

BOOK REVIEWS

'Rhodesians Never Die': The Impact of War and Political Change on White Rhodesia, c.1970-1980 By Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock. Harare, Baobab Books, 1994, xvi, 400 pp., ISBN 0-908311-82-6, Z\$100.

In 1971 the Rhodesian Ministry of Information issued a booklet called *Rhodesia in Brief*. Its purpose was to attract White immigrants to replace those Whites who had emigrated during the slump which followed the break-up of the Federation. Among its more memorable claims was that in coming to Rhodesia the new arrivals would find themselves removed from 'a troubled world, greatly beset by the vexatious problems of the twentieth century' (p. 28). A Rhodesia Front ministry clearly did not consider that imperialism and its dismantling were high among our century's problems. By 1970 the Front felt sufficiently confident that its 1965 gamble had paid off and had declared Rhodesia a republic. During the Liberation War and the various constitutional conferences which punctuated it, Smith never seemed to understand that Rhodesia was a British colony and that the days had gone when people in Europe regarded Whites ruling Blacks in Africa as part of the eternal fitness of things. Smith never registered the huge ideological shift which had taken place in Britain even though the Rhodesia Front's rebellion could be righted and the war ended only if, for the first time in its history, Britain assumed direct control of the colony's government. The sovereignty of Rhodesia was Britain's and only Britain could hand over power to the nationalists. UDI was an affront against history and was the direct cause of the death of perhaps 50 000 people. And yet Smith recalled that awful time between 1965 and Zimbabwe's independence as 'fourteen great years' which he had accorded Rhodesians.

Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock address the events of the last ten of those years in *'Rhodesians Never Die'*. They are peculiarly well placed to provide different perspectives on those years from the authors of other published works which deal with the same period.

Godwin is a White Zimbabwean and, unlike most of the people who have written about Rhodesia, he knows the White community from inside. He was, however, a sceptical Rhodesian. Rhodesians were not peculiarly heroic or peculiarly evil. They were a fairly unremarkable group of people of some diversity. With the help of imported capital and Black labour, they had created a relatively developed economy. The privileges which this gave them was perhaps the only bond which united them. Like any privileged group, they wanted to retain their position and from the earliest settler elections they voted for whoever seemed able to guarantee it. They were even willing to fight although as the book shows, as soon as the call-

ups interrupted the easy flow of settler life, people started drifting away. When it was obvious that their privileges would be lost, the majority of Whites simply fled the country.

Hancock is an outsider, an Australian academic. His *White Liberals, Moderates and Radicals in Rhodesia 1953-1980* (Beckenham, Croom Helm, 1984) is the only full study of White Rhodesia's opposition parties and groups. More than any one, he knows that over the last 30 years of Rhodesia's life there were always Rhodesians, both to the left and the right of the dominant power group, who were aware of other political possibilities than those which were followed. Having studied the liberals as a group, Hancock knows that the only White in public life who almost always understood what was happening was Allan Savory. Twenty years later it is easy to forget the fury which greeted Savory's use in Parliament of 'guerrilla' instead of the politically correct 'terrorist' and the incomprehension of RF MPs when he claimed that the side which won Black support would win the war. Savory's arrogance gave him the confidence to vie with Lamont as the White other Whites most liked to hate. It also made it difficult for him to work with anyone. The liberals knew that Whites wanted to hear only what was comforting; Savory wanted to tell them what was going to happen. As long as the liberals sought power from the electorate, Savory was a liability.

In comparison with the parties to the right of the RF, however, the liberals had the pulse of national life at their finger tips. Through the pages of this book stalk grotesque characters like Len Idensohn and Wilfred Brooks. Both believed that Smith was in the pay of what Brook's weekly would have called international communism. For all its blindness, the right recognised much more quickly than most Whites that Smith's agreement to the Kissinger proposals in 1976 was — what this book calls it — a surrender. In agreeing to hand over power to the Black majority within two years, Smith had turned his back on every political principle he had ever stood for. Of course, he refused to admit that this was what had happened and probably believed that he was negotiating a situation thrust on him by South Africa's betrayal. He never seems to have admitted that he was responding to an agenda which Blacks had made.

Godwin and Hancock describe their narrative as one written 'on the principle of listening and observing' and the text is largely constructed around the interviews both authors carried out with a large number of people from an assortment of backgrounds. They have used this method to discover not only what Whites did but what they thought they were doing. The people that emerge from these pages, although frequently absurd as most people are, are altogether more complex and varied than the Rhodesians in so many books and articles. Godwin and Hancock invoke the stereotypes this book is trying to abolish. On the one side there

are the Rhodies who left and meet 'to remember the hurt of loosing a country or to relive past glories' (p. 10). On the other side there are the Rhodesians constructed by a particular sort of scholarship. This is concerned 'to formulate the theory which correctly locates race and settler capitalism within the framework of class analysis' (p. 10). Godwin and Hancock briefly ponder whether the nostalgia of exile or a preoccupation with class produces the greater caricature of the varied reality of Rhodesians.

Perhaps the strongest impression of those last ten years of Rhodesia is how few Whites there were who knew what was going to happen. It was not that Rhodesians did not know what was happening in the war. Ignorance operated at a deeper level than day-to-day events. Censorship prevented any intelligent public discussion; but even without censorship Whites wanted to be fooled. It is worth recalling the more important of those various moments of self-deception. They believed that the majority of Blacks supported the 1971 Anglo-Rhodesian agreement; they believed that South Africa would always come to their rescue; they believed that Blacks liked being put into protected villages and that the guerrillas had no popular base; finally they believed that Muzorewa would win the 1980 elections. It was not simply ill-educated men and women who held to these extraordinary notions about the world they were supposed to control. Senior officers and civil servants believed them. Only the business world retained its sanity if sanity means having some sense of how other people think.

What this book shows however, is that no particular section of White society was more ignorant than any other. Until I read this book I have always been inclined to think that Internal Affairs was largely responsible for misleading the regime. Hostes Nicolle, the Secretary for Internal Affairs, was both enormously influential with the Cabinet and monumentally ignorant about what Blacks wanted. There is evidence, however, that people working for Internal Affairs in the north-east knew that there was unrest before the 1972 attack on Altena farm but their reports were ignored by higher officials in Salisbury who wanted only to hear of contented Blacks. Somewhere in the senior ranks of the army were men who knew that victory in a guerrilla war involved winning the confidence of the people. But there was so much rivalry between Hickman, Reid-Daly, MacIntyre and Walls that they had little energy left to win anyone's hearts and minds.

If I had to single out the principal strength of this superb book it would be the boldness with which its narrative mimics White Rhodesia's ignorance of the context in which it was living its life. The guerrillas and the nationalist leaders are largely absent in the book. They are present only when they attack White farms or when White politicians have to negotiate with them.

This allows Godwin and Hancock to convey the sense of what it was like for Whites living through those ten years. The cruelty and villainy and bumptious confidence are there of course. Also there are the surprisingly numerous people who hated what the Rhodesia Front was doing in their name. Some bitterly regretted the lives which were being sacrificed to hold off the inevitable. Others loved the country and wanted everyone to be able to enjoy its benefits. And others knew that Blacks were being denied their humanity and this was wrong. These are not the motives of heroic resistance. They do, however, counter the normal image of White Rhodesia with alternative and perhaps saving moments of ordinary decency.

University of Zimbabwe

ANTHONY CHENNELLS

Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War, Vol. Two Edited by N. Bhebe and T. Ranger. Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1995, xii, 250 pp., ISBN 0-908307-37-3, Z\$60.

This book is an important and timely contribution to scholarship on Zimbabwe's experience during the liberation war. It is the outcome of the international conference on the Zimbabwean liberation war held in Harare in July 1991, which brought together academics and participants in the war to analyse the significance of the conflict to the Zimbabwean socio-economic and political reality. Unlike the earlier volume, also edited by N. Bhebe and T. Ranger and which focussed on the experiences of the soldiers, the current volume concentrates on the role of religion, education and ideology in the war, as well as the impact of the war on society at large, both during and after the conflict. It is an impressive effort by participants and leading academics who are concerned more with analysing the factors that shaped the Zimbabwean experience during the years of the conflict than with upholding the 'comfortable myths of the war'.

Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War comprises nine chapters grouped into three sections, each focussing on a select theme. Section One, entitled 'Religion and the war', analyses three case studies of interaction between religion and the guerrillas. The first paper by T. Ranger and M. Ncube examines the role of both traditional religion and Christian missions in the liberation struggle in southern Matabeleland, while, the second and third contributions by D. Maxwell and J. McLaughlin respectively, provide interesting case studies of the war experiences of Christian missions in eastern Zimbabwe, one Catholic and the other protestant. All papers in this section demonstrate clearly that the relationship between religion and religious organisations and the guerrillas was a complex, dynamic and fluid one.