# "Weeks, Rather Than Months":
# Ideology and the Crisis of Rhodesian Independence

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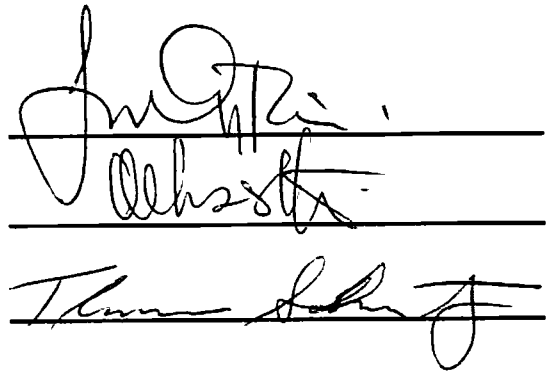

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## INTRODUCTION

**"The wind of change is blowing through this continent, and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must all accept it as a fact, and our national policies must take account of it."**

**Conservative PM Harold Macmillan, to the South African Parliament, February 3, 1960**[1]

As the "wind of change" swept through Africa and new, unfamiliar names like Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia began to appear on the globe, one name remained the same: Southern Rhodesia. As a unique self-governing British colony since 1923, Southern Rhodesia (modern-day Zimbabwe) was one of the last states in sub-Saharan Africa where a miniscule minority of European white settlers maintained political and economic dominion over a vast majority of native Africans. Within two years of Macmillan's speech, Great Britain and Southern Rhodesia seemed to have enshrined such white domination with a negotiated constitution and an apartheid-like philosophy of "separate development" to forestall or prevent majority African rule. African nationalists protested against the new constitution and other draconian measures, while Britain began to escalate demands for progress towards African majority rule before granting Rhodesians independence from the Crown.

The election of the white-nationalist Rhodesian Front in 1962 and the rise of hard-liner Ian Smith as the Rhodesian prime minister in 1964 led to a series of stalled negotiations between Smith and both Alec Douglas-Home's Conservative and Harold Wilson's Labour governments. As negotiations stalled, Ian Smith brought diplomatic tensions to a head on November 11, 1965, committing Rhodesia to a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) from the British Commonwealth. Newly-independent African nations and factions within the Labour in London clamored for immediate military action to restore Rhodesia under British control, but Prime

[1] "Harold Macmillan's 'Wind of Change' Speech", *About: African History*, 2007, http://africanhistory.about.com/od/eraindependence/p/wind_of_change2.htm

Minister Harold Wilson dismissed the military option weeks before UDI, instead settling for a controversial program of economic sanctions in November and adding oil sanctions in December.[2] Later attempts by Wilson to negotiate Rhodesia's return to the Commonwealth onboard the *HMS Tiger* failed in December 1966. My thesis explores how the irreconcilable ideological differences between the British and the white Rhodesians ultimately rendered any resolution acceptable to all parties impossible.

To comprehend the crisis of Rhodesian independence, a brief overview of the Rhodesian history is in order. The nation's roots were comparatively shallow, tracing back only to 1890, when Cecil Rhodes and a group of 700 men set out from modern-day South Africa as the British South Africa Company with a royal charter to pursue commercial gain in what would later become Zambia and Zimbabwe. After defeating the local Matabele and Mashona tribes, the Rhodesians governed themselves under Company rule until a referendum in 1923 whether to join South Africa or to become a self-governing Crown colony. After opting for the latter, the colony of Southern Rhodesia operated almost completely independently, exercising what Rhodesians called "responsible government" in nearly every area. The powers at Whitehall[3] did not administer direct rule as with other colonies, but merely held "reserve powers" to revoke any unacceptably discriminatory legislation passed by the Rhodesian legislative assembly. Yet Southern Rhodesia was not a dominion like Canada, New Zealand, or Australia, and consequently all control over foreign and external affairs was centered in London. Southern Rhodesia, then, was virtually "independent" in everything but name until 1965.

In 1953, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland accepted invitations to form what would become the Central African Federation, an experiment in federalism based on

[2] Robert. C. Good, *U.D.I.: The International Politics of the Rhodesian Rebellion* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 74-75; Theodore Bull, ed. *Rhodesia: Crisis of Color* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), 151.
[3] The bureaucratic center of the United Kingdom, located in Greater London.

"partnership" between European and African. The Federation had a central legislative body in Salisbury, the Southern Rhodesian capital, and a federal military. After only seven years of federal rule, however, the tide of African nationalism and demands by African political leaders in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland doomed the Federation. Soon after the dissolution of the Federation at the Victoria Falls Convention in 1963, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland were given independence under majority African rule as Zambia and Malawi, respectively. Southern Rhodesia remained a self-governing colony, despite white leaders' claims regarding a verbal promise of prompt independence from the British foreign secretary. The rapid move toward independence for Zambia and Malawi, when considered against the Rhodesians' forty years of "responsible government," became one of many points of contention that precipitated UDI.

The foremost political problem impeding Rhodesian independence, however, was the dual franchise instituted in the 1961 constitution. Two "non-racial" voter rolls based on property and education formed the cornerstone of what white Rhodesians like Smith would consider "evolution in preference to revolution."[4] The implicit aim was that, as Africans advanced economically and educationally, they would progressively gain political clout and move from the lower roll to the upper roll, eventually achieving majority rule. African nationalists and others opposing the system, however, considered the dual franchise a mere means to postpone majority rule for decades, or, as European settlers controlled the pace of African education and advancement, forever.[5]

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[4] Ian D. Smith, *The Great Betrayal: The Memoirs of Ian Douglas Smith* (London: Blake Publishing, 1997), 108.
[5] Rhodesian PM Ian Smith told Harold Wilson himself that minority (white) rule could be sustained "for 60 or 70 years, or perhaps even longer." Wilson's memoirs, however, note that Smith claimed his attorneys had projected minority rule for as many as 140 years. Wilson and Smith meeting (PREM 13/534, 30 Jan. 1965), S.R. Ashton and Wm Roger Louis, eds., *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, British Documents on the End of Empire Project (BDEEP), ser. A, vol. 5, II, (London: The Stationary Office, 2004), 184; Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 74.

Most major historians have two tasks at hand when explaining the crisis of Rhodesian independence, presenting some coherent narrative of what seems like a chaotic series of contradictory events and evaluating Wilson's role or performance negotiating the crisis. The best histories try their hands narrating and evaluating, each with variations on a theme. One book evaluates British politics, while another international angles, and a very recent monograph considers Rhodesian independence in the context of Labour foreign policy. All seem to share a distaste for Wilson's leadership. One book, for example, notes that "Wilson was not a man to take a tough decision today if by postponing it there were some chance it might not be there tomorrow" and that "he accomplished nothing more than the shrewd manipulation of a string of recurring political problems deriving from it."[6]

This thesis, however, deviates from the standard political histories by withholding judgment on Wilson's motives, performance, and effectiveness. The politics have been roughly sorted out, and the evaluations appear to have reached a fair consensus that British policy in Rhodesia was ultimately a failure. This thesis seeks to move beyond the traditional historiography and consider the cultural and ideological history of Rhodesian independence. This paper claims Wilson and Smith were not merely ordinary leaders working through a complicated political crisis, but men defined by deep-seated, incompatible ideological trends in modern colonial history. Before Wilson ever met Smith, the conflict over Rhodesian independence was impossible to resolve. The conflict between white colonial rule and the modern multiracial Commonwealth was inevitable and ultimately irreconcilable.

The case of UDI was a unique clash of colonial identities. While former conflicts had pitted the British against Asian and African opposition, the conflict over Rhodesia forced British leaders to face an entrenched white ideology of segregation, racial paternalism, and European

[6] Good, 65, 297

hegemony they had promoted in an Empire past. British and Rhodesian leaders held their respective philosophies as the cores of their morality and essential to their survival, leading to the frequent deadlock and fruitless negotiations. With a zero-sum between the two ideologies, then, the ultimate arbitrator of British policy regarding Rhodesia became a pragmatic consensus dictated by political and economic realities. This thesis explores how both ideologies manifested themselves upon Wilson and Smith's actions in the form of political pressure, and how such pressures produced the tenuous pragmatic consensus within the British political sphere that would become a fifteen-year stalemate.

The challenges of this thesis can only be appreciated with an understanding of the range of secondary literature. As the conflict over Rhodesian independence raged as recently as 1979, the field is relatively new. Three major books best reconcile comprehensive and specific detail with at least some measure of historical distance from the passions of the conflict itself. The first, *U.D.I.: The International Politics of the Rhodesian Rebellion*, focuses almost exclusively on the international roots and conflict as told by Robert C. Good, the United States' first ambassador to Rhodesia's neighbor, Zambia. The book, published in 1973, does a good job presenting numerous perspectives and showing the complexity of the Rhodesian rebellion. Good implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, assesses Wilson's policy, noting that as the conflict wore on, "more and more, thus he would be reacting not to the problem itself; rather he would be reacting to the reactions of the Rhodesian impasse in an effort to minimize British losses."[7] However, rather than focus on the deeper ideological background, Good deals with the detailed nuances of international political concerns. As Good notes, "I have therefore reduced to the minimum the conceptual baggage usually associated with scholarly ventures."[8] Good offers

[7] Ibid., 151.
[8] Ibid., 12

something akin to an international "diary," or what he calls "a scholarly memoir or analytical journalism." This monograph, though historically unorthodox, proves a strong foundation for understanding international implications of British and Rhodesian policies full of particulars from which historians may derive the ideological trends discussed later in this thesis.

Elaine Windrich's *Britain and the Politics of Rhodesian Independence* (1977) provides an extremely thorough narrative of the Rhodesia crisis as viewed through a political lens. The book highlights the difficulties of negotiating a settlement while making clear the tactical failures and successes on the part of Wilson and his Labour Government. The book suffers, however, in overall tone.[9] Windrich's study provides an overly detailed policy critique rather than an ideological history. In fact, the first sentence of the introduction explains that "The book was begun ... as a critique of the Labour party's failure to implement its policy commitments on Rhodesia."[10] When Windrich declares her "interests" as a former advisor to the Labour party spokesmen on colonial affairs for the Parliamentary Labour Party and the National Executive Committee (NEC) in the early 1960s, it becomes increasingly clear how her descriptions of Rhodesian policy as a "failure" almost echo the views of those in the left wing of the Labour Party.[11] While *Britain and the Politics* is one of the few major books comprehensively detailing the crisis, Windrich's critical narrative sometimes positions her on one side of the ideological battle detailed in this thesis. Windrich's primary sourcework, written while many political memoranda and records remained confidential, is limited mostly to British and Rhodesian parliamentary records, contemporaneous monographs, and newspapers.

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[9] As one critic notes, "The book records this mutually unsatisfactory relationship as it has dragged on year after year, but Windrich's study would have benefited greatly from more analysis and less pedestrian description." James Barber, "Sanctions: The Case of Rhodesia: Britain and the Politics of Rhodesian Independence; Rhodesia: Ending an Era." *African Affairs*, vol. 78, no. 311 (Apr. 1979): 284-85.
[10] Elaine Windrich, *Britain and the Politics of Rhodesian Independence* (New York: Africana, 1978), 7.
[11] Ibid., 8.

John Young's foreign policy volume of *The Labour Governments 1964-1970* (2003), and especially its chapter on southern Africa, are the most recent and perhaps the most balanced assessments of Wilson and his Labour Government's policy in Rhodesia. Young takes advantage of "recent archival releases" to provide a much more thorough and nuanced analysis of Labour foreign policy than writers in the 1970s could. This study is more concerned with the complications and dynamics of policy, noting that "isolating particular international questions from one another can give a false impression about how decisions were made."[12] Young's analysis focuses on the sources of failures, concluding that with regard to Labour policy towards southern Africa, "[Wilson's] government tried to escape contradictory pressures by finding a middle way between high principle and the loss of its soul." Wilson himself, Young notes, "seemed inconsistent in aim, veering between threats and compromise, reacting to events rather than controlling them. He never could find the right mix of coercive elements and diplomatic inducements to end the 'rebellion'"[13] Young's focus on "contradictory pressures" as a threat to "high principle" is central to understanding the pragmatic consensus detailed in my thesis. Young's study centers on the Labour party and its distinct policies, however, while my own offers an ideological history placing the "high principle" as part of a recent historical tradition and expanding to understand the complex forces on the Right and their complicated past.

Other secondary sources follow the same pattern of measuring Wilson as the center of the conflict. One journal article is titled "Harold Wilson and the Rhodesia Crisis: Principle or Pragmatism" (the author ultimately favors the former), while British historian Kenneth Young disparages the prime minister:

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[12] John W. Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970*, vol. 2, *International policy* (New York: Manchester UP, 2003), ix.
[13] J. Young, 186-87.

> The finger points decisively in one direction: Wilson was responsible for making what Macmillan might have called a 'little local difficulty' into a major crisis and then for letting it get so far out of control that he became its impotent prisoner. From the beginning the policy was his; to the end the Ministers he used as emissaries and negotiators were no more than his poodles.[14]

Other secondary sources such as James Barber's *Rhodesia: the Road to Rebellion* (1967) and Rhodesian newspaper editor Theodore Bull's *Rhodesia: Crisis of Color* (1968) tend to direct their attacks at Rhodesian prime minister Ian Smith. The secondary literature on UDI, then, lacks an ideological history written after the crisis of Rhodesia was finally resolved in 1979. Sources like Young, Barber, and Bull, written immediately following the crisis, however, show how the ideological conflict of UDI extended beyond players like Smith and Wilson and polarized the observers and historians of the era.

The relatively recent opening of British government and political party archives allows for a better understanding of the Rhodesian conflict. These include previously confidential cabinet papers and Labour and Conservative Party archives. The memoirs of Rhodesian leader Ian Smith, published in 1997, add a new dimension to chronologies dependent on earlier diaries and memoirs of British Labour leaders. British historians William Roger Louis and S. R. Ashton have produced the "British Documents on the End of Empire" series, a compilation of relevant political documents surrounding the dissolution of the British Empire after the Second World War, with special parts focusing on Rhodesia, the Commonwealth, race, and Africa.

The thesis is organized into three thematic chapters. The first gives a brief overview of the ongoing debate about Britain's postcolonial role leading a multiracial Commonwealth and the tensions over how to handle Britain's "responsibility" to the Africans in Rhodesia. The

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[14] Michael Parsons, "Harold Wilson and the Rhodesia Crisis: Principle or Pragmatism?" *Q/W/E/R/T/Y; arts, literatures et civilisations du monde anglophone*. no. 8, (1998): 315-324; Kenneth Young, *Rhodesia and Independence*, (London: J.M. Dent, 1969), 609. This work is so contemporaneous with the Rhodesian crisis and so openly biased that it almost qualifies as a primary source.

second chapter outlines the difficulties of preventing UDI, the failure to do so, Wilson's political rise, and how Wilson found himself ideologically trapped by the same egalitarian Commonwealth he had championed months earlier. The final chapter explores the white Rhodesian mind, and the deeply entrenched racialist ideology and nostalgia for imperialism that both motivated and constrained Ian Smith. A conclusion reviews the ideological deadlock detailed throughout the thesis through the lens of the failed 1966 *Tiger* negotiations.

## CHAPTER 1

## "An Association of Equals": Labour, the Commonwealth, and Rhodesia

**"Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role."**

**U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, at West Point, December 5, 1962**[1]

Acheson's speech, considered a "cruel but accurate epitaph" for Britain's self-image as a world power, startled the British political elite.[2] Though nearly fifteen years had passed since Britain relinquished India and the "wind of change" was already sweeping through Africa, Harold Macmillan was shocked. "Mr. Acheson has fallen into an error," the prime minister wrote a colleague, "which has been made by quite a lot of people in the course of the last 400 years, including Philip of Spain, Louis XIV, Napoleon, the Kaiser and Hitler."[3] Such proud rhetoric might have satisfied Macmillan's own pride, but Acheson's words resonated far beyond the Prime Minister or his circle of friends. Britain had to face its liquidation of empire and consider what role, if any, did the nation retain among the major powers? Though maintaining an empire had proven a difficult enterprise, fear of surrendering all international prestige and becoming "a sort of poor man's Sweden" was ultimately worse.[4] British media and politicians had already begun to speculate upon Britain's future role.

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[1] Dean Acheson, "Our Atlantic alliance: the political and economic strands," speech delivered at the United States Miliatary Academy, West Point, New York, 5 Dec. 1962. Reprinted in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, XXIX, 6 (1 January 1963), 162-6.

[2] John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The retreat from empire in the post-war world* (New York: St. Martin's, 1988), 223.

[3] "Mr. Acheson 'in Error,'" *Times*, 8 December 1962.

[4] Johnston to Colonial Office, Secret, 16 July 1963, FO 371/168630, as quoted in Wm. Roger Louis, "The Dissolution of the British Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis, vol. 4, *The Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford, 1999), 333.

Though Acheson's speech may have been surprising, even a cursory examination of events prior to 1962 confirm his analysis that Britain had "lost an empire." The loss of India, withdrawal from Palestine and the Middle East had significantly diminished the periphery of the Empire. The abortive attempt to take back Suez, however, had severely limited the Conservative view of Britain as an independent world power. Bipartisanship became a necessity for future foreign policy decisions, while a general weariness of prolonged confrontations developed within the Conservative Party.[5] Macmillan's "wind of change" speech followed this trend, as the prime minister sought to align Britain with African nationalists, preclude any traumatic military interventions, and reconcile Britain with a very anti-colonial United States as its junior partner.[6]

Two avenues for maintaining British prestige and economic power emerged from the ongoing debates following the Second World War. Britain could either join the Common Market alongside France and Western Germany as set out by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, or maintain cultural links and Sterling Area trade preferences with its former colonies within the Commonwealth. Though theoretically Britain could have pursued both opportunities, a political orthodoxy had emerged that the two were incompatible and mutually exclusive. Early rejections of the European market as a "dangerous distraction" and De Gaulle's veto of Britain's 1963 application for Common Market membership drove Britain toward the Commonwealth.[7]

This chapter explores the political debate and consensus surrounding Britain's role in the "new" post-war Commonwealth. An explanation about the nature and functions of the Commonwealth, as well as its "new" multiracial makeup in the early 1960s, should provide sufficient background to explore its ideological power within British political spheres. The debate preceding the 1964 election and the political moves to establish Labour as the

[5] Darwin, 230.
[6] Louis, "Dissolution" 343, 347.
[7] Darwin., 129, 232.

"Commonwealth party" moved toward the overarching theme of this study, the ideological constraints Wilson faced when trying to resolve the crisis of Rhodesian independence. An examination of Labour's commitment to Commonwealth cooperation and a brief overview Rhodesia's place in the center of international debate converge at the end of the chapter. This chapter lays the groundwork for understanding how the Commonwealth simultaneously served to enhance Britain's global image and yet limited Wilson's available options to successfully resolve the Rhodesian crisis and shore up waning British prestige in Chapter 2.

The foremost problem facing Britain's Commonwealth policy was a definite sense of what the Commonwealth actually *was* and what its function would be. The "new" Commonwealth was a very fluid, problematic political term, much like Andrew Thompson's "empire" and "imperialism," empty shells or templates waiting to be filled up with or emptied of whatever meanings and purposes served Britain's political needs at any given time.[8] The "new" Commonwealth, however, can only be understood when considered alongside the "old" Commonwealth. Before Indian independence in 1948, what was then called the British Commonwealth of Nations was a skeletal group of preferred nations among the Empire. Britain stood at the head, while after 1931 white dominions Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa served as a group of close relatives or friends. Loyalty to the Crown and traditional political and racial bonds — the same connections of "kith and kin" Rhodesia would claim in its appeals for independence — tied the "old" Commonwealth together into an informal network of consultation and, in times of war, aid and succor.[9]

India's independence and subsequent republican status, however, complicated the picture. Only through ingenious negotiation and the reduction of the monarch as "head of the

[8] Andrew S. Thompson, "The Language of Imperialism and the Meanings of Empire: Imperial Discourse in British Politics, 1895-1914," *Journal of British Studies,* vol. 36, no. 2. (Apr. 1997), 147.
[9] Darwin, 146.

Commonwealth" could this new heterogeneous group of nations endure. The new multiracial composition of the Commonwealth, accelerating in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the wave of African independence, dismantled the bonds of "kinship" that had been sufficient earlier. Now each member defined its Commonwealth bonds by its needs. Britain's weakened post-war economic conditions, for example, required reaching out to other nations for support and favorable trading conditions, and the Commonwealth was the perfect vehicle. As William Roger Louis put it, "The goal was not that Britain should sustain the Empire, but that the Empire, in a new form, should continue to sustain Britain."[10] The British were essentially maintaining an Empire on the cheap. Trade preferences and political influence, the real fruits of imperial hegemony, could flourish within the Commonwealth, and Britain could maintain its former international prestige without the economic drain of domination and administration throughout disparate colonies. As former colonies gained independence, lingering loyalties to the former imperial metropolis within the Commonwealth could sustain Britain's economic and political power for decades. Historian John Darwin concurs with this view, with cynical claims about "a frothy and grandiose rhetoric" that merely covered a lack of "natural unity." Bilateral ties between Britain and each nation produced the Commonwealth's "success," according to Darwin. "The post-war Commonwealth was a British creation, constructed for British purposes."[11]

Darwin, however, obscures the fact that the members of the newly-independent Afro-Asian bloc that emerged within the post-war Commonwealth gained as well. Serious economic development schemes were put into motion (with mixed success) throughout the Commonwealth,[12] and unlike their colonial status within the Empire, these nations had the

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[10] Louis, "Dissolution," 330.
[11] Darwin, 153.
[12] For more on Commonwealth development, and especially the Atlee Government's role, see P. S. Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964* (London: Macmillan, 1975).

chance to come and go as they pleased from the Commonwealth. The more modern, formal Prime Ministers' meetings that developed alongside this "new" multiracial Commonwealth gave African and Asian nationalist leaders voices in Britain's foreign policy—voices that would be extremely problematic for Wilson in 1966 when attempting to resolve the Rhodesian *impasse*.

Yet the ambiguous structure and aims of the Commonwealth rendered it rather perplexing and, perhaps, rather ineffective. There were a series of smaller institutional relations between Commonwealth countries, including international student and teacher exchanges, military training, and economic development plans, but there was no overarching institutional center for the Commonwealth until the Wilson government established the Secretariat in 1965. When trying to elucidate the advantages of the Commonwealth, a writer for the journal *Round Table* ended up obscuring its purpose and appeal even more:

> But in some ways it is not on developing institutions that the Commonwealth ultimately depends; its is not even on the development of a spirit of unity. The essence of the Commonwealth should be above all that it is a *relaxed* association. In a world where many pressures lead towards conformity, rigidity and the formation of tight blocks, the Commonwealth can help to ease tensions, to make life both more pleasant and more fruitful. It does this through the blend of friendships and common language, systems, traditions and communications which characterize it; and through the fact that its members have so much to give to each other.[13]

Though the article detailed specific instances of cooperation between members, a purpose like "making life more pleasant" left some sort of void. No aim seemed apparent, no real framework, no real reason for existing. The Commonwealth, in essence, was nothing more than a laid-back therapy group, or as many fondly called it, a "club." The same writer marveled that "there *is* something romantic about the notion of the Commonwealth," but only pointed to "friendship and shared history" as the source for this romance.

[13] "Is the Commonwealth Farce? An Answer to 'A Conservative,'" *Round Table*, no. 215 (June 1964), 218.

The confusion was not limited to the popular press. A 1965 bureaucratic record attempted to decipher the nature of the Commonwealth. A dichotomy between "Anglocentricity," the focus on England as the center of all meaning and power in the Commonwealth, and "Anglosentricity." England's moves to facilitate other Commonwealth nations, led to a very nuanced, somewhat confusing vision.[14] What did emerge in all sources, however, was the very distinct egalitarian feel of the "new" Commonwealth. Britain was no longer the imperial power, lording over all. In fact, the memo "suggests that a new concept of the Commonwealth should be based on a return to the old principles (of the Balfour declaration of equal nations 'in no way subordinate one to the other')" Others called for a more multilateral Commonwealth, where direct contact through London could be supplanted by much broader networking among the middle powers of the Commonwealth.[15] Despite all the uncertainty about what the Commonwealth might actually *do* and its institutional structure, the chance to produce frank dialogue and a plurality of races and political perspectives outweighed any downside. "It is better to fail in the effort to maintain a multi-racial Commonwealth," an article stated, "than try in vain to hold together an archaic association of peoples who may once have felt British but to a very large extent no longer do."[16] This attempt to develop the Commonwealth as a multilateral, multiracial forum, while admirable, did prove problematic for Wilson later on.

Despite such uncertainty about the nature of the "new" Commonwealth, in 1963 all three parties found themselves scrambling for a distinct vision for a rapidly-expanding Commonwealth before the next year's general election. The Conservatives, a party of empire past, proclaimed the potential of the Commonwealth as a vehicle to reclaim economic and cultural influence and

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[14] "[New concept of the commonwealth]: minute by P Rogers," (DO 193/81, no 1; 1 July 1965), S.R. Ashton and Wm Roger Louis, eds., *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, British Documents on the End of Empire Project (BDEEP), ser. A, vol. 5, II, (London: The Stationary Office, 2004), II, 340-342.
[15] Ibid., 341; "Can the Commonwealth Survive? A Canadian Answer." *Round Table*, no. 213, (December 1963), 15.
[16] "Can the Commonwealth Survive?" 12.

fill a void where imperial power had once stood. "This evolution of an Empire into a Commonwealth is," as Nigel Fischer, Macmillan's Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, told the Conservative Conference at Blackpool, "the most creative and constructive and the most exciting thing that has happened in politics in my lifetime."[17] Liberal Party president-elect Lord Ogmore concurred with Fischer's sentiment in a July 1963 essay, claiming that "the Commonwealth ... is an example to mankind and is potentially a force for peace and prosperity."[18] Labour had also thrown its support behind the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth offered Harold Wilson, a rising star in the Labour party, what he called a "unique opportunity" and "illimitable influence" as members of "the greatest multi-racial association mankind has known, in a world where race and race-relations and the race-explosion are coming to occupy a place even more central than the arms race."[19]

The consensus behind the Commonwealth as a new avenue for British power broke down into partisan politics before the 1964 elections. The Labour Party, after years in opposition, found itself compelled to attack the Conservative government's touting the new Commonwealth as "a purpose of which we should be very proud."[20] Labour needed to counter Tory pride, as Commonwealth studies professor T. H. Silcock urged the party:

> It is distressing that the Labour Party is not, in its current propaganda, taking any advantage of the Conservative debate in the Common Market negotiations, to win over the younger members of all those households for whom the Commonwealth image still has some meaning.[21]

Labour, the argument went, needed both to differentiate itself from the current Douglas-Home government and to characterize the Conservatives as out of touch with the true meaning of

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[17] Nigel Fischer speech at 1963 Conservative Conference, Blackpool. As found in "Labour Commonwealth Subcommittee notes." *Labour Party Archives, Series III Correspondence* (Harvester Microfilm)
[18] The Rt. Hon. Lord Ogmore, PC, TD, JP "The Commonwealth – Present and Future" *Contemporary Review*, July 1963 as found in Labour Party Commonwealth Subcommittee notes.
[19] Harold Wilson, *Purpose in Politics: Selected Speeches by Harold Wilson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), 7.
[20] Fischer speech.
[21] T.H. Silcock letter to Labour Party Commonwealth Subcommittee, as found in Subcommittee Notes.

Commonwealth, the paternal responsibility of leading former colonies. "An attack is needed," Silcock wrote, "to appeal to a sense of responsibility and national obligation, wherever this is real, and not merely a cloak for self-interest." Words like "responsibility" and "obligation" would return to the Rhodesia debate a few years later. Silcock's plan for Labour as the Commonwealth Party revolved around an image of Tory policy as the epitome of selfishness and superficiality, especially regarding Rhodesia. When considering how Labour should present their ideas, he noted that "the correct line should be that the Tories have never been sincere even about the Commonwealth."[22]

The Labour Party appeared to have adopted Silcock's advice readily. A May 1963 Research Department memo by the party's campaign committee titled "The Position of the Parties" considered Labour's image relative to the sitting Conservative Government. The memo cited a "main need" for "a sharp improvement in our standing on international/defence issues" to contest an impending election. "Every opportunity must be taken to show – in contrast to the Tories –" the memo noted, "that we have a clear and positive international policy." One "particular" was "that with our Commonwealth partners we have an enormous power for good in the world." while Labour should present a Tory image that "they lack faith in Britain and in themselves and have immensely lowered our prestige in the world." The memo echoed Silcock with its claims that "the Government abandoned the Commonwealth."[23]

Silcock's vision of Labour as a Commonwealth party had already found its way into Parliament. Arthur Bottomley, a senior Labour MP who would later head the Commonwealth Relations Office, declared in a Commons debate, "We should always be looking for ways to improve relations with the Commonwealth and I am not satisfied that the Government have done

[22] Ibid.
[23] RD 448 "The Position of the Parties" Campaign Committee. Labour Party Archives, Research Dept.

this."[24] After implying that Conservative policies toward the Commonwealth amounted to "gimmicks" as opposed to "real substantive measures to increase mutual understanding among Commonwealth countries," Bottomley presented an the Labour perspective. He stated, "To me the important thing is that we are an association of equals. That means that any ideas we put up have to be ideas that will be welcomed by every Commonwealth government and will meet their interests as well as our own."[25] A Labour Government, Bottomley implied, would bind Britain's fate to those new African and Asian states of the Commonwealth. The party's 1964 manifesto made Labour's attack on Conservative Commonwealth relations most explicit, characterizing prime ministers Macmillan and Douglas-Home as "ready to accept terms of entry to the Common Market that would have excluded our Commonwealth partners, broken our special trade links with them, and forced us to treat them as third-class nations."[26] Such heated rhetoric, Wilson would find, proved formidable in debates and election propaganda, but could have unforeseen consequences when the Government confronted the same Commonwealth partners over how best to handle a rebellious Rhodesia.

Exactly how valid, however, were Labour's claims about a self-interested Conservative policy towards the Commonwealth? Some evidence can be found in the Tories' own words. Fischer, in the speech noted earlier, played into Labour's hands.[27] After claiming the Commonwealth as "a purpose of which we should be very proud," he made an about-turn. "But we are not just a race of romantics and idealists," Fischer stated, "We are very hard-headed realists too and before us now, is I believe, not only a moral purpose but a *very practical, economic purpose as well* [italics added]." Fischer explained that education across the

[24] HC debate, Commonwealth Subcommittee notes.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Iain Dale, *Labour Party Manifestos, 1900-1997* (New York: Routledge, 2000). 119-120.
[27] The speech in question was found in Labour committee records and presumably was used for Labour strategy.

Commonwealth could create demand for British exports across the world, what he called "a frightfully exciting thought."[28]

The memories of Empire had hardly faded from the Conservative worldview. Sir Cyril Osborne, considered by some to be an outrageous and embarrassing character in the Commons,[29] resented the "new" Commonwealth rhetoric. He protested, "I am sick and tired of hearing hon. Members—my hon. Friends included—running down the British Empire and suggesting that we never did any good until the arrival of what we call the 'new Commonwealth.' This is bunkum of the worst order." Osborne continued on his rant — perhaps his repeated complaints that he had not eaten lunch provide some insight into his state of mind — that he felt, "There is more mealy-mouthed talk about the new Commonwealth than any other subject we discuss in Parliament."[30] In a telling misstep, the more restrained Conservative Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home misspoke and possibly revealed more deeply-felt Conservative attitudes towards the new Commonwealth. In response to a question about stressing the political rather than the economic possibilities of the Commonwealth, Home replied:

> The political is very important, but the economic is also very important , *because the African and Asian colonies—err, Commonwealth countries*, now they've emerged from their colonial status of course, they don't live on political slogans, they live on economic prosperity, and so, both of these aspects of the modern Commonwealth are extremely important. [italics added][31]

Though Osborne's exclamations appear anachronistic, and though the Prime Minister's mental slip is understandable, these statements were indicative of nuanced connections between Empire and Commonwealth as British interests. The Empire had functioned as an economic preference zone, and Conservative policy sought to extend such economic hegemony. The Conservative

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[28] Fischer speech.
[29] Robert Pearce, 'Osborne, Sir Cyril (1898–1969)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40643, accessed 19 April 2007]
[30] *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 676 (1963), col. 634
[31] Douglas-Home press conference, as found in Commonwealth Subcommittee notes.

Party manifesto for 1964 affirmed this priority. Along with the typical paternalistic concerns, the document stated, "Our consistent aim is wider world trade and an improved world monetary system to sustain it."[32] Improved world trade and an improved monetary system, it could be argued, were central components to expectations of remaining a world power.

Traditional liberal paternalism and "responsibility" from imperial days appeared on both sides of the Commonwealth debate as well. Conservative MP Patrick Wall, when leading the debate on Commonwealth co-operation, declared the Commonwealth a "bridge" over racial and economic divisions around the world. When considering issues such as southern Africa, Wall noted that "our fundamental responsibility is to the masses of the African people, who will only suffer if economic progress is not made along the right lines."[33] And the theme of economic assistance took rather blunt tones of "doing it for their own good." Labour MP Emmanuel Shinwell noted that newly-independent Commonwealth countries "naturally...want to make a song and dance about [independence], but the fact is that without sound economic foundation their political independence is not worth two pennyworth of gin." and continued in perhaps the most strident paternal language of the debate, "if they were spoken to in such language it would do them a lot of good." The disgruntled imperialist Sir Cyril Osborne noted that "the United Kingdom has a special responsibility to aid, succor and help the newly independent parts of the Commonwealth," while more bluntly concurring with Shinwell that "it is equally no good reciting the wonderful privileges men will enjoy in democratic institutions if they are unemployed, hungry, badly housed and ill-fed."[34] The idea of the Commonwealth as a source of both influence and responsibility spanned party differences and would become the backbone of

[32] "1964 Election Manifesto," *Conservative Party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997*, ed. Iain Dale, (New York: Routledge), 146.
[33] *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 676, col. 589.
[34] Ibid., col. 592-3, 633.

the consensus among parties when faced with future crises in the Commonwealth and especially Rhodesia. The debate between parties, as in the Commonwealth debate, would center on who was *more* dedicated to these principles of responsibility and how their different policies reconciled their international "burden" with their distinctly British interests.

Where, then, did the conflict with Southern Rhodesia play into abstract debate over visions of a future Commonwealth? Rhodesia, it became apparent, would test the Commonwealth's resilience as a "bridge" for intense racial divisions. As Wall led the debate on Commonwealth cooperation, he diverged from a set of detailed proposals for future Commonwealth institutions to what he called "the dangers which lie ahead," most notably the "very dangerous tendency for race to become the dominant factor in world politics." He acknowledged that "the most serious and dangerous problem facing the Commonwealth in the months ahead is that of Central Africa." Wall warned that "racial issues might well cause the breakup of the new Commonwealth," while Bottomley predicted that settlement with the white Southern Rhodesian minority "would weaken the whole Commonwealth and risk the secession of the five African member countries of the Commonwealth."[35] A consensus appeared that Rhodesia was central to this Commonwealth vision.

While British politicians all agreed that a negotiated solution was essential, Labour strategy sought to attack Conservative efforts to negotiate with the Rhodesian regime. As he outlined a potential Labour line of attack, Silcock pointed out that when talking about Labour policy regarding the Commonwealth, "There is the Labour record in bringing in India and the Tory failure in its Rhodesia policy to underline," while later he wrote, "We should hammer hard at their support of white rule in Rhodesia."[36] Silcock tied the Government's difficulties in

[35] Ibid., col. 616, 576.
[36] Silcock letter.

Rhodesia and elsewhere to his attack on what he believed Labour should present as weaknesses in the Conservative policy of self interest. "These are the inevitable consequences of Commonwealth as Great Power Strategy and business interest. Labour should claim that the Commonwealth is more than this: not Union Jacks, and land of hope and glory, but our own contribution, working by constitutional and peaceful methods, bit by bit, toward human equality and dignity."[37] The problems of Rhodesia, in other words, were the product of a Conservative Government treating the Commonwealth as an afterthought.

[37] Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2

## "The Jampot": Negotiations, UDI, and the Aftermath

**"[The Prime Minister] has placed himself in the position of a wasp in a jampot, and the more he flaps about the more he is covered with difficulty and is incapable of moving."**

**Conservative PM Eldon Griffiths in the House of Commons, December 7, 1965**[1]

The story of negotiations, UDI, and its aftermath is the story of a prime minister constantly restricted by ideological forces. This chapter tells the ideological "story," of what seemed to be an ordinary political negotiation. British pledges to end minority rule before granting Rhodesia independence, however, resonated deeply with African nationalist ideology and social justice. A simple political standard for independence, it became clear, severely weakened and nearly destroyed the Commonwealth. The pragmatic pressures of forestalling UDI precluded devotion to any single ideological view, but rather forced Wilson to navigate within a spectrum with ardent anti-racialists both at home and abroad at one end, and Ian Smith and the white nationalist Rhodesian Front at the other. Those political forces engaged in the controversies surrounding sanctions, however, ended up punishing Wilson for the same navigation, the same desire to seek a compromise. This narrative examines the pragmatic necessities of negotiation and the ideological demands of extreme sides demanding action, with Wilson stuck in the jampot.

The complicated story of negotiations between Harold Wilson's Labour Government and Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front is fraught with nuance, detail, and complications, but the basic issue was simple: Giving independence to a minority without universal suffrage for the majority had very little precedent. As early as 1963, the Conservative Government preceding Wilson

[1] *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 722 (1965), col. 349.

faced the Rhodesian Front's first calls with a reliance on tradition. Responding to messages from the then-Rhodesian Prime Minister Winston Field, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations Duncan Sandys pointed out that the Rhodesian situation was unlike any other and cut to the core of the Rhodesian issue, noting that "the present difficulty arises from your desire to secure independence on the basis of a franchise which is incomparably more restricted than that of any other British territory to which independence has hitherto been granted."[2] The voting restrictions of Rhodesia's 1961 constitution were unlike any other colony; as a self-governing colony, the Rhodesian government's was entrusted with African political advancement. Both governments faced a scenario with only one major precedent — South Africa.

The specter of the South African system of *apartheid* loomed large in the British psyche as a failure in decolonization. After Britain granted the Union independence in 1910, the Afrikaner-dominated government implemented stringent white-supremacist policies in 1948 that were reviled around the world. As the "wind of change" swept through Africa and Britain proceeded to decolonize much of the continent, the Labour Party took the position that granting Southern Rhodesia independence without adequate safeguards would be to repeat history and abandoned millions more Africans. As Labour MP (and Wilson cabinet member) Barbara Castle noted in a 1961 parliamentary debate, "I do not think that any of us want on our consciences the responsibility of creating, perhaps, in Southern Rhodesia a successor to the unhappy situation in South Africa."[3] Castle and many other Labour MPs made their position clear that the Rhodesians could not be trusted with African advancement without some form of British oversight. Independence without a universal franchise and equal political rights was out of the

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[2] *Southern Rhodesia: Documents relating to the negotiations between the United Kingdom and Southern Rhodesian Governments*, Cmnd. 2807 (November 1965), 7. For ease of reading, the title "Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations" will be hereafter shortened to "Commonwealth Secretary".
[3] *Parliamentary* Debates, 5th ser., vol. 642 (1961), col. 1746.

question. By the early 1960s, the opposition to *apartheid* and racialist government in southern Africa became the ideological crusade for a Labour party devoted to racial equality.

Before assuming power following the October 1964 parliamentary elections, Wilson immediately took steps to put the party's principles into practice. The Labour Party would inherit the Rhodesian independence negotiations from the preceding Conservative Government, and Wilson sought to make his stand clear in the most explicit terms. In a letter to an African political leader in Rhodesia, Wilson wrote:

> The Labour Party is totally opposed to granting independence to Southern Rhodesia so long as the Government of that country remains under the control of a white minority. We have repeatedly urged the British Government to negotiate a new constitution with all of the African and European parties represented, in order to achieve a peaceful transition to African majority rule.[4]

This policy became known as NIBMAR, or No Independence Before Majority African Rule. NIBMAR became anathema to Smith and his Rhodesian government, the rallying cause for Left-leaning Labour and Liberal members of Parliament and especially the African leaders within and without Rhodesia. The implicit rejection of the 1961 Rhodesian constitution in Wilson's message frustrated white Rhodesian ambitions to postpone majority rule for as much as 150 years, or as Smith often proclaimed, "not in my lifetime."[5]

As negotiations with the Rhodesian Government stalled in early January 1965, Commonwealth Secretary Arthur Bottomley lay out the goals for dealing with the threat of UDI in a memorandum for a Cabinet. Two aims emerged in Bottomley's initial memo that provide a pretty clear framework for understanding Wilson's approach to the Rhodesian crisis. The first goal, or "aim," was short-term: prevent UDI. The failure of negotiations and the appearance of "condoning a white Rhodesian rebellion" would be devastating for British interests in Africa and

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[4] "Letter from Wilson," *Rhodesia Herald*, Oct. 19, 1964.
[5] Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 74.

the United Nations, while "economic war" between Rhodesia and its African neighbors could hurt British industry. The longer-term objective detailed a struggle between Labour's ideological commitment to oppose racial government in southern Africa and the practical realities of preventing UDI. The British government should seek independence "on a basis acceptable to all sections of the population," Bottomley noted, and abandoning this aim could alienate African and international goodwill. Dealing with the Rhodesians, however, might require giving ground on Labour's ideological commitments. Bottomley warned:

> On the other hand if we give the white Rhodesians the impression that we are determined to push ahead too far and too fast we shall certainly defeat our own short-term objective of preventing a unilateral declaration. Thus our problem is to break through the political impasse without triggering off the explosion.[6]

NIBMAR, it seems, would likely "trigger off the explosion" when dealing with the European leaders of the Rhodesian Government. To prevent UDI Wilson would have to balance and compromise and "break through the political impasse" with flexible principles rather than dictate the absolute conditions for independence he had promised months earlier. Ideology would guide the general direction of negotiations to satisfy international opinion, but could not be allowed to drive either side over the edge.

As discussions between Wilson and Smith continued, Wilson softened his absolutist stance on Rhodesia. Though the Labour Party had been adamant about the impossibility of "trusting" white Rhodesian leaders earlier, Wilson and his Government conceded that constitutional safeguards were the solution for an independent Rhodesia. In early 1965, the Lord Chancellor and the Commonwealth Secretary developed a framework for negotiations between

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[6] CAB 148/19, OPD (65)10. "'Southern Rhodesia': memorandum by Mr Bottomley for Cabinet Defence and Oversea Policy Committee on the dilemma facing the British government." S.R. Ashton and Wm Roger Louis, eds., *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, British Documents on the End of Empire Project (BDEEP), ser. A, vol. 5, II, (London: The Stationary Office, 2004), 180-181.

the governments to guarantee eventual majority African rule in Rhodesia. Arthur Bottomley listed what would be known as the Five Principles in a September 1965 letter to Smith:

> 1. The principle and intention of unimpeded progress to majority rule, already enshrined in the 1961 Constitution, would have to be maintained and guaranteed.
>
> 2. There would also have to be guarantees against retrogressive amendment of the Constitution.
>
> 3. There would have to be immediate improvement in the political status of the African population.
>
> 4. There would have to be progress towards ending racial discrimination.
>
> 5. The British Government would need to be satisfied that any basis proposed for independence was acceptable to the people of Rhodesia as a whole.[7]

With ambiguous words like "guarantees," "intention," and "progress," the Five Principles led to extremely technical negotiations about the proper "safeguards" for African advancement. The extraordinarily detailed proposals and careful diplomatic language played to Wilson's political skills and allowed him to navigate Bottomley's "political impasse." As a former political ally noted, the prime minister "knew more about the nitty-gritty of foreign affairs than the rest of the government put together," and discussions with the Rhodesians reveal a very detail-oriented Wilson facing an unyielding Smith.

Continual proposals and rebuffs led to little resolution in the issues. Smith visited London in early October 1965, and stalled discussions led to a terse communiqué that "no means have been found of reconciling the opposing views."[8] At the end of October, Wilson traveled to Rhodesia in a last-ditch effort to forestall UDI. After months of correspondence, the parties had yet to decide the content of a "basic document" to guarantee progress on the first four principles, and a persistent debate lingered on the composition and methods of a Royal Commission to

[7] Cmnd. 2807, 66.
[8] Ibid., 90.

comply with the fifth principle. In other words, negotiations produced no tangible results.[9] Independence for the Rhodesians seemed imminent, and Wilson could do little to stop it.

Yet international response to Wilson's pursuit of a solution revealed how nuanced his ideological allegiance to NIBMAR really was. Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere wrote to Wilson in August 1965, explaining that "it is the uncertainty of your intentions ... that lies behind the present disagreement" and that his country "would regard independence for Rhodesia on anything else than majority rule as being a betrayal of all the principles for which our two countries claim to stand." Though he was certainly glad to assist Wilson and made it clear that "progress to majority rule is going to be gradual," Nyerere had reservations about Wilson's intentions and methods. He feared that the "circumlocutive" language of the Five Principles about impossible "safeguards" was a technocratic stand that betrayed a slow ideological slide toward Smith's desire for perpetual minority rule in Rhodesia.[10]

Nyerere's statement that the move toward majority rule would have to be gradual proved a welcome shade of gray in the ideological spectrum for Wilson. Discussing UDI with African nationalist leaders, Wilson found himself having to constantly maneuver to satisfy them. "The period before independence should not be measured in years," Wilson told African leader Ndabaningi Sithole, "but rather in functional terms, *i.e.*, in terms of the period which was required for political passions to cool and for sufficient Africans to learn the necessary skills." Though he professed the desire "to conduct these talks on a completely frank basis," Wilson relied on undefined "functional terms" and broad "necessary skills" to escape the ideological stands like NIBMAR that would endanger his hopes to avert UDI. The ideological commitment to ensuring majority rule before independence complicated efforts to reconcile the African and

[9] Ibid, 120-121.
[10] "Letter from President Nyerere to Mr Wilson expressing reservations about UK policy and intentions,"(PREM 13/538, ff 94-99, 14 Aug. 1965), *BDEEP*, II, 197-198.

the European in Rhodesia. As he told Sithole, "the present situation in Rhodesia was too much charged with bitterness and recrimination to permit the contemplation of immediate majority rule."[11] Wilson was no longer pursuing NIBMAR, but trying to use the Five Principles and seeking African cooperation to produce a less ideologically divided, more harmonious Rhodesia. Uncompromising ideological stands had produced this bitterness, and only racial reconciliation could end it.

In Sailsbury Wilson found himself in the middle of an ideological maelstrom of African nationalists and European extremists "wrapped up in cocoons of self-delusion." Both sides had unrealistic expectations, and he sought to produce a solution for the "moderates of both races" in Rhodesia. In a frustrated November 1 letter to President Johnson, Wilson wrote about his desire to "change the political climate" and forestall UDI:

> Hence my talks with every conceivable representative body to whom I gave the carrot and stick treatment: I had to get home to them both the tragic consequences of U.D.I. and the fact that no on was faced with a simple choice of U.D.I. or majority rule tomorrow. There were many alternatives. Hence the proposal for a royal commission, which gives them a way out if they have the will to take it.

Wilson had moved beyond NIBMAR and now sought some answer where neither European nor African would triumph completely. Under Wilson, the British Government was no longer guaranteeing African political rights, but trying to extract itself from a situation with no visible winners or totally satisfactory outcome.[12]

Yet the more complicated and fruitless negotiations became, the more the British public supported Wilson. The difficult nuances of the Rhodesian issue led the press and the British people to simplify the issue and come together to support the national cause. Rhodesian

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[11] "UK record of a meeting at Government House between Mr Wilson and a ZANU delegation led by the Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole," (PREM 13/543, ff 113-118, 27 Oct. 1965), *BDEEP*, II, 206-212.
[12] "488. Message From Prime Minister Wilson to President Johnson." *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, vol. XXIV, ed. Nina Davis Howland (Washington, DC: GPO, 1999), 833-834.

independence was not a complicated story of Royal Commissions and interim reports, but a simple conflict. The people and the press considered it a problem of national unity in the face of rebels and an amorphous sense of "fairness" when considering the rights of *all* Rhodesians, African and European. Pollsters agreed with one journalist's assessment that the Rhodesia crisis "may have managed to 'temporarily obliterate the Tory v. Labour argument in the country,'" and they had the numbers to prove it.[13] When told that the British Government demanded conditions "acceptable to the people of Rhodesia as a whole, and not just to the whites," 82 percent of people polled agreed.[14] This fairly simple prompt, and indeed, the simple perception of the Rhodesia issue led to a very strong rally-around-the-leader effect. Wilson's approval rating jumped from 58 percent in August to 73 percent immediately following UDI in November, the all-time high rating for a Prime Minister since NOP had been conducting political polls.[15]

Wilson's popularity was skyrocketing and he rapidly grew in stature and statesmanship. This was his moment to rise to the occasion. When addressing Parliament immediately following UDI, he quoted Churchill, the face of British determination. "We should not intervene in these matters," he said, "unless we are in earnest and prepared to carry our intervention to all necessary lengths."[16] Wilson managed to rapidly pass through a series of sanctions removing Rhodesia from the Sterling Zone, freezing all accounts, banning tobacco exports, and other measures. A piecemeal escalation of sanctions followed in the next weeks, increasing pressure on the Rhodesian economy. Wilson proudly announced in January that the same sanctions would bring Rhodesia to its knees in "weeks, rather than months."

The ideological murmurs surrounding UDI were focused on Britain's potential response.

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[13] National Opinion Polls. "NOP Bulletin December 1965." *NOP Bulletin.* (NOP: London, 1965), 2.
[14] National Opinion Polls. "Special Supplement I: Rhodesia." *NOP Bulletin.* (NOP: London, 1965), 3.
[15] NOP, "December 1965."*NOP Bulletin*, 2, 4.
[16] *Times* (London), Nov. 13, 1965.

Smith's unbreakable focus had convinced many months before UDI to expect the worst, and they were already staking out their prescriptions for the British response. One such group were those sympathizing with the left wing of the Labour Party. Known as the Tribunites for their affiliation with the left-leaning weekly *Tribune*, they formed a group proud of their role, "putting the Government under constant pressure to move towards the Left."[17] As such, they advocated a strict line of British responsibility and an almost-paternal duty to look after those under the colonial umbrella. The disenfranchised African was their cause, and they believed it should be Britain's as well. Wilson must rise to the occasion and assume his responsibility, the Tribunites argued:

> It rests with him and his Government to save Rhodesia from the appalling prospect of indefinite rule by the white minority. Africans and white liberals alike look to him to open the way to democracy in Rhodesia, and will support him in whatever action he has to take to achieve this.[18]

Phrases like "whatever action," while purposefully ambiguous, all centered around one option, the use of force. Specifically, the Tribunites sought to remove Wilson from his October 30 declaration that he would not use force, that if people were expecting "a thunderbolt in the shape of the Royal Air Force, let me say that this thunderbolt will not be coming." Wilson was correct in his reasoning; indeed, military action was not "practical politics."[19] Sixty percent of the British public was opposed to sending troops to Rhodesia, and with a Labour majority of one in the Commons, Wilson could not take the risk.[20] Tribunites and others in the Labour Party were not, however, bound by practical politics, but dedicated to the principles of NIBMAR that Wilson had had to abandon months earlier. There was no navigating or maneuvering for the Tribunites. "For genuine democrats and anti-racialists," they claimed, "there can be no choice in

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[17] "Our Readers and 'Tribune' Policy". *Tribune*, Oct. 15, 1965; p.3
[18] Untitled article, *Tribune*, Oct. 29, 1965, p. 1.
[19] Note, *BDEEP*, 206.
[20] NOP, Nov. 1965, *NOP Bulletin* (London: NOP, 1965), 6.

this matter. The African majority cannot be abandoned to indefinite subordination to a white minority, and no amount of deploring and condemning would excuse such a betrayal."[21] Wilson, then, had the option of avoiding disaster, or abandoning his identity as a "genuine democrat." He was outflanked on the Left.

The right wing of the Conservative Party presented its own difficulties, however. According to this side, arguments of passion and emotion were unnecessary and dangerous. Even though many realized that Wilson had negotiated as much as possible, the solution lay in calm, rational planning and diplomacy. Smith, as a fellow Briton, was rational and could be dealt with honorably. The UDI crisis, according to the Conservative weekly *Spectator*, "is one which needs the drama knocked out of it, not inflated." No matter how morally repugnant negotiating with a racialist regime like Rhodesia seemed, it represented the safest and the most profitable path when dealing with the crisis at hand. "In the end," the magazine advised, "you always negotiate with power, however displeasing the prospect may seem at first."[22]

Others on the Right considered *any* action besides further negotiation dangerous and undesirable. Any "punitive" actions would be unnecessary, or even harmful to *all* the people of Rhodesia. The absolute enforcement of British promises and responsibility through military action, of course, was beyond the pale of rational consideration. "Armed action, though ruled out by men of sense," noted the editorial staff of the Conservative *Daily Express*, "is still being demanded by the lunatic fringe that denounced Suez."[23] While the Conservatives were searching for a solution, the argument went, the Labour side was not only naïve, but philosophically inconsistent and potentially dangerous. Any punitive action on Wilson's part toward Rhodesia, from basic sanctions to military action would be counterproductive and foolhardy.

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[21] Untitled article, *Tribune*, Oct. 22 1965, p. 1
[22] "Entr'acte" *Spectator* Nov. 19, 1965; p. 453
[23] "A Time for Sadness," *Daily Express* (London), Oct 9, 1965.

Wilson found himself slowly being trapped into an ideological middle ground. He had to pass sanctions to satisfy world opinion, yet he applied them piecemeal rather than in one traumatic move. The political rigors of negotiation were well-suited to his eagerness to compromise. The necessary compromise of Labour's ideological devotion to immediate majority rule in Africa left him searching for the proper response. Consequently, his policies came under attack from both quarters, and Wilson found himself ideologically trapped, unable to prevail at any cost.

Rhodesia, it had become clear, was Britain's responsibility, and Wilson declared that his government would go to "all necessary lengths," but the prime minister soon found that the British interests would not determine which lengths were "necessary," but rather the multiracial Commonwealth that Labour had championed. Though a consensus within Westminster opposed the use of force in Rhodesia, the "new" Commonwealth, angered by UDI, threatened to destroy the "bridge" with their demands for military force. In the months following UDI, it seemed that parliamentary fears that escalation of tensions in Rhodesia would threaten the Commonwealth had been realized. Several African members threatened to leave the Commonwealth unless some solution was negotiated. The Organization for African Unity, sources note, urged member-states in early December 1965 to dissolve all diplomatic ties with the United Kingdom if the Rhodesian crisis were not resolved in two weeks. Harold Wilson had a responsibility, then, not only to the African citizens of Rhodesia, but to the entire Commonwealth.

Within days of UDI, it became clear to Parliamentary leaders that their fears about Rhodesia as a danger to the Commonwealth had been realized. Arthur Bottomley announced after UDI that Britain had been consulting Commonwealth countries all through negotiations leading up to UDI. He made it clear that the foundations of the Commonwealth were at stake.

claiming, "The argument [regarding UDI] is about racial equality. Implicit acceptance of racial equality has been an obligation of Commonwealth membership ever since India became independent."[24] Liberal MP and party leader Jo Grimmond had implied the same values the previous day, affirming the understanding that the limited financial sanctions and expulsion of Rhodesia from the Commonwealth Preferences Area were "in defence of the rule of law and the ideals of a multi-racial Commonwealth." Indeed, racial equality would be central to the final communiqués negotiated at both the Lagos and Marlborough House meetings of Commonwealth prime ministers in January and September of the next year. The battle over UDI was an ideological one, where the Commonwealth had taken its place alongside Britain both as an ally and a responsibility.

Fears soon arose about the casualties of battle. As a British tanker carried oil supplies to the Portuguese colony of Mozambique for delivery to the rebel Rhodesian regime, debate in Parliament about the extent of British voluntary oil sanctions against Rhodesia drew questions about British commitment to defeating UDI and the stakes of such a commitment. Liberal MP Jeremy Thorpe pondered the effect of enforcement on the question considered in more peaceful times—Britain's search for a role:

> Another point that I would ask the house to consider is the psychological posture of this country. The Organisation for African Unity has issued an ultimatum that unless we crush the Smith regime by 15th December they will break off diplomatic relations with us. What is far more serious is that anything up to nine African countries will leave the Commonwealth.

Though Thorpe dismissed the OAU's demands, the struggle to maintain Britain's allies in the Commonwealth and to preserve the vision of international and multiracial cooperation had begun. Thorpe made his threat more explicit, fearing that "the idea of a multiracial

[24] *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 720 (1965),cols. 526, 531.

Commonwealth will have to be scrapped and that instead there will be a white club."[25] Left-wing Labour MP Michael Foot concurred, noting that reopening negotiations with Smith would "tear the Commonwealth to pieces," while later warning that if unsatisfactory British efforts produced "a new South Africa" in Rhodesia, "our whole reputation throughout Asia and Africa of Britain as a liberal Power would be destroyed."[26] Because of Britain's extensive sponsorship of the Commonwealth, Rhodesia ceased to be a simple colonial problem, but an international threat to British prestige and the "wind of change." As one Labour MP asked, "How can we allow a tiny minority to twist our arm and flout, the changes of the twentieth century?"[27]

Yet while many British elites feared losing the "new" Commonwealth and sought to maintain unity, antagonism began to develop between Britain and the newly independent African states. As early as July 1965, a minute by a career bureaucrat titled "New Concept of the Commonwealth" circulated Whitehall with some reservations about the newly-independent members of the group, particularly their diplomatic "attitudes." As one point specifically states, "neo-Colonialism," or the persistence of colonial attitudes, would prove problematic in the Commonwealth. The new states, the author notes, "feel free to make any criticism they wish, or any demand they wish, of the 'imperial' power, but regard any criticism or demand by the latter as an expression of imperialism automatically to be resented."[28] Indeed, as some observed, an asymmetry persisted in later Commonwealth meetings, where an African bloc demanded action from Britain, yet Wilson, as the British leader, suffered what one observer noted as "onslaughts" that were "not only positively unjust, but also grossly rude, and even actionably libelous."[29]

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[25] Ibid., cols. 318, 323.
[26] Ibid., col. 334.
[27] Ibid., col. 347.
[28] [New concept of the Commonwealth]: minute by P Rogers (DO 193/81,1 July 1965), *BDEEP*, II, 342.
[29] 'An impression of the Commonwealth conference': dispatch from M MacDonald (Nairobi) to Mr Bowden on the meeting of Commonwealth prime ministers at London in Sept. 1966 (FCO 49/211, 9 Dec. 1966), *BDEEP*, II, 364.

Similar frustrations persisted beyond UDI up to the advent of the first Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting in February 1966. Especially angering was the threat by the OAU to terminate relations with the United Kingdom. As members of Parliament argued over action against a British tanker delivering oil to a pipeline to Rhodesia from neighboring Mozambique in violation of voluntary sanctions imposed weeks earlier, tensions began to flare. One Conservative member declared in response to African threats that "I think it is a measure only of the immaturity of those Foreign ministers gathered in Addis Ababa that they were prepared to make that threat." Though some Conservatives doubted the efficacy of stopping the rogue tanker and Labour and Liberal MPs vehemently disagreed, one Liberal member stated that he "shared" the view espoused by the said Conservative "that the ultimatum is melodramatic and possibly absurd."[30] Referring to "passionate African feelings" about Rhodesia in the same debate, a typically staunch supporter of the Commonwealth noted that though Britain shared a common aim for racial equality, "our hearts must not get the better of our heads. We shall restore constitutional Government in Rhodesia, but we shall do it in our way and in our time."[31] The egalitarian language of past debates where the Commonwealth as a "bridge" and a place where Britain would be a first among equals was gone. Britain now had its own agenda and desires, and the "cooperation" of days past was much more tenuous, and yet necessary to resolve the Rhodesian crisis.

African feelings towards British policy were similarly less enthusiastic. "The hysterical nature of African public opinion is leading to actions, demands and statements which make British officials on the spot despair of getting any understanding of, let alone sympathy for, them in Whitehall," the director of the Overseas Development Institute wrote in the *Times*. The mood,

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[30] *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 722 (1965), col 350, 368.
[31] Ibid., col. 388.

he emphasized, was not the *status quo*. "On both sides of the growing gulf stand normally friendly people staring with unbelief at the inexplicable actions of the others."[32]

African fears for the unity of the Commonwealth, however, were not "hysterical," but centered on a moral determination to produce a free continent for all African peoples that traces back through years of anti-colonialism, African nationalism, and the non-aligned movement. The principle of equality among races was central to the new outlook of the independent African leaders as far back as the Bandung Conference. An independent minority-ruled Rhodesia, free from British restraint, threatened to restore the kind of oppression many of these leaders had fought for years. Rhodesia and its white-rule allies, Mozambique, Angola, and South Africa promised, in Kaunda's words, "destroy the peace of Africa." If one nation were allowed to violate African unity and racial equality with impunity, such "neocolonialism" could spread as fast as decolonization had a few years earlier. As leader of a nascent African nation neighboring Rhodesia, Zambians were on the front line; their fates were economically and politically intertwined. As Zambia's leader, Kaunda became one of the leading opponents of "separate development" in Rhodesia. In one speech to the Royal Commonwealth Society in 1965, he set out a very basic, clear moral position on the specter of Rhodesia:

> I must make clear my stand on Rhodesia. I am an implacable foe of imperialism, colonialism, fascism and inhuman treatment of God's creatures. All these things which I hate, are to be found in Southern Rhodesia; exploitation of one group by another is no more acceptable within a country than between countries; arguing that some who are created in the image of God are sub-human is blasphemy; minority control and the belief in a superior race is fascism.[33]

The problem with Rhodesia for Kaunda was not a matter of the Five Principles or a Royal Commission, but a crisis of ideological and moral proportions. Such absolute evils as what he

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[32] William Clark, "African Pressure on Commonwealth". *Times*, Jan. 10, 1966.
[33] Colin Legum, ed., *Zambia: Independence and Beyond; The Speeches of Kenneth Kaunda* (London: Nelson, 1966), 223.

called blasphemy and fascism must be met with absolute determination. The British, however, presented Kaunda with the best chance to take military action without bloodshed. Any other organization, he feared, might spark a regional conflict that could consume the continent. It was imperative, then, that Britain accept its responsibility for its colony.[34]

Ghana, the first sub-Saharan colony to gain independence from the Empire and the *de facto* leader or African nationalism, made its own case for Britain's intervention into the Rhodesian crisis. Rather than invoke the heated rhetoric Kaunda chose, the Ghanaian government published a pamphlet, *Britain's Responsibility in Southern Rhodesia*, that made a very careful, considered case against Rhodesia. An extensive explanation of the economic and political oppression of the European settler formed the grievances against Rhodesia, while a very nuanced legal argument explains why Britain indeed had a duty to intervene in what had long been considered a self-governing colony. As Britain was the ruler of the colony and had unilaterally granted Rhodesia its cherished "self-governing" status, the pamphlet explains, it was within Britain's discretion to revoke such autonomy. The distant relationship of non-interference between Britain and Rhodesia was, according to Ghana, one of convention rather than law. As Britain had the ability to intervene in Rhodesian affairs, they thus had the obligation to correct the blatant racial discrimination the Rhodesian government hoped to enshrine.[35]

Wilson faced, then, African leaders determined to ensure Britain maintained its responsibilities at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting in Nigeria. The prime minister, as author Robert Good writes, "could not afford to be placed in the dock pilloried by African Ministers." Also at hand were jurisdictional questions—would Wilson be able to maintain control of the Rhodesian issue if African leaders of the new Commonwealth were to push for

[34] Ibid., 237.
[35] Ghana Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Britain's Responsibility in Southern Rhodesia* (Accra: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1964), 12-16.

further action?[36] Expectations were high on both sides, as the *Times* reported. "Flushed with the prospect of victory over the illegal Smith regime," the article[37] stated, "Commonwealth leaders in Africa can be expected, if only for domestic political purposes, to campaign against any further procrastination." The metaphors of campaign and trials would continue through the September meeting; Britain was on the defensive. As Wilson wrote in his memoirs, "Britain was in the dock, as we had been a month earlier at New York [addressing the United Nations]".[38] The *Times* publicly held the same views as Wilson in private, objecting that the conference "may generate more recrimination than constructive thinking for the future," and that "any idea that Britain should be put in the dock is wholly inimical to the spirit of the Commonwealth" while supporting his decision to attend.[39]

The debates in Lagos took particularly nationalistic tones, with the "neo-Colonialist" attitudes in full swing: Britain was in the wrong. The debate was, as Wilson recalled "hard hitting, though somewhat repetitive, as one African leader after another sought to prove how much more African he was than his neighbor. From Asia, Cyprus, the Caribbean, the message of condemnation was the same."[40] Minutes of one day's debate show that absolutist (and perhaps hyperbolic) rhetoric was indeed the weapon of choice. Zambian vice-president Reuben Kamanga warned Wilson of racial and ideological war that "could escalate to become a global war," and that "if it had been possible to defeat Hitler, it was also necessary to defeat Mr. Smith." Demands for the use of force continued, as "failure to take action might plunge Southern Africa into racial fire and threaten the efforts for peace and racial understanding all

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[36] Robert C. Good, *U.D.I.: The International Politics of the Rhodesian Rebellion* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973).
[37] "Mr. Wilson to Attend Lagos Talks", *Times*, Jan. 7, 1966.
[38] Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 195.
[39] "Mr. Wilson's Message", *Times*, Jan. 7, 1966.
[40] Ibid., 195.

over the world."[41] Though Wilson never conceded the use of force, as "any military action against Rhodesia would be a gamble," he did concede some ground. Though "in strict constitutional terms this was a matter between the British Parliament and the people of Rhodesia...the British Government had always accepted that it was also a Commonwealth and world problem." In typically diplomatic language he admitted, "the problem of Rhodesia presented a challenge to each of us and to the whole concept of a multi-racial Commonwealth."[42] Britain and Wilson were, it became clear, "in the dock."

Wilson escaped the dock, however, in his "best parliamentary form," confidently telling reporters. "Some were even foreseeing the break-up of the Commonwealth. But now the Commonwealth has emerged much stronger than ever before."[43] Wilson had erred, however, with his promise that "the cumulative effects of the economic and financial sanctions might well bring the rebellion to an end within a matter of weeks, rather than months" and a promise to meet again in September in London.[44] As the weeks turned into months and British sanctions failed to bring the Smith regime in Rhodesia to its knees, the stakes grew. Wilson now had to preserve an even more disenchanted Commonwealth. As the Government planned their next moves, it became clear that the next meeting with African ministers would likely be less conciliatory than the first. Wilson, in other words, was buying time with the Commonwealth until he hoped to end the Rhodesia crisis. As he wrote in a memo the day after the Lagos conference ended, "I hope and believe that we can now hold the Africans for a further interval."[45] Wilson would have to

[41] "Minutes of a meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers at the Federal Palace Hotel in Lagos," (DO 207/170, CPM(66)2, 11 Jan 1966), *BDEEP*, II, 221.
[42] Ibid., 223, 224.
[43] "Rhodesia Conference to Meet Again," "Rhodesia—A New Stage," *Times*, Jan. 13, 1966.
[44] "Text of the Lagos Conference Statement", *Times*, Jan. 13, 1966.
[45] "[Rhodesia]: minute by Mr Wilson to Mr Bottomley on economic and military contingency planning." (DO 207/5, no 30, 13 Jan 1966), *BDEEP*, II, 230.

face this "even stronger" Commonwealth that also happened to be more impatient and more vulnerable to collapsing.

As September approached, the rhetoric spiked and the stakes became more clear — Wilson would have to make good on his earlier promises, or the Commonwealth as they knew it would cease to exist. *New Statesman*, a left-leaning Labour weekly, made the case most explicit leading up to the conference:

> It cannot be too soberly but bluntly stated that unless the British Government is able to satisfy the Afro-Asian-Caribbean Commonwealth members that the Smith regime is certainly going to be defeated, Harold Wilson will go down in history as the Prime Minister who destroyed the Commonwealth.[46]

Other critics were equally pessimistic. The *Economist* noted that "before the conference has even started, it is already clearly a milestone on the Commonwealth's downward path."[47] Wilson was not in control of a Commonwealth that his party had been championing, but at their mercy. As one historian concluded after considering the meeting in Lagos, "The Commonwealth over whose destinies Britain had once presided, was in effect to act as a watch dog upon Britain. This was accepted but not relished in Whitehall."[48]

Wilson faced tremendous pressure in Marlborough House, but he survived. The conference, he recalled, "turned out ... to be a nightmare conference, by common consent the worst ever held up to that time."[49] Wilson endured criticism from numerous countries, until the conference reached what Wilson considered "a serious situation":

> The dissolution of the Commonwealth seemed imminent unless we agreed categorically to the statement the majority of the Commonwealth demanded: no independence before majority rule. That would mean the end for that year, and all time, of any possible negotiated settlement...

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[46] John Hatch, "Rhodesian Showdown," *New Statesman*, Aug. 5, 1966, p. 187.
[47] "Looser and Looser Yet," *Economist*, Aug. 27, 1966; p. 883.
[48] Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, vol. 2, *From British to multiracial Commonwealth* (Buffalo: U of Toronto, 1983), 192
[49] Wilson 277.

Wilson was referring to NIBMAR. In what was then an unfortunate coincidence, Wilson had begun what became known as exploratory "talks about talks" with the rebel Rhodesian government to negotiate according to the Five Principles. The Five Principles approach, of course, left open the possibility of a white minority government, even under Smith. The Rhodesian prime minister, it was widely perceived, would not opt for a total surrender of power to government by majority-African rule. The *Times* confirmed Wilson's dilemma, noting that African delegates were "intent to block any grant of independence to a minority government," and that the same delegates equated any British desire to keep open a channel of communication with the Rhodesian government, as "determination to retain an opportunity for a sell-out." Wilson, it became apparent, was backed into a corner by the Commonwealth.

Wilson, however, survived yet again, by first giving ground and then striking back, leaving a final compromise where Britain would be given three months to negotiate a solution, or action would be taken for selective mandatory sanctions at the United Nations and all negotiations would cease. As Malcolm McDonald, Wilson's "roving Ambassador in Africa", noted in his impressions of the Conference, the prime minister's tolerance for the infuriated African delegates was crucial for the limited success of the conference:

> His apparently almost limitless tolerance saved the conference, and helped decisively to turn it into a notable success; for his attitude not only earned the respect of the other representatives round the table, but also convinced the newer members of something which they had not fully believed before — that the Commonwealth is an association of peoples of various races who, despite their immense differences of colour, creed, character, political sophistication, etc. are all treated as sovereign equals.[50]

The same spirit of egalitarianism that Bottomley had proposed in 1963 had become practice over the Rhodesia crisis. Wilson's policies and the ideological passions on the African side had diminished some of the British imperial *auctoritas*. One can hardly imagine Churchill or Atlee

[50]Ibid., 284; M. McDonald,; *BDEEP*, II, 364.

tolerating some of the insults that Wilson suffered. *New Statesman* declared as part of the "Lessons of Marlborough House" that "Mr. Wilson himself has made a marked impression," explaining, "This British Prime Minister has readily engaged in a dialogue among equals, abandoning the old accents of condescension that lingered too long after the empire."[51] Yet the same sense of equality and frank discussion empowered Wilson to counter-strike, breaking some of the "neo-colonialist" tones. Wilson's manuscript notes from Marlborough House, as reproduced in his memoirs, show very strident defenses and demands. "I have gone as far as I can...to help this conference reach agreement, and I should like to see a corresponding willingness shown by others." He added, "It would suggest that we have a group here which has now totally lost interest in the Smith regime – they seem to be bending all their efforts bringing down the Wilson regime. Well, if that's what you want...."[52] Indeed, as the *New Statesman* concluded, "Gone are they days ... when Britain can take any major executive action in the world and then call for Commonwealth 'loyalty.'" The group had become the debating table for substantive policy issues. Whatever the case, the Rhodesian crisis had proven to be the "test" of a multiracial Commonwealth and its effectiveness as a body of world opinion.

Though in the long term Wilson's Rhodesia policy failed to bring the rebel state to multiracial, constitutional rule, he was, as one can see, caught in the "wind of change." The rapid pace of decolonization since 1960 and the emergence of a multiracial Commonwealth influenced a Labour party ideology of racial equality that proved a critical constraint on policy. Though the independence of South Africa fifty years earlier had been a relatively quiet affair between a colony and the metropolis, Rhodesia's illegal secession threatened, in both domestic and international political rhetoric, to become a worldwide conflagration. The "wind of change"

[51] "Lessons of Marlborough House", *New Statesman*, Sept 16, 1966, cover.
[52] Wilson, 285.

had raised the stakes and consequently forced Wilson's hand, if not to use force, at least to act decisively with relatively little time for negotiation. The liberal paternalism that had transformed colonialism into what some deemed "the Third Empire" of the British Commonwealth had produced an ideology that significantly complicated the Rhodesian affair. The same ideological push toward Commonwealth, the same "true genius ... in bringing [colonies] to self-government and independence." that Nigel Fischer had proclaimed at Blackpool in 1963 eventually put Harold Wilson "in the dock" in 1966.

## CHAPTER 3

### A "Proud Record": Rhodesian Ideology and "Kith and Kin"

**Loyalty does, indeed, go deeper than trade pacts, treaties and expediency. Southern Rhodesia has proved it.**

***Southern Rhodesia: Proud Record*, 1964**

To fully comprehend the ideological pressures that made the crisis of Rhodesian independence, an understanding of the white Rhodesian outlook is essential. One author's description of Ian Smith as leader of the Rhodesian Front provides a particularly valuable insight into the ideology driving the nation's European settlers to UDI. "Mr. Smith is a dedicated man," James P. Barber writes, "sincere in his dedication, but fixed, narrow and simple in his beliefs and ideals. He has a strong sense of mission, a conviction that his course is the only right course for Rhodesia." This personality, Barber continues, allowed Smith to lead the Europeans in their "white *laager*," but made negotiations with others "intransigent and inflexible."[1]

Dedication and focus were indeed key for Ian Smith, his Rhodesian Front, and the vast majority of European settlers. Dedication to seeking a new future in Africa—not to mention vigorous exploitation of African labor and natural resources— contributed to producing in mere decades what was one of the richest colonies in sub-Saharan Africa. A dramatic influx of immigration immediately following World War II , however, transformed this dedication. "The old spirit of adventure and discovery and the sense of guardianship over the indigenous people was replaced," one former Rhodesian writes, "by a desire to seek a more privileged life than that in Britain in the aftermath of war and a determination to avoid the fate of whites in Kenya and India." The new settlers were fleeing the wave of decolonization spreading through Asia and Africa, leaving them with "a suspicion of all things British and a disdain of all things black." In

[1] James P. Barber, *Rhodesia: The Road to Rebellion* (New York: Oxford, 1967), 193.

addition to being drawn away from Britain and the colonies, the new wave of settlers were drawn to the prosperity Rhodesia offered. The doubling of the white population in Rhodesia[2] and the accompanying economic growth had produced high standards of living for British and other European settlers unlike anything they had experienced in their former homes. It was a prosperity they enjoyed and would continue to enjoy on one condition: the gross inequality of "partnership" between European and African would have to continue indefinitely.[3] By the early 1960s, therefore, this dedication to build Rhodesia and seek new fortune had become rooted in a new objective: preserving and entrenching white economic and political dominance over the African.[4] The new path towards majority African rule carved out by British political leaders in nations like Ghana, Kenya, and Rhodesia's neighbors Zambia and Malawi threatened the Rhodesian way of life.

Indeed, Ian Smith and his Rhodesian Front did have a "strong sense of mission": they were determined to stop Macmillan's "wind of change" at all costs. UDI would be the last resort and a rather extreme measure, but one they were willing to take. The last UDI had been in 1776, and the Commonwealth and the United Nations would not stand for a sudden break with a great world power like the United Kingdom, especially with the specter of another *apartheid*-like state rising on the African continent. Also, Rhodesia was already self-governing and virtually independent: what was the need for a formal break with Britain? Rhodesian leaders needed an ideological framework to justify their actions that extended beyond the mere desire for white privilege. A decision to seize independence could not be a matter of mere convenience; it had to be an absolute necessity. The white leaders of the Rhodesian Front had to turn UDI from a cold,

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[2] The white population at UDI was approx. 200,000+ out of more than four million, or about five percent.
[3] T.R.M. Creighton, *The Anatomy of Partnership: Southern Rhodesia and the Central African Federation* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960), 127-129.
[4] Ken Flower, *Serving Secretly* (London: John Murray, 1987), 27-28.

calculating decision to what one former Rhodesian prime minister called "a piece of madness, a sort of collective rush of blood to the head, which cannot be explained by rational means at all."[5]

To produce this "madness," Smith and his allies had to place Rhodesia in a historical and political crisis. Rhodesia was, as they depicted it, caught in a political fix, fighting a corrupted Britain on one side and the specter of African nationalism and chaos on the other. The drive for independence was, they claimed, part of a greater historical moment—British traditions of responsible (white) government had ceased to exist, and Rhodesia had to carry the torch and "go it alone"' to survive in a future of Communist opposition rising around the world. This chapter will first focus on how Smith and the Rhodesian Front juxtaposed a historical sense of "Britishness," a political fear of African nationalism , and a carefully defined "partnership" between European and African cultures to cultivate this crisis of independence. A concluding section analyzes how well this Rhodesian worldview resonated with the British public, and what its consequences were for Wilson's Rhodesia policy.

Unlike the Commonwealth ideology that focused upon future cooperation and Labour's visions of international socialism, Rhodesians looked to the glory of days past as the basis for their identity and goals. Rhodesia's future would carry the "mantle of the colonial pioneers" that had fallen on Smith's shoulders and perpetuate the affluent lifestyle these pioneers and immigrants had built.[6] Though "there are lots and lots of very nice white people in Southern Rhodesia," as one critic noted at the time, "the white population ... is enslaved by its history, bound by traditional attitudes, and blinded by one of the most powerful of all human lights—the

[5] Ibid., 28; Dickson A. Mungazi, *The Last Defenders of the Laager: Ian D. Smith and F.W. de Klerk* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), 8.
[6] Ibid., 8.

gleam of a large steady income." A fixation on the past and a fear of the future formed the two central elements of the Rhodesian *laager* ideology.[7]

Rhodesians drew on an explicit sense of tradition and British culture, painstakingly built by generations of pioneers, missionaries, colonial administrators, and farmers. For the Rhodesian view of history was not the series of tumultuous ups-and-downs or cycles the rest of the world had faced, but a sense of a continuously growing loyalty and of accumulated pride and ownership. One document, *Southern Rhodesia – Proud Record*, best encapsulates this mentality. *Proud Record* was a pamphlet, a piece of propaganda specifically designed to make the case for independence, touting the colony's stability and competence in government and economic growth. While negotiations between Smith and Wilson fixated on the link between the present political conditions and their implications for the future, the Rhodesian leaders connected present prosperity and past hard work. Photographs of factories, trains, planes, soldiers, and doctors show that independence for Rhodesia is an opportunity for a continuation of past successes. One paragraph makes the link rather explicitly:

> Today you can travel the length and breadth of Africa, landing at modern airports, passing through fine cities, visiting fertile farmlands, using good roads or traveling on long distance railways; you can see evidence of engineering skills, irrigation, social services . . . *what is perhaps not so easy to appreciate, is that these blessings did not fall from the skies.* Their foundations were laid by valiant men, missionaries, traders, soldiers and administrators. [italics added]

Implicit in the statement is that all these "valiant men" and other workers were not African men, but white Europeans. In fact, the argument continues, colonialism "succeeded in less than 100 years in doing for Africa what Africa had never done for herself in countless centuries."[8] Capitalism, the parliamentary tradition, empire, and white racial superiority had been the

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[7] Creighton, 128.
[8] *Southern Rhodesia—Proud Record* (Salisbury: H.C.P. Anderson, 1964), 7

cornerstones of British imperial identity of decades past, and Rhodesians saw no reason to change. They had a "proud record" as the rightful heirs to this imperial tradition.

Smith took this record a step further with the Royal Commonwealth Society in 1964 to show how seemingly opposed British traditions and Rhodesian aspirations for independence were all part of this same "proud record." In an interesting revision of history, he explained how independence was the aim of the British settlers and how they had "brought up our country knowing that this was something which would come to us." The expectation of independence was, he reminded everyone, a distinctly *British* expectation. "Think of all the Britons," Smith said, "men and women, now in Rhodesia—they may be Rhodesians, but they are Britons—whose fathers and grandfathers before them, and sometimes their great-grandfathers, went there and built the country and put down their roots on this understanding."[9] To deny independence would be to deny these settlers' British hopes and aspirations. The past work and sacrifices that had produced such a prosperous present were proof enough that these European settlers were good "Britons"; they could be trusted with a prosperous future as an independent Rhodesia.

Beyond a mere sense of pride in what they had built, white Rhodesians portrayed independence from Britain as a sort of *quid pro quo* for their service outside the country's borders. As Rhodesia faced a "crisis" of African nationalism encroaching on their borders, they expected the British to remember their service in another time of crisis, the two world wars. In fact, the Unilateral Declaration of Independence itself documents their service as a condition for independence. They had served their "kith and kin" in both wars, and were "prepared to shed their blood and give of their substance in what they believed to be the mutual interests of freedom-loving people."[10] In fact, they had been of the greatest service to the Crown. Sources

[9] I.D. Smith, "Southern Rhodesia and its Future" *African Affairs* 250 (Jan. 1964), 19.
[10] "Unilateral Declaration of Independence," http://www.rhodesian.net/unilateral_declaration_of_indepe.htm.

recall that Southern Rhodesia had contributed more soldiers on a *per capita* basis in World War II than any other Commonwealth country, and that one-tenth of white Rhodesians were killed or had died serving in the war. Smith himself had flown for the RAF in the Western Desert and in Italy.[11] This loyalty, comradeship in war, superseded the moral and ethical conundrums the European settlers faced, and Britain should disregard the political troubles between their nations for the deeper feelings of loyalty. As one finds in *Proud Record*, "Loyalty does, indeed go deeper than trade pacts, treaties and expediency. Southern Rhodesia has proved it." In a rapidly changing world, loyalty was rare, and it should take precedence over questions of equality and development. Britain should not negotiate independence, but give it freely as a reward. The demand to claim their reward drove Rhodesians' push towards UDI.

Yet the object of Rhodesian loyalty was not Great Britain as it stood in 1965, but an amalgamation of national symbols, pomp and circumstance, and an almost Victorian vision of England. Rhodesians in power seemed to swear their allegiance to a royal, glamorous Britain while saving Rhodesia from a corrupt Britain that failed its own moral standards. The European settlers were, in Smith's eyes, "more British than the British." He recalls in his memoirs how as good Rhodesians they were raised to sing "God Save the King," and whenever they passed the Union Jack, they admired it. In the speech to the Royal Commonwealth Society, he told the audience that while other nations replaced the Union Jack with their new independence flags, the Rhodesians built a second flagpole. Membership in "this particular club" of British sovereignty had a very simple Victorian code of conduct, one that he claims he believed in passionately:

> Law and order in your society, discipline at your school, play the game by your fellow man, you cannot let your team down, and in the final analysis it may be necessary to die

[11]Ibid., 13; Kenneth Young, *Rhodesia and Independence*, (London: J.M.Dent, 1969), 11.

> for your cause. Those were the conditions under which you lived, under which, as a member of the British Empire, you were privileged to live.[12]

Smith and his allies were not serving the British government, but their own carefully defined notion of "Britishness." This code of "British" ethics omited any notions of equality of man or the authority of Westminster over her colonies. As a rather amorphous mix of nationalism and basic ethics, there was certainly enough ideological 'wiggle room' for Rhodesians to rebel against the flawed policies of a fallen British government while preserving the broad dictates of "Western civilisation" for Queen and country.

Many white Rhodesians believed passionately in "the Crown" and saw themselves more as monarchists than British subjects, with a particular fixation on pageantry. As historian Kenneth Young describes it, admiration for "a long departed England" took a peculiar form as they re-enacted those things that made them good servants of the Empire. They observed the Governor's State Opening of Parliament, dubbed knights, and reviewed troops. They relished the less political trappings of British life, ranging from cricket to boys' choirs at church, and even the "clean trains that run on time."[13] But at the center of this nostalgia was, of course, the Queen. At the end of illegal, unconstitutional declaration of independence, one finds the ironic phrase "God Save the Queen." A now-famous picture from the *Rhodesia Herald* of the UDI signing ceremony shows the Cabinet all gathered around Smith's desk—beneath a portrait of the Queen. One example of the peculiar "loyalty" among the Rhodesian leaders was Lord Graham, the Rhodesian minister of agriculture, or as he was known back in London, the Duke of Montrose. As Ken Flower, the head of Rhodesian intelligence, describes Graham in his memoirs, "The present Duke believed he was fighting for his Queen against a British

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[12] Ian Douglas Smith, *The Great Betrayal: The Memoirs of Ian Douglas Smith* (London: Blake Publishing, 1997), 3; I.D. Smith, "Southern Rhodesia," 17.
[13] K. Young, 10.

government utterly unable to determine Rhodesia's destiny. I went on my way wondering how many Rhodesians saw UDI in the same way as Graham did." The allegiance to the Queen was, Flower claims, a way of convincing the Rhodesian population that UDI was "merely a quarrel" with Labour policy in Britain, not the British people.[14] Smith and the Rhodesian Front used the Queen and her symbolic power to navigate the complicated loyalties of the Rhodesian people. Devotion to the royal dimension of Britain ameliorated anxieties some shared, and focused Rhodesian public opinion on Harold Wilson and his "Labour comrades," the real enemy.

Smith and other Rhodesian leaders asserted their loyalty so convincingly that they were able to subvert the very nature of the conflict over independence. Rhodesians were not violating British law and spurning the world, the argument went, but Britain had betrayed them—they were the traitors. By adopting the "wind of change" and rapidly negotiating with nationalists throughout the continent, the conniving ministers of the British government were the real traitors. They had sold out the values of Empire for the sake of expediency. Guilt over empire had led the British into a frenzy of treaties and duplicitous deals and a consequent fall from greatness. It was Rhodesia's duty, in fact, to prevent themselves from meeting the same fate. There was a time, Smith told an audience in May 1964, where British and Rhodesians held the same moral standard. Now, however, it had become clear that "our codes are very different."[15]

As recompense for their loyalty, Rhodesians argued, the British governments of the late 1950s and early 1960s betrayed their imperial tradition in the interests of political gain with the Commonwealth, African nationalists, and the United Nations. The British had dissolved the Central African Federation and its "partnership" at Victoria Falls, *Proud Record* claimed, "In the same spirit of appeasement which in 1939 made a disastrous world war inevitable and marked

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[14] Flower, 60.
[15] "Government Has Independence Plan, Says PM," *Rhodesia Herald*, May 23, 1964.

the beginning of the end of Britain's greatness."[16] Britain was on the decline, and a rapid withdrawal from Empire had led its Government to seek expediency over loyalty to kith and kin. While Rhodesia had exercised forty years of responsible government, Smith argued, their northern neighbors, Zambia and Malawi, had never experienced one day. By all economic and political indicators, Rhodesians claimed, they should have been first in line for independence.

Britain's vision of the "new" multiracial Commonwealth, so sought after in London, struck Smith and others as an anomaly, or even a distortion of its true identity. Everything had changed, he argued, and the Commonwealth had "outgrown itself" by granting independence to numerous countries that did not live up to the original Commonwealth ideals. Smith does not explicitly state what those ideals were, but one can assume they were similar to his sense of what it meant to be "British." This disillusionment extended beyond the political sphere, according to his memoirs, and infected even his monarchist sentiments. "I have tremendous respect, admiration and loyalty to the Queen," he writes, "but she is no longer the Queen we used to know." Instead she had become "the mouthpiece of party politicians in Britain and cannot speak her own mind and heart."[17] While publicly proclaiming allegiance to the Queen, he privately expressed a deep frustration with an England that fell far short of his expectations. He was, then, well within his rights to abandon a British state that had abandoned him. Before signing UDI, Smith claims, he was caught in an emotional conflict. If Britain had betrayed the Rhodesians politically and betrayed its own values, the notions of "fair play" he had considered British were moot: it was his turn to take a stand. He recollects thus,

> There was within my whole system a very strong desire to preserve my links with the history and tradition and culture that I had been brought up to respect and believe in. But over the last half decade this had taken a tremendous battering. When one looked at the composition of the current Commonwealth, the whole character of it had changed.

[16] *Proud Record*, 16.
[17] Smith, *Great Betrayal*, 70.

> Within Britain itself, we were landed with a socialist government, hell-bent on appeasing the cult of Marxism-Leninism, at the expense of the old traditional values of the British empire. This was never part of my tradition and culture.[18]

British imperial values had, in the language of the UDI document, been "shattered on the rocks of expediency."[19] The political changes from 1960 to UDI and the "wind of change," then, freed him from his loyalty to Britain. By constructing an ideal, chivalric vision of an imperial Britain, he could easily be disappointed and thus justified. Again, while Wilson and African leaders were focused on Rhodesia's future and opportunity for the African, Smith focused himself and the white Rhodesian population on the past and their "proud record." By shifting the debate, Smith and other Rhodesian leaders hoped to claim what moral ground they had and distract from the problems of their "partnership" with the African.

The other major component of the Rhodesian world view was the European's understanding of the African, his needs, and the threats he posed. The vast majority of Africans living in Rhodesia, deprived of political rights and at a severe economic disadvantage, were unable to define themselves. Rather, Smith and his conservative white Rhodesian allies had clearly defined and delineated their African culture and politics to suit their needs, developing a spectrum of African types. On one end was the passive, primitive African with no understanding of politics, a fear of modernity, and an allegiance to his political proxy, the noble tribal chief. On the other end were the African nationalists, Communist thugs seeking to intimidate the docile African masses and use majority rule to transform what responsible white government into corrupt one-party, dictatorial rule. Smith and the Rhodesians treated the former with condescending paternalism, and regarded the latter with outright fear and repulsion. These conflicting views, however, were reconciled in the Rhodesian political philosophy. The radical

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[18] Ibid., 101.
[19] Unilateral Declaration of Independence.

African nationalist movement must be repressed, and "partnership" with the moderate African and gradual political "evolution" towards majority rule with "meritocracy" would be the answer. It was, as one critic noted, "the partnership of horse and rider."[20]

The European settler had a very definite, very paternalistic view of the average African within Rhodesia. Rather than understand the African in terms of real, genuine friendship, Europeans had adopted what one Rhodesian official considered the role of "the Victorian parent." As a parent has difficulty accepting a child's rapid maturity, one critic suggested, the European struggled to cope with the challenges of African advancement.[21] Smith and other Rhodesians produced an image of the African as a perpetually docile child, merely wanting to survive and succeed under the auspices of European rule.

An anecdotal tradition formed the core of the European's mythologized "African." Nearly every Rhodesian source has a story of African traditions, fears or superstitions. Smith himself breaks from the narrative of his life occasionally to give examples of the progress yet to be made with the African. His physician friend, for instance, had encountered an African with only two toes on each foot, "which had probably developed to assist in climbing trees in order to obtain food." He reminds readers that when "western European civilisation" first encountered the African in his exploration of the southern part of the continent, the wheel and the plough had not yet evolved. "The change which has taken place is absolutely phenomenal," he writes, "and is a tribute to what the white inhabitants did over a period of ninety years."[22] Therefore, if Europeans had brought the African from the Stone Age to the present day in ninety years, they implied, how much longer would it take for these people to govern a democratic African state?

The notion of the "primitive" African was not merely a personal prejudice, but highly

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[20] Ibid., 108; Creighton, 102.
[21] Sir Robert C. Tredgold, *The Rhodesia That Was My Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968), 222-224.
[22] Smith, *The Great Betrayal*, 27-28; 55.

institutionalized in Rhodesia. *The Man and His Ways* is the best illustration of state-supported "understanding" of the African. Published in 1969 by the Rhodesian Ministry of Information, the pamphlet explains the African man and his mysterious tribal traditions, in order to help Europeans "remember his background and treat him with patience and courtesy." The book was distributed to white schoolchildren, tourists, and members of the police and ministry, creating a widespread European stereotype of "the African."[23] Descriptions of "the Man" and his spirits, chiefs, marriage, fears, and many other topics create a caricature of the African man as a primitive, naïve creature, prone to happiness and compliance, as one example shows:

> The African loves laughter. his needs are few and simple and when he has satisfied them he is inclined to sit back. After all, time is given to all men for nothing. It has no value, so why do today what can be put off until tomorrow? Land and water have also been put here for the free use of mankind so they, like time, can be wasted. Let tomorrow look after itself![24]

A picture of a paternal approach to African political rights emerges — if the African does not worry about the immediacy of majority rule and complex political questions, why should whites? The idea that time, like land and water, is expendable, implies that Africans lack the logical or cognitive capacity to govern responsibly. A government run by men who believe all things can be put off and wasted, the pamphlet seems to suggest, would be a disaster for the advanced Rhodesian economy and all the white settlers had "built."

By putting words in African mouths, the European engaged in the sort of "anthropology" that justified colonial rule for centuries. He produced "fact" from deduction and stereotype, and reiterated it until it became "science." A lack of systematized African education and empowerment in Rhodesia ensured that he would never be able to challenge this perception. A

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[23] *The Man — and His Ways: An introduction to the customs and beliefs of Rhodesia's African people* (Salisbury: Rhodesian Ministry of Information, Immigration, and Tourism, 1969), 5, also as cited in Julie Frederikse, *None But Ourselves: Masses vs. Media in the Making of Zimbabwe* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 16.
[24] *The Man—and His Ways*, 4-5.

cycle ensued, and European settlers produced a self-fulfilling prophecy, the perpetually evolving African, not yet ready for rule. In the Rhodesian eye, these primitive men (and women) were surviving quite well under the Rhodesian policies of "separate development." Visitors, according to Smith, frequently told him that "In this country we see the happiest black faces we've ever seen."[25] Independence provided a sure means to maintain the *status quo*. The production of a basic, pliable African thriving under European rule justified and validated Rhodesian policy and allowed Smith to move towards independence with absolute assurance.

Central to the vision of the agreeable African and his part in the march toward independence were Rhodesian attitudes regarding African chiefs. The Chiefs and Headmen were leaders of their tribal villages, and, according to the Rhodesian Front, the authoritative voice for the rural African. The Rhodesian Front claimed, as Smith did, that the chiefs were "the true representatives of our black people."[26] The Rhodesian government, then, empowered Chiefs and gave them administrative roles enhanced beyond even their traditional tribal claims. As such "true representatives," the Rhodesian government gave the chiefs the power to decide on behalf of all four million Africans whether independence on the basis of the 1961 Constitution in an *indaba*, or gathering of all chiefs and headmen. As one chief made clear, they took this role very seriously and agreed that their word was final:

> According to our custom it is not permissible for such an important matter [independence] to be discussed by youngsters [lesser men] . . . we are the rightful people who should discuss the important matters in connection with this land . . . Many people say that it is not proper that we, the tribal leaders, should become involved in politics, but we always had the power to govern. These people who have so much to say are the youngsters.[27]

The *indaba* met in October 1964 and agreed to move for independence, thus satisfying—or

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[25] Smith, *The Great Betrayal*, 107.
[26] Ibid., 68.
[27] Barber, 231.

Smith thought—Britain's oft-repeated requirement that the population approve independence *as a whole*. Reliance on chiefs, however, was one of the weaker points of the Rhodesian case for independence. First, chiefs were not only endowed with administrative power by the Rhodesian government, but they were also on the government payroll. Britain thus rejected the results of the *indaba* and refused to send observers. Second, the true African opinion on the 1961 Constitution had already been expressed. African nationalists, or, as the chiefs described them, the "youngsters" had held a referendum among all Africans in Rhodesia a few years earlier, and had rejected the constitution overwhelmingly, by a margin of 400,000 to about 500. The farcical quality of the *indaba* and the Chiefs' sense of self-importance was perhaps the most transparent and least effective component of the Rhodesian attempts to define "the Man."

More effective, and much more pervasive, was the Rhodesian portrayal of the African nationalist movement and its ties to terror and Communism. African nationalist groups like Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union), and Ndabiningi Sithole's ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) posed a threat to Rhodesian security and were, according to white leaders, the major obstacle to majority rule. These "terrorists" would intimidate the "peaceful" Africans and their Chiefs, thus preventing them from voting on the "B" roll and achieving eventual majority rule. The problem for Rhodesians was not white oppression, but black terrorism.

The specter of African nationalism for Rhodesians, however, did not end at their borders. The "wind of change" and the optimistic independence movements hailed by Africans and British alike threatened paranoid white Rhodesians. The new African leaders were, in their eyes, dictators and Communists, determined to wipe out the last vestiges of Western civilization on the continent. Such fears formed an apocalyptic vision that complemented their proud history as the

second pillar of their independence ideology. Majority rule signaled the beginning of African oppression, and thus independence from an all-too-compromising British power was necessary not for convenience, but for survival.

Visions of African nationalism, Communism and chaos sweeping the continent, though highly exaggerated, had some basis in recent history. The extremely complicated series of events surrounding the Mau Mau crisis throughout the 1950s and Congolese independence in 1960 left white settlers throughout Africa frightened. The crisis in Congo, Smith noted, "had a profound effect on our people, making them realise all the more positively the danger of capitulating to the metropolitan powers, who were ready to cut and run at the drop of a hat."[28] A tense "partnership" with the African was for many whites preferable to the chaos they saw in 1960. Along with the threat of chaos came the threat of dictatorship. After many African nations achieved their independence, African leaders would rise to become the "fathers of the nations." Kwame Nkrumah was the leader of this pan-African movement, and his one-party rule was popular elsewhere. Singular leaders like Kenyatta in Kenya, Banda in Malawi, Nyerere in Tanzania, and Kaunda in Zambia became the faces of their nations, representations of national unity in African eyes. Though departing colonial powers promoted these leaders to form a bulwark against Communist influence, Smith and the Rhodesian Front portrayed these men as "dictators" and "fascists" for promoting single-party rule. While African nationalists clamored for the principle of political freedom and "one man, one vote" in Rhodesia, the whites replied with "one man, one vote, one party and one dictator." A white minority of only five percent in Rhodesia would be left with no effective means of opposition, tolling "the death knell of democracy and of Western influence."[29] The Rhodesian Front and its white leaders exploited

[28] Smith, *The Great Betrayal*.
[29] *Proud Record*, 16.

these fears, encouraging whites to circle their wagons and form the Afrikaners' *laager*, fighting off threats from all directions.

In white Rhodesian hands, use of the survival instinct reached epic proportions. Southern Rhodesia became a "bulwark against Communist infiltration," and promised to be the only hope for a future Africa. Much of the battle had already been lost, as *Proud Record* claimed:

> Today the lights are going out in Africa. The newly-independent states now cover some 80 per cent of Africa's land mass and although there are some where democracy has survived and statesmanship lives on, more and more are degenerating into fascist slums propped up by international doles.[30]

Only the strongest language sufficed when describing the march of independent Africa. Though Africans described their newfound independence with optimistic theories of pan-Africanism and African socialism, Rhodesian propaganda painted a darker picture of chaos and destruction. While this passage describes "fascist slums," others would warn of "Communist thugs." Western civilization was being lost to a multitude of forces, all of them African, and all of them destructive. Rhodesia had to assume its "destiny" as a "bastion of western democracy in Africa." Smith believed Communists were undertaking a methodical march down Africa, and Rhodesia was on the front line, protecting the ultimate target, South Africa. Smith also believed the same Communists had enlisted the support of what he called the Afro-Asian bloc. These former colonial subjects were "total and unashamed racialists" whose aim was to have "the white man out of sub-Saharan Africa."[31] If the African obtained majority rule prematurely in Rhodesia, then he might join his comrades, destroying all European setters had built. This was the threat, and Britain could no longer be counted on to protect Rhodesia.

The Communist infiltration had, according to Smith, permeated all the international organizations that Wilson and other British leaders held dear. African nations demanding justice

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[30] Ibid., 16.
[31] Smith, *Great Betrayal*, 124-125.

for Rhodesia in the Commonwealth were tools of the Russians. In his mind, the Organization of African Union was gaining legitimacy through communist propaganda to garner support for their terrorist attacks. In his desire for political expediency, Wilson had abandoned Rhodesia to these forces. Not only had Britain betrayed Rhodesia and its past loyalty, but they endangered their own future by punishing one of the few allies in Africa in the ongoing Cold War.[32]

These fears of the outside world meshed perfectly with the Rhodesian desire to look after their own affairs and their obsession with independence. European settlers were on the front lines in Rhodesia, lacking patience for British conventions and diplomatic negotiations. William Harper, a leading figure in the Rhodesian Front cabinet, pointed out that "British Liberalism is all every well behind the English Channel, but we have got to be more realistic . . . we have got to be a great deal firmer and a great deal harder and take a lesson or two from those down south."[33] Anything short of independence and the maintenance of white rule wreaked of "appeasement." As Smith argued, the British could propose negotiated, moderate solutions for Rhodesia, but they would never have to live with the results. The prospect of actually living with consequences constituted "the finest guarantee that the rest of the world can have that we are completely dedicated to producing the best solution for all our people."

A proud history made the case for why Rhodesians deserved independence, the threat of Communism and dictatorial rule illustrated why Rhodesians needed independence, but first-hand experience provided the best evidence for why Rhodesians were qualified to decide their own futures. While wrong, the ideology Smith and the Rhodesian Front propagated did compel sane, rational settlers to defy British, African, and international opinion.

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[32] Ibid., 6, 72, 125.
[33] Barber, 148.

Though the white Rhodesian perspective was effective at home (due in part to state-owned and censored media), its record abroad was more complicated. Despite countervailing influences, Smith and his allies did gain a foothold in British Conservative political circles and media. Both messages—the history of Anglo-Rhodesian friendship and fear of Communist infiltration—reached the British public. The remainder of this chapter explores the effects of Rhodesian sentiment on British policy before and after UDI, especially as manifested in notions of "kith and kin." Though Rhodesian sentiments may not have gained enough support with the British electorate or within Parliament to threaten Wilson politically, they presented a challenge. Recurring calls from Conservatives to "talk rationally" with Smith as a fellow Briton restricted Wilson's maneuverability and options when responding to the Rhodesian rebellion.

While Rhodesian nostalgia for and loyalty to England might have been fairly consistent, ideas of "kith and kin" within British popular opinion was much more fluid. Adherents to "kith and kin" found themselves loyal to some ambiguous sense of what it meant to be English. Service in the previous world wars, family connections, or Western tradition all sufficed as bonds between London and Salisbury, but the abstract nature of such kinship proved extremely pliable. Whatever the exact nature of "kith and kin," however, various strands were united in opposition to Wilson and his Labour government's "punitive" policies against their kinfolk in Rhodesia.

Notions of loyalty, while oft repeated in Rhodesia, made their greatest impact nearly a month before UDI, at the Conservative Party Conference in Brighton. Lord Salisbury, the direct descendant of the namesake of the Rhodesian capital, defended the Rhodesian cause. Pleading with the conference for a resolution opposing sanctions against Rhodesia in case of UDI, he expressed his warm sentiments towards the European settlers known. "A great deal was owed to

the white Rhodesians," he told the party. "They had brought to their country peace and justice where there was formerly war, pestilence and famine. They had brought peace and prosperity to countless thousands of Africans. They are not, with all deference to Mr. Wilson, traitors. They have always been the loyalest of the loyal."[34] The message could have been ripped straight out of *Proud Record* or even one of Ian Smith's speeches. Among the right-wing of the Conservative Party, a strong belief prevailed that Rhodesian and British leaders had more shared loyalties than differences, and as the Rhodesian propaganda suggested, this relationship should take precedence over the technical issues dividing Wilson and Smith. This feeling of kinship dictated that, as one Conservative-leaning newspaper suggested, "these two leaders should reason together as sensible fellow-Britons."[35] Loyalty and notions of "kith and kin" had, at least, some place in the rhetoric opposing Wilson's pledges of NIBMAR and threats of sanctions.

As Salisbury and others promoted the Rhodesian cause, Smith led his own campaign to remind people of his British ties, and to elicit sympathy toward his move for independence. As the weeks wound down to UDI, the *Economist* made the Rhodesian leader's intent clear. "Mr. Smith has not forgotten his British public," the magazine noted. "Indeed everything that happens over Rhodesia from now on will rest in good measure on the separate assessments made by him and Mr Wilson of how far the British public and thus the British parties can be united behind whatever policy the British government chooses to follow."[36] Smith sought to generate goodwill toward Rhodesian independence as negotiations with Wilson were grinding to a halt. Without explicitly referring to his kinship with the British people during October negotiations in London, some form of camaraderie must account for Smith's success wooing the public. Polls indicate that the British public drew closer to Smith. When asked their impressions of Smith, the

[34] "Lord Salisbury Pleads for Justice on Rhodesia," *Times*, Oct. 15, 1965.
[35] "No Place for Threats," *Daily Express*, Oct. 6, 1965.
[36] "Keep Talking", *Economist*, Oct. 23, 1965, 362.

response was positive. Overall, 79 percent of those surveyed had a neutral or positive view of him. Positive responses regarding Smith outnumbered negative ones by a factor of three-to-one in Conservative and Liberal circles, and even Labour respondents favored him by a two-to-one margin.[37] Smith was a man with whom the British could sympathize and ultimately negotiate. He had built goodwill with the public at large. Though some warm feelings would quickly evaporate with UDI, "kith and kin" had some residual strength that would emerge in December.

Sympathies for Rhodesian kin moved outside the Conservative Party Conference into the parliamentary realm following UDI. Staunch Empire loyalists formed significant political blocs in the Opposition, constantly admonishing Wilson for taking on fellow British subjects with what they considered "punitive sanctions." When Parliament moved to consider voluntary oil sanctions against the rebel regime, "kith and kin" sympathies turned what was supposed to be a fairly routine vote into a political disaster for the Conservatives. A group of twenty Conservative MPs broke with their moderate leader Ted Heath's decision to abstain from the vote and opposed the Government's motion, causing what one political scientist deemed the largest Conservative rebellion in the twenty years.[38]

The leaders of the division were influential in the Conservative Monday Club, a group established in 1961 as an ultra-Conservative group whose "raison d'etre ... was the failure of successive British governments to grapple with the so-called Wind of Change in Africa."[39] Though one Labour MP called the group "the lunatic fringe," the Monday Club was on the ascent, and years later claimed to replace the intellectual Bow Group as "the most powerful

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[37] National Opinion Polls, "Special Supplement I: Rhodesia." *NOP Bulletin.* (NOP: London, 1965), 1.
[38] Mark Stuart, "A Party in Three Pieces: The Conservative Split over Rhodesian Oil Sanctions, 1965," *Contemporary British History,* vol. 16, no. 1; (Spring 2002), p. 52.
[39] Patrick Seyd, "Factionalism within the Conservative Party: The Monday Club," *Government and* Opposition, vol. 7, no. 4 (Autumn 1972), 467-8

pressure group in the Conservative Party."[40] These twenty "kith and kin" devotees were also involved in grassroots movements like the "Friends of Rhodesia" and the Rhodesian Front-funded "Anglo-Rhodesian Society," and about the same number of Lords, including Lord Salisbury.[41] Along with thirty other Conservatives with practical objections to the sanctions these loyalists broke rank. However, Tory rebels ended up grieving opposition leader Ted Heath more than Wilson and his Labour majority. Wilson was unaffected; as he said, he had only the Rhodesian problem to handle, while Heath had to handle his own party.[42]

Yet polling data shows that the "kith and kin" message Smith and his Conservative allies put forth so passionately in October 1965 had some residual effect on public opinion both before and after UDI. Pollsters cut to the core of the conflict between Wilson, African leaders, and Smith over British opinion that month, asking, "When thinking of Rhodesia, where do your sympathies generally lie, with the Europeans or with the Africans?" When all responses from all parties were considered together, an even split emerged, with 28 percent supporting the Europeans, 29 for the Africans, and 29 for neither or both. When divided by party lines, however, a clear difference emerged. Conservatives sympathized with the Europeans over the Africans, 36 percent to 22 percent, while Labour favored the Africans 35-25 over the Europeans.[43] While Wilson was buoyant in the polls, with widespread approval for his policies, seeds of a partisan struggle were sown early in the battle for sentiments. Rhodesian loyalty, then, had some currency with Conservatives, the traditional party of Empire. A month after UDI, while the Conservative Party split over the oil embargo in Parliament, popular opinions were split again down party lines. Conservatives disagreed with the oil embargo by a 46-38

[40] Seyd, 472.
[41] Stuart, 70.
[42] Windrich, 67; cit. *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser.722, col. 1912.
[43] NOP, "Rhodesia," *NOP Bulletin* (London: NOP, 1965), 2.

margin, while Labour took the opposite stand, 55-30.[44] Speculations that the Rhodesia crisis somehow was able "to obliterate the Tory v. Labour argument in the country," while correct from a broad perspective, concealed a more subtle trend as sympathetic Conservatives made the case for Rhodesia.[45]

Smith and Salisbury had carved out a niche within British public opposing the Prime Minister, that seemed to affect the public at large. By March 1966, only 42 percent replied that they were "satisfied" with the British policy towards Rhodesia, and 27 percent wanted Wilson to attempt negotiations with Smith. By May, British and Rhodesian envoys were engaging in "talks about talks," the precursors to the failed talks on board the *HMS Tiger* in December 1966. Though Conservative sympathies for Rhodesia had not produced a dramatic confrontation like those Wilson faced with the Commonwealth, notions of "Britishness" constrained Wilson. While causation cannot be proven, political pressure and a lack of alternatives certainly contributed to the prime minister's decision to step down from the peaks of popularity and hopes of defeating the illegal regime in "weeks, rather than months" immediately following UDI to return to the negotiating table.

[44] National Opinion Polls, "November 1965," *NOP Bulletin* (London: NOP, 1965) 6.
[45] National Opinion Polls, "NOP Bulletin December 1965," *NOP Bulletin* (NOP: London, 1965), 2.

## Conclusion

As Wilson and Smith returned to the negotiating table on the *H.M.S. Tiger* docked off Gibraltar, Wilson believed both men had reached a common understanding and were ready to resolve what had been nearly fourteen months of deadlock and crisis. At the eleventh hour, however, Smith declared that he could not sign; he had to return to Salisbury to discuss the agreement with his Cabinet. Within hours, Rhodesia had rejected the *Tiger* agreement. Wilson made another attempt on the *H.M.S. Fearless*, and later Conservative Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Home reached an agreement with Smith that failed the Fifth Principle, acceptability to the Rhodesian people as a whole. Not until 1979 did the Rhodesian government return to the negotiating table, and the next year Zimbabwe was born.

Though Smith's abortive move on the *Tiger* might seem like a typical diplomatic tack, his denying that he had plenipotentiary powers (to Wilson's surprise) symbolizes something greater. Neither man truly had the power to decide and act like typical politicians. Both Wilson and Smith were stuck in very different eras: it was a meeting of ideologies from 1965 and 1925. Though each man tried various tactics to reach some agreement, neither could completely abandon the ideological strings attached. Wilson could not give up on the fundamental political rights for Africans that served as the foundation of a new, egalitarian Commonwealth. Likewise, Smith could not betray what he considered decades of work and "responsible government" at the convenience of a metropolitan power that had been absent for forty years. Both men were leaders, but they were still followers in much bigger ideological traditions.

Studies of the political deadlocks and problems that surrounded UDI leave one with a sense of despair. There were so many possibilities for compromise and to avert tragedy, but something would always go wrong. One may blame Wilson, one may blame Smith, but

circumstances outside their power always intervene. Wilson had to return to progressive leaders like Barbara Castle and Kenneth Kaunda; Smith to reactionaries like William Harper and Lord Malvern. Neither man ever had plenipotentiary power, and even today in Zimbabwe, ideology defines everything. Ian Smith still gives interviews and claims his side of the story, while President Robert Mugabe answers critics with accusations of neo-colonialism. Racial, cultural, and ideological conflicts drove the politics, and to neglect this aspect of British and African conflicts is to miss the greater picture, to miss the "wind of change" and the "rocks of expediency" that defined the historical landscape of UDI.

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