



## RHODESIA—THE CASE FOR ACTION

*Address by Julius K. Nyerere, President of Tanzania, at the session of the Organisation of African Unity, Addis Ababa, November 1966.*

IN OCTOBER 1965, at the time of the O.A.U. meeting at Accra, there was a clear basic opposition between the Southern Rhodesian authorities on the one hand, and free Africa on the other, with the United Kingdom's position being ambiguous.

Africa objected to the continuation of the white minority rule in the British colony of Southern Rhodesia, and demanded independence on the basis of majority rule. In other words, Africa wanted two things: firstly, some form of democratically elected government responsible to the majority of the people, and secondly, independence. We recognised that independence without majority rule was useless, and would represent a worsening of the situation.

The Rhodesian Whites' position was that their domination was not sufficiently secure while they remained a British colony. The fact that they had gradually secured complete control of Rhodesian internal affairs, and even had their own army, air force and armed police force, did not satisfy them. They resented Rhodesian affairs being subject even technically to the British Parliament.

The real position of Britain was, in October 1965, a matter about which there was some argument. Although their post-war policy position had been that all their colonies should achieve independence on a democratic basis, there were many grounds for the suspicion of certain African countries that Rhodesia was being regarded as an exception. In particular, at the Commonwealth Conferences of 1964 and 1965, successive British Governments had refused to give a British commitment that there would be no independence for Southern

Rhodesia before majority rule existed. Further, negotiations with the Smith Government had been proceeding for many months in the face of public threats of a Unilateral Declaration of Independence, and the threats themselves had not called forth any response in action from Britain. In October 1964, on coming to power, Prime Minister Wilson had said 'a declaration of independence would be an open act of defiance and rebellion and it would be treasonable to take steps to give effect to it'; but statements had also been made, subsequent to that, indicating clearly that military measures would not be used to suppress such a rebellion.

At the Accra O.A.U. meeting, African Heads of Government therefore spent some considerable time discussing the Rhodesian situation. At the end of this discussion they agreed to a conditional resolution which specified various steps which might be taken in the event of a declaration of independence by Rhodesia and an inadequate British response to it. One of these steps was reconsideration of the African states' diplomatic relations with Britain under certain circumstances.

## **THE EVENTS SINCE THE ACCRA CONFERENCE**

### *1. Further British-Rhodesian Negotiations*

Almost simultaneously with the ending of the O.A.U. Conference, the British Prime Minister flew to Salisbury for further discussions with the Smith regime. The content of these discussions has since been published by the British Government; the document shows that the suspicions of some African States were justified. The British willingness to compromise on the basic principle is clear, and during these discussions the British Government even weakened the effect of their own 'principle number 5', by saying that 'the opinion of the people of Rhodesia as a whole' could be ascertained by a joint British and Rhodesian Royal Commission instead of through a democratic vote. The only thing they insisted upon was that the Royal Commission report was to be unanimous.

After his return to London, Prime Minister Wilson continued his efforts to avoid U.D.I. by refusing to accept a deadlock and always making new proposals when Smith refused earlier ones. Then, however, on November 1st, Mr. Wilson specifically told the British Parliament that force would not be used against Rhodesia, even to deal with an illegal assertion of independence. This had been indicated earlier, but never in such unambiguous terms.

### *2. U.D.I. and the British Reaction*

On November 11th, 1965, the Smith regime declared Southern Rhodesia to be independent. It immediately became apparent that

the British were not prepared for it! Strong words were spoken, and a series of totally ineffective sanctions were introduced. All of these sanctions were imposed gradually (it was not until February that Britain banned all purchases from Rhodesia), and in such doses that Rhodesia was able to adjust itself. It is also relevant that immediately after U.D.I. the British Foreign Secretary flew to the United Nations in order to ask for support for the British measures and to prevent the United Nations itself intervening. He succeeded in this endeavour.

Late in November Zambia asked Britain for an air force unit to protect her air space, and for British ground troops to occupy the Kariba Dam (which was jointly owned with Rhodesia and which supplied most of the electric power for the Zambia Copper Belt). Zambia received an air force unit, which was stationed at the Lusaka and Ndola Airports. Britain replied to the request for ground troops at Kariba by offering to station troops in the Zambia capital and in the north of Zambia on the Copper Belt!

### *3. O.A.U. Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Abbis Ababa*

On December 2nd the Foreign Ministers agreed on certain steps to be taken by all independent African States. They were: (a) a complete boycott of Southern Rhodesian goods and the ending of all communications with that colony; and (b) the breaking of diplomatic relations with Britain if, by December 15th, she had not crushed the rebellion and restored law and order in Rhodesia.

Before coming to this decision the Foreign Ministers had considered all the steps which Britain had taken to end the illegal regime. They had noticed the reluctance with which sanctions had been imposed, and the fact that no action was being taken to prevent Portugal and South Africa pouring goods into the colony. They had also considered the difficult position of Zambia, and the British unreadiness—and apparent unwillingness—to relieve that independent African State of the consequences either of the rebellion or the method by which Britain had chosen to deal with it.

To this African ultimatum Britain's only response was to accuse free Africa of irresponsibility. And in the event only nine of the African States represented at Addis Ababa honoured the resolution—two of whom have since resumed diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom.

On December 17th however—that is, two days later—the British Government announced oil sanctions against Rhodesia. In the following week a British air-lift of petrol and oil products for Zambia was instituted from Dar es Salaam, Nairobi and the Congo. At the same time much greater supplies began to flow from Tanzania by road to

Zambia. There had, however, apparently been no steps taken to enforce the oil blockade against Rhodesia; after an initial hesitation by the South African Government, supplies in large quantities began to pour in from South Africa. At one time (the present position is unclear) some oil supplies were even going to Rhodesia on the rail running through the then British Protectorate of Bechuanaland!

#### *4. Lagos Commonwealth Conference*

Held in January, this special Commonwealth Conference on the subject of Rhodesia was called on the initiative of the Prime Minister of Nigeria, the late Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. The conference was most notable for the British Prime Minister's statement that sanctions would bring down the Smith Government in weeks rather than months—a statement which those attending assumed was being made on the basis of British Intelligence work and therefore accepted in good faith. Nonetheless, they insisted upon the setting up of a special Commonwealth Sanctions Committee and an undertaking that a further meeting would be held in July (i.e. six months later) if the rebellion had not by then been brought to an end.

#### *5. Security Council Resolution of April, 1966*

The sanctions committee met regularly in London from February until September. It may have had some influence on the British decision in April, to ask the Security Council for authority to stop oil tankers bringing crude oil to Beira for pumping through the pipe-line to the refinery in Rhodesia. This authority was granted, and one ship was stopped from entering Beira harbour, and another was prevented from discharging her oil. The resolution, which was framed by Britain, made no mention of oil supplies through South Africa, nor those landed at Lourenço Marques in Mozambique. Britain refused to accept any amendment which covered these points.

#### *6. Talks with the Smith Regime*

Later in the month of April, at the request of the Smith regime, British officials were sent to Salisbury to begin what has turned out to be a protracted series of 'talks about talks'. Great secrecy has been maintained as to the content of these talks, and the British Government has maintained the pretence that no negotiations are being carried on with the illegal regime. Four months later, however, the British Government ostentatiously withdrew its officials just before the delayed Commonwealth Conference was held in September 1966. They did this on the grounds that new Rhodesian 'Legislation' contravened the 'entrenched clauses' of the 1961 Constitution.

After the Commonwealth Conference, on the grounds that the decisions there had to be explained to the people of Rhodesia, the British Government first sent officials back to Salisbury, and later sent two senior Ministers for discussions with Mr. Smith. They are reported to have had three separate long meetings with the White minority leader.

#### *7. Commonwealth Conference, September 1966*

At this conference, held in London, almost a full week was spent discussing the Rhodesian situation. African members first directed attention to the objective in Rhodesia. But despite the almost unanimous demands from Afro-Asian and Caribbean members, supported by Canada, for a British commitment to the principle of majority rule before independence, the meeting concluded without such a commitment. What was obtained from Britain was the admission that Britain is prepared to grant independence to Rhodesia on the basis of a racial minority government, and would only withdraw this willingness under certain conditions.

The British Government stated, in the Conference communiqué and afterwards, that Smith would be offered a last chance to accept the proposed terms of independence on the basis of racial minority rule. If Smith rejects those terms, Britain would take two steps. Firstly, Britain would 'before the end of the year' go to the United Nations and ask for selective mandatory sanctions against Rhodesia on condition that she received the 'support of the Commonwealth as a whole' for her request. Secondly, if this condition was fulfilled, but not otherwise, Britain would at the same time declare that independence for Rhodesia would only be granted on the basis of majority rule.

#### **THE CURRENT POSITION**

Thus, one year after the white racialists declared themselves independent, they are still in power, with no obvious likelihood of their falling in the near future. Sanctions against them have undoubtedly caused some difficulty, and may have some long-term effects. But they have not had the desired effect. Goods of all kinds seem to be coming through to Rhodesia from South Africa and Mozambique, and the trade statistics of at least one European country (Germany) have revealed an increase in trade with Rhodesia since U.D.I. In fact, although we are constantly promised that the economy of the colony will become bankrupt because of unsold tobacco, lack of foreign exchange, etc. or that the whites will begin to leave the country, the truth is that the white Rhodesians seem to be remarkably unaffected.

Most of all, they are clearly convinced that if they can only hold on a little while their position will be accepted.

Neither has there been any mass unrest from the African population. Both nationalist political parties had been effectively broken even before U.D.I., and the continued detention of the leaders, combined with ruthless suppression of the first sign of discontent, has effectively controlled the position. Incursions of freedom fighters from outside have been few, and although censorship prevents an accurate assessment it would appear that most groups have been picked up soon after arrival. The effect of this activity has therefore been very limited up to now—except to provide a ‘public-relations’ excuse for further oppression.

The independent state of Zambia, on the other hand, has suffered considerably—both from the rebellion itself and the measures which have been selected to deal with it. Her power supplies are at constant risk, as is the fuel she needs for her vital copper industry, and her imports now have to come through Beira and Malawi or through the long Northern route, unless she is to break the boycott completely. In addition, the inherited structure of her economy and the lack of indigenous skilled personnel means that many of the people in industrial key positions are sympathetic to the racialist governments of Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. The Zambian Government has faced these difficulties with remarkable courage and political skill; the British failure to give her unstinted support has, however, inevitably reduced the extent to which this border country can take active steps against Rhodesia.

### **THE CASE FOR ACTION**

In October and early December 1965, all-African meetings determined on certain actions which it was hoped would cause a speeding up of movement towards democratic independence for Rhodesia. After the Addis Ababa meeting, however, the majority of states had second thoughts about the wisdom and efficacy of one of the actions agreed. In particular, these states felt that the resolution to break diplomatic relations with Britain betrayed an unnecessary suspicion of British intentions, that it gave insufficient time for Britain to bring down the Smith regime, and possibly that the action proposed would not have the desired result.

Eleven months have passed since the Foreign Ministers passed their resolution. Do these considerations still apply? It is worth considering the position in some detail.

1. First and foremost, the majority of African States were, at the time of the Accra Conference, working on the assumption that Britain's

refusal to commit herself to majority rule before independence was a tactical move designed to avoid U.D.I. The refusal to give such an assurance even privately was discounted on the grounds that a private assurance to so large and disparate a group as the Commonwealth Conference might not have remained private. Quite apart from the temptations to which African leaders under pressure from radical elements might be subject, the fundamental opposition to Smith of some other Commonwealth leaders was thought to be a matter for doubt.

Britain's willingness to concede independence before majority rule is not any longer a matter for dispute. The British Prime Minister has himself agreed that 'if the people of Rhodesia as a whole' are shown to be in favour of independence before majority rule, then the British Government will agree to it. Further, the British Government has made it clear that this agreement or otherwise will not be tested by a referendum. Finally, the British Government has said that Britain will make the demanded commitment 'before the end of the year' if (a) by that time the Smith regime has not accepted the terms he is now offering them; and (b) if the 'Commonwealth as a whole' supports the promised British proposals for selective mandatory economic sanctions.

In other words, Britain has said that she will make this fundamental commitment on principle if the Smith regime does not accept the British terms for betraying the principle, and if Africa 'behaves itself' by allowing Britain to determine the pace of action against Southern Rhodesia.

2. In December 1965, the Foreign Ministers' resolution rested on the assumption that Britain was not acting with determination against the rebellion. Some countries questioned this; they said that Britain's policy of sanctions had not had time to have their effect, that the gradual 'tightening of the screw' was aimed at giving encouragement and opportunity to white opposition groups within Rhodesia, and that the British Prime Minister in particular was fully committed to the downfall of the Smith regime.

These questions may have been reasonable less than a month after U.D.I. Are they reasonable after twelve months?

A whole year has gone by without sanctions bringing the Smith Government even into disrepute among the whites of that colony. Few have left the country, and the Southern Rhodesian Government budget was less severe than that of the British Government—which does not suggest national bankruptcy! The expected 'white liberals' have also failed to materialise in any significant numbers. A few individual white people have been placed in restriction, detained, or

imprisoned on trumped-up charges; any others are so overwhelmingly outnumbered that they are clearly helpless in the present situation.

But it is British determination to bring this situation to an honourable and quick end which is really in question now. The British Government has consistently refused to say that it will take whatever action is necessary to bring the Smith regime down. It has repeated on every conceivable occasion that force will not be used to achieve a constitutional settlement. It has objected to mandatory United Nations economic sanctions on the grounds that they would lead to force (which would, of course, only happen if the economic sanctions were ineffective for their purpose). Further, the British Opposition Party is constantly attacking the British Government for taking 'punitive' action against the rebels, and sending its leaders to Rhodesia to 'try and bring about a peaceful settlement of the dispute'.

Thus the Rhodesian Government might reasonably believe that if they can only negotiate the present difficulties and be seen to be firmly in control, then they will gradually secure 'de jure' recognition internationally and the boycott will collapse. This is a very different prospect from knowing that if the present economic measures do not lead to surrender then military force will be used. But British policy up to this moment precludes such knowledge.

3. A further objection which may have been raised by African states in December 1965, is that it was unrealistic to expect the British Government to act in response to an ultimatum. In support of this argument they can point to the fact that oil sanctions were imposed on December 17th—two days after Africa's deadline—and suggest that the O.A.U. Resolution might even have had the effect of delaying this action. This argument would betray a rather naïve and one-sided view of national prestige. For it would not have been very good for British prestige if 36 diplomatic missions from Africa had returned to Whitehall together.

But even if this argument were valid, and even assuming that British pride made it impossible for her to give advance notice to the countries whose support she would need in this operation, this does not account for the failure to take effective action since that date. There has been no ultimatum since December 1965. Why then has there been such a continued reluctance to take strong action against the Rhodesian regime?

4. Some African countries pointed out that at the time of the Declaration of Independence, and in December 1965, the British Government had a Parliamentary majority of three and was consequently unwilling to take any action which would have been very unpopular with the



British public. This fact was used to account for Britain's promise not to use force, and the initially mild form of sanctions.

On March 30th. 1966, however, a new General Election returned the same government with a majority of almost 100 Members of Parliament. The April appeal to the United Nations for authority to stop oil tankers going into Beira appeared at first glance to be the kind of action which the previous political situation had inhibited. It may have been. But, if so, it is difficult to understand why the switch of Rhodesian oil supplies to South African ports and to Lourenço Marques (which could have been foreseen) has not brought a similar response. The British Government's Parliamentary majority is still nearly 100, but Rhodesia is clearly in no particular difficulty about oil supplies. If the British Government were anxious to bring down the regime, would this situation be allowed to continue?

5. In recent months a new reason for British inaction has been advanced, and that is the British international monetary crisis. It is said that this makes it impossible for the British Government to take any action which would not meet with the approval of International Bankers, or which might lead to a further run on sterling.

This may be a good reason why Britain could not itself undertake an expensive military exercise without at least American support. It is also a good reason why Britain should be willing to hand the whole Rhodesian issue over to the United Nations. But in fact she had strongly resisted any suggestion that this should be done. Why does she do this if her reason for inaction is real economic inability? The answer can only be that this is an excuse, not a reason.

6. In 1965 it was argued that Britain's reluctance to invoke Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter arose from her belief that South Africa could be induced to co-operate, or at least to remain passive, in any economic campaign against the Smith regime. It is also true that at the beginning of the rebellion South Africa desisted from open and large-scale assistance. But this is no longer true. The evidence suggests that South Africa watched to see how strong and effective the steps against Rhodesia would be, and only after being reassured on that matter did she begin to risk her own internationally correct legal position in order to give practical support to the Smith regime.

The position now is clear. South African support has made nonsense of the oil blockade, there are strong reasons to believe that she is giving financial and foreign exchange assistance, that she is acting as agent for certain kinds of Rhodesian exports, and that she is in other ways assisting the rebel regime to overcome its difficulties. There can no longer be any hope that South Africa will voluntarily

co-operate in any action against Smith—partly because the South African authorities are not convinced that Smith will really be brought down.

7. Finally, in September 1966, when Britain insisted upon a 'last chance' for Smith, there were British sympathisers who argued that this was simply a 'time-wasting device' while Britain waited for the mid-term United States elections to be completed. The argument was that Britain could not afford to take strong action until she had positive American support, and that it is impossible for an administration to give such support immediately prior to the elections.

In fact Britain has had consistent American support since 1965. From outside it would appear that Britain and America had tacitly agreed that the former would support the U.S.A. in Vietnam in return for an acceptance of British leadership in Rhodesia. There is no reason to believe that American support would not be forthcoming for tougher British action; on the contrary, there is much to suggest that the Americans would like the Rhodesian question settled quickly.

## **CONCLUSION**

In October, and even December 1965, there may have been valid arguments against strong and immediate action in the Rhodesian situation. These arguments could be used to excuse the British position, and by those African States which failed to implement the resolution their representatives had passed.

Not one of these arguments has any validity now, in November 1966.

The question before us now is 'What is Africa going to do about Rhodesia?' Are we going to acquiesce in the betrayal of four million people in Southern Rhodesia? And are we going to agree to the continuation of Zambia's intolerable position?

It was Great Britain which created South Africa fifty years ago. It is Great Britain which now clearly wants to create a second South Africa. Fifty years ago only Ethiopia and Liberia were independent African States. Today Africa has nearly forty independent States.

Individually African States are weak. Collectively we are not weak. It is only failure to work together which now makes us weak. Collectively we are quite capable of making a meaningful statement to Britain. We shall be doing this if we all say, and mean, 'You cannot now create another South Africa and still hope to remain on friendly terms with independent Africa'. This voice we can raise. It is the least we can do to restore the honour of Africa.