



THE PEARCE COMMISSION REPORT

Broadcast Statement

by the Prime Minister,

the Hon. I. D. Smith

and

A Statement

by the Rhodesian Government

23rd May, 1972

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When the Commission weighed these in the balance, it came down on the side of the ex-detainees and unemployed school leavers.

On page 80, the report states "Mistrust of the intentions and motives of the Government transcended all other considerations". One witness summed it up in saying: "We do not reject the proposals, we reject the Government." This was said to be the dominant motivation of African rejection at all levels and in all areas. One is forced to ask why the Commissioners did not explain to these Africans that the question before them did not involve confidence in the Rhodesian Government, and that whether the ultimate answer was "Yes" or "No", there would be no change of Government!

Dealing with the question of intimidation, all the teams of Commissioners reported that there was intimidation. Two of these teams stated that they were unable accurately to assess the position because of the considerable intimidation. Moreover, the Rhodesian Attorney-General presented to the Commission a formidable case history of the serious intimidation which had taken place since the agreement was made. However, in the face of all this evidence, the report states that the Commissioners were unable to accept that opinions were influenced by intimidation.

As a final example, let us look at the statistics quoted in the report. Out of slightly more than 100 000 Europeans, 98 634 said "Yes", 1 790 said "No". In other words, more than 98 per cent. said "Yes". In the case of the Coloured people 391 said "Yes", while only 10 said "No". In excess of 97 per cent. in favour. Dealing with the Asian community, 624 said "Yes", 21 "No". More than 96 per cent. in favour. Dealing with the Africans, the report concedes that the Commissioners saw less than 6 per cent. of the adult African population. Accepting that the majority of these were opposed to the terms, however specious the reason, what about the other 94 per cent. of African opinion?

When all this is added up (and there is much more similar evidence), I submit that there is only one conclusion: the Pearce Commission had the wool pulled over its eyes.

When one reads this report, in spite of its naivety and ineptness, the only responsible conclusion that one can come to is that the answer should have been "Yes". However, in view of the fact that the Commissioners were unable to assess African opinion, and that they were able to make contact with less than

6 per cent. of the African adult population, the only other logical answer, apart from an affirmative, is that it was impossible to assess the opinion of the African people, and, therefore, the two Governments concerned should face up to their responsibility.

Tragically, after all we have been through, culminating in an agreement, signed by the two governments, the whole thing has landed up on the rocks, through their bungling of the test on which the United Kingdom Government insisted, against our advice. To make things worse, they spurned the help of all our experts when it came to planning and preparing the exercise.

We have had many different inquiries and reports during our history; I believe this one will go down as the most irresponsible of them all.

As far as I and my colleagues in Government are concerned, we did our best to ensure the success of this operation — we dedicated ourselves to obtaining a “Yes” answer. However, all of this is in the past and we must now look to the future.

My intention this evening is therefore to dispel any doubts that you may have in this regard.

Firstly, I have informed the British Government that we are fully prepared to implement the agreement if they will do so. There will, however, be no question of any part of the proposals being implemented unilaterally by the Rhodesian Government.

Secondly, it is generally acknowledged that in reaching agreement last November, both the British and Rhodesian Governments went to the limits of negotiation in terms of political reality. Sir Alec Douglas Home and I have both stated, on a number of occasions, that if these terms were rejected there would be no further negotiations. Some chose to disbelieve this statement and for their benefit I now repeat that there will be no negotiations with a view to changing any of the terms of the settlement.

Thirdly, if the British Government are not prepared to implement the agreement, it follows that we shall continue to govern Rhodesia in terms of our existing Constitution. I give you my assurance that we shall govern firmly and that we shall not tolerate any attempt to disturb the peace and harmony to which, in very large measure, the country has returned since the departure of the Pearce Commission.

There are those who have predicted that a rejection of the proposals by the Africans would be followed by a white backlash—a surge of anger that for the second time the Africans have

apparently spurned our offer of political, economic and social advance. I do not believe that this will happen. I have no doubt that white Rhodesians are too mature and too sensible to allow their emotions to get the better of them. I believe that when you read this report you will share my disbelief that a British Commission could reach a conclusion which is so unrealistic, contrary to the evidence in their own report, and so palpably against the interests of all Rhodesians and particularly of the Africans. We should therefore not blame the ordinary decent African; he, after all, is the biggest loser. And, I reiterate, less than 6 per cent. of the Africans felt it "worthwhile to express an opinion to the Commission.

I know that the great majority of you will be as disappointed as I am at the outcome of this unnecessary exercise, but there is, of course, a bright side to it. There has been, since last November, an increasing rate of erosion of the economic sanctions against us. This in no way implies that we should lower our guard. On the contrary, security of economic information remains of paramount importance, but because of the high quality of many of our products more and more countries are prepared to trade quietly and unobtrusively with us.

In the political field we have gained considerable advantage from the agreement we reached with the British Government last November. No longer can the charge of intransigence or unreasonableness be levelled at us, for the agreement was commended to the Rhodesian people by the British Government and was stated by Sir Alec Douglas Home in the House of Commons to be fully in accord with the five principles which Britain had laid down. Since the declared purpose of sanctions was to bring us to the negotiating table with a view to reaching just such an agreement, it is difficult to see how the British Government could, in honour, be a party to the continuation of sanctions. Furthermore, it was Sir Alec Douglas Home himself who said in the House of Commons, as recently as 1st December, 1971, that "it is unhappily the Africans who are the witness (or victim) to any success that sanctions have had". Surely the British Government will not wish to punish the Africans for rejecting the proposals by continuing sanctions against them.

So in the end, this is a disappointment for us. However, many worse things have happened to Rhodesia, and I have a feeling that much good, at present unseen, will flow from this experience which

we have been through. For some time now it has been your Government's assessment, that whatever the outcome of the Pearce Commission, Rhodesia's progress and success are assured.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to thank you, the people of Rhodesia, for the great strength which you have shown, and the support which you have given to your Government, during this frustrating and tiresome period. You have played your part well, and it is my prediction that because of your responsible behaviour, great benefit will accrue to Rhodesia in the years which lie ahead.

Government Statement

The following is a statement by the Rhodesian Government on the Report of the Pearce Commission

The Report of the Pearce Commission, together with its appendices, occupies just over 200 pages. It contains a mass of detail and requires careful study. Although the Report has been in the Government's hands for only a short time, Government have been able to form some preliminary views, and the purpose of this Statement is to acquaint Rhodesians with these views.

The Pearce Commission arose out of a British requirement—their Fifth Principle—that the Proposals for a Settlement had to be acceptable to the people of Rhodesia as a whole. The Commission was appointed by the British Government to ascertain whether or not this was so.

The task of the Commission was an extremely difficult one. This was not surprising to the Rhodesian Government, who have never been convinced that complex constitutional proposals should be the subject of an exercise of this nature.

Certain aspects of the Report are unsatisfactory and certain conclusions do not carry conviction, and these will be commented on later in this Statement.

The Commission concluded that the Proposals were acceptable to three out of the four racial groups in Rhodesia, namely, the European, Asian and Coloured groups, but that on all the evidence, including that on intimidation, the majority of the Africans rejected them. In their opinion, therefore, the people of Rhodesia as a whole did not regard the Proposals as acceptable as a basis for independence.

With regard to African opinion, the Commission found that African agricultural workers in the European Area were probably in favour of the Proposals. These number $\frac{1}{4}$ million, which figure excludes wives.

The Commission were unable to obtain information on the views of the 116 000 domestic servants, which group constitutes a large and important sector of the African adult population.

Two of the teams of Commissioners, namely those who tested opinion in the Provinces of Matabeleland North and Victoria, were unable to determine whether or not the Africans in those Provinces accepted the Proposals, because of the intimidation and the lack of comprehension of the Proposals. The other teams of Commissioners

came to a different conclusion and were supported by the Chairman and Deputy Chairman. Virtually all of them said that there was intimidation but that it was not sufficient to invalidate the expression of opinion because it was intimidation of the minority by the majority and not intimidation of the majority by the minority. They also found that there was a sufficient understanding of the Proposals.

We shall return to the question of intimidation later because we believe that it has been given insufficient weight by the majority of the Commissioners. We also believe that the finding of the majority of the Commissioners that the Proposals were understood by the African tribesmen is of doubtful validity and we shall also return to this later.

The next point to which attention should be drawn is that the Commission estimates that the Commissioners saw 6 per cent. of the adult population in the Tribal Trust Lands. The vast majority of these, that is to say 100 000 out of a total of 114 000, expressed their views at mass meetings. It will therefore be appreciated that there was an enormous silent majority in the Tribal Trust Lands, amounting to 94 per cent. of the adult population, which did not express an opinion on the Proposals. In the absence of any direct evidence of their views, the Commission had this to say—

“We cannot necessarily be sure that this pattern (of views expressed by those who were seen) would have obtained amongst those whom we did not see but, in the absence of any identifiable undercurrent of approval of the Proposals, we think it would be totally wrong to infer that such people would have supported them.”.

Thus the views of 94 per cent. of the adults in the Tribal Trust Lands were not ascertained, even though Lord Pearce had appealed to them to come forward. Moreover the Report states—

“One of the officers of the Bulawayo branch of the African National Council claimed that there was no part of Rhodesia, including the Tribal Trust Lands, to which their canvassing had not penetrated. We think that this was substantially correct and that there was no material section of the population that was prevented from being canvassed by some means or other.”.

It is significant that in spite of this vigorous and extensive ANC campaign, 94 per cent. of the adults in the Tribal Trust Lands

remained silent. In December the Council of Chiefs had come out in favour of the Proposals and this had received wide publicity. It may be that the majority of tribesmen had accepted this as having expressed their views. However this may be, it is evident that the views of the majority of the tribesmen, who comprise the greater part of the African population, remain unknown.

We now turn to the finding by the Commission that the majority of the tribesmen understood the Proposals.

The campaign against acceptance of the Proposals was organized by the African National Council, most of whose office-bearers are known African nationalists. It is not, therefore, surprising that the Report states, under the heading "Reasons for African Rejection", that mistrust of the intentions and motives of the Government transcended all other considerations. The Report goes on—

"One summed it up by saying 'We do not reject the Proposals, we reject the Government'. This was the dominant motivation of African rejection at all levels and in all areas."

This dominant reason for rejecting the Proposals—that the Government could not be trusted—illustrates, in so far as it relates to the implementation of the Proposals, that they do not seem to have been understood.

In terms of the Proposals, before any Settlement can be effected the Rhodesian Government have no option but to implement the Proposals. The Proposals for a Settlement provide that it is only *after* the Rhodesian Government have given effect to the constitutional changes by the passing of a Constitution Amendment Act that the British would carry out their part in implementing the Agreement.

The great majority of the Africans seen, were at the large gatherings in the Tribal Areas. The Commission found that most of these Africans had a sufficient understanding of the Proposals to pass a valid judgement. Notwithstanding the efforts of the Commission and the Government to explain the Proposals, we believe that this finding of the Commission is open to serious doubt. Two teams of Commissioners—those for Matabeleland North Province and Victoria—came to the opposite conclusion, and the probabilities support their view. Firstly, there is the basic improbability that unlettered African tribesmen can understand and assess complex constitutional matters, even though explained in simple terms. Secondly, account must be taken of the intimidation found by the

Commission to have been present. Thirdly, according to the Report, all the political activity in the Tribal Trust Lands was carried on by the anti-Settlement element whose aim, according to the Commission, was to achieve "an appearance of solidarity intended to convince the Commission that Africans spoke with one voice". The anti-Settlement element could hardly have achieved this aim by exposition and logical persuasion in the short time at their disposal; they could only have done so by methods which tended to stifle discussion and explanation, by dragooning people into conformity or by appealing to emotion. There can be little doubt that this is what happened.

In view of all this it would be fanciful to think that the tribesmen gave their answers in the light of an adequate understanding of the Proposals.

The Commission do admit the difficulty of assessing the level of comprehension among those attending the mass meetings and the Report refers to the differing views of the Commissioners on this. The Report says—

"However all our Commissioners were agreed that there was a reasonable level of comprehension of the broad issues amongst the *politically motivated and better educated* Africans."

Most of the tribesmen attending the mass meetings would not fall within this class.

The Report goes on—

"Clearly there were many Africans who at the end of our labours had at best a limited understanding of the Proposals. Few could understand the complexities of an elaborate constitutional document. But all our teams of Commissioners except one (Matabeleland North) concluded that a majority of the Africans *whom they met* sufficiently understood the basic principles and implications of the Proposals to pass a valid judgement on them."

This conclusion, that the majority of the Africans *whom they met* understood the Proposals, could not apply to the great majority of the Africans at the mass meetings. At these meetings it would have been impossible for the Commissioners to have met and therefore to have ascertained the level of comprehension of, more than a very few tribesmen in relation to the numbers at the meetings, bearing in mind that the crowds varied in number from fifty

to several thousand and that in all 100 000 Africans attended such meetings.

It is therefore difficult to find any grounds from which an inference of comprehension on the part of the tribesmen can be drawn. Indeed they, in particular, were voting solidly against their own interests.

Another criticism of the Report relates to the assessment by the Commission of the validity of the opinions of those who rejected the Proposals for reasons not connected with those Proposals. The Commission decided that the test of opinion must be basically quantitative, that is, it must be based on the number of answers given, but that there must be some qualitative limitations, such as the disregarding of the opinion of those who are induced by mistake or duress to give an answer which does not reflect their genuine intentions.

Nevertheless, when dealing with those who said "No" because they disapproved of Government policies or distrusted Government's intentions rather than because they disapproved of the Proposals themselves, the Commission stated that this was not a valid reason for rejecting such "No" answers. It would seem that this unqualified acceptance of "No" votes for reasons not relevant to the Proposals is not consistent with the rejection of votes given by mistake, or with the aim of the test, which was to determine whether or not the Proposals were acceptable.

Intimidation

The manner in which the majority of the Commission dealt with the question of intimidation and the assessments made in connexion therewith are not at all convincing.

The Matabeleland North Team of Commissioners was convinced that all public meetings and not a few individuals were influenced to a considerable extent by fear engendered by the anti-Settlement section of the population. The Victoria Team of Commissioners was "unable accurately to assess how far the results obtained were the consequence of intimidation and fear (which they believe to have been considerable)". Virtually all the Teams of Commissioners report that there was intimidation. However, the Commission states that the meetings must be recognized as giving an indication of the view formed by large sections of the population because of the atmosphere of the meetings, and the consistency of the response exhibited at them and the extent of

solidarity shown. Surely, though, these three factors could have been induced by an effective degree of intimidation organized by small groups of individuals moving about the various areas just ahead of or with the Commissioners. The time and place of the public meetings were invariably well publicized. That the ANC was controlling the mass meetings is recognized in the Report where it is said "As time went on the larger meetings tended to become more orderly and there was a greater willingness to give views in private. This probably stemmed in part from a different approach by the African National Council."

In connexion with intimidation, the Report deals first with the riots and disorders in the urban centres and finds that there were cases of serious intimidation against some who were likely to support the Proposals. However, the Commission concludes that "Too much should not be read into the long-term effects of these sporadic outbreaks" and said that as the state of tension did not last for long it did not have a lasting or overwhelming effect on the opinions given to them. It must be remembered, though, that these disorders continued until the 21st January and the Pearce Commission left Rhodesia on the 11th March, only seven weeks later. It is difficult to accept that the effects of the rioting and intimidation would not be felt for that short period of time. One cannot believe that because the outbursts were quickly brought under control by the authorities, the effects of the intimidation would miraculously disappear within a few short days.

The Report then deals with the individual threats of intimidation and finds that this part of the Government's case proved weak on investigation. Bearing in mind that these Special Commissioners received the dossier from the Government on the 22nd February and departed on the 11th March, it seems that they could have had little time for a full investigation since in that time they also investigated complaints from the ANC against the Government and against employers. In fact, the offer by the Government to make available for questioning every person who had made a sworn statement or report contained in the police reports was not accepted. In the light of this offer it is not clear why it is said, in relation to the police reports, that "other than taking them at their face value there was no means of deciding on their authenticity".

The Report then deals with Pressures at Public Meetings. The Victoria Team of Commissioners reports a calculated cam-

the public meetings, the Report refers to them as "party organizers" who are "a normal feature of political activity".

In conclusion therefore—

- (1) the Report itself clearly shows that the views of the overwhelming majority of African adults were not obtained;
- (2) two of the teams of Commissioners were satisfied that amongst Africans the intimidation was on such a large scale and the level of comprehension of the Proposals was so low that it was not possible to assess the views of Africans;
- (3) the reasons given by the remaining Commissioners for concluding that the intimidation was not by a minority against the majority and that there was an adequate degree of comprehension of the Proposals amongst Africans are unconvincing;
- (4) it was unreasonable not to discount the weight of the votes of those who were not rejecting the Proposals but were expressing disapproval of Government policies or distrust of Government's intentions.

For these reasons Government is unable to accept as being correct the conclusions reached by the Pearce Commission.