

THE CONFLICT in Zimbabwe which culminated in the national war of liberation was not motivated by a desire among black Zimbabweans to become white but was essentially a class struggle between the usurpers of the country's wealth on the one hand and the landless blacks on the other.

So said the Minister of Home Affairs, Comrade Herbert Ushewokunze, who went on to stress that the conflict was not over "colour, language or religion" but over land and mining rights acquired by the colonisers.

The struggle, he added, would continue until there was a "just distribution of the nation's resources".

Within days, the outgoing chairman of the Natural Resources Board, Mr. Lance Smith, expressed disappointment at the way in which the agricultural resettlement scheme was being applied: he did not consider that the resettled farmers could survive and bring up a family on a sustained yield basis comparable to the existing (white owned) commercial farms.

He pointed out that there was "no other source of wealth but that produced by the energy of the people applied to the land at their disposal", that there is "nothing that does not come from the land and nowhere to turn if we muck it up".

Mr. Smith also argued that it was a mistake for the government to allow the inhabitants to believe that "every single man had a right to a piece of land".

Between these two speeches, the U.N. Secretary General issued a report on economic assistance to Zimbabwe and stressed the adverse effect of the lack of foreign exchange on the well developed and diversified manufacturing sector. Such industry was dependent on imports of materials and capital equipment and, due to lack of foreign exchange to purchase, their manufacturing output was not absorbing the labour force available.

WHAT LESSONS can we draw from these three quite independent statements made in the same week?

The freedom of action of the Zimbabwe government is subject to severe restraints due to political, territorial and constitutional factors,

A message to Mugabe



● Robert Mugabe

By PAUL KNIGHT

but one wonders why it has not attempted more in the economic field during its 2½ years' existence.

Why does it spend so much effort on state visits (there were three in early November) and political invective? Is it so bereft of

‘The principle of resettlement remains sound: most white farmland is underused and if farmed more intensively could easily support the landless while still producing a surplus for export. But the Government's current plans would require two-thirds of all white farmland for the 162,000 families, and that much land is not available.

The Lancaster House agreement called for voluntary land reform. The Government could take over easily only land that farmers wanted to sell. If it nationalised land, a complex court procedure is required, and then payment must be in hard currency that can be taken out of the country. To nationalise sufficient land would cost £250m.

Progressive economists in Zimbabwe are promoting the idea of a land tax. Scaled according to the quality of the land. It would have little impact on the minority of efficient commercial farmers. But the majority would be forced to concentrate their attention on part of their land, and sell the rest to the Government. Not surprisingly, there is strong opposition from commercial farmers and entrenched colonial bureaucrats still in Government ministries’

Joseph Hanlon in *The Guardian*, 3.12.82.

ideas and initiative that it must still retain the repressive laws of the Ian Smith regime to the detriment of industrial expansion, individual enterprise and freedom?

The country is hemmed in by its location, its access to the sea being over unfriendly South Africa which nevertheless serves it better as a corridor of trade than the alternative, though friendly, Mozambique, a country still in turmoil.

But must it cut itself off even more from the outside world by severe exchange controls?

Comrade Ushewokunze may see that rights to land are the basic problem, yet he appears to spend his main energies harrasing people, particularly the whites.

It may not be practicable for everyone to own a piece of land in the sense of becoming a farmer; nor does the constitution agreed at Lancaster House allow the existing (and economically vital) commercial farmers to be taken over except by purchase.

● But would not a national tax on land values help to redress the present inequitable distribution of ownership and in a real sense give "every man a piece of land"?

● Equally, some relaxation of exchange controls, particularly in respect of new industrial enterprise and materials needed for the existing industry, could help national regeneration.

Industrial expansion in Southern Africa is necessary to absorb and release the energies and enterprise of the emerging nation, where blacks and whites alike have much to offer and much to lose.

Both these steps – taxation of land values and easing exchange controls – could result in further exodus of whites which in turn could aggravate and lower the levels of skills available in the country in the short term.

But if the changes were made gradually, the immediate loss could be contained and even reversed by new expertise, not only from Europe. In the medium and long term, the benefits from such a liberation of spirit could be crucial.

May we hope that Mr. Mugabe, who must be well aware of all that is said above, will turn his energies – and those of his ministers – towards economic reconstruction, so that all Zimbabweans may look forward to a future of peace and prosperity?