their comfortable insulation from the cares of the outside world at least a part of

the lesson that they prefer not to receive at the hands of visiting journalists.

But there is something that the Report could not properly mention, because it is the stuff of everyday politics. It is a plain political fact that even if the Monckton Report had been less radical, and even if the Macleod-Macmillan policies for Africa were much less flexible than they are, there would be two powerful forces making for change. Central Africa is not living in splendid isolation any more. Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Krushchev both have eyes on Africa. Mr. Macmillan is acutely aware that much of his speech at the U.N. had to be a reply to Soviet charges of British imperialism. And Britain now simply cannot afford to have colonialist white supremacy rampant in a territory for which she is still responsible.

As for Mr. Kennedy, three of his close colleagues—Chester Bowles, Averell Harriman and Adlai Stevenson—have toured Africa exhaustively and none of them has any patience with Whiteheadery. There may still be Rhodesian ostriches who think their sand-pile is unique and unassailable. At this point in the twentieth century it is not.

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