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EDITORIALS

THE MESSAGE FROM RHODESIA

REALITY is a South African journal and does not normally deal editorially with the affairs of other countries. The present Rhodesian situation, however, is too important to be allowed to pass without comment. Besides, it is in fact an international matter, not a merely national one; and the whole story seems to us to have a moral of universal significance.

At the time of writing, the Pearce Commission has made no report on its findings, but it is difficult to see how it can avoid telling Sir Alec Douglas-Home that the overwhelming majority of Rhodesians do not accept the settlement proposals.

What are we to make of this fact? Do most of the Africans who have said or chanted or shouted "No" realize what they are rejecting? Do they prefer the 1969 Constitution to the proposals sponsored by the British Government? (This witty thought was offered to the world by Mr. Ian Smith during his justly notorious broadcast.) Have the dissenting Africans given very much thought to the implications of their rejection of the proposals? And have they worked out any sort of realistic plan of possible action for the future?

To most of these questions (we except of course Mr. Smith's sick quip) there is, we suspect, no simple answer. The more detailed and convincing of the newspaper reports suggest that, while many black Rhodesians are unwilling or unable to enlarge very much upon their blunt "No", a certain number — perhaps a rather larger number than many observers would have expected — are able to explain fully and articulately their reasons for thinking that the settlement, if accepted, would not be as advantageous to the underprivileged as all the men in power have been saying.

UNANIMITY

But if the terms of the proposals are understood in varying degrees by Rhodesian Africans, how are we to account for the large measure of unanimity which has been displayed? Well, it would be naive to leave out of account the vigorous activities of the African National Council, formed specifically for the purpose of combating the proposals: clearly "the word has gone round" in a way that it would have been unlikely to if the A.N.C. had not come into existence. But then one must remember that "the word" can only do the rounds quickly and efficiently when the relevant section of the population is from the first very well disposed towards it. And in reply to those supporters of Mr. Smith who have claimed that there has been widespread intimidation among Africans we can only record our impression that African expressions of disagreement, so far from seeming reluctant and constrained, have if anything tended to err on the side of animation, not to say exuberance.

It seems reasonable to deduce, then, that there are some underlying causes which are impelling almost all black Rhodesians, whatever their education, background or intelligence, to reject the settlement proposals. And it seems necessary to ask what these underlying causes are.

TWO REASONS

We believe that black Rhodesians dislike the settlement that has been proposed for two simple reasons : (a) they distrust Mr. Smith and his Rhodesian Front Government, which would of course have the task of carrying out the proposals if they were accepted; and (b), and more important, Africans played no part in drawing up the proposals.

As we are concerned in this article with the general rather than the local implications of what we take to be the thoughts and feelings of Rhodesian Africans, point (a) will be considered fairly briefly. One has to concede that the British Government has perhaps had considerably less room to manoeuvre in this affair than it would have liked; but still it is difficult to see how the British negotiators can have expected Africans to be enchanted by promises of a new deal from a Government that has in the last few years spent much of its energy in pushing the Rhodesian body politic in the direction of apartheid. For if the settlement were once accepted, and Rhodesia became independent, who is to say what "reasons of state security" Mr. Smith might invoke as an excuse for changing his tune — that somewhat strained new tune that the British Government and the force of circumstances would together have persuaded him to hum? Indeed the arbitrary imprisoning of Mr. Garfield Todd and several other important Rhodesians provides an all too vivid foretaste of the sort of future that Africans are anxious to avoid. Is it to be expected, then, that they should wish to utter the "Yes" that Mr. Smith needs in order to become respectable in the eyes of a large part of the world?

NOT INVITED TO SHARE

Intimately connected with their distrust of the Rhodesian Front, but in the long run probably more significant, is the annoyance that black Rhodesians feel at not being invited to share in the drafting of proposals. As more and more Rhodesian Africans seem to have been saying, "How, in the 1970's, can the future of Rhodesia be determined by a group of white men? "After all, most of the inhabitants of Africa, and indeed of the whole world, find themselves under governments which they either help to choose or

feel in some sense to be their own. Why should the Africans of Rhodesia be expected to approve of a constitution with which they can feel no vital connection at all? Why should they acquiesce in alien formulations and trust in a distinctly dubious white benevolence?

It should be stressed that Africans did not (on the whole) insist that the future of the country should be decided upon by blacks alone; they simply asked to play their part. REALITY believes that the feelings of black Rhodesians on this point (if our analysis has been correct) are both inevitable and wholly justifiable. It believes too that, if white Rhodesians wish to be generous, if they wish to recognize the pressures set up by valid human development, and indeed if they wish simply to continue to live in the land, they should modify their thinking and feeling as quickly as possible.

IMMENSE MEANING

And of course the message of Rhodesia (as we interpret it) has immense meaning for South Africa. The day of almost universal African acceptance, tolerance, endurance, "gratitude", silence, is surely past. Things are no longer quite what they used to be. Ovamboland is in a muffled turmoil; Chief Kaiser Matanzima is (at the time of writing) speaking to the Nationalist Government with surprising boldness and sharpness; Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, in his charming and ironical way, maintains the quietly forceful assertion that Africans know their situation and know their mind, and cannot be fooled by insincere turns of phrase.

The sooner the whites of Southern Africa recognize the essential equality of all human beings, the greater will be the chance of a general peace and growth. But it must be underlined that recognizing essential equality is not just a matter of opening the mind and heart. No one can live on sympathy alone. It is a question of discerning and actively responding to an essential equality of need.

A DERISIBLE DECISION

The Prime Minister's decision to investigate the activities of the Institute of Race Relations, the Christian Institute, NUSAS, and the University Christian Movement, is derisible. All these organisations have a common characteristic — they advocate the reform of our society.

That means — basically — that they condemn the race-caste system that places such a monstrous burden on South African life, on its industry and commerce, on its unrepresented peoples, on the freedom and aspirations of many.

The existence of these four organisations is a symptom of the illness that afflicts our society. It is typical of our Government that it aims at eliminating the symptoms rather than treating the illness. That the Prime Minister's threat will please some, we have no doubt. That others will find it laughable we have no doubt either. But what we hope is that more and more of the people in the middle will see his action for the evasion that it is.

REALITY joins itself with those who demand that the enquiry should be a public one before a judicial commission, not a private one before a parliamentary committee.

There is one encouraging lesson to be learnt from all this. No doubt all these four organisations wish they were more influential than they are. But obviously they are the guardians of ideas and principles, of truths and aspirations, of tremendous power. **These truths are immortal, because they are not concerned with the supremacy of a race, but with the freedom and dignity of all our people.**