

CENTRAL AFRICA (V): FEDERATION AND THE BRITISH LABOUR PARTY

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INCREASING pressure is being brought to bear on Britain, by both the European and African inhabitants of the Central African Federation, to declare her attitude in advance of the Constitutional Conference that is due to take place in 1960. The inhabitants of the Federation are naturally concerned about their future and seek as much security as can be found in this H-bomb world in which we live. But, unfortunately, they are proposing two diametrically opposed solutions to the people of Britain. One stream of thought asks that Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland should secede from the Federation and thus ensure that it is dismantled. There is a second group pressing for dominion status, in order that the Federation shall escape from the control of the British Parliament and shall itself control the Northern Territories. It follows that in the absence of agreement in the Federation itself about its ultimate destiny, a heavy responsibility is thrown on Britain, whose Government will either have to make a choice between the various solutions that are proposed, or propound its own.

The strong opposition to the continued existence of the Federation itself from politically conscious Africans is indeed melancholy confirmation of those who foretold in the early 1950's that the concept was being pushed too fast. Those who prophesied what has, in fact, happened, were pooh-poohed at the time by the protagonists of Federation: but they have been proved right.

The Labour Party has decided to respond to the pressure that is being brought to bear from both sides inside the Federation by making an interim statement of its own position. It is a statement of the principles that will guide us in our approach to any conference that is held in 1960 or later to consider the constitutional future of the Federation.

Here I must remark that many Europeans have failed to comprehend that it is the political concept of Federation which they themselves espoused that is on trial in the period between 1953

and 1960. This is the testing time for those who believe in Federation; it is their job to make it succeed. To me it is an astonishing phenomenon that they have done so little to try and win over African opinion. It is the view of most observers that local antagonism is as strong as—if not stronger than—it was before 1953. This present period should have been a time for consolidation of the Federation, for gaining the confidence of the African people and of the young African nationalist movements. But none of these things has been attempted. Instead, the European-dominated Federal Assembly has deliberately altered the basis of the franchise and the allocation of seats in the Assembly in such a way as to arouse violent protests from the politically vocal Africans. Under the new franchise, Europeans will have a large say in the election of Africans, but not *vice versa*. The Federal Government's proposals drove the African Affairs Board, which was set up under the Constitution as a safeguard of African rights, to declare its opposition twice and cause the issue to be referred to the Secretary of State in Britain. Nevertheless, the Federal Government plunged ahead and flouted the informed and moderate views of the African Affairs Board. In so doing, the Federal Government put the British Government in a dilemma. The British Government had to make a choice between supporting the Federal Government, knowing that if it did so it would undermine the faith of Africans in the constitutional safeguards provided for them in the Federal Statute; or, alternatively, of rejecting the Federal Government's proposals in the knowledge that a constitutional crisis would be precipitated, followed by a General Election. The British Government capitulated to the Federal Government and, in so doing, forfeited much African confidence.

In other matters too, the Federal Government has done little to win African confidence and support. It has been singularly timorous in the matter of inter-racial education. Apart from a promising advance in the University, the secondary schools and trade schools are still run on racial lines.

In industry, it is widely believed that the Federal Government has encouraged the immigration of European workers—Italians and others—rather than carry out an intensive training of Africans for skilled posts. Although apprenticeship schemes are admittedly part of the responsibilities of the individual Territories, nevertheless the Federal Government could have given a bolder

lead in the matter of establishing apprenticeship systems for Africans—despite the hostility of a great many interests.

On the other hand, the Federation has been economically fortunate, in that its existence has coincided with a copper boom (lately followed by a sad decline in prices) and excellent prices for tobacco. The Federation has been able to go ahead with great and beneficial expansion schemes, like that of the Kariba Dam. The standard of life of the urban African has risen.

But as industrialization proceeds, the European minority places itself more and more in the hands of the African to keep the wheels of industry turning.

If a community is to be healthy, it is impossible for economic progress to march ahead of social and political progress. Unfortunately, in the social and political fields, there has been little change of attitude on the part of many Europeans. There is still an ingrained belief in the superiority of the White over the Black. As one of them said to me a few months ago: "We Europeans do not intend to commit political suicide for the sake of an abstract notion like democracy." I pointed out to him that, with the pace of industrialization, if he could not get the goodwill of the Africans, he might have to choose between economic suicide and political democracy.

The European leaders are still appealing too much to European opinion. It is their job to lead the Federation as a whole—and that includes the millions of Africans who help to constitute it; if they cannot do so, we may have to save them and their children from themselves.

I can fully understand the feelings of irritation and exasperation felt by many White Southern Rhodesians at the present position. They believe that in joining in Federation they have hitched themselves to two colonial territories and, to some extent therefore, they have lost status.

Some of them say that they only entered into a Federation because of the tacit understanding that African policies in the two Northern Territories would, at an early date, become their responsibility. I must reiterate, therefore, that whatever tacit understandings or misunderstandings there may have been, the Labour Party is not committed by them. We stand specifically by the words of the 1953 Constitution, the Preamble of which lays down that: "Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland should continue under the special protection of Her Majesty to enjoy separate governments for so long as their respective

peoples so desire, those governments remaining responsible (subject to the ultimate authority of H.M. Government in the U.K.) for, in particular, the control of land in those territories, and for the local and territorial political advancement of the peoples thereof."

Those words are specific and clear; Britain cannot hand over responsibility for the peoples of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland without their consent. Our approach to the 1960 Conference stems from this beginning, and it follows that claims for dominion status by the Federal Government will become ripe for consideration only when it can be shown that the peoples (mark the words, *NOT* the voters, *NOT* the White population, but the *PEOPLES*) desire an alteration in their status.

Secondly, we must approach the 1960 Conference from the undoubted starting point that the basic concept of federation has not yet been established in the minds of the peoples of the Federation. By that I mean that Federation has not yet shown that it has been able to foster partnership and co-operation between the inhabitants of the Territories inside the Federation. There is still time to achieve this before the Constitutional Conference: but that time is running out.

In our view, Britain should prepare for the Conference by strengthening the position of the Africans in the Legislative and Executive Councils of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and by broadening the franchise. Such steps would enable a more representative African view to be expressed at the Conference.

The Conference itself will need to re-examine the powers of the Federal Government and of the Territories to ensure that the rights of the Protectorates are not whittled away, thus making the Preamble to the Constitution no more than a sham.

But the real test for 1960 is this: can the European leaders of the Federation make good their promise of 1953 and win the support of the African peoples to the concept of Federation? The Territories themselves have no natural geographical boundary; nor do they comprise an ethnical unit. The Federation itself is no more than a convenient economic aggregation. But that is not sufficient for the idea to take root and grow; Federation must make an appeal to men's hearts and loyalties. There is, so far, no sign of that development in the hearts and minds of the politically educated Africans.

On the other hand, those Africans who press for the right

to secede, come what may, should beware of throwing away the baby with the bathwater. It is not Federation as such that they object to, but White-dominated Federation. The Federation exists; and the Africans should bend their efforts to strengthening their position inside it because, economically, the three Territories together have much to offer each other in the way of mutual support.

To sum up, therefore, the tests that we must apply in 1960 must be: first, what progress has been made towards carrying out the avowed objectives of those who pressed for the inauguration of the Federation? Second, how far has partnership and co-operation progressed between the inhabitants, especially in regard to social relationships, education and industry? Third, if any part were to secede what would be the consequences to the people of that Territory, and also to those who remained behind? Would a separate Territory be able to stand on its own, politically and economically? Fourth, is there a reasonable prospect that Federation can command the voluntary allegiance of its peoples? And, finally, what are the prospects of the Federation becoming a democracy with equal rights for all citizens?

It is not our place to give a final answer to all these questions now, nor should we try and do so. There are still two years (or even more) to run before the first period of the Federation's existence comes under review. What may happen inside the Federation in the period remaining before this review, can affect our attitude. But an interim reply has been given now by the Labour Party statement. It is that the signs so far are not propitious, and that much more must be done by the present leadership of the Federation if it is to become a democratic partnership of peoples living in co-operation with each other, and a focal point for their loyalties.

STATEMENT ON CENTRAL AFRICA

The Labour Party deeply deplores the approval given by the Conservative Government to the Constitutional Amendment Bill and the Electoral Bill recently passed by the Parliament of the Central African Federation. The passing of this legislation marks a new stage in the history of the Federation. Although the Labour Party strongly resisted the imposition of Federation in 1953, it has always been willing to do its best to make it work, provided that it established a genuine racial partnership in Central Africa and was based on the voluntary adherence of the African people. We have, how-

ever, watched with growing concern the aggravation of racial tension in the last few years. The over-riding of the African Affairs Board by the present Government has weakened the confidence of the African people in the safeguards against discriminatory legislation that were written into the Constitution and has tragically deepened their hostility to Federation.

If, therefore, Federation is to endure, we believe that concrete proof must be given to the African people that the principles of the Preamble are in fact being operated. The Labour Party welcomes the economic expansion which has taken place in the Territories in recent years, but believes that this must go hand in hand with the political advancement and social integration of all races. We therefore call for the following steps to be taken in order that these principles may be fulfilled:

- (a) an unequivocal statement that the objective of the Federation is complete democracy and equal rights for every citizen;
- (b) the revision of the federal franchise to ensure genuine African representation in the Federal Parliament;
- (c) the rapid elimination of racial discrimination in both social relations and industry;
- (d) the extension to other levels of education of the inter-racial policy now being developed so encouragingly in the University.

It will be by reference to the progress made in these matters that the Labour Party will decide its attitude at the Conference which is to review the future of the Federation in 1960. The Labour Party regards itself as completely bound by the Preamble to the Constitution, which declares that the people of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland should continue to enjoy separate government under the special protection of Her Majesty for as long as their respective peoples so desire. Labour believes there should be a review of the powers of the federal and territorial governments so that the position of the protectorates is safeguarded. We reaffirm the pledge that dominion status shall not be conceded until all the inhabitants of the Federation have expressed a desire for it, through the exercise of full and equal democratic rights.

In order to enable African views to be more effectively expressed at this Conference and as a step towards full democracy, the Labour Party believes that Africans in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland must now be given opportunities for much greater participation in their governments. To this end it urges immediate constitutional reforms to ensure a majority of elected Africans in the Nyasaland Legislative Council and the appointment of African Ministers equal in number to those of other races. In Northern Rhodesia there should be parity of representation between Africans and other races in both the Legislative and Executive Councils. Labour also believes that the franchise in both territories should be broadened immediately as an instalment of progress towards a common roll and full adult suffrage.