

HOUSE TAKES A REVOCABLE OPTION ON MUZOREWA

June 29, 1979

On last Thursday, June 28th, the House passed by a surprisingly large margin the compromise measure on Rhodesian sanctions proposed by the Foreign Affairs Committee:

" ... the President shall
(1) continue United States efforts to promote a speedy end to the Rhodesian conflict; and
(2) terminate sanctions against Zimbabwe-Rhodesia by October 15, 1979, unless the President determines it would not be in our national interest to do so and so reports to the Congress."

The key vote came when the House turned down an amendment proposed by Congressman William Broomfield, ranking Republican on the Committee, which would have made the termination date December 1st but, more importantly, would have stricken the President's discretion to keep sanctions in effect. The margin of defeat, 242-147, and the vote on final passage, 350-37, were so decisive that conservatives suffered a major setback in their plans for immediate, unequivocal backing of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia.

In earlier action, the Senate on June 12th had approved as part of the Department of Defense Authorization bill the lifting of sanctions on June 30th. While the margin of victory, 52-41, was not sufficient to over-ride a veto, which Secretary Vance had said was "very likely", it nevertheless seemed the prelude to a battle with the President if the House were to follow the Senate lead. The differences between the House and Senate language will be negotiated in conference committee on the Department of Defense Authorization bill.

The House action is a vindication of the House Subcommittee on Africa's strategy, which was to preempt ground from the conservatives by building a moderate-to-liberal consensus. Chairman Solarz and his colleagues conceded points in their preamble to those who saw virtue in the internal settlement. They called the elections "a significant step" and said the national interest required encouragement of "multi-racial democracy" with "majority rule and protection of minority rights." On the other hand, sanctions should not be lifted until Zimbabwe-Rhodesia by its actions had demonstrated that it was exercising "genuine majority rule." The latter phrase, however, was too controversial for the full committee, which substituted language allowing the President to retain sanctions if he finds it in the U.S. national interest, while expressing its preference for lifting sanctions in 3-1/2 months.

While the elections in Rhodesia of April 20th had created a favorable political context for the lifting of sanctions based on an alleged "democratic" mandate, pragmatic considerations have since surfaced to induce a mood of prudence in the Congress:

1. The African countries remain solidly against recognition of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. According to oil industry sources, Nigeria is supplying one out of eight gallons of oil that Americans consume; it is therefore in a position to lengthen the lines at the gas pumps very considerable if it should boycott or slow supplies to those who break sanctions. Gulf Oil, which gets 60% of its oil from Nigeria and 10% from Angola, has been lobbying against lifting sanctions.

2. Since Britain, the country with legal responsibility for de-colonizing Rhodesia, has not yet acted in spite of Margaret Thatcher's promises to lift sanctions, U.S. action now seems precipitous.

3. Muzorewa has yet to demonstrate that he is more than a puppet of the white power structure. Indeed his actions since the elections confirm his dependency. The white-officered military continues its raids on Zambia and Mozambique. Smith's role as "minister without portfolio" suggests he is still calling the shots while Muzorewa's trip to South Africa to confer on military assistance demonstrates his continued dependence on that country. At the same time, to meet the demands of the black population, Muzorewa has to demonstrate his independence in bringing about genuine changes in the power structure of the country. Such changes might lead to flight of white forces which are the base for his power. Such contradictions have promoted a wait and see attitude.

Where do we go from here? No one seems to know what the scenario will look like after Congress returns from recess on July 9th. Muzorewa is scheduled to arrive on that day to start lobbying for help. It is likely that the next struggle will occur when the conference committee meets to reconcile the House and Senate versions of the Defense Authorization bill. Since the bill has not yet reached the House floor, it may be late July before the issue is joined.

We suggest the following actions:

● Join us on the Capitol steps at 5 p.m. on July 10th in a demonstration demanding an end to the war on the basis of a genuine transfer of power in Zimbabwe and retaining sanctions until that goal is reached. Or plan your own local demonstration. There will be one in New York on the same day.

● Write to the President urging him not to meet Muzorewa. A sample letter is enclosed.

● Write to Melvin Price and other members of the House Armed Services Committee who voted for the compromise adopted on June 28th. (See enclosed list) Congratulate them on their vote. Ask that they stand firm on the expressed consensus of the House when discussing the Department of Defense bill either on the floor or in conference.

● Thank your representative for voting right on the bill (if he or she did). Use the vote on the Broomfield amendment, which is enclosed, as the gauge.

● Plan for an educational event in the early fall. The best film we know of that has been made recently is "Who has a Right to Rhodesia?" It gives a good "feel" of the issues involved in the war. It's available from Syracuse University Film Library, University of Michigan Audio Visual Center and the World Council of Churches office in New York (at 475 Riverside Dr., New York, N.Y. 10027). Since the film cannot be completely up to date, additional commentary may be needed from representatives of the Patriotic Front or other speakers we might be able to suggest.

Remember that the action taken by the House just means a delay in the Congressional battle on sanctions. So we need to use the intervening time to expand educational and outreach work on the issues at stake in Zimbabwe.