

# The Dalhousie International

Volume 2 Number 2 October 1976

Liberation or Neo-colonialism

## The Fight for Zimbabwe

by Jim Robson

The current preparation for a "negotiated settlement" in Rhodesia must be closely scrutinized if the historical obstacles to full independence are to be understood. The fact that majority rules was eventually conceded by the Smith regime is by no means assurance that Africans will be able to control the direction and orientation of the new state of Zimbabwe.\*

The Most difficult task for the African nationalists currently jockeying for power in Salisbury will be to acquire control over the economy, particularly the industries that provide foreign exchange earnings. In order to make sense out of a complex problem it is necessary to look at the historical roots of underdevelopment in Rhodesia.

### Historical Background

The African people occupying Zimbabwe before the British colonial invasion can be roughly divided into two major groups, the Shona and the Ndebele. Both pre-colonial states contained certain structural weaknesses which enabled the penetration of British colonialism under the leadership of Cecil Rhodes and the British South Africa Company (BSAC). The Matabele state was highly centralized, containing diversified economic activities which ranged from pastoral farming to raiding neighbouring tribes for needed economic goods. In the northern part of Rhodesia the decentralized Shona kingdoms had developed a more advanced type of agriculture and were not dependent on raiding. By 1898 the BSAC had undermined the economic and political institutions of both the Shona and Ndebele people. The Ndebele in particular were robbed of both their cattle and land and were placed on totally inadequate reserves. Their land and cattle were sold to white farmers and speculators. With their only economic resources expropriated these African peasants were forced to sell their labour on the colonial market. In addition, as Giovanni Anrighi, an Italian economist, suggests: "The imposition of Pax Britannica released the labour time (and the means of production) previously allocated by the Shona to the production of the surplus appropriated by the Ndebele (tribute and raids) and to a variety of defense preparations." Labour time became geared to the demands of a white settler economy through coercion and the introduction of the colonial market economy. In fact, as the development of white settler farming and mining grew, the demand for labour increased and both the Ndebele and Shona people gradually became divorced from their traditional subsistence economy. This in turn developed the basis for the division of the economy into European and African areas, in many ways similar to the Apartheid system established by South Africa. The Monis-

\*Zimbabwe is the name Africans have chosen to call the colony of Rhodesia. It is a name rich in historical significance. The ruins of Zimbabwe in southern Rhodesia attest the fact that Africans had advanced civilizations at the time Europeans were entering the Renaissance.

Carter Commission of 1970 made the division permanent while the 1931 Land Apportionment Act transferred 17.5 million acres to white settlers while only transferring 7.5 million to African farmers. Of the land suitable for use in

over the Army and Air Force in December 1963. The British thereafter refused to consider a military solution to the illegal state of Rhodesia.

In a recent book by Martin Loney,

In 1975 alone the Rhodesian government received 60-70 million through trade with the U.S., particularly through U.S. purchase of the strategic material, chromium. Rhodesia accounts for 86% of



forestry, fruit farming and beef production in 1970, 98 percent was controlled by Europeans as was 82 percent of the land suitable for intensive farming.

### The Power Play

Control of land and industry are potentially the most explosive issues in any transfer of power to African majority rule. After generations of appropriating surplus labour and profit from African workers and peasants how much will white Rhodesians be willing to share? If the United States, Western Europe, and Canada contribute to an indemnity fund established to re-imburse whites for any economic losses if they leave Zimbabwe, what favours or pay-offs will these countries expect from the new state of Zimbabwe? The compromising actions of both the United States and Britain must be watched closely to avoid a sell out of the people of Zimbabwe.

Historically, British colonial interests created the conditions for the survival of the settler community and yet at the same time sought to insure that African farmers were integrated into the colonial economy. This antagonistic contradiction between the dominant interests of the colonial metropolis and the white settler community is certainly not a new development. Clashes between Portugal, the People Government of Angola, and the white settler community in Angola eventually led to the repatriation of over 200,000 whites. Similar repatriations have taken place in Zaire and Algeria. The Rhodesian case is different in some aspects. Here the white settler community has taken complete military and political power from the British metropolis. They did this formally through a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in November 1965. There was no need to stage a coup d'etat such as the OAS attempted in Algeria because the British had already acquired militarily and gave the settler community control

Rhodesia: White Racism and Imperial Response, evidence is given that many leaders of the Rhodesian Air Force and Army did not support UDI and indeed that there was no evidence that the Rhodesian Army would have refused to restore constitutional rule in Rhodesia. Instead the Labour Government of Harold Wilson chose to limit confrontation by using economic sanctions. However, the implementation of sanctions proved to be as impotent as those introduced by the British government against Italy after Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935.

Access through Mozambique (until March 1976) and South Africa continued to buttress the Rhodesian economy. British financial interests in South Africa continued to reap profits from the import-export trade. The British government supplied arms to South Africa which enabled the country to send military forces to bolster the Rhodesian army in their fight against the guerillas of Zanu and Zapu. The interests of British capital were left intact while the British government's equivocal reasoning floundered in the numerous constitutional talks from 1966 to 1972.

### US Interests

Recent attempts by Henry Kissinger to bring about a "negotiated settlement" will not help bring full independence to Zimbabwe. The United States failure to remain detached from issues in Southern Africa is based on her own selfish economic and strategic motives. In the former case, a large number of American based multi-national firms are actively exploiting African resources in Southern Africa, particularly in South Africa. With the exception of South Africa, the U.S. has done the most to break the economic sanctions established by Britain and the UN.

the world's supply. These mines would probably be flooded in an all out war with the African Nationalists. Hence the U.S. has an obvious concern for the establishment of a negotiated settlement. The strategic interests are related to U.S. interests in the Indian Ocean. Despite the fact that Rhodesia is landlocked, a moderate nationalist government would enable the U.S. more leverage in both monitoring and undermining the socialist governments of Angola and Mozambique.

"Failures" in Mozambique, Angola, and Vietnam have been particularly embarrassing for the U.S. The scuttle-shuttle diplomacy of Henry Kissinger was designed to give the U.S. image a face lifting in Southern Africa just before the 1976 Presidential election. The Kissinger Five point plan contributes nothing to the movement towards independence in Zimbabwe. So Many concessions were made to the Smith regime that a neo-colonial situation seems likely. In the five point program there is no discussion of the distribution of wealth, only an innocuous statement that settler assets will be protected and insured by the advanced capitalist nation of the World. In fact, the main program calls for "massive investment funds into Rhodesia for the development of the country's resources". A cursory glance at the state of economic dependency prevalent in newly independent African nations such as Kenya and Ivory Coast shows the dangers in foreign control of industrial development. Zimbabweans must face this fact and continue to struggle against a U.S.-UN imposed settlement. Concessions and compromises endanger the prospects for liberation.

Those who seek "negotiated" solutions have ulterior motives. The past record of U.S. and UK involvement in Southern Africa speaks for itself.