

# South Africa: for your information

#3 October 1965

## THE RHODESIAN CRISIS

Southern Rhodesia, a land-locked, self-governing British colony is a buffer between South Africa and black Africa. A unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) from the UK by the Rhodesian Government would precipitate a major crisis in southern and central Africa. American interest in Zambia and South Africa would be involved. The US has announced that it would help Zambia, Britain and neighboring African states with "economic retaliation" in case of UDI. Yet Smith is committed to UDI as are most (est. 90%) Rhodesian White settlers. For your information, we summarize the essential elements of the situation.

### The Significance of UDI

Rhodesia is a sovereign state in all but two functions: foreign affairs and the power to make constitutional changes (particularly those affecting franchise provisions); The UK holds these residual powers. Under the present constitution, white settlers (who number about 250,000 or 6% of the population) are guaranteed domination for many years to come. A Land Apportionment Act guarantees them tenure of 40% of the country. A web of legislation prohibits African counter-action. African nationalist groups are banned, their leaders jailed or restricted. The Rhodesian terrain is not conducive to guerrilla activities. The British Government has refused to risk its slim majority by taking any liberalizing initiative in Rhodesia (Lord Salisbury leads a strong Tory bloc sympathetic to settler interests). Hence, the Rhodesian Government has little to gain from UDI save the emotional satisfaction of telling the labor Government where to go. Premier Ian Smith is committed, however, by a referendum in October 1964 and a general election in May 1965 to UDI. The mood among the great majority of settlers - recent emigrants (since the war) of fairly low educational background and social status and Afrikaners from South Africa - is strongly against British protection of African rights. White salaries are about three times their equivalents in England. Rhodesian per capita swimming pool ownership is second only to Beverly Hills.

Rhodesian Big Business is much less attracted to UDI. It warned settlers of expected disastrous economic consequences of rebellion against the Crown. Big Business spokesmen, Edgar Whitehead and Roy Welensky, were defeated at the polls.

### The Real Struggle

The heart of the Rhodesian problem is not in the interminable jurisdictional conflicts between the UK and Rhodesia, but rather in the all-or-nothing stakes of who should rule - black or white. Africans (94% of the population) came under total white domination, largely by the trickery of Cecil Rhodes,

about the turn of the century. Many of the older persons can remember when there were no whites around.

The 1961 Constitution permitted, for the first time, a microscopic number of African to vote (12,000 though in the October '64 referendum, virtually no African voted). But the present Government is even here trying to turn back the clock by giving power to government-appointed and paid chiefs. State of emergencies amounting to virtual martial law are continuously called in one African area or another. A UN official has estimated that some 6,500 Africans are political prisoners.

Though most African fall into one of two large tribal groups, tribalism as such is not a divisive force. There are two nationalist groups however: Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the American-educated Rev. N Sithole's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). Both parties are banned. Nationalists refuse to join in constitutional talks unless they are guaranteed to be given a clear majority of seats in a new legislature.

#### The UK and the US

Britain does not favor constitutional revisions unless assent is given by the Rhodesian Government. In opposing UDI, Britain has not made clear whether it would put down a rebellion by force. It has made clear, however, its intention of applying economic and diplomatic sanctions against a rebel Government. The US has always closely followed the British lead, and continues to do so today, promising similar measures against UDI. Britain is Rhodesia's best market for her main export-tobacco, which actually competes with US tobacco. Minor American investments exist in Rhodesia, primarily in automobile assembly plants (Ford).

#### The UN View

United Nations bodies have passed many resolutions on Rhodesia. The most recent to come out of the Committee of 24 (on decolonization) appealed for the release of African nationalist leaders and requested that no state or institution assist in any way the Government of Rhodesia until it had renounced white domination. The Security Council called on the UK to "take all necessary action to prevent" UDI and asked for a new constitutional conference. Britain maintains that the UK has no competence to deal with the question.

#### Effects of UDI

Premier Smith has warned that in case of sanctions, his government would retaliate against Zambia. Zambian copper production (half controlled by American Metal Climax) is greatly dependent on Kariba Dam power, Wankie Coal and the railroad line to Beira (Mozambique)...all three are in Rhodesian hands. Zambia is the world's second largest copper producer. South Africa, which has made several large loans to Rhodesia, has increasingly identified itself with the settler government. A Rhodesian clash might well spread south.

The US resolve to back Britain on sanctions and offer aid to Zambia is to be applauded. Yet because the basic problem is not UDI but black-white relations, the current crisis offers the US the opportunity to work towards long-range interests in southern Africa. On the constitutional (i.e. franchise) issue, the US should disassociate itself from the UK which refuses to take up the issue against Rhodesian wishes. The US must align itself with the African nationalists, urging majority rule. It was shown in Kenya that such transition could be effected peacefully against settler opposition. Why not Rhodesia?