

Notes of the Month

RHODESIA — WHAT NEXT ?

The United Nations General Assembly today decided, in the face of British objections, to call on Britain to take 'all necessary measures, including military force, to bring about immediately in Rhodesia the suspension of the constitution, the release of political prisoners, and the convening of a constitutional conference, based on adult suffrage, with a view to fixing the earliest possible date for independence'.

The Times, November 6, 1965, summary of United Nations resolution carried by 82 votes to 9 on November 5, 1965—six days before the Smith coup.

November 14, 1965

The battle for African liberation is reaching its highest climax yet with the Smith racialists' coup in Rhodesia on November 11. This coup, like so many previous coups of a fascist type in many countries in the modern era, was only made possible by the preceding typically social-democratic nervelessness and procrastination (not to call it complicity) of the Wilson régime through the endlessly prolonged negotiations while the Smith gang openly made ready, alongside the ill-disguised sympathies of Toryism with the plotters. The battle for elementary democratic freedom and national independence against an open police state of racial suppression is not merely the cause of the oppressed Rhodesian people. It can be no separate concern of Britain alone—although the first responsibility rests on the British people, in view of the constitutional position, to compel their Government to act. It is the common cause of all the peoples of Africa, of all the peoples of the world, and of all supporters of freedom against racialism. In any comments written within a couple of days of the coup it would be premature to endeavour to measure yet the full world-wide consequences which will follow from this blow of reaction, or the forms which the further development of the battle will take. But this much is certain. The battle will go forward until the final victory of the forces of freedom. The interests of African freedom and of world peace demand the unconditional defeat and destruction of the racist régime in Rhodesia.

A Slave Owners' Revolt

In vain the petty colour-bar dictators of Rhodesia seek to invoke

the memory of the great American Revolution and the American Declaration of Independence. The American Revolution was a great democratic revolution, the precursor and in many respects the direct inspirer of the French Revolution, which in its turn was the precursor of the further advance, in a new historical era, to the higher level represented by the Russian Revolution. The American Revolution was the second of the three great bourgeois-democratic revolutions, the English, the American and the French, which each in their time represented the vanguard of human progressive advance, and established the never to be forgotten revolutionary foundation (however reactionary the outcome today in the era of monopoly capitalism) of the leading capitalist states, Britain, France and the United States. The Rhodesian coup belongs to the record of counter-revolution. It represents the rearguard action of a fanatical racist minority, doomed to defeat, to turn back the wheel of history; to block and reverse the advancing African Revolution; and with their puny breaths to blow back that 'wind of change' which even a Tory Premier has had to recognise as governing the future in Africa.

A Parallel—With a Difference

But there is just one ironic parallel which Ian Smith and his Simon Legree cronies could have drawn with some effect, if they had had any sense of historical reality in their philistine heads, and not been concerned merely to make an empty rhetorical flourish in the hope of filching a rag of respectability to cover a piece of die-hard backwoodsmen's treason. The ever-memorable words of the American Declaration of Independence, drafted by Thomas Jefferson and adopted by the Continental Congress at Philadelphia on July 4, 1776, proclaimed:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

When the delegates at Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, adopted this ringing affirmation of their faith, whose words were destined to inspire generation after generation in the struggle for freedom, it certainly never occurred to them that their 'self-evident' axiom that 'all men are created equal' with an equal right to 'liberty' applied to their African slaves. George Washington was a large-scale slave-owner. It was no doubt this characteristic anomaly in the foundations of American bourgeois democracy which led

Samuel Johnson, no lover of Americans (he used to say: 'I am willing to love all mankind, except an American'), to make the biting comment in 1775: 'How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?' If Ian Smith had been clever, he might have chosen this analogy to try to cover his shame.

A Shameless Claim

But even this analogy is lame. African slavery was, it is true, inbred in the foundations of American democracy, just as the African slave trade laid the foundations of the great English fortunes (Gladstone's father was a slave trader, and one of Gladstone's earliest speeches in parliament was in defence of slavery). The price of this canker at the heart of Anglo-American democracy was the civil war a century later and the bitter struggle which is having to be waged still today for Negro civil rights. But the Negro slave population was under half a million in a total colonial population of three and a half millions at the time of the foundation of the United States in 1776, or under one seventh. It was an overwhelming White majority which was demanding freedom from the fetters of colonialism and the rule of George III. In Rhodesia the European population is 217,000 and the African population just under four millions, together with 12,400 'Coloured' and 7,900 Asians. Thus the leaders of a tiny White minority of the population, amounting to five per cent, have proclaimed their racial dictatorship over the African 95 per cent and have dared to invoke in defence of this the memory of the glorious American democratic revolution. The attempted analogy boomerangs in their face.

Whose Guilt?

But the real responsibility for the shameful racist coup in Rhodesia on Armistice Day, 1965, does not rest primarily with the bigoted or indoctrinated majority of the European settlers. The real guilt needs to be placed squarely where it belongs, with British imperialism, and with the political leaders of British imperialism, acting on behalf of some of the wealthiest and most powerful British monopolies entrenched in Rhodesia. It was the Tory Government in 1923 which, with Labour acquiescence, established the anomaly of a so-called 'self-governing colony' in Southern Rhodesia in the interests of the settlers, that is, in practice self-governing in respect of the White settlers and colonial in respect of the African 95 per cent deprived of rights. It was the Tory Govern-

ment in 1953 which, again with practical Labour acquiescence, imposed the arbitrary and indefensible and unworkable 'Central African Federation' to hand over what were then the colonies of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland to the tender mercies of the Southern Rhodesian racialists, against the overwhelming and outspoken opposition of the Africans of all three territories. When the Central African Federation broke down, and independence had to be conceded to Zambia and Malawi, it was the Tory Government which began the endless negotiations with Smith and the Rhodesian Front to seek to find a figleaf formula to cover the reality of racialist 'independence' with hopes and promises for the future—negotiations which the Wilson Labour Government continued on the same basis laid down by Home, playing into the hands of Smith and his plotters to prepare their coup.

Green Light For Smith

From the outset of the interminable negotiations Harold Wilson, while making a great show of stern words that a unilateral declaration of independence would be treason, simultaneously explained no less emphatically that he would on no account take the normal consequent action against treason, and that, while he was busily engaged in sending massive troops and planes and warships to Aden or Malaysia to quell into submission any non-Whites who dared to challenge the rule of Britain, in the case of Rhodesia, if the rule of Britain were overthrown by White racialists, he would guarantee beforehand not to use force against them. This preliminary tip-off was of course the green light for Smith, which made the rest of the wordy palaver meaningless. When the Mission of the Commonwealth Secretary Bottomley, and the Lord Chancellor, Lord Gardiner, went to Rhodesia for ten days in February, 1965, the African national leaders were in detention. There was no protest from Britain or demand for their release. Instead, after they had heard from Smith his intention to declare his racialist dictatorship with or without Britain's consent, Bottomley returned to announce in parliament that Britain would not use force against him.

Reporting to parliament yesterday on the results of the 10-day mission to Rhodesia, the Commonwealth Secretary, Mr. Arthur Bottomley, said flatly that there will be no attempt by the present British Government to use military means to force through constitutional changes and bring about African majority rule (*Guardian*, March 9, 1965).

This meant that the gates were opened for Smith to act.

Whose 'Subversion'?

Premier Wilson went further. On November 1, that is, within a few days of the coup, in an interview on Panorama, he handed out to Smith, whom he called 'a great leader', the indispensable guarantee required by Smith for his action.

I think it would be wrong to use force to try and get a constitutional solution. The only conditions in which I could foresee force being used would be if while we still had responsibility—assuming no U.D.I. or anything of that kind—there was an outbreak of disorder, murder, subversion, whether it came from African or European extremists. In those circumstances we would certainly have to consider that.

So he recognised conditions in which he might use force while Smith was building up his plot, throwing African leaders into prison and establishing his reign of terror. Not against Smith. Britain would use force against 'subversion'—of course impartially, whether it came from either side, 'whether it came from African or European extremists'. But the 'European extremists' were in power. They were exercising a White racialist dictatorship. A dictatorship does not conduct 'subversion' against itself. The only 'subversion' could come from the Africans struggling against the dictatorship. Thus, under a transparently hypocritical cover of pretending that he might use force against 'subversion' from either side, he was in fact declaring that he would use force only against the Africans, but never on the side of democracy or, in the words of Bottomley, to 'bring about African majority rule'. Smith took the plain hint passed him by Wilson on November 1. On November 5 he established his state of emergency to complete his iron grip on Rhodesia. On November 11 he carried out his coup.

Who Bluffed Whom?

Faced with the manifest and now indisputable failure of the prolonged and futile negotiations, which only gave Smith and his gang time to complete their illegal preparations, Wilson and his Labour Ministers now seek to excuse themselves by claiming that they succeeded by spinning out the endless interchanges in delaying the unilateral declaration of independence and thus gained time. This plea remarkably recalls Chamberlain's similar apology for Munich, after its breakdown had become obvious and war had followed, that he had succeeded in buying time. But of course the advantage went to Hitler. And in the same way the advantage went to Smith. Indeed, already in a speech on August 27 this year Smith was boasting of the success of his technique in outmanoeuvring

the Labour Government. He referred to the 'incredible remarks' made by Bottomley that 'Britain had averted a unilateral declaration of independence by Rhodesia last October'. On this Smith commented:

I can only say that if the British Government seriously believed we were on the edge of taking independence last October I am agreeably surprised at how effective our technique at bluffing the rest of the world has been. We knew at that time we were not ready.

Precisely. Prompt action could have scotched the plot, compelled the release of the African leaders and the convening of a constitutional conference before Smith had had time to mobilise his forces. The technique of 'spinning out' the negotiations (Prince Philip's phrase in his speech at Edinburgh on July 2 when he recommended: 'It is better to spin out the process of the solution; a few years here or there do not matter') meant buying time for Smith.

Complaints After the Event

The subsequent bitter complaint of Wilson in Parliament on November 12, after the blow had fallen, that he had been let down by Smith; that he had conceded every possible point to Smith until there was nothing left to concede ('I proved beyond any reasonable doubt that every point they had made was fully dealt with on terms that must be satisfactory to them'); his pitiful satisfaction that he was 'glad to think that Mr. Smith at any rate agrees with the claim that I have done everything any man could do'; his disillusioned lament over his 'heavy heart' that 'reason had left the scene' and that Smith must have been all the time, even while they conducted on the phone 'almost a friendly conversation', in reality 'hellbent' on evil courses—all this recalls nothing so much as Chamberlain's lamentation in Parliament and in his broadcast on September 3, 1939, that he had been let down by Hitler; that he had done everything to make possible for Hitler 'a peaceful and honourable settlement'; that on this 'sad day' of 'a bitter blow' for him all he had worked for had 'crashed into ruins'; that 'no word given by Hitler could be trusted' any more; and that they were confronted with 'evil things'. There followed then the phony war.

Echoes of the Thirties

Indeed all too many echoes of the Appeasement of the thirties are recalled by the Rhodesian story. The initial deferment of oil sanctions, whatever may be the calculation of holding this as a card

in reserve to defeat more positive action by the United Nations, inevitably recalls the experience of the Italian war on Abyssinia and the fiasco of the limited League of Nations sanctions, when the British Government fought to the last and in this case successfully to prevent oil sanctions, and Sir John Simon let the cat out of the bag with his customary naïveté by declaring that it would be unthinkable to impose oil sanctions since if this were done the war could not go on. The dramatic flight of Wilson to Salisbury at the height of the crisis amid wishes of godspeed from all parties in Parliament (this time there was no Gallacher) inevitably awoke for many memories of Chamberlain's dramatic flight to Munich; although this time the efforts of Wilson to bully the African leaders into accepting Smith's demand that they should work the 1961 Constitution fortunately met with resolute refusal. Equally the memories of Non-Intervention in Spain, when the cause of Spanish Democracy was the common cause of all the peoples of the world, come back to mind every time Wilson reaffirms his supreme objective to keep out other nations, whether African or non-African, from intervening with direct help to the Rhodesian people in their struggle for freedom against racist dictatorship.

Warnings In Advance

Warnings of the course and consequences of Appeasement, and demands for action in time, were not lacking in the thirties. Nor have they been lacking in the years preceding the Rhodesian coup. It was already in September 1963 that Britain vetoed the resolution of the African States in the Security Council on what was then Southern Rhodesia; but the Assembly in November passed the same resolution by 73 votes to 2. It was in the summer of 1964 that the United Nations delegation came to London and reported back that its members were 'disagreeably surprised' to find that the United Kingdom Ministers had shown 'constant concern for the possible reactions of the White settlers if an attempt were made to implement United Nations resolutions, whereas they were not in the least concerned about the possible reaction of the four million Africans in Southern Rhodesia if they continued to be denied the most elementary rights'. The U.N. delegation condemned the British Government's attitude as 'a flagrant denial of its responsibilities to protect the interests of the majority and a deplorable refusal to discharge its obligations under the Charter and under the resolutions of the General Assembly'. It called on the British Govern-

ment to release political prisoners, repeal all repressive and discriminatory legislation, remove all restrictions on African political activity, and convene a constitutional conference. The report of the delegation was endorsed by the U.N. Special Committee on Colonialism by 20 votes to nil with three abstentions, and the issue was forwarded to the Security Council. The final warning call of the United Nations before the explosion was the resolution of the Assembly on November 5 for 'all necessary measures, including military force' to suspend the constitution, release political prisoners, and convene a constitutional conference based on adult suffrage with a view to establishing democratic independence. The decisions of the United Nations, to which all political parties in Britain love to profess loyalty as the supposed sheet-anchor of their foreign policy, were thus sufficiently clear. Had they been carried out, the coup could never have taken place.

Africa's Voice

Even more explicit were the warnings and the calls for decisive action in time from all the African states. The Commonwealth Premiers' Conference in June of this year almost broke down on the question of Rhodesia; and a single communiqué was only adopted in the end on the basis of recording separately that the 'responsibility' lay with Britain, but that 'the British Prime Minister was urged by other Prime Ministers' to take action 'within three months' to convene a constitutional conference with free participation of all political leaders in order to establish democratic independence on a basis of majority rule. In October the Conference of the Organisation of African Unity at Accra recorded the unanimous resolution of the leaders of the 28 independent African states represented, calling on Britain to suspend the Rhodesian constitution immediately; to use force if necessary and to convene a constitutional conference of representatives of the entire population. The resolution further recommended all member states 'to use every possible means, including armed force, to prevent a unilateral declaration of independence' if Britain failed to take the necessary measures to stop it; and also recommended member states to 'extend immediate assistance to the Zimbabwe (Rhodesian) people with a view to establishing a majority government'. This was three weeks before the coup.

Red Bogy

But the most sinister parallel with the Appeasement of the thir-

ties, far more significant than any incidental fleeting analogies, is the underlying motive for Britain's resistance to the repeated calls equally of the African states and of the United Nations. The reason which led the dominant British statesmen of the thirties, despite their recognition of the rivalries of interests of British and German imperialism, to back Hitler, to assist his rearmament, to gloss over the evils of fascism, and to connive at his successive aggressions (even while always 'deploring' them) was their deep-seated anti-Communist and anti-Soviet obsession, which led them to see all the time the Soviet Union and not Nazi Germany as the main danger, until the remorseless judgement of the event finally brought the collapse of all their calculations and compelled them to accept with eagerness the alliance which they had so long rejected. Similarly Harold Wilson, with that deep-seated anti-Communist and anti-Soviet obsession which has always ever since 1917 distorted the judgement of the top ranks of Labour's leadership in all questions of foreign policy, has revealed more and more clearly with every utterance that he has seen the problem of Rhodesian racialism and the African states, with his vain attempts to square both, not as primarily a problem of the African struggle for freedom, but in terms of the cold war. Thus it was characteristic that in his speech in Parliament on November 12, immediately following the racist coup and open treason, he should paint before his hearers in vivid terms the horrors, not of the real sufferings of the millions of Africans under the heel of a racist dictatorship, but of a hypothetical picture of 'the Red Army' marching into Africa. Thereby was revealed the mentality which underlay Munich. But those days belong to the past.

Police State

Similarly Rhodesia is now described in British Government statements as having become since Smith's State of Emergency 'a police state'. But Rhodesia was already a police state for years before, and was described as such by constitutional authorities ever since the notorious Law and Order (Maintenance) Act of 1960. When Britain finally broke with Hitler in 1939, after Hitler had shattered their calculations by signing a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, the British Government immediately issued a White Paper on the Nazi concentration camps, whose murderous barbarities had been in full operation throughout the preceding six years, during which British official policy had been building up

Hitler and British statesmen (Churchill included) had been praising him as a great leader, and the horrors had only been described in the left-wing press to be passed over in silence by official circles or discounted as grossly exaggerated. So with Rhodesia. Not only the denial of political rights to the African majority, but draconian legislation and decrees to crush African political organisation had gone on for years. Yet the British Government which, whenever African or other states protested, replied that it alone had responsibility for Rhodesia as its own internal affair, refused to intervene or insist even on the right of existence of African national organisations. The African National Congress was banned. When the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act was introduced in 1960, its provisions were so outrageous that the Federal Chief Justice, Sir Robert Tredgold, resigned in protest, describing it as 'evil and a threat to the rule of law' and declaring:

It will remove any lingering vestige of doubt whether Southern Rhodesia can properly be called a police state . . . it outrages every basic human right.

That was already in 1960, not 1965. The National Democratic Party, successor to the African National Congress, organised an unofficial referendum on the 1961 Constitution, and recorded nearly 500,000 against. Thereupon the National Democratic Party was also banned. The Zimbabwe African People's Union (Z.A.P.U.), which took its place, called for the boycott of the 1961 Constitution of African enslavement. Thereupon Z.A.P.U. was also banned, its leaders arrested, and an amendment passed to the Unlawful Organisations Act to forbid any organisation being formed to replace it. Such was Harold Wilson's 'rule of law' before November 11, 1965, against which the British Government refused to take action.

Phony War?

Now, when at last, despite all the concessions and entreaties by Wilson, which only gave Smith time to complete his mobilisation, the break has been made, not by Wilson, but by Smith. Wilson has been forced to make a stand. But what kind of stand? Certainly a great outward show of sternness is made. Smith is declared guilty of treason. His government is declared to be deposed and no longer a government, but a group of private citizens unlawfully assuming the rights of a government, and therefore enemies of the Queen. Relations are broken off and High Commissioners are recalled. Rhodesia is excluded from the sterling area, from imperial

preference, from aid and credit facilities; extensive trade bans are imposed, including on tobacco and sugar. But the more these stern measures are examined in practice, the more a fog of ambiguity descends upon them. Smith and his Ministers are declared by Wilson to be guilty of treason. ('This is an act of rebellion against the Crown . . . Actions taken to give effect to it will be treasonable.') But is any step taken to arrest them? Not a hint. The law lays down with some precision what is required to be done with subjects committing acts of rebellion and treason. The law is ignored. The denunciation is purely verbal, and is obviously not intended by Wilson to be treated seriously in a legal sense, nor is it so regarded by Smith. The Governor of Rhodesia duly proclaims Smith's Government illegal. The proclamation rings round the world — everywhere except in Rhodesia. In Rhodesia it is excluded from being broadcast; the *Rhodesian Herald* is forbidden to print it. So for Rhodesia it is just some words which disappear into the air. A government cannot be displaced unless it is replaced by another government. But no other government has so far been set up by Britain. For a government to be effective requires force to maintain itself. And Britain has expressly excluded the use of force. The African national leaders have set up an alternative government (unfortunately with a rival at the moment; this has still to be sorted out). But Britain refuses to recognise it. So the public officials and citizens of Rhodesia are solemnly exhorted by Wilson to refuse to obey the illegal régime. But they are not given an alternative government to obey. For the Governor in isolation, who has not even the means to communicate with the citizens of Rhodesia, cannot function as an alternative government. The situation of a 'Governor' who cannot govern, and a non-existent 'government' which is supposed not to exist and in fact does govern, is fit only for *Alice in Wonderland*. There is about all this an unmistakable sniff of the phony war.

What Kind of Economic Sanctions?

As for the economic sanctions, all the expert financial comment has tended to stress their limitation rather than their severity.

In imposing financial as well as trade restrictions on Rhodesia, the British Government have not gone to the ultimate extreme in either case. They have not actually frozen the London sterling balances and other assets owned on Rhodesian account, nor have they gone to the lengths of an oil embargo (*The Times*, November 12, 1965).

There are some indications that the Government is deliberately

holding oil sanctions in reserve as a possible trump card to play in order to defeat the demand of the African and socialist majority in the United Nations for more positive action to bring down the racist dictatorship in Rhodesia and win the fight for African liberation. In other words, as every statement of Government spokesmen has again and again made clear, the problem is seen, not primarily in terms of defeating Rhodesian white racialism, but in terms of circumventing the African and socialist majority in the United Nations. When angry Tory questions demanded why the Foreign Secretary was being sent to call for an urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council on Rhodesia, Wilson's answer was to say, not that this was necessary because the issue was of international concern, but 'because if we do not, somebody else will'. Heath, supporting Wilson, declared: 'The problem will be to avert excessive action by the United Nations'.

A Dubious Strategy

But will economic sanctions alone, especially of the present limited variety, or even if extended, bring down, the racist dictatorship in Rhodesia? All experience throws doubt upon such a proposition. It is evident that the British official calculation is that the pressure of limited sanctions, with careful avoidance of any 'extreme' measures such as might bring immediate democracy with an African majority, should be sufficient to rally the 'moderate' elements among the European minority to displace the Smith Ministry by a Ministry willing to co-operate with Britain on the compromise terms already proposed, without establishing democratic rights for the African majority. This dream of British policy was already expressed long ago by the *Economist* on August 22, 1964, when it said:

The Smith threat once averted, a new Welensky Government could be very popular in Britain . . . the whole issue of independence could simply be shelved.

Similarly *The Times* editorial on November 12, in discussing whether the economic sanctions imposed could be effective to secure 'Britain's ultimate aim' concluded that

they can only be conducive to the aim if they are strong enough to persuade a majority of responsible Rhodesians that their leaders have made a wrong decision.

With obviously inspired parallelism of thought the *Daily Telegraph* editorial on the same day gave the same line:

We must hope that before too long the formalities of these sanctions

and the doubt and discomfort they will cause will bring the change of heart in Rhodesia that is necessary.

It is impossible not to recognise in this strategy the parallel to the similar strategy which inspired British official policy in the period of the phony war—to avoid any extreme measures which might bring revolutionary consequences, and seek to exert only sufficient pressure to replace Hitler by a more ‘moderate’ German Government, possibly of Goering and the military chiefs, such as would be ready to cancel the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and cooperate with Britain. We know what happened to that strategy.

The Fight for African Freedom Will Go Forward

The present British official strategy in relation to Rhodesia will end in a fiasco. With the experience of the *colons* in Algeria before us, to look to the ‘moderates’ among the White settlers for the key rôle in displacing Smith is to indulge in a doubtful gamble for the sake of a spurious ‘solution’ which would still keep the African majority disfranchised. This strategy means to ignore the decisive forces which are shaping the new Africa. To expect that the pressure of limited economic sanctions will rally the majority of those settlers to get rid of Smith instead of consolidating their support around him is to fly in the face of experience. To base all calculations on economic sanctions alone as a sufficient instrument, even if extended to include oil sanctions, is to ignore the rôle of South Africa, which has maintained relations with the Smith régime, and against which Britain has refused to impose economic sanctions in accordance with the recommendations of the United Nations. The question of Rhodesia cannot finally be separated from the question of South Africa and of the Portuguese colonies. The fight to end racial servitude and win democratic freedom in these territories is a common fight. Smith’s action has in the end only sharpened the battle. It is a common battle of all the African peoples, as proclaimed already by all the independent African governments, with support of all the progressive peoples of the world, of the socialist nations, the newly independent states outside Africa, and of all who support these common anti-imperialist aims in the imperialist countries. No manoeuvres can sidetrack this common battle. But it is the vital interest of the British labour movement to play its full part in this common fight which is of such decisive importance for the future, not only of Africa, but of the world.

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