



# Give Rhodesia a Chance

As this nation shifts to black rule, its future will be decided either by ballots or by Russian guns. The choice may depend on British and US support

By SIR ROBERT THOMPSON

ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, if all goes according to plan, the white minority that has ruled Rhodesia for more than half a century will turn the government over to the country's black majority. A new Central African nation, to be called Zimbabwe—after the extinct civilization of that area—will be born. Zimbabwe stands a good chance of becoming a show-place of democracy, prosperity and inter-racial harmony. It is also one place where Soviet expansion into Africa can be stopped.

During the past two decades, 40 or so African countries have received independence from European rule. Although born in high hopes, most soon became one-party systems, some ruled by bloodthirsty military tyrants such as Uganda's Idi Amin. Often white racism has been replaced by black racism. The economies of many of those new nations have stagnated, and some have gravitated into the Soviet orbit.

Zimbabwe, however, promises to be the exception. As I found

during a recent visit, the black leaders who will take over on December 31 are committed to moderate, reasonable policies and friendship with the West. Despite racial discrimination in the past, they want whites to remain and assist in Zimbabwe's development. Unlike some dictators in Africa, Zimbabwe's new leaders have—in the opinion of experts I talked

Rhodesia, as the country will continue to be known until the change-over to black rule, is one of Africa's most prosperous countries. Its farms produce far more food than needed and, with further irrigation, agricultural production could be quadrupled. Rhodesia also has extensive deposits of the world's best-quality chromite as well as of other valuable minerals.

#### Participants in Rhodesia's internal settlement



**Ian Smith, 59**, served in Royal Air Force during Second World War. Entered politics 1948, Prime Minister since 1964. Led Rhodesia to UDI 1965.



**Bishop Abel Muzorewa, 53**, US-educated Methodist minister, President of United African National Council (UANC) since 1971. Awarded 1973 UN Prize for Outstanding Achievement in Human Rights.



**The Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole, 58**, US-educated Congregational minister, Co-founder of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in 1963.



**Senator Chief Jeremiah Chirau, 55**, President of Council of Chiefs. Member of Smith government until late 1976, when he founded Zimbabwe United People's Organization (ZUPO).

to—the support of a substantial majority of the country's six million blacks, as well as most of its 270 000 whites.

An authority on guerrilla warfare, **SIR ROBERT THOMPSON** served in the RAF during the Second World War. Between 1948 and 1960 he helped to direct successful operations against communist insurgents in Malaya. Later he served as head of the British Advisory Mission in Vietnam.

Its fledgling industries are the envy of many of its neighbours. And it has one of the best black educational systems in Africa.

Nevertheless, this year's settlement between the whites and the moderate black leaders is a surprising development. From its formal establishment in 1923, Rhodesia had been a self-governing British

colony, and the white minority ran the government pretty much to the exclusion of the black majority. During the early 1960s, while European governments were granting freedom to their African dependencies, Britain pressed Rhodesia's whites to turn control over to the blacks gradually. The whites responded by declaring their independence in 1965.

national isolation and guerrilla pressures, the whites are relinquishing control, and the settlement is bound to have important international consequences.

Zimbabwe may turn out to be a roadblock in the Soviet drive into Africa. One of Moscow's aims is to bring the vast mineral deposits of the southern half of Africa under its political control. It has thus been supplying arms to the Rhodesian guerrillas, and Cuban instructors have been training them.

The Rhodesian guerrillas are based in neighbouring black countries and have waged their struggle for more than ten years. Some of their leaders openly proclaim that they want to turn the future Zimbabwe into a one-party Marxist state, aligning the country with the Soviet Union.

Time and again, the guerrilla's Patriotic Front has been offered the chance to participate in free elections if it renounces violence. But, knowing full well it would be defeated, the front has spurned the ballot box—unless it is allowed first to take control of the army and police, thus enabling it to assure the outcome.

The country needs full political and economic support. It cannot go it alone. Washington and London should take the lead in lifting the Rhodesian trade sanctions, now that black majority rule is being achieved.

Yet, incredibly, both the American and British governments have

#### Patriotic Front guerrilla leaders



**Joshua Nkomo, 61,** South African-educated sociologist. President of Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Operates from Zambia with Russian aid.



**Robert Mugabe, 54,** South African-educated former schoolteacher. Marxist, co-founder of ZANU; claims leadership of ZANU in Mozambique, as well as of its military wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army.

Not a single country recognized the rebel regime. At Britain's behest, the United Nations imposed a trade ban on Rhodesia to force the whites to capitulate. Black guerrilla movements sprang up, aimed at toppling the white regime. And Moscow stepped in to manipulate the guerrilla movements to its advantage. Now, because of inter-

refused the support Rhodesia so richly deserves. Instead, US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and British Foreign Secretary David Owen have been trying to reconcile the Patriotic Front and the moderates. Vance and Owen argue that if the Front is left out of the settlement, a future Zimbabwe will never have peace and may not be accepted by neighbouring African governments. At the same time, there is the fear that, if the front is not placated, it will invite Cuban troops into the conflict.

**Trouble Makers.** Rubbish, I say. Attempts at reconciliation of the two sides won't work. Guns and votes, like oil and water, do not mix. Many of the guerrilla leaders are terrorists, who can't be coaxed into gentlemanly give and take. They are out to destroy the moderates, not to share power with them.

As a student of guerrilla movements, I realize that the hard core of the Patriotic Front will try to keep up the struggle. I am convinced, however, that many of the rank and file will desert the cause once they see that what they have been fighting for—a black government—has been achieved. With that, the fighting will be reduced to a manageable nuisance and, eventually, die out.

If Zimbabwe succeeds, I think other African states will accept it. Immediate neighbours Zambia and Mozambique stand to benefit from the country's food surpluses, its manufactured goods and the re-

opening of its borders. If, on the other hand, various African regimes refuse to accept Zimbabwe for the time being, so what? Most are dreary one-party states or military dictatorships. And some, notably Angola and Mozambique, are client states of the Soviet Union. There is no reason why Washington and London should curry their favour.

The Cubans may be a real threat, but resolute action—and not spineless appeasement—is the only way to deal with Castro's marauding legions. As former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger stated recently: "We in the United States must make clear to other countries that we will not be blackmailed by Cuban troops or by Soviet arms."

If America and Britain continue to withhold their backing, Zimbabwe's new government will be sorely weakened and could collapse. Should the whites leave the country, a million blacks, now employed in largely white-owned business firms, factories, farms and mines, will be left jobless.

**Bad Strategy.** A collapse of the moderate government would be followed by a Patriotic Front takeover—and full-scale civil war. The front consists of two guerrilla movements based largely on tribal lines, which are ancient rivals. One, led by Robert Mugabe and based in Mozambique, is called the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army. It is formed mostly of Mashona tribesmen who account

for about 75 per cent of Rhodesia's black population, although only a fraction of them are part of the Front. The other movement, commanded by Joshua Nkomo and operating from Zambia, is known as the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army. It consists mostly of Matabele tribesmen. An offshoot of the war-like Zulus of South Africa, the Matabeles comprise only about 15 per cent of the black population, but they dominated the Mashonas in pre-colonial times.

One of the reasons the forces of Mugabe and Nkomo are based hundreds of kilometres apart is that this keeps them from killing one another. The two movements have on occasion turned their guns on each other—with hundreds of guerrillas killed in training-camp battles. A take-over by the Patriotic Front thus adds up to a sure recipe for civil war.

In view of this, the whites led by Prime Minister Ian Smith, were not about to hand the country over to the Patriotic Front. Instead, Smith struck a bargain in March with three black moderate leaders, bringing them into the government as a prelude to black majority rule. The three, Bishop Abel Muzorewa, an American-educated Methodist clergyman, the Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole, a Congregational preacher, and Jeremiah Chirau, a tribal chief, are portrayed as "puppets" of Smith by the Patriotic Front. This is not true. Muzorewa has an immense following, far

greater than any other black leader. He and Sithole are committed black nationalists. Sithole spent ten years in jail because of his political activities. Chirau commands considerable respect among older and more traditional blacks because of his chieftainship.

The transfer of power, moreover, is irreversible. Smith and the three blacks have formed an executive council, which makes all major decisions by consensus. Black and white co-ministers head each of the government's nine ministries. Elections are to be held later this year to form the black government that will take over on New Year's Eve.

**Wise Precautions.** Safeguards for the white minority have been written into the agreement. The whites will have 28 of the 100 seats in Zimbabwe's parliament for ten years—or the duration of two parliaments, whichever is longer. As a bloc, the whites cannot be part of future governments in any kind of coalition. Nor will they have any direct say in national policy. Yet they will be able to hold up fundamental constitutional amendments, which will require at least 78 votes.

Before arriving in Rhodesia, I wondered what future the whites will have. More than one beautiful constitution has been torn up in Africa—and elsewhere. But in talking with black and white leaders, I found a refreshing change in the country's racial politics.

To a man, the black leaders are

mindful of the disastrous experiences of Angola and Mozambique, whose economies utterly collapsed after the flight of the Portuguese, and want the whites to stay in Zimbabwe.

Many whites are prepared not only to accept black rule but to co-operate in making a success of it. Here again economic considerations prevail. If the settlement breaks down, all that the whites have built will be swept away in violence, looting and chaos.

Race relations, I found, are remarkably harmonious. White and black politicians are on a first-name basis with each other, and businessmen of both races lunch together in leading restaurants. The University of Rhodesia has long been integrated, and 53 per cent of its students are black. Meanwhile, the expected exodus of whites has not reached alarming proportions, and some whites are returning.

The settlement is actually quite close to what Henry Kissinger proposed in 1976. Obviously, it may not be perfect—what political compromise ever is? But the wonder is that there could be any agreement at all after 13 years of white recalcitrance. Now it needs recognition from America and Britain and a lifting of sanctions.

The hard-core element in the Patriotic Front will try to keep the political-violence pot boiling. But, as it becomes increasingly evident that they are fighting not white racists but a freely elected black government, the black populace will cease to support them. Without such support, no insurgency can succeed.

The issue in Rhodesia is clear cut: are votes or Soviet guns going to triumph? The decent people of Rhodesia, black and white, will do what they can. It is in the best interests of the United States and Britain to give them a chance.

EDITORS' NOTE: On August 2 the US House of Representatives voted to lift economic sanctions against Rhodesia if a freely-elected government were established by the end of the year.

On July 26, the US Senate had adopted a more cautious measure that called for the lifting of sanctions after Rhodesia has held free elections and has "committed itself to negotiate in good faith with the Patriotic Front." The House did not call for such talks. Under American Congressional Procedure, a committee of Senators and representatives was to try to work out a compromise.

PHOTOGRAPHS: PAGE 36 (SMITH AND MUZOBWA); PHOTOGRAPHS INTERNATIONAL; PAGES 36, 37, SEX FEATURES

*Reprinted from the September 1978 issue of The Reader's Digest*  
© 1978 The Reader's Digest Association South Africa (Pty.) Ltd.