



“no serious work has been done”

“Le premier Octobre on va saisir le Camerun du Sud”

“firm agreement in black and white”

1 August 1961 | 1:21 a.m

**George Morgan Thomson's warning in
Parliament**

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George Morgan Thomson

Labour MP for Dundee East; made the 1
August 1961 warning.

new federation and the means by which that transfer was to be effected. The idea of such a conference, like that of the new federation, had originated not with his delegation but with the two parties concerned. It had therefore seemed to the sponsors of the draft resolution that account should be taken of the practical questions raised by the convening of such a conference. Mr. Foncha, the Premier of the Southern Cameroons, had even requested that the date should be postponed until 1 December 1961. The Indian delegation had objected and had insisted on 1 October; he hoped that the representative of Ghana, who at the previous meeting had proposed 1 November as the date, would not press that proposal.

78. The commission referred to in paragraph 6 of the draft resolution would not, he assured the Camerounian representative, in any sense be a political commission instructed to report to the General Assembly, but would simply be a commission of constitutional and administrative experts which would assist the parties concerned if they needed and asked freely for its assistance. The representative of Brazil had said that it should also be sent to the Northern Cameroons. He himself thought that no purpose would be served by such action, for the situation in that region was perfect-

82. The CHAIRMAN thought that the Committee might immediately take a vote on the draft resolution before it.

83. Mr. RAKOTOMALALA (Madagascar) asked why paragraph 6 of draft resolution A/C.4/L.685 provided for a commission of experts to be sent to the Southern Cameroons. The Southern Cameroons had, after all, replied in the affirmative when asked during the plebiscite if it wished to achieve independence by joining the Republic of Cameroun. If it acted on the basis of agreements which were outside its jurisdiction, the United Nations would, in a way, be penalizing the Southern Cameroons. In his view, private agreements between the Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroun were not the concern of the Committee, since the inhabitants had not stated their views on the subject.

84. He was very disappointed with the draft resolution that had been submitted by a number of States which he esteemed, including India, as certain passages therein constituted discrimination against the Republic of Cameroun.

85. Mr. ACHKAR (Guinea) said that he understood that the representative of India had accepted his amendment to paragraph 6 of draft resolution A/C.4/L.685.

First, then, is the question of the kind of government that is to be set up. There have been a number of statements from the Prime Minister of the Southern Cameroons, Mr. Foncha, and the President of the Cameroun Republic that they have agreed in general terms that the best form of government would be a federation. There can be no doubt that, given the difficulties facing the two countries, with their different systems of administrations and their different languages, federation is the only practicable system, certainly in the interests of the inhabitants of the Southern Cameroons. But there is no sort of clarity as to how far this is a definite commitment on behalf of the Cameroun Republic, and I should be grateful if the Minister could tell us how far the Cameroun Republic is committed to a federal form of government.

Hansard Column 1338

I know that in the Republic many voices are being raised to express a very different and much more alarming point of view. If the House will bear with me while I talk French for one sentence, I understand that "Le premier Octobre on va saisir le Camerun du Sud" is a familiar slogan. I am wondering how far this is an official slogan of the Government of the Cameroun Republic, and what our Government are doing to try to ensure that there is a firm agreement in black and white that there should be a proper federal system which will allow the two territories to work out their future harmoniously and gradually. I think that the House deserves much more information than we have been able to obtain through repeated questioning by hon. Members on both sides.

Tuesday 1 August 1961

1.21 a.m.
Mr. G. M. Thomson
(Dundee, East)

Can we have some information from the Government concerning what they are doing about the maintenance of law and order after 1st October? There was a story in the *Daily Express* earlier this week in which its correspondent in the Southern Cameroons stated:

“The Premier of the Southern Cameroons, Mr. Foncha, has appealed to Britain to let the troops stay when the British administrators move out.”

Indeed, I think that Mr. Foncha told the *Daily Express*:

“My Government and business interests have appealed to Britain three times, but Britain has refused.”

Is this true? Can we be told what requests have been made to the British Government about maintaining law and order after 1st October and what sort of response has been made?

Hansard Column 1340

I must confess that the information which I receive is very disturbing. A number of hon. Members on both sides of the House have been pressing this matter on the Government by Questions in recent months. I have here a report from one of the Cameroon newspapers of 1st July giving a statement by our Commissioner in the Southern Cameroons who refers to the questions that we have been asking in the House about British troops staying on there and law and order being maintained. He says:

“I have been advised that there has been no change in Her Majesty's Government policy in this respect and that it is definitely the intention of Her Majesty's Government to withdraw the British troops on 1st October.”

As I was saying, I was anxious to raise with the Government the situation in the Southern Cameroons. As the House will know, this is a Territory for which we operate a trusteeship under the United Nations. The Southern Cameroons chose in a United Nations plebiscite on 11th February of this year to join with the Cameroun Republic, a former French Territory. The United Nations in its wisdom decided that the union between the Southern Cameroons and the Cameroun Republic should take place on 1st October this year. This is a very short period indeed even in the most favourable circumstances but the circumstances here, as the Minister will agree, are in many ways anything but favourable.

The problem of uniting these two territories would in any event be difficult. They are two territories of completely different cultures, with different political systems, the one English-speaking and the other French-speaking in the language of its administration. There are extremely complex problems in bringing these two countries together within one national State. So far as I can discover, no serious work has been done on joining these countries and getting down to the hard problems of bringing them together. So far only a number of very general declarations have been made about the kind of framework that might be proposed. In these circumstances a potentially very dangerous situation has arisen.

— George Morgan Thomson
Hansard Column 1335

But it was decided that this trusteeship, which we had held for forty years, should terminate on 1st October, 1961, when the Southern Cameroons would join the Cameroun Republic. This is a far more complicated question than that of simple independence; it is a question both of granting independence and of creating a new unit from the Cameroun Republic and the Southern Cameroons. In the resolution passed by the United Nations, we as the administering authority were invited, together with the Governments of the Southern Cameroons and the Cameroun Republic, to initiate discussions with a view to finalising before 1st October the arrangements by which the agreed and declared policies of the parties concerned would be implemented.

Since this resolution was passed, there have been several discussions between Mr. Foncha, the Premier of the Southern Cameroons, and the President of the Republic, Mr. Ahidjo. There have been further tripartite discussions between ourselves, the Cameroun Republic and the Southern Cameroons, and, as the hon. Member said, there will be a resumption of these talks this very weekend.

Column 1347

The hon. Gentleman has made the astonishing comment that it should be left to the happy chance that Mr. Ahidjo may read HANSARD and hear of the suggestion that an approach for a breathing-space should be made to the United Nations. Are not we a party? Have not Her Majesty's Government, through their trusteeship, a direct interest in these tripartite negotiations for a future settlement? Is it not possible for our representative to put this proposal at the discussions and try to achieve a joint approach to the United Nations?

Column 1348

The Government have been guilty of neglect in a number of different instances. They should have fought much harder than they did at the United Nations in the Trusteeship Council for a third choice being offered to the peoples of the Southern Cameroons when the plebiscite took place. The fact was that both the Prime Minister of the Southern Cameroons and the Leader of the Opposition there, though they had some differences between themselves, were anxious that there should be sufficient breathing space for the Southern Cameroons to negotiate with the Cameroun Republic proper arrangements for union and that they should not be suddenly forced into the kind of union which may well be thrust upon them without adequate preparation.

I appreciate the difficulties of our getting our way in the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations, but it does not seem to me from reading the debates there and from what I have been able to gather that Her Majesty's Government made nearly as big an effort to back up the elected leaders of the Southern Cameroons in facing up to this problem.

According to the last Trusteeship Report which the Government made, out of 6,829 civil servants in the Southern Cameroons, 129 were British and 880 were other Africans apart from Cameroonians. I take it that they were mostly Nigerians. This means that 1,000 expatriates who, I take it, are the top civil servants in the Southern Cameroons, the people holding the key positions in the administration, are, by and large, to be withdrawn or are going to withdraw themselves on 1st October. This gives one an alarming picture of a kind of Congo chaos which may develop in this small country if adequate steps are not taken to fill the posts held by these people. A number of us want to know from the Government tonight what steps are being taken to carry on the essential administration of the country during the period that the unification arrangements are being carried through.

Thirdly, one comes to the question of security. Here, of course, first and foremost one is dealing with the safety of our own people, men, women and children, in that country. According to the correspondent whom I quoted earlier, the women and children are already very largely, being evacuated from the territory, and arrangements are being made for those men staying behind to barricade themselves in the clubs and other communal buildings in the places where they live and to be ready to face a dangerous situation if it arises.