

The Importance of Owen Falls

The extraordinary importance of the Suez dispute to the Commonwealth has been well demonstrated in this office by the numerous references to it by our correspondents. From Uganda we have received a report of the discussion following a question from Mrs. Barbara Saben in the last session of Legislative Council. "Is Government aware of the strategic importance of Owen Falls as a factor in world politics?" she asked. "And are adequate precautions being taken to safeguard the dam's security?" Acting Chief Secretary G.B. Cartland replied that they were, but Mrs. Saben remained unconvinced. She said afterwards, "By closing the dam's sluices we could cut Egypt off from White Nile water indefinitely. They would go to any lengths to prevent that happening".

Our Uganda Correspondent points out that the Owen Falls Dam controls only one source of the Nile. By far the greater flow of water comes down the Blue Nile, which rises in Ethiopia. The great seasonal spates, which give Egypt her floods, are from the latter river. The White Nile, fed by the huge bulk of Lake Victoria, flows steadily throughout the year. When the Blue Nile is in spate, White Nile waters are dammed back in the Sudan. They are released as the Blue Nile flow falls off.

The Blue Nile is high during the winter months. If the Owen Falls sluices were closed in September, therefore, the effect would be felt by Egypt next spring. This would give her plenty of time to think things over without any great harm done. If the Owen Falls sluices were opened again, the flow could be speeded up to fill the Sudan reservoir in time for its spring opening. Alternatively, the Owen Falls sluices could remain closed for years before the vast Lake Victoria rose sufficiently to force them to be re-opened.

(New Commonwealth, September 17, 1956).

2480/4 1552

work done 15/18