
RHODESIA OR ZIMBABWE?

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THREE days before the abortive Victoria Falls talks took place, Ian Smith stated that his ruling Rhodesia Front 'never had a policy in Rhodesia to hand over to any black majority government and, as far as I am concerned, we never will have.' That declaration shows the fundamental reason for the conference's failure: the Canute-like intransigence of the white settlers who constitute five per cent of the country's population. The immediate cause of breakdown was the Smith regime's refusal to guarantee immunity to the African negotiating team. But behind that lay the regime's reluctance to enter into meaningful negotiations on the central issue, the hand-over to majority rule.

For whatever tactical differences there are on the side of the African nationalists, they are totally united on the necessity for majority rule to usher in a free Zimbabwe. In this they have the full backing of the African governments as expressed in the statement on April 25 of the Organisation of African Unity:

The OAU's objective in Zimbabwe is independence on the basis of majority rule. This can be achieved either peacefully or by violent means. Either way, Africa will lend its unqualified support to the freedom fighters led by their nationalist movement—the African National Council. As long as the objective of majority rule before independence is not compromised, the OAU would support all efforts made by the Zimbabwe nationalists to win independence by peaceful means.

The media have played up, over recent months, South African premier Vorster's role as 'honest broker'. Certainly Vorster has worked assiduously to cultivate the image of the promoter of detente in southern Africa. He appears to have calculated that, whether the conference succeeded or not, his involvement in it as the man appearing to pressurise Smith would help to polish that image.

There are, of course, differences of tactics on the side of the white supremacists. But South Africa continues to provide Rhodesia with assistance which is vital for the survival of the minority regime. South Africa remains in the role of the major breaker of sanctions against Rhodesia; and, despite reports of South African troop withdrawals, Vorster continues to provide substantial military assistance in the way of equipment and opportunities for recruitment.

But if there remain any illusions about South Africa's role as 'peacemaker', they are dispelled by her invasion of Angola. South Africa has attempted to justify this blatant act of aggression by saying troops were sent in to preserve the supply of water from the Cunene Dam. But the Angolan liberation movement, MPLA, has stated that the South African troops have attacked their forces, and the *Financial Times* has speculated that the troops may later be used to wipe out bases of the South West African People's Organisation. Whatever the precise motive, it is clear that the South Africans are prepared to wage war in neighbouring territories in order to further their own interests.

In any event, the Rhodesian regime is itself prepared to increase repression. In June, the regime's 'Minister of Defence' stated that if detente failed in southern Africa, Rhodesia would move into a phase of 'total concentration on the complete eradication of the terrorists and their political adherents.' In the same month, the Karima massacre took place in which 20 African civilians, including nine children, were gunned down by the Rhodesian army, according to the Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice.

Security measures have been intensified in order to stop the exodus of Zimbabweans to Mozambique and Botswana, where they aim to join the freedom fighters. Rhodesian security forces have imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew along the eastern border with Mozambique, with a kilometre-wide free-fire zone; there is a similar curfew along the western border with Botswana. The Rhodesian army boasts that it has already killed six curfew breakers, including two schoolboys. Between 50 and 60 officials and supporters of the African National Council are at present awaiting trial on charges of 'recruiting terrorists', and face the mandatory death penalty if

found guilty. A new bout of forced removals has begun in the Maramba Tribal Trust Land, 70 miles north-east of Salisbury. Here 4,500 Africans are being moved into 'consolidated villages' because it is an area of 'incipient insurrection'.

The Rhodesian regime have at the same time undertaken a considerable military expansion to guard against the possibility of less overt South African involvement. A rise of 23 per cent in defence spending over the coming year—from £39 million to £48 million—has been announced. Combat soldiers of all ranks are to get a pay rise of 40 per cent. A new 'Rhodesian Women's Service' has been launched, recruiting women aged 18-50 as security force radio operators, air traffic control assistants, clerical and intelligence staff.

In its desperate search for manpower, the regime appears to be encouraging the recruitment of mercenaries from Britain and the US. Advertisements appeared in June in an American newspaper published by a recruitment agency called Phoenix Associates of Boulder, Colorado, and calling for 'adventurous Americans' to serve abroad in the Middle East and Rhodesia. On June 19, the Manchester *Guardian* reported that the head of the British Military Volunteer Force had been asked to recruit by the commander of the Rhodesian army.

As the struggle of the African people of Zimbabwe intensifies, and as the regime becomes increasingly short of manpower, it can be expected that such efforts to recruit will be multiplied. Sharp government action is needed in order to stamp out such direct military aid for the illegal regime.

Perhaps most urgent, however, is the need for action to save the Zimbabweans under sentence of death in the regime's prisons. Over recent months, the regime has greatly increased the number of trials of freedom fighters, and there have been persistent reports of secret executions. The labour movement must put pressure on the Foreign Secretary to revoke all death sentences on political prisoners in Zimbabwe, and to take action to secure the release of political prisoners and detainees there.

With the clear declaration of white intransigence which the liberation movement in Zimbabwe faces, the need for support and solidarity becomes increasingly apparent. In particular there should be greatly increased support for the liberation movement from the Labour Party Southern Africa Liberation Fund.

The need for solidarity work on Zimbabwe will intensify over the coming months. The situation will be examined and plans for campaigning work in Britain discussed at a two-day conference to

be held on October 18-19 at the Digbeth Civic Hall, Birmingham (details from Anti-Apartheid Movement, 89 Charlotte Street, London, W1P 2DQ). The labour movement has a vital role to play in solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe. By vigorous and concerted action it can go some way towards compensating for the sordid betrayals of the African people in which successive British governments have been involved.