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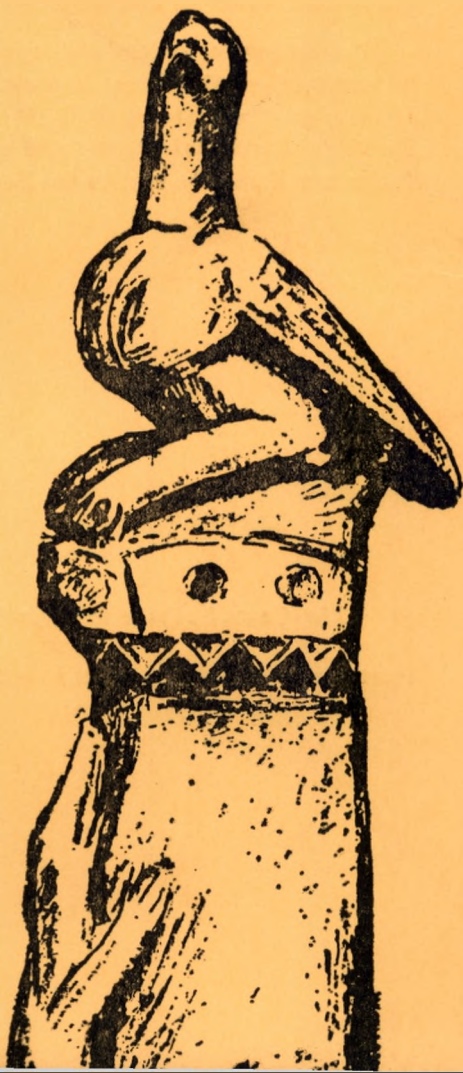
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Notes, Documents and Revisions

Reviews



RHODESIAN HISTORY

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NOTES. DOCUMENTS AND REVISIONS

**BRITAIN AND AMALGAMATION OF THE RHODESIAS,
1937-1941***

IT IS GENERALLY believed that the rejection of closer association in Central Africa before 1953 by the British Government was largely to do with the racial policy of Southern Rhodesia. For according to the Bledisloe Commission Report of 1939, the principle of amalgamation itself was acceptable; but before amalgamation could be contemplated as a practical and salutary development, it would be necessary for Southern Rhodesia to show that her racial policy would 'in the long run prove to be in the best interest of the natives'.¹ Most commentators have accepted this view² but the opening of Colonial Office correspondence for the period 1937-41 makes a closer examination of the question desirable; for the evidence suggests that the native policy of Southern Rhodesia was not the decisive impediment to amalgamation though undoubtedly an important one. The events of these years can now be reconstructed as follows.

At the end of 1937 Huggins wrote to the Colonial Office urging that immediate steps towards amalgamation in Central Africa be taken. The British Government would do him a service if it could announce that it had approved of amalgamation in principle and that steps would be taken sooner or later in order to put that principle into effect. The reason that he gave this urgent request was that he was faced with a rising tide of pro-South African sympathies and that only a counter-move such as he proposed would save his government from being overwhelmed by that tide. The British Government refused to make such an announcement. Huggins then suggested that an alternative was to announce that a Commission of Enquiry would be sent to investigate ways and means of putting the principle of amalgamation into effect; but the Commission would be useful 'only if it were empowered to report on the advisability of amalgamation, either sooner or later'. Eventually the British Government agreed to send such a Commission which could recommend accordingly but with one provision, known to Huggins only, that the British Government would not be bound to implement the recommendations 'at any rate in the near future'.

* A preliminary unedited draft of this article appeared as 'Britain and the Rhodesian Federation 1937-1941 : A revisionist view' in *The Bible and the Gun* (Kingston, Jamaica, ASAWI Publications, No. 8 Supplement, 1975); I am grateful to Professor J. Magabule of the University of Alberta at Edmonton for suggestions in writing the original version and to Professor R. S. Roberts for his help and encouragement in preparing this Note for publication.

¹ Great Britain, *Rhodesia-Nyasaland Royal Commission Report* [Cmd 5949; Chairman: Lord Bledisloe], paras 213, 216 (H.C. 1938-9, xv, 211) [hereinafter cited as *Bledisloe Commission Report*].

² C. Leys and C. Pratt, *A New Deal in Central Africa* (London, Heinemann, 1960), 9-10; C. Sanger, *Central African Emergency* (London, Heinemann 1960), 38; G. Jones, *Britain and Nyasaland* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1964), 126-7; G. Pike *Malawi* (London, Pall Mall, 1968), 106.

Of the members of the Commission, only Lord Bledisloe was acquainted with this secret provision. What if the other members of the Commission, in ignorance of this, made recommendations in favour of immediate amalgamation? asked E. J. Harding of the Colonial Office. Eventually it was agreed to let Lord Bledisloe handle the matter in his own way.³ Two memoranda were addressed to all members of the Commission. The one on Southern Rhodesia emphasized that, although that colony was not a dominion, it was self-governing. It went to some length to show that the British Government had residual powers designed for the protection of Africans and that no discriminatory legislation could have been passed without the prior consent of that government.⁴ Whether this was a subtle suggestion to the Commissioners not to annoy Huggins with too much emphasis on racial matters is not clear. The second memorandum dealt with the history of the amalgamation issue up to the Hilton Young Commission. It pointed out that in the past Nyasa opposition to amalgamation with Southern Rhodesia was based on the fear of racial discrimination practised in that country.⁵

The next step was to consult the Governors of Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. Sir Hubert Young, then Governor of Northern Rhodesia, had recently been transferred from Nyasaland and was thought to be opposed to amalgamation; but his reply in March 1938, said that although it was almost impossible to reconcile African and European interests and that one would inevitably be subordinate to the other, this was not an impossible barrier to amalgamation. He proposed a trial period of 25 years in which those matters on which agreement could be reached would fall under the central authority while the residual powers would fall to the provincial governments.⁶ It also appears that the government of Nyasaland, if only for economic reasons, was not hostile to amalgamation either.⁷

Lord Bledisloe's report was published in July 1939 and suited the British Government very well. It said that amalgamation was desirable as the ultimate objective of the three territories but could not be put into effect immediately because of the different native policies followed in those countries.⁸ Huggins went to London in September to discuss the report with Malcolm Macdonald, the Colonial Secretary, and they were joined by Anthony Eden, the Dominions Secretary. In the discussions Rhodesia's racial policy was the main issue. Macdonald told Huggins that the recommendation for amalgamation was not unanimous and that in any case certain objections to Southern Rhodesia's native policy 'would have to be met first'. In view of these objections, further enquiries would have to be made with a view to reconciling 'the principle of trusteeship for the native population and at the same effectively safeguarding

³ [Public Record Office, London], C[olonial] O[ffice], 795 [Original Correspondence, Northern Rhodesia], 99[1938], 45104/2, Copy of Secret Memo for Chairman's personal information handed to Lord Bledisloe by Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Jan. 1938; minute of E. J. Harding regarding the withholding of Secret Memo from the rest of the Commissioners, Feb. 1938.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Copy of H. N. Tait's separate memo on Southern Rhodesia given to all members of the Commission, pp.1-3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Introductory Note for the Rhodesia-Nyasaland Royal Commission, 1-36.

⁶ C.O. 795/99/45104/9, Governor of Northern Rhodesia to Secretary of State for Colonies, 19 Mar. 1938, encl., pp.1-8.

⁷ C.O. 795/120[1941], 45007, Extracts from Record of Proceedings of a meeting of the Economic Council held at Blantyre, 30 July 1941, p.1.

⁸ *Bledisloe Commission Report*, paras 477-8.

the legitimate interests of all other sections of the population'. Immediate steps could be taken to enquire into the type of 'machinery' necessary for co-operation in common areas of interest without necessarily bringing about amalgamation.⁹

On 7 September, Huggins went to the Colonial Office to say goodbye to Macdonald. It was then that 'he realized that no early decisions on the Report could now be expected'. In a press statement, Macdonald used the war as an excuse for the delay, but it was suggested to Huggins that in the meantime Lord Hailey should visit Central Africa and make an assessment of Southern Rhodesia native policy.¹⁰

Lord Bledisloe realized that his report was being used to justify indefinite postponement of any progress towards the amalgamation that he had recommended. He also did not believe that the racial policy of Southern Rhodesia was a decisive impediment, and he told Eden that racial discrimination in the Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt was as bad as it was in Southern Rhodesia. He protested that his references to the 'native policies . . . have been over-emphasized in connection with the question of amalgamation'. In order to avoid the widening of these divergencies, the British Government 'should definitely and clearly pronounce amalgamation to be the objective'.¹¹

Lord Hailey's trip to Central Africa was made to look as inconspicuous as possible. Huggins was sure that a way would be found to modify the native policies in the northern territories to bring them more into line with those of Southern Rhodesia. On his return home in 1941, Lord Hailey was convinced that any reconciliation between the two policies would be theoretical only, on the lines of 'constitutional safeguards' which would in reality leave the European settlers in a position to maintain their racially discriminatory privileges, but without the backing of the law. Lord Moyne, who served as an adviser at the Colonial Office during the War, was prompted to ask:

Is this point very important in your mind in the problem of closer union?

Lord Hailey: It is the one crucial point. Other questions are less material. The crux of the question is the possibility of the introduction of a legal colour bar in Northern Rhodesia. The colour bar in Southern Rhodesia has come to stay.

Lord Moyne: It looks as [if] we ought to make our stand at the Zambezi.

Lord Hailey: I should not object to amalgamation myself if some form of agreement could be reached on the Industrial Conciliation Act. It should not be applied in Northern Rhodesia; they [the Europeans] can get all they want by Trade Union methods.

Lord Moyne: Apart from this colour bar question, it would be in the interest of the three units to amalgamate?

Lord Hailey: Yes, it would undoubtedly be an advantage.¹²

⁹ C.O. 795/108[1939], 45104/9, The Joint Dominion Office and Colonial Office Draft Formula (final version) to form basis for further discussions with P.M. of Southern Rhodesia. G. M. Huggins, 6 Sept. 1939.

¹⁰ Ibid., Minutes of 7 Sept. 1939 on meeting between Huggins and Macdonald.

¹¹ Ibid., Lord Bledisloe to Sir Anthony Eden, 1 Dec. 1939, pp.1-2.

¹² C.O. 795/120/45007, Extract of Note of a discussion between Lord Hailey and Lord Moyne 18 Mar. 1941. pp.1-2.

When in July 1941, the British Government approved the setting up of an Economic Council, composed of representatives from the three Central African territories', to 'intensify and co-ordinate the war effort of the three territories', the excuse that war was an impediment to amalgamation fell away. The Governor of Nyasaland, Sir Donald MacKenzie-Kennedy, was enthusiastic and saw the plan as the precursor to amalgamation.¹³ The moral argument over native policy was never considered irreversible. As early as 1940, Huggins and Robert Tredgold had impressed Eden and Macdonald as men with good intentions towards natives. How much influence this had on British policy is difficult to assess, but the contradiction involved in the view that the two Rhodesians were 'progressive' will soon become obvious.

Malcolm Macdonald told an Aborigines Society deputation that came to see him and Eden at this time:

I would like to say — and I daresay that you will agree with me — that Dr. Huggins and also Mr. Tredgold, are in my view leaders of the progressive and more enlightened opinion as to native policy in Southern Rhodesia. I will go further than that. I do believe that Dr. Huggins and Mr. Tredgold are using their influence to bring their ideas of native policy . . . much more into line with our ideas of native policy than may appear to be the case. I only state it as a fact that they are using their influence in the direction of getting a harmonious native policy throughout Africa.¹⁴

A. Creech-Jones reminded him, however, that Huggins had 'certainly suggested that he was looking to a time in the not too distant future when the franchise roll would be almost exclusively white', as the 40 Blacks already on the roll were considered a threat to white supremacy. Eden and Macdonald ignored this remark but Eden went on to say: 'I think it would be a pity if we got into our heads that necessarily [sic] the attitude of those people who have responsibility in Southern Rhodesia is violently reactionary. It did not strike me as being so at all'.¹⁵

If the moral argument of trusteeship for Africans was not decisive, one may ask, why then was amalgamation not approved between 1937 and 1941? The answer seems to lie in a secret cabinet paper prepared in 1931. In that year, the Labour Government, faced with a request for amalgamation from the Premier of Southern Rhodesia, H. Moffat, thought the matter of such importance that a national policy rather than a party policy was called for. A special cabinet committee was therefore set up and joined by Leo Amery and Lord Winterton, representing the Conservative Party, and Sir Robert Hamilton and John Pybus, representing the Liberal Party. With the agreement of all the three parties, this committee presented a policy paper to the cabinet in April 1931. The paper, the contents of which were not communicated to the Southern Rhodesian Government, laid down the principles that would form the guidelines of future imperial policy in Central Africa. The paper said that:

¹³ Ibid., Extracts from Record of Proceedings of the meeting of the Economic Council, Blantyre, 30 July 1941, pp.6-9, 19; the Economic Council was reconstituted in 1945 as a permanent Common Services Council.

¹⁴ C.O. 795/115 [1940]. 45104. Record of discussions between Macdonald and Eden and the Aborigines Protection Society, 14 Mar. 1940, pp.14-15.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.16.

As a matter of Empire policy, it appears desirable that the mining area [i.e. Copperbelt] should remain under the control of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom. These mines may before long be the governing factor in the copper markets of the world, and their output will become essential to national defence in the event of war and of primary importance to the Empire's trade and manufacture in peace time. [A] Cabinet Committee of the Board of Trade has at present in hand negotiations to secure a proportion of refining in this country.¹⁶

In addition to the Copperbelt, the agricultural area immediately south of it would remain in the British-held zone for the purpose of assuring supplies of food. To the east of the Copperbelt lay North-Eastern Rhodesia, which would be valuable for its surplus labour and as such should also remain tied to the Copperbelt. Barotseland was a native state and should be left as such. But the area adjacent to Southern Rhodesia, lying east and west of Livingstone, inhabited by the Tonga, could be transferred to that government if the European settlers in Southern Rhodesia so desired.¹⁷

Thus the policy of the British Government in respect of Huggins's request for amalgamation in 1937-9 was consistent with that laid down in this paper in 1931.¹⁸ After the War, of course, the British Government relented somewhat and, although still against amalgamation, did agree to Federation. One can only assume that the British defence interests held to be so important before the War were thought to be better served this way; how far the stability of the Southern Rhodesia Government and the increasing stature of Huggins influenced the change of policy will not be clear until the correspondence between the Southern Rhodesia and British governments for the period between 1941 and 1953 is available.

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¹⁶ Ibid., 'Future of Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia': Joint Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs and the Secretary of State for Colonies (Cabinet Paper 162/31), Apr. 1931, p.4.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.7.

¹⁸ C.O. 795/90[1937], 45104/3, Discussions between Secretary of State for Colonies and Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 3 Mar. 1937.



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