

Return — N9.1
W. G. Ballinger

Undated
(How Relations
Rehabilitate?)

The recent joint statement of the Dominions Office and the Prime Minister of South Africa is undoubtedly the most important step that has so far been taken in the course of the protracted negotiations between the Imperial Government and the Union of South Africa in regard to the desire of the latter to acquire the political control of the three British High Commission Territories in Southern Africa. That statement announces the formation of a joint permanent conference to consist of the three Resident Commissioners of the Territories and, on the Union's side, of the Secretary for Native Affairs and two of their officials. The function of this conference is to promote understanding and co-operation between the officials and through them the people of ^{the} Territories and the Union Department of Native Affairs to which the Territories will become administratively subject in the event of transfer. That in itself, is an important move; but much more important is the promise of a statement by the Union Government of the terms on which it proposes to ~~bargain~~ ^{negotiate} for the transfer of the Territories.

This promise is the first step that has been taken towards lifting the negotiations with regard to transfer out of the realm of speculative discussion into the realm of practical and concrete suggestion - a step long overdue. So far, while there has been a widespread acceptance of the fact that, geographically and economically, the whole of South
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Africa including the Protectorates is one and must eventually in actual fact achieve unity, the profound difference in declared policy of Britain and the Union of South Africa in regard to the claims and rights of native peoples has raised an apparently insuperable barrier to mutual agreement; and without any explicit statement on either side as to what might be regarded as acceptable conditions of transfer, the matter has tended to reach a deadlock in which there has always been a danger that temper^s, at least on one side, would begin to fray.

The promised statement should be of the greatest interest from more points of view than one. Setting out as it must, what the Union Government is prepared to do for the Protectorates in return for their political allegiance, it should also throw some light on the insistent desire of the Union to possess these Territories. At present the foundations of that desire are ~~extremely~~ problematical. All three of the Territories are essentially poor and backward. Everybody who has any knowledge of them agrees that the characteristic feature of their life for the last forty years has been stagnation. Old and wasteful methods of agriculture still prevail, maintained by tribal tradition and the force of tribal organisation which clings in Basutoland and Swaziland to an open field system of cultivation and a traditional crop necessitated by the practice of turning the cultivated fields into common pasturage after the harvest has been reaped. In Bechuanaland, a similar uneconomic and undiversified use of the land is enforced by a different set of circumstances. Unlike the Basuto^{and} the Swazi,
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who live in the midst of their fields, the Bechuana congregate in large towns, if mere aggregation of thousands of mud huts can be thus styled. Their fields and cattle posts lie at very considerable distances from the town, so that in the cultivating season, the people must abandon their urban homes for rural ones; but in the months between the reaping of one crop and ploughing in preparation for the next, the chief backed by tribal custom, gathers the people into the town again for an enforced inactivity of approximately four months.

Serious overcrowding in two of the territories adds greatly to the resultant poverty. In Basutoland, the only purely native territory of the three, in that ~~as~~^{no} European settlement is or has been permitted there, the pressure on land has jumped from 29.07 persons per square mile in 1904 to 47.99 in 1936. While these figures are not impressive as compared with usual densities of population in countries of older settlement they do represent a pretty serious pressure of population on sources of production in a country of extensive agricultural methods where more intensive methods are hampered by lack of education and lack of transport. Over the greater part of Basutoland, the pack-ox is still the main means of transport and reflects pretty adequately the tempo of the economic life of the community. In Swaziland, where, unlike Basutoland, two-thirds of the land is in European ownership or reserved for such ownership, the Swazis are also pressing heavily on their restricted resources and already a considerable number have to seek not only their livelihood but their homes on the

European farms of the territory because the tribal land cannot accommodate them. Here too, of course, wasteful methods, lack of education, and lack of marketing facilities reduce the value of the lands reserved to the tribe.

Thus at the present time, none of the Protectorates has anything much to offer except a field for lavish expenditure on all types of development which alone could put them on to some sort of efficient economic basis. What they have in fact to offer, already flows to the Union which has, at the present time, every economic advantage that could be derived from political control, and more in some directions than would be permissible if the Protectorates were in fact part of the Union; and that without the obligations and responsibilities, financial and other, which such control would involve. For instance to-day, the main commodity which all the territories have to export is labour. Unable to produce and market enough to pay their taxes and buy such commercial commodities as have, in spite of poverty, become part of their standard of living, the adult males of all these territories flock to the labour markets of the Union, mines and farms, to earn the money necessary to satisfy those demands. But the Union, in spite of its white labour policy, clamours continuously for more native labour than its own resources can supply - at least at the wages offered - and welcomes all that comes. It has, indeed, been suggested that political control is sought in order to increase the supply from these territories but that is extremely unlikely since already the supply exceeds what improvement the

native agriculture can afford and could only be increased through increased pressure, direct and indirect, which will scarcely be possible in any circumstances in which transfer is likely to take place.

On the other hand improved agriculture which is the natural line of development for the territories must and will mean increasing competition with the Union which is also a country of farmers. Such competition has already raised its head and has been dealt with very effectively, if not very sympathetically. For many years now, cattle which are the chief export commodity of Swaziland and Bechuanaland have been deprived of any entry into the Union except to the Johannesburg slaughter market in limited numbers and under prescribed regulations as to weight and a preliminary quarantine period - conditions that have effectively restricted the cattle trade of those territories. ~~Now~~ ^{Once} the territories become part of the Union, such restrictions will no longer be possible, and it is interesting to note that in some quarters that circumstance is already being ^{viewed} ~~received~~ with alarm. Last year when the matter of transfer was again in the forefront of political discussion, at the annual conference of one of the Northern Transvaal Farmer's Unions the President of the Union claimed to voice the anxiety of the farmers of the district in regard to incorporation when he said that it would be detrimental to the markets of their own farmers "It will only be a repetition of the South West African position" he stated "where the Union farmer finds himself forced to subsidise the export of South West African

farmers to prevent their ^{produce} pressure coming to the Union and
ruining our market".

But whatever the Protectorates do sell in Union markets whether it is native labour or unwanted agricultural produce, the money earned all returns again to the Union. In other words, in the commercial as in other fields, the advantages are already all on the side of the Union. To-day, practically the whole trade of the territories flows into Union channels. Without industries of their own, the territories purchase food, clothing, agricultural implements and anything else they have the money to buy from or through Union commercial houses. Before the depression, the trade of Basutoland alone amounted to £1,000,000 per annum, and during the depression, all three territories still spent in the region of that amount. Admittedly it is not an impressively large amount in itself, but it has its importance in the struggle of South African secondary industries to establish themselves. And it is all that the territories have to give. An increase in the general purchasing power of the people (alone can) increase this contribution to the Union's income and that can only come through a rise in the present wage rates paid in Union labour markets or through a development of the resources of the territories which postulates a capital expenditure which the revenues of the territories have not so far made possible.

Is the Union prepared to undertake this expenditure? Perhaps for the sake of some idea of prestige, or more probably the desire to establish a uniform native policy in South Africa,

the Government of the Union may be prepared to offer quite heavy contributions to the development of the territories, even at the cost of conflict with the labour interests of some sections of her own people and the agricultural interests of others. If they are, much of the opposition to transfer that has come from European sources will undoubtedly disappear. There is no guarantee, however, that native opposition will similarly fade away. It is doubtful whether any promise of development will be enough to remove the determined opposition of the vast bulk of natives, both inside the Protectorates and inside the Union, to incorporation. In fact there are some elements in that opposition to whom the mere prospect of hastened development would itself be an additional cause of opposition. It is a sad reflection on our imperialist methods that in the minds of large numbers of the older people at least, development of their resources means ultimate loss of their control of these resources. Hence in principle they oppose anything in the nature of development on an impulse of self-preservation.

But even among the more educated, suspicion plays a ~~very~~ large part in their opposition to incorporation. Aware of their own backwardness, passionately anxious for education, and already demonstrably able and willing to make sacrifices for their general advancement, there is yet one sacrifice they are not prepared to make for such advancement - their personal liberty. To-day, admittedly, the territories are poor, but they are peaceful. The gaols are not crowded with poll-tax defaulters and pass law offenders, and conflicts between police and people,

now a common occurrence in the Union, are unknown in the British territories. And even with those disadvantages, the Union Native is not demonstrably so much better off than the Protectorate Native. Only some 30 per cent of his children get any education, the men even of the Transkei have to go out to the mines to eke out their living, ^{and} malnutrition and disease are taking an ever increasing toll of all age groups ~~while~~ while ~~The~~ The Union Government insists that social services for natives shall be paid for out of native taxation, ^{while} ~~while~~ the declared paramountcy of native interests in native areas receives curious interpretation in the refusal of the Free State to grant trading licences to natives in native locations and the Government itself declares that it has no intention of establishing in native reserves industries that would compete with European industries.

But perhaps the ultimate ground of suspicion on the part of the natives is to be traced to the fact that, while there are many people in the Union of South Africa, itself who subscribe to the idea that native and European progress must go hand in hand, that justice and expediency alike necessitate the encouragement of the fullest development of which the native is capable, no political party in South Africa represents that view. To-day, the argument lies merely between a number of groups all of which subscribe to the doctrine of the paramountcy of European interests; and the sense of insecurity which the native people feel as a result of this circumstance will undoubtedly derive much reinforcement from the election campaign now in progress. In that campaign, the

typical plank in the Nationalist platform is the "generosity" of the Government to the natives, even with the limits of the very restricted field of rights left to those people by the Government's own policy embodied in the native legislation of two years ago.

In the minds of Protectorate natives there is still a deeply rooted suspicion that ~~you~~^{one} can pay too heavy a price for the prospect of progress.

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