

REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE IN ZIMBABWE

by Garfield Todd



Robert Mugabe Prime Minister, designate, leader of Z.A.N.U. (P.F.) at the helm of the New Zimbabwe.

P. Weinberg

In the final months of its travail Rhodesia was so unreal that whites who thought as we did came almost to question their own sanity, let alone the soundness of their judgment.

Ian Smith's propagandist machine which for fourteen years had exerted such baleful influence in the west, continued to assure the world that the Government enjoyed the support of almost all the people and that it stood, clothed in shining armour, defending the west or anyway South Africa, against the communist hordes led by Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo. We, the whites, supported by "our" seven million Africans were still winning the war against the Marxists and each evening the Headquarters communique from Combined Operations Command listed X murders by terrorists and 10X laudable killings by the Security forces.

In April 1979 Bishop Muzorewa had been elected by a "free and fair" election in which every white employer, the police and the army had ruthlessly combined to ensure just that result. The week before the election and within seven miles of our home, soldiers shot three innocent men without even challenging them. It was the same soldiers who, the following week, gathered the people on the borders of our ranch and walked them six miles to a mobile polling booth to record their frightened votes. Whatever may have been the joy of the people in voting for Bishop Muzorewa in Salisbury or other places, this was the truth of the situation in our area.

The mantle of Ian Smith had now settled incongruously on the shoulders of Bishop Muzorewa, the man of God and Minister of War who claimed full responsibility for conducting the war, but in fact had no control at all over it. The army and air force now shed any remaining inhibitions and mounted a campaign of terror throughout the rural areas.

By the close of 1979 a quarter of a million villagers had fled from their devastated homes and their country and were living destitute in refugee camps in Botswana, Mozambique and Zambia. Within Rhodesia the black population of the cities and the towns had doubled as a million men, women and children trekked from the villages to find shelter with friends and relatives in the black townships. Many, in desperation, found their shelter under plastic sheets on the borders of the towns.

By the time the Commonwealth met in Conference at Lusaka to experience what proved to be their "finest hour" Mrs Thatcher, the Conservative leader, was poised to recognise Bishop Muzorewa as Prime Minister and in Rhodesia the people were in desperate straits. "Operation Turkey" a hideous name for a programme designed to starve out the "terrorists" by reducing the food available to the people to such low levels that the liberators, who numbered one in 200 of the population, half of one per cent, would not be able to survive. Mr Ian Smith's Government and the Bishop's Government which followed, limited the amount of maize meal, the basic food, which could be purchased by any one person at one time and all grinding mills in rural areas were not only closed down but were physically removed and taken to military posts for safe-keeping.

If the guerillas had been 20% of the population, "Operation Turkey" might have succeeded in its aim but as the ratio was one guerilla to 200 villagers the result was to make life extremely difficult for mothers and to limit the food available to the families. No-one can tell what the long-

term damage to children will be but no guerilla starved or was greatly inconvenienced by the measure, despite official reports to the contrary.

The guerillas established committees of the people in every operational area; teachers paid 10\$ or more monthly, store-keepers were levied and a detailed organisation for feeding the itinerant bands of twenty to thirty guerillas was set up. As the villagers were constantly being searched by troops it was not practicable to establish caches of food but the local "logistics secretary" knew where he could get enough small amounts of food to feed the visitors—though, in some areas, the day did come when people said, "Our chickens are finished, our goats are finished and now we have to kill our cattle." When that day came it was often the white farmers who provided the cattle. These were stolen in large numbers, driven through the African areas and dropped off one by one at each village. The villagers would kill their animal and then hang the meat to dry. Many people have been jailed for nine years or more for cattle theft during this period, but as their crimes were politically motivated and an integral part of the war, they will no doubt be released before long.

The propaganda machine continued to tell of the "brutal terrorists" and of the "terrorised masses", but those of us who lived with the people in friendship knew that the people and the guerillas were one. The 30 000 guerillas were indeed "the fish" swimming safely "in the water", the water being the loyal population of Zimbabwe.

When the leaders of the Liberation Armies accepted an invitation to attend talks at Lancaster House, a great many people and especially the British, expected the talks to break down at an early date. If this had happened the British Government would almost certainly have recognised Bishop Muzorewa and would have lifted sanctions. Then the British Government, together with the Government of South Africa, would have given Bishop Muzorewa all the assistance he required to defeat the "Marxist" armies. There seemed to be only the vaguest recognition in the west that in Rhodesia the basic problem was not Marxism but Nationalism—a crisis of liberty for the people. Smith told the world that he was fighting atheistic Marxism which threatened to engulf seven million people. The truth was that he, for the whites, had declared a thousand years of war against African Nationalism, against the armies of Mugabe and Nkomo which were totally committed to the liberation of Zimbabwe and her peoples. Mr Smith, his government and army had stood in their way but, by April 1979 he had found it politic to set up a black facade behind which white power would be protected by a new constitution for a minimum of ten more years. Bishop Muzorewa became Prime Minister and Minister in charge of the war against the people of Zimbabwe.

Another fact not generally recognised was that by the time the Lancaster House Conference opened, not only were the Rhodesian Government and the economy under critical strain, but the people themselves had had more than enough of war.

A third of their schools were closed, hundreds of thousands of people were confined to "protected villages", so many cattle had died and many fields were no longer cultivated. Between 20 000 and 30 000 people had been killed. Word was sent to the leaders that a solution had to be found. When some guerilla leaders demanded that the war be continued until the liberation armies marched victoriously into the streets of Salisbury, one answer was that the whites were already defeated. The 1979 Constitution had given

whites control over possible changes in the Constitution but they were to have only two representatives at the Lancaster House Conference out of a total of twenty-four delegates. This was defeat for the whites and so it proved to be.

But even at that point defeat was not recognised, certainly not accepted by the Rhodesian Government or by the whites. When one contemplated the scene in the period leading up to the election it was difficult to be confident that the people would prevail. Ranged against them were the Government of Rhodesia, the civil service, the army, the police, the whites in general, and supporting this powerful group and making the continuation of the war possible, the Government and white people of South Africa.

But in Zimbabwe we were dealing with miracles. The Lusaka Conference which might have broken the Commonwealth instead laid out the path to Lancaster House. During those London weeks the Commonwealth played a key role and following the agreement its members encouraged and supported Mr Mugabe and Mr Nkomo along their difficult and most dangerous way. I hold that the greatest act of faith in the whole delicate process was the decision by Nkomo and Mugabe to call their men from the bush and place them in open camps, and then for 22 000 men and women to obey the call.

The Patriotic Front had asked for adequate time to prepare voting rolls. This was refused and the party-list system had to be used. The Patriotic Front asked for a substantial peace-keeping force from the United Nations or the Commonwealth, and this also was refused. After weeks of battling they did obtain a monitoring force from the Commonwealth but the British resisted full Commonwealth participation because they realised that the Commonwealth, with the exception of Britain and perhaps of New Zealand, supported the African people in their struggle.

We are deeply indebted to Lord Carrington and to the officials of the Foreign Office for all that they accomplished. Some of the officials worked themselves to exhaustion to bring Lancaster to a viable conclusion—but the British Government were prepared to go beyond the limits of wisdom or justice to keep Mugabe out of power.

Bishop Muzorewa was acceptable to the British, or a combination of Bishop Muzorewa, the whites and any residue of the small parties. The British too, were deceived by Rhodesian propaganda and believed that all would be lost if Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo came to power.

I had hoped that with the arrival of the Governor the whole atmosphere of war would be changed. I thought that the army would largely disappear from view and I knew that the Auxiliaries, Bishop Muzorewa's private army, would be either disbanded or confined to barracks.

Nothing like this happened and the system continued as before. When I had earlier protested to Sir John Boynton because the ZANLA (PF) head office could not get one telephone installed, Sir John replied: "Mr Todd, you cannot beat the system". I thought to myself that perhaps I could not beat the system but the people could, and they did.

Twenty thousand armed Auxiliary forces were deployed throughout the country. Their presence was excused by various pretences. They were "building roads", "opening dips", "re-building schools", but the truth was that, in full co-operation with the District Commissioners, they were an integral part of the system which was determined at all costs to keep the Patriotic Front out of power.

The white population had been so imbued by Rhodesian



Fatherly figure Joshua Nkomo makes a point at a press conference during the election build-up.

Paul Weinberg

Front propaganda that they genuinely believed that a Mugabe victory would be the end of life for them in the country they love. This is not to be wondered at when in Britain a reputable publication such as the Church Times gave space as late as February 22 to a letter in which it stated that Robert Mugabe had said that if he were given control of Government "all children from the age of seven shall (be placed) under military training as well as (being taught) the principles of Socialism. . . . "all Churches will be turned into barracks, concentration camps and dancing halls. . . .

"All those associated with the Church will be brought before a military tribunal."

The two month period leading up to the election was a grim time for anyone supporting the Nationalist cause. In my home village of Shabani the police seemed to lose all power of judgment. The Principal of our local high school, three candidates for the ZANU(PF) and even I were committed to prison under the terms of the notorious Law and Order Maintenance Act.

The three candidates are now all M.Ps and all in government while charges against the Principal and me have been dropped. What really was frightening was the air of certainty of the Police, the Magistrate, the Army—all who belonged to the system—that they could carry on along their illegal way and that nothing could stop them.

Before the election I was discussing the election with a Minister of Religion. I prophesied that Mugabe would get 40 seats, Nkomo 23, Muzorewa 15—and at that point I was interrupted by an indignant interjection: "You think Muzorewa will get 15 seats? Never! The people will not

give him one." My friend was not far wrong but the people did give the Bishop three seats.

On March 5 in a letter to a friend overseas I said "Rejoice with us. On Tuesday, March 4 Zimbabwe emerged from persecution and war with a clarity of decision which has taken the world by surprise. This overwhelming expression of the people's will is our recipe for peace.

"Some 2 649 529 people enthusiastically cast their votes, giving ZANU of the Patriotic Front 1 668 992 votes, ZAPU of the Patriotic Front 638 879 votes and Bishop Muzorewa 219 307 votes. The other six parties were eliminated by the vote. Mr Mugabe emerged with 57 seats, Dr Joshua Nkomo with 20 seats and the Bishop with three.

"Mr Mugabe, as Prime Minister designate, addressed the nation last evening and his message was one of reconciliation and of hope. Not in many years have we listened to a speech by our Prime Minister so unambiguous, so articulate, so carefully conciliatory. At the same time people from both sections of the Patriotic Front were dancing and singing in the townships and in the villages, brothers in the struggle and in the victory.

"The war has cost over 20 000 lives, the detention and imprisonment of tens of thousands of people, the destruction of innumerable homes, but we are now emerging into the sunlight of hope. So many Governments as well as the Churches around the world are offering help in the rehabilitation of our country."

"I know that there will be problems and disappointments; there are wounds of the body and of the spirit which can hardly be healed but the people have massively spoken for peace." □