

Smith's Blank Cheque

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THE OVERWHELMING VICTORY of the Rhodesian Front, led by strong-man Ian Smith, in the Colony's general elections on 7th May, meant the end of the multi-racial opposition Rhodesian Party, led by David Butler. White R.F. candidates won every one of the 50 A roll seats elected by a 97,000-strong roll, the monetary and educational qualifications of which are pitched so high as to exclude all but a couple of thousand Africans. The thumping majorities showed a 29% swing away from the party which under Sir Edgar Whitehead had governed the country until December 1962. Mr. Ian Smith was thus given the blank cheque he had asked for to do whatever he thinks fit, including making an illegal unilateral declaration, to obtain Rhodesia's independence from Britain.

In the contests for the 15 seats elected by the predominantly-African B roll (11,000 strong), five Independents (white Dr. Ahrn Palley with a bigger majority than any of the African candidates) and 10 African R.P. members, were elected. Thus the Parliamentary leader of the R.P. is now black, and that Party, unlikely to retain the support of its former white members, will probably wind itself up in the near future.

WHEN THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER Garfield Todd was ousted from the leadership of the Southern Rhodesian governing party in 1958 for being too liberal in colour matters, and when in the ensuing election his United Rhodesian Party failed to win a single seat, it was clearly demonstrated that the white electorate had no intention of practising the doctrine of "racial partnership" to which they were then paying lip service. The May election results seven years later have simply confirmed and underlined this. The only new factor in the present situation is that the whites are now being more honest with themselves and the outside world since they dropped the hypocrisy about "multiracialism" which had camouflaged their true colours during the decade when Rhodesia was part of the ill-fated Federation. The settlers' chief reason for wanting independence is to ensure that Britain will not "interfere" by imposing a democratic system in the Colony.

Rhodesian-born Ian Smith, with his flat, clipped Rhodesian accent and expressionless voice and face, has in the last year done a remarkable job in canalising latent white nationalism into a strongly-flowing stream. He has made it respectable for whites to say openly what they really think about non-whites, and white insults to blacks, with remarks like "Go back to your trees" are now *de rigueur* even in Parliament. At a press conference the day after the elections, Mr. Smith was asked what time limit he set on Africans achieving majority rule. He replied: "If we get to a stage where eventually we have a take-over by Africans, we will have failed in our ideas as far as this country is concerned."

THIS IS, OF COURSE, the fundamental issue, and the whites are being quite rational in their determination to hang on to absolute political power. Their refusal to accept the possibility of black rule, not only now or in ten or 15 years' time but *ever*, is under-

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standable. They cannot reasonably be expected voluntarily to give up the positions of privilege and the high standards of living which they enjoy in Rhodesia. With few exceptions — professional men, senior executives and wealthy businessmen, for example — Rhodesian whites are fully aware that Africans could comparatively quickly be trained to replace them, and that should an African government come to power they would have to compete on, at best, level terms with Africans. Few could expect to be able to live as comfortably anywhere else in the world should they emigrate. Consequently they will oppose bitterly any moves which might conceivably lead to a sharing, let alone a handing over, of political power to the four million Africans.

Among the many defects of the present constitution is the fact that it does not entrench a minimum proportion of African-elected B roll Parliamentary seats. There is nothing to stop Smith from increasing the number of white-elected A roll seats from the present 50 to 100, and reducing the number of B roll seats to one, if he is so minded; Britain has no legal rights under the 1961 Rhodesian constitution to interfere with any such move. But the Rhodesian Government can only change the *entrenched* Constitutional clauses by obtaining, in addition to the two thirds Parliamentary majority the R.F. now has, the approval of the four racial groups voting separately in a referendum *or* the consent of the British Government. The cross-voting provision permitting each roll to exert a 20% influence on the other is entrenched. Mr. Smith has said that he would like to see this removed but that, should Britain refuse her consent, his Government would just have to

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accept this. "I don't visualise the sort of thing that is going to provoke us into taking matters into our own hands like the British resisting legislation or denying concurrence," (sic) he told a questioner. "The issue would be if we believe we have got to the stage where it looks as though we are going to lose the civilisation we have built up and the forces of Communism are going to take over our country or *are assisting extreme racialists* (my italics) to take over. These are the conditions I visualise when we believe we would be entitled to take matters into our own hands."

THESE WORDS MAY BE A POINTER to the tactics Smith might adopt if Britain continues, as she must unless she is willing to sacrifice the Commonwealth, to refuse to grant independence to Rhodesia under a minority white government. Since 1959 successive Rhodesian governments have had to take increasingly tough and repressive "security" measures to control a dissatisfied and restive African population which outnumbers whites by 18 to 1. Thousands of African nationalists are serving long prison sentences for offending against the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act and hundreds more are detained or restricted without trial. The security legislation under which they are held had been enacted by Whitehead before the 1961 Constitution came into effect in December 1962, and therefore cannot be thrown out by the Constitutional Council because it offends the provisions of the constitutionally-entrenched Declaration of Rights. But when the Constitutional Council reports adversely on *new* legislation introduced since the 1961 Constitution became effective, then such legislation can be tested in the Courts and if the bench agrees with the Constitutional Council's opinion, the legislation is then invalid.

THE SMITH GOVERNMENT are finding that even the very wide security measures already on the statute book are not tough enough to enable them to hold nationalist leaders incommunicado without trial for long periods, as they would like to do. But an attempt last year to re-enact and then use Whitehead's 1959 Preventive Detention (Temporary Provisions) Act to hold Nkomo and 18 others in prison without trial was declared illegal in Court and the men had to be released from jail. They were immediately re-restricted under the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act, but even the remoteness and unhealthiness of the Gonakudzwingwa restriction area, on the border of the Portuguese-owned Mocambique, has not deterred Africans from visiting their leaders, and every week hundreds make the long and difficult journey to the area. The Minister of Law and Order told Parliament in March that he was searching for some way of stopping this contact of the leaders with the people, and Smith in an election speech referred to the necessity to make constitutional amendments to improve "security." But clauses affecting the Declaration of Rights and the Constitutional Council are entrenched, thus requiring Britain's consent to any amendments.

It seems unlikely that Britain will agree to further reduction of the minimal rights Africans still have. It may be, therefore, that Smith's pretext for declaring unilateral independence — and he never tires of reiterating that independence is vitally urgent — might be that Britain has "interfered" in Rhodesia's affairs by refusing to let him make the constitutional changes necessary to prevent a "take over by Communist-backed racial extremists" of Rhodesia's "white civilisation."