

Notes and News

Partnership in Nigeria

SIR BERNARD BOURDILLON, G.C.M.G., K.B.E., in a paper read before the Dominions and Colonial Section of the Royal Society of Arts on February 15th, 1944, referred to the use of the word 'Partnership' in place of 'Trusteeship' to describe our relations with colonial peoples. While welcoming such a change in terminology, he pointed out that it should not be taken as indicating a change of policy. Economic partnership might be a new idea, but political partnership was a policy already being actively practised. If political partnership meant the education of the people in the management of their own affairs, with responsible self-government as the final goal, he was convinced that in Nigeria there were good grounds for the belief that the accomplishment of that goal would take place with less friction than had been experienced in some other parts of the British Empire. In his view, the system known as 'Indirect Rule' provided an excellent training in the art of government, and, by virtue of its elasticity, enabled the handing over of authority to proceed gradually.

Sir Bernard gave a brief description of the system of 'Indirect Rule' in Nigeria, and suggested that the merits of the system might be tested by the answers which could be given to such questions as: Have the native authorities real power? Are they efficient instruments of government, particularly in view of the accelerated programme of social and economic development which may be expected? Do the native authorities represent all shades of opinion and all legitimate interests?

With reference to the first question, naturally the actual power varied according to the capacity of the people, but the practice was to allot responsibility in excess of capacity rather than the reverse, and to allow people to learn by their own mistakes. With regard to the second question, although the efficiency of native authorities varied in different provinces, he would give an unhesitatingly affirmative answer, because the system secured, better than any other, the co-operation of the people themselves, without which effective government action was impossible. There were, of course, different types of native administration of varying efficiency. The type existing in the Northern Provinces, in which the head of the administration is the Emir, was thoroughly well constructed and well designed to carry out any policy entrusted to it. That in the Western Provinces was similar in some respects, though there were differences, due particularly to the different character of the people. But given a wise ruler and a good council, the native authority in the Western Provinces was capable of functioning admirably with very little guidance. The Eastern Provinces provided a different problem; the outstanding feature of the social structure being an intense individualism. It was possible that an increase in governmental activities might necessitate a change in the form of administrative partnership in the Eastern Provinces, but he was confident that the genius of the people would help to evolve something more effective, and indeed one or two possible lines of development were already appearing.

It had been suggested that the Government attached too much importance to ancient tradition and custom, with the result that progress had been hindered, the people had been kept more backward than they might have been, and discontent had been created among more advanced Africans who might have become leaders. Sir Bernard did not consider this criticism to be justified, and, quoting from a memorandum written by himself in 1939, pointed out that there were two criteria by which any native administrative system should be judged: 'It must be traditional and it must be acceptable', and the second of these was

more important than the first. If the people themselves wished to abandon or to remodel a traditional organization there was no reason why they should not do so. Further, although at one time the system of indirect rule had been viewed with suspicion by more advanced members of the community, it was now generally approved; some antagonism existed between the younger and more progressive elements and the older and more conservative, but the antagonism was less than might have been expected, and there was a real and conscious determination to avoid it. Various devices had been adopted, especially in the Western provinces, to secure the co-operation of the younger and better-educated men in the administration.

Sir Bernard then went on to discuss the share taken by Nigerians in the direction of major policy, as distinct from the partnership in administration which he had been describing. He pointed out that in a Crown Colony the direction of policy was in the hands of the Governor alone; there was no half-way house between this form of government and responsible self-government, and it was necessary to recognize that fact. There could be a gradual preparation for the change-over, but there could not be a gradual change-over. Therefore in examining the progress of partnership at this level in Nigeria the question to be considered was how far Nigerians share with the alien bureaucrats the duties of advising the Governor. The Governor was advised by his Executive Council, his Legislative Council, and the heads of departments and other senior officers. At present in Nigeria there were no African heads of departments and not many senior African officers, but the remedy for this was only a matter of time, there being no post from which an African was excluded on account of his race. In the Legislative Council the majority of unofficial members was African, and their influence on the passage of a Bill was really important, particularly in the finance committee, which consisted of unofficial members only, except for the chief secretary and the financial secretary. It was an important fact that not one farthing of the tax-payers' money could be spent without the prior approval of a body having a large majority of African members. On the Executive Council two of the three unofficial members were Africans.

In conclusion Sir Bernard indicated that there was need for certain reforms, such as a closer connexion between native authorities and the central legislature. The time had not yet come for the Nigerian peasant to elect his own representatives to the legislature, and the present unofficial members did not sufficiently represent the peasant class. The native authorities, however, could be trusted to protect the interests of the peasants if they were represented in the legislature. He did not consider that the native authority system was incompatible with self-government at the centre; if an alien bureaucracy could govern through indigenous institutions there was no reason why a native central government should not do the same or why native authorities should not become an integral part of a representative government.

Bekwai Education Committee (Gold Coast)

AN instance of the enthusiasm inspired by the work of Mr. Meyerowitz, formerly Supervisor of the Art Department at Achimota and now on the staff of the new Institute of West African Arts, Industries, and Social Science, comes from the small town of Bekwai in Ashanti. In 1941 the Headmaster of the local Methodist Mission school, having heard Mr. Meyerowitz outline his aims, launched a scheme to teach his pupils something of the indigenous arts and crafts. Financial support was given by a prominent European merchant who is well known in the Gold Coast for his generous interest in all educational activities. The scheme made such a promising start that it was decided to try and bring in the pupils of the three other Mission schools in the town. To this end a small 'Bekwai Education Committee' was formed in 1942 including the scheme's benefactor and a repre-