

THE DOCTOR'S DISCARDS

DENIS GRUNDY

"DEAD, dead, they are all of them dead! The Monckton Commission, the Federal Review, Federation with Southern Rhodesia, they are all dead and buried. We will have nothing to do with them."

This summary epitaph was pronounced by Mr. Orton Chirwa, founder of the Malawi Congress Party, at Dr. Banda's final press conference the day after the end of the Nyasaland Constitutional Conference. That end came, be it noted, on August 4th. The press conference was held at 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, Kensington on the premises of the "Union of Democratic Control". Beneath their name-plate on the door was another announcing joint occupation by the "Euthanasia Society".

Despite such auguries the mood of the platform was highly euphoric. This is scarcely defensible in logic, since Dr. Banda, the only political leader involved to come out publicly in advance, firmly and repeatedly, with a list of detailed and decisive demands, appears to have lost out on most of them. If he has certainly secured control of the new Legislative Council for Malawi, he has not done so by the overwhelming margin he had stipulated. The variable composition of the Executive Council does not look like providing him with a majority there. Worse than that, it is not to be of cabinet status responsible to Legco as to a democratic parliament. Its function will be purely "advisory" to the Governor. Moreover, if he runs into difficulties, the Governor can "pack" both bodies "in the interests of good government". In short, there is an hiatus between the two Councils, and a gulf set between both of them and the Governor. Real effective and executive power remains where it was, with the Governor.

As for the suffrage, here is yet another "fancy franchise" considerably inferior to the grail of "one man—one vote". Still, it is plain, practical and commonsensical compared with the incomprehensibly fashioned articles worn by some of the neighbours. Nor is there any ostensible communal element about it, as is the case with Kenya, though the Colonial Secretary admitted that the minor "A" roll would for the moment be likely to elect only Europeans to its eight seats. The wide qualifications for the "B" roll (20 seats) largely by-pass the usual barriers of education and income, and will probably recruit 100,000 Africans, the vast

majority adhering to Malawi. Perhaps this was the most satisfactory feature of the eleventh-hour, eleventh-day compromise so suddenly and dramatically accepted by Kamuzu.

The atmosphere of the last United Federal Party press conference, held earlier at Carlton House Terrace, was definitely *piano*. All along this old-style, conservative-colonial delegation of three Europeans and one Nyasa had shown signs of strain, and even distaste, in seeking to come to terms with the new African age. Between them, and behind masks of reservation, the Europeans—M.L.C.s, civic dignitaries and company directors—rather grudgingly explained their party's acceptance of the joint undertaking by all delegates, to work the new constitution for a reasonable period, which had come out of the blue only the afternoon before. Banda's intransigence and intimidation, they said, had nearly wrecked the conference. They had failed to get any firm definition of "reasonable period", and were afraid that Malawi thought of it in terms of six months. There were dangers that a situation would develop like the present one in Kenya. The U.F.P. did not want another conference for at least five years, when a further instalment of self-government might be expected. Independence—perhaps in 1970. The Colonial Secretary, of course, had the last word in such matters, but they certainly regarded the Colonial Office as a necessary evil to be got rid of as soon as was convenient. Africans were very slow and backward and had everything to learn about practical politics and administration. The Belgian Congo was a terrible object lesson. But they were quite prepared to train them over a proper period of probation.

Mr. Dixon said he was pretty confident that Sir Roy Welensky would be happy about the terms of agreement, and Mr. Blackwood, when taxed, hastened to add that it was "purely a Territorial matter". Mr. Little said that Malawi did not believe in the Federation, which had come to stay. The Nyasa, Mr. Matthews Phiri, who at a previous meeting had produced Chief Chikumbu to testify that all the chiefs of the official delegation, except himself, had been silenced by intimidation, now announced that the chiefs were content with the settlement. When asked if they were still intimidated, he replied that they were.

In between this sedative and the heady stimulant provided by Malawi, Mr. T. D. T. Banda (no connection, of course) of the minor Congress Liberation Party held his closing session. He was assisted by two aides, neither of whom was the well-known

figure of Mr. Wellington Chirwa, still presumably in the party. Mr. Banda called himself an African nationalist as distinct from a Pan-African. He said, with complete truth, that the conference's conclusions represented his party's official programme very closely. He spoke of continuous personal intimidation and denounced the flagrant bribery and terrorism employed by both Malawi and U.F.P. to recruit party members. He expected to secure a satisfactory number of seats in the new Legco. He ended by stating that Dr. Banda had "accepted defeat", would fail to control his extremists, and would fall.

Back to Kensington. The Doctor was buoyant, confident, emotional. He had his own rather individual interpretation of the outcome of the Conference. Intending originally to boycott it, he had attended in a spirit of give and take. Naturally, the result was a compromise. His followers in Nyasaland would be satisfied. They were, in fact; there were telegrams to prove it. After all, the control of the legislature would be with Malawi. "People will take anything from me. They trust me. I will never let them down."

The U.F.P. were a bunch of eighteenth-century squires trying to ignore the wind of change. They had banked on his walking out of the Conference. There were only three hundred Europeans in Nyasaland who could be called true inhabitants. The delegation of chiefs had been brought over by the U.F.P. to oppose him. Three of them, and the two African members of Legco, were "government stooges". He had been accused of wholesale intimidation. It would require genius to collect a million members, including eleven thousand Asians, by threats.

He had felt absolutely confident about Mr. MacLeod ever since the Colonial Secretary had released him from prison against the wishes of Welensky and the Governor. Welensky (the word came out like spittle) had plotted to keep him inside until after the Federal Review. The Colonial Secretary had been misreported as saying that it would take the working-party nine months to prepare the new voters' roll. It should be ready for an election in December. He would be in power before the Federal Review, and there would be no Federation. Never, never would he take the government whip in favour of Federation with Southern Rhodesia. That was dead. Federation with African States in East and Central Africa was another matter. The whole delegation was off almost immediately to Dar-es-Salaam as guests of Julius Nyerere.

Finally, he recognized no set time-limit for the trial period of the new constitution. "To us, it is just a beginning. The majority must rule."

Amongst the many absurdities of this conference, surely the greatest has been the conspiracy of silence surrounding the master problem of the Federation's future. When Orton Chirwa condemned the findings of the Monckton Commission to death before they are born, he was doing no more than repeat the sentence of the main Rhodesian nationalist parties when they boycotted the commission's proceedings while it was in Africa. This, it should be noted, did not deter Lord Monckton from proclaiming in Salisbury that he had received a good cross-section of opinion.

If, as informed opinion anticipates, Lord Monckton eventually presents recommendations that will not please the extremists of either wing and colour, he may be in danger of losing his reputation as the greatest "fixer" of the day. For in Central Africa it is the extremists who are now very much in the ascendancy. The formal retention of some sort of federal structure with merely vestigial powers, capable perhaps of underwriting the British Government's guarantee of the huge Kariba indebtedness, will infuriate Welensky, who is pressing for stronger central government, and scarcely likely to mollify the Dominionites or the Africans. If, on the other hand, and this seems the only alternative short of Federal dissolution, there is a re-allocation of functions and responsibilities—the devolution, for instance, of the management of Health, European Education and Agriculture upon the separate Territories—this will have to be compensated by a strengthening of the central hand over the armed forces and police. And this would inevitably lead to open rebellion.

Although Dr. Banda seems to regard him publicly as a species of Billy Graham, everybody knows that Mr. MacLeod is a long-headed bridge-player. With the Monckton dummy-hand unexposed—at least to his opponents—he has won a game cleverly, taking some fine finesses, "roughing" rather toughly, and forcing some valuable discards—particularly in clubs and spades. But he has not won the rubber; and, in the next game, the Doctor may pick up some of the honours he threw away and rather change the score.