

Blacks are straining to hide divisions

James Fox
reports from Geneva

THE MILITANTS of Zanu were privately congratulating themselves on what they saw as a master-stroke last week—that of declaring their total intransigence on the date of independence. Twelve months is the furthest they will go, and it appears that they have the backing of the “front-line” presidents for an uncompromising stand.

What began as a piece of practical judgment has now become elevated to a principle—shared by all the black nationalist delegations, in public at least. It is designed to clarify several points quickly:

First, is Smith seriously negotiating, or simply playing for time? The issue of a date is legally the least technical point on the agenda, and the easiest one with which to prove Smith's unreasonableness.

Second, in a deadlock, will the British Government finally play a decisive role, and bring the outgoing Smith Government down to size and tie him to what it considers a reasonable time-scale? “Just because this is Smith's mathematics, you abandon all calculations,” said one front-line observer last week. “They believe that the only person who has a constituency to satisfy is Ian Smith—who is on his way out.”

Mugabe was seen by moderate blacks, however, as having taken a political risk. His support depends on Zanu and Zipa (the guerrilla army), and his stand depends on backing from the front-line states. Their representatives in Geneva seemed to be aware that moderates might break up the common front, and hinted that Ivor Richard's attempts at compromise with black leaders over the weekend were designed to “divide the nationalists.”

Smith's own enabling legislation—which will run parallel to the programme in Westminster—is a purely cosmetic opera-



Mugabe: taking a risk

tion, which tacitly recognises UDI—a point which has been quietly buried.

There was a solid practical reason behind the blacks' choice of a short interim government—which cannot have been lost on Smith: Nkomo put it succinctly last week—“While we don't have power, we risk chaos if the interim government goes on too long.”

The effort at Geneva to bury political differences and hide ambitions is strained to the limit. And the fears of each delegation about lasting beyond the interim government are already in evidence. Muzorewa's own plans for power—to have an election for the interim government representation—was denounced partly for that reason. One of his aides said that any politician in the interim government whose place was not justified by popular support would “use other methods” to stay there.

Indeed, whoever has control of the interim government will be able to use its machinery to build up a powerful political structure for the elections that would follow. Zanu hardly hides its ambitions in this respect. Without any tested political structure inside Zimbabwe, they will insist that the guerrillas of Zipa play a predominant part in electing the prime minister, for example. Zipa—which is effectively a Zanu army—would move in and take control along Frelimo lines.