

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SPEECH

BY

The Rt. Hon. SIR ROBERT MENZIES,
K.T., C.H., Q.C., M.P.,

ON

RHODESIA

Ministerial Statement

[From the "Parliamentary Debates," 16th November, 1965]

Sir ROBERT MENZIES (Kooyong—Prime Minister).—by leave—Mr. Speaker, I propose to make a statement to the House. When I have finished it, I will table some relevant documents on Rhodesia. Those documents contain a verbatim account of the communications between Mr. Ian Smith and the Prime Minister of Great Britain. I am happy to say that there will be enough copies of the documents for every honorable member to have a copy for his own consideration. At the conclusion of my statement, which will not be very long, I will move that the House take note, not only of the paper, but also of the papers that I will table so that all will be available for discussion in due course.

Recent events in Rhodesia, and the reactions to those events in other countries, have presented to all of us acutely difficult problems. It is therefore desirable that I should, on behalf of the Government, set out for the benefit of honorable members what we believe to be the facts and what views we take on the various suggested remedies. First I should point out that as Great Britain is for this purpose the colonial power, only the Parliament of Great Britain could grant independ-

ence to Rhodesia. The Unilateral Declaration of Independence by the Rhodesian Government was therefore illegal. The Declaration having been made, and the Governor having dismissed Mr. Smith and his government, a position arose in which the only lawful government in Rhodesia is now the Government of the United Kingdom.

The executive authority is at present in the hands of the Governor, subject to any legislative or administrative steps taken by Great Britain. We accept the view that it now becomes necessary for the Governor of Rhodesia to call, if he can, a new government into existence. If he cannot do so, the responsibility for the government of Rhodesia will rest with Great Britain. It is important, I think, to remember these basic facts. Rhodesia is not now without a government at all. That is, it is not in a state of anarchy, but is subject to the direct authority and control of Great Britain. Let me emphasise this. The objective of any action now to be taken must surely be to assist the United Kingdom to bring into being a constitutional government, and to end the illegal situation in Rhodesia. The sooner this can be done, the better. If it cannot be done, or if it is not done with reasonable

promptness, the risks of violence, bloodshed, and extreme action, to which I will refer later, will grow, bringing grief and suffering to millions of human beings.

The Rhodesian problem has twice been discussed at Prime Ministers' Conferences. On each occasion, it was unanimously—I repeat, unanimously—accepted that the authority and responsibility for leading Rhodesia to independence must continue to rest with Britain. Though this seems at present to be under some challenge in the United Nations Assembly, it still remains the central truth in the controversy. In the discharge of its responsibilities, the Government of the United Kingdom went to great pains to conduct discussions with the then Prime Minister and Government of Rhodesia. I will narrate, as objectively as possible, what the British Government did. It indicated very plainly that it was not contemplating force; that it wished to establish a basis for ultimate independence which would be fair to all the people of Rhodesia. It did not take the extreme view, now being advocated by some, that the Constitution of Rhodesia should immediately be altered so as to provide for an immediate African majority. It realised that the people were not yet ready for this, and that to act precipitately might conceivably create what might be called a “Congo situation”, of unhappy memory.

The Government of the United Kingdom indicated five principles as providing the basis upon which independence could be granted. These principles were—

1. The principle and intention of unimpeded progress to majority rule, already enshrined in the 1961 Constitution of Rhodesia, 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.

As principles, these appear, as Mr. Harold Wilson has said in the House of Commons to have been accepted by Mr. Smith. The real difficulties arose as to their application. The five principles, as I took an opportunity of telling Mr. Wilson, were and are completely in line with our own thinking. Having regard to what has happened, I think I should now tell the House that I sent a message to Mr. Smith just as he was entering upon his discussions in London. I said I had a natural understanding of the problems confronting the European settlers in Rhodesia, a country which has enjoyed its own substantially but technically incomplete form of self-government for many years, and in which the contribution of the European settlers to the economic vigour of the country has been most substantial. I repeated my own view, which I have on several occasions expressed, sometimes quite forcibly, I hope, in Prime Ministers' Conferences, that two extreme views that had been put forward were not practicable.

The first extreme view was that either immediately or within a few months there should be adult suffrage with, in consequence, an African majority. If this view were to prevail then, as I said to my friend Mr. Smith, I could see all the elements of bad, because inexperienced, government, and possible economic disaster. The other extreme view was that the achievement of an African majority should be indefinitely resisted. This view, as I have repeatedly said, and, as I said to Mr. Smith, was, in the prevailing international political climate, quite impracticable.

I pointed out to Mr. Smith, as I have done in Prime Ministers' Conferences, that in my opinion the matter was one of timetable, a matter of phasing in more and more African voters until after some reasonable period of time they found themselves in a majority. By “phasing in” I mean such measures as adjustments to the B roll and perhaps the creation of a blocking third in the local Parliament. After all, the 1961 Rhodesian Constitution and the discussions attending it seemed to me, as I pointed out to Mr. Smith and as I have pointed out in Prime Ministers' Conferences, to contemplate that ultimately the African voters would prevail. I told Mr.

Smith that the working out of such a timetable should provide a good basis for agreement. I told him that should agreement fail to emerge and should there then be a unilateral declaration of independence, the results, not all of which were foreseeable, could be painful and difficult. I told him, as I have since told this House, that Commonwealth countries would not recognise an independent nationhood so achieved.

It should be clearly understood that a similar line was followed with much patience and reasonableness by the British Government. Mr. Wilson himself, in his speech to the House of Commons, put it in this way—

Although successive British Governments—

I emphasise "successive British Governments"; the Home Government and the Wilson Government have followed identical policies in this respect—

are deeply and irrevocably committed to guaranteed and unimpeded progress to majority rule, the British Government, who alone through the British Parliament have the legal power to grant independence, do not believe that in the present and tragic and divided conditions of Rhodesia, a majority can or should come today, or tomorrow. A period of time is needed, time to remove the fears and suspicions between race and race, time to show that the Constitution of Rhodesia with whatever amendments may later be made can be worked and is going to be worked and that the rule of law equally with the maintenance of essential human rights will be paramount and the time required—

This, I think, is a very wise statement—

cannot be measured by clock or calendar but only by achievement.

In spite of all these efforts, this illegal declaration of independence has now been made with the constitutional consequences to which I have referred. What has happened since? The British Government has done two things. First it has, through the Governor, dismissed the Smith Government. It has prohibited exports of arms to Rhodesia. It has imposed certain exchange restrictions. It has denied Rhodesia access to the London capital market and has terminated Commonwealth preferences.

Some of these clearly have more relevance to the particular position of the United Kingdom than they would have to the position of Australia. But the British Government has also imposed a ban on the import of tobacco and sugar into the United Kingdom, these

two items constituting more than one-third of the total Rhodesian exports. It will be observed that the imposition of these sanctions by Great Britain has been made with what I would call constructive moderation. As I understand it, it is not aimed at ruining the total economy of Rhodesia, for that would be to punish indiscriminately, but to provide a means of persuading the European minority and its leaders to realise the gravity of the situation, to have second thoughts, and to approach the lawful Government with an expression of willingness to negotiate to finality on the basis of the five principles.

The second action taken by the British Government was to bring the matter before the notice of the Security Council. Now this may at first sight seem to be inconsistent with the sound basic proposition that this is a matter between Great Britain and Rhodesia. But I have no doubt that the British Government felt that it was better for it to take the matter to the Security Council, to outline the steps taken by it, and endeavour to secure international support for its actions, than for the matter to go to the United Nations under the auspices of other people who might demand courses of action which did not recognise either the particular authority and responsibility of Great Britain in this matter or the present constitutional position of Rhodesia. Recent events seem to have justified this view on the part of the British Government, though they have at the same time presented us all with problems of the utmost gravity.

I turn now to considering our own attitude. We have, as I have previously pointed out, refused to recognise what is now an illegal administration. We have also in this House rejected any notion of the use of armed force which would be repugnant to the people of Australia, but would also inevitably produce more ruin and disaster than any of us would be prepared to contemplate. We will not either physically or financially contribute to the use of force. Measures of enforcement—if I may use that phrase—need a good deal of thought. Are they to punish, or to persuade, or even to compel? We reject the idea of punishment, for it would be indiscriminating and therefore unjust. The machinery of persuasion deserves more thought. This great problem is essentially a matter to be solved by negotiation, in the light of the principles that have been

stated, and with the object of securing a peaceful and ultimately a democratic future for Rhodesia.

The demands currently being made at the United Nations for violent repression require critical examination. Suppose the United Nations directs or proposes military sanctions. What will be the object of this exercise? If it is to defeat the European Rhodesians in the field and kill a number of them, what problem will be solved? If adopted it would represent a violent course in which the innocent would suffer with the guilty, and would embitter racial relationships in the whole African continent for generations to come. If the object is not to be punishment but persuasion, what is it that the Rhodesians will need to concede in the face of force? What new Constitution or form of Government will be demanded? It is, alas, quite clear that if the United Nations authorised armed force, the clamour would be for an immediate adult suffrage, the immediate application of which would quite plainly have at the best hazardous, and at the worst disastrous results. What is needed in Rhodesia is a reasonable timetable, accompanied by a special educational campaign, to which all of us might well contribute something, to fit the African voters for their ultimate authority.

What I have said emphasises the nature of the deep differences which the debates in the United Nations have already disclosed, differences which are fraught with great danger and on which we are bound to express our own views with some frankness.

The first difference, and I here repeat myself, concerns the position of Great Britain as the colonial power whose legislative authority has been illegally defied by the Smith administration. That problem is one primarily for Great Britain and Rhodesia. What Great Britain is seeking at the United Nations, as we understand it, is general international support for her own measures of an economic kind. This does not satisfy what may be called the direct action or armed force views of many nations, particularly of some in the Afro-Asian group. They demand armed force, and are attacking Great Britain for not employing it. If these nations had their way, the United Nations would no doubt be called upon to establish what might be

somewhat ironically called "a peace-keeping" force. I say ironically, because the peace to be restored or kept would have been broken by the action of these nations themselves.

I have already put and answered the question as to the objective of armed force which, it would appear, would be not only to punish but to create a new Constitution and system of government on a basis which we would not want to see established overnight, or prematurely. My colleagues and I have had very great reservations about even economic sanctions.

Mr. Uren.—I thought you would have.

Sir ROBERT MENZIES.—I am delighted to hear that the honorable member has been thinking. I will repeat the statement, having regard to this brilliant interjection. My colleagues and I have had very great reservations about even economic sanctions. If we accept for ourselves some economic measure or measures, it will not be because we think them intrinsically equitable. They may bear most heavily upon the Africans themselves—which is something worth thinking about—and if strongly resisted by the Rhodesians themselves imposing sanctions against, for example, Zambia, formerly Northern Rhodesia, that great copper producing country might well be ruined. But making allowances for these views, we have come to the conclusion, particularly having regard to the way in which Great Britain is being attacked for employing peaceful means, that we would regard economic measures as the lesser of two evils. The greater evil would be the use of force with all its bloodshed and misery. This would be aggravated if the forces were directed by racial hatreds or gave rise to political consequences of which advantage could be taken by other and more hostile nations. It might well be, and this would appear to be the judgment of the British Government, that the losses arising from the kind of economic measures they have announced will be sufficiently serious, while not involving utter disaster, to induce most Rhodesians to have second thoughts, and to come back through constitutional means to the negotiating table. We hope that this will occur, and will occur before too much damage has been inflicted on people who have, as I have pointed out, been the greatest contributors to the prosperity of Rhodesia.

We will not export arms or military equipment to Rhodesia. We do not import sugar from Rhodesia, with which we have a fairly modest trade. But we do import tobacco. On this we will follow what has been done by Britain, and put a ban on the import of Rhodesian tobacco; this, of course, will not apply to tobacco in transit. Tariff preferences to Rhodesia will be suspended. We will cooperate with the Government of Britain in two other financial respects: First, we will amend the definition of the sterling area in the Banking (Foreign Exchange) Regulations, so as to exclude Rhodesia, or make such other amendment as is appropriate to exclude Rhodesia from the treatment accorded to sterling area countries, and, secondly, we will take such action as is open to us to prevent evasion of the British exchange control measures.

We do not have any diplomatic mission in Rhodesia. We have a trade representative, whose appointment in Rhodesia will terminate. Above all things, we hope that none of these measures will be of long duration. It would be a sad commentary on the unwisdom of mankind, if through the obstinate pursuit of an illegal course, this prosperous country should be reduced economically to ruin, to the lasting unhappiness of all of its people, voters or non-voters, white or black. I present the following papers—

Rhodesia—Ministerial Statement, 16th November 1965.

Documents on Rhodesia, 27th October 1964-11th November 1965—

and move—

That the House take note of the papers.

Debate (on motion by **Mr. Calwell**) adjourned.