

PORTRAIT OF AN AGITATOR: PATRICK MATIMBA

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On Sunday, July 26th, 1959, Patrick Matimba was driven under guard from Salisbury Jail to the airport outside the city, where his wife and young daughter were waiting for him. At the airport he was released from an imprisonment which had lasted five months, on condition that he directly boarded a plane which would take him to Holland. The fares for himself and his family had been paid by the Government. He was told that he was not being deprived of his Southern Rhodesian citizenship; he was not required to undertake that he would stay away from his homeland. But he was told that as soon as he recrossed the frontier he would be rearrested.

We must suppose from this that the Government formally believes Matimba too dangerous a man to be allowed to live in Southern Rhodesia, and that his presence as a free man there would constitute some kind of threat to the safety and the order of the State.

Matimba came back to Rhodesia about three years ago, after some time spent in England. While there, he had earned his living by working in a café and had continued his education at evening classes. At an International Club he had met a young Dutchwoman, Adri van Hoorn. They had married, and there was now a baby girl. Matimba's earliest activities after returning to Rhodesia were in search of a home to which he could bring his wife and daughter. The Land Apportionment Act in Southern Rhodesia prohibits Africans and Europeans from living together in the same area, and he was not able to obtain a house in any African township. After a long unsuccessful search for some way in which he could set up home, it became clear that he could only live with his wife in some place where the provisions of the Land Apportionment Act did not apply. They do not apply to mission land. Matimba's father, an Anglican priest, was living in retirement at St. Faith's Mission, near Rusape. He approached the Mission authorities on behalf of his son—and they agreed that Matimba and his wife should come to live at the Mission.

So Matimba prepared to bring his wife to Rhodesia, and

Rhodesia prepared to receive her. Mr. Straw of the United Rhodesia Party, the Territorial M.P. for Rusape, was applauded by his audience when he declared that her arrival was not in the public interest. The Federal Government of the day, however, granted Mrs. Matimba permission to come and live in Rhodesia. Many thoughtless people considered that she should have been refused entry. They were properly rebuked by the Federal M.P. in whose constituency St. Faith's falls. "Any action of this kind", he said, "would have delayed the achievement of Dominion Status and upset the tobacco market. Let them think of that before deciding that the Federal Government was wrong in granting a permit to Mrs. Matimba." Both these comments were made at a meeting called by Federal and United Rhodesia Parties in Rusape Cinema Hall to discuss the situation. At the end of this meeting, 350 people passed an almost unanimous resolution calling for legislation against mixed marriages and demanding a general election on the issue, if such legislation were not passed.

So Mrs. Matimba joined her husband at St. Faith's. A woman at the meeting in the cinema hall had spoken of the reception she might expect. "When she walks down the street in Rusape, the whites and the blacks will, of course, look the other way". Yet Mrs. Matimba was not made unhappy. Africans do not find it easy to persist in that remorseless hostility towards mixed marriages which is attributed to them and expected of them by Europeans. It was decided not to hold a party to welcome Mrs. Matimba in the African township at Rusape—but only because it was felt this might exacerbate the Europeans. In the months that followed, no party or wedding in the local African community was complete without the Matimbas. On the Mission itself, the couple lived in an atmosphere easier for them than could have been found anywhere else in the Colony. They had no need or desire to walk hand in hand down the main street of Rusape. The Mission stands several miles away from the town, and when a wife goes shopping she does not take her husband; when a husband does his business or buying in town he does not take his wife. Only now and then did difficulties arise: when Mrs. Matimba took her husband's trousers to a dry-cleaner; when she had to go to hospital and her husband was not permitted to visit her.

At St. Faith's, Matimba kept the books for the co-operative store, and did the buying. But there was hardly enough work to

keep him busy, and nothing to stretch his powers. It is true that the co-operative experiments at St. Faith's were interesting, and there was intellectual stimulation in the courses which were held at the Mission—there was one held early in 1958 when politicians and university teachers gave talks on various aspects of democracy. There were also many visitors to St. Faith's, some of them eminent people; for St. Faith's has a world-wide reputation, as well as its reputation in Rusape. But Matimba had ambitions of his own, and the knowledge that he could not go and live elsewhere made him restless inside the Mission. While he was in England he had bought a small printing machine; and he was always talking of having this sent out to Rhodesia and starting a printing firm of his own.

In September 1957, the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress was founded. Mr. Guy Clutton-Brock, the farm manager at St. Faith's, became one of the few European members. Matimba also joined. A branch was formed at Rusape. The man elected as secretary was soon found to be unable to do the job, and Matimba was persuaded to take it over. It is not easy for us to build up a very clear picture of Matimba's activities as an agitator, or to discover the exact steps by which he became one of the few hundred men whose activities by February 1959 were, according to the Prime Minister, threatening the whole security of the State. None of the inflammatory extracts from Congress speeches quoted in the Southern Rhodesian Parliament, or later, in the report of the Review Tribunal, has been attributed to him. And the charges brought against him by the Government in the secret proceedings before the Review Tribunal, even if they threw light on the matter, could only be inserted here if the writer were willing to brave penalties of up to three years imprisonment under the Preventive Detention Act. Certainly Matimba had a passionate interest in politics. He read newspapers and Hansards, government papers and books on political subjects, incessantly. He loved to talk politics and, during discussions held at St. Faith's, would make long meditative contributions in his quiet voice, using the terms of political science carefully and illustrating attitudes and situations in a leisurely roundabout way with the proverbs and fables of his people. For Matimba, politics was an intellectual passion. He was interested—as who can help being?—in the strange wonderland of Rhodesian politics; he was interested too in the reactions there had been in Rhodesian society to his own anomalous

position. He was certainly less disturbed by the attention he was given than some other men might have been. He was also less embittered by it. The source of his political feelings was his own desire to lead a happy life, move where he wished, and do work that he felt worthwhile; rather than any larger passion for reform, personal political ambition, or all-absorbing dedication to a cause. He loved discussion, but he seems never to have addressed public meetings. He is said not to have been a very efficient branch secretary. He was often in talk critical of the Congress leaders. He felt Congress affairs were sometimes incompetently administered. He attacked the policy of making speeches deliberately in order to provoke the Government. And he was concerned to get his printing machine out from England and to set up his own business.

He tried once more to get a house in Highfields, one of the townships at Salisbury. The Southern Rhodesian Parliament discussed whether the wife of an African should be considered an African for the purposes of the Land Apportionment Act. One of the difficulties of such a solution, however, was that any legislation to effect it would clearly have been discriminatory, unless the African wife of a European could similarly be regarded as a European. The legal position remained as it had been. The printing machine arrived. A shop was rented in one of the humbler parts of Salisbury in Mrs. Matimba's name, and a business was established. Technically, Mrs. Matimba employed her husband. There were rooms above the shop; and there, surreptitiously and illegally in a European area, the Matimbas lived together. And it was there that Patrick Matimba was arrested, when the police burst into the bedroom at 2 o'clock in the morning of 25th February, 1959. He was taken first to Kentucky lock-up and then—with the more dangerous prisoners—to Khami Jail, near Bulawayo. Mrs. Matimba kept the printing business going, carrying out the few orders that came along, for cards and headed notepaper. She visited her husband at Bulawayo when she could, and helped in making transport arrangements from Salisbury to Bulawayo to enable the wives of detainees to see their husbands. The little printing shop in Market Square became the point where cars going to Bulawayo at the week-ends picked up their passengers. Her courage, in the strange situation where she found herself, was at this time very great. But as the months went by and her husband was not among the several hundreds of detainees released, as it became increasingly clear

that the Government intended to safeguard the safety and order of the State by keeping many men imprisoned without trial for five years, she found it more and more difficult to face the future. The printing business had to be sold. She was expecting another child. In her great difficulty, the Government's behaviour towards Mr. Guy Clutton-Brock suggested a course of action. He had been arrested at the same time as Matimba. A few weeks later he was offered his freedom by the Government on the condition that he immediately left the country. These terms he refused, and soon after, he was released unconditionally. Mrs. Matimba now approached the Government with the suggestion that her husband be released if he promised to go with her directly to Holland. The Government agreed to this. Matimba, after some hesitation, also agreed.

So the man who had done something or other which was not in the public interest, the man whose unconditional release would have imperilled the safety of the State, went upon his way. It would be unfair to the Government not to mention the risks it took in enabling Matimba to rejoin his family and enjoy his freedom elsewhere. It undoubtedly ran the risk of inviting similar appeals from the relations of other detainees, many of whom could probably find asylum in other parts of the world. There seems no doubt, of course, that these would be rejected. Yet clearly Matimba is not appreciably less dangerous than the rest—or why is he to be rearrested if he returns? Already the Government has suffered whispers that Matimba was released because he was an acute embarrassment to it. Further, the Government had appointed a Tribunal to inquire into—and report upon—the case against each detainee. The hearing before the Tribunal is, of course, in no sense a trial, nor is the Government necessarily bound by its findings. But still, in deciding to release Matimba and yet refusing to give him his freedom within the country before it had received the Tribunal's report on him, the Government showed scant courtesy to a body that is its own creation. The awkwardness of the Government's position was increased by the ungrateful behaviour of Matimba himself, and the perhaps over-officious zeal of a warder at Salisbury Jail, where Matimba spent the night before his release. The warder discovered two letters from Paul Mushonga and Robert Chikere-ma, detainees in Khami Jail, to "sympathizers" in London, which Matimba had smuggled out with him and which he intended to take to Europe. Smuggling letters out of prison is an

offence. The letters were taken from Matimba, but his release and departure were not delayed. Later Mushonga and Chikerema were sentenced to sixteen days solitary confinement and punishment diet as prescribed by the Prison Act.

For Matimba then, the story ends happily enough. To illustrate the suffering caused by the actions of the Southern Rhodesian Government, there are many other stories that can be told. Not that Matimba has been shown any mercy. There can be no mercy where there is no justice. But he has been, compared with others, rather lucky. His story is not told here because he is an outstanding political figure, a man of destiny. On the contrary; though as an African married to a European woman Matimba was a strange anomaly in the Southern Rhodesian scene, yet as a man looking for his happiness—not in dedication to any cause, but in the building up of a life for himself around work which gave him his independence—in this he is typical. When the political leaders of the great mass of the population have to be imprisoned by government in order to secure the State, there has been a fundamental political failure in the society. When men like Matimba cannot be left to live their lives, the failure, though it is less easy to name, goes much deeper. Matimba will probably make a happy life for himself in Europe. It is easier for us to feel more concern for the political martyrs, for the men totally devoted to their cause, than for him. It is also easier for us to feel more indignant about governments openly devoted to evil ends than about governments taking at every moment what seems the easiest way out, unconcerned with principle and appearance, or consistency, paying lip service to this and that, escaping from one embarrassment carelessly into the next, abrogating law in the name of order, and promoting the insecurity of the individual in the name of the security of the State. But the ease with which we feel concern and indignation is not always the best measure of the danger that threatens.