The Changing Rhodesian Political Culture: 1969

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The year 1969 should be remembered as the year in which a new White Rhodesian political culture finally emerged. Two reasons may be adduced for this contention; in the first place the constitutional issue was clarified by the publication of a new constitution approved by referendum on 20 June, and secondly there developed a realisation that a solution of the Anglo-Rhodesian dispute was extremely unlikely. In short, the prospect of majority African rule became more and more remote.

A political culture has been defined as "the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place [and which] provides the subjective orientation to politics."[1] Political cultures are not, however, entirely "natural"; they are also "created". In 1969, the values and attitudes held by political actors, which are a component of political culture, underwent a decisive clarification.

A political culture is most probably formed at certain significant moments in the course of national history. These key moments occur, most particularly, with ethnic inflow or immigration from another culture, dominant or otherwise; at the moment when representative institutions are being formed and finally, at the time when party alliances come under discussion.[2] In 1969, Rhodesian political institutions were settled with the greatest degree of finality certain in that country's uncertain political climate. It was also the year in which new party alliances were formed and new and more positive positions were established.

If we take the first point first, namely that of considering Rhodesia's political institutions, we should find that in 1969, the Rhodesian government, already pronounced a *de jure* government by the Rhodesian judiciary, determined on a final termination of negotiations with the British government. During 1968, the second attempt at an Anglo-Rhodesian *rapprochement* had ended in failure on board H.M.S. *Fearless*. The British then set out their position in two White Papers.[3] The Rhodesian government likewise set out its case in a White Paper, and part of this is worth quoting at length as it offered an interpretation of the respective positions of the two sides in the dispute:

> "*British position* (as publicly stated by the British Government)
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> (a) There were three basic issues which, as far as the British were concerned, were non-negotiable, namely:
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> (i) The provision of a blocking quarter of directly elected African members in the Legislature;
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> (ii) the incorporation of a further safeguard for the specially entrenched provisions, e.g. a system of appeals to the Privy Council as set out in the *Tiger* proposals;
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> (iii) the establishment of a broad-based Government to serve until the new constitution came into force;
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> (b) Other points of difference would be negotiable.

(c) The six British principles must be adhered to.

Rhodesian position

(a) Any blocking mechanism must provide for equal numbers of elected Africans and Chiefs in the Senate.
(b) Appeals to the Privy Council were entirely unacceptable.
(c) An interim broad-based Government could be countenanced if this were not to be part of a so-called "return to legality" as envisaged on H.M.S. *Tiger*.
(d) Other points of difference would be negotiable.
(e) The six British principles were of no concern to Rhodesia and were solely a British commitment."[4]

After this no further attempt was made to bridge the gulf between the two sides, and, in February 1969, the Rhodesian Front produced a set of proposals for a new constitution. There was some confusion at first, because the document issued on 24 February 1969 from the headquarters of the Rhodesian Front in Salisbury differed from that issued shortly afterwards in South Africa in respect of its proposed scheme for the amendment of the constitution. This point of difference was taken up in an editorial in *The Rhodesia Herald* of 21 March, but Mr. Smith lent his personal charisma to the constitution, describing it as a "world-beater". The Government's definitive proposal for the constitution appeared on 21 May 1969 accompanied by a speech from Mr. Smith.[5] These proposals had effectively been approved by the Rhodesian Front in February; Mr. Smith had comfortably succeeded in 1969 where he had only narrowly survived at the Rhodesian Front Congress in 1968.

The constitution permitted Africans to elect eight members to the Parliament of 66 seats. A further eight would be elected by Chiefs and Headmen. The present "A" and "B" rolls would be eliminated as would cross-voting. African representation would be determined by the payment of income tax to the national exchequer. It was suggested that, in the far future, when Africans paid an amount of income tax equivalent to that paid by Europeans they would have a parity of representation; 50 seats in the national Parliament of 100 members. The introduction of a Senate was envisaged with 23 members, ten Europeans and ten Africans who would all be chiefs. There would be a small but highly significant group of three persons to be appointed by the President without reference to race. This group would be crucial in the formation of the racial composition of the Senate, particularly where amendments to the Constitution and to the entrenched clauses of the constitution were concerned. Given the admittedly remote time when Africans might expect to receive a parity of representation in the Assembly, the franchise issue may be said to have been settled in 1969. At present there are four and three quarter million Africans in Rhodesia (shown by the preliminary results of the 1969 Census), and they pay about 8½% of Rhodesia's direct taxation; expressed in another way, for every $200 paid by the European at present, the African pays only about $1. Africans pay other taxes, of course, but the constitution is concerned solely with income tax.

One determinant of the Rhodesian political culture was settled by this new constitution. The question of representative institutions had now been "solved" with all the finality possible in the situation. No more debate may be expected over questions of voting rolls, parliamentary structure or ideal of any political institutions until such time that the Rhodesian Front has been removed from office. Before 1969 it was always possible to visualise a *rapprochement* between Britain and Rhodesia but this would presumably involve an acceptance of unimpeded progress to majority rule, the first of Britain's Six Principles. By accepting the proposed constitution by referendum on 20 June 1969, the Rhodesian electorate logically turned its back on such a *rapprochement*. Whatever else this means, it clearly implies a certain degree of certainty if not finality.

The question of party alignments may perhaps be examined next. The Centre Party, largely white-sponsored party established in order to oppose the Rhodesian Front, was formed in mid-1968 and it appeared, until June 1969, that the Centre Party might constitute a substantial opposition to the Rhodesian Front. The Centre Party took its stand on a platform of settlement of the Anglo-Rhodesian dispute and gradual acceptance within the terms of the Six Principles including unimpeded progress towards majority rule. The Centre Party appeal could only attract the European electorate in so far as it was prepared to accept the certainty of eventual African majority rule. The eventuality of majority rule was the price in fact to be paid for settlement with Great Britain. The Centre Party could only appeal to the African population in so far as it was able to persuade Africans that majority rule ought to be held back for the rest of the century. This would prove an extremely difficult proposition to accept for

sophisticated and politically conscious Africans. In this context ought to be remembered the words of de Tocqueville: "It is exetremely difficult to prevent an extension of the franchise; something like trying to make water run uphill."

The results of the referendum were somewhat blurred as the conservatives wished to accept the republican proposals, but to reject what they regarded as a "liberal" constitution, whilst the Centre Party rejected both the republic and the constitution. Naturally Rhodesian Front supporters welcomed the proposals, both republic and constitution. Party alignments just before the June referendum then were in a state of uncertainty which was not to be dispelled until after the referendum.

Of the many interesting observations made on the fate of Rhodesia after 1969, perhaps the most interesting came from a journalist, Douglas Brown, writing to the *Sunday Telegraph* of 25 May. He observed that a unique political formula had been established in Rhodesia, arguing that "a kind of perverse honesty has broken through". He argued that "Mr. Smith's Government must be the first in modern history that actually proclaims a police state as the norm . . . " He contrasted this with the South African situation where the "governing principles" of apartheid gave rise to a series of measures designed to give it logical effect. In a sense, the Rhodesian political culture specified the measures which it proposed to take against its enemies in some detail, without any *a priori* thinking involved. The South Africans, on the other hand, refused to take any measures without an appeal to a *principle*, the principle of rational or quasi-rational racial segregation.

Given the hostile attitude of the outside world, it may be worthwhile asking a fundamental question. Is Rhodesia a democracy? Clearly it could not be described as a Madisonian-type democracy: for Dahl, speaking of the Madisonian concept of majority rule, argues that preoccupation with the rights and wrongs of majority rule has "run like a red thread through American political thought since 1789".[6] As far as Rhodesia is concerned, majority rule is a *red* thread. Indeed the Rhodesian political myth may be the assertion that majority rule is a myth itself. The essence of the case of the Rhodesian government is the incompetence, supposedly self-evident, of African governments. Dahl distinguishes further between government by a minority and government by minorities. In a sense Rhodesia does constitute the latter rather than the former case; for there may exist a contrived but *de facto* "alliance" between the hegomonic Rhodesian Front and the minority Ndebele tribe together with duly appointed African chiefs. Rhodesia in fact may be described as neither a democracy nor yet as a fully fledged totalitarian monopoly. It has in fact, to use the terminology of Giovanni Sartori, a *predominant* party system structure.[7]

U.D.I. was, in a sense, a "democratic" movement, removing as it did the barriers to the emergence of a new white Rhodesian independence, and substituting a more specific set of Rhodesian *mores*. Rhodesian society is consequently socially less pretentious than before 1965 — "what has been removed is the garden-party syndrome". Alternatively it might be said that the new Rhodesian elite has captured the role of the old quasi-British aristocracy expatriate in Rhodesia.

There exists in post-independence Rhodesia a non-competitive political system, closely approximating to monopoly in economics. Competition in politics is however neither as common or rare as is competition in economics. There is a constant tendency for imperfect competition or even oligopoly (corresponding to oligarchy) as in the facts of social and political organisation. One does not have to be too cynical to remark that those who preach competition frequently practise monopoly, but as eminent a commentator as Dahl has argued, 'In a rough sense the essence of all competitive politics is bribery of the electorate by politicians'.[8] Such bribery may even be necessary in states where such cajolements may be regarded as no more than rhetorical. The political scientist whose main field of interest lies in Africa or Asia faces a two-fold analytical problem. He may see his subject as a whole with African politics as a part of the whole. Should he make this axiomatic, he will find it difficult to avoid seeing African politics as a mere derivative of Western European politics. He may on the other hand see his speciality as *sui generis*. The concept of political culture is an excellent example of this twin dilemma. When Almond and Coleman offered functionalism as the answer to the dilemma, they really did little more than to argue that in every non-European there may be a European wanting to get out. They declared that there must be a "political culture" lurking just beneath every political surface, slightly difficult to recognise until one was practised in the techniques of the functionalists.[9]

A political culture in Rhodesia may exist, but it is still largely an unquarried area. Should it be found, it might then be "organised", "socialised", "mobilised" in order to attack the old, discredited apparatus of legalism and the state. Unfortunately,

it will never really be easily possible to persuade the simple electors that a "state" which protects their interests is an enemy, that it does not exist, is not worth their homage, loyalty and respect, just as it is not easily possible to persuade those who curse a regime to assure them that their fears are unfounded because the object of their hatred is no more than a process, or a bundle of functions.

Nearly two decades have passed since the withdrawal of European colonial regimes from Africa. Considerable political experimentation has taken place. Most states first attempted to adapt themselves in accordance with the Westminster, or a related, system, but in most cases for a very short while only. Rhodesia, however, still operates a version of the Westminster model and this was commended and recommended in the abortive Whaley Commission Report in April 1968.[10] The Westminster model has been a singularly important element in the Rhodesian political culture. The retention of parliamentary forms, even in a truncated fashion, is significant because institutions "embody power and not mere opinion". Yet this situation is changing and with it Rhodesian political culture; for nothing, not even a political culture, can remain static. Rhodesia is no longer what Popper would call "open society". This is not to suggest that the new states of Africa have discovered a more democratic political path to follow. The lugubrious dialogue between corrupt politician and austere soldier has increased and multiplied, and indeed, between 1958 and 1969, fifteen African states were successfully taken over by the military, out of a total of thirty-five.[11] The point is simply made that Rhodesia is in Africa; its turmoils are Africa's turmoils. There is no law which says that men north or south of the Zambezi are politically more gifted than others, though it is a part of conventional wisdom to accept that this is so. There is throughout all Africa a curious paradox; there exists both a ferment and a fear of ideas. Sir Isaiah Berlin, speaking of nineteenth century Russia once said: "If a man was a professor in late nineteenth century Russia, then the mere fact of his involvement with ideas made him an implacable opponent of the regime in which he lived; if it did not, he was, in the eyes of the militant, a traitor, a man who had sold out, a coward or a ninny." These words are unfortunately applicable in much of independent Africa in 1969.

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