

# Ian Smith's once 'mixed-up' son forms a remarkable friendship

● The son of the Prime Minister of Rhodesia has seldom followed the conventional path. Now, through the cementing of a new friendship, he may well have found the road to harmony. In Johannesburg, TONY DUGAN met Mr Smith's once mixed-up boy.

The friendship between the Prime Minister's son and the African Nationalist leader is an unlikely combination in the melting pot that is Rhodesia today.

But then Alex Smith, 26-year-old son of Rhodesian Premier, Mr Ian Smith, has never followed convention.

His close association with Dr Elliot Gabellah, vice president of the African National Council, has caused more than just raised eyebrows among Black and White in Rhodesia.

Many see this friendship as a ray of hope in the country's thorny path to racial harmony. Others see it as "a sellout to the other side."

## Passport incident

Alex Smith spoke about this and his chequered life — three years ago he was the central figure in a sensational drugs trial — when he passed through Johannesburg recently on his way to Switzerland for an international Moral Rearmament Conference.

He hit world headlines in December 1970 when he tried to get a new British passport while a university student at Grahamstown.

Fifteen months later, rebellious, jobless and "totally disillusioned with life," he was convicted for possession of dagga.

"That shook me to my senses because suddenly I had a 200 dollar fine to pay and no money."

# Off-beat with the key to harmony

In this state he started looking at Christianity which he had regarded until then as little more than an extension of the drug experience.

## 'Dedicated people'

"I was incredibly mixed up both at university and during my army service," he said. "Anything in the drug line that could be taken, I took."

Shortly after becoming a Christian he met Moral Rearmament, "a world force of people dedicated to the creation of a society governed by men governed by God."

"The border war in Rhodesia in early 1973 when I served with the Territorials made me very conscious that Christianity must have a part to play in creating the right society,"

he said.

"I found MRA to be a group that was actively involved in trying to change society in a basic way. I thought I'd like to help them because of what they were doing in Rhodesia particularly."

Through MRA he met in Bulawayo towards the end of last year with Dr Gabellah and several homeland leaders from South Africa.

## 'The new society'

It was a time when Rhodesia teetered between high hopes and pessimism about its future. At the meeting the idea came up of holding an international conference in Rhodesia on the theme of "creating the new society."

"It was apparent that political moves were



Mr Alex Smith, son of the Rhodesian Prime Minister . . . a changed man.

getting nowhere and what was needed was a change of heart of both Blacks and Whites," Mr Smith said.

"This is the change MRA is working for world-wide and it seemed Rhodesia needed to deal with this human problem.

"After all discrimination exists in people's hearts,

not on paper and no government can legislate for a change of heart."

Alex Smith, Sir Cyril Hatty and Dr Gabellah were among those who lent their full weight to this conference which took place at the University of Salisbury from June 2 to June 8.

"The conference has

given a new perspective to more than 1 000 Black and White Rhodesians at all levels and I am very optimistic about the future of the country," Mr Smith added.

At least three Rhodesian Cabinet Ministers and several Senators and Members of Parliament attended MRA sessions and heard Dr Gabellah among others speaking on politics and change.

## 'Rhodesia the key'

Before leaving for Europe Mr Alex Smith happened to meet Mr David Ennals, the British envoy who held discussions with the South African and Rhodesian Governments on the situation in Southern Africa.

On that meeting Alex Smith will not be drawn but he made some pertinent points about South Africa.

"I see Rhodesia as the key to the whole of Southern Africa, a microcosm of the problems on this sub-continent including Angola and Mozambique. What happens in my country will happen later elsewhere in Southern Africa," he said.

"Any politician who thinks a compromise can be worked out leaving South Africa intact if Rhodesia collapses has his head in the sand.

"But if Rhodesia can create a state in which all races can live peacefully together it has an answer not only for Southern Africa but for the rest of Africa," said Mr Smith.