

## CENTRAL AFRICA (II)

# THE CHALLENGE OF FEDERATION

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I THINK it relevant that I should start this article by saying that I was Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1946 to 1950 and took part in discussions in 1948-9 when the idea of federation of the two Rhodesias and Nyasaland was referred to me. Earlier, the idea had been officially discussed and rejected, following the Bledisloe Royal Commission Report. However, and in spite of continued African opposition, the European representatives in the two Rhodesias pressed their views for an association of the three territories closer than the facilities afforded by the Central African Council. I was opposed both to amalgamation and federation, and again objected to Federation when it was later introduced, after I had left high office. Nonetheless, I have always felt that some close association between the three territories was desirable, useful and important.

My own view was that the European request for federation was premature and could not win African support. I felt that, whatever its existing limitations, the Central African Council could be turned into a useful instrument of consultation and co-operation and could be adapted to running certain common services. At that time I believed that it could operate with African acquiescence and increasing interest. In 1950, however, it was virtually dissolved.

I was opposed to Federation because I thought it wrong, at the behest of a clamorous minority, to impose a system of government to which the majority of inhabitants were manifestly opposed, which lessened the protection Britain had guaranteed by treaty and agreement, and which crystallized European political ascendancy in the constitution. It provided Africans with only inadequate safeguards and renounced Britain's ultimate authority in the matter of future constitutional amendment, if the Federal Parliament refused to accept the kind of amendment sought. Federation however, received the sanction of law from the British Parliament, and, although my doubts about its wisdom and illiberal structure never lessened, I took the view that the scheme should be given a chance and

tested by experience. I hoped that, could a generous spirit guide the working of the constitution as a genuine 'partnership', Federation might become a workable system, which would remove African suspicions and fears and bring the African community into harmony with it. So far my hopes have been disappointed, and African opposition remains as strong as before. Nevertheless, Sir Roy Welensky is determined in his course—to eliminate London responsibility altogether and secure the sovereign independence of the Federation. He said just recently that independence cannot be withheld much longer. But, he added, it would be wise to await the outcome of the constitutional conference to be held in 1960.

There are in Britain to-day widespread doubts about the future of Central African Federation. Oddly enough, they are not due to any refusal by liberally minded people to believe that Federation could succeed. Nor are the doubts confined to those who reluctantly acquiesced in the political change and thought that experience would inevitably demonstrate how unwise and politically unsound the experiment was. Most people, in fact, recognize that under Federation there have been important economic developments; such misgivings as they have, come from insufficient signs that 'partnership' is a governing principle of policy. Conditions have not strikingly changed, it is said, since Federation was imposed, and African opinion remains to-day utterly hostile and without prospect of reconciliation. Sir Roy has felt compelled to complain that the loyalty of Africans is directed to London rather than to Salisbury, and Africans seem to value their 'protected' status above citizenship of the Federation. In fact, the predominant mood of Africans is still resentful and sullen, and their spokesmen demand that the Federation be dismantled. In the circumstances, there is no internal unity or conception of national purpose, though it is on these things that the good and orderly progress of the Federation towards sovereign independent statehood must rely.

This state of affairs has created a chorus of demand that the British Labour Party should proclaim its determined support of Federation and Sir Roy Welensky. The reason is clear. There is every prospect of there being a Labour Government in Britain after the General Election, an event likely to take place within two years and before 1960. Events cast their shadows backwards, and Sir Roy is uneasy about the response Labour

will give in 1960 to his request for sovereign independent status. Conservatives believe that Sir Roy and his policy would be strengthened and his path in Central Africa made easier if Labour would give uncompromising support to this request now. In fact, they urge the virtues of bi-partizanship in colonial affairs. They forget that Labour policies are based on principles of some value in public affairs and that there are issues enough on which they themselves vehemently oppose Labour. Presumably, in this matter of Central Africa, it would be convenient to all concerned, *except the Africans*, if Labour would declare—that unity in purpose by Britain is above all things desirable, that it agrees that Sir Roy is right in his demand that the next Labour Ministry should surrender all responsibility for Central Africa, and that the Party should reject decisively all its sentimental notions about protection and trust! Henceforth, it is suggested, perhaps Sir Roy will disguise his contempt for much of Labour's policy and his scorn for London and its Ministers. In truth, his abuse of Labour spokesmen serves no tactical ends!

The Labour Party however, is not likely to fall into the error of making any such declaration. The future of the Federation raises issues of the widest significance which are of much greater importance than any problems related purely to the communities in Rhodesia and Nyasaland. A Labour Government has a moral responsibility over a considerable field, and the extensive implications of that responsibility in regard to the larger issues of race relations and human rights cannot be shirked on grounds of short-term expediency in Central Africa.

The problem in Central Africa is the reconciliation of several races in its political life and the prevention of one or other community, *qua* community, from securing political domination. Such issues test Britain's intentions in respect of all emerging independent states in the Commonwealth, particularly the multi-racial territories. Her policy is felt and evaluated by non-European peoples everywhere. British policy in Central Africa will increase or decrease racial tensions, not only in that Continent, but well beyond it, and have a profound bearing upon international relations in the world for a long time to come. It will also have repercussions on the shape of the Commonwealth and the role of Britain in eliminating colonialism and pioneering with her dependencies a racially co-operative world. The work of Britain in helping to free from imperial bonds India, Burma, Ceylon, and recently, the West Indies,

Ghana, Nigeria, Malaya and other countries, would be overshadowed should Central Africa be surrendered to a European minority, and a final transfer of power made which fails to concede their rights to the non-Europeans and neglects the most complete guarantees for a political status as favourable as that enjoyed by the Europeans.

It is well, therefore, that Britain should straighten out her policy in respect of Central Africa, and persuade the European minority there that the interest of all lies in the existence of a well-founded democratic state. The surest means of entrenching independence will be a political system which commands the loyalty, good-will and co-operation of all the inhabitants of Central Africa. This will not be achieved if a large number of the Europeans in Rhodesia turn a half-regretful eye southwards to the land many of them have left, but whose conventions have become ingrained in their social and mental habits. The policy of the Union Government already embarrasses the Federal administration. The repercussions of its intolerable harshness and the re-actions to its doctrine of *apartheid* encourage suspicion and racial distrust throughout the Continent; so that, to the African, administrations outside the Union differ only in degree. Undoubtedly, a free state built upon foundations of justice and democratic principles for all its inhabitants would prove an effective guarantee of security and provide a strong barrier to the pernicious policies of the Union. It would deepen the spirit of independence and self-esteem in all its people. But to state this only emphasizes how far from attainment in Central Africa is 'partnership' between Europeans and Africans, the principles of co-operation between the races embodied in the preamble to the constitution and declared to be the basis of this great venture in statehood.

But the critic of Federation must be fair. It is hardly four years since the venture was launched. There were bound to be complicated difficulties in ushering in this new enterprise, in initiating its departments and finding experienced Ministers and officials. The pre-occupations of a new Government are many, apart from the replacement of one Prime Minister by another. In any case, there would be in the Federation insufficient opportunity in the time available to work out many phases of policy, to smooth out basic differences, unify earlier conceptions of race relations, and apply in all aspects of the Federation's life the idea of 'partnership' which had helped win

British consent to the experiment. The validity of these points should be acknowledged. At the same time, however, Sir Roy Welensky asks that independence should be conceded without much delay, before he has modified opposition to Federation by the majority of its inhabitants, or created confidence, or brought forward evidence of achievement to give support to the policy of 'partnership'. He is impatient and presses now for our judgment that Federation has so far succeeded and that his racial policies are bearing good fruit. He cannot reconcile himself to the fact that other territories are achieving independence and so outstripping the Federation. He requires us to trust our kin overseas to build a civilization in harmony with our best traditions, and he portrays himself as dedicated to the lofty purpose outlined in the preamble to the constitution. But the future of Federation cannot be settled by the British Parliament as an act of faith. The British public wants to see concrete accomplishments.

For Britain still has responsibilities and liabilities which she is obliged to respect if her honour is not further to be tarnished. The Prime Minister of the Federation knows as well as anybody the solemn trust which Britain must respect, and that this trust cannot be transferred to him without African consent. And it should not be forgotten that European settlers and miners entered the protected territories with full knowledge of what their status would be. Yet in spite of this, supervision over the Northern territories by the Government in London has been relatively slight and not the bogey of domineering Colonial Office rule which Sir Roy has created for his own purposes. The Prime Minister does his cause little good by appearing so over-anxious to be rid of the ultimate responsibility of the Secretary of State.

The evidence available must obviously be set against the difficult conditions under which the Prime Minister must work. He has undoubtedly to convince his Party and the Europeans in the Federation that the moral and practical merits of the policy of 'partnership' far outweigh those of the policy practised in South Africa. Unless he can do this, his political prospects are dim, and more reactionary forces will possess the government and use it to impose measures which have their inspiration in *apartheid*. Such a development would, of course, be an unmitigated disaster. It may be that the Federal Party leaders feel obliged to temper their speeches on African advancement

and race relations in order to win the plaudits of less enlightened electors, and that their real intentions are different. But do they really emphasize with sincerity the necessity for maintaining "civilized" standards regardless of colour? Do they really believe that political democracy should set no racial barriers to the number who can qualify for the rights of citizenship and for membership of political institutions?

The Federal Government is entitled to some credit for having encouraged the founding of the University College at Salisbury, even if at present African students have separate hostels and dining halls; for having removed some of the restrictions on public employment in the higher reaches of the civil service, and having brought citizenship within the grasp of protected persons. Protected status in the Northern territories will not be a disqualification for franchise enrolment. In Southern Rhodesia also, *apartheid* has been resisted, and the policy of segregation modified. The Pass Laws have not been repealed, but Africans in a few special categories may move with greater freedom. The Land Apportionment Act still causes the removal of hundreds of Africans from their holdings, and the Industrial Conciliation Acts still operate adversely for African industrial workers, but African trade union rights are under enquiry, and legislation respecting African membership of European trade unions is being considered. The limitations on skilled employment for non-whites remain, as do those on training and apprenticeship. Again, in Northern Rhodesia, while the colour bar still dominates allocation of work on the Copperbelt, Sir Ronald Prain has courageously forced open the door for the admission of selected Africans to more responsible and superior work, and has offered a Development Fund for improving the Northern territories. A Bill affecting racial discrimination in administration and social convention has also been passed, though much emaciated after the resistance it met. Yet the harvest for the cause of 'partnership' fails completely to satisfy African aspirations. Their gloom is unenlivened in the absence of bolder political strokes.

The citizenship concession has brought little enthusiasm to them because they have little desire, in the light of their continuing opposition to Federation, to alter their status as protected persons. And the removal of franchise disabilities from protected persons can only be real to them if the qualifications for, and the results of, the exercise of a vote are sufficiently

liberal. There is, moreover, the overshadowing fact that in the Federal Parliament the Europeans are strongly entrenched, and the Federal Government controls many major powers and all economic development. It is proposed now to enlarge the size of the Federal Assembly to increase proportionately the number of African seats. There will be eight seats reserved for Africans elected by all persons on the franchise roll, and there will be two Africans from each of the two Northern territories nominated by the Governor after indirect election from African Councils. The European members "representing African interests", elected by the top tier of the franchise roll in Southern Rhodesia and nominated by the Governor in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia, will be retained.

The franchise issue is of fundamental importance, not only on the Federal, but also on the territorial, level. For certain of the African seats in the Federal Parliament, European votes will be in the majority, and in any case, the franchise roll will be of two tiers, with qualifications for the upper tier so high as to ensure complete European domination in all constituencies. The Prime Minister describes this as preserving the common roll while extending it downwards so as to put some Africans onto it. He proclaims the hope that his proposals will gradually eliminate purely racial representation—a hope assisted by another device by which, should an African be elected by some unlikely chance to one of the 44 seats in the Assembly, a deduction will be made, first from the number of seats reserved for elected Africans, then, when these are exhausted, from those for nominated Africans, and finally, from those of the Europeans representing African interests. The elimination of communal representation and of members elected for their race is a commendable thing when the political stage is reached for such a change, but a system which perpetuates European domination by disguised devices and hindrances to African participation and expression, must be regarded as vigorously illiberal.

But the political helplessness of Africans is not limited to the Federal political institutions. No African sits in the Southern Rhodesian Legislature, and African representation is no more than a helpless minority in the other two territories. Africans have no seat on the Governor's Executive Councils. Yet the doctrine of 'protection' is proclaimed for Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and the governments of both territories exist primarily to protect the rights and promote the welfare of the



African populations. In the case of Southern Rhodesia, the franchise has recently been considered by the Tredgold Commission, and, as I write, proposals for a two-tier division of a common roll are being considered. Qualifications for the vote in Southern Rhodesia to-day are too high to admit many Africans to the register, and whatever prospect of enfranchising more Africans existed a few years ago, was quickly dispersed by putting the qualifications beyond their reach. The new proposals will make many more Africans eligible for the franchise, but give to their votes only a qualified value.

The frustration experienced by Africans in the two Protectorates might have been met by a new franchise law and by an alteration in the proportion of White-Black representation on the Legislative Councils. The reconstruction of these bodies is long overdue, and Africans are entitled to, at the very least, parity with Europeans in representation. The situation at the moment is intolerable, for direct African representation is withheld altogether from the Executive Council. It is not sufficient to accept the fact that in the initiation of policy the Governor and his officials on these bodies must act in accordance with the policy laid down by the Secretary of State. Nor can the situation in the Federation be justified, whereby no African sits on the Executive Council, and the African Affairs Board (on which three African representatives out of ten members sit) has not yet been brought into effective play to consider legislation as it affects Africans. All these disabilities emphasize to the African that his advance to a fair political system will depend on his own organization and struggle, that a democratic system may prove illusive because of the devices to protect European interests worked into the constitution, and that the final surrender by Britain of political power to the European minority, even with protections for the African embodied in treaties or entrenched clauses in the constitution, may confirm his subordination to European power.

Sir Roy has just been in London to discuss the advance in Federal status and prepare the way for independence. The Conservative Government agrees with him that he should have a permanent seat at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, that he should have direct access to the Queen, that he should appoint his own diplomats to courts overseas, and that the civil service should be transformed into a local one and the colonial officials steadily withdrawn.



But I do not think that the British Government can be very happy or complacent about the present situation. Some Ministers may think that African opposition will lessen as the virtues of Federation become more widely known and understood, but the frustrations they have suffered as a result of their political helplessness and the discriminations ringing them round have made the Africans bitterly hostile. And the bold implementation of a more liberal policy of genuine 'partnership' is unlikely now to decrease the tension or create a co-operative atmosphere. The outlook is serious and foreboding. The Africans insist that they have never agreed to having their country governed by European settlers, have never agreed that Federation should be imposed on them. They fear that 'partnership' is an empty flourish to hide a system which betrays their rights and their destiny.

One great obstacle has to be overcome by the Federal Prime Minister before independence can be conceded by Britain. When Federation was enacted, the Secretary of State assured Parliament that the constitution would under no circumstances be reviewed before seven years had passed. As for independence, he said it would be impossible to grant dominion status unless "there was a change in the constitution", and Her Majesty's Government would subject the constitution to all the safeguards necessary and take account of whether the majority of the inhabitants—all the inhabitants—were in favour of any altered status. He added: "It cannot take place with these safeguards until the authorities of the day are satisfied that the majority of the inhabitants so desire." That pledge has been renewed as recently as June of this year.

A Conference of the five Governments concerned is to be called in 1960. It will have no power to decide whether Central Africa should be dismembered and Federation abandoned; it can do no more than review the working of the Federal constitution and make such alterations in it as experience of its detailed working has shown to be necessary. The Secretary of State has said that any part of the working of the constitution, including racial representation, can come up for review. Unfortunately, the present constitution lays down that any change requires a two-thirds majority in the Federal legislature. In fact, the progressive political advancement of the Africans can only come about if the consent is obtained of a European Assembly in which at the moment only 9 out of a total of 35 members

represent African interests. As I see it, the British Parliament most unhappily parted with its power to amend when it passed the Federation Act, and put all future changes into the hands of the European community.

If, in the face of solid African opposition to Federation and demands for its dismemberment, the British Government finds itself unable to meet the requirement of sovereign independence which Sir Roy will advance, a first class crisis will occur within the Commonwealth. Certain of the Commonwealth nations will place themselves squarely behind the London Government, which will only be able to maintain its decision by employing stern measures. If, however, the British Government yields to the Federal Prime Minister, the situation will be worse, for it will then involve taking stern measures against the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Federation. The British Government will find itself betraying the high degree of trust and confidence reposed in it and the whole Commonwealth divided on support for African opinion. It is hoped that this is a hypothetical and unreal dilemma, which will in the end be avoided.

But it must be confessed that it will be difficult for any Government to unscramble the eggs which have been beaten to make Federation, or to disentangle the services and make three viable territories. Nyasaland has benefited by the distribution of federal revenues, and African services are being improved as a result. On the other hand, African fears are hardly allayed when they hear that development will proceed according to a European pattern in which their voice has never been given a hearing. Nor can their traditional rights remain unaffected as a result of profound economic changes over which they have no control.

It may be premature to pronounce upon the future of Federation before the next few critical years are over, but at least some steps should be taken without delay. The territorial and Federal franchise should be tackled now. The territorial Legislative Councils should be reconstructed, and parity of African representation conceded at this stage. Seats should immediately be given to Africans on all the Executive Councils. There should be a re-examination of Federal and territorial powers, in order that far greater responsibility may be exercised in the territories by the local governments. Such changes might help Africans to reconcile themselves to the Federal solution. Their demand for complete dismemberment of the Federation

will prove somewhat unrealistic now.

It is doubtful if the Federal Prime Minister himself regards the issue as already determined. His desire for a bi-partisan declaration, his awareness of the Commonwealth difficulties which would ensue if he forced the issue, his knowledge that African loyalty and co-operation have still to be won and unity secured, and the repetition by the British Government of its pledge that the consent of all the inhabitants must be obtained before independence can be conceded—all these factors indicate obstacles which will have to be surmounted. His anxieties will increase if his own followers prove more intransigent, and if the Africans show moderation and sound judgment in pursuing their objectives. And racialism is less of a vice among most African leaders than among the European population. Concessions to African opinion must be made, industrially and politically. The banning of Africans on the footplate, the restriction of their trade union rights, the bans placed upon their movement, such evidence of discrimination should be removed; and the increase in legislative representation, the granting of seats on the Executive Councils, the adoption of a straight-forward franchise in the Federation and the separate territories, are only a few of the measures which should brook no further delay.

And Africans must give themselves time to learn the workings of political institutions and the exercise of responsibility in territories where economic development is of first importance to themselves, no less than to the alien interests operating in them. A negative policy of Federal dismemberment is a desperate one at this stage and ought not to be seriously considered until all efforts at reform have proved unavailing. It may be that Federal politicians have said that genuine democracy will never come to Central Africa and that the most the 6,000,000 Africans can ever expect is to share half the power of government with 200,000 Europeans. But the British Government is unlikely to surrender the fate of these millions to so small a minority without the most effective security for African political advancement. If no future British Government would be in a position to restore the pre-1953 situation, it has not surrendered its powers altogether, and the critical period ahead gives opportunity for statesmanship which can greatly transform the present depressing outlook.