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Brief Report No. 24

## RHODESIA: THE ELECTIONS AND AFTERWARDS

This is a translated and slightly expanded version of an interview by Mr. Otto Krause with the Director of the Institute, Mr. John Barratt, which appeared in Die Vaderland (Johannesburg) on 13 February, 1980.

Question: With all the assassination attempts, the widespread intimidation and the threats to resume the war in Rhodesia, do you think that the election can have any meaningful and conclusive results?

Answer: In these circumstances I do not believe that anyone can regard the election as "free and fair" in the normal sense of these words. What Rhodesia is clearly undergoing is a trial of strength between the parties, which includes the exercise of a certain degree of intimidation on all sides. In other words, there are additional factors which in more normal circumstances do not form part of an open election, and the fact is that the Governor is clearly not in a position to prevent this. The best that can be done is to prevent the degree of intimidation from rising too high and thus disrupting the election process completely. From a rather cynical point of view, one could say that the balance of intimidation should be more or less equal for a convincing result to be provided. What is of key importance is that the results should be generally accepted in the country and internationally.

Q: Do you mean that the Mugabe men will accept a victory of their opponents?

A: The refusal of Mugabe's forces to accept such a result is one of the most dangerous possibilities, because of the large number of his men still under arms\*. But, if the victory of his opponents is a convincing one, then Mugabe could find President Machel of Mozambique withdrawing his support, because Machel has strongly indicated that he wants the war ended - for his own purposes.

If Mugabe, however, wins the greatest number of seats of any Black party, but a coalition is formed against him to deny him power, then Machel may not be in a position to withdraw support from Mugabe, given general political

\* There is also the potential danger that some other parties, e.g. Muzorewa's, might not accept the election results.

considerations in the rest of Africa.

On the other side, in order to enjoy credibility in the eyes of Black Africa, a winning coalition against Mr. Mugabe would have to include Nkomo. That would divide the current international support for the Patriotic Front. In addition, the Russians would face a dilemma, because they have always given Nkomo stronger support than Mugabe. Apparently the British hope that a Nkomo-Muzorewa coalition can be put together, but reportedly the personal dislike between these two leaders is still very strong. It will thus not be easy to form an effective anti-Mugabe coalition.

Although Nkomo's and Mugabe's parties are competing against each other in the election, it should not be assumed that an Nkomo-Mugabe coalition afterwards is an impossible development. This would amount to a restoration of the Patriotic Front alliance, as it existed before and through the Lancaster House Conference - an alliance which was always fragile, but which was held together by the support and insistence of the Black Frontline States. The Frontline States would no doubt like to see such a coalition ruling Rhodesia after the elections, and they may well exert some pressure to achieve this, even if they realise that the differences between the two partners will eventually lead to a split.

Q: Is not an important difficulty with the Rhodesian elections the simple fact that the British do not have the power to control the country and prevent intimidation?

A: Yes, this is definitely so, and the Governor must therefore rely on the existing Rhodesian security forces, which of course weakens his position with the PF parties - particularly Mugabe's ZANU - because they can then allege that he has taken sides against them. This allegation is being used internally and internationally (e.g. in the OAU and the UN) to whip up support and to paint Mazorewa's UANC into a corner with the "colonialists" and "racists".

Q: How, in your view, would the different possible governments of the future Zimbabwe govern the country?

A: A government dominated by Muzorewa's party will initially probably follow more or less the same road as the régime (of which Bishop Muzorewa was the Prime Minister, before the conference at Lancaster House. It will rely to a great degree on the Whites to manage the economy, the civil service and the army.

Problems will, however, arise for such a government if it does not enjoy clear majority support from the Black population. This would encourage attempts to overthrow it.

If Nkomo is included in a Muzorewa government, or vice versa, this would greatly strengthen the ability of such a government to rule effectively. And it is unlikely that Nkomo would travel very far along the socialist road, given his past history and known inclinations.

On the other hand, a government dominated by Mugabe is bound to bring about, if not immediately, substantial changes in the economy, in order to establish a socialist system. It will also attempt to Africanise the civil service and army much more quickly than any other government. Mugabe will have to take these steps to satisfy his supporters who have learnt to expect radical changes.

But, to judge by recent statements of Mugabe, he is aware of the necessity to give assurances to the Whites who fear his coming to power more than anything else. There is also some doubt as to whether Mugabe is such a convinced ideological Marxist as he has sometimes been pictured. There may be a degree of pragmatism in his make-up, similar to that of Machel, although there is little doubt that both of them have a revolutionary approach.

Finally, there is still the possibility, mentioned above, of a Mugabe-Nkomo coalition - at least in the initial period after the elections. If they can work reasonably well together, this would be the strongest government, given the nature of the leadership and the fact that the ethnic composition would be balanced by the inclusion of both the Ndebele and Shona groups. (The latter factor would apply also to an Nkomo-Muzorewa coalition, but the Shona support for Muzorewa is likely to be considerably less than that for Mugabe.) Mugabe's revolutionary aspirations would probably be tempered by Nkomo's more realistic and non-Marxist approach, but Mugabe's supporters would have to be given evidence of some substantial changes to prevent the coalition from breaking up very quickly.

Q: How would these possible governments, respectively, affect relations with South Africa?

A: A Muzorewa government or a Muzorewa-Nkomo coalition government, especially if it has White support, will undoubtedly be the easiest for South Africa to deal with.

at least in the short term. But it must be remembered that such a government will be looking for support and links in Black Africa and elsewhere, and it could come to the conclusion that too-close links with South Africa would not be an advantage politically. On-going close links with a "moderate" government must thus not be seen as inevitable. Even in economic field such a government will want to open up a wider range of options and diversify its links away from the predominant South African connection.

A Mugabe government, on the other hand, will undoubtedly mean difficulties for South Africa, because of the strong ideological differences. However, these should not be insurmountable - as in the case of South Africa's relations with Mozambique - provided that both countries accept and apply the principle of non-interference. To put it rather simply, this means that Mugabe's government will have to resist the temptation to give concrete support to South African exile movements wanting to infiltrate South Africa from Zimbabwe for subversive purposes, and South Africa will have to resist any temptation there might be to intervene on behalf of parties opposing Mugabe.

If Mugabe should win and form a government, he would soon become aware of the importance for Zimbabwe of the maintenance of economic links with South Africa, and that realisation could convince him to adopt the same sort of pragmatic attitude as President Machel. This would apply even more to a Mugabe-Nkomo coalition. South Africa would, of course, still have to expect rhetorical attacks and periods of tension with a Mugabe or Mugabe-Nkomo government, and the relationship would have to be managed with subtlety and sophistication. The Zimbabwe government will, in any case, not have an entirely free hand in relations with South Africa, because - apart from the need to attend to internal reconstruction - it will have to take into account the views of its other neighbours - Mozambique, Zambia and even Botswana - which, given their own internal problems, have every reason to want to avoid further conflict, especially involving South Africa, at least for the foreseeable future.

Apart from the likely problems and opportunities which could arise with whatever government is formed after the Rhodesian elections, the most dangerous situation will, of course, be one where no effective government can be formed and the fighting between the parties escalates. In such circumstances it is difficult even to speculate on the implications for South Africa.