



BOOK REVIEWS

Central African Witness, by Cyril Dunn, African Correspondent for *'The Observer'*, 1954-58. Published by Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1959. 250 pp. 21s. 6d.

UNLIKE most books on Africa by journalists, this is the work of an expert. Cyril Dunn probably knew as much about racial politics in the Federation (before *'The Observer'* transferred him to India) as anyone else there. What he lacked in years of residence, he made up for in acute perception and sheer journalistic efficiency.

Dunn admits that there is no easy dividing line between pro-Federation and anti-Federation. "It is one of the peculiarities of the Central African situation," he writes, "that argument against the federal idea by those who are capable of thinking about it with detachment has always been hesitant. Among the liberals of the Western world . . . there is still a marked willingness to give the Federation a chance . . . The white settlers of Central Africa have the support of these unlikely and most valuable allies for one reason above all others. It is because they believe that this region has become the setting for a great experiment in race relations . . ."

In his careful, deceptively restrained style, Dunn begins by quoting the Federation's High Commissioner in Pretoria as rejecting "the false idea of the Federation as a sort of laboratory set up to conduct novel experiments in race relations." Item by item, he then proceeds to put together the record of partnership, including the pre-Federation days when Africans were on the way to becoming the majority in the Legislative Council of Northern Rhodesia and when Nyasaland Africans were comforted by the British Government's "historic pronouncement" that in British African countries the interests of the Africans should be

paramount and that, if and when these interests and those of the immigrant races came into conflict, the former should prevail. This latter statement, says Dunn, threw white settlers in the two northern territories into a state of alarm and they "at once began to urge union upon the all-white settler's government in the South."

Dunn's view of the white way of life in the Federation is not one to endear him to the average white (churlish reviews of his book testify to this), but he is gentle in his wit. "The first figure to attract the bewildered attention," he writes, "is, more often than not, a most noticeable policeman. Usually young, large and handsome, he wears the standard shirt and shorts of superbly laundered khaki drill, but, with this uniform, boots and leggings of polished brown leather. The effect is not only odd, as of a warrior heavily armoured from the knees down and otherwise half-naked; it is disturbing, too. One fancies that a man thus accoutred would have commended himself to the late Mussolini, for service in the African section of his Praetorian Guard." Or: "In Salisbury . . . in the late afternoon (there) are young English housewives, hatless and pleasantly dowdy in woollen cardigans, with none of the skin-tight metallic smartness of white womanhood in Johannesburg. They carry library books and drift, gossiping, towards afternoon tea. With them sometimes are schoolboys of immense size, wearing grey trilbies with the school colours banded round them. These are boys so highly trained in the forms of politeness that they take their hats off even when they go into shops. Nor is the spirit of reckless, pioneering adventure dead in them, if one is to judge by the number going about with one or other of their limbs in plaster casts; girls, too."

Dunn also gives his Central African Glossary of Political Terms, "as Congress Africans believe they are being interpreted":

Racialist: Any African who thinks that Africans ought to be the dominant group in Central Africa.

Non-racialist: Any European who thinks that Europeans ought to be the dominant group in Central Africa.

Responsible African: Any African who consistently supports the European point of view.

Irresponsible African: Any African who campaigns in what he conceives to be the interests of his own people.

The illusion of the Federation, says Dunn, is that "on a basis of rigid racial segregation they could build a multi-racial sanc-

tuary." Around this illusion, Federation politics have revolved consistently, beginning with the 1949 Victoria Falls conference to consider Central Africa's future "to which not one black man was invited." Some Rhodesian reviewers of Dunn's book have made the point that, compared with South Africa, the Federation is undeniably moving in an opposite direction. It is an accurate observation, at least when the apartheid and partnership theories are put side by side, but it is not a relevant one. What matters is not that Afrikaner Nationalists are dissatisfied with the direction the Federation is moving in (since the Nyasaland upheaval they have become more hopeful), but that the Africans in the Federation are completely up in arms about it.

The dilemma of Federation politics, as Dunn puts it in reference to Lennox-Boyd, is that "the blacks fear that he means to abandon them; the whites fear that he will do nothing of the kind." Essentially, this is Sir Roy Welensky's dilemma: how to mollify British public opinion and yet rally the enthusiastic support of the white electorate in the Federation by being in constant controversy with the British Government.

Two chapters in particular make fascinating reading: on the Copperbelt, and on Garfield Todd's expulsion—that "long and voluble day in February, 1958," when the first blow was struck "in the planned murder of Central African liberalism." Dunn was an eye-witness of this particular episode, and his account is one of the most devastating things ever written about the Federation. To complete the picture, he examines just how "liberal" Mr. Todd had been as Prime Minister (in his dealings with the African National Congress, "he rarely did anything with which even a life member of the Segregation Society could disagree").

Central African Witness is indispensable reading for anyone seriously interested in Central African affairs—or in African affairs generally, because Dunn pays intelligent attention to some of the basic problems of African development: whether education comes before the vote, or vice versa, and why "it is arrogant for us to suppose that a purely Western way of life must and will predominate in Africa." It is a fair book, sensitively written. And it answers, clearly and without hesitation, the question whether the Federation can be granted Dominion Status while Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland continue under their present constitutional systems. The answer is: No.