

RHODESIA



The Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies reviewed the Rhodesian situation today in reply to a question in the House of Representatives from Mr. Nicholls (Bonython, S.A.). For your information, the text of the question and answer follows:-

Question: "I ask the Prime Minister a question. A week has elapsed since the right honourable gentleman was asked a question about Rhodesia. In that time, the Prime Ministers of Britain and Rhodesia are reported to have referred to the role that the right honourable gentleman might play in settling the differences between those countries. Will the Prime Minister state the Government's attitude on this matter which not only can affect the peace of Rhodesia and the major African States but the standing in the world of the entire British Commonwealth?"

Answer: "The honourable member may take it that this is a problem that we have approached with a proper realisation of its very grave importance.

"Some days ago, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, his discussions in London having failed to produce an agreement, rang me and promoted to me an idea that there might be a Commonwealth mission to Rhodesia which, if it were to be useful, should include, say, two of the African leaders, one from Asia and myself. This presented me with a very difficult problem. Mr. Wilson followed up his call that night with a cable repeating his request.

"I do not need to tell the honourable member that this presented me with some political difficulties, but I gave the matter a lot of thought. I concluded that I ought not to stand in the way of the sending of a Commonwealth mission because slight though the hope might be, there might be some hope of arriving at a composition. So, after great and anxious thought, I said that I would be willing to go. I showed to the Leader of the Opposition for his information my cable and my reasons.

"In the result, as we now know, the Prime Minister of Rhodesia has rejected the mission idea. He has said that he does not want a mission and that he will not receive it. This means that the whole position goes back into a state of deadlock. It looks as though - one cannot be positive however - this deadlock is to be resolved by the Government of Southern Rhodesia declaring its independence unilaterally; in other words, illegally. That may not be the situation but at the present moment, this seems to be the case.

"Messages have been exchanged, I gather, between Mr. Wilson and Mr. Smith. I have not seen the text of these messages. I have had no further communications. Even at the last moment we all hope that better counsels will prevail and, to say nothing else, that there may be some process of delay in which heat can go down and in which people can accommodate themselves to new ideas.

"I do not think there are many people, even among African leaders, who have strong views on this matter, who would demand an instantaneous creation of adult suffrage in Rhodesia. I think most people looking at the situation hope to see steady progress - a phasing in of the ultimate majority rights of the native people.

"That has been my own view. It is a view I advocated in London and which indeed I pressed to Mr. Smith in a long letter to him when he was in London for these discussions. This view appears to be unacceptable to the Government of Rhodesia and it looks as if we will have some extremely difficult problems presented to us. Of course, none of us would fail to understand something of the position of the European settlers, if I may so call them, chiefly the British settlers, in Southern Rhodesia. They have made an enormous contribution to the country. They have rights which everybody would want to protect. So the matter is not utterly simple.

"What will be done in the event of a unilateral declaration of independence will be decided, in the first place, I have no doubt, by the Government of Great Britain, which is the colonial power and which, by common agreement amongst all of us, has the responsibility for dealing with the Government of Rhodesia. This is a matter between the two of them. In due course, we will learn what the Government of Great Britain proposes and we will, as a Government, have to give earnest thought to what we will present to the Parliament as the policy of the Government. That is as far as I want to go at present; but one thing is certain: If there is a unilateral declaration of independence, there can be no diplomatic recognition by the Australian Government of a government so formed."

CANBERRA,
21st October, 1965.