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CABINET

RHODESIA: THE PEARCE REPORT

Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

1. The Report of the Commission on Rhodesian Opinion under the chairmanship of Lord Pearce has been circulated to the Cabinet.
2. I now circulate at Annex a draft statement which I propose, subject to the agreement of my colleagues, to make in the House of Commons on Tuesday 23 May.

A D-H

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

19 May 1972

RHODESIA: DRAFT PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT

1. With your permission, Mr Speaker, and that of the House, I wish to make a statement about Rhodesia.
2. On 25 November 1971 I announced the appointment of a Commission under Lord Pearce to ascertain whether the Proposals for a Settlement which I had agreed with Mr Smith were acceptable to the Rhodesian people as a whole. The Pearce Commission have completed their difficult task with independence, skill and devotion and the text of their comprehensive Report will be in the Vote Office when I sit down. The Government are very grateful to Lord Pearce and his fellow Commissioners.
3. Lord Pearce and his Vice-Chairman have reached the conclusion first that the great majority of those who gave their opinions to the Commission had a sufficient understanding of the content and implications of the Proposals to pass judgment on them; second, that the Proposals were acceptable to the great majority of Europeans; third, that the majority of Africans rejected them. The Commission have therefore concluded that the people of Rhodesia as a whole did not regard the Proposals as acceptable as a basis for independence. They explain in detail their reasons for reaching this conclusion, their approach to their task and the methods which they used for testing opinion. They consider the extent and effect of intimidation, the validity of the claim that the Chiefs speak for their people on political matters, the measure of understanding of the Proposals and the reasons given for acceptance or rejection of them. Inevitably there are some paragraphs which deal with particularly contentious issues and which will be widely and properly debated both here and in Rhodesia.
4. When Hon Members have read the Report I hope that they will study once again the terms of the proposed settlement for although the proposals have failed to gain acceptance they still represent a genuine attempt to find a sensible and in all the circumstances a just solution of Rhodesia's special social and political problems.
5. Hon Members will find in the Report a wide variety of views expressed by people of all races. I hope that particular attention will be given to those opinions and memoranda given by persons who are clearly intent upon furthering multi-racial co-operation.
6. They illustrate very clearly the dilemma facing anyone who tries to re-establish in Rhodesia the basis for a multi-racial society.

7. The choice lies starkly between a compromise settlement which by definition will not wholly satisfy anyone but which will gain for the Africans a foot in the door of evolutionary political change, and a rapid and complete polarisation of the races and the prospect of certain conflict.

8. It may be that on further reflection the majority of Rhodesians, African and European, will decide to choose the way of compromise and to work together for orderly political change. I devoutly hope so for the sake of all Southern Africa.

9. It will be apparent to Hon Members that the negotiations of November followed by the Pearce Report have created a situation in which many new ideas will be current and in which positions which hitherto have been inflexible, could become more fluid. It is clear therefore that in these circumstances there must be time for reflection, particularly by Rhodesians, for it is from there that any fresh ideas must come.

10. Her Majesty's Government feel that plenty of time should be given in which the position can be clarified. We feel that the best atmosphere for constructive discussion and advance will be given if from the start we continue the situation as it is today, including sanctions, until we can judge whether or not an opportunity for a satisfactory settlement will occur once more. If there are to be processes of consultation inside Rhodesia they will take a considerable time. Accordingly it is likely that we shall have to ask for the renewal of the sanctions order in November. Meanwhile Her Majesty's Government will keep every option open.

11. There will be some who on reading the Report will feel that we have done all that can be expected of us as far as helping the Rhodesians back to legality is concerned and that we should wash our hands of the matter from now on. I must in honesty say to all Rhodesians that we are very nearly at the end of the road in our ability to help them to a solution of their problems. But I would ask Hon Members to remember that Britain is the only country which can restore to Rhodesia its international status and Britain is the only country which can, by the means of a settlement, legally lift sanctions off their shoulders. For these reasons whatever tomorrow may hold I trust that Hon Members may feel, when they have read the Report, that we should not cut off hope from Rhodesia today. A debate on these matters can be arranged through the usual channels.

