

# LAST CHANCE IN RHODESIA

Britain must negotiate  
with the Africans

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THE debate over Southern Rhodesia has now been temporarily suspended, both in Whitehall and in Fleet Street. Harold Wilson and Ian Douglas Smith are still licking the wounds inflicted on their parties and populace by the ill-fated Tiger document. Experts are piecing together the factors that influenced Smith to reject a document that gave his 220,000 white settlers independence on terms virtually guaranteeing their rule over the 4 million Africans, 9000 Indians and 13,000 Coloureds, for as long as they wanted or managed to. They have stumbled on one new factor: Smith may have feared, among other things, discovery of the extent of maladministration in Southern Rhodesia under the cloak of U D I (unilateral declaration of independence).

No doubt the Rhodesian debate will be re-started next month (March) when the Security Council of the United Nations reviews the operation of the mandatory sanctions voted last December. There will be the usual verbal exchanges, and another resolution urging more effective sanctions. Even less will be expected to happen in Salisbury, Rhodesia, as a result of either the debate or the new list of sanctioned goods. International capitalists in South Africa, Portugal and France will make certain that the holes in the sieve are kept wide open. For example, the French textile firm Marcel Boussac is exporting £2 million worth of textiles in exchange for £2 million worth of Rhodesian tobacco at the knock-down price of 10d per pound. Both effective sanctions and/or a constitutional solution favourable to the Africans, can only be achieved by the use of force or the threat of using it, by forces greater than those at the disposal of the Smith régime.

Ian Smith himself could re-start the debate by putting concrete proposals based on the Tiger document before his predominantly white electorate in a referendum, and to his puppet Chiefs at an "indaba". If they were accepted, and he proceeded to incorporate them into yet another constitution, Wilson will be hard-pressed by large segments of British opinion to accept the fait accompli. The British Conservative Party and South Africa are pressing Smith to do

just that. These are sources so valuable to the rebellion that they cannot be ignored for long. Further, Britain's Commonwealth Relations Secretary, Mr. Herbert Bowden, has told the House of Commons that such a development would not be rejected out of hand. More importantly for Smith, he could avoid that interim administration which may uncover the gross post-U D I maladministration.

If the debate were resumed under these circumstances, it will follow the tragic, retrogressive pattern of previous negotiations: Smith setting the pace of events while Wilson merely reacts to his initiatives; and the complete disregard of the voice of the people concerned - the 4 million Africans. Both the "talks about talks" and the Tiger negotiations were initiated by Smith (making maximum and skilful use of the settler Governor loyal to Britain) at the behest of South African authorities. As long as Smith sets the pace the African voice will of course be ignored, and Britain's hand will always be spurned (using the Conservative Party) whenever sanctions reach areas vital to Rhodesia's economy.

IF the situation in Rhodesia is to change significantly in the critical year ahead, Britain must wrest the initiative by negotiating directly with representatives of the African majority. Britain has exhorted Rhodesian Africans to be constructive and united, but it has never given them anything to be constructive or united about. The nationalist movement has worked single-handedly in a growing, and frustrating vacuum. On the other hand, Britain has been pursuing a futile policy of attempting to split the white settlers; and the illusion that transition and change could receive white settler endorsement. A fresh start could be made by a statement from Whitehall expressing readiness to hold discussions with all representatives of African opinion in order to discover the minimum demands they would insist upon in a new constitution, and the safeguards they would contemplate for the powerful European minority. Such a statement would be the catalyst in the new situation. It could lead to discussions that would establish a wide measure of agreement among representatives of nearly 96 percent of the population -- Africans, Indians, Coloureds,

and a substantial number of progressive Europeans. The British Government would then have the more justifiable task of rallying opinion in Britain and Rhodesia behind proposals likely to be supported by 4 million Africans, 9,000 Indians, 13,000 Coloureds, and may be up to a third of the European population -- in all, 96 percent -- rather than trying to split the racialists and white supremacists in the Rhodesian Front, who incidentally, cannot count on the support of more than 50,000 white adults (about 4 percent of the total adult population).

SUCH a development would have a most beneficial effect on the nature of African politics inside the country. Not only would new hope be given to the ordinary Africans, but the task of assembling an all-party delegation to speak to the British Government would be a focus for purposeful activity for the two nationalist organisations, Z A N U and Z A P U. To be effective, a constitutional delegation would include representatives of Z A N U, Z A P U, the Chiefs, Opposition M P s, representatives of Indians, Coloureds and progressive Europeans. The much discussed differences between Z A N U and Z A P U would be reduced to their infinitesimal size when faced by constitutional issues over which there are no differences at present. It will be remembered that Kenya and Zambia, to cite only two, had similar differences which were ameliorated at the time of important constitutional changes. In each case coalition governments were formed. It must be repeated that Rhodesian Africans have had little inducement for purposeful and/or constructive activity. Those who deplore the campaign of terror and guerilla killings in some parts of the country, or those who are critical of the leadership of the nationalist movement, must try to see the problem from this point of view. If Britain, as the administering authority, had established a hopeful, working, and consultative relationship with the chosen leaders of the Africans, the white settlers would not have been as restless and fearful of majority rule as they are today. The settlers, including Ian Smith, showed great interest in the outcome of the meeting between Mr. Wilson and the African leaders, Rev Ndabaningi Sithole, President of Z A N U and Mr. J.M.N. Nkomo, President of Z A P U, in Salisbury in October 1965, as the published white papers confirm. If Britain's attitude to them were not so contemptuous, segments of settler opinion, particularly in business and the professions, would have accepted their leadership.

Unfortunately, large sections of the British press have

joined in this chorus of blaming the Africans. They present the division as an insuperable obstacle; they interpret the fact that railways have not been blown up as an indication that they like life to remain as it is. On the other hand, if we form one monolithic party as Africans in other countries have done, or if we blow up the railway lines, the same people raise the fear of a one-party dictatorship as an insuperable obstacle, or will interpret the sabotage as a lack of appreciation for the benefits of civilisation. The game is: Heads I win, tails you lose.

The more serious question is whether members of an anti-Smith delegation can be allowed to leave Salisbury; if they did what power do they have for introducing their agreed proposals? There are two half-answers that I can see: The first is that once the principle is established, preliminary talks can be held with representatives of the nationalist parties from Dar es Salaam and Lusaka, and those Chiefs and parliamentarians who can leave Salisbury. In the end, however, any serious negotiations could only be conducted by Rev Ndabaningi Sithole and Mr. Joshua Nkomo. Their release may be contingent on the second factor, that the thrust of international sanctions must aim at the introduction of such agreed proposals. Present international sanctions aim at the futile and rather limited task of demoralising and thereby splitting the minority Rhodesian Front. This goal is not worth the trouble that has been taken.

If this approach were adopted, Britain would have to do the following: Scrap the six principles which formed the basis of previous negotiations; abandon the contention that any settlement must be acceptable to the white power structure; stop the futile effort of splitting the Rhodesian Front (Smith, Welensky, Beadle, Gibbs etc are one and the same thing to us); not pander to racial and kinship opinion in Britain which wants to sell-out the Africans.

IN conclusion, it must be emphasised that if Britain does not open negotiations with representative Africans soon she will have condemned Rhodesia and its people to a future of violence and bloodshed. A settlement with settlers now, on the lines of the Tiger document, is no real solution to the problem. Further, the fact that sabotage has been limited today, does not suggest to an observer that it will remain so for ever. Britain may want to condemn Rhodesia to such a future, as long as she found a formula for rigging out now. But the majority Africans would never let Britain or the settlers off the hook until justice was done to them lawfully or unilaterally.