

RHODESIA: SECURITY CLAMP-DOWN

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RECENT supplementary estimates tabled in the Rhodesian House of Assembly mean that the Smith regime is now setting aside nearly 20 per cent of its total budgetary appropriation for police and defence expenditure. The money to be spent directly on defence during the financial year to June 1976 is going up by nearly one-third; expenditure on the British South Africa Police by one-sixth.

This year is expected to be the 'roughest and toughest' that the Rhodesian regime has experienced to date in its increasingly desperate efforts to keep abreast of the armed liberation struggle. Since early January, the number of men deployed by the security forces in the field has increased by nearly two-thirds, and recruiting is actively proceeding to expand both the regulars and the reserves. Plans have been announced by the regime's Ministry of Defence to commission African officers for the first time in the army's history, and it is forecast that the present ratio of about three black soldiers to every

two whites will rise until the 'vast majority' of the army are Africans. Now that virtually all available adult white males have been drafted into one form of military service or another, recruiting drives have been stepped up abroad. English language courses have also been introduced into the army to make fuller use of the large numbers of Portuguese-speaking settlers who have entered Rhodesia recently.

Since the beginning of this year, the official 'operational area' has doubled, and now extends down the entire length of Rhodesia's eastern border with Mozambique as far as the junction with South Africa. A new front, 'Operation Thrasher', has been opened in the south and east of the country, while contingency plans are acknowledged to exist to combat guerrilla incursions in the north and west. Between the launching of 'Operation Hurricane' in north-eastern Rhodesia in December 1972, and the end of March 1976, 86 members of the security forces are admitted to have been killed in battles with African freedom fighters. Counter-insurgency operations are co-ordinated through a committee system, or 'Joint Operations Command', bringing together representatives of the army, police, air force and civil administration.

As far as African civilians in the operational areas are concerned, security continues to be tightened up even further. Since August last year, the entire length of Rhodesia's border with Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana has been under a dusk-to-dawn curfew and protected by a 'free fire' zone varying in width from one to five kilometres. The security forces are under orders to fire at those apprehended near the border who fail to give themselves up when challenged, and on March 26 it was announced in an official communiqué that eleven curfew-breakers had been shot in the past two weeks alone. The border with Mozambique is heavily mined and protected by barbed wire-topped security fencing wired up to an electronic alarm system.

The regime's programme of mass population removal into so-called 'protected villages' (which are fenced) and 'consolidated villages' (which are unfenced but based on the same principle of amalgamating a number of hamlets or kraals together under armed guard and subject to a strict curfew) is now being extended southwards along the Mozambique border. In something of a departure from previous practice, and in a tacit admission that other methods of 'winning hearts and minds' have failed, spokesmen for the regime now concede that the primary purpose of the 'villages' is forcibly to break contact between the freedom fighters and the local population of the operational areas. Their defensive and strategic significance has always been

obvious to the outsider, but in the past the main official emphasis was given to the idea that the villages were designed to 'protect' civilians from atrocities allegedly committed by guerrillas, and at the same time to promote economic and community development by consolidating people and services. The regime has recently stated that between 175,000 and 200,000 people have been removed into consolidated villages; the number involved is almost certainly much higher than this and may approach one million.

Responsibility for the protected villages is being progressively transferred from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Defence, and a new body of specially trained ex-servicemen, the Guard Force, is being formed to take over their administration in July this year. It is intended to put African warrant officers in charge of Guard Force units at different villages, thereby releasing white personnel for more active military service elsewhere. The Ministry of Internal Affairs employees, both black and white, who are currently posted in the protected villages and are responsible, *inter alia*, for the organisation of forced labour, have established a reputation for harsh and authoritarian rule. Like other members of the security forces, they are protected under the terms of the recently introduced Indemnity and Compensation Act from any legal proceedings resulting from acts committed 'in good faith for the purpose of or in connection with the suppression of terrorism'. Chiefs, as government-paid and appointed officials, can also claim the protection of the Act, and, under the frequently amended Emergency Powers (Maintenance of Law and Order) Regulations, have been granted powers of arrest, summary punishment and confiscation of property.

New Emergency Regulations published on March 19 this year appear designed to prevent independent welfare organisations from working in the protected villages and the border zones. They provide for the banning of any financial assistance to residents of the operational areas, where it is 'known or suspected that the money, or things bought with it, have been made available to terrorists.' Agencies such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia, which has repeatedly called for an independent enquiry into alleged atrocities committed by the security forces, are obviously an embarrassment to the regime and could well find their work even more severely restricted by this new legislation.

In the country as a whole, there are indications that a new wave of preventive detentions is getting under way. Arthur Chadzingwa, a leading member of the African National Council who was released from detention in January to take part in the recent constitutional

talks, has since been rearrested. The total number of Africans held in prison, detention camps and police stations without charge or trial is unknown although it is certainly at least as high as 800. Under Emergency Regulations the police are empowered to arrest without warrant and to detain incommunicado for up to 60 days. There is every reason to expect these and other powers to be put into effect with increasing rigour in the coming weeks.

