

## THE NYASALAND CRISIS

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TALES of a massacre plot in Nyasaland, the declaration of a State of Emergency there and in Southern Rhodesia, the arrest of hundreds of African leaders throughout the Federation—all this following upon reiterated threats by the Federal Prime Minister of a “Boston Tea Party” to force dominion status in 1960—have suddenly brought about a crisis in Central Africa which has already been described as the worst in the Commonwealth since the Indian independence struggle. Its repercussions for South and even East Africa must be enormous . . . yet the focus is one of the smallest and most neglected territories in Africa.

About seventy years ago, when the European powers rushed to parcel out Africa into their respective “possessions,” Nyasaland became a British protectorate. The agreement took place with “the consent and desire of the chiefs and people,” as the proclamation phrased it; and this free consent was possible principally because of the faith which the people of the territory had in the missionaries of the Church of Scotland, who had been working among them since the 1860’s.

Since Nyasaland is a protectorate and not a colony, her people naturally aspired to and expected political development towards self-government, an ultimate abdication of British rule. Nothing before Federation led them to believe that this was a hopeless ambition; and their trust in Britain was so great that they willingly sacrificed themselves in the last two world wars to defend what they were told was freedom for all. Victory promised them the right to decide their future and develop their own form of government.

When Federation was imposed on Nyasaland, therefore, and power over the destiny of some seven million Africans in the countries of Central Africa surrendered to less than three hundred thousand Europeans, the people of Nyasaland did not have to be persuaded to oppose the scheme. They recognized a betrayal of the very principles of self-determination to which Britain had subscribed in signing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an end to all their hopes for democratic government. For the architects of the Federation, Sir Roy Welensky

and Lord Malvern, made no secret of their distaste for 'Ghanas' in the vicinity of White Southern Rhodesia. Sir Roy has stated often enough that he does not envisage equality between the Africans and the Europeans of Central Africa within the foreseeable future, and his attitude was accurately reflected in the constitution of the new State.

Federation offered too a frustration of their longing to live with decency and dignity in their own country at least. For the people of Nyasaland saw—and still see—no difference between Southern Rhodesia and South Africa; except perhaps that the Union is outspoken about her oppression of Africans, while Southern Rhodesia imitates the oppression and not the outspokenness, hiding its hands behind a smoke-screen of words. The people of Nyasaland do not need to be told of conditions in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, there is hardly a family left that has not sacrificed a member to work on a farm or in the home of a Southern Rhodesian White, or in the gold mines of South Africa. Their knowledge of settlers is deeper and far more personal than that of those who read up race relations in books or propaganda pamphlets. It is because of their determination that what they worked under and saw in Southern Rhodesia and the Union should not be allowed to spread into their own country, that they give to the Nyasaland African Congress their unswerving support in its opposition to the Central African Federation.

Developments during the six years since the imposition of Federation have given Nyasaland no cause for complacency. The Federal Constitution Amendment Act and the Federal Electoral Act gave the settlers of Central Africa further opportunities to entrench White dominion. That the African Affairs Board, which was established to safeguard African interests, named both bills as discriminatory, did not appear to matter to the British Government. Then, early in 1957, the British Government entered into an agreement with Sir Roy Welensky under which the Federal Prime Minister was given direct access to the Queen; the Federal Prime Minister was granted a permanent seat at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference; and the Federal Government was given powers to create its own civil service and appoint its own diplomatic representatives abroad. In the words of Sir Roy Welensky, the effect of the agreement was to "rule out the risk that a future Labour Government in Britain would try to inflict some of their half-

baked ideas on the Federation". In fact, the effect was to give the Federation virtual dominion status by the back door. How mad that our African neighbours in Tanganyika and Uganda should be given repeated concessions towards self-rule by the same British Government which expects us to accept a permanently inferior status in Central Africa!

One of the main arguments in favour of Federation has always been economic. Nyasaland is reputed to be relatively poor, the one member of the Federation whose resources have been least exploited. It has no major industries, and its people are peasants or labourers upon the tea estates. Some 300,000 of the able-bodied male population are employed outside the territory, in the mines of Northern Rhodesia and South Africa, on the farms of Southern Rhodesia. And the total Nyasa population is only 2,700,000. Can Nyasaland exist on its own economically? And how is it to solve its migratory labour problem? Exponents of Federation ask these questions as if economic development and national independence were mutually exclusive. It is the belief of the Nyasaland African Congress that the very reverse is true—that only with freedom will a permanent solution to the country's economic problems become possible.

In any case, whatever happens, Nyasaland Africans would prefer freedom in poverty to plenty in servitude, though it is not yet our experience that servitude brings plenty. Nyasaland, however, is not as poor as the world is made to believe.

The Financial Secretary said in March, 1958 during a Legislative Council debate that before Federation was imposed the country was viable, could balance its own budget, had a surplus, and indeed could have developed on its own. And this statement was confirmed by the Governor of Nyasaland when he was in Britain in the same year. Of course, those who support Federation reply that development would have been slow. But the Africans of Nyasaland would prefer slow, ordered development to the sort of lunatic lavishness characterised by the group hospital in Blantyre—which harbours an official colour bar!

Nyasaland could stand on its own feet if the civil servants, who are now administering the country without the mandate of its people, began concentrating on the development of the country for its own sake, rather than moving up and down the territory as if they were paid agents of Sir Roy's Federal Party. The very agricultural policy of the Administration inhibits any

full-scale agricultural drive by the people. Instead of hoeing their gardens in peace and producing more food and more cash crops, villagers live under the terror of agricultural instructors and police who have the power to arrest them on the flimsiest of pretexts. The Co-operative Department, which in a country like Nyasaland should provide an opportunity for poor people and peasants, through their pennies and farthings, to participate in the economic development of their country, is the most primitive department in Nyasaland. Headed by a Commissioner who has never seen the inside of even a Co-operative Summer School, it has a European staff holding senior posts equally uneducated in co-operative techniques. Paradoxically, the African staff-members, who have greater experience and better training, all occupy inferior positions in the department and cannot influence or help to initiate policy. The violent contrast with similar departments in East Africa, where proper staffing and techniques have resulted in increased earnings and a marked improvement in the standard of living of the Africans, suggests that Nyasaland is being deliberately looted of its able-bodied men.

The very fact that the Government is not prepared to cease issuing licences to recruiting agencies is sufficient proof that it is those who recruit rather than the recruited who benefit from this detested and detestable traffic in human beings. The argument that Nyasaland Africans would still go to South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, whether recruited or not, should make unnecessary a commerce which for years now has corrupted the minds of the young and completely destroyed ordered family life. As it is, powerful recruiting agencies are allowed by the Government to entice teen-agers into believing that the best way of earning their money is by migrating to Southern Rhodesia or the Union, so that the youth grow up believing that manual work can only be done in the mines and farms far away from home. The rottenness of such a system cannot be overemphasised; it places the burden of maintaining families on those least able to bear it, the women, the aged and the sick, corrupting communal and personal relationships alike.

This wastage of human resources, and the untold harm that it does to the social and economic development of the country, can be prevented by adopting a creative approach to the problem. A better agricultural policy, the giving to the Co-operative Department of the place and the staff it deserves, and a vigorous campaign to reorientate the people in and outside the school-

room, would help to maintain the bulk of the able-bodied population in the country. Such a policy would include the abolition of recruitment and would ensure that the best use possible was made of the available labour. On many occasions the existing industries and agricultural undertakings have complained of lack of labour; and the Government itself, when work started on a secondary school in the Northern Province, found itself in similar difficulties.

With its labour properly used—on the co-operative basis upon which churches, schools, clinics and postal agencies are built and roads constructed even now—and with a creative drive on agriculture, co-operatives, and secondary industries for the benefit of the country rather than absentee landlords, the country could produce the capital needed for ordered development. Patriotism for this is there in abundance; and under an African government enjoying the confidence of the people, the capacity for faith and sacrifice will be a powerful economic factor. The Shire Valley project, for instance, to provide power and reclaim a large tract of land for agricultural development, will be welcome under an African government, as there would then be no question of the uncontrolled influx of Europeans, and the danger of the land's being accordingly alienated.

Indeed, the agricultural potential of the country is immense, its fish potential inadequately exploited, and its geological wealth not even fully surveyed. Thirty-eight economic minerals have already been found in the territory, including coal, copper, gold, lead, iron ore (of 60-70% extraction compared with a British average of 30%), manganese, mica, platinum, titanium and thorium, the last an especially important discovery as thorium is a radio-active material used as an alternative to uranium. The unwillingness of the concession-holding companies to exploit these minerals on any large scale can only be explained by their wish to retain Nyasaland as a reservoir of cheap labour for their other African enterprises.

Even before Nyasaland was forced into the Central African Federation, there was trade between the territory and adjoining States; and experience in other places has shown beyond any shadow of doubt that political unions are not the prelude to economic associations. An independent Nyasaland would trade with her neighbours because such trade would be of mutual benefit; though doubtless the territory would look more to the East for education, trade and economic associations, in the wake

of political sympathy.

Independence can only benefit Nyasaland's economic development. But independence is essential too, for her political advancement. Despite the professed aim of the Governor and the British Government to advance the country constitutionally, there has been so little political progress in the past seventy years that of the 23 members of the Legislative Council, only 5 are—or were before the arrests—Africans. These are elected indirectly, through local councils, and not one of them is a member of the Executive Council, which is nominated in its entirety by the Governor. This position can hardly be regarded as an advance on the position that existed before Federation.

The Africans of Nyasaland intend to escape from Federation, however long and bitter the struggle; they are determined to have self-government. They no longer believe that Britain can protect their future; they have come to realize that they alone can safeguard their interests, through their own freely chosen government.

In their struggle, they have found in Dr. Banda the leader for whom they had so long been looking. Leaders indeed they had had, but men less experienced and vital, so that Congress was riddled with government spies and informers, and lacked an efficient and expanding organization. Dr. Banda has brought no new policy to Congress—its aim has always been secession and self-government—but he has certainly brought new leadership, new inspiration; and within a short time of his arrival, Congress was taking shape as a modern, militant, political organisation. Our 83 branches swelled to 200 within five months. His sincerity and courage brought a new and virile consciousness to the people, till he became the talk of every household in Nyasaland. At every step he took outside his home, there were thousands to cheer him and wish him luck and long life.

It is against this background, and against the background of avowed settler intentions to force a showdown with the Africans, that one must view the actions of Sir Robert Armitage and Mr. Lennox-Boyd on the one hand, in proclaiming a State of Emergency and deporting Dr. Banda and his colleagues; and the reaction of the people of Nyasaland on the other, who recognize in the repression a clear Government attempt to destroy their only means of opposition to settler domination. Seeing their hopes fade, their leaders deported, the people rose up in their despair to show their indignation.

Much has been said of a "planned massacre" of Europeans, Asians and "moderate Africans". It is a crude fantasy, and publication of the miserable evidence contained in the White Paper can only reinforce this opinion. The Congress has never been anti-White or anti-Asian; Dr. Banda has proclaimed this himself over and over again, and demonstrated it by living among Europeans at Limbe. When he toured the country, he often visited or stayed in European and Asian homes.

The core of the accusation set out in the White Paper is contained in the report of a meeting of 150 Congress delegates held in Blantyre on January 25th. It is to be noted that Dr. Banda is said not to have been present, although the Governor claims to have some unspecified reason for believing that it was held at his direction. The evidence of the meeting did not reach the police for three weeks; and one wonders what inducements were offered during that period to the informer, which would overcome the 'oath of secrecy' and the 'threats of death'. It is more likely that, in a country where spies and informers are so commonly employed by the police, it took those three weeks to decide upon exactly what story it would be most politic to invent.

On page 8 of the White Paper, it is reported that the murder of European and Asian men, women and children was ordered. And yet no European or Asian has been killed throughout Nyasaland, while 50 Africans, including a woman and a child, have been shot dead by the security forces. Whose, indeed, was "the massacre plot?" In February, Dr. Banda actually handed over firearms, taken by individual Africans from the security forces, to the police. Is this the action of an organisation contemplating massacre?

The appointment of an independent commission to investigate all these allegations is to be welcomed; but no lasting peace will follow until the constitutional question is settled, and the future of the people of Nyasaland properly assured. Immediate steps should be taken to end the State of Emergency and thus remove the atmosphere of tension and distrust; and to release the Congress leaders, so that they can take part in talks on a new constitution, based on universal suffrage and territorial self-government. The right of Nyasaland to secede from the Federation must be recognised, for only then will her people be free to develop their resources, economic and human.