

A LONG TIME DYING : CENTRAL AFRICAN FEDERATION

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THOSE who have watched the Central African tragedy for some time have by now got used to the long periods of suspense between the decisive scenes. Anyone who expected an early knock-out forgets that Roland Welensky was once a heavyweight boxer. After the battering he received from the Devlin and Monckton Reports, he needed time to recover position and breath. The British Government, too, has seen advantage in spacing out the irresistible crises. Time, it has told itself, should allow tempers to cool in Central Africa, for politicians to see the other chap's point of view; time was also necessary to give their dyspeptic backbenchers a chance to rest before digesting another dose of colonial reform. African leaders, partly because they have little control over the speed of change, partly because they mistakenly believe that time is on their side in all respects, have acquiesced in this slowing of the pace.

In the six months since *'Africa South'* last summarised the Central African story, there has been a great deal of manoeuvring and suspense, and a few decisive moves. But nearly all that has happened has been to the advantage of Sir Roy Welensky and his United Federal Party. Since Doctor Banda returned triumphantly to Nyasaland from the Federal Review talks in December, to invite his people to the funeral of Federation, Federation itself has taken an unconscionable long time dying.

To travel round the three territories is to see how cleverly the U.F.P. leaders have used their respite.

In Northern Rhodesia at Christmas time, there were high hopes of peaceful progress. During that extraordinary weekend when all the stallions of Central Africa were corralled at Chequers, the Colonial Secretary whispered to Kenneth Kaunda that he had in mind for Northern Rhodesia "something similar to Nyasaland". Kaunda, with the patience of an angel, felt his people's reward was near, for Dr. Banda had been given an African legislative majority and high hopes of at least parity with the officials in the executive.

Welensky knew that Nyasaland could perhaps be jettisoned without much harm, but Northern Rhodesia and its Copperbelt never. The eight months' struggle over that constitution was probably the toughest fight of his life. At times he seemed to act clumsily, as in March when he called up the territorials and summoned the Federal Assembly in order to make blustering, threatening speeches at Britain. But he had his effect. Africans, who made the soldiers look silly by refusing to be provoked, were reinforced in their delusion that time would bring them everything they wanted. British politicians, though angry at this blunt display of force, had to admit to themselves that they were not prepared to use British troops in order to impose an African majority.

There followed then what must count as the craziest period of compromise in all colonial history. Macleod had already tried in February to sneak through an African legislative majority with his 'three-fifteens' scheme. The U.F.P. leaders called it "diabolical" because, though they would have won the 15 upper roll seats and lost the 15 lower roll ones, they felt sure that they would lose the 15 middle or 'national' seats as well if lower and upper roll votes counted equally, since there were three times as many lower roll voters than upper.

Welensky and his clever Federal Minister of Law, Julian Greenfield, worked impressively hard (for there is no U.F.P. politician in Northern Rhodesia worth the name of negotiator). They succeeded in convincing the British Government that non-racialism (or multi-racialism, or whatever principle it swears by) consisted in equalising the effect of "the two main races", conveniently ignoring the fact that one main race outnumbers the other by 40 to 1. This meant sweeping the Asians and Coloured into a segregated seat of their own, and loading the regulations with a set of percentage quotas that in effect gives a European candidate six times the advantage of an African.

Kaunda's United National Independence Party has rejected the constitution in despair. Sir John Moffat's Liberal Party is fatally split, the paternalists among them being prepared to fight an election while the genuine liberals are ready to line up with Kaunda and honesty. The African National Congress, refurnished by one-time leader of the mineworkers Lawrence Katilungu, while Harry Nkumbula lies in jail on a severe motoring conviction, is able to reconcile its principles to condemning the constitution "without reservations" and yet

fighting an election in what may yet turn out to be a loose alliance with the U.F.P. How such a reconciliation can come about, only politicians and cynics understand.

The result undoubtedly pleases the British M.P.s who have been given a blurred glimpse of Rhodesian realities under the wand of Voice and Vision tours. They feel they have helped to save the Federation by preventing a second anti-Federation territorial government from coming to power and with Dr. Banda's help dismembering the 8-year-old structure. In fact, of course, they have done the opposite. It is crystal-clear to Northern Rhodesians that only Federation has stopped them keeping pace with their poorer neighbour, Tanganyika. Instead of being prepared to take part in the swift evolution of the Federation into an African-run association (the only salvation, as Lord Monckton saw it), Kaunda is now determined on the breaking of all links with Southern Rhodesia. Precisely how U.N.I.P. will achieve this, no one can yet say. Kaunda has handicapped himself by dismissing his Secretary-General, Munukayumbwa Sipalo, the one man ruthless enough for this period of clash. But the determination is there, and will prevail in the end.

In Southern Rhodesia, Welensky and Sir Edgar Whitehead had a comparatively easy task. Since the settlers got self-government in 1923, Britain has used her reserved powers so sparingly that they were called "vestigial". Nevertheless, there was always the danger that a Labour Government might pull on these reins, or even one of those misguided Conservative Governments that were being thrown up these days. In return for the surrender of the reserved powers, Sir Edgar was ready to offer apparently great advances to Africans; but they were only large, because no advance had ever been offered before.

Sir Edgar was careful to ensure that less than a quarter of the 65 seats in the new Assembly were elected from the lower roll, that a simple two-thirds majority would be sufficient for altering the composition of the Assembly, and that qualifications for the upper roll franchise would keep nearly all "unreliable" Africans out of the House. A Declaration of Rights was drawn up by his own and British officials, but nearly every clause left great latitude for government to curtail liberties in the public interest. A Constitutional Council was added to keep watch against discriminatory legislation; but Monckton's recommendation that the Council should review existing as well as prospective

laws was disregarded, and the Council lost any teeth it might have had.

The U.F.P. had little difficulty in winning the approval of nearly two-thirds of the 60,000 European voters for these proposals in the July referendum. After all, Sir Edgar had brought them virtual independence in the territorial sphere, in return for giving 15 African seats which would wield little influence. The right-wing opposition Dominion Party's only argument—that they could have got the same amount of independence without any concessions—was refuted by Mr. Duncan Sandys, Secretary for Commonwealth Relations, himself. After that, the Dominion Party's only other weapon was fear—fear of social integration, of being swamped by a black government majority within 10 years. To fight this, the U.F.P. ran the most reactionary campaign, brought Lord Malvern out of retirement to rumble "Rubbish!" at such degenerate fears, and went through the familiar manoeuvre of sending troops into the African townships to show that it could be as tough as anyone else with "extremist agitators".

Joshua Nkomo and his National Democratic Party leaders played into Whitehead's hands at nearly every stage. They gave enough support to the original proposals for Sir Edgar to claim, when they opposed, that they were bowing to extremists in the party. They tried to stage a three-day general strike to precede the government referendum, but there was such confusion of dates and clandestine orders (secrecy being thought necessary to avoid the penalties of the fierce security laws) that no firm lead was offered the originally willing followers. Whitehead had learned just enough in the last two years to avoid arresting the N.D.P. leaders and so offering the crowds a human issue. In the confusion African strikers beat up African workers, and the government was given substance for its frequent accusations of intimidation as well as justification for the presence of their troops and police.

The only successes the N.D.P. achieved were the staging of its own referendum, when 500,000 people voted peacefully against the government, and the defiance of laws in carrying off the referendum and publicly calling for a general strike on the final day. But Sir Edgar was able to dismiss scornfully the strike call, and did his best to ridicule the "mock referendum" by exposing several abuses. Even if there was not strict secrecy everywhere and even if some schoolgirls voted, the discontent

voiced by 500,000 hangs loudly on the air.

By winning the referendum and defeating the strike so overwhelmingly, Sir Edgar won six months' or perhaps a year's opportunity to rush through progressive measures, before being faced with another nationalist challenge. His first remarks after victory gave promise that he would "go right ahead". But his decision to hold back elections under the new constitution for 15 months at least soon curdled these hopes. His followers fell into a slough of complacency, cheerily assuring themselves that African nationalism was a scarecrow figure they would never worry about again. The thing to do, they explained, was to build up support for government among the 8,000 African yeomen farmers in the native purchase areas, and among the other "civilised" Africans who are teachers and agricultural demonstrators and so on.

This familiar tactic of 'divide and rule' (dignified in this instance with the title of "building up an African middle class") will offer an immediate advantage to the U.F.P.; it will give them a chance of winning several of the 15 new seats with reliable African candidates on the restricted franchise. But it will do Southern Rhodesia immense harm in the long run, setting African against African and failing to use the short breathing space to tackle the real grievances of urban unemployment and peasant poverty and landlessness.

These successes at territorial level in the Rhodesias have heartened Welensky and Greenfield into demanding a resumption of the federal talks, which were indefinitely adjourned—in gloomy enough circumstances for them—last December. It wasn't necessary to wait, said Welensky, until the agreed territorial changes had been put into effect. It was important, they both declared, for the Federation to be given as much independence as one of its component parts—Southern Rhodesia—had now assumed in its own sphere. The old boxer has judged that the time is now ripe for a full frontal attack.

There remains Nyasaland to prevent him—Nyasaland, the poor but lovely country of tough hillfolk, whose population spills over in labour migrations to surrounding countries—Nyasaland, which Welensky never wanted in his Federation and has never been able to decide how to dispose of. The rebellion of the Nyasas in 1959 showed that they would never be brought to heel. Yet, if Nyasaland is allowed to secede, the precedent would be set for Northern Rhodesia also to break away.

The Nyasaland elections in August strengthened Dr. Banda's hand and his people's purpose. Although the U.F.P. picked up a number of the older generation of nationalists, it had no chance to divide Nyasas. The 20 lower roll seats were acknowledged as lost to the Malawi Congress Party, and the fight was simply for the 8 upper roll ones, since they had to provide two Ministers in an executive council of ten. To prepare for defeat even in some of these, the U.F.P. candidates complained of nation-wide intimidation and called the elections "a farce". Commonly heard was the remark of white democrats in the U.F.P.: "Let's face it, it's no better than the Nazi régime." Obstinate, senior Nyasaland Government officials maintained that the country was generally calm and peaceful, and made ready for Malawi's taking over of a large part of government to open an era of happier days.

How will the Federation now break up? Certainly Malawi members will make it their first duty to pass a resolution for secession through the next Nyasaland legislative council. This will be formally passed on to the Colonial Secretary, who will politely acknowledge it as an interesting document to put before the resumed federal talks. What then? Will Dr. Banda go to the talks, resolved to break the Federation in debate? Will Northern Rhodesia erupt into violence and strikes, despite the increased police strength and the pressure of Copperbelt unemployment? Will the Governor of Northern Rhodesia, honest and despairing Sir Evelyn Hone, screw up his courage to resign and so precipitate a better kind of crisis than riots beget? Will the British Government, after months of back-sliding, step out boldly on the only sensible course?

Who can tell? Of all political tragedies, the Central African one is the most difficult to predict with precision, and the most tormenting suspense story to watch.