

RESOLVING THE RHODESIAN CONFLICT:

DETENT OR CONFRONTATION?*

by

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After a decade of abortive negotiations for an independence settlement with the Rhodesian Front regime, the British Government had become reconciled to standing aside until the Rhodesians themselves had produced sufficient evidence of the possibility of agreement to merit their intervention to confer legality on the final result. This decision had been arrived at by the Conservative Government in 1972, after the Home-Smith settlement had been overwhelmingly rejected by the African majority (as the Pearce Commission of Enquiry had duly recorded), and it had been continued by the Labour Government after their return to office in February 1974. By the end of that year, however, as the weaknesses of the Smith regime were becoming increasingly apparent, the Labour Government began to consider the means by which increasing pressure could be exerted to effect the prospects of a settlement. The first step in this new departure was the Labour Foreign Secretary's statement, on the occasion of the annual renewal of the sanctions Order on 8 November, that the time had passed when the Rhodesian problem could be settled between Britain and the illegal regime alone. It was not for Britain to tell the Africans what sort of settlement they should or should not support; it was for them to decide and work out for themselves. African aspirations would not be met by "complicated franchise solutions", but only by the recognition by white Rhodesians that they would have to deal with a black majority which must be given real power. What Mr. Callaghan was envisaging as a solution was a constitutional conference at which all Rhodesians would be represented. Although there was considerable doubt whether Britain would be able to bring this about, the Foreign Secretary intended to seek the views and co-operation of African Commonwealth leaders on the subject when he met with them in the course of his visit to Africa at the beginning of the new year.¹

Even before Mr. Callaghan had announced the Labour Government's new approach, the initiative had already shifted to the African continent. While the British had been prepared to await the result of the "processes of consultation" within Rhodesia,² the African States most directly affected by the conflict -- Zambia and South Africa -- had arrived at the conclusion that no solution would be

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forthcoming from this exercise unless pressure were exerted upon the contenders from their respective supporters outside. The impetus for opening the diplomatic offensive was provided by the removal of the Portuguese colonial presence from the scene and the resulting vulnerability of the Rhodesian regime to guerrilla warfare on an extended front. In this transformed situation, Zambia and South Africa had become the two main protagonists: South African military forces were operating on Rhodesia's borders and guerrillas based in Zambia were confronting South African units supporting the Rhodesians. In a war which the Rhodesians could no longer sustain without massive South African military intervention, the alternative could only be a South African disengagement. Before this was possible, however, there had first to be a cease-fire and then a political solution.

Under these circumstances, Britain's role was, if anything, an irrelevance. Having long since abandoned any hope of British intervention, the Zambians had concluded that the real power to effect a change in the military conflict resided with the South Africans, upon whom the rebel regime was totally dependent for their survival. They therefore decided to reopen the diplomatic contacts with South Africa, tentatively begun in 1971 but aborted by Dr. Vorster's premature revelations. However, before President Kaunda's special emissary, Mr. Mark Chona (brother of the Prime Minister) began his series of secret meetings with the South Africans, in October 1974, the British Government were informed of the new initiative. At a meeting between their Foreign Minister, Mr. Mwaanga, and the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Callaghan, on 10 August in Geneva (where the Cyprus discussions were proceeding), agreement was reached on the project, and a committee, to include representatives of Tanzania and Botswana as well as Zambia and Britain, was to be established to maintain a review of the situation in Rhodesia while the diplomatic contacts were proceeding.

The Voice of Reason

The first evidence that the Zambian initiative was yielding some result came with Dr. Vorster's speech to his Parliament on 23 October, hailed by President Kaunda as "the voice of reason". In response to the South African offer of detente, the Zambian President put forward his disengagement scheme, appealing for the withdrawal of South African forces from Rhodesia as a first and essential precondition for peace in the area. What Zambia could offer in return was control of the guerrilla forces operating from its own and from neighbouring territories (the latter assured with the concurrence of the leaders of Tanzania, Botswana and Mozambique), while negotiations among the Rhodesians took place.

Although the South Africans held out no promise of an immediate withdrawal of their forces from Rhodesian territory, since the Prime Minister was still maintaining (in a speech to his constituency on 5 November) that they were protecting South Africa against black nationalist "terrorism", his simultaneous pronouncement that changes could be expected within the next several months was some indication that a time limit was envisaged for the duration of their support for the Rhodesians (and also for the institution of changes within the Republic itself). The warning to the rebel regime was loud and clear: a negotiated settlement with the African nationalists or a continuation of guerrilla warfare without South African assistance. Whether Mr. Smith would draw the obvious conclusions remained uncertain from his usual contradictory utterances. While paying lip service to "any efforts to foster peaceful co-existence"³, in his UDI anniversary address he took a strong line against "those who advocated appeasement and compromise on principle, even before they have reached the stage of negotiating". But he was obviously embarrassed by the exposure of South Africa's reluctance to remain in what he continued to regard as "the same boat", for he told the *Financial Mail* on 15 November that while he welcomed South African material support and the presence of their police units, if the Rhodesians had to do the task themselves, they would not hesitate to do so.

In spite of Mr. Smith's public show of confidence in Rhodesia's ability to survive, preferable with, but even without, South African support, he could not afford to be seen to be the only obstacle to what was developing into an atmosphere of detente in southern Africa. This he was reminded of by the European Establishment, particularly by the leader of the Rhodesian party, Mr. Timothy Gibbs, and by the former Federal Prime Minister, Sir Roy Welensky, the latter now convinced that a settlement was possible as a result of the peace initiative undertaken by what he regarded as "the most important white man in the sub-continent" and also "the most important black leader in Nigeria".⁴ To cover the eventuality of a capitulation to the pressures for a peaceful settlement being exerted upon him both within and outside the country, he admitted, also in his UDI anniversary broadcast, that the situation had been transformed by "new developments emanating from certain other countries" (from which Britain was obviously excluded as not having a contribution to make).⁵ At the same time, however, he was aware of the rising tide of opposition from the intransigent right -- Mr. Len Idensohn's Rhodesia National party and Mr. William Harper's followers, establishing the new United Conservative party to express their fears of "a betrayal of white interests". It was to this constituency that his strictures against appeasement of "terrorists" and against "lowering of standards" or departing from basic principles were directed.⁶

Although it was not revealed until the following month, Mr. Smith

had, in fact, already yielded to South African pressures while publicly disclaiming any intention of doing so. On 3 December it was officially announced in Salisbury that a number of African nationalist leaders, including representatives of the banned ZAPU and ZANU, had been released from detention to attend talks in Lusaka with the three African Presidents (of Zambia, Tanzania and Botswana) involved in the preliminary negotiations. Notably absent from the scene, the British, in a Foreign Office statement on 5 December, claimed that they had been kept informed about the proceedings during their meetings in London with representatives of the three African States, presumably begun after the Zambian Foreign Minister had first approached Mr. Callaghan on the intended initiative the previous August. Also absent from the Lusaka meetings (at least at this stage) were the South Africans, whose negotiations with the Zambian emissary had been responsible for their taking place at all. For Mr. Smith to have consented to the release, however conditional, of the ZAPU and ZANU leaders (including Mr. Nkomo and Rev. Sithole), hitherto regarded as "terrorists", to participate in talks in an African country from which guerrilla invasions were being mounted, was a concession of such magnitude that it could only have been procured by severe pressure from the South Africans. While Mr. Smith had himself been talking with the ANC leaders for well over a year, he had made a clear distinction between the "moderate" or "reasonable" ones (silencing most of the others by detention) and had ruled out the possibility of ever recognising the claims of the detainees to be spokesmen of the African people. By refusing to consider the latter, he had precluded the possibility of ever reaching any agreement with the Africans, since one of the main conditions laid down by the ANC in their talks with the regime had been the release of those detained for political purposes. For any talks to succeed, this was an essential precondition, but it was also one which the Rhodesian Front had not been prepared to concede at any stage, because of their equation of the forces of political opposition and those of "terrorism". The prospect of a cease-fire on the part of the guerrillas, arranged through the mediation of Zambia, undermined the Smith regime's case for continued detention as a deterrent against "terrorist" invasion, and the weight of South African pressure in support of the Zambian initiative proved to be the decisive factor in opening the way for the meetings in Lusaka.

Although the South Africans had succeeded in getting the Smith regime to allow the African nationalists, ANC as well as ZAPU and ZANU representatives, to confer with the African Presidents in Lusaka, in preparation for talks between the Presidents and the Rhodesian officials (the Secretary to the "Cabinet", Mr. Gaylard, and the "Attorney-General", Mr. Anthony Smith) on 6 December, they had obviously not got any advance commitment from the Rhodesians

on what they were prepared to accept in the way of a political settlement. If they had, the Rhodesians had subsequently changed their mind. While the breakdown of the Lusaka talks remained clouded in obscurity, the official version put out by the Smith regime raised the question of why they had gone into the talks at all, other than to show a sign of willingness to their South African protectors. According to the statement issued by the office of the "Prime Minister", after a meeting of the "Cabinet" on 7 December, the regime had agreed, following the discussions which had taken place in Pretoria, Lusaka and Salisbury, "to mount a constitutional conference on certain conditions". Those conditions were that there should be a "cessation of terrorism" and that any constitutional conference would have to accept that there would be "no lowering of standards". Claiming to have entered the negotiations under these conditions, the latter of which would never have been acceptable to any of the African leaders, the regime then maintained that they had been informed by the African Presidents that there would be no cessation of terrorism unless it were agreed that a precondition of the constitutional conference was that it would be on the basis of "immediate majority rule". Although the source of the alleged information was unspecified in the official statement, Mr. Smith had no such inhibitions in a London *Independent Television News* interview two days later, in which he claimed that the Tanzanian President "in the chair" and "extremist elements" from Rhodesia had started "ruling the roost". But in spite of the fact that proposals from these sources were not acceptable to the regime, they would nevertheless continue to pursue their stated objective of promoting "peaceful co-existence" in southern Africa.

The Smith regime could scarcely have afforded to do less, in view of the prolonged efforts of the South Africans to get them as far as the conference table. That they would go no further must have come as a shock to the South Africans, since it was inconceivable that they would have been a sponsor of a conference to impose immediate majority rule in Rhodesia. Similarly, the Zambians would not have entertained a conference to perpetuate the Rhodesian principle of "no lowering of standards". Had either of these positions been proclaimed in advance, the conference would never have met, since there could have been no result other than deadlock. In spite of the credibility gap established by the official Rhodesian explanation for the failure, the South Africans exonerated them (and also the Zambians) from the blame, preferring to regard the whole episode as a temporary setback to their long-range peace plans for the area. According to Dr. Vorster's version, the day after the Rhodesian rejection, the discussions foundered as a result of "the new demand" at the end of the proceedings, a demand in total conflict with the spirit, intent and result of the agreement up to that point. Whether he intended to

confirm the Rhodesian claim of being given the ultimatum of immediate majority rule was not spelled out, but he did maintain that Rhodesia had throughout "fulfilled its obligations in terms of its commitments". Having exonerated Rhodesia, Zambia and all of the other parties at Lusaka who had made "an honest attempt to find a solution" (but not those who had made "the new demand"), he attributed the failure to "influences exerted by certain circles in the world, the African States, Rhodesia and South Africa" militating against the attempt to reach a settlement. On the credit side, however, he noted the useful contacts established and the favourable climate created, which were sufficient to encourage South Africa to continue its efforts to bring the parties together again around a conference table. The alternative, as Dr. Vorster envisaged it, was "too ghastly to contemplate".⁷

Dr. Vorster did not have long to contemplate the ghastly alternative. Three days later, Mr. Smith, in a televised broadcast, announced that as a result of the exchanges which had continued after the breakdown of the Lusaka talks, the difficulties had been resolved. In particular, he had received assurances that "terrorist activities" in Rhodesia would cease immediately and that the proposed constitutional conference would take place "without any preconditions". To create the right atmosphere for the holding of a constitutional conference, he had accordingly agreed to release the African leaders from detention and restriction and to permit them to engage in "normal activity in terms of the laws applicable to all Rhodesians". For those who would feel concerned at the implication of these developments, he offered the reassurance, first, that it was the regime's firm intention to maintain law and order and, secondly, that they were not prepared to deviate from their standards of civilization -- the latter a condition laid down at the Lusaka meetings and also a cause of their breakdown. And for those who might have seen the parallel with the situation in Mozambique, he insisted that there was no possibility whatever of a similar train of events occurring in Rhodesia. While Rhodesians were called upon to accept the new situation, to put behind them the differences and recriminations of the past and to look to the future, they were nevertheless warned to take appropriate precautions against continuing acts of terrorism and carefully safeguard the security of commercial information.

Mr. Smith's apparent concession was undoubtedly influenced by the South African peace offensive, with Dr. Vorster matching it with a pledge to withdraw his forces as soon as "terrorism" had ended; but it was also related to the fact that he was now confronted for the first time in a decade with a united African opposition. Although no settlement emerged from the Lusaka talks,

a major coup for the African Presidents involved was their success in getting a unity agreement among the African nationalists. At a meeting on 6 December, the two main groups, ZAPU and ZANU, which had maintained separate organizations throughout the years of their banning and exile, together with a splinter group, FROLI led by Mr. Chikerema, agreed to consolidate their forces under a reconstituted ANC, then the only legal African nationalist organization surviving inside Rhodesia. Whether the ANC could continue to survive as such, after incorporating the membership of the banned groups, was dependent upon the regime's willingness to tolerate the existence of an organization whose leaders recognize in their unity agreement, "the inevitability of continued armed struggle and all other forms of struggle until the total liberation of Zimbabwe". The revision of the ANC constitution and the enlargement of its executive to include the banned groups was to be effected at a congress the following March, provided that it could survive both the repression of the Smith regime and the internal differences existing among its component parts, particularly on the issues of a cease fire and the timing of majority rule. The unity of an organization that embraced such a diversity of views as those of the "moderate" ANC and those of the militant ZANU was bound to be fragile. Nevertheless, there was no doubt about the party's commitment to majority rule as the only basis for independence, and a statement to this effect was made to the Press by Bishop Muzorewa on 12 December, in reply to Mr. Smith's offer the previous day of a constitutional conference without preconditions. As the Bishop said, the ANC was ready for talks with the regime, but the venue, the chairmanship and the agenda for those talks had first to be settled between the two sides before a discussion of the constitutional issues could even begin.⁸

A Yawning Chasm

The hopes for a constitutional conference early in the new year, and "without preconditions", as Mr. Smith had pledged, gradually receded over the weeks and then months that followed the breakdown of the Lusaka talks. Within Rhodesia, the differences between the two sides were not limited to the procedural questions of how such a conference should be arranged, with the Africans committed to a British presence, preferably in the chair and to London (or at least another African country) as the venue and the regime holding out for an all-Rhodesian membership meeting in Salisbury under the chairmanship of Mr. Smith. While a compromise, involving the participation of other African or "neutral" countries might have reconciled these differences, the substantial divisions were so fundamental as to cast doubt upon the possibility of a successful outcome of any conference, even if one could be staged. Most of the differences between the two sides arose over just what had or had not been agreed at Lusaka, particularly on

the subjects of a cease-fire and the release of political prisoners. But the most fundamental division was over the critical issue of majority rule, on which no compromise appeared to be possible after the Rhodesian regime had rejected the Lusaka proposals on the basis of their refusal to recognize this principle. Although Mr. Smith had subsequently conceded, in his broadcast of 11 December, that a constitutional conference would take place without preconditions, he was obviously excluding the condition of majority rule, which remained, so far as the rebel regime was concerned, non-negotiable. This was evident from his remarks in a BBC interview only a few days later (15 December), in which he admitted that the thought of African majority rule had never entered his head, he doubted that it ever would, and he still believed that there would be no black rule in Rhodesia in his lifetime. As a self-confessed "right-winger" and the leader of "the right-wing party in Rhodesia", he firmly believed in a qualified franchise and was opposed to the counting of heads "like the counting of sheep". His only concession towards sharing power was a recognition that the Africans must be brought along and that if he found any of ability or merit he would be prepared to give them a chance, provided that they were willing to cooperate in the face of "extremist" pressure against their doing so.

Incredible as it might seem, in view of Rhodesia's precarious existence and the pressure being exerted by its mainstay, South Africa, for a settlement, Mr. Smith was still able, at the end of 1974, to cling to the same outworn cliches and positions that had been responsible for both the origin of the conflict and its prolonged continuation. Party political pressures were certainly responsible for keeping Mr. Smith in line with previous Rhodesian Front commitments, as the chairman, Mr. Desmond Frost, indicated in a statement two days later, relegating the decision to attempt negotiations to "something that the South Africans started" as a means of getting international recognition for Rhodesia. Dismissing the prospect of majority rule as unrealistic and as something that the Africans and the Press were attempting to foster, Mr. Frost warned that unless the Press indicated to the Africans that their demands were unrealistic, it could lead to a right-wing backlash -- as Mr. Smith had been aware when he assumed the role of "a right-wing leader of a right-wing party".

For the Africans, the recognition of the principle of majority rule was an essential condition for the success of any constitutional conference. On the same day that Mr. Smith was telling the BBC that the thought of African majority rule had never entered his head, Mr. Robert Mugabe, a leading spokesman of the new ANC and a former executive official of ZANU, was calling for the acceptance of the principle of immediate majority rule as a fact,

Leaving the mechanics to be dealt with after that fact had been accepted. The main issue, as he saw it, was one of immediate transfer of power, although he was prepared to concede that there would necessarily have to be an interim period during which the legislative changes would be introduced.⁹ Under these circumstances, majority rule was not negotiable; concessions or compromises were relevant only to the mechanics of the transfer; and the purpose of a constitutional conference would be to work out the conditions by which it could be brought about.

The widening gulf between the regime and the African opposition was not restricted to the constitutional question of majority rule. Also in dispute was the regime's good faith in carrying out their part of the agreement to release those still detained and restricted and to implement the cease-fire as agreed. The issues were inextricably linked by the fact that the Africans would not attend a constitutional conference until the detainees were released and the informal cease-fire would not become a formal one until a date for the conference had been set. On the other side, the rebel regime would not continue to release the detainees until a complete cease-fire had been observed by the guerrilla fighters. The cease-fire issue was further complicated by the manner in which the regime attempted to implement it, with the Rhodesian Air Force dropping leaflets over the fighting areas calling upon the guerrillas to abandon their arms and surrender or to withdraw to their bases in Zambia or Mozambique. That some fighting would continue was inevitable, not only as a result of the difficulty of getting the cease-fire message across to the guerrilla forces as emanating from their own leaders and not the enemy regime, but also as a result of the determination of certain ZANU forces to continue the liberation war as the only certain means of assuring the victory of the African majority which had been so long denied. The regime, well aware of the differences which had arisen within the nationalist camp over the implementation of the cease-fire, was able to take advantage of the violations which had occurred as a means of both dividing the nationalist movement and delaying the implementation of any constitutional commitments to the Africans which might have the effect of alienating their European supporters.

The first evidence of the regime's retreat from the Lusaka agreement came with the announcement by the "Minister" of Law and Order, Mr. Lardner-Burke, on 10 January, one month after Mr. Smith had announced the decision to release the detainees, that no more were being released because the guerrilla forces were not observing the cease-fire. In an interview in the *Rhodesia Herald*, he claimed that not only had "terrorists" failed to obey explicit instructions from their alleged leaders to cease hostilities, they had increase

their activities in some areas and, since the cease-fire was announced, more "terrorists" had actually crossed the border into Rhodesia. Furthermore, he had evidence of pamphlets with a "violent and racialistic content", presumably printed in Zambia, being circulated in the operational areas urging guerrillas to continue fighting and accelerate the war. Although he would reveal no figures on the number of detainees still being held, it was evident from the numbers being cited by the ANC and by former detainees who had themselves been released that less than one-third of those down for release by the regime had managed to achieve their freedom before the halt was called. According to Mr. Mugabe's statement to the press on 15 December, up to 300 of his ZANU members were still being held at that time; and Mr. Chikerema, at an OAU meeting in Dar es Salaam on 14 January, a month after the Lardner-Burke announcement, claimed that only about 100 of some 600 detainees had been released by then. The dispute concerned not only the number of detainees still held but also the grounds on which they were being held. While the ANC claimed that all "political" prisoners were equally entitled to their freedom, the regime was maintaining that those captured as guerrilla fighters or those arrested for aiding "terrorism" were special categories excluded from the agreement on release.

If the regime's motive had been to split the nationalists over the cease-fire issue or shift the blame for the continued detentions to their inability to control their fighting forces, their intention misfired. What the regime encountered instead was a hardening of African attitudes to the whole question of a settlement and counter-charges of their own violations of the cease-fire. At a meeting of the Central Committee of the ANC in Salisbury on 12 January, it was agreed that the party would refuse to take part in any constitutional negotiations unless the regime fulfilled their part of the eight-point plan agreed at the Lusaka talks in December between Rhodesian officials and the three African Presidents and the FRELIMO leader. According to the ANC statement at the conclusion of the meeting, the regime had completely misinformed the public on the commitments undertaken at Lusaka, which Mr. Smith had not even mentioned either in his rejection of the terms for a constitutional conference on 7 December or in his subsequent declaration on 11 December concerning the cease-fire, the release of detainees and the holding of a conference without preconditions. Those commitments, as revealed by the ANC publicity secretary, Dr. Edson Sithole, were mainly concerned with the release of all political detainees and a general amnesty for all political prisoners; but they also included an agreement to revoke the ban on ZAPU and ZANU, to allow free political activity and expression and to lift the state of emergency -- the latter essential prerequisites for meaningful

constitutional discussions throughout the country. On the cease-fire terms (not included in the eight-point agreement), the ANC maintained that it had been agreed that there would be an informal arrangement by which both sides would inform their forces; a formal cease-fire would be brought into effect only after the announcement of the date for a constitutional conference and the start of "meaningful" discussions on the subject. Furthermore, the ANC charged the regime with "flagrant violation" of the cease-fire by their distribution of leaflets in the operational zones calling for surrender and an end to the war. To the ANC, a cease-fire did not mean surrender: it meant no more than "stopping to shoot and to advance beyond the lines where the respective forces are found". At this stage, the ANC was not only holding out for an implementation of the eight-point Lusaka plan as a condition for a constitutional conference (and, in turn, for a formal cease-fire), it was also insisting that it would attend such a conference only if it were held outside Rhodesia and under the chairmanship of the British Foreign Secretary.¹⁰

Since the Smith regime was still maintaining that the release of detainees and the restoration of political activity were dependent upon the achievement of a cessation of hostilities, a complete deadlock had developed between the two sides during the month following the so-called agreement arrived at in Lusaka. This "yawning chasm", as Mr. Smith called it, was confirmed by his declaration, at the opening of a new factory at Norton on 15 January, that the regime had no intention of ever handing over the country to black majority rule. Their mission was to preserve that Christ civilization which their forefathers brought with them when they settled in that country for all time -- a claim clearly belied by the emigration figures of the previous decade. Mr. Smith also counter-attacked the African nationalists for their "blatant disregard" of the Lusaka agreement, again citing violations of the cease-fire by the nationalist forces (some 56 guerrilla incidents reported since 11 December)¹¹ as a justification for the regime's policy of withholding their part of the agreement. Not only had the regime failed to restore political activity to the African nationalists, they had that very day banned all political meetings organized by the ANC, including a planned multi-racial one. In view of these conditions, Mr. Smith's assessment of the chances of a settlement with Britain was that they were "very slim". Although claiming that his regime would not be found wanting (by the South Africans?) in their efforts to reach a settlement, he made it clear in a direct attack upon the South African press (*Die Transvaler*, in particular), which had criticised his "illogical conduct" over majority rule, that they would accept a settlement of the constitutional dispute only on terms which would be beneficial to Rhodesia. Anything else would be simply unacceptable, at least to the European sector of the population.

The British Presence

While the charges and counter-charges over the implementation of the Lusaka agreement continued unabated and unreconciled, the British Foreign Secretary was pursuing his meetings with African leaders which he had proposed the previous November as the Labour Government's new initiative towards a Rhodesian settlement. There was an air of unreality about the whole exercise, since the real decisions were being taken elsewhere -- not only in Rhodesia itself but also in Lusaka and Pretoria. But the visit had been announced before it was known what effect, if any, the initial efforts of the African States towards a detente would produce. By the time Mr. Callaghan arrived in Africa at the end of 1974, his presence there was no longer a significant factor so far as enhancing the prospects of a settlement in Rhodesia was concerned. If there was anything to be gained from the effort, it was in the direction of improving relations with Commonwealth leaders in Africa, not an achievement to be underrated in view of the strains imposed by the differences of approach over Rhodesia which had persisted during the years since the UDI. The fact that a British Foreign Secretary thought it necessary to consult African opinion on the conditions for a settlement was in itself a new departure from previous British practice. But it amounted to no more than a belated recognition of the fact that it was now the African leaders themselves -- particularly those of Zambia, Tanzania and Botswana -- who were actually determining the conditions that would be acceptable to the Africans as a settlement. Britain had no immediate contribution to make to the dialogue that had already begun before the Foreign Secretary's visit; its responsibility was limited to conferring legality upon the end product, if any. For the first time since the UDI, the real initiative for a settlement had shifted to the African continent and Britain's role at this stage of the proceedings was to be kept informed of the new developments.

The Foreign Secretary admitted as much when he reported to Parliament on 14 January that the main purpose of his visit had been to obtain a clear idea of the views of the six Commonwealth countries he visited and to work out a common policy with them in order to take advantage of the recent initiatives of the African Presidents as well as the South African Prime Minister. What he found, as a result, was that there was now a greater degree of understanding between Britain and the African Governments than at any time since the UDI: in President Nyerere's words, their policies were now "converging". What accounted for this new relationship was not an alteration of African opinion, which had remained constant, but a reversal of British policy, particularly its belated

recognition of majority rule as the only basis for an independence settlement. Once this principle had been accepted by the British, the only remaining differences with the African Governments concerned were over the methods of achieving it. Although Mr. Callaghan had conceded to the three African Presidents that the Rhodesian problem could only be finally settled by a constitutional conference, there was no indication of what Britain would or could do to bring this about. To the two requirements which he regarded as essential observance of the provisions of the Lusaka agreement and direct exploratory talks between the ANC and the Smith regime -- Britain had no contribution to make. As before, the British Government would be ready to do anything which would contribute to a settlement, but only after the people of Rhodesia themselves had got down to working out what sort of constitutional solution would be acceptable to them.

While the Foreign Secretary's tour was originally designed to include only the Commonwealth countries of Zambia, Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya and Nigeria, his statement on arrival in Lusaka that he would be willing to meet anyone if he thought it would further the objective of securing a constitutional settlement immediately raised the question of a possible meeting with the Rhodesians and also with the South Africans. Although Mr. Callaghan had expected to meet the Rhodesian African leaders while he was in Lusaka irrespective of whether Mr. Smith took up his open invitation to meet "anyone" while he was there, the six-member ANC delegation which was to fly to Lusaka for the meeting was prohibited by the regime from leaving the country. The official reason for refusing permission for the visit was that "no request had been received by the Rhodesian Government from either the Zambian or British Governments for ex-detainees to visit Lusaka". Since the ex-detainees had been permitted to attend the meetings in Lusaka with other African leaders the previous December, the regime's action to prevent this particular meeting was an obvious snub to the British Foreign Secretary. It also amounted to a clear indication by Mr. Smith that neither he nor any members of his regime had any intention of conferring with a Labour Foreign Secretary whose Government were now committed to African majority rule as a basis of an independence settlement. If the Rhodesians were, as Mr. Callaghan had suggested in Lusaka on 31 December, like "men stranded in the middle of an ice-field", they certainly had no intention of taking up the British offer to "help save them from themselves".

Although prevented from saving the stranded Rhodesians, Mr. Callaghan managed to arrange a "surprise visit" to South Africa, as he put it, "to explore Dr. Vorster's mind". The visit to South Africa had not originally been included in the itinerary, partly because of the offence which it might have caused to a large section of the Labour party and also to several African leaders whose

opinions were being sought on the policy to be adopted towards Rhodesia in the context of southern Africa. There was the additional question of how South Africa would respond to a proposed meeting with a Labour Foreign Secretary whose Government had reimposed the arms embargo, threatened to terminate the Simons-town agreement on the naval base and supported the United Nations policy on the occupation of Namibia. However, despite these strains in their relationship, South Africa was indebted to Britain (and also to France and the USA) for the veto cast on 30 October to prevent its expulsion from the United Nations. As for African reactions, having first cleared the visit with the Zambians, who themselves had by this time experienced some fifteen official meetings with the South Africans, Mr. Callaghan was assured that no offence would be caused to the leaders of the African Commonwealth States still to be visited.

On at least one aspect of the visit the British and the Africans especially the Zambians, were agreed: the future course of the rebel regime would be determined in Pretoria. Although Mr. Callaghan had denied, while announcing the intended visit, that its purpose was to urge Dr. Vorster to exert pressure on Mr. Smith to get a settlement, this was the obvious objective, and one which the Zambians had pursued in their own diplomatic efforts of the preceding months. For the British there was also the question of South African military forces on the territory of what was still, in law, a British colony. The presence of these forces had been a continuing source of friction between Britain and South Africa, with the latter refusing to remove them at the request of successive British Governments and with Britain having to answer for its inability to affect the situation before the world community at the United Nations. Although Dr. Vorster had already indicated, in his exchanges with the African leaders, that South Africa would be prepared to withdraw its forces as soon as there was a halt to "terrorist" activities, the delay in implementing the pledge had been attributed to the failure of the African nationalists to control their forces in the field. Since South Africa had already lost the lives of some half-dozen of its policemen in incidents occurring during the few weeks following the declaration of the cease-fire, it could claim that the conditions for its withdrawal had not yet been established. Mr. Callaghan could therefore expect no immediate reversal of South African policy on this subject. However, since the support which South African forces were providing for the Rhodesians remained one of the main weapons of coercion which Dr. Vorster had at his disposal to exert pressure on the Smith regime, the mere threat of their withdrawal could be invoked as a means of influencing Rhodesian attitudes towards a settlement. Furthermore, the South Africans had to consider the fact that the retention of their forces on Rhodesian soil was one of the major obstacles to realizing the detente which they were

seeking to promote with black Africa. If South African forces were to be withdrawn, it would not be as a result of British pressure to do so; it would be because it was no longer in South Africa's interests to keep them there.

Nor was any agreement forthcoming on the other main issue raised in the course of the talks on Rhodesia -- a constitutional conference. While Mr. Callaghan had encountered from all of the black African leaders he had consulted a demand for Britain to stage a constitutional conference, the South Africans were noticeably unenthusiastic about such a proposal. Having opened their own dialogue with black Africa, they apparently expected Mr. Smit to do the same with the Rhodesian Africans. While they might be prepared to exert the necessary pressure to get Mr. Smith to recognize the principle of majority rule, based on a qualified franchise, which the South Africans had come around to accepting as an inevitable result of Rhodesia's constitutional development, they were less inclined to exert that influence for the purpose of ensuring a British presence in the proceedings. South Africa's main concern was to have a stable and peaceful neighboring country across the Limpopo, even if that objective could only be realized by a transition to African majority rule. A black government in Rhodesia would at least mean the end of hostilities, which were a threat to South Africa's own security, and an end to the economic sanctions, which were a barrier to the expansion of South Africa's economic relations with the rest of Africa. Clearly, South Africa and Rhodesia were no longer, as Mr. Smith preferred to believe, "in the same boat". As Mr. Callaghan summed up the situation at a press conference after the meeting in Port Elizabeth on 5 January, he and Dr. Vorster were looking at the situation from different perspectives. Because of its geographic proximity Rhodesia was a national security matter of some magnitude for South Africa. For Britain, on the other hand, it was a matter of honor -- not a question so much of victory or defeat, but of redeeming the promises which it had made.

By the time Mr. Callaghan concluded his African tour in Lagos on 9 January, he was speaking of a reasonable solution of the Rhodesian constitutional crisis "within this decade". Whether the Africans were prepared for a wait of what could be up to another five years for Britain to redeem its promises was exceedingly doubtful. In both Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, while he had conceded Britain's responsibility for convening a constitutional conference, he was exceedingly cautious about the means by which this could be brought about, ruling out, as if it were still necessary at this stage, any possibility of a resort to force. In a reply to the Tanzanian Foreign Minister, on 6 January, calling for a British initiative, he warned that there was still a great deal to be done to prepare for the next step, since confidence was very frag

and the gap between the two sides very wide. Nevertheless, because the three African Presidents had already "taken the lid off the Rhodesian problem", which could never be put back in the way it was before, he was optimistic that there was a greater chance than ever to settle the conflict with justice and honor. While Mr. Callaghan may have satisfied the Tanzanians, as President Nyerere admitted to Independent Television News after the talks, that Britain had finally abandoned its attempt to persuade Africans to accept independence on the basis of minority rule and was now prepared to play a meaningful role in getting a settlement based on majority rule, there was still the issue of force to be accounted for, which the British Foreign Secretary had refused to contemplate. The Tanzanian President had no doubts on this score when he warned the white Rhodesians that if the proposed constitutional conference failed, an intensified and more bitter guerrilla war would be resumed. In an address to the OAU Liberation Committee on 8 January (while Mr. Callaghan was in Nairobi), he called upon the Rhodesian Africans to be prepared for a protracted armed struggle in the event of a breakdown of the constitutional talks. In that struggle they would have the full support of the OAU, because Africa would accept Rhodesian independence and its return to the international community only on the basis of African majority rule, whether it came in a month or in a year or after long years of fighting.

In view of the complete deadlock between the ANC and the rebel regime, not only on the fundamental issue of majority rule but even on the procedural means of establishing a constitutional conference, President Nyerere's assessment of the situation was probably a more accurate one than Mr. Callaghan's vision of a settlement of the conflict with justice and honor. Even the precarious detente established by the three African Presidents was beginning to show signs of strain, with the South African failure to produce any change in the Rhodesian situation other than a withdrawal of their police units from forward positions on the Zambezi, officially announced in Salisbury on 11 February. The African Presidents were also under fire from the OAU for engaging in diplomatic contacts with South Africa without prior reference to that organization. Regarding the whole exercise as a South African manoeuvre to split the black African camp, the Council of Ministers meeting in Addis Ababa on 22 February recalled that OAU policy on the issue of "dialogue", established in 1971 in response to the efforts of the Ivory Coast, was that only liberation movements should speak to South Africa. Since OAU support was an essential element for a continuation of the liberation struggle, its strictures on African governmental contacts with the South Africans could not be entirely ignored by the African States which had been involved in the negotiations.

While there was still the possibility of South Africa continuing to exert its pressure on the rebel regime for the sake of its own disengagement from the hostilities and the possible extension of the guerrilla war, its efforts to induce Mr. Smith to accept a settlement were dependent upon the African Presidents doing the same with their side in the conflict. If Mr. Smith could convince the South Africans that he had done everything possible to reach a settlement but had been frustrated by the lack of cooperation from his African opponents, the South African case for abandoning the Rhodesians would be considerable weakened. Since the rebel regime had the support of the South Africans for their case that a settlement must be an all-Rhodesian affair, they could afford to dismiss the ANC's demands for a British presence at the conference and to reject the British offer of sending an emissary or mission to Salisbury to participate in the preliminary negotiations, as they in fact did at the end of January. They could also expect South Africa to support their claim that they were prepared to make their contribution to a "reasonable" settlement but not to yield to "extremist" demands (which in their view meant immediate majority rule), as Dr. Vorster had concurred with their stand on this issue at the abortive Lusaka meetings the previous December. Whether South Africa would in addition accept the Rhodesian case for restoring detention as a means of silencing the militant African opposition and provoking a split in the already strained African nationalist alliance was, however, a more doubtful proposition, in view of its response to the regime's arrest of the former ZANU leader, Rev. Sithole, on 4 March, on a charge of plotting the assassination of his ANC rivals for the leadership. As the Minister of Police announced on 10 March, South African units would be withdrawn from forward combat positions and confined to their camps, so that they would not be "involved in any way in any possible incidents and thereby embarrass the Rhodesian Government".

That the arrest and trial of the former ZANU leader would also prejudice the prospects of implementing cease-fire and of proceeding with the constitutional talks was confirmed by the refusal of the ANC to participate in any further meetings until Rev. Sithole was released. If, as the ANC publicity secretary said on 10 March, the detention had shattered the whole southern African detente exercise then this was a calculated risk that the regime was prepared to take. For them, the far greater risk was the loss of their European supporters by conceding to the ANC that a settlement was only possible on the basis of majority rule. Nevertheless, their strategy of prolonging the inevitable was dependent upon obtaining the tacit consent of the South Africans, and this was obviously not forthcoming, as the Smith-Vorster meetings in Cape Town on 18 March revealed. Whatever else the South Africans might have required from their Rhodesian allies, they were not going to allow their own detente efforts to be frustrated by the Smith regime's resort to such delay.

tactics as a trial based upon an unsubstantiated (and subsequently withdrawn) charge of an assassination plot. Mr. Smith was obliged to concede as much when he announced in a televised broadcast on 4 April (two days after the special court had upheld the detention of Rev. Sithole on the ground of his advocating continuing guerrilla warfare) that, as a result of a request from the ANC President, supported by the South African Government and the four African Presidents, the former ZANU leader would be released to attend the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the OAU in Dar es Salaam the following week. As he reluctantly admitted, the decision (taken after a visit from the South African Foreign Minister) was not one to which the Rhodesian regime had "readily agreed"; but the reason for doing so was that Rhodesia, both politically and economically, was going through one of the most difficult stages that the country had ever known. What Mr. Smith's belated confession amounted to was an admission that the future of his country was being determined no longer in Salisbury but in Pretoria. The stark alternative had become a detente fostered by South Africa and the four African Presidents or a confrontation supported by the African member states of the OAU, in accordance with their Declaration at Dar es Salaam.

The Rhodesian conflict has yet to be settled and the means of doing so remain unpredictable. A decade ago the UDI was regarded as "A nine-day wonder"; it is still with us today. Since the British have been unable to effect a change in the situation, a solution to the problem must be sought elsewhere. It may be found in Africa itself, either as a result of the policy of detente or as an outcome of the guerrilla war waged by the liberation movement. The only certainty is that a white minority regime cannot long survive in Rhodesia. Less certain are the time required and the method of change, since these are dependent upon the response of the South Africans, without whose support the regime would collapse, and of the black African States controlling the movements of the forces of liberation. It would indeed be an irony of fate if Britain's last colonial responsibility in Africa were discharged not by the British but by the Africans themselves.

Footnotes

1. *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, 8 November 1974.
2. Statement by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, on the Pearch Commission Report, *Ibid.*, 23 May 1972.
3. *Rhodesia Herald*, 2 November 1974.
4. *Ibid.*, 29 October 1974.
5. Interview in *Financial Mail* (Johannesburg), 15 November 1974.
6. Interview in *Sunday Mail* (Salisbury), 1 December 1974.
7. Broadcast of 8 December, *The Star* (Johannesburg), 9 December 1974.
8. *Rhodesia Herald*, 13 December 1974.
9. Press statement, 15 December, *The Times* (London), 16 December 1974.
10. *Ibid.*, 13 January 1975.
11. *Sunday Mail* (Salisbury), 20 January 1975.
12. *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, 14 January 1975.

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