

The Ian Smith Papers on the Period up to UDI

J.R.T. Wood, *So Far and No Further! Rhodesia's bid for independence during the retreat from empire, 1959-1965*

30° South Publishers, Johannesburg, 2005

534 pp

ISBN 0 9584890 2 5

R350.00

So Far and No Further! is the first in a series of three books by Richard Wood that aims to utilise the hitherto closed source of Ian Smith's papers to produce an account of Rhodesian politics until Zimbabwe became independent in 1980. This first volume deals with the period up to the Rhodesian unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) on 11 November 1965. For Wood, privileged access to archives is nothing new. He was previously given permission by Sir Roy Welensky to work on his papers before they became generally available to scholars. The result was *The Welensky Papers* (1983), Wood's weighty account of the rise and fall of the Central African Federation. In many respects Wood's latest work fits well with *The Welensky Papers* and where the two books overlap, his latest account benefits from access to British governmental archives that have been opened since *The Welensky Papers* had been written.

In *So Far and No Further!* Wood sets out to chart the Rhodesian settlers' attempts to secure independence from Britain. The picture he paints of Anglo-Rhodesian negotiations at this time, is broadly sympathetic to the settler cause, for example in his description of the origin of the 1959 Nyasaland emergency. Wood cites the discovery of an African nationalist "murder plot" (p 16) to be carried out against the European population of Nyasaland as one of several factors leading to the declaration of a state of emergency. However, he fails to mention that the Devlin Commission, appointed to investigate the background of the emergency, dismissed the validity of a "murder plot" out of hand. Whilst Wood, like Colin Baker, may question the veracity of the Devlin Commission's findings, he fails to mention the position of other scholars,

for example John Darwin, who have found the Devlin Commission's findings to be sound.⁸

This omission reflects the wider failure of this book to place the Rhodesian experience within the wider historiography of decolonization. Wood makes no attempt to locate his account in relation to any of the standard texts on decolonization produced during the past twenty years. Consequently, the arguments put forward by Darwin, Hargreaves and Holland to explain Britain's colonial policy, receive no attention.⁹ This lack of engagement with historiography can also be seen in Wood's assessment of British politics. While Murphy's article on the Federal Intelligence and Security Bureau receives attention, his 1995 work, *Party Politics and Decolonization*, is seemingly ignored. As this book sets out to account for Conservative Party policy towards Africa during the period 1951 to 1964, its exclusion is surprising, to say the least.¹⁰

The book comprises twenty-seven chapters and is laid out in three sections. Following a foreword by Lord Deedes and a brief introduction to pre-1959 Rhodesian history, the first section, entitled "Sir Edgar Whitehead's Pursuit of Dominion Status", covers the period from Whitehead's bid for full independence in 1959 to his removal from office in December 1962. This section draws attention to the critical importance of the Land Apportionment Act. According to Wood the settlers saw the act as "their *Magna Carta*" (p 16), as land allocation had been a contentious issue for Africans since the first European settlement in the area. Wood accredits Whitehead's removal from office to his plans to reform the Land Apportionment Act, describing it as "a fatal commitment to make" (p 98). Therefore, Winston Field and Ian Smith's commitment to defend the Act led the larger settler community to lose faith in the United Federal Party's ability to uphold their interests in the face of African nationalists at home and Britain abroad. The significance of wider events in the United Nations and the Congo is also well described in this section, as Wood pinpoints the external influences that helped solidify diametrically opposed Rhodesian and British opinion.

8. C. Baker, *State of Emergency: Crisis in Central Africa, Nyasaland 1959-1960* (Taurus, London, 1997); J. Darwin, "The Central African Emergency, 1959", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 21, 3, September 1993.

9. J. Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988); J. Hargreaves, *Decolonization in Africa* (Longman, Harlow, 1996); R. Holland, *European Decolonization 1918-1981* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1985).

10. P. Murphy, *Party Politics and Decolonization: The Conservative Party and British Colonial Policy in Tropical Africa, 1951-1964* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995).

In the second section Wood charts the final months of the Central African Federation from December 1962 up to the removal of Field as Prime Minister and leader of the Rhodesian Front in April 1964. This section gives insight into the laborious negotiations that led initially to the break-up of the Federation, resulting in independence for Zambia and Malawi, and subsequently the Rhodesian Front's moves to secure independence for Southern Rhodesia from (notional) British rule. Disagreement between London and Salisbury over the interpretation of the 1961 Southern Rhodesian Constitution and over putative promises made at the Victoria Falls Conference during June 1963, led to claim and counter-claim sailing back and forth between the British and Rhodesians. This section draws to a close with the forced resignation of Winston Field as Prime Minister in April 1964. Wood contends that Field "was the victim" as much of his "own caution as of Rhodesian impatience to be free of the endless negotiations with Whitehall" (p 208). Here he links Britain's decision to court African nationalists, the often corrupt reality of newly independent African states and African nationalist movements within Southern Rhodesia as three factors providing the impetus for the vast majority of white Rhodesians to demand stronger action from their government.

This demand for action sets up the final section of the book, which begins with Ian Smith's ascension to power and draws to a close with Rhodesia's unilateral declaration of independence. This section weighs in at over two hundred pages and meticulously details the ongoing negotiations and deteriorating relationship between Whitehall and Salisbury. The relationship reached a new low with the Labour Party's victory in the British general election of October 1964. Harold Wilson assumed the British premiership and Wood notes that "despite his obvious qualities, the self-confident aggressive and often self-righteous Wilson was destined to never earn anything more than the contempt of most white Rhodesians" (p 241). On several occasions in this section, Wood refutes the widely held British belief that Smith was under the control of the more right-wing members of his cabinet, or indeed his wife Janet. According to Wood, Wilson's belief that Smith was under the control of Clifford Dupont gave him hope that Smith could be talked round into compromising over African advancement in Rhodesia. However, this was not to be the case and the volume ends with Rhodesia's unilateral declaration of independence on 11 November 1965.

So Far and No Further! benefits from extensive archival research and constitutes a comprehensive account of Rhodesian politics during this period. Unfortunately, though Wood makes effective use of the relevant

British documents, his account is disappointing in just those areas where his unique access to the papers of Ian Smith gives him an opportunity to excel. In his acknowledgements, Wood highlights that Ian Smith originally granted him access to the Smith papers in 1984. However, due to a lack of financial support to undertake this study, it has taken twenty years to produce the first volume. It seems that this delay coupled with the publication of Smith's *The Great Betrayal* in 1997, has stolen the thunder from Wood's eventual utilisation of this source. Whilst the Smith papers undoubtedly add flesh to the bones of Wood's narrative, on reflection one cannot help but feel disappointed at the quantity of new insights contained within them. It may however be that they have far more to divulge in the post-UDI context as Wood's future books may reveal.

The above criticism aside, *So Far and no Further!* provides a solid point for both students and scholars interested in Anglo-Rhodesian politics directly preceding UDI. This account, despite its limitations, is a welcome addition to the historiography of the period directly preceding UDI and provides the first comprehensive account of the Anglo-Rhodesian relationship based predominantly on archival sources.

Andrew Cohen
Department of History
University of Sheffield