

Zimbabwe at two

by Clyde Sanger

The second anniversary of independence — April 1982 — seemed a good moment to revisit Zimbabwe from Canada. Enough time had gone by to let the effervescence settle and the euphoria of that occasion vanish. (Sadly, Bob Marley, the visiting star of those celebrations, has gone also.) Time to ask many questions. Had the government of Robert Mugabe, which in April 1980 was still newly arrived from exile in Mozambique and Zambia, got into stride? What sort of pace was it setting and in what direction? If it was hastening towards a socialist goal, were the 200,000 whites (many of whom had fled the socialism of postwar Britain) packing up to leave? The long struggle for independence had produced several splits among the African nationalists and many talented politicians had not ended up in the winning party. Were their talents being used in other ways? How much change had already come in Zimbabwe's social life, in the business ranks and the professions?

The second anniversary followed a few days after the Easter holiday weekend. On Easter Saturday we were sitting on a hillside twenty miles out of Harare (formerly Salisbury) in the shade of msasa trees and talking the afternoon away with old friends. One can be forgiven some nostalgia at a time and place like that.

The house was a modest one: two rondavels made of fieldstone, thatched and joined together with a straight wing of bedrooms — the traditional design of a Rhodesian farmhouse. The host, Enoch Dumbutshena, is equally modest. He gestures towards the valley, with cows munching by a stream, and towards the three small hills beyond and he says: "My friends laugh at me for buying a view." He and Miriam have it to themselves. A mile beyond the hills is the old Arcturus goldmine, part of the glitter that brought Cecil Rhodes's "pioneers" to this land ninety years ago.

Enoch is the first black lawyer to be appointed a High Court judge. Twenty-five years ago, when we first met, he was selling insurance on commission because he had been too involved in politics to remain a teacher. I first saw Great Zimbabwe, those mysterious drystone ruins, in his company. And I remember him, too, explaining with patience and dignity about spirit mediums and the throwing of bones to an Australian woman broadcaster who kept talking about "witch doctors." He remained a teacher at heart.

At the age of thirty-eight Enoch decided to study law and went to England. (I have a faded photo of him shivering in the snows of Derbyshire.) He practised for some years in Salisbury, but the atmosphere, after Ian Smith made his Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in

1965, became too oppressive. He escaped by walking for days through the bush to Botswana, climbing trees at night to avoid animals; and he set up practice instead in Zambia. He briefly entered politics in 1979 but, when Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) swept all of Mashonaland in the 1980 elections, Enoch vanished from parliament and then was soon afterwards appointed a judge.

Enoch Dumbutshena has other visitors on Easter Saturday. George Nyandoro arrives, full of the same boisterous laughter as used to accompany the dire prophecies he made when he and Robert Chikerema revived the African National Congress in September 1957 and recruited Joshua Nkomo as its President.

Some fruits of independence

I remind George how he had said, on the day he launched Congress, "Our rivers will flow with blood," and he replies, "Well, they did, didn't they?" Resistance to white rule had run in his family for three generations: his grandfather, a paramount chief, was a leader of the 1896 rebellion.

He and nearly everyone else under Enoch's trees have suffered for their politics. George and Chik and Michael Haddon, a mining engineer, had all been imprisoned for four years. George, an accountant by training, now heads a paper and printing firm that makes most of the country's supply of toilet rolls. Chik is trying to move into the meat wholesale business, and his wife has ideas about a plastic design for a thermal food container.

There is nothing in this narrative resembling life in a Marxist state, for sure. Zimbabwe may over the years indeed become a socialist state. But what distinguishes its citizens today, besides a deep enjoyment of peace, is business enterprise and a resilience in recovering from the devastation of a seven-year guerrilla war.

The scars of that war have faded but not vanished. The remarkably successful exercise of monitoring the cease-fire from December 1979 to the elections in February 1980, and

*Clyde Sanger knows southern Africa from years of experience there, five of them as correspondent for **The Guardian**. Later he was Director of Communications in the Commonwealth Secretariat. Mr. Sanger contributed an article to **International Perspectives** two years ago when Zimbabwe began. This spring he went back to have another look.*