

American Committee on Africa,
198 Broadway,
New York, N. Y. 10038
Phone: (212) 962-1210

March 4, 1980.

The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) headed by Robert Mugabe, has won an amazing and overwhelming victory in the unprecedented election in Rhodesia. I have just returned from a three week trip to Rhodesia (soon to be officially Zimbabwe). I was part of an unofficial group of five American observers. Although our group represented four organizations, we acted as a team during the time we were in Rhodesia. Enclosed is a copy of our report, based on our findings and experiences, and issued on March 3 before the result of the election was known. We had previously issued an interim report on February 25 in Salisbury in collaboration with seven unofficial observers from Canada in which we made a series of practical suggestions to the British governor which we hoped might improve chances for a "free and fair" election. This statement received front page attention in the Rhodesian Herald and other papers in Salisbury, as well as prominent coverage on the BBC.

Now that the election results are known, the most obvious thing to say is that black people of Zimbabwe have registered their preference for a government headed by Robert Mugabe. This speaks authoritatively for the independent judgement of the people. As our report points out, the media (newspapers, TV and radio), dominated by the white minority, was strongly biased against ZANU-PF and for the UANC of Muzorewa.

A second observation is that the harrassment and intimidation practiced by the security forces, the police and auxiliaries against ZANU-PF and to a lesser extent against Nkomo's Patriotic Front (PF) did not work as expected. We were told again and again by local ZANU-PF leaders that the strong arm methods of the military forces of the government would turn the people against the party favored by the white minority, the UANC. This is in fact what happened.

A third observation is that Lord Soames has no alternative to asking Mugabe to form a government, ZANU-PF has an absolute majority in the House of Assembly. It was feared that the British, in order to keep Mugabe out of power, might ask a combination of parties, each holding only a minority of seats in parliament to form a government. If this had been done, it could have caused serious problems. But now this is obviated.

Although there may be cries of "foul" and "fraud" in the election by some, the overall judgement of observers is that the election reflected the views of the majority of the people of Zimbabwe. The Commonwealth Observers clearly stated this. The British said this. Both Mugabe and Nkomo said they would accept the results of the election before they knew what they would be. Only Muzorewa refused to commit himself to the results. We can only hope this will not lead to continued conflict with dissident whites in Rhodesia backed by South Africa attempting to interfere in the establishment of the new government.

There is now hope that a government of true majority rule will be accepted by all parties and a new Zimbabwe can move onto the task of developing a free nation-peaceful, prosperous and secure.

George M. Houser.