

THE UNITED NATIONS AND SOUTHERN RHODESIA

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THE United Nations General Assembly on June 28, 1962, the last day of its 16th session, administered a sharp rebuff to British imperialism on the question of Southern Rhodesia and the right of the vast majority of its inhabitants, the African population, to exercise to the full the same functional democratic and civil liberties as the whites. The resolution on Southern Rhodesia, which was sponsored by 38 Asian and African countries, 'noted with regret' that the United Kingdom had not yet taken steps to transfer all powers to the people of Southern Rhodesia, as required by the General Assembly's Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples. The resolution also approved the conclusions of the Special Committee of Seventeen on Southern Rhodesia 'that the territory of Southern Rhodesia is a non-self-governing territory within the meaning of Chapter XI of the United Nations' Charter'.

Britain was asked to undertake urgently the convening of a constitutional conference to frame a new constitution in place of that of December 6, 1961. It was requested that this conference should include 'full participation of representatives of all political parties', and that the new constitution should 'ensure the rights of the majority of the people, on the basis of "one man, one vote"', in conformity with the principles of the United Nations' Charter and the Declaration on Colonialism. The inclusion of the phrase 'on the basis of "one man, one vote"', was the result of an amendment proposed by the Bulgarian delegate, and this was adopted by a vote of 55 in favour to 1 (South Africa) against. There were 42 abstentions and 4 absent. The United Kingdom and Portugal preferred to take no part in the voting.

Britain was also asked to take 'immediate steps' to 'restore all rights' of the non-European population and to remove 'all restraints and restrictions in law and in practice' on the exercise of the freedom of political activity, including all laws directly or indirectly sanctioning racial discrimination; to grant amnesty and to ensure the immediate release of all political prisoners. Finally, the General Assembly asked the Special Committee of Seventeen to 'continue its constructive efforts' toward the earliest implementation of the

Declaration on Colonialism with regard to Southern Rhodesia 'in order to ensure its emergence into an independent African state'.

The final speaker in the debate, Sir Patrick Dean, the U.K. delegate, denounced the 38-Power draft resolution as 'ultra vires, unacceptable and impractical', and said its adoption would do more harm than good. He contended that the United Nations had no jurisdiction regarding Southern Rhodesia, which, he claimed, had had full internal self-government for almost 40 years. Because the United Kingdom disapproved, not only of the resolution itself, but of the proceedings as a whole, Sir Patrick announced that his delegation would not take part in any of the voting. In adopting this unvalorous course of action in the doubtful company of her oldest ally, Portugal, who herself was under great pressure from the same Special Committee of Seventeen to account for her brutalities in Angola, Britain sought to escape from even greater embarrassment and ignominy. For had she taken part in the voting she would have found that she could hardly have done less than South Africa and would have been obliged to join the Verwoerd-Vorster Police State in open opposition to the resolution on Southern Rhodesia.

The debate on Southern Rhodesia in the U.N. General Assembly really had its origins in the resolution presented by Mr. Khrushchov on October 12, 1960, on the question of Colonialism. He asked that this question should be debated in plenary session and not in the Assembly's Political Committee. On that memorable occasion Mr. Khrushchov's unanswerable indictment of colonialism's blood-stained record met with the enthusiastic approval of the representatives of the newly-independent countries, while the colonialists' own delegates squirmed in anger. Mr. Khrushchov reminded the Asian and African delegates that the fate of their brothers on the African continent greatly depended on them, and thereby impressed on them the urgency of the need to take active steps to secure the freedom of those African peoples who were still groaning under the yoke of colonialism. Mr. Khrushchov's resolution, though at first strongly opposed by the United States and Britain, was eventually adopted.

On December 14, 1960, a resolution on Colonialism, sponsored by all the African and Asian countries, and embodying a 'declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples' was adopted by the General Assembly by 89 votes to nil with 9 abstentions. It was nearly a year later when returning to the question of Colonialism that the General Assembly, on November 27, 1961, voted to create a 17-member Special Committee to make

recommendations on how to implement the Assembly's 1960 Declaration on Colonialism. The resolution was adopted by 97 votes to nil with 4 abstentions (France, South Africa, Spain and the United Kingdom). It appears that on this occasion the imperialists were temporarily deserted by their friends. The United States, for instance, took advantage of the occasion to parade with no little ostentation in the borrowed garments of anti-colonialism to the discomfiture and at the expense of the old European imperialists.

Among the points of the Declaration on Colonialism which the Special Committee of Seventeen was expected to deal with were the following :

The subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the U.N. Charter, and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation.

All peoples have the right of self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Inadequacy of political, economic, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence; and

Immediate steps should be taken, in trust and non-self-governing territories or all other territories which have not yet attained independence, to transfer all powers to the peoples of these territories, without any conditions or reservations, in accordance with their freely expressed will and desire, and without any distinction as to race, creed, or colour, in order to enable them to enjoy complete independence and freedom.

On February 22, 1962, a resolution on Southern Rhodesia was introduced in the Trusteeship Committee by ten Afro-Asian countries and Yugoslavia. It asked the Assembly's Special Committee of Seventeen to 'consider whether the territory of Southern Rhodesia has attained a full measure of self-government' and to report to the Assembly's 17th Session.

This resolution, which in fact gave several months' respite to the Tory Government in dealing with the Southern Rhodesian problem, was rejected by the U.K. delegate who was joined by 20 other delegations in recording dissentient votes. Among them were the delegations from the older Dominions (Australia, Canada, and New Zealand), and the familiar henchmen of imperialism, the United States, France, Greece, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, South Africa, Spain and Turkey.

The sponsors of this resolution alleged that racial discrimination existed in Southern Rhodesia, asserted that the great majority of

the population had had no opportunity to express their views on the territory's Constitution, and maintained that only the General Assembly could decide whether a territory was non-self-governing and whether an administering authority had the obligation to provide information under Article 73 of the U.N. Charter. Sir Hugh Foot for the United Kingdom objected strongly to the resolution. He claimed that as long ago as 1922 a referendum had been held in Southern Rhodesia on whether the people wanted 'responsible government' or union with South Africa. They had chosen self-government. Sir Hugh, however, quite naturally did not trouble to explain that the 'people' to whom he was referring were only a few thousand white settlers. He went on to declare that the Southern Rhodesian Government had no obligation to give information to the United Kingdom on its economic, social or educational policies, nor could the U.K. Government demand such information. Hence, ran Sir Hugh's facile argument, the British Government was not in a position to give the United Nations information which it did not itself receive.

Meanwhile, Sir Roy Welensky, the Federal Prime Minister, determined to preserve the principle of white supremacy was, with the delicacy and adroitness of some rogue rhinoceros, indulging in all manner of provocations against the Africans of Northern Rhodesia and Sir Edgar Whitehead, the Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister, was doing likewise in imitation in his territory.

In April, a 6-member sub-committee of the Special Committee of Seventeen came to London, led by the Committee's chairman, Mr. Chandra S. Jha of India, for conversations with British Government Ministers regarding the future of Southern Rhodesia. Reporting to Parliament the following month on the talks, Mr. Butler made it plain that they had not budged an inch. 'We are not prepared to make any further changes', he declared, referring to the Southern Rhodesian Constitution. When the U.N. General Assembly reconvened in June, Southern Rhodesia was not on the agenda, since the Assembly had endorsed the Trusteeship Committee's recommendation that the Special Committee should report on that territory to the 17th Session starting in September.

However, so urgent had the situation become that 41 African and Asian countries tabled a memorandum calling for the inclusion of the item on Southern Rhodesia. It said that the situation there was 'explosive' and that a new Constitution had been granted by the U.K. Government, whereby important reserve powers 'will be trans-

ferred to the present minority régime . . . based on the practice and policies of racial discrimination in disregard of the rights and aspirations of the vast majority of the territory's inhabitants'. Consideration of the subject at the Assembly's resumed session was, therefore, 'imperative', concluded the memorandum.

Contending that 'any debate at the United Nations about the situation in Southern Rhodesia goes beyond what is permissible under the U.N. Charter', Sir Patrick Dean said the onus must be on the proposers of the item 'to show beyond reasonable doubt that the situation in question is so urgent that it cannot wait until the regular session in September'. The General Committee decided by 9 votes against 7 with 5 abstentions to recommend the inclusion of the item on Southern Rhodesia on the agenda of the resumed session. The seven dissentients were: Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. Thus the way was prepared for the resounding defeat suffered by imperialism three weeks later.

The case of the British Government in regard to Southern Rhodesia rests on two contradictory claims. On the one hand it is a territory for which the U.K. Government is entirely responsible so that any debate at the United Nations regarding the situation there constitutes interference in Britain's internal affairs. On the other hand the claim is made that Southern Rhodesia is independent to such an extent that it is under no obligation to give information to Britain concerning its affairs and Britain is not entitled to demand it. Yet the British Government can and does convene Constitutional conferences which it guides in determining the future of that territory.

While the U.N. General Assembly is not legally entitled to intervene in the affairs of a member state and its decisions are not legally binding on member governments—only those of the Security Council are—it is, nevertheless, fully entitled to discuss any subject that falls within the scope of the U.N. Charter. The situation in Southern Rhodesia, which the Tanganyika delegate, Mr. Asanterabi Nsilo Swai emphasised could lead to discord in adjoining African countries and territories, constitutes such a subject quite clearly.

The Tory Government whose representatives never neglect an opportunity to lecture the newly-independent countries on their conduct of international affairs should be compelled by the powerful insistence of the British people to observe the decisions of the U.N. General Assembly and uphold the principles of the Charter.