

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

BAB-1 The Leaders Return

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 2952 N. Kendale Avenue
 Toledo, Ohio

Mr. Richard Nolte
 Institute of Current World Affairs
 366 Madison Avenue
 New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Jim and I were inadvertently on the scene when Joshua Nkomo, then the only accredited African leader in Southern Rhodesia, returned from exile. He had been in and out of the country before and this arrival received no great fanfare; its historical significance wasn't realized until the following week when he fired the first gun against the Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole and dissidents within his party, a challenge which brought into being a new African political party (ZANU) to compete with his (ZAPU) for African allegiance.

We were seeing friends off at the airport when we became aware of an unusually large contingent of fur-hatted Africans (the symbol of ZAPU) waiting on the observation deck. We waited too amid mounting excitement. The plane from Bulawayo landed and Nkomo stepped out among the first passengers, stopped on the top step and waved his hat in the manner of politicians everywhere. The waiting crowd let out a giant roar as he descended.

Then they began singing their party's anthem, the men standing straight and still, the women shifty with excitement, creating a shrill obligato with the high tremulous wail which is at once so terrifying and so beautiful. Chills ran up my back and I felt we were witnessing one of those really moving moments which happen so seldom in a lifetime.

Halfway in from the plane, still far out on the apron, Nkomo paused reverently hat in hand, a Black island amid the European passengers hurrying to the terminal seemingly unaware of the throat-lumping thrill we were experiencing. Nkomo had been the only African on the plane and some of the passengers were obviously wondering who in the world he was. But it didn't slow their



progress.

The moment passed. When the anthem was finished Nkomo entered the terminal and the singers fragmented into individuals - men hurrying down the stairs to meet him followed by the women, tightening the blankets holding their babies on their backs, gathering up their children in a gay holiday cackle of voices.

Downstairs Nkomo was again the politician with his bluff heartiness and expansive handshaking. On a wave of good fellowship he moved out to the cars which would drive him in convoy to Highfields, the African township where he makes his headquarters while in Salisbury.

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The Reverend Sithole's arrival was anticipated with more publicity. Nkomo had removed him from the party and a knock-down fight for leadership seemed imminent. There had been a long lull in African politics and somehow everyone felt that when Sithole came home from Dar es Salaam things would start happening again. Would he form a new party? Would he inaugurate some new policy toward the European-dominated Government? Would he be able to survive a break with the tremendously popular Nkomo? All kinds of conjecture surrounded his arrival. Nkomo's homecoming had been moving; Sithole's seemed more an exciting adventure.

That Sunday afternoon we wives sat on the veranda after a delicious lunch. Most of the men in the party were reporters and all of them had gone off to see Sithole arrive. We sat, a rather dejected group, complaining over being left behind. The men had warned us there might be trouble between the two warring factions and had decided it was no place for women and children.

After a rather petulant discussion we decided that children might be in the way but we could certainly take care of ourselves; that our husbands probably thought they would be saddled with us if they took us along but they certainly couldn't object if we kept out of their way. And there surely should be some White admirers to meet Sithole at the plane other than assorted newsmen. With these rationalizations we dropped our various children with their various "nannies" and headed for the airport in a spirit of high adventure.

On the way out the ladies filled me in on Mr. Sithole. He was a man of great polish and intellect and one who, they felt, could control and move a nationalistic push without letting things get out of hand.

"Nkomo's not as intelligent," they thought, "although he's a good politician. He's swayed by whoever speaks to him last."

"I'm not a White settler. I was born here and I'm a Rhodesian. I'm for rights for all Rhodesians and I don't care whether Nkomo or Sithole leads the fight....just so they accept me as a Rhodesian too."

"Well, now maybe things will start to happen. The Africans haven't been doing anything for themselves and yet they get mad at us for not doing more. Africans are always telling me I should move to one of the African townships in protest because they can't move into our suburbs. I'd move down there in a minute if I thought it would really do any good. Let them give us something to join in on and we'll go all out. But why should we sacrifice what we have when they're not willing to do anything for themselves."

"Maybe Sithole will change all that!"

Salisbury rises rather abruptly out of the open veld and the road to the airport crosses open countryside. We passed a circle of Africans holding a prayer meeting under the trees but not until we neared the field did we see any unusual signs of life. Several knots of African men were gathered near the entrance where the police had set up a heavily manned road block. A carload of Africans just ahead of us were turned back and they parked and joined the others. We were a little nervous about being stopped but when the police asked us why we were there we answered truthfully "To meet the plane from Dar", and they waved us through.

The parking area was alive with armed police and surrounded by armoured landrovers. We approached a young policeman lounging against a car and asked him (very innocently) what all the precautions were for. "We're not allowed to tell you," he answered rather sullenly.

Avoiding the waiting room where our husbands stood with a small and serious group of Africans, we climbed to the observation deck where a large crowd had gathered. We were surprised to find most of them White and accompanied by a number of children. (So much for our husbands' concern, we thought!) Climbing on available tables and chairs to get a view over the crowd we were even more surprised to find that all the people, unaware of the drama we had come to watch, were waving good-bye to a plane-load of boys off to represent Rhodesian boy scouts at the World Jamboree in Greece. Here a holiday atmosphere prevailed that seemed completely to ignore the armed policemen and the tense atmosphere.

Downstairs again we found that we had just missed Sithole's plane and that he had entered Customs some time ago. The other passengers from the flight were streaming out the door - corsaged ladies greeted and carried off by other corsaged ladies, inevitably blazered schoolgirls, relieved of their inevitable tennis rackets and hockey sticks by



dotting parents or relatives, a very few businessmen since this was a Sunday flight. Still no Sithole.

Long after the last passenger had retrieved his luggage a policeman came and motioned Nathan Shamuyarira aside. From our vantage point at the edge of the crowd we could hear him explain that Sithole had been arrested in Customs for carrying a piece of subversive literature in his bulging briefcase; that he would not be brought out through the waiting room; that no one would be allowed to see him at this time. The policeman seemed apologetic and a little defensive. Nathan said nothing but passed quietly through the crowd explaining what had happened and moving with them back out to the parking area. Everyone was dispirited and let down. Nathan held a short news conference around the hood of his car and everyone stood indecisively. The police wagons and arms were much less in evidence now. After all there was just this small and ineffectual knot of people within the parking area.

Outside the gates it was another story. Mobs of Africans, busloads of partisans, had piled up at the guarded entrance. The police had separated them, those pro-Sithole on one side of the road, pro-Nkomo on the other. They glared and shouted at each other over the intervening police barrier as newly-arrived busses were unloaded or turned back. Some of the men were obviously armed. They seemed less interested in greeting Sithole than in defending their own positions. There had been rioting between the groups a few days previously and the police were determined there wouldn't be another clash. Their job was made frustrating by the Europeans who, having seen off their scouts, now lined the road with their cars to watch the show, reminiscent of the pile-up of cars when a lion in Kruger Park makes his kill within viewing distance of the road. The police could roughly separate the brawling Africans but could only politely request the cars to move on. The cars stayed. Reporters and cameramen, frustrated at the airport, moved through the two groups creating more confusion.

We pulled into a petrol station just outside the gate and watched the panorama while getting our tank filled. "Who are you for, Nkomo or Sithole?" we asked the African attendant, much as you'd ask who'll win the World Series. "I don't like fighting," he answered. "I'll stick with Nkomo. It seems pretty late to change leaders now." "I guess I'm a Sithole woman," the Rhodesian girl said. She and the attendant wished each other good luck and we drove back into town past several more busses waylaid by police roadblocks.

In front of the police station Mrs. Sithole, who had been unable to see her husband at the airport, sat patiently on the curbstone waiting for him to arrive. "They might at least have given her a chair," someone said, and "Let's bring the poor dear a cup of tea." But the tea shops were closed and it was getting late so feeling tired and vaguely guilty we drove home through the dusk to our warm hearths and our children.

Sincerely yours,

Barbara Brewer