

Nyasaland and Federation

By FRANK DUPUIS

On March 3 the Governor of Nyasaland, Sir Robert Armitage, declared a state of emergency and proscribed the African National Congress. Rioting broke out in which 23 Africans were killed and hundreds were arrested. The number of deaths, casualties and arrests is still mounting as we go to press.

Such disturbances—if Federation was imposed—were predicted in January 1953 by Mr. Dupuis in the representations he submitted on behalf of the International Union for Land-Value Taxation and Free Trade to the then Governor, Sir Geoffrey Colby. Hitherto unpublished, they are here condensed.

I WRITE as one who has no material interest whatever in the question, only an affection for Nyasaland and its people of both races gathered during a residence of nearly seventeen years, including two years in the East African campaign. I am no partisan of what is called an "extremist" group neither do I believe that any serious African problem can be solved by immediately introducing "democratic" political machinery in imitation of European models. I think the happiness and prosperity of all races in Nyasaland can be most effectively promoted by Colonial Office administration applied to securing the elements of freedom equally to all while leaving the Africans to work out their political institutions in their own way under traditional leadership. For these reasons, I regard any attempt to curtail the freedom of Nyasaland people as unsound in principle, alien to British Colonial tradition and, in the present atmosphere of African affairs, highly dangerous.

The Rhodesias started with Chartered Companies, Nyasaland with direct Colonial Office rule. The Chartered Company method was to declare limited areas—usually poor or remotely situated land—Native Reserves. In this way they provided themselves with a convenient situation to acquire the remainder of the land (for profitable sale to Europeans) without arousing too much controversy concerning their moral right to do so. Then, by imposing Hut or Poll Taxes payable only in money, the Africans were obliged to work for the European settlers. To be able to assure the prospective buyer that abundant labour was available at cheap rates, obviously enhanced the value of the land. The Company had no interest in encouraging the African to remain on his own holding and develop it more effectively. This was the principle, briefly summarised, that determined the direction in which the Rhodesias were to develop.

The Colour Bar policy is an inevitable outcome of giving political power to politicians depending upon the votes of Europeans employed by the big interests owning the mines and other industrial undertakings. But these undertakings depend also on native labour, part of which has come in the past from Nyasaland, so much more densely populated than the Rhodesias. This supply tends to decrease following the increasing prosperity of Nyasaland industry, largely based on peasant holdings.

Both fear and interest therefore prompt the Rhodesian Europeans to try to secure control over Nyasaland and to subordinate its administration to their requirements. The method chosen is a federation in which they will exercise

the preponderating influence. Any so-called safeguards that may be devised can be whittled away later when public opinion in Great Britain has grown indifferent to what will appear only a legal quibble. This is, of course, until Nyasaland African resistance is driven into taking a different form from peaceful and constitutional protest. Moreover, the safeguards are unlikely to touch the root of African interests—the system of land tenure.

In Nyasaland at the beginning the would-be Chartered Company was liquidated by the Arab wars which obliged the Colonial Office to administer the country directly after the signing of the treaties with the Headmen in which Queen Victoria guaranteed freedom and justice to the people under protection of the British crown. The Colonial Office was not a land-selling undertaking and missionary influence might easily have provoked awkward questions in Parliament if great land concessions had been granted to Europeans. Grants made by chiefs were investigated and usually confirmed but thenceforward very little land was alienated.

A low Hut Tax, although it brought some pressure on Africans to work for Europeans, was not onerous. No "Native Reserves" were proclaimed because the Administration observed its Protectorate obligations. It also honoured its obligations under the Congo Basin Treaties of 1884 to refrain from any discriminatory tariff policy by which the inhabitants might be exploited for the benefit of British Exporters. (Federation, of course, will violate these Treaties.)

Such things as Pass Regulations or Colour Bar restrictions were not even conceived. Under this just and non-interfering policy, peaceful progress went forward to the benefit of all races. Population increased not only internally but by immigration from neighbouring territories where taxes were higher and interference rife. Increasing population enabled the Hut Tax to remain low while ensuring an increasing revenue: all this despite poor and expensive communications and dearth of mineral wealth.

The policy of the Administration in deliberately encouraging native export production on their own holdings, e.g. The Tobacco Board, was amply justified by results. Conditions were not ideal but during the time I lived in Nyasaland, 1915 to 1932, I am sure that for peace, loyalty, safety of life and property, and all the conditions that made for happiness the Protectorate compared favourably with any country in the Empire.

Some of the arguments for federation are based on an allegation that Nyasaland Africans and Europeans without

directions from a federation cannot be trusted to develop their country adequately. It is surprising that the Nyasaland Administration allows this argument to go without immediate refutation. One has only to consult the White Paper Cmd. 8233 p.11 where the comparative figures of material progress 1939 to 1951 are given. This shows as follows :

	Multiples of Increase During Period.		
	S. Rhod.	N. Rhod.	Nyasaland
Revenue :	5	10	6
Imports :	6	4	11
Exports :	3	3	4½

It will be noticed that, apart from the Revenue figure for Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland surpassed both the other territories in every respect. The exception is probably due to the immense mineral resources of Northern Rhodesia which are capable of affording great revenue without necessarily implying wealth in the possession of those who produce it. As Southern Rhodesia also possesses great mineral wealth and Nyasaland has none the figures are especially significant. But mere figures are not in themselves a guide to the true well-being of the people. A Nyasaland African, living on his own holding and producing crops for personal consumption as well as for export, appears under such a tabulation as a producer of export goods only, and a much higher proportion of Nyasaland wealth consists in these non-recorded items than in the case of the other territories. Furthermore, the Nyasaland African working his own holding is a free man, not a mere unit in a "compound".

Before the 1914-1918 war the great majority of Nyasaland Europeans were British born. As there was little contact with the South, their political conceptions were not influenced by South African or Rhodesian practices. But after the war some Rhodesians and South Africans remained in the country and soon expressed resentment about the difficulty of acquiring land and disciplining labourers. I recall a Mr. T., a Cholo settler from Southern Rhodesia, and prominent spokesman, explaining to me the Rhodesian system as I have described it earlier. He did not claim that it was in the interest of the Africans themselves ; his concern was exclusively with its advantages for the European settlers.

Mr. T. and his friends never represented more than a minority of the Nyasaland Europeans but they were very vocal. In the extravagant atmosphere prevailing for a few years after the war they succeeded in introducing to the Legislative Assembly a proposal to introduce Pass Regulations. About the same time a Commission was appointed to investigate further alienation of native land. Fortunately, on the instance of such experienced and respected leaders as Doctor Laws and Doctor Hetherwick, the Colonial Office vetoed the Pass Ordinance before it became law ; and the Commission reported against the alienation of more Boma land.

In the controversy on both subjects the Government referred to the obligations of Protectorate status. It was then that a section among the Europeans began to suggest

that by some form of union with the Rhodesias the Protectorate could be abolished and the Europeans "run the country" to their advantage. Although the agitation within Nyasaland declined afterwards it evidently fomented external movements that have continued to grow.

I do not suggest that conditions in Nyasaland are, or ever have been, more than imperfect. No clear principle of land tenure has ever been recognised and this omission becomes more serious as material progress advances and population grows. Merely to assert that "all the land must be kept for the natives" only begs the question ; moreover Africans have no more right than others to monopolise land. A system is required that will enable any person to use a plot of land, provided he can put it to its most productive use and is prepared to pay the rent which it could command, excluding any improvements, in a free market. The system must provide, moreover, for equal participation in the value of the resources of the country, which are common property so that the holder of a plot of valuable land has no greater communal advantage than the holder of a less valuable plot.

Both these objects can be attained by first assessing the value of all plots of land, apart from the value of improvements, and then collecting from each holder annually an amount equal to the value of his plot. These sums, providing for the cost of public services, would enable the Administration to reduce or abolish other forms of taxation all of which tend to raise the cost of living.

This rent (or tax) would be payable whether or not the owner put the plot to fullest use. Land suitable for mines, tobacco or tea factories, European stores, etc., would continue to remain in the possession of those who can manage such concerns best, but, although it is impossible to forecast exactly, I am sure that every peasant proprietor really interested in his holding would always be able to outbid any European who wanted to waste his money trying to buy up such plots to form a large estate. By graduating the present Poll or Hut Taxes the basis could be laid for introducing the system in rural areas.

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