



World Wide Photo

*Last year's talks between Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith and black nationalist leaders ended in failure. They did, however, bring together for the first time President Kaunda of Zambia and Prime Minister Vorster of South Africa. The two leaders are shown during their meeting on the Victoria Falls railway bridge just before the talks.*

Mr. Wilson tried to rescue him from it at two meetings, which nearly succeeded, but the solutions were turned down by Mr. Smith and his Cabinet. I tried again in 1971, and agreed on the terms of a settlement with Mr. Smith, but this time the Africans, on consultation, came down against it.

The latter meeting is of interest because Mr. Smith actually put his name to significant change. He agreed to a commission to recommend ways to end racial discrimination. He agreed to alter the income tax laws, which operated to disfranchise thousands of Africans, so as to make them eligible for the vote. He agreed to move to parity between blacks and whites in the Parliament, and from there to a common voting roll for blacks and whites. He accepted the need for a bill of human rights to be incorporated in the constitution. In these measures lie the secret of evolutionary change, and a future of harmonious relations in the country.

But two things have changed for the worse. Mr. Smith, when the Africans turned down the proposals, felt himself absolved from carrying through the reforms. The Africans, unable to gain acceptance of their own proposals, and following the U.S.S.R.'s intervention in Angola, seem to be concluding that their only hope is guerilla warfare conducted from Mozambique on a scale that will force the Europeans to capitulate.

Britain has little ability to influence

the situation, while the South African Government, gravely embarrassed by the apparent inevitability of conflict, finds it impossible to apply pressure beyond strong advice. An economic squeeze would not be supported by the South African electors.

The second factor in the equation is that, since 1971, the time-scale for evolutionary change has contracted fast. The British Government has put it at two years, which I believe to be physically impossible and a mistake; but majority rule is now bound to come and reasonably soon.

There is perhaps one saving grace. "Majority rule" need not be "one-man-one-vote". A comparatively high qualification for the franchise would still bring majority rule in the easily foreseeable future. It could be responsible rule too. Hope, however, is receding fast as both sides dig in.

The perspective, then, in Africa is nowhere encouraging. There is danger of a return to tribalism. There are grave dangers from Communist intervention in unstable societies, and Southern Africa poses acutely the problem of race. Few outsiders are going to risk getting their fingers burnt, so Africans and Europeans on the continent will need to settle their problems themselves.

We must hope for evolutionary change, but it will require much wisdom, and that commodity, for the present, is conspicuously in short supply.

*Smith agreed to parity in Parliament and a common voting role*