

"Suicide of the West"*

by Milton Friedman

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Of the 49 countries in Africa, 15 are under direct military rule and 29 have one-party civilian governments. Only five have multi-party-political systems.

I have just returned from visiting two of these five – the Republic of South Africa and Rhodesia (the other three are Botswana, Gambia and Mauritius). If this way of putting it produces a double take, that is its purpose.

The actual situation in both South Africa and Rhodesia is very different from and very much more complex than the Black-White stereotypes presented by both the Government and the Press – and the situation in Rhodesia is very different from that in South Africa. Neither country is an ideal democracy – just as America is not. Both have serious racial problems – just as America has. Both can be justly criticized for not moving faster to eliminate discrimination – just as America can; but both provide a larger measure of freedom and affluence for all their residents – Black and White – than most other countries of Africa.

Both would be great prizes for the Russians – and US official policy appears well designed to assure that the Russians succeed in following up their victory in Angola through the use of Cuban troops by similar takeovers in Rhodesia and South Africa.

Rhodesia was opened up to the rest of the world less than a century ago by British pioneers. Since then Rhodesia has developed rapidly, primarily through its mineral production – gold, copper, chrome and other ores – and through highly productive agriculture. Both Whites and Africans have benefited from their co-operation. Modern cities, especially Salisbury, an extensive network of roads and communications, productive farm lands, mines and industrial works – all this would have been impossible for a population of Whites that even today totals fewer than 300,000.

On the other hand, without the knowledge, skill and capital provided by the Whites, Rhodesian Blacks would today be many fewer and far poorer. To judge from the crude evidence that is available, the Rhodesian Blacks in the modern sector enjoy an average income that is considerably more than twice as high as that of all the residents of the rest of Africa, excluding only South Africa.

The relation of the Whites to the Blacks is complex: a large dose of paternalism, social separation, discrimination in land ownership and little or no official discrimination in other respects. In particular, there is no evidence of that petty apartheid – separate post office entrances, toilets and the like – that was America's shame in the South and that I find so galling in South Africa.

The education of the Blacks has been proceeding by leaps and bounds. Today, half or more of the students at the University of Rhodesia are Black.

Guerrilla warfare from outside and inside the country has produced a reaction by the Government that can properly be described as repressive – but the provocation has clearly been great, and it is important to maintain a sense of proportion.

More than half the defense forces patrolling the borders are Black. I was told that more Blacks volunteer for the defense forces than can be accepted. The streets of Salisbury give a visual impression of a Black sea with occasional White faces that brings to life and gives new meaning to the 20-to-1 numerical population ratio.

It is very difficult to reconcile that visual impression with any widespread impression of feelings of oppression by the Blacks. If that existed, Rhodesia could not easily maintain such internal harmony or so prosperous an economy.

During the past ten years of sanctions, Rhodesia has grown in real terms more rapidly than in the prior ten years – and more rapidly than the rest of Africa. The external pressures against Rhodesia arise from its unwillingness to grant “majority rule” within a definite and brief timetable. Whatever the merits or demerits of “majority rule” as an abstract principle, the imposition of sanctions against Rhodesia on this ground is a striking example of a double standard.

The other former African colonies of Britain that were granted independence without question and without sanctions do not have anything approximating what Americans regard as majority rule. They have minority rule by a Black elite that controls the one party permitted to exist. If the elite minority in Rhodesia had happened to be Black instead of White, Britain would have rushed to grant them independence and provide “development assistance.”

“Majority rule” for Rhodesia today is a euphemism for a Black-minority government, which would almost surely mean both the eviction or exodus of most of the Whites and also a drastically lower level of living and of opportunity for the masses of Black Rhodesians. That, at any event, has been the typical experience in Africa – most recently in Mozambique.

Rhodesia has a freer Press, a more democratic form of government, a greater sympathy with Western ideals than most if not all the states of Black Africa. Yet we play straight into the hands of our communist enemies by imposing sanctions on it.

The Minister of Justice of Rhodesia cannot get a visa to visit the US – yet we welcome the Ministers of the Gulag Archipelago with open arms.

James Burnham had the right phrase for it: suicide of the West.

Notes

* Some impressions of South Africa and Rhodesia – an article by Professor Friedman which appeared in *The Sunday Times*, May 2, 1976.

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