

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JS-16
Federation -- The Kenya View

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Dear Mr. Nolte:

The British considered joining their East African territories together from the earliest colonial days. In recent years, when it became apparent that the four countries would soon be independent, Federation assumed a new significance and their new African leaders began to discuss it with growing seriousness. Their talks, however, have not been conclusive; Federation seemed likely tomorrow at one moment and years away the next. Right now, after months of meandering discussion, these facts have emerged: President Nyerere of the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar wants a Federation; the leaders of Uganda are against it and, here in Kenya; the people, the Parliament and the leading Ministers are all for Federation, while Jomo Kenyatta, the Prime Minister and the most powerful man in the country, is not.

Britain talked of Federation almost from the first day she ruled more than one country in East Africa. But, in the past, the term meant a white-dominated union and Africans, with what voice they had, fought it bitterly. Just the mention of the subject in official circles could cause African emotions to erupt. In 1953, an apparently innocuous remark by the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttleton, "... nor should we exclude from our minds the evolution, as time goes on, of still larger unification, and even federation of the whole East African territory.", led to a political crisis in Uganda and the eventual exile of the Kabaka, the king of Buganda. However, towards the end of the 1950s, when Africans realized that their countries would eventually become independent, they began to consider the idea of an East African Federation and to discuss it seriously in such groups as Pafmea (the Pan African Movement for East and Central Africa).

If, in this rough summary, there is a point when these discussions became focused, it would be in June, 1960, when, at the second conference of independent African states in Addis Ababa, Julius Nyerere, there as an observer, declared, "We must confront the Colonial Office with a demand not for the freedom of Tanganyika and then for Kenya and then for Uganda and then for Zanzibar, but a demand for the freedom of East Africa as one political unit."

But although Britain paid no attention to Nyerere's plea and Tanganyika became independent in December 1961, the very fact of her independence brought federation one step closer. The British had established the East African High Commission in 1948 which administered certain inter-territorial services such as the railways and the postal system with the aid of a rubber-stamp Central Legislative Assembly (CLA). Tanganyika's independence necessitated a change in the High Commission's structure and, as a result of a conference held in June, 1961, it became the East African Common Services Organization (EACSO, see JS-7) with power transferred from the colonial Governors to the political leaders of Kenya, Tanganyika, and Uganda. The assenting Civil Servants were swept out of the CLA and replaced by the new generation of African politicians who were elected by the legislatures of their respective countries. The conference also decided to place the various inter-territorial services under the direction of committees composed of one Minister from each of the three territories. Thus, on all three levels; the executive, the legislative, and the administrative, EACSO became a truly federal body.

When Uganda became independent in October 1962, it seemed that the major remaining obstacle to federation was Kenya's colonial status. Knowing that the British Government looked kindly on an East African Federation, Prime Minister Obote of Uganda and the Vice President Kawawa of Tanganyika flew to London to convince the Colonial Office that the longer it delayed Kenya's uhuru, the dimmer the chances of federation were.

Whether this trip had any softening effect on Her Majesty's Government is not clear, but, in any event, Kenya became internally self-governing on 1 June 1963 and, four days later, the Prime Ministers of Kenya, Tanganyika, and Uganda issued their often-quoted "fifth of June" statement, pledging themselves, "to the political Federation of East Africa." The announcement disclosed the establishment of a Working Party, "which will prepare a framework of a draft Constitution for the Federation," and which, "will report back to a full Conference of East African governments." The leaders stated further that, "The three Governments, having agreed to the establishment of Federation this year, expect the British Government to grant Kenya's independence IMMEDIATELY." The statement ended with an invitation to Zanzibar and to, "any of our neighbours" to join the Federation in the future.

The brotherly euphoria that surrounded this declaration was not due to last long, although at first, things seemed to go well. During the rest of June, the Working Party met and instructed its lawyers to prepare a draft constitution for presentation to the three heads of state on the 29th of the month; the opposition party, the Kenya African Democratic Union, (Kadu) endorsed the statement; Duncan Sandys, the Colonial

Secretary, announced that his Government, "fully supported federation"; and there was even talk that Ethiopia and Somalia might join. Then, early in July, the first sign of trouble appeared. The Ugandan kingdom of Buganda, as we have seen, had been leery of a federation for some time and the Kabaka refused to join the next meeting of the East African heads of state. Two days later, Mr. Obote declared that the fifth of June statement did not commit Uganda to a federation. Tom Mboya, one of the members of the Working Party, quickly reassured the Press that the talks were actually, "ahead of schedule" and that there would soon be a full progress report on them.

Yet, as the Working Party continued its meetings, no reports were issued and there began to be rumours of greater difficulties than Mboya's calming remarks indicated. These were substantiated late in August when the leader of the Uganda delegation to the Working Party, A.A. Nekyon, bluntly stated that there would be no federation in 1963. Just three weeks later, at a press conference in Stockholm, President Nyerere expressed the same view, saying that he doubted whether federation would be achieved at the end of the year as he had once hoped.

Little progress was made in the time before Kenya became independent in December -- if anything, ground was lost. The three heads of state were to meet in Nairobi in the middle of September, but Mr. Obote begged off at the last minute, pleading illness suffered from, his Government's statement said, "the effects of overwork." A month or so afterwards, a Kenya Minister, Joseph Murumbi, stirred up a further flurry of excitement with the public remark that, if Uganda was not interested in federation, then perhaps Kenya and Tanganyika should go it alone. Murumbi's speech drew angry demands for an explanation from Uganda and, even though the Kenya Government hastily stammered that Murumbi was not speaking officially, many thought his speech accurately portrayed its real position.

Although, at the beginning of 1964, Burundi and Mauritius both stated that they would like to join an East African Federation, chances of it still appeared dim, so much so that, early in April, President Nyerere said that Federation, "would not come about this year," and that, "there may be one next year, but it is unexpected."

His next statement on the subject of Federation electrified all four East African capitals: in a newspaper interview Nyerere said that Tanganyika was considering withdrawing from the East African Common Market. After recovering from their shock, the leaders of Kenya, Uganda, and Zanzibar met hurriedly with Tanganyika in an attempt to stave off the biggest threat to Federation yet. It was rumoured that Tanganyika aimed to speed Federation along by this move, but, whatever her intention, an

emergency committee appointed by the heads of state shortly calmed matters by agreeing on the allocation of industries to each East African country and on a temporary quota system for certain items of inter-territorial trade.

Then, on 23 April, to the apparent surprise of Kenya and Uganda, the formation of the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar was announced. President Nyerere lost little time in declaring that the United Republic was just as much in favour of Federation as Tanganyika had been alone, but his assurances were followed by depressing news. After the final session of the Working Party which had met in Dar es Salaam during May, Mr. Nekyon airily stated that so few problems were left that its job was practically finished. Hopes rose until the United Republic Government, almost as if it were angry at Nekyon's hypocrisy, released a statement which explained frankly what had actually happened. It appeared that, instead of there being accord on practically all the issues, as Nekyon had so blandly said, Uganda, through him, had listed no less than ten points of disagreement, the most important of which dealt with foreign affairs, the distribution of legislative power in a bicameral legislature, the division of executive power between the Federal and State Governments, citizenship, and labor matters. More interesting still, and in even greater contrast to Nekyon's original remark, the statement quoted his countryman, Felix Onama, the chairman of the meeting, as saying that Uganda believed that Federation was not politically feasible and that the most she could agree to was a strengthening of EACSO. Commenting on the United Republic's statement, and editorial in the East African Standard said, "The areas of disagreement so eclipse the areas of agreement that one is left wondering whether any deep-rooted desire for fully fledged federation exists on Uganda's part."

Meanwhile, a group of Kanu Backbenchers who were angry because the Working Party had not told Parliament of its progress and who believed, as J.D. Kali, one of their leaders put it, "That unless something is done to achieve Federation, now, it may never come about," met with several United Republic M.P.s in an effort to prod their Governments into action. At the end of the meeting, they announced that they had reached agreement, "on all aspects of political Federation," and demanded that the heads of state meet within three weeks to, "publish a declaration on the Federation and then in 15 days to sign the federal instruments." The M.P.s also agreed that Kenya and the United Republic should federate without Uganda if necessary.

The reactions of the heads of state to these demands are instructive. President Nyerere said that the United Republic was, "fully committed to entering immediately into a Federation with Kenya and Uganda or with either alone." Mr. Obote growled that he and his country would not be pushed around, and to the surprise of many, Mr. Kenyatta dismissed the demands as

"ill-timed," saying that they, "could do grave disservice to the cause," and that he did not, "consider it necessary to fix yet any target date," as, "the declaration made in June 1963 on the formation of a federation still stands."

The matter came to a head in Kenya's House of Representatives in the middle of June when the Kadu Secretary General, Martin Shikuku, proposed a motion which urged the Government to "accelerate the machinery (for) the proposed East African Federation." A Kanu Backbencher then added the crucial phrase, "to such an effect that instruments of Federation may be ratified by the Kenya National Assembly not later than 15 August 1964." The Kenyatta Government strongly opposed both parts of the motion, but when, after two days of debate, the roll was counted, the Backbenchers and the Opposition carried it by a large margin.

And there the matter now stands. Mr. Kenyatta and several Ministers left for the Commonwealth talks in London shortly after this important vote. From London, they went on to the Organization of African Unity summit conference in Cairo after which they must return to face their rebellious party.

There is no doubt that the majority of the people that matter; i.e. the politicians, want Federation. Both parties, for example, made it a plank in their election platforms. Kanu said, "We shall build on the foundation of the East African Common Services Organization and of the East African Common Market to bring the peoples of Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar into closer political association." In its turn, Kadu stated that, "The establishment of a Federation in East and, perhaps also parts of Central Africa, will be discussed with our neighbours at the earliest possible date. Kadu are federalists and foresee a close degree of cooperation, particularly in economic matters, between all our neighbours ..." The Cabinet also supports Federation; one of its advisors says, "The principal Ministers, the strong ones, are all in favor of Federation and the weak ones will go along with whatever they say."

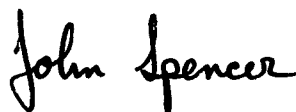
The Kanu Backbenchers' motion to speed Federation, although based partly on pique at not being kept up to date, was a genuine manifestation of the people's desire for closer union. "We suspected", Bildad Kaggia, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Federation, told me, "that something was wrong because the Government never gave us clear answers to our questions about the delay in agreeing to federate. The reasons for our actions are obvious -- we must have Federation with Uganda and Tanganyika or with either alone. It will give East Africa a strong defense -- look at how weak Tanganyika is now -- it will give us a louder voice in international affairs, and it will save the Common Services Organization and make it possible for our economics to grow."

If then, the Cabinet and the Parliament want Kenya to join with one or both of her East African neighbors to form a Federation, what is holding it up? The answer is quite simple -- Jomo Kenyatta is dead against it. He knows that the promise of Federation attracts investors and that to repudiate it would severely damage his image as the leading elder statesman in his part of Africa, so he supports it publically but he opposes it in private. There appear to be several reasons for this.

One of his Ministers says that what the Prime Minister actually wants is a Federation of all three East African countries, not just two, and that he is determined to have full agreement on all issues before Kenya federates. But there are others close to the situation who say that the real reason Mr. Kenyatta does not want Kenya to join an East African Federation is that, knowing he is certain to leave his present position to become its first leader, he is concerned that his successor here (who, if Parliament had its way now, would certainly be Oginga Odinga) will not run the country as he thinks it should be run. Also, reliable sources say that he has heeded his Kikuyu advisors who warn him that the power of their tribe would be greatly watered down in a Federation and that, therefore, Kenya should not join. Suggestions of this appeared in some of the speeches in the Parliamentary debate on Federation when several Members mentioned that, "certain people in Government" were afraid of being less important in a Federation.

And so, unlike Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who preferred "the easy comfort of the marriage bed to the hurly-burly of the chaise longue," Mr. Kenyatta wants to remain single. The chances are, for the time being at least, that he will have his way. True, there is the possibility that his Government may be forced to resign if it does not meet the 15 August deadline, but I doubt if the Kanu M.P.s really want this to happen. Mr. Kaggia himself says, "All we wanted to do was to give the Government a target date so it could collect itself." It is likely, then, that Parliament will pass some face-saving resolution again expressing its displeasure at the lack of progress towards Federation, but, in essence, giving the Kenyatta Government more time. As a result, in spite of all the posturing, Federation will not be one step closer.

Sincerely,



John Spencer

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