

Towards a United Africa

by N. NUMADE

Africans all over our Continent, both in the independent states and in those still to achieve their independence, are strongly attracted towards the concept of a United Africa, beginning perhaps with regional federations or unions of existing states, but aiming ultimately at an All-African Commonwealth. There are many sound reasons why this noble concept should be so attractive to us. In order to safeguard and fully realise African independence we must carry forward the unity and solidarity which we achieved in the anti-colonial struggle. We are opposed to the "Balkanisation" of Africa—the creation of numerous small states within the artificial and often meaningless frontiers created by the imperialists on our Continent. We recognise the tremendous economic and other advantages to be gained by treating Africa as a single unit from the point of view of planning its development and the upliftment of its poverty-stricken masses of people.

Though our peoples are diverse, in language and custom, we share a common history of domination by colonialists, which has wrought untold damage to our peoples, keeping them backward and divided, subjecting them to terrible poverty and humiliation. We share a common aspiration to see the African peoples free, advanced and progressive, making a full and equal contribution to the family of mankind. This common background, and the knowledge that in unity is our strength, and our main weapon to achieve our aspirations, gives Africans from every corner of our Continent a powerful sense of kinship and brotherhood, transgressing all regional, linguistic, religious or other loyalties and giving us a powerful sense of identity. Here is the positive and progressive essence of what is often referred to as "the African personality".

Before African independence became a reality, this trend found its expression in the Pan-African movement inaugurated at the end of the First World War by the famous African-descended scholar, Professor W. E. B. Du Bois. In the present era of independent African States, it has found expression in numerous all-African and regional conferences of leading African statesmen, as well as of African liberation movements, and in the expressed aim of the evolution of a "United States" of Africa or a Commonwealth of African Nations.

THE AFRICAN COMMUNITY

One of the leading spokesmen for this concept has been Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. In his concluding address to the first All-African Peoples' Conference at Accra in 1958, Dr. Nkrumah said:

"If the Accra Conference (of Independent States) gave birth to the African Personality, this All-African People's Conference has laid the foundation for the African Community. From here we shall go forth with renewed strength and determination to join all our forces, having created a climate for unity between the independent states and those of us in Africa who still have freedom to attain.

"Two currents have therefore merged into one at this conference: *the current of independence and the current of interdependence*. The unity of action which Ghana and Guinea have started received the endorsement of this Conference. More than that you are going to give it your active co-operation and support. And most important, we look forward to the adherence to the Union of those of you who will shortly become free and independent."

CONCRETE PROPOSALS

The Conference did not confine itself to broad generalisations on this question of All-African unity of independent States. It put forward a number of concrete proposals.

The question of a Commonwealth of African States was a subject of a special Committee at the Conference, which had to deal with "Artificial boundaries in Africa". In its report under the heading of "Pan-Africanism" the Committee "took the view that the great mass of African peoples are animated with the desire for unity". The Committee recognised that "the unity of Africa will be vital to the independence of the component units, and is essential to the security and general well-being of the African people".

The Committee also took the view that "*the existence of separate states in Africa is fraught with the danger of exposing them to intrigues of imperialists and the danger of colonialism after attainment of independence unless there is unity among them*".

For this reason the Committee endorsed Pan-Africanism and suggested that "the *ultimate objective* of African nations should be a Commonwealth of African States".

REGIONAL GROUPINGS

As a step towards this objective of a Commonwealth of African States, the conference decided that the continent should be divided into five regional groupings: North Africa, West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa and Southern Africa,

The regional groups, it resolved, should be on the following principles:

1. "That only independent states and countries governed by Africans should come together."
2. "That adherence to any regional group *should be based on the wishes of the people ascertained by referendum based on universal suffrage,*" and
3. "That the establishment of these groups should not be prejudicial to the ultimate objective of a Pan-African Commonwealth."

Let us briefly examine the position in each of these groupings. In *North Africa*, even before the above-mentioned Conference, there had been moves towards a wider union. A conference of African states was held in Tangiers, and a North African Federation of States was proposed. Since then, very little has been heard of this proposal. Patriots in these countries have, perhaps, been preoccupied with the all-important issue of the independence of Algeria. It may well be, that with Algeria now at the time of writing appearing to be on the verge of a glorious victory, a powerful new impetus will be added to the moves for unity in this part of the world.

WEST AFRICAN UNION

In *West Africa*, the Union of Guinea and Ghana has since been joined by Mali. To what extent is this "Union" a reality? No doubt the will for unity is there. The preamble to the constitution of Guinea states that the country "unconditionally supports any policy directed towards the establishment of a Union of African States", and Article 34 declares that "the Republic may conclude agreements with any African State regarding association or community, containing partial or complete *renunciation of sovereignty* with the aim of securing African Unity." However much fruitful co-operation there may exist between the three States in the Union, there is, however, no evidence that there has in fact been any real renunciation of sovereignty by any of the members. There are formidable geographical and other obstacles to a true merging of these three states, and perhaps it was inevitable that at this stage their union should be little more than an inspiring demonstration and example. Perhaps the most formidable obstacle is the position of Nigeria and other West African States, but to this we shall return later.

EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

The *Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa* (P.A.F.M.E.C.A.) has held a number of meetings and conferences,

and has now accepted affiliation of Southern African liberation organisations. One of its most prominent spokesmen is Mr. Julius Nyerere, leader of the Tanganyika African National Union, and first Prime Minister of Independent Tanganyika. He is a strong advocate of Federation. "I believe," he said, "the bigger the unit, the better.

"I have in mind the East African countries—Kenya, Uganda, Zanzibar and Tanganyika, but there is no reason why within federation there should not also come Nyasaland and Northern and Southern Rhodesia.

"The people of Tanganyika want a bigger unit in East and Central Africa. There is no need for them to take their own separate independence if they can have independence as one political unit."

Nyerere's views on an East African Federation enjoy wide support amongst the leadership of the Kenya African National Union, the Malawi Congress in Nyasaland, and other East African countries. The rapid advance of independence in these countries may soon provide a practical basis for implementing some of these plans.

In *Southern Africa* the liberation movements have been too preoccupied with the difficult and dangerous underground struggle—in the Rhodesias and South Africa against white minority rule, and in Mozambique against Portuguese domination—for much detailed attention as yet to have been given to future state forms after liberation. Good relations prevail between the African National Congress and its brother organisations in South-West Africa and the British Protectorates, although difficulties have been created by the negative attitude of certain elements in the leadership of the Basutoland Congress Party, which have even gone so far as to condone British victimisation of African refugees from the Republic. The African National Congress is one of the pioneers of the idea of All-African unity, having been represented at Dr. Du Bois' original conference in Paris, and is wholeheartedly in principle in favour of the concept of a United Africa.

DIFFERENCES AND DIFFICULTIES

The idea of African unity is a progressive and challenging one, which evokes great enthusiasm amongst the ordinary masses of the African people and amongst their leaders at conferences. At the same time, enthusiasm and proclamations of belief in the "African Personality" are not in themselves sufficient to gain so great an objective. It would be idle to deny that serious difficulties and differences exist in the way of our goal.

No African leaders publicly oppose the idea of a United Africa. But many of them behave in a way which does not help unity, or support it with so many reservations that little real content of unity remains.

Even at the 1958 Conference, both Liberia and Nigeria objected to a West African federation, and one of the grounds was stated by Chief Anthony Enabaro of the Action Group who said that it was unrealistic to expect French West Africa, French Equatorial Africa, the Camaroons, Togoland, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gambia and the Federation of Nigeria, with a total population of over 60 million to "adhere" to a Union predetermined by Ghana and Guinea with a population of 6 million, in the formulation of which union their leaders had not been consulted. Chief Enabaro, however, said that he fully supported the idea of the evolution of a West African Federation, with the ultimate objective of an African Commonwealth of States.

"CASABLANCA", "BRAZZAVILLE", "MONROVIA"

The divisions which showed themselves at the 1958 Conference have not grown any less. Indeed they have tended to harden, with the emergence of three separate groupings of African states in West and North Africa—the "Casablanca", "Brazzaville", and "Monrovia" powers.

The "Casablanca" group consists of Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, the United Arab Republic and the provisional government of Algeria. This is by far the most outspokenly anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist of the groupings. It is also the most ardently devoted to the conception of a United Africa. Representatives of the governments of these countries met at Casablanca in January 1961. They expressed support for Lumumba's policy in the Congo, condemned Western imperialism, and suggested the formation of an African High Command.

The so-called "Brazzaville" group consists of twelve former French colonies, the extent of whose economic and even political independence from French colonialism is dubious. Explaining why their first meeting was called, in October 1960 at Abijeljan, on the Ivory Coast, François Houphouët Boigny, the President of the Ivory Coast, announced:

"That the responsible leaders of African States *oriented towards France* [i.e., towards French imperialism—N.N.] must urgently meet and seek together a common solution of the problems giving rise to common anxiety."

In discussing problems of unity among themselves, these States

emphasised that “the purpose was *not* to create a political confederation which would infringe on national sovereignty”. They did, however, state their aim to establish strong economic ties, common currency regulations, and a common policy on African and world affairs.

The “Monrovia” group originally comprised most of the West and North African States which were not in the other two. It takes its name from its first meeting at Monrovia, the capital of Liberia.

More recently, however, the so-called “Monrovia” and “Brazzaville” States have moved closer together.

At Lagos, Nigeria, in January this year the heads of twenty African states * met together and set up a “Charter of Inter-African and Malagasy States”. The eight “Casablanca” States declined the invitation to attend, on the grounds that the convenors—the Nigerian government—had deliberately, in order to appease the pro-French imperialist sentiments of the “Brazzaville” group, decided to exclude the provisional government of the Algerian Republic.

It is doubtful to what extent the organisation established at Lagos will truly contribute towards the cause of a United Africa. Firstly, it is patterned after the United Nations Organisation, and that means that it will tend to preserve and accentuate rather than diminish the separateness and “sovereignty” of each of the members. Secondly, it excludes the most dynamic and forceful advocates of African unity—the “Casablanca” powers.

AT THE UNITED NATIONS

The differences between African states are not confined to arguments about the forms of unity, or the degree of “sovereignty” that should reside in each existing territory. Let us examine the voting record of African states at the United Nations General Assembly, on three matters which primarily concern the African people:

1. Recommendation for the recognition of the Kasavubu delegation as the Congo’s legal representative in the United Nations.

For Senegal, Malagasy Republic, Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, Congo (Brazzaville).

Against Guinea, Ghana, Mali, U.A.R., Morocco, Togo.

The rest either abstained or were absent.

* These states were the Cameroon Federation, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Dahomey, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Malagasy Republic, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Upper Volta, Ethiopia, Liberia, Libya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Togo, Tunisia.

2. A resolution on the Congo demanding the immediate release of all political prisoners, convocation of Parliament, withdrawal of all Belgian technical and military personnel and advisers.

For Guinea, Ghana, Mali, U.A.R., Morocco, Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya, Nigeria, Togo.

Against Congo (Brazzaville).

The rest either abstained from voting or were absent.

3. Draft Resolution recognising the Algerian people's rights to self-determination and providing for a referendum under U.N. supervision to determine the future of Algeria.

For Guinea, Ghana, Mali, U.A.R., Morocco, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Liberia, Nigeria, Togo.

The rest abstained from voting.

Here, clearly, is evidence of profound disunity between our states, all on matters which vitally affect the interests of the African people as a whole. And every student of African affairs is sharply aware of many other serious differences as well. No amount of vague philosophising about the "African Personality" can explain or conceal these differences.

Nor is it any service to the cause of African unity to try to conceal them. The only way to our goal is to bring them out into the open, to analyse and discuss them, above all to understand them. We all know there are unifying forces and trends in Africa. *There are also divisive forces and factors.* Only the sharp weapon of scientific socialist theory, of Marxism-Leninism, will enable us to isolate these factors, and thus to understand and work to overcome them.

DIVISIVE FORCES IN AFRICA

We know there are many differences among the peoples of Africa. These differences are of two types.

Firstly, we are aware of differences of language and custom, differences in the degree of cultural and economic development, historical differences, including those arising out of which colonial power occupied each country; differences of geography or climatic conditions. *None of these are differences which should divide us; all of them can be overcome without great difficulty.* They are all differences of a "non-antagonistic" kind.

For example, Guinea, Ghana and Mali are separated by geography and language. They have different colonial heritages—British and French. They achieved independence by different paths and at different times. Yet it was not difficult for them to come together, because each of them is *struggling vigorously against colonialism and neo-colonialism, each of them is advancing along non-capitalist lines towards National Democracy.*

Secondly, and far more important than these non-antagonistic differences of history, or language or geography, are the differences in the degree to which the new African states *genuinely fight for independence against colonialism.* An African State which is “oriented towards France” or towards Britain or the United States, or towards the “European Common Market” cannot at the same time be truly *oriented towards Africa*—towards African independence and unity.

Let us speak bluntly. The greatest single obstacle to genuine, not merely fictitious and formal, African unity is the fact that many of the new “African” governments are not truly independent either in fact or intention.

As long as we have “African Prime Ministers” and “Presidents” who permit imperialist war bases in their countries, who vote at the United Nations at the behest of London, Washington, Paris or Brussels, so long is talk of a United Africa with them illusory and formal. African States which do not safeguard and extend their independence, develop the national economy and raise the people’s living and cultural standards; which do not pursue independent and positive foreign policies based on the interests of their own and other African peoples—such “States” are a barrier to the closer union of our Continent.

UNDEMOCRATIC REGIMES

Another serious barrier to African unity is the existence of undemocratic and unprogressive regimes in certain countries in our Continent. We may find a basis for co-operation and co-existence in various spheres between African states irrespective of their internal regimes. But it is not possible to discuss the question of *Federation* or *Political Union* (as distinct from such co-operation) between existing African states without regard to the concrete social, economic and political conditions existing within each state.

Let us examine, from this point of view, the proposals advanced from time to time by Mr. Julius Nyerere. When he contemplates federation between, say, Tanganyika, Kenya and Nyasaland, after

the latter two have won independence, he is proposing something imminently practical and workable. For, under progressive leaders enjoying firm popular support, one should have no doubt that the new Federation, entered into with the enthusiastic agreement of the masses, would be a viable and democratic entity. But, when he tends, as he has sometimes tended in his speeches, to include Northern and Southern Rhodesia (under, presumably, their present undemocratic and autocratic governments) in such a federation, he is bordering on fantasy. As the experience of the British-imposed "Central African Federation" has amply demonstrated, there is no room in a democratic federation for a Roy Welensky, or for the economic predominance of vast imperialist mining monopolies such as we have in Northern Rhodesia and Katanga. The condition for the inclusion of "the Rhodesias" in an African community is the establishment of genuinely democratic majority government in these territories, based on the principle of "one man, one vote"; together with the bringing of vast imperialist-controlled monopoly concerns, which have huge weight in the economic life of the country, under public ownership.

Some advocates of East African unity include Ethiopia in their talks and plans for federation. One must express the gravest doubts as to the reality of such speculations. True, here we are not dealing with a White autocracy, such as is exercised in Salisbury or Pretoria. But is autocracy and the stifling of the aspirations of the masses any more acceptable because it happens to be imposed by fellow Africans? Will the Ethiopian feudal ruling class accept the principle of democratic elections, or trade union rights, of the right to form political parties, of freedom of speech and the press? And, if it will not, how can it take its place in a federation with territories which uphold these cherished principles?—unless the federation itself is to be but a formality and a mockery.

CLASS FACTORS FOR UNITY AND DISUNITY

In discussing our aspirations for a United Africa, we should look at the historical factors which have led to disunity in other Continents. We hope that Africa will be able to avoid the phenomenon of the existence of mutually antagonistic and often warring nation-states which has marked the development of other Continents, particularly that of Europe. In that case it will be necessary for us to examine the historical *causes* for the emergence of these antagonistic nation-states, to see if we can avoid the same experience here.

The nation-states of Europe emerged as the result of a specific

system—the capitalist system—under the leadership of a specific class—the capitalist class. The capitalist bourgeoisie of Europe carried out a great progressive role in history by destroying the innumerable feudal principalities into which the continent was divided, and creating new, larger state entities based, by and large, on communities of language, territory, economy and culture.

But the bourgeois-democratic revolutions stopped short at the national frontiers; they did not—except by way of empire building and conquest—rise to the conception of supra-national, of international communities on a voluntary and equal basis. Why was this? It is because bourgeois nationalism, by its very nature, the nature of the competitive trader, playing on national sentiment to capture the market—is incapable of looking beyond the national frontier to the broader unity of mankind. The capitalists see “foreigners” either as competitors or as objects for the forced “unity” of conquest and domination.

Here is a potent lesson for Africa. If we wish to avoid the path of Europe of antagonistic, warring nation-states, then we must avoid the *root cause* of this phenomenon in Europe—we *must avoid capitalism; we must seek the path of non-capitalist development*. We must base ourselves not upon the bourgeois class, with its competitive, restrictive and exclusive outlook. We must build the future on the working people of town and country, with their broad outlook of African and human brotherhood.

Is it historically possible for us to do this? Are we not bound by the same laws of social development as led to the division of Europe?

Yes, it is historically possible for us to traverse a different path from that of other Continents. Although the laws of social development are universal, it must never be forgotten that *Africa is entering the period of independence, of revolutionary upsurge, not at the phase which Europe did—the phase when capitalism held unchallenged sway as the most advanced social system*. Our African Revolution is taking place in an epoch of the transition of mankind, on a world scale, from capitalism to socialism; an epoch in which the world socialist system and the international working class, guided by Marxist-Leninist Parties, is the *decisive* and growing factor in all world events.

It is this all-important truth which above all makes the noble concept of a United Africa a practical possibility, and not merely an idealistic dream.

But if we wish to convert this concept into reality, we must decisively *reject* the capitalist way of development, which inevitably breeds antagonism between peoples and between states. We must reject the dominant leadership of capitalist, feudal, and colonialist elements in the leadership of our new States; our national united fronts must be headed by our most progressive and advanced elements, who wholeheartedly support African and international unity—the working people of town and country, and the revolutionary socialist intellectuals who wholeheartedly identify themselves with the cause of the masses.

The experience of the Egyptian-Syrian Union is most instructive in this regard. The *idea* of such a union was warmly supported by the Syrian and Egyptian masses, and by all Arab peoples of Africa and the Middle East. But in practice, the big capitalists who control Egypt used the Union in order to establish their own economic stranglehold over Syria. The stifling Egyptian dictatorship, which bans political parties and trade unions, suppresses free speech and progressive ideas, was extended to destroy the democratic institutions of the former Syrian Republic. The “Union” became a shield to cover the reality—the imperialistic domination of Syria by the Egyptian bourgeoisie. Such a “union” was built on foundations of shifting sand—it was unable to endure. All sections of the Syrian population united to put an end to it.

NO UNITY BY VIOLENCE

It is impossible to build true and enduring unity of peoples by means of compulsion or conquest; it can only be achieved by the voluntary consent of all the peoples concerned. History is full of examples of this truth. Only yesterday, Hitler and the German Nazis attempted to “unify” Europe by force and violence. But the “unity” was fictitious; it fell to pieces as soon as Hitler’s Germany was overthrown. Only yesterday the imperialists tried to “unify” Africa by conquest. The African peoples have decisively rejected such unity.

We cannot approach this question of unity in a formal way. We do not want larger units merely for their own sake, but because of the practical benefits which they bring to the people. That is why the Nyasas have rejected Welensky’s federation. That is why Africans will fight tooth and nail against the attempts of Verwoerd to annex South-West Africa, or to reach out his greedy hands for Basutoland, Swaziland and Bechuanaland.

As was correctly pointed out at Accra, a cardinal principle of

closer union is that it should be based on consent—"on the wishes of the people ascertained by referendum" and universal suffrage.

But this in itself presupposes that the peoples concerned should enjoy democratic rights and freedom of speech. It also presupposes that they will be free from foreign imperialist domination and management.

The African peoples is the concern of the Africans themselves. It cannot be arranged or "negotiated" in Downing Street or Paris.

PART OF THE AFRICAN REVOLUTION

One of the great weaknesses of many of the exponents of Pan-Africanism is that they treat this question in general abstract terms, divorced from all the other burning and urgent questions facing the people; that they rely on vague slogans and philosophising instead of analysing the concrete difficulties and evolving a plan to overcome them; that they treat the question as a purely formal and constitutional one instead of analysing its profound social and economic implications.

Such an approach is bound to lead to disappointments and disillusionments.

A United Africa—it is a splendid and inspiring goal, one that is capable of realisation.

But to understand it properly, in all its richness and value, to fight for it purposefully and intelligently, we must view it in its proper context, as inseparably bound up with the strivings of the peoples of our Continent—indeed, of the peoples of the whole world—for peace, democracy, national independence and socialism; for a fuller and happier life.

This is not a matter of negotiations between statesmen. It is part and parcel of the strivings of our people for freedom, against colonialism and its heritage of economic and social backwardness.

The achievement of a United Africa is inseparably bound up with the continuation and the victory of the African Revolution; the victorious struggles of the masses of the people against colonialism and its African agents; against reactionary forces and classes in Africa itself; for higher living and cultural standards and rapid economic development along non-capitalist lines; for the eradication of imperialist economic domination in Africa; for agrarian revolution and industrial development; for democratic rights and national democracy; for a socialist Africa.