

**RHODESIA'S**  
COLIN CLEAT

**OPPRESSIVE**

**INTERESTS**

**& SETTLERS**



THE RHODESIAN GOVERNMENT'S THREAT of a unilateral declaration of independence, and the British Government's counter-threat have for well over a year now provided almost all the drama and the suspense in Central Africa. With how deliberate an eye for effect this drama has been contrived it is possibly too early to say — some of the cruder parts like Mr. Evan Campbell's moving valedictions in London may not come out of the prompt book — but certainly to attract attention, to hold it by keeping the outcome in constant doubt has been the general and controlled intention of the Rhodesian government and it has been achieved now with the greatest success for more than a year. The British Government has been drawn into the play and made to say its lines, now blustering now wheedling, now proclaiming its intention to the world, now sending its High Commissioner round to Mr. Smith's office ostentatiously unprovided with script or scrippage. The Rhodesian settlers have applauded each new phase of the echo; the Africans themselves have waited breathless, sure that one side or the other must soon be provoked into actions which will break the situation open and bring them to power wafted by the winds of change. The O.A.U. consisting mainly of countries where dreams of this sort really came true, is avoiding Pan-Africanist responsibilities by building its Rhodesian policy around the threat of U.D.I. and retaliation to it and so joining in the charade.

To take part in the U.D.I. game, either among the gentlemen or among the players, means to help Mr. Smith to maintain the status quo and his own position in Rhodesia. Simplifying — though not so far as the U.D.I. game simplifies — we may distinguish three main groups in Rhodesia: the white settlers; the Africans; and what we may call the Interests. The white settlers are wage or salary earners, farmers, shopkeepers. They have a common interest in preventing African economic and social advancement as small independent entrepreneurs or as white-collar employees and so increasing competition either on the labour or the produce markets. This would mean a drop in the absolute standards of white living or, assuming an expanding economy (though the economy has not been expanding since the late '50s) in the relative economic position of whites. The Africans obviously have opposite interests — their own economic advancement either as independent producers (in agriculture) or as employees. The room for advancement as employees is large since at present the average wage of the Europeans is more than ten times that of the Africans. Conflicts of interest within the African group are bound to increase in future, especially between the professional and salaried African middle class on the one hand and the African peasant and worker on the other, but at present these still seem to be unimportant.

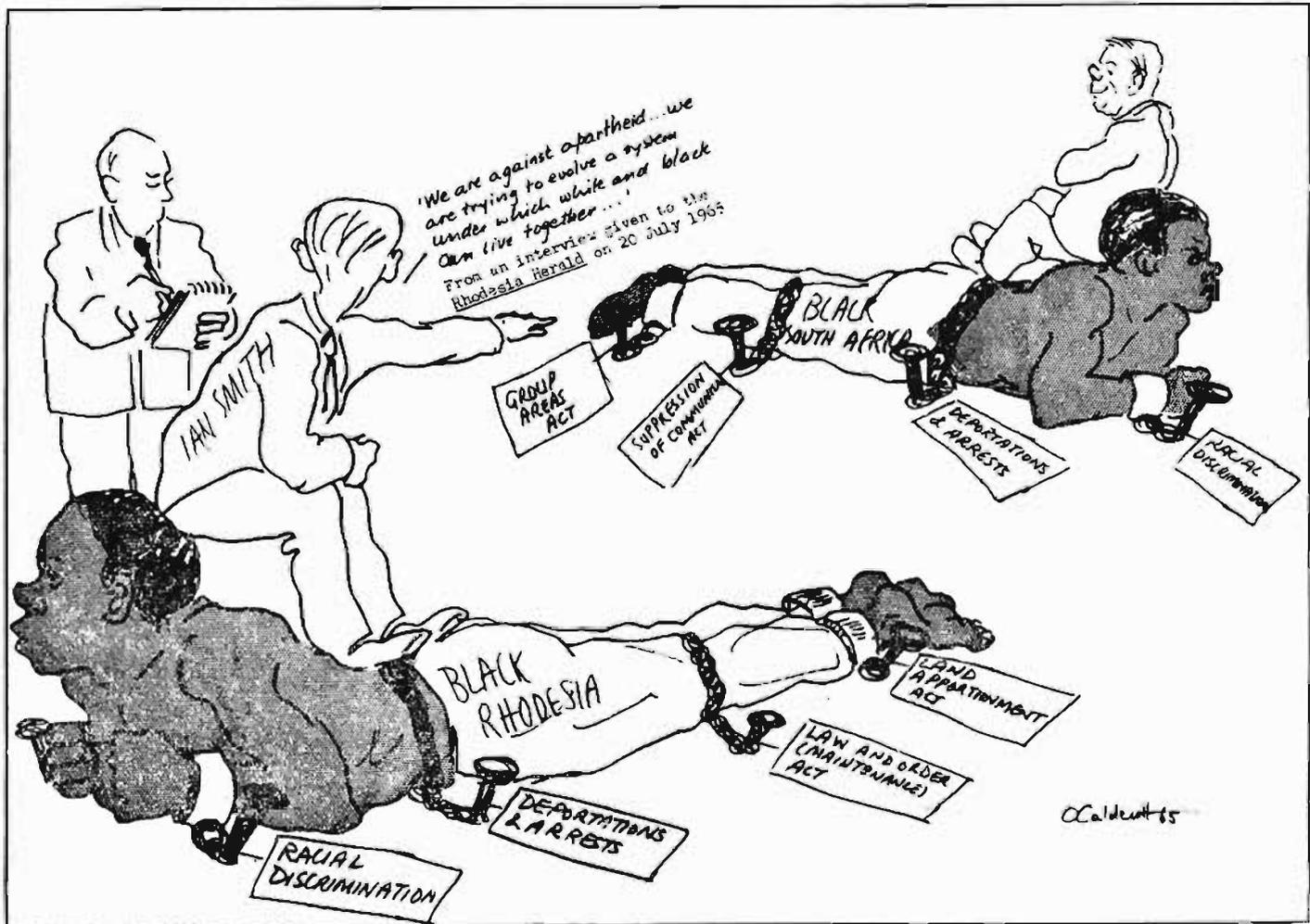
THE INTERESTS, TO WHICH in the last count the British Government is sensitive, can be identified with the Rhodesian Establishment, if we remember that the Establishment in a colony is the local face of fundamentally metropolitan interests. It is Big Business and Finance, the top civil servants, the Churches, the main newspapers (which are not Rhodesian owned) and the University. In the conflict

between settler and African the Interests have pursued a policy not so much of neutrality as of shifting opportunism, making of law and order an end in itself. They do not compete with the Africans or the settlers but they benefit from competition among them and between them. Thus Big Business and finance clearly have an interest in African economic advancement, which would bring about greater competition in the skilled labour market and possibly in the produce markets as well. Controlled political advancement of the African middle class would at the same time help to confirm the status quo. On the other hand the Interests are bound to support the Settlers against African claims for advance which seem to threaten law and order or their own economic power within the system or, indeed, the system itself. Big Business is not always so preoccupied with law and order in colonial or ex-colonial territories of the "enclave type" based on large plantations and mines — witness the Congo. But in Rhodesia capitalist interests are tied to local production for local markets and therefore the unhampered flow of labour and goods throughout the country and to and from neighbouring countries is essential to their functioning.

These Interests have shaped Rhodesia's political evolution since the war. From the early '50s the unrest which has led to the African Nationalist movement, drawing strength from rural discontent over pressure on the land and from the rapidly growing African working class, became a threat to the existing economic order. The Interests which at this time controlled the political as well as the economic power in Rhodesia attempted a programme of reform, first under the Todd and later under the Whitehead Governments. These reforms which consisted essentially of measures to promote competition between black and white failed because the settlers could, within the existing legal and institutional framework, exert pressure to block them. The failure in turn led the African Nationalists to reject the whole reformist approach to the Rhodesian racial problem. The African middle class was too small and undeveloped to break away from the Nationalists and make an effective alliance with the Interests against the settlers.

With the slackening of economic expansion in the late 50s and early '60s, such attempts at reforms threatened not only the relative but also the absolute economic position of the white settlers and they were abruptly brought to an end by the ousting of the Whitehead Government in 1962. With the victory of the Rhodesian Front at the polls, the Interests lost control of the political machinery. Throughout the period of Field's premiership the settlers remained somewhat astonished by this sudden achievement of political power. The African Nationalists still enjoyed a degree of freedom in organisation for Field pursued a policy markedly less repressive than that of the Whitehead Government and they were able to exert some pressure for constitutional advancement upon the U.K. Government. At the same time, the Interests fearing that hardening white dominance might plunge the country into unrest and civil warfare looked for some alternative to right wing settlers rule. For a while they seem to have thought that in ZANU they had found a form of nationalism controlled by middle class Africans with which an alliance could be formed.

They still took it for granted that in spite of a temporary resistance by the settlers, transition to African government was inevitable in a few years. This assumption underlies the attitude of



the main Rhodesian newspapers and the action of the British Government at this period. Uncertainty, economic stagnation, and the resulting emigration of whites, all weakened the R.F. regime. The necessity felt by the rank and file of the party to consolidate their power against the possible alliance between a moderate and "acceptable" section of the African Nationalists and the Interests found expression in the more militant government led by Ian Smith.

SMITH HAS IN FACT succeeded by means of a series of threats in reversing the attitude of the Interests towards reforms and African advancement in general. That is to say over the last eighteen months both business and finance in Rhodesia and the British Government have moved from the belief that economic and political stability in Rhodesia demands steady liberalisation towards majority rule to a belief that it depends on finding a *modus vivendi* with the Smith Government. This has come about partly because Smith has been able to arrest and restrict Mr. Nkomo and the African Nationalist leadership (it was over this immediate issue that he supplanted Field) without widespread disorders in the country and partly because he has been able to issue and maintain his own bluff of white settler violence — the threat of U.D.I. Thus he has left the Nationalists with no alternative but violent resistance and has brought the Interests over to his side by demonstrating that he can maintain law and order. The hard core of Rhodesian industry is controlled directly or indirectly by British capital. The threat of U.D.I. was and is a warning that no compromise between the Interests and the Africans at the expense of the white settlers is possible without endangering the economic position of the Interests themselves.

The results of the May election have brought the formal political position into line with the consolidation achieved by Smith through the support of the Interests which have now relinquished all desire

to secure reforms and are willing to support the status quo however oppressive. So, instead of the compromise found elsewhere in British Africa between the Africans and the Interests at the expense of the white settlers, for the time being in Rhodesia there is a compromise between the settlers and the Interests at the expense of the Africans.

There can be little doubt however that the Africans realise that they cannot now move out of their present situation by reopening negotiations for an alliance with the Interests against the settlers. Furthermore the Interests with the utter defeat and the disbanding of the Rhodesian Party have no political wing at all inside Rhodesia. And the British Government has made it clear to the Nationalists through Mr. Bottomley that the only course they can adopt which will satisfy Britain is to participate in the working of the present constitution—that is, to add their support along with everyone else's to the status quo. The Africans have also learned from observing the events of the last year that the Interests are responsive to threats of violence only if they can and will be carried out.

The violence present in the situation is already very great. No one supposes the present regime rests on consent. Even the savage legislation of the last seven years is insufficient to control the country without states of emergency almost continuously in one area or another. The political and economic situation condemns the majority of Africans to hopeless poverty and many to death by starvation or the diseases of malnutrition. Yet the only way of moving the Interests and the British Government is by disrupting law and order. The form which violence will take has been determined by the banning of political parties, the arrest of leaders and by the overwhelming military strength of whites. The kind of terrorism which now seems inevitable will of course confirm to the settlers, to the press controlled by the Interests and to many liberals the essential savagery of the African. But as far as can be seen only if terrorism drives the whites into such excesses in the attempt to suppress it that the stability of the country is shaken will the Interests withdraw their support from the regime.