

Zimbabwe: a new beginning after 14 years of Ian Smith

by Clyde Sanger

One of the less remembered prime ministers of Southern Rhodesia, Winston Field, tried to put his country's problems in a nutshell when he said, "The trouble here is fear of the unknown."

That was in 1962, and we were making an inspection tour (for he was a paternalist, of military bearing) of his tobacco farm near Marandellas. There seemed little to fear, that pleasant evening. But the Rhodesia Front (RF) of which he was the first leader, was soon busily spreading trepidation: its prize effort, for the elections of December 1962, was a poster-photograph of schoolgirls' legs—black and white, all mixed up together. That's what will happen to your daughter, if you vote for Whitehead and let him repeal the Land Apportionment Act! So the properly frightened whites abandoned Sir Edgar, and the RF came to power, and within 16 months Ian Smith had pushed Winston Field aside and began accelerating down the dirt road that led him to his Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in November 1965. Smith kept telling everyone that independence would end uncertainty.

He was, of course, absurdly wrong. Through his UDI he simply enlarged the uncertainty and multiplied the fears and agony of thousands of Rhodesians for 14 long years. The British were frightened of using force (they might have called it "police action") to snuff out his rebellion, either because they thought they would mess it up or because they thought the risk too high of shooting some kith and kin and outraging public opinion at home.

For his part, Smith was too stupid to grab the two chances Harold Wilson gave him, in December 1966 and October 1968 aboard HMS *Tiger* and HMS *Fearless*, of a legalized independence with a national assembly dominated by whites and only a small group of black M.P.'s to provide a "blocking quarter" (17 out of 67 seats) that would prevent the "retrogressive amendment of the constitution". Ian Smith's talents lay in devising means of short-term survival, a few months at a time, by dividing his enemies: dividing the African nationalists by pegging them down separately in prison, detention area or exile; and dividing the British politicians and Commonwealth leaders by sow-

ing suspicions of some secret deal. (He tried playing the vulnerable Kaunda in this way against Nyerere. It was only through stalwart work by the first Commonwealth Secretary-General, Arnold Smith, through general good sense prevailing at Heads of Government Meetings that his opposition did not fall apart in the years before the Zimbabwe guerrilla armies grew to any strength after 1972. Then his time began running out inexorably.

Final effort

Rather than attempting a necessarily inadequate summary of all these years of rebellion, or a comparison of the half-dozen efforts to conclude a political settlement, it is preferable to concentrate on some of the tails of the final effort—let's call it the Carrington settlement, to give credit to its author—and to peer over his shoulder a few years into the future of Zimbabwe. For Winston Field's fear of the unknown is still with us. The six million people of Zimbabwe will move into a state of internationally recognized independence in February, March or April while the leading figures among the 230,000 whites and the rest of the people—whether they are politicians or farmers or teachers or soldiers—still hardly know one another. This is part of the legacy of the rebellion.

But before becoming too gloomy about the prospects for Zimbabwe, it is worth recalling how the feelings expressed about a somewhat similar situation in Kenya in the early 1960s were marvellously allayed.

Remember those days? A nervous British governor, Sir Patrick Renison (who ended his days less obviously, running the Playing Fields Association), refusing to release Jomo Kenyatta from detention, calling him "the leader to darkness and death" and then saying he couldn't let him loose because he didn't "know what is in his mind". There were fears that forest fighters, unexorcised of their Mau Mau oath, would wreak vengeance on their fellow Kikuyu who had been loyalists and "home guards", and then drove out the white farmers without ceremony or compensation. And British ministers did their best to institutionalize the division between the KANU and KANU parties by imposing an independence constitution that gave large and residual powers to six regional legislatures. Even for those who didn't read Robert Ruark's titillating novels, there were grounds for fear in Kenya's approach to *uhuru*.

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