

Mr. Speaker:

On November 24 the British Government announced proposals for settlement of the constitutional position of Rhodesia.

By now Members will be familiar with the main features of these proposals, which include provisions on the franchise and the composition of the legislature designed to give an increasing political voice to Africans, provisions intended to reduce racial discrimination, including a justiciable Declaration of Rights, a large development programme, and a test of acceptability to be conducted by a commission appointed by the British Government.

For the convenience of Members I am tabling the British White Paper containing these proposals, which are complex and cover a number of interrelated procedures that must be completed before a settlement can be said to be secured.

From the beginning, Canada has held that the solution in Rhodesia should be a constitution providing for the rapid election of a government broadly representative of the Rhodesian people, of whom the overwhelming majority are black. The constitutional arrangements which have been announced fall short of this objective. The period for the transition to majority rule is not specified and the means for achieving it are highly complicated. Given the past experience with complicated constitutional provisions in Rhodesia and in various other parts of the world, there is inevitably concern as to how these arrangements will be implemented. Much will depend on the goodwill and co-operation of all concerned -- qualities not always evident in recent years in the conduct of the Rhodesian régime.

When I visited Africa last March, I was struck by the fact that two great contemporary dramas were being played out on that continent. Southern Africa is the scene of one of the most crucial chapters in the world-wide search for racial equality and human dignity, and the scene of the final stages in the liquidation of the European colonial empires.

Both of these themes are found in Rhodesia. In seeking to provide equitable arrangements for Rhodesian independence Britain has had to face the fact that the white minority is at the present time unwilling to yield power to the black majority, and that British capacity to influence the situation is very limited. Even mandatory United Nations sanctions have not been sufficient to produce this transfer of power. The only alternative means for bringing about a radical change would have been the use of force, a course of action which has been judged unacceptable by successive British Governments. Mr. Godber, the British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whom I saw on November 27, gave me to understand that in the