

Land: Rhodesia's Powder Keg

ZAPU

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At the 1961 Constitutional Conference, our leader Joshua Nkomo made it categorically clear that any constitutional settlement in Rhodesia should solve the land issue. Five years later, Britain is still toying around Rhodesia's constitutional aspects without any consideration of this key issue. This impels us to restate the position over this vital issue.

In 1923, when the white settlers negotiated internal self-government, they demanded from the British Government that land in Rhodesia should be divided among the racial communities, with settlers holding exclusive ownership rights to part of the country. The British Government turned down their demands but blessed them with internal self-government. Armed with this new weapon, the settlers proceeded to take measures to achieve their objective. To bluff British public opinion, they appointed a commission, the 'Land Commission of 1925' to find possibilities of such an apportionment of land. Africans were not consulted and those interviewed rejected the idea. The Commission headed by Morris Carter, a servant of settler interests, recommended land apportionment on a racial basis, giving the white settlers exclusive rights over large tracts of land. After a detailed survey of which land to grab, the settler Parliament passed the Land Apportionment Act 1931: This law empowered the settler government, or commissions and agencies set up by it, to divide the land into European and African areas. In the European areas, the white settlers have exclusive ownership rights over such designated areas. The African can reside in such an area as a worker (for the white man) but can neither own land there nor use it for productive purposes. His residence in such areas is by permit of the settler authority and the permit is given only on condition that the applicant has written proof that he is employed. On termination of his services, his employer notifies the local authority and the African loses his right of residence in such an area.

But the kernel of land apportionment is economic privilege. In a country with a population of over four million Africans and 220,000 white settlers, the land is apportioned as follows:—

European Area	:	47,897,000 acres	African Reserves:	21,020,000 acres	
Forest Area	:	3,190,000 acres	Special African Area	:	12,878,000 acres
Game reserves, Parks, etc.	:	4,057,000 acres	African Purchase Area	:	8,052,000 acres
Total area (European)		55,134,000 acres	Total (African area)		41,950,000 acres

Thus four million are allocated less than 42% of the land whilst 6% of the population has exclusive rights over 58% of Rhodesian soil. It should be noted that Special African areas represent African residential areas or townships in the urban areas. In these areas, Africans are prohibited from using the land for productive purposes. Thus in fact, the bulk of the African population lives in and cultivates 21 million acres or 22% of the land surface. To consolidate their devilish schemes, the settler Parliament passes the Land Husbandry Act 1951. The Land Husbandry act was designed to be an administrative instrument for the implementation of the Land Apportionment Act under the new conditions that had arisen. Population increase from 1931 had resulted in serious overcrowding in the African reserves, the land formally allocated to every family had further to be subdivided into yet smaller plots. Every household was allocated a maximum of 6 acres, and livestock had to be drastically reduced since grazing land had become scarce. The Land Husbandry Act empowered the regime to remove families and groups of families or entire villages from their residence if the land was required by a white farmer. Tens of thousands of families were removed from lands which they had owned and cultivated for decades. The regime had to use armed troops to effect such measures since it met with stiff opposition from the African population. Under the guise of land consolidation, the African people were systematically dispossessed of rich land and driven to arid areas to give room to the new overlords – the white settlers.

The 21 million acres of land allocated to the African population consisted of (i) dry, arid regions where cultivation of any crops is impossible and rearing livestock impracticable due to lack of water; (ii) swampy areas infested by tsetse flies and unsuitable for human habitation; (iii) arable regions but with low rainfall and poor soils. It is in this belt where the African lives. On the other hand, European areas consist of rich land with good rainfall. Industrial and commercial centres are in this belt, thus making farm products near consumption markets. We must further note that, in the whole of Rhodesia, all European land was occupied by only 4,630 farmers in 1961 (I.L.O. statistics). In 1966, there are less than 6,000 white farmers.

Land policy in Rhodesia is a deliberate device to ensure a constant reservoir of cheap labour for industry and commerce. Deprived of his land and incapable of subsisting on anything else, the African is driven to industry as a wage slave. The exodus of the population from rural areas to urban areas is out of proportion with industry's ability to absorb all the available manpower. Unemployment is the logical result and this provides the industrial-

ists with the necessary artillery to flout the rights of the workers – aware that any ‘dissidents’ could be dismissed and replaced instantly. It further creates a situation in which the labour supply is higher than the demand for labour, and wages can thus be kept low. The stability of such a supply/demand curve ensures stagnant wage bills.

Exclusive ownership of farm land leads to monopoly production. Cash crops are thus controlled by a handful of people throughout the various stages – production and distribution. The interests of industrial, finance and agricultural capital are closely interwoven. Farmers get loans from finance houses, their products are raw materials for industry in Rhodesia and abroad, and industrial concerns are in turn shareholders in the finance houses, and so the vicious circle goes on. Many farms are owned by absentee landlords (British) and vast tracts of land are owned by certain companies (British). It is necessary to note that, of the vast tracts owned by the white settlers, a very small percentage is under cultivation. In other words, they do not own these acres in order to use every one of them. Exclusive ownership has a deeper philosophy: the dispossession of the African people of any means of production so as to compel them to be dependent on a certain class and thus become tools for use by the white settlers and their financial bosses.

The land issue thus emerges as a key point since land is the basic interest of the white minority. The expropriation of African land by the white settlers constitutes a major bone of contention. The resistance of the white minority to majority rule is based, among other things, on the fear of losing exclusive rights over land. Whilst the white settlers are hirelings for the protection of British interests, they too have a stake to preserve; exclusive land ownership is the price they demand for their role in preserving British interests.

The Zimbabwe African People’s Union has made it perfectly clear that the land in Zimbabwe belongs to all people and there can be no question of exclusive ownership of the land by any class or group of persons. The struggle for liberation, therefore, envisages the recovery of the land into the hands of the legitimate owners: *The People of Zimbabwe*. Land is a great economic potential and the wealth thereof must be shared fairly by all. Our policy remains the same: reclamation of the land and redistribution in the interests of the people.

The white settlers in Rhodesia have an unshaken determination to maintain the status quo in agriculture, for it ensures their continued domination of the African people and is a means to perpetuate a position of economic privilege. On the other hand, the readjustment of the land policy is a prime consideration for the African people. The Policy of ZAPU has been made clear several times and it will be sufficient here to quote a recent statement by ZAPU’s Deputy President, J.R. Dambadza Chikerema; ‘Therefore in fairness to Zimbabwe and its people the basic principle that the land belongs to the *People* of Zimbabwe must be conceded, and this must be the guiding principle for any readjustment of land.’