

JOHN REX

Towards a Racial Dictatorship

The Story of Central African Federation

Over the past decade feeling "has risen in Britain in hostility to the racialist repressive policies of the South African Government. But there is still very little realisation in the British labour movement - and among the British public generally - that policies with an exactly similar tendency have been pursued in territories which are the direct responsibility of the British electorate.

These policies have been disguised under the 'title of Central African Federation. Many people have been so much confused by this issue that they suppose it concerns a mere question of the administrative re-organisation of the three territories: South and North Rhodesia and Nyassaland; or even that it concerns the degree of "self-government" within these territories or the rate of progress towards eventual democracy.

In this detailed chronicle of developments in Central Africa, John Rex shows that from its inception the scheme for closer association of these territories has been pressed forward by the minority of white settlers (notably in South Rhodesia) in order to free their hands of British control (which, however ineffective and paternalist, has none-the-less served as a break upon racial dictatorship), and thereby to ensure permanent settler supremacy of a character which will exclude the possibility of the peaceful achievement of democracy.

John Rex show how - despite the opposition of British Governments in the 1930s and of the first post-war Labour Government - Sir Godfrey Huggins, the settler's leader, won successive concessions until a Federation scheme with no adequate safeguards of African interests was accepted by the Colonial Office. He shows how even the hopelessly inadequate safeguards which were accepted have been swept away since Federation, how the British public — and the House of Commons — have been misinformed with fraudulent franchise statistics, and how today the last barrier between the unchallenged supremacy of 250,000 white settlers over an African population of 6.5 millions rests in a nominated 'African Affairs Board,' which can refer disputed legislation to the British Parliament. Such an appeal to the House of Commons (and through this to the British electoral)

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has just been repealed, and we hope that these concise notes will assist in mobilising opposition to prevent our finally betraying the people of Central Africa to the control of a Government no less racialist than that of Strydom.

/. The Struggle against the Colonial Office.

prior to 1939 Central Africa was the meeting ground of two traditions of Colonial administration. While the whole area had been brought under British influence as a result of concessions and treaties negotiated between the chiefs and the chartered companies, subsequent events in Southern Rhodesia led to its actual conquest by the pioneer settlers, whereas in Northern Rhodesia and Nyassaland the Africans retained their treaty rights. Thus the government of Northern Rhodesia and Nyassaland was shaped in accordance with the Colonial Office doctrine of trusteeship.

This doctrine was first formulated in 1923 in relation to Kenya as follows:

" Primarily Kenya is an African territory and His Majesty's Government think it necessary definitely to record their considered opinion that the interests of the African natives must be paramount, and that if and when these interests and the interests of the immigrant races should conflict, the former should prevail In the administration of Kenya His Majesty's Government regard themselves as exercising a trust on behalf of the African population, and they are unable to delegate or share this trust the object of which may be defined as the protection and advancement of the Native races."

There was never any question of this doctrine applying to Southern Rhodesia, which achieved self-government in 1924, even though the British government retained a nominal veto on matters of native policy. The government there was firmly in the hands of a 30 member assembly elected almost entirely by settlers. But in 1929 the twin doctrines of African paramountcy and trusteeship were repeated and applied not only to Kenya but to Northern Rhodesia and Nyassaland as well, by the Hilton Young Commission, which Sidney Webb at the Colonial Office appointed to consider the possibility of closer union of the various territories in both East and Central Africa. This Commission saw quite clearly that the difference between the philosophy underlying the government of Southern Rhodesia and the philosophy which was supposed to underlay British Colonial policy, made union between the two sorts of territory unthinkable and it was, indeed, precisely the clear understanding of the issues by this commission which caused every settler community in Africa to send delegations

scurrying to London to demand the withdrawal of what became known as the hated White Paper policy.

Sidney Webb acted with characteristic weakness (or at least with the weakness which characterised his work at the Colonial Office) by trying to placate the settlers in a new and very evasive White Paper based upon the pretence that there was no conflict of interest between the settlers and the natives. This satisfied nobody, and the tiny settler community in Northern Rhodesia and Nyassaland (then no more than 15,000 among nearly 4,000,000 Africans) began to agitate for union with Southern Rhodesia, where settler rule was firmly entrenched by means of a qualified franchise which excluded all but a few hundred Africans (at that time there were probably about 80,000 settlers in Southern Rhodesia and about 1,750,000 Africans). This agitation eventually led to the appointment of a new Commission (the Bledisloe Commission) but like its predecessors this Commission decided that the differences in Native policy were too great to permit amalgamation. It did not, however, exclude the idea of closer union in the future provided that changes in Native policy in Southern Rhodesia brought that territory into line with Colonial Office practice, and, recognizing the economic case for closer union, it suggested the formation of a Central African Council with consultative functions. The genius of Mr. Godfrey Huggins, the Southern Rhodesia Premier, was then applied systematically to building on these two tiny concessions until, eventually, the substance of settler demand was conceded.

But two factors delayed Huggins' plans. The first was the outbreak of war in 1939 which delayed the foundation of the Central African Council until 1945. The second was that the 1945 election produced a Labour government and, in Creech Jones a Colonial Secretary who, for once, was not simply a career politician, but someone who had devoted most of his political life to colonial questions. When Huggins began to press for a further step towards closer union he was rebuffed, and such evidence as there is seems to suggest that this was due to the Colonial Secretary's own opposition, for some of his senior civil servants were known to favour Huggins plans, which they helped to implement as soon as they had a more pliant Secretary of State in 1950.

Huggins was not, in any case, to be defeated quite so easily. His next move was to organise a meeting of settler leaders from the three territories at Victoria Falls to discuss Federation, and, having obtained sanction for his scheme, to wreck the Central African Council by giving notice in January 1950 of Southern Rhodesia's withdrawal from membership. When this had been done, he proposed to the Central African Council the formation of an inter-governmental

committee to consider alternative forms of co-operation, thus securing the opportunity to discuss his plans for Federation over the head of the Colonial Secretary with the governments of Northern Rhodesia and Nyassaland.

It is only necessary to read the speeches of Huggins made at Victoria Falls and subsequently at Gatooma during 1949 to grasp the full significance of what he had in mind. At Victoria Falls he referred to the previous difficulties regarding native policy which had barred the way to closer union and went on to declare that the fact that Northern Rhodesia had Africans on its Legislative Council need no longer be regarded as a stumbling block! He personally would agree to the nomination of African members to a Federal Upper House, although he did not consider the Natives to be yet sufficiently advanced to participate in elections.

At this time he still spoke of " a benevolent aristocracy " " leading the masses towards full democracy " (which is what he believed to have happened in Britain), but in an important policy speech at Gatooma on December 3rd the goal of " full democracy " had dropped from view even as a long term objective. Indeed the new notion of " partnership " which he put forward specifically excluded it. The British Government was represented as standing for " a policy of trusteeship of the native peoples, which, of course entails the retirement of the trustees when the ward grows up," but he himself favoured " An evolutionary process leading to a partnership which assures the survival of the European in this part of Africa." It is important to notice that this was the first use of the term " partnership " in the context of Central African Affairs. It was later to be enshrined in the constitution and hailed by the pseudo-liberal sections of the British Press as the height of liberalism. Even some critics of the Federal Government have attacked it for not practising partnership. The truth is that " partnership " was quite literally a reactionary notion and the Central African Government has applied it in the sense in which Huggins always meant it (i.e., referring to policies designed to promote European survival). Moreover it was not intended that it should apply only to Southern Rhodesia, or even Central Africa, for, as Huggins said, " from the point of view of my descendants, I don't relish the prospect of an independent Native State as a neighbour."

These then were the ideas which the great architect of the Federal scheme had in mind. But to continue the story chronologically, it must be pointed out that, by now, an anomalous situation had arisen. The Colonial Secretary had refused to consider any scheme for Federation, but his own civil servants in Northern Rhodesia and Nyassaland had agreed to search for alternatives to the Central

African Council. It is an interesting question for a future historian whether Creech Jones actually sanctioned these talks, but there is no doubt that their initiation represented a triumph for Huggins and a defeat for the Colonial Secretary.

Whether Creech Jones, himself, would have allowed matters to go any further is a matter for speculation, for at this stage the Shipley Communist Party took a hand in making African history. As a result of Communist intervention Creech Jones lost his seat and was succeeded at the Colonial Office by Mr. James Griffiths, and, Noel Baker having been demoted to the Ministry of Fuel and Power (Was it perhaps because he refused to deport Seretse Khama?), Mr. Gordon Walker took over at the Commonwealth Office. Thus at a crucial time in the history of Central Africa control of Colonial Affairs passed to two career politicians with no experience of the complexities of multi-racial societies. Sir Godfrey could hardly have wished for a more happy outcome of the General Election in Great Britain.

For the next eighteen months Griffiths and Gordon Walker were dragged along, sometimes protesting, but more often not, behind a Central African policy, which was now being made in Salisbury. Mercifully perhaps the Tories won the General Election in November 1951, and it did not fall to Griffiths to perform the final act of betrayal. Gordon-Walker, however was persuaded of the settler case, and having written his book called "Restatement of Liberty," had the courage of his new convictions and refused to vote with his party against "Partnership." By initiating talks the Labour Ministers prepared the way for the adoption of "partnership" as British policy. Thereafter all that they could do was to appeal to the settler leaders to include "safeguards" in their new Constitution.

//. *The Negotiations preceding Federation.*

The outstanding fact about the negotiations which took place between March 1951 and January 1953 is that the British government was at the best on the defensive trying to prevent the settlers from whittling away such safeguards of African rights as were included in the draft scheme, rather than trying to gain for the Africans greater political power either immediately or in the future. But even then it should be noted that for the great part of the time the British negotiators were not at their best and the major part of the story is a miserable one of capitulation on all issues of principle.

The fact that the British government was represented by Mr. Andrew Cohen and Mr. G. H. Baxter, both believed to be keen federationists, was not a very happy augury for the first high level talks in March 1951. The report, with its accompanying specialist surveys, which emerged from the Conference must surely be one of

the most dishonest documents which has ever disgraced a British government department. All the difficulties about differences in Native policy, which had stood in the way of previous plans for closer association were brushed aside in the sentence :

"The most striking conclusion which we draw from our examination of the survey is the degree of similarity between the policy and practice of the three governments rather than the degree of difference."

This, of course, was not surprising, because many of the civil servants who had made the survey as well as those who examined it had abandoned the declared British policy of trusteeship and were working for Huggins' conception of partnership. This is shown by a reference to "partnership" as the ideal towards which all the governments were working. But even then it was necessary for the Comparative Survey of Native Policy to resort to actual falsehood to establish its thesis. Thus one finds in its section on forms of government the astonishing statement that "The Southern Rhodesian Parliament at present consists of a single chamber of 30 members elected by universal adult suffrage." The actual fact at this time was that all but about 400 Africans were excluded from the franchise by property and educational qualifications. Perhaps, however, it is unfair to say that this was a deliberate lie. In every age there are men who believe with Aristotle that a slave is not a man, and in the hey-day of Colonialism many such found their natural home in the Colonial Service.

Griffiths was not, apparently aware of these subtleties, for, when he introduced the reports to the House of Commons, while insisting that the British Government was not committed, he went out of his way to praise their constructive approach. Mr. Lennox-Boyd, on behalf of the Conservatives welcomed the reports without reservation, and no doubt with relief for at other times the reactionary faction of Toryism which he represents had had to contend with principled opposition from the Labour benches. Nothing could have suited him better than to see the policy in which he believed being carried through by the man from the Rhondda.

Griffiths and Gordon-Walker visited Central Africa in September 1951 to take part in further negotiations about the scheme at Victoria Falls and to meet the leaders of various communities. They found that the scheme received an enthusiastic welcome from nearly all settler bodies (though even some settlers in Nyassaland dissented on liberal grounds), but unanimous opposition from Africans. One might have thought that the Labour Ministers would have welcomed this opposition as a means of strengthening their hands at the Conference table. But this was not to be. In speech after speech they

sought to persuade the Africans of, and expressed themselves as believing in, the advantages of Federation.

It would be an injustice to Griffiths, however, to suggest that he did nothing to defend existing African rights at the Victoria Falls Conference. Huggins' complaint afterwards that the meeting had been turned into " a sort of mothers' meeting to see how the Natives could be placated " and that " We are having more difficulty with our Natives as a result of the conference than ever before " showed that some criticism of the settler position was made, and Huggins himself seemed for the moment to despair of getting a federal scheme after his own heart. Fortunately for him, however, the General Election of November 1951 produced a new Colonial Secretary in Oliver Lyttleton with what he called " a more realistic attitude." By April 1952 Mr. Lyttleton had convened a new conference and in January 1953 an amended scheme was ready to present to the House of Commons.

The main feature of the proposed scheme was the transfer to a Federal Assembly of 35 members of the most important powers exercised previously by the Territorial Legislative Councils. 26 of the members of the new Assembly were to be elected by an almost entirely settler electorate, while 9 would be chosen in various ways, all undemocratic, to ' represent ' Africans.

One crucial change had, however, been introduced into the proposed constitution of the new Federation during 1952. This concerned the structure of the African Affairs Board. The creation of this Board had been the main way in which the British Government had envisaged that African rights would be protected. It was to be a board of independent experts appointed largely by the Governors and the Governor General and it would have had the power to delay legislation passed by the Federal Assembly, which it judged to discriminate against Africans, and refer it for approval or disapproval by the British Parliament. In the revised scheme the Board was to be a Committee of the Federal House consisting of 6 representatives of Africans, but these must include the three white representatives who would be included in the 9 special members, and also one African who would owe his election to a largely European electorate. The immediate reaction of those interested at the time was that such a board could not be relied upon to act unless some absolutely outrageous legislation were proposed. Nonetheless, as we shall see, this Board has in fact once used its delaying powers, and is likely to do so again, and thus provides - ineffective and uncertain as it is - the last possible place of appeal from the African people to the British electorate.

During the negotiations about the scheme both Mr. Henry Hop-

kinson for the government and Mr. Attlee for the opposition had visited the territories to assess local opinion. Hopkinson came back unable to point to any African support for the scheme, but put this down to misunderstanding and to intimidation by Congress. Attlee visited the territories at the invitation of Welensky the Northern Rhodesian settler leader and from this rather unhappy vantage point as Welensky's guest met the Congress leaders (whom Welensky to this day has not even met). The Congress leaders were more depressed by this encounter than by anything else which happened during the whole ten years. Attlee came to them with the reputation of being the architect of Indian Independence. They expected their memorandum to be considered sympathetically. Instead Attlee told them that he was " not very impressed " with what they had to say and that he particularly regretted the allegation that " Governors have always been drawn from the most reactionary element," commenting " when you say things like that it casts doubt on other things you say " (If there were no other argument against drawing Labour Leaders from public schoolmen their behaviour in colonial situations like this would provide a conclusive one).

Despite these encounters, however, the young Northern Rhodesian Congress having overthrown its original M.R.A. leadership now joined the much older Nyassaland congress in campaigning against Federation both in the territories and in Britain. A remarkably representative delegation including on the one hand the conservative old Citimukulu of the Bemba and on the other Harry Nkumbula of the Congress made a tremendous impact on British opinion and not least upon members of the Churches, some of which, (notably the Church of Scotland) took up the campaign which a compromised Labour Party failed to conduct. Thousands attended meetings in Northern cities to hear the delegation and men like Michael Scott, who could see the South African story being repeated, pleaded for a halt in the progress of racialism. For the first time the combination of African opinion and Liberal opinion in Britain became a factor to be reckoned with.

In the final debate in the House of Commons which centred around the Enabling Act the Tories based their case upon four main safeguards of African rights which it was claimed were included in the scheme. These were (1) the existence of 9 African representatives out of 35 in the Federal Assembly (though three of these were to be White and two of the Africans would be elected by a predominantly White electorate), (2) the African Affairs Board referred to above, (3) the continued existence of territorial governments (in Northern Rhodesia and Nyassaland still under Colonial Office control) with responsibility for those matters most closely affecting African inter-

ests, and (4) a provision that amendment of the Federal Constitution before a ten year period had elapsed would require an enabling resolution by the territorial legislatures on two of which the Colonial Office had the decisive voice.

Even government spokesmen, however, did not seek to maintain that these were absolute safeguards and rested their case ultimately on trusting the more liberal settlers to use their power justly. Just how far such a trust has been kept may be judged from Section Three.

///. *Beyond Federation.*

Huggins retired to a Viscounty shortly after the establishment of Federation and was succeeded in the Premiership by Welensky, who took a knighthood himself to be going on with. On the whole this appointment was welcomed by the settlers for, although Welensky was not sufficiently out of the top drawer to please the more Kipling-esque colonials, he was known to be far less liberal than Huggins and to have fought all his life for the maintenance of the colour bar. He very soon sought to show what he stood for in Federal politics by undertaking a twofold campaign to destroy "the safeguards" and to win Dominion status for the Federation.

The new campaign began in 1956 and was directed against the Colonial Office, the Labour Party, and the African Congresses. Its meaning can be gleaned from two of his speeches. Thus at Sinoia on December 1st, 1956, he said :

"A political clique in the United Kingdom, a clique which dominates the colonial thinking of the Labour Party must not be allowed to set at naught all that the Federation is striving for and achieving." And at Salisbury on January 1st, 1957 :

"What is dangerous for the future of this country is that the state of affairs in which we find ourselves encourages the African leader to turn his eyes towards Britain and to engender a state of mind wherein the British government is considered a kind of super-government, to which he need only turn to achieve his aims." It was with the intention of ending this state of affairs that Sir Roy visited London in April, 1957.

The immediate outcome of his talks with Lord Home and Mr-Lennox Boyd was the announcement of a number of concessions to settler pressure. The meaning of some of these is obscure, but one seemed to Africans to be of major importance. This was that in future all Civil Servants including those working for the Northern Rhodesian and Nyassaland Governments were to be locally based in the Federation. Since few Africans are in the Civil Service above the most menial posts, this seemed to mean that settler civil servants were to replace British as soon as Sir Roy could make the necessary

arrangements. If this interpretation is correct it is obvious, that the third safeguard mentioned above will disappear. There will be little difference in practice between Federal and territorial governments. But the public announcement about these talks by no means told the whole story, for it was well known that Sir Roy had come over to discuss amending the constitution, and shortly after his return he was able to announce the outline of two Bills to amend the Constitution, the first by enlarging the Federal Assembly and the second by altering the franchise. That the fourth safeguard mentioned above did not mean very much was soon shown, for the purpose of the Bills had hardly been announced when the Governors of Northern Rhodesia and Nyassaland instructed their nominees in the Territorial Legislative Councils to vote for a suitable enabling resolution which was passed with settler support and against African opposition.

Of the two Bills the more innocuous was that to enlarge the Federal Assembly. This altered the proportion of African representatives in the Assembly from 9 out of 35 to 15 out of 59.

But this Bill is not even meaningful unless it is taken together with the Bill to amend the franchise and it is on this Bill that the argument has turned, both in Salisbury and Westminster. The crux of the matter is this. Will some of the 15 African representatives be chosen by an overwhelmingly European electorate, and is the new franchise plan setting up in the Federation at large the stooge system of government, under which the Europeans decide who shall represent Africans? From the figures given it is perfectly obvious that this is what will happen, but as will be shown various attempts have been made to disguise the figures in order to deceive the British Parliament.

While the first Bill was being discussed in Salisbury Mr. Greenfield, Federal Minister of Law, gave some estimates of the number of voters who would vote for various classes of M.P. According to these 44 ordinary members of the assembly would be chosen by 85,000 voters of whom 3,000 would be African. To these 85,000 voters there would be added another 34,000, mostly African and the total electorate of 118,000 would choose 9 of the 15 African representatives. In other words the Africans would be outvoted in the election of their own M.P.'s in a proportion of 82 to 37.

Little wonder then that the very long suffering African Affairs Board decided that the Bill to enlarge the Assembly should be referred to Westminster as a differentiating measure. The Board had already allowed a number of Bills which were held by Africans to be discriminatory to pass. But Sir John Moffatt and the Rev. Andrew Doig, two of the three white members, were both men of honour who recognised that this Bill was a violation of all the solemn promises made at the time of Federation. They therefore threw in their weight

with the African members and ensured that the British Parliament should have the opportunity to halt Welensky's plans for racial dictatorship.

Before the Bill reached Westminster, however, someone apparently decided that the estimates of the number of African voters needed tarding up in order to convince Parliament. No doubt this could not have been done had there been a less pliant or more competent pair at the Commonwealth Office than Lord Home and Mr. Allport, but it fell to Mr. Allport to pilot the Bill through the Commons and he was quite prepared to accept the figures which had been given him, according to which there would be 128,000 ordinary voters including 3,000 Africans and an additional 58,000 special voters, mostly Africans.

Now, of course, even these figures show the African as being outvoted in the choice of their own representatives in a proportion of 125 to 61, so Mr. Allport tried to show that because of the concentration of the settler vote the Africans would be in a minority only in Southern Rhodesia, that they would have majority in Nyassaland and something like equality in Northern Rhodesia.

To reach this last conclusion Mr. Allport argued that in Northern Rhodesia, while 37,000 settlers were eligible, only 16,000 had voted at the last election and that while only 21,000 Africans would qualify because of the literacy qualification if there were no literacy qualification some 48,000 would qualify. Since there will be far more settlers at the next election than the last and they will be every bit as eager to register as Africans (for whom 100% registration is assumed) and since there *is* a literacy qualification for Africans it is difficult to see how Mr. Allport's conclusions follow from his figures. Moreover, even this is not the whole story, for the 'Manchester Guardian' now claims to have seen a Rhodesia House memorandum, which must have been accessible to the Minister prior to the debate, which gives the figure for Africans who could vote if there were no literacy test as 18,000 rather than 48,000.

Nonetheless on the basis of Mr. Allport's figures the first Bill was allowed by the House of Commons and the Government made it clear that they in no way felt bound to uphold objections by the African Affairs Board. Thus with a diminution of the African share in legislative power and the exposure of the weakness of the African Affairs Board, the last of the so-called safeguards has been swept away and the government of Sir Roy Welensky has achieved dictatorial power and will be pressing its claims for Dominion status in 1960. In the wings there are waiting even more reactionary political forces, Strijdomite Nationalists, Empire Loyalists, and emigre supporters of the Suez group who regard even this government as too liberal and who

will depose Welensky if they fail to sell him their policies*. The only difference between Central African and South African history in these matters is that Central Africa has proceeded towards white domination at a greater pace and calls its version "partnership."

IV. *What Can Still be Done.*

The fight to check Welensky is by no means ended. The second of his Constitutional Amendment Bills has still to be passed and the African Affairs Board threatens to take it not merely to Westminster but to the Courts, which unlike Mr. Allport are restrained by some sort of logic. The first task of the Labour and Liberal Opposition must be to defeat this Bill*. If they make a principled attack on it they may even win the support of one or two Tories who are sick to the teeth of the moral corruption of their own leaders. And whether the Bill is passed or not it should be the task of the next Government to shape the Federation in such a way as to ensure the gradual transfer of power to the African people. It could begin by giving the Africans an elected majority on the Legislative Councils of the Northern territories and could then allow the representatives of these councils to enter into free negotiations with the Southern Rhodesian as to whether Federation should continue and if so, on what terms. Such a policy would involve the honest application to the tangled Central African situation of the policy enunciated in Labour's policy statement "The Plural Society."

The danger is that a future Labour Colonial Secretary will grow faint-hearted in the face of settler threats of a Boston tea-party. Whoever is Colonial Secretary should remember that Boston tea-parties are not on the cards in a territory where the colonisers represent a tiny ruling class of a quarter of a million in a total population of more than six and a half million, and that if he does not call the settler bluff on this issue, he is likely to find himself faced with a full scale *African* revolt. Such a revolt might well assume the proportions of the Algerian war, and the attempt to suppress it might be as disastrous for British Labour as the Algerian war has been for French Socialism. But there are ways of saving the situation now, if the Parliamentary Labour Party will commit itself whole-heartedly to fighting for democracy in Africa. The re-election of Mr. Gordon-Walker to its Front Bench is not the happiest of auguries.

* Since this was written a reactionary alliance within Welensky's party has teamed up to depose the Southern Rhodesian Premier, Garfield Todd, a paternalistic liberal who supported a minimum wage of about £6 per month for African workers other than those in mining, agriculture and domestic service.

The second Amendment Bill was passed in our House of Commons on February 16th, but it is not too late for the next Government to reverse these policies,