

THE CRUCIBLE OF PRIVILEGE: SOUTHERN RHODESIA

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THE Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland is experiencing a political storm which has taken the lives of over 50 Africans, and sent many hundreds to gaol or detention, most of them with no charge of any kind preferred against them. Sir Roy Welensky has found reasons for the crisis outside the territories—he blames the Accra Peoples' Conference; he talks of Communists, plots and agitators.

But he deliberately passes over the real reason for the crisis—his policy of 'White supremacy,' which springs from Southern Rhodesia and from South Africa. For it is this that has brought tension and disorder to the once tranquil land of Lake Nyasa. And Britain too must bear her responsibility for this. She, as guardian of the two Protectorates, has refused to listen to the pleas of the African people not to hand them over to a clutch of power-hungry settlers in Southern Rhodesia. Her Government devised a policy of "partnership", and without defining it, handed it over to Lord Malvern and Sir Roy Welensky to shape into the crucible of White privilege and African repression that it is today. I must emphasize that the British Government knows this, and that, knowing it, it denies to the Africans in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland their right to secede. Clearly 'protection' would seem as capable of conflicting meanings as 'partnership.'

The dominant partner in the Federation, and the source of most of our present troubles, is Southern Rhodesia. It is a self-governing colony, self-governing that is as far as the two hundred thousand settlers are concerned. When this status was attained in 1923, the settlers immediately formulated a land and property policy which became the basis of political power. A franchise based on high property and educational qualifications was introduced; and by raising the qualifications from time to time, and by denying the Africans adequate opportunity for education and economic advance, the settlers have been able to retain political power for themselves to the almost total exclusion of the African majority.

The present franchise qualifications, for the Ordinary roll, are

- (a) citizenship of Southern Rhodesia or the Federation;
- (b) age over 21 years;
- (c) continuous residence of 2 years in the Federation;
- (d) adequate English to fill in a voting form without assistance;
- (e) one of the following educational and financial qualifications:
 - (i) income of £720 p.a. or £1,500 worth of immovable property;
 - (ii) income of £480 p.a. or £1,000 worth immovable property, plus primary school education;
 - (iii) income of £300 p.a. or £500 immovable property, plus 4 years secondary education.

There is also a lower roll, for which the qualifications are (a), (b), (c) and (d) above; plus either £240 p.a., or £120 p.a. and two years' secondary education. When the number of voters on the lower roll reaches 20% of the other voters, however, the roll must be closed. In effect, therefore, these sets of qualifications are even more restrictive than those for the Federal vote, even the 4 African members of the Southern Rhodesian parliament being elected by an almost wholly *European* electorate.

The centre of the struggle for a share in the political control of Southern Rhodesia, therefore, pivots upon the question of the franchise. The property qualifications detailed above are so high that the fiction of the Common Voters' roll can no longer be maintained. For the wage structure of the colony is deliberately designed to prevent Africans from getting onto this roll. Most skilled jobs are jealously reserved by the European trade unions for Europeans only, and the minimum wage for an African unskilled labourer is £6—£7 per month. The Native Land Husbandry Act is ostensibly intended to produce a middle-class of African small farmers, holding land in freehold instead of communally. But so far, its main result has been to force thousands of Africans off the land—providing a useful float of labour for European enterprise.

The path to advance through education is blocked almost as surely as that through economic development. In 1956, 355,651 African children attended school.¹ Of these, 91% were in junior primary schools, and only 1% in secondary schools (i.e. in a position to gain one qualification for the *lower voters'* roll).

And most important of all, Southern Rhodesian land policy stands in the way of African advance, and remains one of the

¹Faith Raven, 'The Constitution and Race Relations in Central Africa', Africa Bureau, 1958

main grievances of the African people. The history of how the Africans of the territory were robbed of their land goes back to Rhodes' fraudulent treaty with Lobengula, and the massacre of the Matabele following their rebellion in 1896. And the Land Apportionment Acts of 1931 and 1941, ostensibly passed for the protection of what land had been left under African control, have been used for the purpose of dispersing and impoverishing the African population and retaining political and economic power in the hands of the settlers. Under these laws, some 2,150,000 Africans (2,070,000 according to the 1953 estimate) have rights to only 56,980 square miles of land² while 200,000 Europeans (160,000 in 1953) enjoy some 76,128 square miles. It should further be remembered that most of the European inhabitants of Southern Rhodesia are town dwellers; so that of all the "European" land, only a small proportion has been actually developed. This is all the more galling in view of the dispossession of thousands of Africans under the new Husbandry Act.

The Apportionment Act and the Urban Areas and Accommodation Act have, of course, also been used to enforce segregation of living areas in the country and in the towns; so that there had to be amendments recently to allow even a few inter-racial clubs to be established, and a hotel where "foreign" non-Whites visiting the Federation might stay. Since the consent of the local authority has to be obtained before an inter-racial club is legal, and it must concern itself purely with cultural, religious and welfare activities alone, the value of this relaxation of the colour bar may be seriously questioned. So might the concession that certain "civilized" Africans may be exempted from carrying a pass. Is a pass exemption, after all, not just another kind of pass?

It was the increasingly oppressive pattern of Southern Rhodesian legislation, combined with the inadequacy of a number of small African organizations who had no right to speak on behalf of the African people as a whole, that led to the reconstitution of the African National Congress of Southern Rhodesia in 1957, incorporating the Southern Rhodesian Youth League. We based our policy on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, especially the right of adult suffrage and the rights of individuals to property; and we gained—for all Sir Edgar Whitehead's picturesque contradictions—the clear support of the African masses.

² Lord Hailey, *An African Survey*.

Our aims were—and, for all the arrests, remain—

1. To recapture human dignity for the Africans, which has been destroyed over a number of years;
2. To restore the land and property rights of Africans; and
3. To gain universal franchise so that the African may play a full part in the political life of the country.

Congress has never restricted membership on racial grounds—there were several European members, and one was arrested for his pains.

Our programme brought panic to the settlers. Hundreds of our supporters were brought before the courts almost throughout the whole of last year, but in 98 cases out of 100 they were acquitted. Realizing their weak position in the courts of law, the Government arbitrarily declared a State of Emergency on the 26th February, 1959, banned our organization, and arrested and detained officials and many members without bringing any charges against them. No satisfactory reasons have been given for these stern measures. Sir Edgar Whitehead says that the situation in Nyasaland warranted them. In the same statement, he reveals that preparations were under way before Christmas 1958, or months before any crisis in Nyasaland gave him his shabby excuse.

We have, in fact, no alternative but to conclude that the present situation, with all the repressive measures in Central Africa, was planned by the Southern Rhodesian and Federal Governments for the purpose of crushing African organizations and eliminating the African leadership. The Bills before the Southern Rhodesian parliament are proof of this. But the Government will discover that bannings, imprisonment and terrorism will never crush African resistance to oppression. If there is to be any hope of peace and prosperity in our country, we are more convinced than ever that the time for a fundamental revision of the political, social and economic system, is *now*. And by a fundamental revision, we mean the immediate concession of real participation in political control to the Africans, not just the removal of specks of discrimination here and there.

We are aware that the Rhodesian settler politicians have been very much encouraged by the apparent success of South African apartheid policies. They have largely copied the disgusting pattern, substituting for apartheid the label of partnership, as if to say that the African must be a willing partner in his own subjugation. But the events of the past two months have

so far exposed the partnership myth that even some of the leading settler politicians have had to make shame-faced admissions of the failure of their policies. In this connection, the formation and general drift of the Central African Party is not without significance.

There is still time for Southern Rhodesia to retreat from disaster, and with dignity. We of the Congress, by the very nature of our policy, offer the settlers the opportunity of beating a retreat in time. We ask for the reconsideration of discriminatory laws—the Native Affairs Act, the Urban Areas and Accommodation Act, the Pass Laws, the Electoral Act, the Unlawful Organizations Act, the Preventive Detention Act. This would lead to a tremendous reduction in tension, and leave the way open for the peaceful evolution of democracy. What we are asking for immediately is therefore direct participation in the territorial legislature and government. And we ask not as suppliants, but as a people who know that their rights cannot indefinitely be withheld from them. The door is still open. Who can tell if it will be open forever?

