

ZIMBABWE'S COLONIAL LEGACY

by

OLIVER B. POLLACK

The current debate on Rhodesia's future concentrates on two issues: the liberation timetable and whether this goal will be achieved peacefully or violently. This essay proposes to give a general look at the Rhodesian colonial legacy that might influence the structure of and pose problems for independent Zimbabwe.

Rhodesia first received international attention during its founding in the 1890s when John Rhodes and his British South Africa Company imposed their rule over the Shona and Ndebele peoples. This imposition was achieved by concession, treaty, war and conquest, the duplicity of which left a feeling of bitterness amongst the autochthonous peoples. The founding of Rhodesia reflected Rhodes' ego and Cape-Town-based, sub-imperialistic ambition to encircle the Boers, converging with London's imperial strategy of safeguarding the route to India and thwarting Boer, Portuguese and German ambitions in Southern Africa. With the achievement of British paramountcy in South Africa following the Anglo-Boer War, and with Rhodes' death in 1902, Rhodesia slipped back into obscurity--established as white settlers furthest penetration into south central Africa.

By 1914 Afrikaner and British South African settlers had superseded the more transient adventurers, lured by the prospect of finding a second Rand. These settlers were *fragments* of 17th-century Dutch and 19th-century British Societies. By further migration to Rhodesia they became even more distorted fragments. Their isolation, ecology-bred independence, and their uprooting from society bred resistance to new social forces, and their beleaguered frontier society mentality. Predestination and Calvinist oriented Boers worked with social Darwinist Britons. Both considered themselves the chosen people and superior to the African majority they dominated.

Rhodesia's racial policies have deep South African roots. Faced with similar circumstances the Rhodesian settlers successively divided the land, created a ready supply of cheap labor, and provided the wherewithal to control a majority black population to a minority "whiteocracy". A hut tax was introduced in 1894 to raise revenue and induce Africans to leave their homes to take up 'civilizing' wage labor. Following the defeat of the Ndebele in 1894, in deference to the occasionally watchful 'philanthropic' eye of London, reserves were set aside. Poor quality land, and

too little of it, forced able bodied Africans to enter wage employment. Both the Hut Tax and the reserve system had been developed in mid-19th-century Natal. Pass Laws, with an 18th-century Cape heritage, were introduced to control freedom of movement and employability.

The whites brought with them the spirit of the conqueror, the of a superior race and culture, and rigid social separation symbolized by the terms 'baas' and 'boy'. Rhodesia was assumed to be a white man's land that awaited white immigration attracted by the promise of land, cheap labor and white privilege. These foundations of racial domination have contributed to the creation of a settler economy highly stratified by race and class. The current differences in incomes, diets, life styles, education, aspirations and social security between the black and white communities are striking. While the work force is over 85% African, the black workers receive no more than 10% of the national annual wage. Europeans eat bread, potatoes and meat, while most Africans subsist at poverty conditions on corn and occasional meat. Leisure time activities such as movies, vacations and travel, are tually unknown to most Africans. One European in 188 is attending a university as compared to one in 10,000 for the African com A deeper appreciation of the gulf can be obtained by focusing on the subjects of *land* and *labor*, and the class relations based thereon.

Class structure - Rural and Urban

The ownership of land is the most contested issue in Rhodesia. How much should each racial group possess? The British South Africa Company could well argue that by right of conquest the entire country was theirs. Virtually any change from the pitifully small, poor quality reserves of the 1890s would appear an improvement. The 1930 Land Apportionment Act which divided the country into black and white zones has become the "white man's bible". The almost 50,000 whites then were assigned about half the country, while the over one million Africans received about 30%. The remainder stood unassigned. Not only did Africans once more receive the poorer land, but they were ejected from land where they had resided for generations, now designated for white occupancy. The most recent possessory segregation legislation is the Land Tenure Act (1969) which, covering the entire country, provides different tenures for black, white, Asian and coloured peoples in rural and urban areas and generally prohibits the cohabitation of different races in the same area or under the same roof.

The 4.8 million rural black inhabitants fall into three socio-economic classes. The communal agriculturalists live on the reserves and eke out a subsistence or sub-subsistence

existence. Where the land is depleted and mouths to feed numerous, survival is only achieved through supplements from urban based kinfolk. In 1951 the government introduced the Native Land Husbandry Act to (supposedly) transform the reserves into viable, individual, peasant plots. Africans, having been dispossessed of their ancestral lands, distrusted white intentions. Land reform from above was rejected at the grass roots level. By 1960 the Husbandry Act was scrapped as impolitic. The government now aims merely at low-cost conservation projects and hardly keeps statistics on the written-off communal sector.

Over 375,000 African laborers are employed on white farms. Their average cash earnings are \$21 per month in season. Their meager cash income is supplemented by a vegetable patch, "rations" (subsistence requirements with high starch content), and free housing which the laborer generally builds himself. And 50,000 rural based miners earn an average wage of \$52 per month. Some employers provide education facilities at the estate or mine for laborers and their children.

The most prosperous rural black group is the African Purchase Area Farmers, which was created by the 1930 Land Apportionment Act, which provided purchasable individual tenured plots for "advanced" Africans. Today there are almost 9,000 purchase farmers whose average annual income is \$300. (The government's goal is \$450.) The purchase farmers constitute the elite of a rural middle class, more inclined (like settler farmers) to using capitalist farming techniques (nourished by a market orientation) than communal subsistence production.

Eight thousand white farmers constitute the most prosperous rural class. They specialize in intensive farming for home consumption and export. Tobacco, corn, cotton, coffee and tea are cash crops whose profitability are based heavily on cheap black labor.

The situation within urban areas exhibits a similar lopsided socio-economic pattern of internal African divisions and black-white separation. Although the towns are considered 'the white man's Kraal,' Africans outnumber Europeans by almost 4:1 in urban areas. At the bottom of the socio-economic scale are over 120,000 domestic servants who earn \$43 per month (including cash value of food and housing). The domestic servant is not free to choose what he will eat or where he can live. This creates a dependency and deprived status relationship. The next category of town dwellers are the 400,000 Africans employed in the industrial sectors whose average wage is \$79 per month.

Initially African labor was migratory based on seasons of the year and age of the worker. Even now Europeans in Rhodesia

still consider Africans in towns only as transients who have "one foot in the towns and the other foot in the reserves". The white minority government spends an absolute minimum on social welfare services. Thus when an African becomes maimed or too old to serve his white master efficiently, he must find his social security in the reserves.

Following the Second World War it became clear that many Africans considered themselves permanent town dwellers and today there are second and third generation town-born Africans. The white minority government, however, maintains the myth of transient Africans and attempts, with mixed success, to control population movements from rural to urban areas. Insufficient African housing means urban overcrowding and so workers frequently leave their families in the rural areas. Urban home ownership schemes are extremely limited and only available to the African elite. These city people often resent their kinship obligation to rural areas, and the white government that reinforces persistence of traditional social patterns.

Due to stringent discriminatory legal restrictions, low skills and high turn over of workers, black trade unions have had mixed success organizing this urban proletariat and have made little progress against management's and capital's conquest mentality. During the 1948 three-day nationwide African General Strike--the largest African demonstration since the 189 rebellions--the government intervened quickly into the labor-capital struggle fearing civil unrest. Africans were neither legally considered "employees" nor allowed to form official recognized trade unions until the passage, in 1959, of the Industrial Conciliation Act. Prior to this they had been governed by the archaic Master's and Servants' Act. The 1959 Act, however, virtually declared strikes illegal, government permission first having to be obtained to ensure that any prospective labor stoppage did not damage the national economy. Since then, no legal strikes have occurred though there have been many unofficial wildcat stoppages, especially in 1974. The unions have continued to direct their attention to bread and butter issues but have only marginal gains in their standard of living. The average African purchasing power has advanced little since 1918. A pattern of government support of management and the exploitive capitalist system has been established and black organized labor is looked upon as an obstacle to industrial peace and progress and political stability.

An African professional class is emerging among those engaged in teaching, health, public administration and transport. They earn about \$100 per month. A university-trained teacher receives \$370 per month. The wealthiest among the elite are the self-

employed businessmen, especially the busowners. This professional and economic elite numbers less than 50,000.

Europeans constitute the "aristocracy of labor". Employed whites, coloureds and Asians number over 110,000. Their monthly earnings range in various employment sectors from \$402 per month to \$620 per month. In addition the upper echelon posts in the industrial, commercial, financial and public service sectors are exclusively occupied by whites.

Political System in the Colony

This highly stratified class-race economy was created and continually reinforced by self-interested white settlers. In 1923, the British South Africa Company liquidated its governmental administrative responsibilities after a settler referendum opted for Responsible Government rather than incorporation into the Union of South Africa. The settlers hoped that Dominion Status for Southern Rhodesia would follow Responsible Government as it had in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The transplantation of the Westminster Parliamentary Model into the Southern African environment has seen the two party system develop with a tension and alternation between the moderate right ("liberals") and the reactionary right, also referred to as the "soft" and "tough" wings. In Rhodesia, Responsible Government came to mean responsible to the interests of a minority white electorate. That partial responsibility was markedly apparent during the economically depressed 1930s when the white legislature assembly divided Rhodesian society into two non-competing black and white economic spheres of interest, at the cost of the African sector.

Following the Second World War, white immigration to Southern Rhodesia accelerated. Meanwhile, Britain was involved in cutting loose its imperial possessions and creating successor regimes in Asia and Africa--successor regimes in which responsible government was equated with majority rule. However in areas of substantial white settlement such as Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, political devolution was uniquely complicated. Impressed by America's federal experiment, Britain doted on this formula of weakness to strength through union. Britain imposed union with varying degrees of success in Canada, South Africa, Australia, Malaysia, the Caribbean, the South Pacific, and, in 1953, united Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland into the Central African Federation.

This Federation fostered the image of "partnership" between the races which Prime Minister Huggins accurately likened to the partnership between horse and rider, an African being the horse-- and a European the rider. Some social and economic discriminatory

legislation was modified. Marketing restrictions were eased to allow black agriculturalists to enter the wider economy. Several hotels were declared multiracial by the Whitehead administration. African lawyers were granted office space in white areas so as to be able to plead before the bar (which required having offices within a mile of the High Court). The moderate right broached the idea of modifying the Land Apportionment Act and widening the African franchise. By 1959 separate African nationalist movements were active in the three component territories, declaring these reforms "too little, too late". A growing and vocal "tough" right wing, white segment of Southern Rhodesia thought the reforms "too much, too soon". Successive nationalist parties were banned and their leaders languish in jail, in detention or in exile.

British Conservative Prime Minister Harold MacMillan's "Winds of Change" speech, delivered in Cape Town, horrified Southern Rhodesian whites as a sell-out of kith and kin's interests. During the early 60's, Rhodesia received immigrants that naturally supported the forces of reaction. Unskilled Greeks, Italians, Portuguese, and Afrikaners felt most threatened by the possibility of equal rights, as it would erode their most favored position. Blacks and whites working side by side on the railways was anathema. Whites clamored for government to "protect the standards of skilled workers against exploitation by cheap labour" and state control to "remain permanently in responsible hands" (Rhodesian Front Constitution). Embittered white immigrants from India, Kenya, Zambia, and the Congo added to the right wing movement. They looked for inspiration and stability to South Africa's white supremacist regime.

The watershed of white electoral politics came in 1961 when Whitehead succeeded in pushing through a moderate constitution and committed himself to repealing the Land Apportionment Act. The right galvanized into the Rhodesian Front with Ian Douglas Smith emerging as the grass roots spokesman for the survival of white civilization. In 1963 the Federation broke up and the successor regimes in Zambia and Malawi were led by Kenneth Kaunda and Hastings Banda. Britain felt a sense of responsibility towards Southern Rhodesia but was impotent to modify the Rhodesian Front's obdurate stand against majority rule.

Contemporary Political Scene

Rhodesia re-emerged in the international limelight during the 1960s. Decolonization in the British and French empires was proceeding at an ever-accelerating pace. The racial domination of five and a half million Africans by a quarter of a million whites became anachronistic in the face of the morality of

decolonization, the newly independent nations and the United Nations. Rhodesia had failed to obtain Dominion status and Britain would not decolonize *de jure* short of majority rule. Buffeted by these modern ideas, white Rhodesians clung to the past and in 1965 declared their 1776-style Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain. The United Nations declared Ian Smith's government an illegal regime and imposed economic sanctions.

The Rhodesian Front has continued the tradition of bastardized constitutionalism. Rhodes held out "equal rights for all civilized men south of the Zambezi". The symbol of civilization was the property franchise, which rose from R\$100 in 1898 to R\$1440 in 1961 and now stand about R\$2200 per year. New constitutions were adopted in 1923, 1953, 1961, 1965 and 1969. Their main import was exclusion rather than comprehension. The effect of the various franchises and representative systems has been to maintain complete legislative control in white hands, and over the last decade, in the hands of the Rhodesian Front. The 80,000 white electors have 50 representatives while black voters have 15. Civilization was an income unattainable by 99% of the Africans.

Rhodesia's place in the community of nations is a hotly debated question. While United Nations sanctions are an imperfect instrument, isolation has taken its toll in white morale and growth in the white community. Negotiations have been intermittent between Smith and both Harold Wilson's Labour and Edward Heath's Conservative governments. Rhodesia seeks settlement to lift sanctions and infuse a sense of stability and security into the white community. Settlement might make it possible to temporarily back off from the untenable, romantized idealization of the perpetually beleaguered republic. Settlement however, has proved an illusive goal. In 1971, it looked as though Smith had achieved his cherished settlement with Lord Home, Conservative Foreign Secretary. The agreement provided for eventual majority rule sometime in the 21st century. However, the African populace overwhelmingly, and to the surprise of the white community, rejected the agreement. The shock and amazement demonstrated how out of touch the white minority government was in their paternal conception of "our happy Africans".

The 15 African members of the Assembly Chiefs in the Senate are inadequate and ineffective representatives of the African population. The African majority has had to voice its interests and aspirations though extra-parliamentary political movements such as the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). These groups virtually refused to participate within a constitutional structure which left

power under the control of the settler minority. The current black organization, the African National Council, formed in 1974 to organize African rejection of the Smith-Home proposed agreement, has become the dominant African party since ZAPU and ZANU came together under it. It is headed by Bishop Abel Muzorewa and the executive is filled with members from earlier national organizations. It represents mass discontent and aspirations and was the cause of Westminster rejecting the Smith-Home agreement. Britain has since stated that before any international or "external" settlement will be approved that black and white Rhodesians will first have to reach an "internal" settlement.

Ideologically, Smith and the Rhodesian Front find it difficult to negotiate or compromise with blacks. Part of the settler mentality is to apply inflated standards, never let the side down, and let the "African know who is boss". These attitudes pervade the entire society with few exceptions. Circumstances, however, can override ideology. Despite public statements swearing that he would not negotiate with the Bishop, Smith has held semi-secret meetings with the ANC, which have ended inconclusively. The guerilla war in the Zambezi valley and on the north east frontier, the likelihood of its expansion following the collapse of the Portuguese presence in Mozambique will leave 92% of Rhodesia's borders in unsympathetic or hostile control. And the escalating reliance of Rhodesia on South Africa has further increased the desirability for settlement.

The question at the 1974 General Election was whether the Front could succeed in recreating a workable and durable copy of the South African system in the face of international sanctions and increased hostility, or whether the Rhodesia Party (a moderate white party) should reach a settlement with the African majority and thereby defuse the problem. In the atmosphere of the changing geo-political climate surrounding Rhodesia the white moderate right raised the romantic banner of trust between the races and peaceful accommodation towards some untimely larger African political role in the country. Two independents, Allen Savory (who left the RP) and Dr. Ahrn Palley, of the Rhodesia Party campaigned along these lines. The result of the election, however, clearly reveals that almost 80% of the white electorate prefer to cling to white privilege and the bankrupt Rhodesian Front. As usual, the minority electorate wants to have its cake and eat it-- continued white privilege and settlement. Instead, they may be setting the stage for heightened conflict.

In the final analysis the initiative for change is up to the African population and its leadership. "Watchful waiting" may be a practical temporary policy as the dust settles in Mozambique.

But FRELIMO in the palace in Lourenco Marques is still a long way from ANC in Independence House, Salisbury. Moreover, Rhodesian whites will not be undercut by a European continental based metropolitan power. After all, says the RF, that is what UDI was all about. The immediate future holds continued and perhaps heightened conflict and polarization. The ANC has six sympathizers in Parliament, escalation of guerilla warfare is likely and draft eligible white males will continue to leave the country. Labour unrest in the midst of international inflation and other forms of boycott, combined with continued international pressure could all take their toll of the white supremacist regime as the simultaneous pressures escalate and converge.

DR. OLIVER B. POLLAK is with the Department of History at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He lectured in History at the University of Rhodesia, Salisbury, from 1971 to 1974.