

END THIS HELL IN AFRICA

Jack Woddis

LABOUR Party policy on Central Africa is now in the forefront of political issues. The Tory leaders are engaged in wooing Hugh Gaitskell and the other Labour leaders to accept a bi-partisan standpoint on Central African Federation. By this means they hope to take Federation out of the realms of party politics—and so dash the hopes of the African people who have been looking for the return of a Labour Government to bring about a change of policy. It is therefore timely to examine the whole matter of Federation and why the Africans oppose it.

It is fashionable nowadays—and indeed, essential, in view of the existing spotlight on Central Africa—for the supporters of Federation to claim that Federation has brought great benefits to the African people. This is a claim whose falsity is easily exposed. But it is just as well to recall what were the main arguments used before Federation was set up, when the average man in the street in Britain was not so concerned, and when the Welenskys felt no obligation to conceal their real motives.

Interviewed by the *Bulawayo Chronicle* on September 6, 1951, Welensky stated that during his European tour he had been ‘tremendously impressed by the interest of bankers and industrialists . . . in the political future of Central Africa.’ They had told him, ‘If you get Federation it means stability and if you get political stability we are interested in “your” country.’ Clear enough? American financial interests, too, showed great interest in Federation right from the start, and increasingly poured dollars into Central Africa as the foundation of the Federation drew near. W. L. Batt, of the E.C.A. Mission to the United Kingdom (Marshall Plan), announcing £5 million for Rhodesia, added that America would

be repaid to the fullest extent possible in raw materials in which the United States is deficient, such as cobalt, copper, tungsten and chrome.

(*Bulawayo Chronicle*, July 6, 1951)

Nor was the military aspect overlooked. Central Africa’s part in military plans was fully discussed at the Commonwealth Defence Conference in London, June, 1951. To quote the same source :

We see in this Conference Rhodesia’s introduction as a cog in the vast machinery of defence preparations linked with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

(June 20, 1951)

No wonder *The Times*, on November 22, 1951, referred to the projected Federation as ‘an imperial issue.’ The London weekly *East Africa and Rhodesia* confidently predicted that

given Federation, hundreds of millions of pounds would . . . become available from British and American sources.

(June 26, 1952)

Thus, in the days of the creation of the Federation no pretence was made that this was intended to benefit the Africans. Investments, dollars, minerals, war plans—these were the words bandied about so openly then, and to this day they remain the reality behind the Federation. In fact, Lord Home, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, speaking recently on the question of investment in Central Africa stated that

the Federation was the unit most likely to attract such investment.

(*Observer*, April 5, 1959)

Mr. Harry Oppenheimer, whose companies have invested millions in the Federation, including a new £3½ million factory, declared

My faith in the economic future of the Federation is not only as great as ever before—it is greater than ever before.

(*Federation Newsletter*, May 8, 1959)

When big industrialists have faith, it is time for the workers to watch out.

For the African people, too, it was no less clear, right from the start what Federation was intended to achieve. There is no space to detail here their long, firm battle of resistance from even before the African representatives' rejection of the Federation proposals at the abortive Victoria Falls Conference in September, 1951, right down to the present day. The record is there for all to see, no less than in the present crisis. Suffice it to quote the words of one African speaker at a mass meeting in N'dola, on the Northern Rhodesian Copper Belt, in 1953.

In rejecting Federation with Southern Rhodesia we are not choosing between heaven and hell. Northern Rhodesia is also hell, but the door out of the Federation hell will be more tightly bolted than the door out of the present hell.

What a clear understanding of the issue is conveyed in these words, and what a welcome corrective to certain Labour leaders' conception of maintaining Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland under the allegedly paternal guidance of the Colonial Office. To the Africans, both alternatives are 'hell,' and their aim is to get out.

African opposition to the Federation has been more than justified by the events that have followed. Nyasaland, in particular, is cited by Federation supporters as a beneficiary from Federation. A few snazzy white buildings may have gone up in Zomba and Blantyre—but for the Africans taxation has increased by 50 per cent, wages are still only 1s. 4d. to 2s. a day, only one child in every 1,000 goes to secondary

school, two in every five able-bodied males have to leave the territory to find employment, African trade union and political leaders and hundreds of ordinary people have been arrested, their organisations banned, and many people killed. Such are the benefits Nyasaland has received from Federation.

Africans in Northern Rhodesia have received no better treatment. Their once powerful Mine Workers' union in the Copper Belt has suffered terrible blows, its sixteen leaders permanently exiled from the mining areas and kept under police supervision, thus enabling the employers to enforce a wages standstill for two years. In Southern Rhodesia a new trade union law under the pretence of encouraging 'multi-racial unions,' denies to Africans the right to form their own unions. If they wish to join a trade union they will have to join the existing European ones which cater for an exclusive white labour aristocracy, and which will undoubtedly draw up their rules in a way which ensures the unions remaining under European control.

Starvation wages, impoverishment of the peasantry, repression against trade unions, the banning of political parties—these are the realities of the 'partnership' policy of the Federal Government. Paltry manoeuvres, like the abolition of separate counters at post-offices, will fool no one, especially in view of Welensky's open and cynical declaration :

I am satisfied that if all discriminations were removed the Africans to a very large extent would be the greatest sufferers.

(*Rhodesia Herald*, March 17, 1959)

In both Rhodesia and in Nyasaland, the leaders of the African organisations have called for secession from the Federation. In anticipation of such demands, the imperialist framers of the Federation Constitution deliberately excluded any mention of secession from the Constitution. Thus, if the African people are not to be driven into attempting to take their secession by force, there is only one thing left to do—repeal the Federation Act itself.

It is important that the campaign for this be mounted now, both because of the talks the Tory leaders are conducting with the Labour leaders to reach an agreed policy on Central Africa (and whatever one's views may be of Mr. Gaitskell, one can be sure that any policy which has the agreement of the Tories will be one which maintains the realities of imperial power in Central Africa, even if certain surface features are cleaned up), and because of the pressure coming from reactionary circles in Britain and in the Federation to block permanently any African escape from the Federation hell.

We are here to stay (Sir Roy Welensky, in a speech reported in *East Africa and Rhodesia*, February 5, 1959)

Any idea of hoping to solve the problem through the 1960 Conference to review the Federal Constitution, on the basis of representation from the five governments—Britain, the Federation, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland—can only lead to the surrender of the real interests of the African people, who will have no representation at such a conference. The Federation Act should be repealed, universal adult suffrage introduced in all three territories, and the African people, as the majority in each case, given the right to form the government of their choice, and to determine their future relations with each other and with other states.

With the shock of the attack on the African people in the Federation, there is a favourable opportunity to develop the campaign in Britain. The courage and dignity of the Africans in the face of sickening brutality and discrimination have not only demonstrated that the imperialist idol has feet of clay, but also touched the heart and conscience of the British people. It was demonstrated in the stand of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (some 1,500 votes to 50 against) in favour of the transfer of effective power to the African community in Nyasaland.

If the British trade union and labour movement speaks out with the same clarity and decisiveness, then any Tory-Labour agreement on Federation can be scotched or its implementation prevented.

Mr. Julian Amery, M.P. Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, has said that 'unless there was mountainous and over-whelming evidence to the contrary, the British Government could not go back on the 1953 decisions that had brought the Federation into being.' (*South Africa*, April 25, 1959). It is up to the British people, and above all the labour movement to see that the 'mountainous and overwhelming evidence' is provided in the form of a mountainous and over-whelming demand that the Federation Act be repealed.

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