NOT FOR PUBLICATION

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

PBM-3
Easy Living

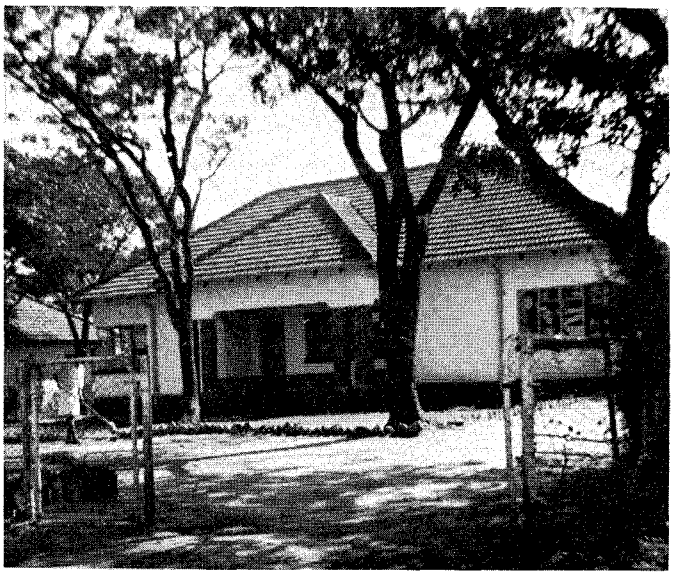
42 Fereday Drive
Eastlea,
Salisbury
July 29, 1953

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
c/o Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36,
New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

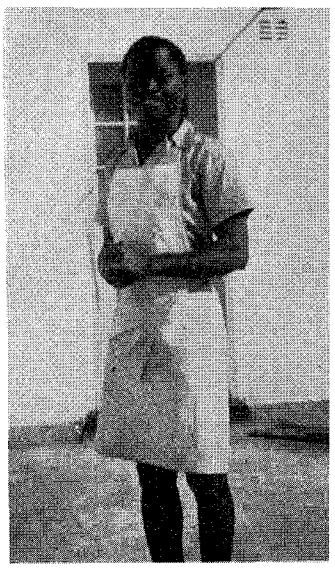
Although most of our English friends still call England "home" not one of them ever goes back to his sceptered isle except for a visit every four or five years. They live here, work here, raise their children here and are, to all intents and purposes, Rhodesians. While we ourselves were still in the hotel-living, newcomer stage, we couldn't understand this. Now that we are living in our own home we understand a little better. But our understanding, I think, goes a bit further than that of our friends. It has become obvious to us that this easy way of life cannot last indefinitely.

Rhodesia apparently is a live, humming country with a bright future. The average citizen can live here in what would be unheard-of luxury at "home" in England. Julie's friends who are housewives sit across the canasta table from her and make small complaining noises about the "high cost of living." But they are not serious. They are merely remembering pre-war days in Rhodesia when food and floor wax and permanent waves cost half what they do now. But they also are remembering what they have heard of prices in Great Britain and they know they are living far better than they ever did at home. They realize that food, rent, and household servants cost a fraction of what the average London or Birmingham householder must pay.



Julie, coming from the United States, can see the difference more clearly than her friends do. Take our house, for an example. It is of recent construction. At home it would be called the "one-story ranch type." It is built of brick covered with smooth, white-painted stucco. The windows are the steel casement type and the roof is of good, red tile. The space under the roof is insulated to keep out cold in winter and heat in summer. It is equipped with modern plumbing, numerous, well-placed electricity outlets, and a new hot water heater. The floors are of local hardwood and the whole place is clean, light and airy.

We rent it furnished for 25 pounds a month ($70). And this price includes the hire of two native boys, Nomeas (at left, below), the house boy, and Aaron, the garden boy. Nomeas cooks, washes dishes and laundry, irons, serves meals, and cleans the living room and dining room. Aaron cares for the lawn and gardens, washes the automobile, and cleans the two bedrooms, back hall, lavatory, and bathroom. He also does odd jobs, such as shoe-shining and parcel-carrying.



They are well paid by our landlord by local standards, Nomeas receives 3 pounds 10 shillings ($9.80) a month and Aaron gets 1 pound 10 shillings a month. We supply their provisions, outlined in an earlier letter (PBM-1). Although we are not accustomed to such grand living in the United States, Julie tells me that for the work he does, Nomeas would receive about $135 and Aaron would be paid about $80 a month. The house would rent, furnished as it is, for somewhere between $125 and $175 a month.

We pay nothing for heat, for the simple reason that there is no heating plant. The Rhodesian winter, which is just ending, lasts only 2½ months, and the temperature at night rarely, if ever, gets down to freezing. During the day, in wintertime, the temperature stays somewhere near 75 degrees. Electricity and water, supplied by the city, total a little more than 3 pounds ($8.40) each month.

Another marked difference between the cost of living here and in the United States surprises Julie every time she sets foot in a food market. She is a little prone to complain about the fact that she must go to three markets here to buy the food and household supplies she could pick up in one stop at the local supermarket in the United States. She must visit the butchery, the greengrocer, and the grocer who sells staple items, butter, and eggs. Milk is delivered to the door by a native boy who must be paid at each delivery with coupons purchased from the local dairymen's cooperative. Milk costs 12 cents a quart. Bread is also delivered from door to door and must be paid for in cash, 17 cents a loaf. But the low price of most foods more than makes up for the far-flung diversity of Julie's shopping.

Vegetables are noticeably cheaper. There is no vegetable that cannot be purchased at from 6 to 8 cents a pound. In the United States (at least at the time we left) vegetables cost from 20 to 30 cents a pound. Julie points out, with feminine significance, that these compared prices are "winter prices." Vegetables, I understand, drop in price during the summer. But since the drop is proportionally the same in both cases, I will spare you the confusion of further comparison and let the subject drop.

The meats are very good. Many people, warning us about infected meats "for our own good" have proved to be wrong. All meats sold in butcherys are dressed in government slaughter houses and are governmentally inspected before being sent to the retailer. If Julie's butcher ever heard what his American counterpart charges for lamb chops or T-bone steak, he would, I am sure, suspect her of exaggerating or being one of those curious people who boast of the misery they endure.

Hamburger is unknown here. All the second-rate cuts of meat which go into American hamburger are saved, wrapped in pound packages, and sold as "boys' meat." When we eat hamburger here, it is chuck roast which has been ground. It sells for about 20 cents a pound as opposed to the American chuck roast price of between 39 and 49 cents a pound. Steak is just as cheap and so are cuts of lamb and pork. Another point of comparison is cubed steak, which costs approximately 90 cents a pound in the United States and 30 cents a pound here. Filet costs a luxurious $1.20 a pound at home--here it can be bought for 50 cents.

Life is not entirely a bowl of cherries, however. All items which must be imported are expensive by local standards. Rhodesia still is sadly lacking in secondary industry, and almost all manufactured items such as farm machinery, egg beaters, automobiles, and knitting needles cost slightly more than they do in the countries in which they are made. Manufactured items and foods canned in sterling areas are reasonably priced. That is, they cost slightly more than their retail price at their points of origin. Items which must be imported from "hard money" areas--the United States, Italy, Portugal, South America, France, etc.--are either impossible to obtain or impossible to buy because of prohibitive prices.

Most Rhodesians will tell you that the only automobiles which will stand up under the punishment they must absorb from poor roads are American autos. Yet there are no new American cars to be had in Rhodesia because of a lack of dollar credit. And the used cars which are available make anyone but an extremely wealthy man think twice or perhaps three times before purchasing one.

For example, a 1950 or 1951 Chevrolet will cost anywhere from $2200 to $2800, depending on its condition. And when the auto breaks down, as it is almost sure to do after two or three years on Rhodesia's primitive roads, repair costs are fantastically exhorbitant because of the difficulty of obtaining replacement parts. A British auto of good manufacture and reasonable durability will cost from 645 pounds to 690 pounds ($1906 to $1932).

Almost all clothing except that made of cheap cotton twill or duck must be imported from Great Britain. Clothing prices, therefore, are dear compared to those in the United States, since British clothes cost more than American to begin with.

Thus, the necessities of life take, on the average, a good deal less from the Rhodesian's pocket than do similar items in the United States. The amenities of life, being mostly local products, cost even less. A bottle of beer costs about 12 cents. A coca-cola costs 4 cents. A sandwich in a restaurant costs about 12 cents.

A man can go to a restaurant and eat a hearty meal of curried chicken, rice, salad, bread, and dessert for about 70 cents. He can buy good scotch in his local bottle store for about $4.50. The local wines, which are very good, cost about 55 or 60 cents a bottle. His gasoline is expensive, since it is imported, and costs about 45 cents a gallon. This, however, is offset by the fact that his automobile will get anywhere from 22 to 35 miles per gallon, depending on whether he is making a long trip or using his machine as a family, in-town car.

If a man is a sportsman, he can buy polo ponies for about $65 each and stable three of them for one month for $5. He can join a golf club for next to nothing and tip his native caddy 35 or 40 cents for an afternoon of lugging. Most Rhodesians belong to two or three clubs--an eating club in the city, a country club, and a golf club.

In the evening, a fellow can take his girl to the cinema and sit in the best reserved seats in the house for 60 cents a seat. He can take his girl night-clubbing and buy her a dinner for about a dollar and drinks for about 30 cents each. It's almost more expensive for him to take her for a moonlight drive, depending on how far he goes. On Saturday afternoons he can take her to watch Rugby, polo, tennis, soccer, field hockey, or bowling on the green--or he and she can go swimming in the public baths, built by proceeds from the Rhodesian national lotteries.

It has been said that if two Englishmen meet in the jungle, the first thing they do after they have been properly introduced is hack out a golf course. If that is so, the second thing they do is construct a race course and begin to breed race horses. Salisbury, as does every other good-sized community in Southern Africa, has a handsome race course at which race meetings are held monthly. Lotteries and horse race betting are legal here--and the betting on a bright and sunshiny Saturday afternoon is lively.

By taking a leisurely day's drive, any Rhodesian can find lakes, mountains, sea coast, or scenes of historical interest where he can spend a holiday. He can visit Portugese East Africa for a continental meal and a dip in the surf. He can drive to the Zimbabwe ruins over roads made unusually smooth in preparation for the visit of the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret. If he does not own a car, he can always travel by train or plane to the larger cities, although by using this means of mass transportation he misses the beauty of the countryside and the back-country life to be found in small farming villages. He's also tied down a great deal when he reaches his destination because, as any Rhodesian can tell you, "this country is impossible to live in if you haven't a car."

It is somewhat difficult to find out how much money a man must make each year to enjoy this "easy life." I have found, however, that the average clerk, salesman, skilled machine operator, and newspaper man can afford the sort of menage I have outlined above. There are no common laborers among the white population. All that work is handled by natives. It is therefore fair to say that almost every white person in Rhodesia can afford at least one native boy and probably more. Every "white collar worker" has at least

two native servants and usually owns his own automobile. From this state of affairs you can readily draw your own conclusions.

Most Rhodesians (and adopted Britishers) have not yet awakened to the fact that life will not always remain as it is today. Colonial history has shown time and again that when the white man moves into a country with his artificial lighting, his easy means of transportation, his labor-saving devices, and his means of converting fruit or grain into potable alcohol, the native will absorb part of this materialistic culture through some force of osmosis. He will not always remain content to wash master's shirts, to cook madam's food, and to eat the left-overs from the white man's butcher shop and the white man's table.

As secondary industry grows, the native will learn that he can earn much more money as a machine tender or bobbin tender in a factory. To add to the desirability of obtaining such a position, he will find that he works from 8 or 9 to 5 in the factory five days a week as opposed to the uncertain and long hours he puts in at domestic employment seven days a week.

And since the native is at the bottom of the "soft" life in the Rhodesias and Nyasaland, the soft life will become more and more hard as the country develops its natural resources and begins to make them into manufactured products here instead of selling them to other nations. Food may remain as cheap and the housing situation may grow with the population--but the easy, relaxed, workfree life at home must, eventually, suffer severe modification.

It seems to me most imperative that the Rhodesians realize this fact, and soon. Most of them are completely unaware of it. Some are beginning to realize it, but the realization is so repugnant to them they are fighting back, trying to hold back the hands of a clock that has been tightly wound and set running. If a Kenya-like situation is to be avoided in the future, the people of Rhodesia must learn to accept the ticking of the clock and prepare for the day when it has run its course.

Behind many of the wrangles and maneuvers of the political parties which are taking shape in preparation for the first federal election in December, is the budding realization that people do not want to lose the easy life--and may, in fact, vote for a political party which holds out a hope of keeping it.

I will deal with political parties and their platforms in later letters.

Sincerely,

Peter Bird Martin

Peter Bird Martin

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