

# THE PROMISE OF ZIMBABWE

by Rafael Suarez, Jr.

A Rhodesian revisiting the city he knew as Salisbury could probably make his way around Harare, Zimbabwe, a lot better than a Portuguese revisiting what is now Maputo, Mozambique, or a Belgian returning to Kinshasa, Zaire. Harare still has broad boulevards, flowering jacarandas, clean public parks, orderly traffic circles, and even some city streets with familiar colonial names. But there are also street signs to bewilder the returnee—avenues named for Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's postindependence leader, and for Samora Machel, president of the People's Republic of Mozambique. And our visitor would look in vain for the statue of Cecil Rhodes, now an empty pedestal.

Three-and-a-half years after independence from Britain, and more than four years after winning a civil war against white rule, Zimbabwe's leaders are attempting to rebuild the country, hoping to retain enough of the familiar to stem the tide of departing whites and *also* satisfy the aspirations of the black population. White Zimbabweans still manage the country's big businesses, own a good portion of the arable land, and grow most of the food the country exports and consumes. Their continued presence also serves to reassure the West that Zimbabwe hasn't been lost to the "other side." How to assert pride in a revolutionary past without rubbing it in the faces of fellow citizens who backed the losers is one of the problems confronting the Zimbabwean government.

This visitor arrived in Zimbabwe in August, in time for Heroes Day. A new holiday for a new country, Heroes Day is a two-day tribute to those who died in the war for liberation fought by the Popular Front—the forces of Robert Mugabe, now prime minister, and Joshua Nkomo, his former comrade and chief political rival. The main events are held at Heroes Acre outside Harare—a vast park, still under construction by North Koreans, that combines elements of socialist realism, such as distinctly African idioms as the birds of Great Zimbabwe found on the nation's flag, and, in the bronze bas relief depicting Mugabe at the head of Zimbabwe's masses, an incipient cult of personality. "Zimbabwe was supposed to be different," said Africa scholar Richard Hull, the first American to address a joint session of Zimbabwe's parliament, "and Heroes Acre is exactly the kind of thing Zimbabwe wasn't supposed to have. And the North Koreans are soaking them for it...;

it's costing Zimbabwe millions."

On this Heroes Day, a mere four years after the war's end, the atmosphere is not particularly festive. Though ice cream salesmen hawk popsicles made by the National Dairy Board and people occasionally break into revolutionary or patriotic songs, the crowd is generally quiet, almost somber. The young people are in uniforms of one sort or another, many of the women wear wraparound dresses and headcloths liberally printed with pictures of Robert Mugabe, while others wear a Mugabe skirt topped with one of the T-shirts distributed by ZANU, the prime minister's party. Here are choirs and dance companies from all over the country, there the chiefs of staff of all the armed forces, and, sitting stiffly on a row of folding chairs in the section of Heroes Acre reserved for dignitaries, a group of general officers of the old Rhodesian Army. Also present are the country's most prominent clerics, black and white. Prime Minister Mugabe is in neighboring Botswana for an economic conference, but President the Reverend Canaan Banana, the popular head of state, is on hand.

The crowd gives full attention to the day's speakers, who talk about the sacrifices of war. Its somber mood is broken somewhat by a community "responsa"—shouted chants of the Shona equivalent of "viva" and raised fists to evocations of the prime minister's name, of the socialist revolution, of the people's struggle for self-sufficiency. This is followed by shouts of "We'll defeat them!" and downward gestures to a litany of such popularly despised institutions as neocolonialism and imperialism. A white Zimbabwean—approximately 170,000 remain—could feel a bit left out in all of this, and, indeed, not many are present.

## UNCIVIL LIBERTIES

The image of bombast and uniforms is reinforced at the Ministry of Information, where a journalist undergoes scrutiny before he may receive permission to remain in the country for more than a day. Robert Mugabe has taken a personal role in expelling or scolding journalists for stories he says portray Zimbabwe in a negative way to the outside world.

Though in 1982 the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists reported that, with the exception of Nigeria's press, Zimbabwe's was the freest in Africa, that freedom is gradually disappearing. The *Herald*, the capital's daily, the *Sunday Mail*, and the television news are dominated by ZANU men and women who stoutly defend

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the idea of press freedom while avowing the need for subtle censorship in the interest of nation-building. Perhaps most telling was domestic reportage on the return of Zimbabwe's opposition leader from six months of self-exile in London. Joshua Nkomo, one of the fathers of Zimbabwean independence, left his country maintaining that his life was in danger: His driver had been killed by automatic weapons fired by government troops. Lacking a passport, Nkomo had crossed into Botswana and made his way to London. Prime Minister Mugabe scoffed at Nkomo's claim of danger and hinted that he had fled from prosecution for a variety of offenses, including jewel smuggling and tax evasion.

When Nkomo returned suddenly last August, he was met at the airport by the international press and an ever-growing crowd of ZAPU faithful. Word came from fellow-passengers that the opposition leader was having a bad time in customs, had even been searched down to his shoes. And when Nkomo finally emerged, the cameras rolled, reporters shouted questions, the women of ZAPU ululated, and the entire mass followed him to his waiting car. Later, at his Highfields home, with much the same crowd mustered in the backyard, reporters got a crack at the returnee. Here, in the presence of reporters from the *Times* of London, the *Washington Post*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, Australian Broadcasting Company, ABC, BBC radio and television, Agence France Presse, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Company, the *Harare Herald*, and even a "reporter" from the Zimbabwe Ministry of Information, Nkomo showed himself a master handler of people. With wit and dash he sidestepped questions he was not prepared to answer and milked every nuance from those he did. He also promised to answer some of the Zimbabwean services' leading and provocative questions the next day in Parliament, during a debate about whether he should be expelled from the legislature.

Although the drama of his exile and sudden return are the sort of thing of which dynamic headlines and gripping photos are made, the day's events yielded only a few column inches on an inside page of the *Herald*. Even so, this was a model of responsibility when compared with the coverage provided by the ZBC on television that night. It was the last story mentioned by the anchors—one black, one white—during their opening summary of the day's features, and in the course of that broadcast it followed eleven other stories—including the attempt to develop performing arts cooperatives in the countryside and a warning from the Ministry of Health about the dangers of skin-lightening creams.

The television report also provided a glimpse of what modern technology has done to refine the art of character assassination. "Mr. Nkomo repeatedly said Zimbabwe had many problems," intoned one anchor, "while refusing to name any of them specifically." This was followed by videotaped portions of the Nkomo news conference, edited and spliced to provide a series of rambling non sequiturs that portrayed Nkomo as a doddering clown, not the crafty politician refusing to betray his parliamentary game plan to prying newsmen.

No more reassuring to Zimbabwe watchers is the aftermath of the trial held some months back of six high-ranking white Zimbabwe Air Force officers charged with destroying, or participating in a South African plot to destroy,

the better part of Zimbabwe's small Air Force: its new Skyhawk jets. Though all six men were acquitted—the black justice trying the case having accepted the evidence that confessions from the six were obtained through torture—three were released from jail on the condition that they leave Zimbabwe forever and three remained in detention until late December, when they too were exiled. The Mugabe government continues to assert their guilt and to maintain that the acquittals were obtained through a technicality. It has also promised that such matters as Zimbabwe's laws of evidence and the right to counsel will be reexamined.

As a result, many white Zimbabweans are keeping one eye on their homes, businesses, and families, and the other on the airport. Each appears to have a limit to which he will go before finally throwing in the towel. For one it may be a further move to a one-party state; for another, signs of undue pressure on white farmers in carrying out the land reform program. When land rights go, one farmer said, so will he. Many of the whites have much to lose by leaving: There would be little return on their possessions and holdings and little chance of duplicating their life-style elsewhere. With double-digit unemployment throughout Europe, few have faith that they would obtain suitable positions on the continent or in England, even if they were accepted as immigrants. "Whatever the political situation here, they're still paying pretty well for those with technical training," a man in his late twenties told me as we drove through the well-kept suburbs that ring Harare. "My parents sold their land and left, went to England. But there's nothing for me there. I'm staying. For a while at least."

Many whites were initially encouraged by Mugabe's promise of a mixed economy and the prospect of a truly multiracial Zimbabwe. The first commander of Zimbabwe's Army, formed from the main guerrilla forces and the Rhodesian Army, was a white man, Peter Walls. He has since left for South Africa under the shadow of accusations of treason. Of the several white members of the initial Zimbabwean cabinet, only the agriculture minister, Dennis Norman, remains.

One white civil servant, still in the job he held during Ian Smith's time, says the rapid Zimbabweanization of all sectors of society is only fair, given the country's history. Others say forced hiring of unqualified blacks is driving up the cost of doing everything. The old regime made sure there were only a small number of skilled and educated blacks, and today black college graduates are being snapped up by the burgeoning bureaucracy, installed behind desks in government ministries rather than in business, industry, or finance.

#### **SURPLUS AND SHORTAGE**

Economically isolated for fifteen years, Rhodesia built itself an excellent infrastructure, became self-sufficient in many consumer items, did a lively export trade in agricultural produce, and had a growing industrial base. As the old Rhodesia was crumbling, blacks in the countryside and the cities began to look forward to sharing in the country's resources. Many will continue to be disappointed.

Zimbabwe, a small country with a wide range of climatic and soil conditions, finds only 20 per cent of the available rural land suitable for mixed-crop agriculture using avail-

able rainfall. (Last year the worst drought in a century proved disastrous for this sector as well.) The other 80 per cent is essentially dry, and crops require irrigation. The government has worked out a formula for resettlement of rural families that promises to provide each with enough land to yield an annual income of \$400. In the well-watered regions a family gets 25 hectares, in others 45, 75, or 200 hectares, depending upon the rainfall charts. So far the Zimbabwe government has not expropriated a single hectare of land, much of the best of which continues in the hands of white commercial farmers, with yields rivaling anything found in the United States. Many farmers left the country after independence, and the government paid them before they left; others simply left farming and sold their land to the government. This is the land Zimbabwe has distributed to thousands of families.

Now yields have plummeted and available land is running out. Much of the money for resettlement has been provided by Britain—a sort of quid pro quo for the new government's compensation of white farmers. Since the trial of the Air Force officers there have been calls in Britain for suspending or reducing these payments. Harare is unruffled: The loss of British funds would simply mean that whites will not be paid.

But if the 4.5 million people in the countryside waiting for land are to be resettled, the government will have to acquire all the land remaining in the hands of whites. This would mean the end of agricultural exports, an important part of Zimbabwe's economy. The chief economist at the Ministry of Agriculture, Peter Murphy, explains that "even if the new black owners farmed up to their optimum potential, they couldn't match the production of today's commercial farms." He is quick to add, "I'm not slighting their farming ability; it's just that a smaller farm can't be worked as efficiently. They don't have the access to credit or expensive inputs that the commercial farmers have."

With Zimbabwe's population increasing at 3 per cent a year—one of the highest growth rates in the world—the estimated eight million Zimbabweans will be more than

thirteen million by the year 2000. According to the government formula and using every available hectare, six million people could work the land by the end of the century, leaving seven million to live in the cities. Can the country build industries fast enough to employ this new proletariat? Can the farmers grow enough food to feed themselves and the seven million in the cities? What of the whites who still own land, still feed the country, and still (when the rains come) sell the excess to neighboring black states in need? "In the future," says Murphy, "it's inevitable that some form of acquisition without sellers willing to sell it will have to be adopted."

Perhaps the drought has been a blessing in disguise, the hostility of the land itself slowing down the resettlement program, which had been proceeding at breakneck speed, and pointing up the need to divert resources and manpower to industry. Murphy calls it an "unexpected opportunity" for the government to reexamine its present policies.

In many more ways, of course, the drought has been anything but an opportunity. Two million people are now underfed, and farmers themselves, lacking income, had to be given food by the government, thus diverting funds from development programs. There was further draining of government resources to prop up the livestock industry, mainstay of the minority Ndebele, devastated by lack of water and grazing land. The Ministry of Agriculture has tried to slow the stampede to the slaughterhouse by buying animals and moving them into feedlots, transporting many to areas of the country where there is sufficient grazing.

With such crop losses, agricultural creditors have not been repaid the money they had lent small farmers for seed and fertilizer. They may never be paid. The small farmer in default has no access to the credit market, and the government has tried to fill the role of the agricultural banks by providing "input packs" of seed, fertilizer, and pesticide to tide the farmers over. In August, 1983, Agriculture Minister Norman, once the chairman of the commercial farmers organization, took the unusual step of announcing a high preproduction price for the 1984 maize

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# COMING

C. SYLVESTER WHITAKER on whose coup in Nigeria; WILLIAM COLBY on the many versions of Vietnam; ROBERT W. BARNETT on Japan's security agenda; DANIEL PONEMAN on U.S. nuclear exports; ROBERT J. MYERS on morality and international law; STERETT POPE on Ethiopia—emperor and empire...

crop—a move designed to provide an incentive to farmers to plan a large planting despite 1983's bad yield. The World Food Program (WFP) officer in Harare, Desmond Taylor, called this "a mature move" by a government of a developing nation and predicts that the country should just about make its goal in corn.

But from all indications Zimbabwe is going to be short of grain, one of the crops that requires irrigation, and the WFP stands ready to help. It has helped Zimbabwe before—notably in the first year of independence when, with the biggest maize crop in Zimbabwe/Rhodesia history, South Africa took back all of the rolling stock it had lent the new government, citing some urgent need of its own. WFP helped Zimbabwe organize the "Maize Train" by rounding up rolling stock in Mozambique, quickly organizing shipping and port facilities in Beira on the Indian Ocean, and getting the grain out to African customers. The WFP and other U.N. agencies also helped Zimbabwe ship the surplus of 1981 and have established a presence in the country, supplying marketing, management, and other agricultural expertise.

Taylor points out that although today Zimbabwe is not a net food exporter, things are much worse in other African nations, including South Africa, which last year imported corn for the first time in this century. But the loss of foreign exchange hurts Zimbabwe, and especially at a time when the country is trying mightily to resist the economic embrace of South Africa, with which the old Rhodesia was highly integrated economically. The Pretoria government would like things to remain that way; and despite Robert Mugabe's anti-apartheid rhetoric and verbal support for the aims of the African National Congress in South Africa, Zimbabwe cannot cut South Africa off. There is still brisk import/export traffic between the neighbors, and daily flights between Johannesburg and Harare are full of businessmen and vacationers.

Pretoria has already shown that it has the power to make things very difficult for Robert Mugabe. Mozambican guerrillas funded by South Africa were regularly sabotaging Zimbabwe's oil pipeline from Beira, cutting off the country's only source of oil outside South Africa. With a mere two-week supply, Harare put the country on an oil starvation budget, stood up to the South Africans, and muddled through until, with American diplomatic intervention, the oil began to flow again.

U.S. help flooded into Zimbabwe, and Eurodollars too, to encourage the newly elected Mugabe onto a pro-Western path. This past December, just after the prime minister had hotly denounced the U.S.-led invasion of Grenada and was urging condemnation of the U.S. at the Commonwealth conference, the United States reduced its planned aid to Zimbabwe from the \$75 million Harare had requested to \$40 million. After being informed of this, Mugabe excoriated the State Department in a ZBC radio broadcast; the Grenada incident, the refusal to condemn the Soviet Union over KAL 007, and Harare's continued nonrecognition of Israel were, he said, "insufficient" grounds for reducing U.S. aid.

If Zimbabwe fails to make a go of things, Mugabe will blame, among others, South Africa, Western capitalists, Nkomo-led Ndebele dissidents, and diehard white Rhodesians in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, a good deal of the blame will rest on his own shoulders.

While avidly courting Western aid and soft loans, he scorns the same countries and their policies, spending much of his time in Prague, Budapest, and other Communist capitals, where the larder is empty but the rhetoric of socialism rolls on. The North Koreans not only have built the national monument, but have trained the Fifth Brigade, now a formidable fighting force and used to put down civil unrest in the home of Joshua Nkomo's Ndebele tribe. Russians teach trade unionism to Zimbabwe's workers and Zimbabwe abstains from the U.N. vote to condemn the Soviets for shooting down Korean Airlines flight 007. Portraits of Mugabe and President Banana look down on visitors in every public place, from provincial bars to Harare Airport.

Without a doubt Mugabe still enjoys a high degree of personal support outside Matabeleland, where, according to church and Western news sources, Shona shocktroops spread terror after Ndebele guerrillas, refusing demobilization, went into the bush. In the last year Mugabe has withdrawn behind a wall of security: Heavily armed troops guard his mansion, and the streets around it are permanently sealed off. When he ventures into the capital, his car is surrounded by a large cordon of cars and motorcycles—riders armed and sirens blaring—called by wags "Bob Mugabe and the Wailers."

For all the change, some things remain the same. There are no black patrons in evidence at the splendid buffet lunch served at the Victoria Falls Hotel, though black waiters, as of old, move noiselessly between the tables, and no blacks among the aging players in spotless outfits at the Harare Lawn Bowling Club. From time to time a troop of uniformed white schoolgirls may giggle by—though, as the pressure for integration from the Ministry of Education mounts, the few blacks in their class will be joined by a few more. In the alleys between the fabulous mansions of Harare's rich, barefoot black children run among the garbage and squawking chickens, and house servants are deferential to whites, even a stranger. Here, unlike the capital cities of other former British colonies in Africa, hot and cold water flows from taps, the electricity stays on, public transportation works, and the streets are clean.

After observing the signs of old Rhodesia and new Zimbabwe, one can only come to the conclusion that the country is on the verge of making some fundamental decisions about itself that will mean its success or failure as a nation. The record since April 18, 1980, when the Union Jack was pulled down, has been a mixed one. There are indications that the people are ready for a mixed economy and a mixed society. There are also indications that leaders are willing to sacrifice that possibility on the altar of political theory and make their country a bastion of orthodoxy where nothing works.

Right now more than anything Zimbabwe needs rain and a spirit of conciliation among its political leaders so that they can do business not only with the whites but with the minority tribesmen and the black opposition. It also needs a little more time from the West, which would do well to wait and see which way the wind is really blowing in Harare before deciding how to deal with Zimbabwe. If Mugabe continues to talk like Marx and act like Keynes, Zimbabwe could turn out to be a strong, wealthy, and stable place indeed. With time, of course, and a lot of luck. [WV]