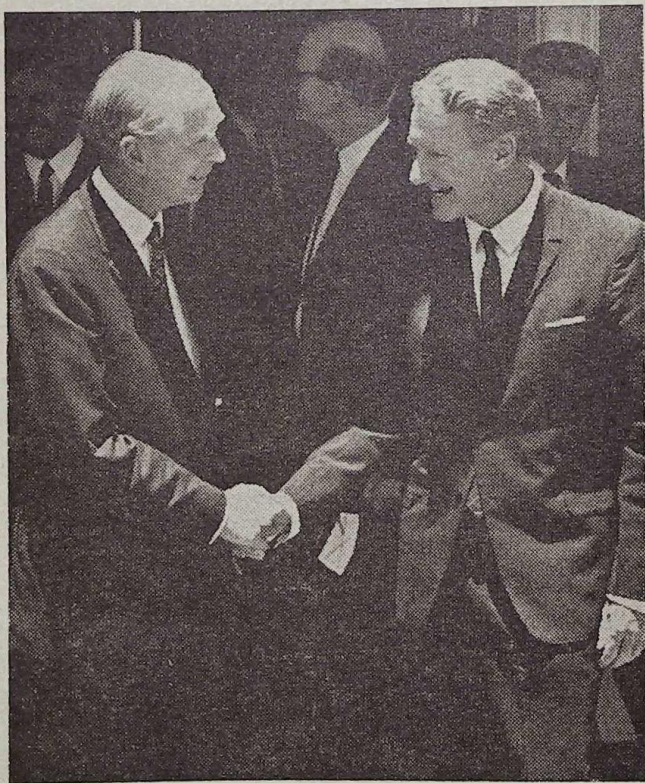


# Where did Pearce go wrong?

A Brief Appreciation of the Pearce Report





## ANGLO-RHODESIAN RELATIONS

"The above proposals are acceptable to the Rhodesian and British Governments.

I. Douglas Smith  
Alec Douglas-Home

Salisbury, Rhodesia  
24th November, 1971"

This agreement brought to an end 12 months of patient negotiations between representatives of the two Governments. It was the earnest hope of reasonable and responsible Rhodesians of all races that it would mark the end of the constitutional dispute between the two countries.

The proposals agreed upon reflected marked concessions by both sides. They provided for accelerated political and economic advancement for the black Rhodesians.

## THE TEST OF ACCEPTABILITY

The British Government was adamant that the proposals should meet the requirements of what has become known as "The Fifth Principle".

Accordingly, the opening text of the proposals reads as follows:

"The proposals set out below are conditional upon the British Government being satisfied that they are acceptable to the people of Rhodesia as a whole. The British Government will therefore appoint a Commission to ascertain directly from all sections of the population of Rhodesia whether or not these proposals are acceptable and to report accordingly to the British Government."

## THE PEARCE COMMISSION

A Commission was duly appointed under the chairmanship of Lord Pearce, a retired British Judge.

The Commission arrived in Rhodesia on January 11th, 1972, amid growing unrest among the African population resulting from the activities of the African National Council. This body was formed immediately after the signing of the agreement to oppose



acceptance of the proposals. With few exceptions its national executive was composed of ex-detainees and ex-restrictees who had previously been office-holders in organizations banned by the Rhodesian authorities for fomenting violence.

In the two weeks following the Commission's arrival there was serious and widespread rioting. There was evidence of massive and vicious intimidation by adherents of the African National Council.

The Pearce Commission spent two months in Rhodesia and then returned to Britain to write its report.

### THE REPORT

The main body of the report runs to 112 pages. The Commission concluded:

"We are satisfied on our evidence that the Proposals are acceptable to the great majority of Europeans. We are equally satisfied, after considering all our evidence including that on intimidation, that the majority of Africans rejected the Proposals. In our opinion the people of Rhodesia as a whole do not regard the Proposals as acceptable as a basis for independence."

It is the Rhodesian Government's contention that this conclusion is not borne out by the evidence. Indeed, the report can be contested on a number of grounds.

In paragraph 414 the Report states "We believe that most of the 'Noes' sprang from a genuine, deeply-felt opposition to the Proposals".

But in paragraph 311 it is asserted "Mistrust of the intentions and motives of the Government transcended all other considerations".

The Commission was specifically bound in its terms of reference to confine its test of opinion to the Proposals for a Settlement. But it is apparent from the Report that "Noes" given for reasons quite unrelated to the merits of the Proposals were also taken into account. In Appendix E one of the teams of commissioners that visited all parts of the country conceded that the people as a whole did not have a good knowledge of the proposals. They went on, exceeding their terms of reference, to say that "In many cases 'Yes', or more usually 'No' decisions were

made by Africans for reasons not related to the merits of the Proposals, but legitimate and rational ones nonetheless".

Perhaps the most significant and poignant passage in the Report occurs in paragraph 150 "Had the question which we had been asked to test been whether the proposal 'ought to be acceptable to the people of Rhodesia' or 'should reasonably be acceptable', then the view of ten wise men would outweigh the view of 10 000 foolish men".

The Commission based their conclusions, as far as African opinion was concerned, on a sample survey of rather less than six per cent. of the adult black Rhodesian population. But what of the views of the ninety-four per cent. silent majority?

The commissioners themselves obviously entertained certain misgivings in this respect. The following questions are posed in paragraph 232 of their Report, "Are we justified in concluding that the opinion we received was representative of opinion in the rural areas as a whole? Might it not be that we had seen those who felt most strongly about the proposals, which in the circumstances meant those who were opposed to them? Had we any impression of the views of the really silent majority?"

What emerges with perfect clarity is that the great majority of the Asian, Coloured and European communities voted "Yes". Africans forming the higher income brackets were in general prepared to give the proposals a fair trial. But the Commission, deciding that the test must be basically quantitative, deemed the carefully orchestrated "Noes" at the mass meetings dominated by the bully boys of the African National Council to be the view of the people of Rhodesia as a whole.

Of the 107 309 Africans who were held to have voted against the proposals, 97 800 did so at public meetings or in large groups.

The commissioners observed that on many occasions coach loads of Africans were brought in shortly before these meetings took place. Frequently the commissioners recognized the same faces at different meetings. As one team of commissioners reported "All too often the public meetings followed the same pattern. Large crowds, well organized and drilled, were dominated by a few politically active cheerleaders, the presence of two or three of whom was sufficient to stifle any debate. Profitable discussion was frustrated and the contents of the proposals were regarded as irrelevant. Minds had clearly been made up beforehand . . .".



Intimidation is as rife to 20th century Africa as slave-trading was in the 19th century. Notwithstanding that two of its nine teams in the field were unable to determine whether or not the Africans in the areas they visited accepted the Proposals because of intimidation, the Commission found that the degree of intimidation had not been sufficient to invalidate the exercise.

As a leading British national daily newspaper observed, there was a marked hiatus between the Commission's detailed account of its inquiry and its ultimate judgment "that the majority of Africans rejected the Proposals".

By applying a different standard of values the answer could have been "Yes".

### WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

The British Foreign Secretary commended the terms of the agreement reached between the two Governments as being in the best interests of Rhodesians as a whole and of particular benefit to the African population. Now Sir Alec Douglas-Home, feels his hands are tied by the Pearce Commission's finding.

Most of the national executive of the African National Council were members of the African nationalist party that attended the Constitutional Conference that gave rise to Rhodesia's 1961 Constitution. It was they, and people like them, who compelled their delegates to renege on that constitution. Their leader, having first accepted the proposals, sought subsequently to free himself from blame by saying in the course of a speech "A leader is he who expresses the wishes of his followers . . .".

These extremists bear a heavy responsibility. It is tragic that the commissioners were deluded into believing that they spoke for the silent—and largely unseen—majority.

It is unrealistic to look to the Rhodesian Government to implement unilaterally those provisions that required domestic legislation. The agreement was a package deal. Rhodesia remains willing to implement the solemn undertakings it gave only if the British Government, for its part, would honour its undertakings also—this it will not do.

Rhodesia has no guarantee that its independence would be recognized if she took such a step. At present it is not Britain's intention even to lift sanctions. An uncharitable, if not indefensible, decision in view of all that was said by Conservative Party

leaders when they were the Opposition. The present British Prime Minister stated in the House of Commons on the 28th March, 1968, "The purpose was to bring about a negotiation, that can be the only justification for the policy of sanctions . . .". The purpose has been achieved. A negotiation was brought about in November, 1971. The two Governments reached agreement. The proposals were endorsed by both Houses of Parliament at Westminster.

The British Government is satisfied that the settlement terms provide the best basis for the future of all races in Rhodesia. It should now have the courage to implement the proposals.

In an historical, as opposed to a political perspective, a settlement would earn the respect and gratitude of the vast majority of those Rhodesians whose interests Britain claims is her responsibility.

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