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CABINET

SOUTHERN CAMEROONS

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

1. My colleagues will recall the anxieties felt in the summer over the situation which was likely to arise in the Southern Cameroons when it joined the Republic of Cameroun on 1st October.
2. It will be remembered that the Southern Cameroons which had been under United Kingdom trusteeship and was administered as part of Nigeria voted in a plebiscite last February to gain independence by joining the neighbouring Republic of Cameroun, which was formerly under French trusteeship. This decision was confirmed by the United Nations in April.
3. The Republic had been struggling for years with Communist-inspired terrorist organisations and it had been necessary to keep a battalion of British troops in the Southern Cameroons to prevent the troubles from spreading across the border. It appeared all too likely that when the battalion was withdrawn, as it had to be on 1st October, terrorism would spread to the Southern Cameroons at once.
4. It appeared all too likely also that the leaders in the Southern Cameroons would not be able to agree on the terms of unification with President Ahidjo and his Ministers in the Republic. If that happened they might make an unholy alliance with the terrorist and Left-wing parties in the Republic to overthrow President Ahidjo's Government. Communism would thereby gain a fresh and substantial foothold in West Africa.
5. In the face of these gloomy prospects we feared that nearly all the British

officials in the Southern Cameroons whose contracts expired on 1st October would be unwilling to remain. The country could not run without them and if they went it might well dissolve into chaos. This would—among many other things—imperil the British investment in the country of about £20 millions.

6. Some of these fears may well revive later; but so far none of them have been realised. Mr. Foncha, the President of the Southern Cameroons, had a series of meetings with President Ahidjo throughout the summer and there were two tripartite meetings in which the United Kingdom also took part. Thanks largely to the statesmanship of President Ahidjo a form of Federal Constitution was worked out which was acceptable to Mr. Foncha. The two States will retain their separate existence but all major powers will be in the hands of the Federal authorities. The Federal Constitution is very much of the modern French type in that the President will be executive in the fullest sense. There is a Vice-President who is in fact Mr. Foncha) but he only performs such functions as the President may bestow upon him. The Prime Ministers of the two States and of the Federal Government are appointed by the President and he can remove Ministers if he wishes to do so. Federal Ministers are not responsible to the legislature.

7. On the security side very close co-operation was established between the Commanding Officer of the British battalion (the 1st Battalion of the Grenadier Guards) and the two senior officers of the Republic who are still French. Careful arrangements were made for an orderly handover to at least equal numbers of forces from the Republic. The handover went in fact very smoothly. The Guards were withdrawn at the beginning of October and there have been no reports of any-serious incidents since then.

8. Because of the improved prospects about 50 of the British staff, or rather more than one-third, have decided to stay on. As long as they remain this may be just sufficient to keep the machine of government going in the Southern Cameroons, now that many services have been taken over by the new Federal Government. Mr. Field, the Commissioner, *i.e.*, the head of the Administration "and representative of The Queen, had of course to be withdrawn on 30th September but some other senior officials are remaining. Great credit is due to Mr. Field for the way in which he carried out a most difficult and invidious task.

9. As to external affairs, the sympathies of the present Government of the Federation are with the moderates. President Ahidjo sent to represent it at the United Nations a former Minister of the Southern Cameroons. President Ahidjo and Sir Abubakar, the Prime Minister of Nigeria, have both been most anxious that

there should be friendly relations between the new Federation and Nigeria. Nigeria has been helpful in various matters to the Cameroons and the two countries are in fact on cordial terms.

10. The banana producers in the Southern Cameroons are dependent on the United Kingdom for a market. We are continuing imperial preference until 1st October next. The arrangements thereafter will have to be considered as soon as the Federation has proceeded further with the harmonisation of the tariffs of its two constituent States.

11. The new Federation will of course have its troubles. The terrorist threat has by no means been eliminated and the country will be very short of money. In accordance with a Cabinet decision we are making a parting gift of £500,000 to the Southern Cameroons (C.C. (61) 36th Conclusions, Minute 6) subsequently increased to £575,000 to enable the salaries of British officials staying on to be increased when the cost of living rises. But this will not go far to meet the deficits of the Southern Cameroons, let alone of the Federal Government which is now to be superimposed on the two State Governments. The Republic has always been heavily subsidised by France and we hope that France will now support the Federation too. Hers is indeed bound to be the major influence in it since the Republic is five times as large as the Southern Cameroons and the federal currency will be a franc currency. But the French are showing some reluctance to increase their already substantial contribution.

12. It would be unwise to make any complacent prophecies. There are bound to be economic difficulties and we must expect that the terrorists will take advantage of any weaknesses to renew their attacks. But we can at present record that the transfer of power went smoothly and that we have been spared the embarrassment of a collapse into anarchy, which would have jeopardised the merger of the two territories and compromised our withdrawal.

H.

*Foreign Office, S.W 1,
24th November, 1961.*