

Essay Review

Rhodesia in the 1960s

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Rhodesian politics in the 1960s may be viewed as the articulation of European economic interests in the form of white nationalism, reacting to changing British politics and rising African political aspirations. A number of events were of central importance in this process: the 1961 Constitution, Rhodesian Front victories, dissolution of the Federation, African political violence, the independence referendum, U.D.I., terrorist incursions, declaration of a Republic and the negative findings of the Pearce Commission during the early 1970s. Within this context, the Rhodesian Front party emerged as the champion of colonial interests, dedicated to the perpetuation of political and economic dominance, as well as the further institutionalization of social segregation. In short, the central values of white Rhodesian culture (i.e., economic exploitation, political dominance, and social segregation) assumed a different political form in the face of changing societal conditions which threatened those values.

In consequence, any formal analysis of this period requires a number of important ingredients as follows: (1) it should deal with the complexity of these events both external and internal, in a manner which handles their interactive relationship in a longitudinal and process-oriented fashion; (2) it should attempt to account for these events rather than describe

them chronologically; (3) drawing on this analysis, the writer should then be able to make predictions concerning the possible course of future Rhodesian politics; and (4) suggest possible solutions to the present impasse. In general, what is implied here is an analytical, process-oriented approach to Rhodesian society, focusing on its structural antecedents and possible consequences within the context of internal political, economic, and social forces and external pressures both in Africa and Europe. It is with such ingredients in mind that we turn to a critical examination of recent studies of this period, assessing their contribution and implications for further analysis.

A number of works on the Rhodesian situation have recently appeared, focusing on the society's racist structure, factors within that structure, and the international context in which it operates. We shall examine each type of analysis in turn.

RHODESIA'S RACIST STRUCTURE

Mlambo's recent book was written 'in the attempt to correct the misrepresentation of the African case on Rhodesia that has been going on since 1890'.* The exclusion of Africans from

* E. Mlambo, *Rhodesia: The Struggle for a Birth-right*, London, Hurst, 1972, 333 pp. £2.95; see p.vii.

political power, along with their paternalistic treatment in general, according to the author, has led to high levels of racial resentment among Africans, on the one hand, and white intransigence on the other. Mlambo proceeds to give an historical account of the factors behind the country's racist structure: its constitutional development, the land question, early pressure groups, the Department of Internal Affairs, African education, African resistance, and the Rhodesian Front. He concludes that the 1971 settlement terms were based on British racial expediency and political misinformation, the franchise and educational proposals represent 'escapism', while increasing international and African pressure are rapidly bringing matters to a head. His suggested solutions include a change in British policy, free elections, modifications of the civil service towards integration, the removal of racist laws, and the development of inter-racial courts. While not offering any new historical insights into the Rhodesian situation, Mlambo's work is useful in so far as it takes a racial and colonial approach, highlighting structural antecedents and possible solutions of the 'race problems' as a whole.

Zimbabwe Now is a similar reaction to the 1971 proposals; the outcome of a seminar on Rhodesia at Oxford in 1972, this small set of eight papers examines 'the social, economic, and political factors leading to the present state of affairs' and suggests 'that the British Government should not be allowed to escape its responsibility to the African people of Zimbabwe via the proposed settlement or any minor adaptations of it'.* Participants focus on the historical background to the 'Zimbabwe Problem' (Atieno-Odhiambo and Chambati), its economic and political context in Southern Africa (Hall, Gervasi, and Nolutshungo), and the negative implications of the 1971 settlement proposals (Palley, Moyo, Muzorewa and Mlambo). In similar fashion to Mlambo, this work highlights the extent to which Rhodesia is a colonial-racist society in which political, economic and social dominance are heavily institutionalized and will not be removed by implementing the settlement proposals. Instead,

the long-term racial and economic interests of the white elite would be served, moving Rhodesia in the direction of inevitable conflict and violence.

Both these works highlight the colonial history behind Rhodesia's racist structure, delineate the dimensions of that structure in some depth, and suggest that the settlement proposals will not solve the basic problem it represents — that of white dominance and African exclusion. In contrast, more structural solutions are required in order to de-institutionalize racism. While providing little in the way of new historical data, these two books do serve to highlight the background and structure of racial politics in Rhodesia, in a way that the more descriptive and non-racial accounts of the society's historical development, such as those by L. H. Gann, fail to do. On the other hand, they tend to neglect the internal complexity of these politics — a topic we turn to next.

INTERNAL STRUCTURE

Hirsch's recent work, *A Decade of Crisis* is an important analysis of Rhodesian Front politics between 1962 and 1972, which attempts 'to assess the critical areas of the Rhodesian story of the decade in adequate depth in order to provide a clearer perspective for the stock-taking'.* Accordingly, he focuses on political and racial philosophies, the Constitution, African emergence, and the balance between racial conflict and co-operation. His thorough and useful analysis highlights a number of key elements: Rhodesian Front tactical errors both in internal and external politics, British 'blunders' in dealing with white Rhodesians, the failure of Rhodesian Front programmes dealing with African educational, economic and agricultural development, and the relative heterogeneity of European and African opinion on racial politics. Rhodesian 'blunders' consist primarily in political brinkmanship, misjudging the effects of U.D.I., a decline in constitutional protection, and lack of consultation with African leaders. The British, on the other hand, prejudged U.D.I., reinforced white backlash,

* *Zimbabwe Now*, ed. S. E. Wilmer, London, R. Collings, 1973, 141 pp. £1.00; see p.11.

* M. I. Hirsch, *A Decade of Crisis: Ten Years of Rhodesian Front Rule*, Salisbury, P. Dearlove, 1973, 186 pp. Rh\$2.45.

and failed to provide for the minority's long-term future. Consequently, white mistrust of Britain and African distrust of the Rhodesian Front government resulted in the present 'fiasco'. On the other hand, the Pearce opinion survey revealed a lack of European homogeneity regarding racial issues while Africans appeared concerned more with economic issues than immediate majority rule. In conclusion, Hirsch emphasizes the need for European 'accommodation' to changes in the 'balance of power' between the races in the face of changing demographic, educational, political, and economic conditions.

While Hirsch's study may be criticised on a number of points — his view of the African as lacking 'sophistication and organization, tactics and strategy' in particular — his analysis highlights the degree to which Rhodesian-British politics are extremist and error-prone in contrast to moderate and heterogeneous opinion within the population at large. While extremist politics have become institutionalized, then opinion at other levels reveals greater variety of thought but demands a new vehicle for expression. Such internal details are useful in providing a more detailed and less simplistic view of Rhodesian politics, with greater understanding of their oscillating internal developments and discussion of wider ranges of future alternatives. Rhodesia's international context, however, plays a role in such alternatives.

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

U.D.I. within the context of international politics has recently been described by Good in a book written in reaction to 'notorious' American obliviousness to 'events in Southern Africa'.* Good draws on his experience as American Ambassador to Zambia, 300 anonymous interviews, details of which are totally lacking (and therefore cannot be evaluated), and reports in American, British, South African, and Rhodesian newspapers, as well as parliamentary and U.N. debates. The result is a descriptive, journalistic account of the background and course of U.D.I., dealing with

pre-U.D.I. negotiations, the effects on Zambia, sanctions, post-U.D.I. negotiations, and the Pearce Commission. Little real analysis is provided, particularly in the international sphere, although Good emphasizes the historical independence of Rhodesian Whites and the constraints, both internal and external, on British policy. Otherwise, the reader is provided with journalistic detail concerning the major personalities and events of U.D.I. with a few ambivalent conclusions regarding the effectiveness of sanctions, the use of 'forceful intervention', as well as the eventual effects of U.D.I. as a whole on Britain and the U.S. Unless the reader is concerned with descriptive detail or political cartoons (there are a number in the book) this work confirms Good's own statement that 'there are no adequate studies of U.D.I. and its aftermath'. However, the book's detail in itself emphasizes the need to take the interactive efforts of Rhodesian international context into account, particularly in regard to the racial politics, both white and African, within it.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this essay we delineated a number of ingredients as essential to the formal analysis of Rhodesia in the 1960s: adequate discussion of the complexity of events, their explanation, prediction, and possible solution. Applying these criteria to recent works, it was evident that works on Rhodesia's racist structure were useful in the delineation of the society's colonial history and present racist structure. Hirsch's analysis of the internal factors in Rhodesian politics was also relevant in its delineation of extremist Rhodesian Front — British politics and the heterogeneity of internal racial opinion. Thirdly, Good's book, while underlining the relevance of Rhodesia's international context, was generally descriptive and non-analytical.

These works suggest a number of conclusions: (1) Rhodesia is a colonial society whose history is best understood in these terms; (2) its structure represents institutionalized racism which will not be significantly altered by the 1971 settlement proposals; (3) British-Rhodesian politics represent extreme political opinion in contrast to the heterogeneity of such opinion within Rhodesia as a whole; while (4) the Rhodesian situation should be viewed within

* R. C. Good, *U.D.I.: The International Politics of the Rhodesian Rebellion*, London, Faber, 1973, 368 pp. £4.95; see p.11.

its international context, in particular those factors constraining British policy. Consideration of these studies as a whole also highlights their specific limitations when each is viewed separately. What is required, it would appear, is a multi-dimensional, process-oriented approach to Rhodesian politics which would take a number of key elements into account in an

ongoing and interactive fashion, i.e., the international context, particularly the influence of the O.A.U. and U.N., British policies and related factors, Rhodesian Front policies, Rhodesia's racist structure, and the variety of internal opinion. It is in regard to such a task that the works discussed here provide a useful starting-point.