

## White Settlers in British Colonies

Wallace G. Mills Hist. 317 7 White Settlers

- this discussion applies to the colonies of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Kenya. For the French, the only area in Africa which received large numbers of white settlers was Algeria. While the Belgian and Portuguese colonies had some white settlers, their numbers were comparable to those in Northern Rhodesia.

- the presence of white settlers led inevitably to conflicts and clashes of interest.

- white settlers generally (some exceptions in blue collar occupations) saw themselves as being bosses.

- certainly, the 'farmers' usually came to operate large farms specialising in export crops ('plantations') and requiring large, cheap labour forces—Africans were the obvious source of the labour supply.
- Africans were also potential competitors as producers.
- therefore, both the demands for land and the demands for an adequate labour supply brought settlers into conflicts with Africans who also claimed the land and who by themselves had little incentive to work for whites, especially at the low rates most whites wanted to pay. Also, the settlers sometimes wanted to prevent Africans from producing crops in competition (the strongest example is coffee in Kenya; Africans in Tanganyika next door seemed able to grow coffee alright!).

- the settlers pressured colonial governments or tried to take them over by getting responsible government with an electorate limited entirely or mostly to whites.

- there was a slight variation in the Rhodesias where white blue collar workers arrived in considerable numbers—for mining and the railroads. They retained more of the working class outlook than did the farming families who more often tried to emulate landed gentry.

- white workers' livelihoods were threatened: initially, these white workers had the advantage of their skills, but Africans could learn the skills and get the experience; then, they would displace the white workers because they could and would work for less than white workers.

- there were a couple of factors:

- most African families relied on subsistence farming to supply a portion of their needs and they had lower consumption and living standards than whites were willing to accept.

- white workers immigrating to the Rhodesias, where norms were strongly influenced by those in South Africa, quickly acclimated to what were called 'white' or 'civilised' standards: often residential schooling for children, imported goods and luxuries and employing servants ('housewives' quickly became 'madams'; this would be unheard of and unimaginable back in Britain); this required substantially higher wages as compared to Africans.

- as a result, they formed trade unions which (as in South Africa) were primarily to protect their jobs and high wages; this usually meant a demand for some kind of 'colour bar'. A 'colour bar' is any system, whether officially enshrined in the law or unofficially by rigidly accepted practice, which restricts who may be employed in categories of jobs on the basis of skin colour.

### Settler Drive for Political Control

- getting control of the colonial government became a major preoccupation of white immigrant communities, hoping to emulate those in South Africa, although their proportions of the colonial populations were all considerably less than was the case in South Africa.

### Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)

- in Southern Rhodesia, responsible government was granted in the new constitution of 1922, and although they never comprised more than about 10% of the population, whites were in control.

- Southern Rhodesia was modelled very much along the lines of the Cape Colony before the Union of South Africa (in fact, a number of laws were borrowed almost exactly): the franchise was based on property and income qualifications rather than a specifically defined racial qualification. However, only a few Africans got the vote.

- this set the stage for the special history of Rhodesia (the Southern was dropped after the north became independent as Zambia and the Unilateral Declaration of Independence—UDI) in the 1960s & 70s.

- after 1948, South African whites deliberately attempted to avoid any trend of giving additional political say to people of other ethnic and racial backgrounds (which would lead to majority rule) by implementing extreme forms of racial separation (apartheid) and by developing a police state to control the majority. Rhodesians wanted to maintain rule by the white minority but tried to avoid following the South African route.

- in the 1960s, the 'winds of change' and growing independence under African rule made Rhodesia an anomaly.

- Britain refused to grant independence to Rhodesia under white minority rule, but couldn't or wouldn't try to intervene internally to force majority rule. There was a period of deadlock until finally the Rhodesian government led by Ian Smith issued its UDI (unilateral declaration of independence) in Nov. 1965. We'll discuss the outcome later.

### Northern Rhodesia (Zambia)

- the white immigrant population of Northern Rhodesia was too small to ever have any realistic chance of controlling the government or the colony.

- in the 1950s, the British tried to create the Central African Federation (N. & S. Rhodesias and Nyasaland).

### Central African Federation

- there was an economic rationale; all three were inland states without access to the sea except via railroad either through Mozambique or South Africa. Thus, the railroad was the economic lifeline of all three. Their economies tended to be complementary as well; mines in N. Rhodesia required large amounts of labour and food supplies for that labour. S. Rhodesia provided food supplies and along with Nyasaland provided migrant labour for the mines.

- the whites of N. Rhodesia realized that only by joining with whites in S. Rhodesia, which already had responsible government, could they avoid majority rule by Africans. Thus, they supported the CAF. The number of whites in Nyasaland was negligible.

- however, Africans, especially in N. Rhodesia and Nyasaland, mostly tended to regard the CAF as a plot to pass control to white settlers who were largely based in S. Rhodesia. They mostly opposed the CAF and once they had a say, Africans in Zambia and Malawi rejected the CAF. The CAF then disappeared, as they say, into the dustbin of history.

- when Zambia and Malawi became independent under African majority rule, whites either left or adapted.

### Kenya

- in Kenya, the struggle was much closer.
- at the beginning of the 20th C, the building of the railroad and the need to pay its operating expenses had led colonial officials to adopt a policy of encouraging white settlers by offering large blocks of cheap land; also, retiring army officers were offered land as a pension. A few of those who came, such as Lord Delamere, had high social status and connections.
- even by 1914, the settlers, who had been given representation on the Legislative Council and who were led by Lord Delamere with his powerful political allies in Britain, had been making exorbitant demands for a greater say in political decision-making.

### **Indians in Kenya:**

- the Indian community in Kenya has played a very important role in the economic and political history of Kenya in the 20th C.
- a number of Indian business families had had extensive connections in the 19th C in Zanzibar with the Arab traders (they provided much of the credit for the inland trade).
- then many labourers had been brought to build the railroad and stayed on.
- Indians came to dominate local trade and a good deal of local business; they also were the clerks etc. in the lower levels of the bureaucracy. Later, they came to fill a large, almost dominant role in the professions—doctors, lawyers etc.
- they benefited from the support of the Indian Government which was trying to bolster its standing against the nationalist demands of the Indian National Congress by championing the rights of Indians elsewhere in the British Empire (e.g., South Africa & Canada).
- at the end of WW1, the settlers made a concerted effort to get responsible government by whites; they already had 11 elected representatives, but they were a minority to the officials and appointed representatives (e.g., Indians had 1 appointed rep.). The settlers wanted to get a majority of white elected representatives.
- the Indian community was demanding a common roll using property and income qualifications, but completely non-racial.
- the whites were too greedy and intransigent; they resisted this demand by the Indians (which might have been accepted by the British government) because it would have given Indians virtual equality.

- instead, whites argued that only British subjects of European descent (whites) could be trusted to protect Africans.

- this was too patently hypocritical; the settlers were notorious for their demands not only that Africans be forced to provide labour for them but also that the African population should be taxed to provide most of the tax revenues (while demanding that their own taxes be limited).

- colonial officials in Kenya were too often sympathetic to settler demands and the Colonial Office in London frequently had to intervene and overrule their policies to protect the African people. Thus, both officials in the C.O. and many politicians were too suspicious of the white settlers. Also, the Indian Gov't's influence was used against the idea in support of the Indian community's position.

- when Alfred Lord Milner left the C. O. (he had been Colonial Secretary) in 1921, the battle really had been lost.

- among the various proposals put forward during the period, little was said of African participation except in the very remote future (even though Africans were beginning to make demands).

### **Devonshire White Paper in 1923**

- this was a statement of the British gov't (Conservatives) policy regarding Kenya. Its most important principles were:

1. Responsible government was out of the question for the foreseeable future.
2. The Indian population should have elected representation.
  - however, the proposals ultimately made were for Indians to elect their own representatives (i.e., communal representation, not common roll representation). This was not acceptable to Indians and ultimately the proposals fell back to three appointed reps.; most Indians refused to serve.
3. The interests of the Africans in Kenya must be paramount, and if African interests conflicted with the interests of the immigrant communities, then the interests of Africans should take precedence.

- this last principle was reinforced during the Labour government of 1924-25 by the Passfield Declaration; this went even further in rejecting the inflated demands of the settlers.

- however, this principle that African interests should be paramount was not really applied very consistently; officials in the Kenya government were still strongly influenced by the settlers (they socialised together and belonged to the same clubs). Governors to

Kenya tended to come with little experience and stayed only a few years; thus, there was a tendency to accept the opinions of settlers who claimed to 'know' what was required and how Africans should be treated.

- however, the principle did prevent settlers from gaining political control as in Rhodesia.

- the Indian community was very important in preventing political control passing to white settlers in this critical period just after WW1 and throughout the inter war period.

- also, after 1945, many Indians were sympathetic to African political aspirations and they continued to demand that political rights be extended to all on an equal, non-racial basis (i.e., common rolls, same qualifications, etc.). The logic of this was, of course, eventual majority rule by Africans.

- the white settlers did pose a problem for the British in the 1950s; it seems likely that the existence of the white settlers helped to sharpen the tensions which led to the violent outbreak known as Mau Mau.

- one can see a big difference in British responses in the Gold Coast as compared with Kenya:

- in the Gold Coast when disturbances arose, the British responded initially by trying to take strong action—Nkrumah and other leaders were arrested, curfews were imposed, etc. However, within a short time, that policy was reversed. Elections were allowed in which Nkrumah's party, the Gold Coast Convention People's Party, won. The British accepted that, released Nkrumah and began working with him to achieve responsible government (1956) and independence (1957).
- in Kenya, the white settlers made such accommodation almost impossible; there was resistance from the white settlers to allowing even elected representation of Africans, let alone responsible government with majority control by Africans.

- when the British in the early 1960s decided to go to majority rule and independence (Jomo Kenyatta—recognised as the leader of the Kikuyu and others—was released from jail to assume leadership), they felt responsibility for the white settlers and with American financial assistance (this was the height of the cold war) bought out many of the settlers by giving compensation for their plantations.

- Kenyatta and his gov't tried to reassure the settlers to get them to stay, but did require them to choose their citizenship (i.e., if they stayed they would have to become Kenya citizens **and** give up their British citizenship).

- while some stayed, quite a large portion took the compensation and emigrated—many to Rhodesia or the South Africa. Some took the compensation for their farms (the land

was the most serious grievance by Africans, especially the Kikuyu), but stayed on in business—tourism and the financial industry as Nairobi was the financial centre for east Africa.

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