

RHODESIA: CRISIS FOR WHITE POWER

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RECENT reports about the success of African freedom fighters in Rhodesia, and the panic measures adopted by the Smith regime, have once again drawn attention to the nature of the Rhodesian conflict—the struggle to maintain white power in the face of determined resistance by over five million Africans. These developments are particularly significant when considered together with British policy towards Rhodesia which is aimed at bringing about a settlement along the lines of the Home-Smith proposals, despite the clear evidence of their rejection by the African majority in the Pearce Report.

In his Lancaster House press conference on January 17, 1973, Edward Heath restated British policy thus: ‘. . . we thought that after the Pearce Commission’s report there ought to be a time in which those in Rhodesia can consider how best they can try and advance by consultation together, and this remains our position.’ It is clear that neither the Smith regime nor the British Government have accepted the findings of their own Pearce Commission. Both

parties have been concentrating their efforts into turning the Pearce 'NO' into a 'Yes'—indeed, Smith conceded this recently in a public statement using the same words.

But events within Rhodesia and the subsequent retaliatory measures adopted by Salisbury raised the level of conflict to a point where once again the outside world became aware of the real issues involved. Prompt messages from London and Pretoria forced Ian Smith to reopen his border with Zambia and comply with the wishes of his principal allies to cool the conflict. Britain and South Africa prefer that Rhodesia should not be the subject of international attention because that can only hinder the process of arranging a settlement aimed at consolidating the white power system in southern Africa.

It is important to recount British policy towards Rhodesia since November 1965 because that reveals the primary concern of Britain to preserve the *status quo* in southern Africa with a growing regional power role for South Africa.

At the very outset, before the illegal declaration of independence, Prime Minister Wilson declared that Britain would not use force in Rhodesia but would apply economic sanctions instead. However, sanctions were to operate in the context of an overriding policy of 'no confrontation with South Africa'. Rather than the prospect of sanctions serving as a stern warning it was more of an assurance in advance which enabled Pretoria and Salisbury to work out trade and other arrangements in good time. Both parties were assured that Britain would not do anything to disturb the white-power system in southern Africa.

Nevertheless, a dispute does exist between Britain and Rhodesia—but it is a *legal* dispute and not one about transferring power to the oppressed African population. The betrayal of British African subjects has been absolute whilst the white regime continues to be protected from effective international action. We cannot therefore expect a British programme of international sanctions to bring the Smith regime to its knees, because that has never been the intention—the purpose has always been to bring Rhodesia back to constitutional rule, meaning a settlement which will confer legality on the white regime.

The legal dispute with Britain has not been resolved so far although Sir Alec Douglas-Home has promised his backbenchers that they may not be required to support a sanctions order in parliament in November 1973. If, by then, there is no settlement, then Britain

may place the problem in the lap of the United Nations, knowing full well that the international organisation cannot take any meaningful action without the support of the principal Western powers. In either case the Security Council will have formally to call an end to sanctions, and this gives some political power to the United Nations. Of course, this power would be more meaningful were it not for the determination of Western powers and especially the United States to violate UN sanctions resolutions—resolutions for which they voted.

Despite the weakness in the sanctions programme of the United Nations, it must be supported and every effort made to prevent a British sell-out to Smith during 1973. But all our efforts in this direction must be tempered with the knowledge that international sanctions may make things more difficult for the white regime but will not by themselves bring about its downfall. The African people of Rhodesia have realised this for a long time and recent events have shown that they have taken the initiative into their own hands rather than rely on Britain to help in the process of transferring power to the African majority. Events within Rhodesia, taken together with the success of the liberation movement in neighbouring Mozambique, have caused serious alarm in Salisbury and Pretoria. South Africa has committed more armed units to Rhodesia, and Britain has done nothing to secure the withdrawal of their illegal presence in her colony.

All this indicates that Britain is deeply committed to maintaining the white power system in southern Africa as a whole: British policy over Rhodesia is governed by an overriding consideration of South African interests. Those interests require that the Rhodesian dispute be settled speedily so that Western links with that territory may once again operate without hindrance, and thus help the process of integrating the white power system in southern Africa with the major Western powers and their allies. A Rhodesian settlement will set the seal on an alliance relationship between Britain and other Western powers and the Unholy Alliance in southern Africa—an alliance with white power which will bring the Western powers into direct confrontation with the forces of African liberation. What is at stake over Rhodesia is not only the course of change in that territory but the survival of white power south of of the Zambesi and its aggressive posture towards the rest of Africa. That is why we need to increase international political and material support for African liberation movements in the territories under colonial and race rule.