

SOUTHERN AFRICA

John Sprack*

THE past few months have been historic ones for the cause of freedom in southern Africa. Nail after nail has been hammered into the coffin of white supremacy in the subcontinent, and it has been increasingly clear, to those who needed convincing, that the liberation of southern Africa is an idea whose time has come.

Nothing seems to bring this home to the Smith regime, however. They destroyed the last chance they will probably get to negotiate a settlement, by sticking rigidly to a totally unacceptable time-table for majority rule. According to their own calculations, the 'terms' which they offered to the African nationalists meant that it would be ten years before there would be more African than white voters. According to the Africans, it might well be much longer, and in any event the right of the people to universal franchise could not be bargained away.

Shortly after negotiations broke down, President Samora Machel of Mozambique, in an important move of solidarity with the liberation movement of Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), closed the Mozambique-

* John Sprack is the author of *Rhodesia—South Africa's Sixth Province*, International Defence & Aid Fund, 1974.

Rhodesia border. He announced a total ban on any communication with the white Rhodesians, and the full implementation of sanctions. His reasons, which received little prominence in the Western media, included a series of attacks which Rhodesian forces had made upon villages on the Mozambique side of the border, including an aircraft attack on the village of Pafuri. The announcement highlighted the fact that white supremacy in southern Africa is a threat not only to the people within its own borders, but to the independence of neighbouring black Africa.

Weeks after the closure of the Mozambique border, the Zimbabwe liberation movement struck a dramatic blow in the south-east of the country. There were in fact two attacks which took place almost simultaneously. In the first one, at Nuanetsi on the Fort Victoria-Beit Bridge road, three South African motor cyclists were shot when they interrupted a group of freedom fighters involved in a raid. In the second, a Rhodesia Railways goods train detonated a mine on the Rutenga railway, which is Rhodesia's only direct and reliable rail link with South Africa. The regime was forced to close the routes for some time, and to institute a system of convoys thereafter for the protection of traffic.

These incidents were significant in several respects. Firstly, a statement issued in Lusaka stated that the operation had been carried out by 'cadres under the joint command of the former ZANU and ZAPU', implying a considerable measure of unity in the liberation movement in its military operations. Secondly, the incidents took place in an area which had previously been regarded by the regime as immune from attack. The situation is approaching where every part of Rhodesia can be regarded as an 'operational area'.

These events also focused attention upon the links between Rhodesia and South Africa. The Rutenga rail link, after all, had been built to enable the regime to carry on some sort of trade with the outside world through South Africa. Since UDI, South Africa has become increasingly responsible for Rhodesia's economic, as well as political, survival. She has been responsible for Rhodesia's trade, either on her own account, or acting as a middleman for some sanctions-busting third party. With the closure of the border with Mozambique, through which about 20 per cent of Rhodesia's trade used to be conducted, this role has become accentuated.

South African traders, of course, exact a high price for acting as middlemen. And this is not the only profit which they reap from the continued existence of the settler regime in Salisbury. The

amount of South African investment in the Rhodesian economy has grown rapidly from the £100 million at which it stood at the time of UDI. Exactly how much is impossible to tell, because of the regime's security restrictions on any release of economic information. But it appears that South African capital is now dominant in tobacco, beverages, chemicals, mining (apart from gold), food manufacture, paper and publishing, and possibly in the fields of distribution and tourism (the latter industry is rapidly dwindling).

This economic interest, accompanied by strategic considerations, accounts for the military role which the Pretoria regime continues to play in Rhodesia. Under the Lusaka Manifesto of December 1974, South Africa undertook to withdraw its troops from Rhodesia, and claims to have honoured this commitment. But a series of eye-witness accounts, and reports of South African security forces killed in action, indicate that nothing of the sort has happened.

Quite apart from the presence of South African troops in Rhodesia, there is the role which Vorster and company play as armourers to the Smith regime. It is a simple point of logic that Rhodesian weapons and equipment would have become obsolete long ago, had it not been for this source of supply. On occasion, such arms deals have come out into the open: the most notorious case was the Jordanian deal in 1974, under which Jordan sold British planes, Tigercat missile systems, and Centurion tanks to Rhodesia, using a South African company as a go-between. The former British mercenary, Tom McCarthy, who served with the Rhodesian security forces, and has exposed some of the atrocities which they are committing, has also revealed details of arms transactions. In November 1975, he says, South African crews and technicians were sent up to Salisbury with four squadrons of Mirage planes.

It is in the light of the aid given by South Africa to Rhodesia, and the aggressive posture which these partners-in-crime adopt towards the rest of Africa, that British collaboration with the white regimes must be considered. Recent information brought to light by the Anti-Apartheid Movement shows that the UN embargo prohibiting the sale of arms to South Africa is being breached. The case which has perhaps received most publicity recently is that of the Marconi Troposcatter communications system for Namibia, which is aimed to form part of a weapons system in the war against the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO). Another well-publicised case is that of Hasler (UK) of Croydon being involved in providing Hasler (SA) with a message switching unit. Bob Hughes MP has indicated to the Prime Minister that he has good reason to

believe that the unit is ultimately destined for Rhodesia.

In this, as in so many other respects, British imperialism bears a heavy burden of guilt for the continued survival of apartheid and white supremacy in southern Africa. As the struggle intensifies over the coming months, moreover, the media in this country are likely to become increasingly vociferous in their efforts to whip up a tidal wave of sympathy for 'Britain's kith and kin'. The labour movement here will need to step up its campaign of solidarity with the people of southern Africa. It will need to be vigilant in opposing collaboration with the white regimes, particularly in fields such as the maintenance of the arms embargo and the prevention of mercenary recruitment. Such actions of solidarity are not only right in themselves. The peoples of southern Africa are poised to deal another body-blow to imperialism. Their victory will be of benefit not only to themselves, but to the peoples of the world as a whole.