

in this issue . . .

EDITORIALS: 1. Botha and Mugabe	2
2. More Persecution	3
3. Margaret Ballinger	3
4. Subscriptions	3
MARGARET BALLINGER. A TRIBUTE by O. D. Wollheim	4
REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE IN ZIMBABWE by Garfield Todd	6
ZIMBABWE—FROM WAR TO PEACE by Paul Weinberg	9
CILLIE COMMISSION by Pat Tucker	11
PORT ELIZABETH—THE FUTURE IS HERE by M. G. Whisson	13
THE FARM SCHOOL SYSTEM AND BANTU EDUCATION by R. W. Harvey	16
COVER PHOTOGRAPH: A PRE-ELECTION MUGABE MEETING IN ZIMBABWE by Paul Weinberg	

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EDITORIALS

BOTHA & MUGABE

To say that white South Africa was taken aback by the Mugabe victory would be the understatement of the year. Given the fact that many South African newspapers hardly carry any news at all of what the rest of the world is thinking, and that South African radio and television is committed to trying to persuade its audience to believe what the Government would like it to believe, it is not surprising that ordinary people should have been so out of touch with reality. But that the government itself should have been so misinformed — that really is something.

The Prime Minister's grudging and ungracious response to Mr Mugabe's win suggests that he was totally unprepared for what happened. Who is supposed to tell him about these things? Does he know as little about the true state of affairs in other parts of Africa as he knew about Zimbabwe? More important, has he learnt anything from what happened there?

Has he realised yet that the time has come to start looking for Mugabes to talk to instead of Muzorewas to prop up? In this regard what he does in Namibia will be a crucial indicator. He must know now that the DTA is unlikely to win a free election under independent supervision there. Can he bring himself to face that possibility and hold such an election in spite of it? We sincerely hope so. And suddenly there is some hope, in the Administrator General's Statement in London that the Government might under certain circumstances be prepared to talk to SWAPO.

Even from its own point of view the Zimbabwe result should surely have shown the Government that the longer it delays free elections the more certain it will become that the one of its opponents it would least like to live with will turn out to be the eventual winner. □