

The proposals for a Settlement in Rhodesia

The real meaning

The proposals for the so-called settlement for Rhodesia have been agreed between the British Government and the illegal Smith regime over the heads of the 5 million African Rhodesians—95 per cent of the population. How can such an agreement, which recognises the Smith minority regime, be acceptable to all the Rhodesian people? Any white minority government on the African continent, by its undemocratic nature, must be unacceptable.

The issue is of vital concern to the British people. What we do in and to Rhodesia could determine on which side we stand in the Southern African conflict. It matters whether these proposals are 'just and honourable' as it is claimed. And whether they are, in fact, in the interests of the African majority.

It has been argued that it was necessary to reach an agreement with Smith now, in order to save the Africans from South African style apartheid, and in this Sir Alec Douglas-Home and Lord Goodman claim to have succeeded. What they have failed to notice is that Rhodesia is now an apartheid state and that there are no

adequate provisions in the settlement proposals to prevent it moving further along this path—much less to reverse the process.

GROWTH OF APARTHEID

The foundation of apartheid legislation was there before the Rhodesian Front regime. But within the past decade many more racist laws have been enacted. The Tribal Trust Land Act 1967, copied from the South African Bantu Authorities Act; the Land Tenure Act and the African Affairs (Amendment) Act 1966 establish apartheid in Rhodesia. Residential segregation, the authorisation of racially segregated public facilities and the ban on African domestic employees keeping their families with them while quartered on white premises—all these are now more rigidly enforced.

To set against this record of the Rhodesian Front's racist and repressive legislation we have nothing more than the faith and hope of Sir Alec. For though a review commission is to be set up to examine racial discrimination, it has only an advisory function, and Smith retains the power to veto its recommendations for considerations

that the 'government would regard as overriding'.

Since the Rhodesian Front has been in power it has committed itself time and again to the maintenance of white supremacy. Will not this overriding factor continue in the future to determine its actions?

DECLARATION OF RIGHTS— THREADBARE GUARANTEES

In defending the settlement proposals in the House of Commons, Sir Alec has put forward the Declaration of Rights as the main British demand and one which, under the proposals, can be tested in the Rhodesian courts. On the face of it, the proposed Declaration appears an impressive summation of human liberties. Closer inspection reveals, however, that the Declaration of Rights itself authorises detention without trial, permits police to search people and premises without warrant, and that most of its provisions allow for exceptions 'in special circumstances'. Even more significant, the battery of existing apartheid legislation which violates the Declaration will be exempt from review under it. The fact is that **NONE OF THE EXISTING LEGISLATION CAN BE TESTED IN THE COURTS.** To avoid being tested in the courts, new discriminatory legislation has only to be passed as an 'amendment' to existing laws.

Thus the major protection afforded under the Declaration allows the white minority to continue to do all it considers necessary to protect its position, privilege and interest. Yet we are told that these same proposals are somehow

going to protect the African majority from racist oppression.

NO PROGRESS TO MAJORITY RULE

Sir Alec's claim that the five principles are maintained in the settlement proposals has no basis in reality. The first principle calls for 'unimpeded progress to majority rule'—only if it were possible to change the meaning of the words could the proposals meet this principle. At no time, even in the unforeseeable future, is it envisaged that there will be a government elected on the principle of one man, one vote. The Africans may hope to achieve parity in 70 years, and after that the black/white ratio in the Rhodesian Assembly is fixed at 57:53, regardless of the fact that there are now 21 black Rhodesians to every white Rhodesian. And this disparity is likely to increase.

In creating and entrenching separate electoral rolls, this provision condemns Rhodesia to a future of perpetual racial separation and discrimination. African citizens whatever their merit will always have a devalued vote. Far from moving away from apartheid, this provision firmly entrenches apartheid in the constitution.

In the immediate future the prospect for political progress is even bleaker. The income qualification for franchise at R\$1200 (£696) is so high that only 7,460 Africans will qualify. For example, a schoolteacher earns only R\$579 (£335) per annum.

EDUCATION FOR SERFDOM

The qualifications for the franchise require 4 years of secondary education.

But in 1966 Rhodesia introduced a special system of 'African education' into which 75 per cent of African secondary school students will be channelled by 1976. This system provides only 2 years secondary education and is geared to practical rather than academic subjects. Thus, time and further education will not necessarily increase African voters.

Even if the Africans were to overcome these barriers, they would still have only 26 directly elected members in a legislature of 100 when parity is achieved. For another apartheid concept entrenched into these provisions is that of indirectly elected African members who, chosen by chiefs and headmen, will always pay heed to the interests of their white paymasters.

Finally there is no safeguard against action which will retard African progress even further.

Within days of the settlement being agreed, the chairman of the Public Works Committee of the Salisbury City Council announced that preparations were being made to receive 50,000 white immigrants in the next 2 years. This not only increases the number of Africans who must qualify for each new African seat, but, by filling all new skilled jobs with white immigrants, can halt African progress indefinitely.

The provisions can, of course, be altered by the House of Assembly. The South African experience, however, has shown that similar constitutional safeguards can easily be overturned. Smith has torn up three constitutions since coming to power, so any constitutional hurdle is hardly likely to deter him.

Moreover, the Rhodesian government has only promised not to introduce any amendment to these provisions for 3 years or until the first two seats on the African Higher Roll have been filled, whichever is sooner. There is nothing to prevent it doing so immediately after that.

In theory, these proposals have to be accepted by all the people of Rhodesia before being implemented. As Prime Minister, Sir Alec had insisted in October 1964 that 'the mechanism whereby the feelings of the Rhodesian people is to be ascertained must be fully democratic'. A REFERENDUM AFTER FULL DISCUSSION AND DEBATE IS STILL THE ONLY VALID TEST OF ACCEPTABILITY.

'DEBATE AND DISCUSSION'— POLICE STATE STYLE

How can a Commission composed of two white peers and two white knights seriously test African opinion? Who is to explain the proposals to the African people: their own leaders such as Joshua Nkomo and the Revd Sithole, or Rhodesian Front-employed chiefs and district commissioners?

How are the people to feel free to express their opinions, when the state of emergency and police control will be maintained throughout the test?

How can those opposed to the settlement have a fair hearing when they are denied access to the media and are subject to police harassment?

Successive British governments have failed to fulfil their responsibility to the African people, and the Tory government has already committed

Britain to 'joint defence' with South Africa, disregarding UN, world and Commonwealth opinion by agreeing to sell arms to Vorster. While the sanctions policy, for all its limitations, was continued, Britain was not irrevocably committed to the white supremacist bloc. Rhodesian Africans had at least moral support, and some hope for change through international action and pressure.

Far from averting the escalation of armed resistance in Rhodesia, this settlement will certainly ensure it. It will do this because it stultifies all reasonable hope of majority rule, or even of substantial political advance for many decades.

To appreciate these developments fully we have to see them in the context of Southern Africa where the triple alliance of South Africa, Rhodesia and Portugal has jointly coordinated

plans for the suppression of the forces of African advancement. The extensive police and security network reinforced by joint military manoeuvres work to maintain the power and privilege of the white minority rulers.

With Britain's special responsibility on this sub-continent, a major task rests with the people of this country who believe in democratic and just government. For the implications of these settlement proposals are that Britain will be aligned with those forces determined to maintain minority repressive rule throughout Southern Africa—at any cost.

We cannot sit by and allow the British Government to sign away the human rights of 95 per cent of Rhodesians. There can be no independence before majority rule. If you support this principle, then support us.

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