

CONFIDENTIAL

168

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

Printed for the Cabinet March 1961

*C.C. (61) 36
16th March 1961*

Copy No 32

CABINET

THE CAMEROONS UNDER UNITED KINGDOM TRUSTEESHIP

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES

In accordance with decisions of the United Nations, plebiscites were held in the British Cameroons on **11th and 12th February**. The people had a choice between joining Nigeria and joining the Cameroun Republic. In the Northern Cameroons the vote was 3 to 2 for joining Nigeria and in the South 7 to 3 for joining the Republic.

2. The United Kingdom Government remain as the Administrating Authority until the United Nations have considered the results and agreed with us on the date for termination of our Trusteeship. The United Nations will take this question at their current session, probably after Easter.

3. Nigeria is pleased that the North has chosen to stay where it has been for the last 40 years and has accepted the loss of the South with good grace. The Government of the Cameroun Republic were anxious to win the North and probably would not have been sorry to lose the South, which is expected to bring a reinforcement to the opposition elements in the politics of the Republic. The Republic has only recently achieved a precarious peace after a long period of Communist-inspired disturbances. Her reaction to the result in the North has been highly emotional.

The Northern Cameroons

4. The Cameroun Republic will challenge the validity of the plebiscite in the North at the United Nations. It should be possible for us to rebut her allegations but the Republic will probably be able to rally the support of the other French Community States and also of France herself, who will be anxious to demonstrate to the Community that their ties with France really mean something and that they have a great power to rely on for support if they have difficult matters to pursue in the United Nations. If the Republic presses these things

seriously they will come into conflict with Nigeria—to say nothing of bedevilling Nigerian relations with France yet further—and a festering situation might arise between two neighbouring states on the west coast of Africa, one of them a major Commonwealth country in whose influence for stability and good in Africa we have all placed such great hopes. I hope that the report of the United Nations Plebiscite Commissioner will vindicate the impartial conduct of the plebiscite and that the result of the vote will be upheld. But developments in the United Nations are unpredictable.

5. Administratively the return of the Northern Cameroons will be straightforward and all our interests (financial as well as political) lie in handing it over as quickly as possible. We may be able to do this in May or June and we are already discussing these matters with the Nigerian Government.

The Southern Cameroons

6. This is a much more difficult problem and the manner in which the Southern Cameroons should join the Cameroun Republic has not yet been worked out in detail. A federal form of association is in mind but more precise formulations have not yet been arrived at. The establishment of a federation is bound to present great difficulties both because of political differences between the two sides and because for the past 40 years one territory has been developed on French lines and the other on British. Moreover the present Government of the Republic are not too securely based. The Communist-inspired Union des Populations Camerounaises and One Kamerun parties are a constant threat. Nevertheless, the United Nations will want to get Trusteeship ended as soon as possible, at the latest by the end of this year. In spite of the practical difficulties I am sure that our position must be that the decisive vote in the plebiscite should be implemented as soon as possible.

7. Officials, together with the Premier of the Southern Cameroons, have just held preliminary conversations with the Government of the Cameroun Republic. These have not produced firm solutions to problems, but have helped to clarify questions which will remain to be settled. I am considering with the Foreign Secretary how the next round of discussions should be pursued but I think it is important that we should try to keep the initiative.

8. One thing we must watch is that a wrangle over the North does not hold up things over the South and that on the other hand we are not saddled with the North until we can complete arrangements in respect of the South. At present, however, it seems that the Cameroun Republic will co-operate on the South despite their attitude on the North.

9. I expect there will have to be a full-scale conference later on in regard to the South with which we and the United Nations should be associated (though the Government of the Cameroun Republic are not in favour of the United Nations playing a major role), and Nigeria as well so far as matters in which she was involved remain to be settled. It might conceivably then be agreed that a Provisional Federal Authority should be established to whom sovereignty could be transferred. It is too early at the present stage to say just what will happen.

10. Among the practical questions are the following:

- (i) **Staff.**—We have borrowed on payment a substantial number of staff from Nigeria. I understand that the Prime Minister of Nigeria is willing for us to continue to use them (subject to the wishes of the individuals concerned) until the end of Trusteeship and for the Southern Cameroons to continue to have them after that provided satisfactory arrangements can be made and provided conditions do not deteriorate, until the territory can make its own arrangements. This is very welcome. It will probably be necessary, however, for us in some way to underwrite the conditions of service of these staff in order to persuade them to remain.
- (ii) **Police.**—The present police force is a segment of the Nigerian Federal Police. The rank and file are entirely Cameroonian and there is good reason to hope that Nigeria will agree to their transferring to the new authority. It may be necessary to increase their numbers in some way.
- (iii) **Defence.**—At present a battalion of the King's Own Border Regiment and a detachment of the Royal Air Force are in the Southern Cameroons. I would expect that United Kingdom forces would be withdrawn at the end of our Trusteeship but the Premier of the Southern Cameroons is pressing for us to train a Southern Cameroons unit of the Federal force and it may be necessary to investigate whether we could make available a training mission. The relationship with the French-trained forces in the Republic will need careful working out. The French are maintaining a battalion of their own forces in the Republic and may also be able to assist in training.
- (iv) **Money.**—The Cameroun Republic is heavily subsidised by the French and the Southern Cameroons has a deficit running at a rate of about £3/4 millions a year which we underwrite (so far it has been met from the territory's own reserves). We shall have to help during the remaining months of our Trusteeship and very likely we shall have to consider some further help after Trusteeship has ended. I understand that the French think it likely that their agreements with the Republic will apply to the unified State. I am sure, however, that we shall have to continue some

form of commitment ourselves—it would not be great—in order to indicate that we are shouldering what others may feel to be a moral responsibility of ours. I do not think that we can look for much financial help in the transitional period from others. The United States Government have many demands on them and are bound to expect us to share the main burden with the French during the initial stages. The West Germans may later be able to help but we must first ensure that the new State is established. This cannot be left to the Germans. In any case, as I have said above, we shall probably have to underwrite the staff in some way. If we do not, there is a major risk of collapse in a very important corner of Africa. Quite apart from anything else we must do everything possible to prevent collapse on Nigeria's border.

- (v) **Preferences.**—There will also be the question whether we can continue Imperial Preferences to the Southern Cameroons after the South has joined up with the Republic. I can see the arguments against this but I think it may be necessary to continue Imperial Preference, which in fact relates mainly to bananas, for a transitional period. I am not yet ready to submit precise proposals on this.

Discussions with other States

11. Officials have discussed with the French both in London and in Paris and the general indications are that, as far as the Northern Cameroons is concerned, the French will not be on our side in the United Nations discussions. It is, however, in our interest that they should continue to enjoy the confidence of the Cameroun Republic and maintain the material support which they give her. We should not wish to quarrel with the French at the present time; rather we shall have to understand their position. There have also been some preliminary contacts in Washington with the Americans to whom we have explained the line which we expect to follow in the United Nations but nothing further. We have had very frank discussions with the Nigerians and have informed them fully of our thinking and of the line the Republic is expected to take. We have assured them of our intention to keep them fully informed and consult them on the situation as it develops.

12. I now invite the Cabinet to endorse the general line of procedure which I have outlined above and to authorise me to explore further on the lines indicated the matters which I set out in paragraph 10. The Treasury are aware that there will be financial implications for Her Majesty's Government.

I. M.

Colonial Office, S.W.J,
15th March, 1961