

The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland

THE establishment of the new Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in October 1953 marks the emergence of a new and important political unit in Africa under the British Crown. The Federation commands special interest because it joins together three territories at different stages of constitutional advancement, and is based on the principle of partnership between the European and African inhabitants.

With an area of 485,973 square miles, the new Federation is one of the largest political units in Africa. Although the new Federation is located in the tropics, the climate of the two Rhodesias is temperate owing to the fact that the altitude is mainly over 3000 feet. The topography of Nyasaland is somewhat different, its chief characteristic being the long Rift Valley at the bottom of which lies Lake Nyasa. The climate tends to be more variable, and consequently the territory has been less attractive to European settlement.

The total population of the new Federation is approximately 6,470,000 with roughly one-third of the total in each territory. The white population forms only about 3 per cent of the total; there are about 145,000 persons of European descent in Southern Rhodesia, about 43,000 in Northern Rhodesia and about 4,300 in Nyasaland. Persons of Asian and mixed races amount to about 18,000 throughout the Federation. The density of the population varies considerably among the territories, the figures being fourteen persons per square mile in South Rhodesia, seven per square mile in Northern Rhodesia and forty-nine per square mile in Nyasaland.

Development Began in 1889

Development of the Rhodesias was begun by the British South Africa Company, which, in 1889, obtained a Royal Charter to promote, under the supervision of the High Commissioner of South Africa, "trade, commerce, civilization and good government in the area." In what is now Southern Rhodesia, a Legislative Council with some representative members was set up and subsequently twice enlarged. In 1920 the Legislative Council petitioned the United Kingdom Government for the establishment of responsible government. Before a new constitution was put into effect, however, a referendum was held to determine whether the colony should join the Union of South Africa. A majority voted in favour of responsible government, which was granted in 1923 when the territory was formally annexed by the United Kingdom as the Colony of Southern Rhodesia.

Southern Rhodesia is the most advanced of the three territories economically. Prior to the war, mining occupied a particularly important position in the economy, and gold was the most important mineral. During the period 1934-38 gold accounted for nearly 60 per cent of Southern Rhodesia's total exports. The picture has since changed considerably. Other minerals, particularly chrome and asbestos, have become relatively more important. Tobacco has replaced gold as the colony's chief export, accounting for 40 per cent of its exports in