

# THE COLLAPSE OF MOZAMBICAN SOCIALISM<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

The 1980s have not been a good time for socialism anywhere. In Mozambique in particular, the 1980s were an horrendous period.

In 1980, Mozambique was regarded throughout Africa as the embodiment of 'real' socialism on the continent, as the model for African socialists. The attempt to transform economic and social relations and culture along socialist lines was by far the more far-reaching and serious of the many varieties of 'socialism' in Africa. The Mozambican government was very proud of the fact that Maputo was known as 'the red capital of Africa'. The uniqueness of Mozambique in its first six years of independence is worth recapitulating briefly.

The FRELIMO government had come to power through an armed national liberation struggle which (unique in Africa except for Guinea-Bissau) had *begun* to turn into a genuine social revolution. Although the Portuguese fascist colonial state collapsed before this revolution could be extended to the whole territory of Mozambique, with independence in June 1975, FRELIMO and its socialist programme clearly enjoyed vast popular support throughout all areas and most social strata in the country. Despite inheriting an already bankrupted colonial economy, further devastated by pervasive sabotage wreaked by departing Portuguese colonialists, the first six years of independence saw the FRELIMO government achieve remarkable progress in education, health and housing, and Mozambique was consciously held up as a model, not just by many South African blacks, but throughout the continent. Indeed, in 1981, the World Health Organisation proclaimed Mozambique's preventative health care system as a model for the Third World.

As a political movement, FRELIMO had proved itself, and would prove itself again and again, capable of a domestic and international political creativity and imagination unique in Africa. Its leadership was always genuinely collective. FRELIMO had come to Marxism through its own revolutionary experience and its ideology (at least till the late 1970s) owed little to the prevailing orthodoxies sponsored by either Moscow or Peking. FRELIMO was the only African liberation movement which refused to take sides in the Sino-Soviet split, and at least till the late-1970s, maintained warm relations and elicited strong support from both China and the Soviet Union.

Cherishing its independence, the FRELIMO government turned down a Soviet request to use the port of Maputo as a naval base. In the southern African region its imposition in 1976 of UN sanctions against the illegal white settler government in Rhodesia was an exemplary and selfless act of solidarity with the Zimbabwean liberation struggle which cost the new state its major source of foreign exchange. After independence, Mozambique became perhaps the most important and influential member of the Front Line States grouping, and President Machel was one of the most highly respected Heads of State in the OAU. Mozambique played the pivotal role in the establishment in 1980 of the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), which attracted strong Western support for its imaginative and pragmatic strategy to reduce the economic dependence on apartheid South Africa of the nine independent black states of the region.

The significant achievements of Mozambican socialism by 1981, and the extraordinary regard that its political leadership enjoyed not just in Africa but in left circles everywhere, promoted such a sense of overconfidence that FRELIMO proclaimed the 1980s as the 'Decade of Development'. According to this plan, Mozambique was to become 'a developed country' by 1990. Tragically, the 1980s were in reality more a decade of devastation. Today the Mozambican government has lost control over vast areas of the country and the Mozambican state has virtually ceased to exist. There is no national economy worth speaking of. The once-fiercely independent FRELIMO government survives on international grants and aid. FRELIMO has effectively abandoned Marxism-Leninism and swallowed the bitter pill of Western-prescribed plans for structural adjustment. Mozambican society has been shattered by South Africa's undeclared war of destabilisation - described by the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Africa as 'one of the most brutal holocausts against ordinary human beings since the Second World War'. Over a million Mozambicans have died as a direct result of the war and perhaps another six million of the fourteen million inhabitants have been forced to flee from their homes. It is difficult to speak of the existence of civil society in Mozambique.

The experience of Mozambique in many ways is the worst nightmare of what might have happened in Nicaragua had there been a full-scale American intervention. What I want to concentrate on is what went wrong. Why was it that the decade labelled by Frelimo in 1979 as the 'Decade of Development', became in fact the graveyard of Mozambican socialism.

There are four broad types of explanation of this collapse. One is obviously that of the cold war warriors in Pretoria and the State Department which holds that socialism is a lunatic, evil project which runs against human nature and is doomed to failure everywhere. I will not waste any time on this argument. The

second type of explanation is that put forward by FRELIMO itself, and is perhaps the most widespread explanation one finds throughout the left and particularly in the southern African solidarity movement. This holds that the collapse of Mozambican socialism is all the South Africans' fault - that this regional superpower unleashed massive economic and military destabilisation against a Mozambique too weak to hold out indefinitely.

While destabilisation was clearly of overwhelming importance, and was without doubt the decisive factor, I nevertheless feel that to explain everything in terms of destabilisation is a dangerous political and theoretical oversimplification. In justifiably blaming Pretoria this argument, however, has tended to blind its proponents to the real shortcomings of Mozambican socialism, and has enabled the vast bulk of the South African left to avoid drawing the painful but real theoretical and political conclusions for its own struggle of the failure of socialism in Mozambique.

A third explanation is found amongst the more Stalinist sectors of the South African Communist Party, which is not unimportant in southern Africa, and, paradoxically, in some tiny Trotskyist sects. While acknowledging the devastating impact of destabilisation, this argument tends to stress the 'objective' facts that 'in any case', firstly, there was never any 'real' working class in Mozambique; and, secondly, FRELIMO was never a 'real' Marxist-Leninist party - therefore, even without South African intervention it would never have been possible to create 'proper socialism' in Mozambique. Clearly, the class structure of Mozambique and (changing) social base of support for FRELIMO, as well as the level of theoretical and ideological development and sophistication of its members and leadership were all crucial elements in the prospects for and process of attempting a socialist transformation in Mozambique. However, this smug argument forecloses any debate and discussion over *process* and struggle in Mozambique. Partly reflected in the Soviet Union's official characterisation of Mozambique as a country of 'socialist orientation' rather than a socialist country, this type of sectarian orthodoxy led to FRELIMO being excluded from the 1980 conference of African Communist Parties (though the MPLA of Angola was invited). Caught between the iron rails of Stalinist historiography and South African aggression, socialism in Mozambique clearly stood no chance.

The final broad type of explanation has been put forward mainly by some Marxist trends which are not orthodox communist. This type of explanation tends to give most weight to the commandist and ultimately anti-democratic political style of FRELIMO and its grave policy and political 'errors'. While acknowledging the destructiveness of the South African interventions, such explanations would argue that the real damage was already done by the time Pretoria's all-out offensive against Mozambique was launched in 1981. As

exemplified in the work of Michel Cahen, the more extreme variant of this view goes so far as to argue that there is no real difference between FRELIMO and the unparalleled barbarism of the so-called Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo).

While each of the last three types of explanation pose some of the key issues, each seem to me unable to grasp the concrete, contradictory and highly complex process by which the socialist experiment unravelled in Mozambique. They leave unposed a series of crucial questions and significantly fail to periodise the social and political struggles which led to the collapse. Clearly I cannot answer all these questions. However, I want briefly to cover two major areas: firstly, the ways in which the Mozambican experience is relevant to the broader issue of socialist transformation elsewhere; and, secondly, to pose the bare outlines of a periodisation through which to analyse the collapse. Both will obviously be partial and schematic.

### Socialist transformation

The very depth and uniqueness of the Mozambican experience, coupled with the devastating extent of the collapse of the 1980s poses a series of theoretical and political issues which have been at the heart of the debates and struggles within Marxism at least since February 1917.

The first refers to one of the key issues between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks - whether or not socialism is on the agenda in a backward, rural society in which: a) the level of development of the forces of production is very low; and b) in which the capitalist relations of production either have not developed on anything other than a very partial scale, or, depending on how one reads Lenin's characterisation of the peasantry in his *Development of Capitalism in Russia*, where these relations have developed but in a distorted, contradictory fashion. In a country in which close to 90% of the population lived and worked essentially on small family plots of land, the extremely small size of the classically-defined proletariat and the total absence of an indigenous bourgeoisie made the question of the social base of the revolution and socialist transformation highly problematic. FRELIMO's real base was in the peasantry. The Chinese experience had a clear resonance in the strategic dilemmas faced by the FRELIMO leadership.

Very schematically, the theorisation of the socialist transformation FRELIMO put forward argued that a class base for socialism *would be created in the rural areas* through the consolidation of huge state farms which would lead to the rapid formation of a rural proletariat. Almost all the resources of the Department of Agriculture were pumped into the state farm sector (run by Bulgarian 'experts'), to the obvious detriment of the peasantry which had comprised the

real base of the Mozambican revolution. The long-term negative consequences of this were compounded by both the economic situation FRELIMO inherited, and its conceptualisation of the main 'class enemy' (as we shall see below).

This then highlighted the second classical issue posed by the Mozambican experience - the character of the relationship between a self-defined vanguard party practising 'democratic centralism' on the one hand, and the masses, or popular classes on the other, and more particularly the different class forces (workers, peasants, 'revolutionary intellectuals' etc) making up this broad popular bloc. This emerged very early as FRELIMO moved to impose its control over a remarkable explosion of popular initiative, organisation and politicisation following the April 1974 coup d'état which had brought down the fascist regime in Portugal. The early debates around Lenin's *What is to be Done* and particularly the exchanges between Lenin and Luxembourg were highly relevant here. The whole question of socialist democracy and the role of the vanguard party was posed very starkly in Mozambique.

Thirdly, this also led to the question of the imprint on the process of transformation of the practices derived from the period of the struggle to seize power. Prefigurative forms of socialism which emerged in the pre-seizure period of power and the way in which this experience, the organization of the social process, and particularly the forms through which the political struggle is organised, all imprinted themselves on the later period in varying degrees, and set some of the terms, delineated some of the options, and determined a significant part of the prism through which the post-independence period was experienced and dealt with.

The fourth major issue was that posed by Marx in the *Civil War in France*. Socialist transformation is not a question of merely taking hold of an existing capitalist state, but of using political power to transform, or dismantle, that state. In the Mozambican case this posed the question of how to deal with the inherited colonial-fascist state, one characterised by mind-numbing bureaucratic and almost feudal practices. This posed the related issue of how 'the state' is to be conceived in theory and practice. The conception which came to predominate saw the state as a simple 'instrument' of class rule, exercised through the FRELIMO party - which gave rise to absurd formulae common in political education meetings: 'the vanguard party controls the state, the party is a workers and peasants party, therefore the workers and peasants are the ruling class (sic) in Mozambique'. Any idea that the (FRELIMO-ruled) state remained a site of class struggle was a dangerous thought which could only be (and frequently was) expressed by President Machel himself - he was at the same time both the embodiment of this state and its fiercest critic. However, the most common prescription, repeated ad nauseum by most national and internationalist intel-

lectuals working in Mozambique, was that 'class struggle' was confined to the level of economic relations and that there was no political class struggle in Mozambique and least of all in the apparatuses of the state.

A fifth central set of issue was that of the respective roles of planning and the market, of socialist accumulation - primitive or otherwise - in the transformation process. The Soviet experience of the NEP, and the debates between Bukharin and Preobrazhensky around the question of socialist accumulation and the role of the market were echoed in much less theorised form by early discussions in Mozambique. Combined with the pressing issue of what to do with the huge tracts of developed agricultural land abandoned by the settlers and Portuguese and British plantation owners, the issue of the relationship between 'the plan' and the market was one of the major early economic dilemmas faced by FRELIMO. While the pervasive economic sabotage and flight of the Portuguese severely reduced FRELIMO's options, the lack of skilled cadres necessitated the use of planning personnel from the German Democratic Republic, who proceeded to plan the Mozambican economy to the third decimal point in orthodox top-down fashion. Very little input from workers and peasants went into the processes of fixing norms and targets which, when combined with the almost total collapse of the market by 1981, meant that basic wage goods were simply unavailable, and led to the virtual total collapse of the network of urban-rural exchange. This then posed not only 'economic' questions, but crucial political questions such as: how planning was to be organised and controlled; the role of the party, classes, mainly foreign 'experts' and their 'expertise' dictating targets and norms to workers and peasants; bureaucratization and the consolidation of bureaucratic privilege through control of the plan and resources allocated under the plan, etc, etc.

I could go on. However, to mention but six other areas. These are: the question of the attempt to transform agriculture, particularly to create rural socialism in a country where 90% of the population is engaged in family-based agricultural production; issues of nationalism and 'nation-building' confronting class interests; the capacity of a socialist government to form regional alliances against imperialist or sub-imperialist powers. There is also the question of opposition, which in Mozambique took an armed form, organised, financed and led by the Special Forces Command of the South African Defence Force. And, lastly, there is the question of the Mozambican experience of a large-scale assault on this under-populated, weak country by an overwhelming regional power.

These then are the dilemmas, amongst others, which pose themselves at a theoretical level about the Mozambican experience.

## Periodisation

Concretely trying to synthesize actually existing (or previously existing) socialism in Mozambique in a somewhat schematic way, I find it useful to point to four broad phases in the Mozambican experience. These phases are: 1962-1974, from the formation of FRELIMO to the collapse of Portuguese colonialism; secondly, from 1975-1980, the first five years of independence, the 'triumphalist' phase, when FRELIMO believed it was moving from one victory to another; a third phase would run from 1980-1984, and was the period of intense struggle between planning on one hand and South African intervention on the other hand; the fourth is the period which began in 1984, and saw progressive retreat and ongoing collapse. Let me go through these very briefly.

### *1962-1974*

To grasp the pattern of the struggle against Portuguese colonialism and the implications of that colonial heritage, it is essential to recognise that despite a history of almost 500 years, Portuguese colonialism did not forge an integrated national economy in Mozambique, as happened in Tanzania, for example. Rather, Portuguese colonialism produced three distinct and discrete economic regions in the country. They differed in terms of the processes of exploitation and accumulation, patterns of class formation, social and class structures, and emerging political organizations. There was virtually no economic exchange between them beyond the draining of revenue by the colonial state to Lourenço Marques, the capital in the extreme south. Until 1973 it was not even possible to travel between the two major cities, Lourenço Marques and Beira, except by air or sea.

Put broadly, Mozambique was integrated into a regional southern African economy whose major pole of accumulation lies in South Africa. Mozambique's southern provinces were little more than a vast labour reserve and tourist playground for South African capitalism, the central region was dominated by British-owned plantations and the supply of migrant labour to the British colony of Southern Rhodesia, while the northern provinces were deeply integrated into the process of accumulation structured by the British in Tanzania, oriented economically towards east Africa rather than southern Africa.

FRELIMO was formed in Tanzania in 1962 as an alliance in exile of three political groups. It launched an armed struggle in the north in September 1964. In its early years, it was always an uneasy alliance characterized by a very high level of internal struggle. Its very military successes exacerbated differences within this national liberation movement around such fundamental questions as: who is the principal enemy (whites in general or the Portuguese colonial system)?; who should control the movement (the fighters or the politicians in

Dar es Salaam)?; were educated Mozambicans absolved from the duty to fight, preserving their skills for the administration of the future state and leaving combat to their less fortunate comrades?; what kind of post-colonial society did FRELIMO envisage?

These conflicts were often violent. They led to the assassination in 1969 of the first President, Eduardo Mondlane, and ended around 1972 with the victory of the Marxist-Leninist core and election of Samora Machel as President, leading to the expulsion of a significant part of the original FRELIMO leadership.

During the armed struggle period, FRELIMO finally elaborated a peasant-based, protracted-war strategy drawing much from the Chinese experience, and particularly Mao's military writings, but without adopting either a Maoist model or a pro-Chinese orientation. This strategy was based on the creation of liberated zones in the rural areas. A map of these liberated areas subsequently published by the Mozambican Department of Education illustrates graphically the fact that the liberated zones and semi-liberated zones established by FRELIMO prior to April 1974, were all located in the northern regions, and in the less populated areas.

This latter is important because in a real sense acknowledged by FRELIMO, the Portuguese coup which effectively ended colonial rule, occurred too soon. FRELIMO had not managed to extend its organized base into the southern areas of the country where the major concentrations of population (and only centres of industrial production) are found. So it came to power not as the result of the final success of the revolution in Mozambique, but rather as a result of the collapse of Portuguese fascism - in which collapse FRELIMO's military victories had played perhaps the decisive part. With the installation of a transitional government in September 1974, the major political presence of FRELIMO moved from the northern half of the country in which the armed struggle had taken root, to the capital Maputo (then Lourenço Marques) in the extreme south.

The imprint of this period on the politics and choices of the post-independence period was important. The experience, traditions and growing mythology of the armed struggle, and particularly some of its more militarist, commandist tendencies - embodied in the persona and charismatic political style of President Machel - produced a profoundly militarist discourse of politics, and led by 1977 to the adoption of the view that the revolution and socialist transformation was to be *directed* and controlled via tight discipline and instructions from Maputo. The fact that FRELIMO had imposed a military defeat on Portugal (in the elaborate last Portuguese offensive known as 'Operation Gordian Knot') was occasionally reduced to a question of superior tactics and skill at manoeuvre. It

produced in much of the leadership a wild overconfidence bordering on arrogance, seen most damagingly in profound miscalculation of how to deal both politically and militarily with the South African state and its Renamo agents.

### 1975-1980

This period is possibly the most interesting. Five features stand out.

Politically FRELIMO reconstituted itself, abandoning its old guise as a national liberation movement, to adopt that of a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party. During this period the party worked hard to impose itself on, and take control of, the bubbling cauldron of popular social and political organisation and to direct the striking degree of popular initiative and spontaneity. This was a very complex process, but basically what happened by about 1978 was that the party managed to suppress or bring under its control and direction, a series of independent power bases. The most important of these were structures called *grupos dinamizadores* (dynamising groups or GDs).

The GDs were local, community- and factory-based organizations which were very contradictory in their class character but did reflect something of a popular organization and democracy. Not yet under the direct control of the party, the GDs played an important - though I repeat, contradictory - economic and political role, particularly in combatting economic sabotage. With FRELIMO's campaign to 'structure' the new Marxist-Leninist party in 1978, the GDs were dissolved and replaced by 'production councils' which were directly subordinated to the party structures and subjected to democratic centralist discipline.

The second important element was the widespread economic sabotage undertaken by the departing Portuguese. Much of the infrastructure of the country was very severely damaged. Less dramatic but even more significant in this large, elongated country with a population of only 12 million in 1975, was the abandonment by Portuguese traders of the literally thousands of small rural trading posts and stores. These *commerçiantes* provided the mechanism through which peasant surpluses were channelled from the rural areas to the cities, the way in which the whole structure of the market in colonial Mozambique was organized.

The virtual total flight of Portuguese settlers who occupied all posts involving even minimal skill or education, and the enormous economic sabotage they wreaked, had three far-reaching effects. Firstly, it obliged the new government to take over abandoned enterprises before they collapsed entirely. This led to the creation of a state sector much larger than FRELIMO had ever envisaged, and way beyond its capacity to manage or keep functioning, draining resources and - perhaps even more damagingly - sapping its capacity to conceive of alternative, more flexible economic strategies.

Secondly, it led to the almost total collapse of the market, and particularly the fragile - but crucial - fabric of urban/rural exchange which was the only way to ensure the production of peasant surplus. With the now state-owned commercial sector unable to deliver the most basic necessities such as implements, clothing, soap, etc, to the rural areas, the state was unable to 'purchase' peasant surpluses. This led both to the flourishing of a vast black market oiled by foreign exchange, and then the progressive erosion of the national currency as a medium of exchange.

Thirdly, this then posed major economic policy dilemmas in two areas. The first is in agriculture, with the wholesale abandonment by Portuguese settler farmers and Portuguese and British plantation owners of what FRELIMO called 'the modern agricultural sectors' (as opposed to the 'family sector' - the echoes of dualism are real and had seriously negative effects). These were large concentrations of productive land and capital, with highly developed infrastructure which had been largely maintained by the colonial state. The settler farms and plantations were respectively the key areas producing food for the cities (ie a range of food crops not produced by peasants) and export crops (tea, sugar, etc) for the economically beleaguered new state which, through its solidarity with the Zimbabwean struggle, had lost its single most important source of foreign exchange by closing down Rhodesian access to Mozambican railways and ports.

What was FRELIMO to do? Was it to allow the peasantry to take back this land through a programme of wholesale land reform or should it attempt to try to preserve this existing infrastructure as a base of accumulation in the countryside (and source of food for the cities and foreign exchange to pay for imports of very basic consumer goods)? After a long debate, FRELIMO opted for the second alternative and set up a very extensive state farm sector with all the by now too familiar negative consequences. Bulgarians were brought in to manage the state farms, not very successfully. Resources and inappropriate technology poured into the state farm sector.

When taken with the other major rural initiative of the period - an attempt to provide basic social services to the peasantry by forcing rural families to live in collective villages - FRELIMO's agricultural policy set up extreme tensions in the rural areas between the state, its representatives and its state farms on one hand, and the peasantry, which had been the major social base of FRELIMO in the period of the revolution, on the other hand. It saw the emergence of forced labour emerging under the rubric of voluntary labour. With the movement of East European agricultural 'experts' into the Ministry of Agriculture, most of the key lessons FRELIMO had learned about peasant agriculture during the armed struggle were swept aside. Forgetting about the peasant surpluses which

had fed the armed struggle, 'family agriculture' was now fatally conceived more and more in classically dualist terms as backward 'subsistence farming'. This meant that the economic, social and political processes of the socialist transformation of the rural areas increasingly came to be conceived as an essentially technical question in which the 'modern' state farms represented the pole of 'development' which would necessarily and unproblematically drag into 'development' the backward family sector, provided the right technical resources were allocated by the plan.

To the disastrous economic and political consequences of agricultural policy during this period must be added FRELIMO's early decision to 'crush the snake of the national bourgeoisie before it is born'. Here too we find the deep imprint of the experience of the armed struggle. This decision was likewise a wrong conclusion drawn from the armed struggle period. In the period 1964-1970, in the only area of the country where a relatively prosperous stratum of peasants existed - producing cotton and cashew nuts and organised into cooperatives - a small group of wealthier peasants had sought to take control of FRELIMO. Known as the Kavandame group they tried to turn the liberation struggle into one for the independence of only the northern provinces (or sometimes just the Cabo Delgado Province bordering Tanzania) and impose KiSwahili or English as the national language. Clearly proto-capitalist in its orientation, the Kavandame group had also been implicated in the assassination of FRELIMO's first president, Eduardo Mondlane.

The struggle against this group was depicted as a 'two line' fight between the progressive socialist wing, and racist aspirant capitalists. In transposing this struggle into a generalised post-independence identification of such 'Kulaks' as the class enemy, FRELIMO simply ignored the fact that the class structure and forms of economic organisation which had given rise to the Kavandame group were unique to Cabo Delgado and that, aside from the Portuguese appointed 'chiefs' (*regulos*) who had been a key link in the chain of the colonial state, a proto-Kulak class simply did not exist in the rest of the country.

This attempt to smash the as yet unborn snake of a national bourgeoisie then led to fairly widespread and senseless repression against alleged 'Kulaks' who had nothing to do with the relatively small number of *regulos*, and far from constituting 'the class enemy', were barely at the level of middle peasants in Lenin's classification. When coupled with the drain of resources to the state farms, the forced villagization of most areas, the lack of availability of the most basic supplies in the rural areas, and the widespread coercion of peasants into 'voluntary seasonal labour' on the state farms, it had the effect by 1981 of deeply alienating wide sectors of FRELIMO's original class base.

The other major economic dilemma of this period was over what to do about

the heavy levels of integration of the Mozambican economy, or the two southernmost regional economies, into South Africa - whether Mozambique should try and break that link. Here it is crucial to remember that in 1975, to the extent that a proletariat existed anywhere in Mozambique, it was in the form of a migrant labour proletariat, 140,000 of whom were working every year in the South African mines, and perhaps an equal number illegally in other sectors of the South African economy. The remitted wages of these migrant workers were the base on which the economic structure of the whole of southern Mozambique rested - not to mention a significant source of foreign exchange for the Mozambican economy.

With Mozambican independence in 1975, South Africa slashed the number of legally employed Mozambicans to just over 40,000. FRELIMO had to decide what to do about both the laid-off workers and the ongoing pattern of migrant work. Was it to prohibit the flow of labour to the South African mining industry, and attempt to reintegrate these workers into a developing southern economy? It decided to maintain the flows of migrant labour whilst simultaneously 'transforming' the countryside so as to offer a viable economic alternative to the sale of labour power in South Africa. But as I have mentioned, its agricultural policies led to a rapid shrinking of commercial production from family agriculture and thus undercut this strategy.

The fourth feature of this period was an ongoing war. Mozambique was involved in a fairly high level of conventional warfare with the then white settler separatist state of Rhodesia. The FRELIMO government took two steps which had a significant impact on the economic capacities of the new state. In 1976 it cut all economic links with Rhodesia by imposing UN sanctions against the Smith regime. This closed off the largest single source of foreign exchange earnings, the transport networks from Rhodesia to Mozambique, with a loss of some US\$200 million a year. And secondly there was heavy physical destruction wrought by the Rhodesian army at a cost of something like US\$600 million over four years - this in a country which had a GNP of only US\$1.7 billion in 1973.

By 1979 the war with Rhodesia had become an enormous drain. President Machel later declared that he was spending over 60% of his time on issues related to this war. FRELIMO made a hardheaded political calculation in mid-1979 that despite seven years of growing armed struggle in Zimbabwe, there was little evidence of a real revolutionary struggle. It concluded that neither of the two Patriotic Front parties were capable of such a transformation and that if the end result of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle was not going to be a genuinely socialist government, Mozambican socialism should no longer go on paying the very high price of sustaining this struggle. FRELIMO thus placed irresistible pressure on a very reluctant ZANU to attend the Lancaster

House negotiations, and to accept the far from perfect deal which the British finally engineered.

The overwhelming victory of ZANU(PF) in Zimbabwe's independence elections and the rapid formation of SADCC with Mozambique and Zimbabwe at its core, signalled the apogee of Mozambican policy in the region. By 1980, despite the growing contradictions in agriculture and alienation of the peasantry, Mozambican socialism was largely seen both inside and outside the country to be working. Measures of exports and the Gross Social Product were virtually back to pre-independence levels. Millions of Mozambicans were now being educated and its model health care system drastically cut the rate of infant mortality. Throughout the region the progressive forces seemed to have the initiative, and the SADCC strategy to offer a real possibility of reducing South African economic domination of the region while wooing the more conservative black states out of Pretoria's political orbit. At the heart of all of these developments stood the strikingly confident FRELIMO government.

The end of the war with Rhodesia held out the real hope of peace for the first time since 1964 and fostered the real belief that Mozambique would be allowed to pursue its domestic policies without external interference. This led to a reorganisation of the FPLM, the Mozambican armed forces. Calculating that the potential military threat lay in a conventional attack by South Africa, the still-prevailing politicised and largely self-sufficient guerilla orientation was replaced by a conventional military structure and training. Thus, when the sharp shift in the regional balance of forces pushed the apartheid regime into a vigorous destabilization of Mozambique using the Rhodesian-trained puppet group, Renamo, the FPLM's capacity to fight a 'political', mobile war had been fatally sapped.

#### 1980-1984

The years 1980-4 marked a period of much more overt struggle in Mozambique. The political trends were contradictory. On the one hand there was the reinforcing of the earlier commandist tendencies. The groundrules for this new definition of democratic centralism were laid out by President Machel in a key speech at the Maputo General Hospital in May 1979. This 'hospital speech' laid down two directives. First of all that the term comrade was no longer to be used amongst Mozambicans except between party members in party meetings. This was a severe, and at the time shocking, attack on a strong culture of egalitarianism. He directed, secondly, that the role of managers was to manage (or to 'direct' in the stronger Portuguese verb *dirigir*) and the role of workers was to work and to obey the managers (*dirigentes*). This undermined the fragile but important embryonic structures of collective decision-making emerging in

the state structure and it reimposed control by the managers. It reimposed direct, hierarchical labour discipline on all sectors of the economy.

Contradictorily, however, this increasingly commandist trend went along with a startling degree of political creativity. Most notable was a sustained and serious campaign for 'socialist legality' led by the President. It produced scathing and officially-sanctioned criticism of the police and secret police throughout the country. Both were denounced by President Machel as 'worse than the Portuguese colonialists' and the responsible Ministers forced to make public self-criticisms (though they kept their jobs). It similarly saw a three day national discussion and criticism of former collaborators with Portuguese colonialism leading to their reintegration into civil and political life in a very sophisticated way. Yet, although it was a contradictory process the major trend was towards increasing control and freezing out of large-scale (or indeed any form of) democratic participation both in economic decision-making and in the political life of the country.

This went hand in hand with perhaps the major error committed by FRELIMO during this period, an economic commandism, a lunatic utopianism and voluntarism of the plan. The first ten-year plan was put forward in 1979, the Perspective Indicative Plan or PPI. Its proclaimed objective was to transform Mozambique into a developed industrial economy by 1990. The 1980s were described as the 'Decade of Development'. The PPI projected a targeted annual economic growth rate of 14.7%. This absurd growth rate would be achieved through maximizing exports. The only exports Mozambique had were agricultural exports and so it would be the peasantry which would produce these agricultural exports, who would have to maximize their production. And I think we can draw the conclusions of what the political implications of that were. By maximizing exports, you could import on a very large scale the kinds of inputs which were seen to be the key to this image of 'development'. This industrialisation by importation was to be financed externally at a projected interest rate of 6%, to be provided by the comrades in the fraternal bloc of socialist states. Answering some incredulous senior state officials who fought against the PPI with great courage, President Machel declared that its objectives were realistic and achievable 'because we have a vanguard party and are determined'.

Now, none of this worked of course. The socialist countries were unable to provide the kind of financing that was required, Mozambique was twice refused admission to COMECON. The collapse of the market, coupled with the growing economic destruction wrought by Renamo made an increase in exports a pipe-dream. Yet the insistence on huge development projects was maintained and sucked Mozambique into a debt to the capitalist economies alone by 1984 of more than twice its pre-independence Gross Domestic Product.

Increasingly, however, the third element of this period, the undeclared war of destabilisation, came to dominate every aspect of Mozambican society. In 1980, South Africa inherited from the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) the ragbag of former Portuguese commandos and colonialists, and former FRELIMO soldiers known as Renamo. Created and controlled by Ken Flower of the CIO, Renamo was quickly incorporated into the Special Forces Command of the SADF and placed under the direct control of its No 5 Recce Commando. Reeling from the 'loss' of Rhodesia, the defeat of its own plans for a 'Constellation of Southern Africa States', the formation of SADCC, its reverses in Namibia and the dramatic upsurge of spectacular guerilla operations inside South Africa by the ANC, Pretoria decided to strike back. The 'constructive engagement' policies of the new Reagan administration gave it virtual *carte blanche* in southern Africa, and Pretoria unleashed a programme of military and economic destabilisation against all the states of the region, with Mozambique as its principal target.

From 1981 onwards, Mozambique was attacked by the South African army and airforce, suffered sustained economic sanctions, but most importantly was subjected to the escalating terrorism of the South African-led Renamo. Pretoria used Renamo to attack five key types of target in Mozambique. The targeting of these five areas profoundly aggravated already severe economic problems and social and political tensions and pushed Mozambique steadily towards social, economic and cultural collapse.

The first target of destabilization was the Mozambican population itself. Despite the widespread rural discontent with FRELIMO's agricultural policies, no attempt was made to cultivate political support in the population. Instead, a war of the most barbaric terrorism was launched against a largely defenceless population. It is almost as if white South Africa lived out its very worst racial nightmares of what might happen if a vengeance-filled black majority sought retribution for the crimes of 340 years of racism, and had realised its deepest fears and myths of primitive 'unspeakable rites' by unleashing this nightmare against the people of Mozambique. The extent of this savagery has been documented by a key framer of American support for the Nicaraguan contras, Bob Gersony, whose horrified official report on the activities of Renamo and the style of its 'national resistance' led President Reagan's Deputy Under Assistant Secretary of State for Africa to accuse the anti-communist army and its backers of perpetrating 'one of the worst holocausts against ordinary human beings since the Second World War'. This massive, systematic terrorism had as its aim the destruction of the morale of the population, and since FRELIMO was unable to defend every village in the country, turning them against the government and destroying the coherence of Mozambican society.

This was linked to Renamo's second major target, the production and distribution of food. This was very easy to disrupt given the size of the country and its attenuated transport networks. It also meant that the trickle of industrial commodities and consumer goods into the rural areas was decisively halted, which meant that the capacity or willingness of the peasantry to produce for the state market collapsed.

The third target was any kind of social or political structure identified with the FRELIMO government, particularly education and health facilities. These were particularly important because while by 1981 there was widespread and deep disaffection throughout the country amongst the peasantry, strong popular support existed for the two major gains of the Mozambican revolution, access to health and to education throughout the country. Destroying these destroyed the last basis of peasant support for the government.

The fourth target was anyone associated with the government and the party. It became very dangerous to be a member of FRELIMO or a state official in the rural areas. They and their children and their wives were threatened with death in the most brutal way possible. The fifth target was the infrastructure that the governments of the region were attempting to put in place through SADCC. Mozambique's ports and rail and road connections to five of the six landlocked countries of the region were the fundamental prop of SADCC's strategy to reduce collective dependence on South Africa. These were systematically attacked and destroyed.

Essentially during this period the economic and social infrastructure of the country were fatally undermined by a combination of the wrong policy decisions, then overwhelmingly combined with the mindless barbarism of Renamo. But it was not a one-way process; this was a period of deep struggle, when FRELIMO still had a capacity to respond and attempt to take the initiative. This was seen most clearly in its April 1983 Fourth Congress.

During these years FRELIMO was a highly contradictory political movement. On the one hand, it was extremely centralized and commandist, moving slowly towards a growing personality cult around Samora Machel. On the other hand, it was at that stage still highly responsive to all kinds of mass pressures, and indeed organised wide-ranging consultative processes at all levels of society. The Fourth Congress was preceded by an organised process of intense, lively and highly critical discussions throughout the country of a set of preliminary theses. The result was a fairly thorough-going self-criticism by the party at the Congress of its political formalism, its commandist political practices and above all the absurdities of its economic planning - its concentration on large projects.

The Fourth Congress formally changed all of these policy directions. It changed its policies particularly in agriculture, specifically in terms of the

relationship between state farms and the peasantry and announced the beginnings of the dismantling of state farms and the redistribution of land to the peasantry.

However, there was a world of difference between a relatively democratic party congress taking a decision and the bureaucrats in the state implementing that decision. The state itself remained 'undemocratised', theoretically oriented now by the more enlightened, but still commandist, policies of the Fourth Congress, still dominated by the same bureaucratic lack of accountability. Moreover, even if the bureaucrats in the Department of Agriculture, in the Ministry of the Plan and other key state departments had been willing to implement these decisions, the war had spread to such an extent that the state no longer had effective control over much of the countryside. FRELIMO and the government were now technically incapable of implementing these decisions - or where they could implement them, unable to guarantee that a Renamo band would not arrive the following week and destroy whatever had been built.

But the Fourth Congress had a rejuvenating impact not just on the party, but on the population. May Day, 1983, was the formal end to the Congress. Maputo was then a city of just over 900,000 people, almost one third of whom joined in a vast demonstration of support for the party of Government. While people can be forced to join a demonstration, they cannot be forced to exhibit the exuberant sense of fun and pride which so deeply marked this seven hour parade past the Politburo. This was clearly a popular government and the new directions of the Fourth Congress enjoyed real popular support not just in the urban areas. Unfortunately it was followed very shortly by the biggest and worst political mistake in the party's history, one which inevitably became associated with the Congress and sapped the rejuvenated political support the Congress had generated. This was the so-called 'Operation Production'.

Given the collapse of rural production, given the effect of the war on breaking down the supply of food rations to the cities and given the large-scale flow of refugees to the cities, it had become impossible to sustain a programme of subsidized food for workers in the cities. After a series of minor food riots, and at the 'request' of the Maputo Labour Council, the government decided to expel 'unproductive people' from the urban areas. Everybody in the cities, no matter who they were, were exposed to a very bureaucratic process to prove they were 'productive', and to obtain an official 'labour card' to be signed every month by their employer, attesting to this fact. Anyone caught without such a card was unceremoniously shipped out of the cities to the remote Lichinga province in the north, where they were supposed to become 'productive' on isolated plots of land. Many died there of starvation.

Of course this provided all sorts of opportunities for the settling of personal scores by petty officials, for the emergence of local bureaucratic mafiosi who controlled access to the cities, and quite literally, to life. It victimised the entire informal sector, and particularly single women with children, who were vulnerable to the charge of prostitution. In many cases they were forced to provide sexual favours to local officials in order to acquire the precious labour card.

Operation Production had two immediate political resonances. The first was that although the form was different, the content was similar to the hated pass law system in apartheid South Africa. In southern Mozambique almost every male over 16 had worked in South Africa and knew what it was to be decreed in South Africa an unproductive person, and hounded for not having the right stamp in your pass. There was an immediate link drawn between South Africa and Mozambique. Secondly, as one of the cleaners at the university told me in the middle of Operation Production: 'You know comrade Dan, the problem is that there has been terrible trouble with the FRELIMO government before. But we always knew it was our government; it was different from the Portuguese. We always knew that whatever we did that they would not come for us in the night. Now they are starting to come for us in the night'.

The disappearance of political support was palpable. Two months after the Fourth Congress, Maputo had become a sullen, fearful city, and the political exhortations of the Party, and particularly the President, begun to be openly laughed at when newsreels were shown in cinemas. Nobody in the city or the rural areas wanted to know about socialism. So FRELIMO destroyed what was left of its urban and rural political base by Operation Production, despite having recognized its major economic error of imposing state farms on the peasantry. This is the context in which it was forced to sue for a settlement with South Africa.

#### *Post-1984*

By the end of 1983 the war had so reduced FRELIMO's ability to implement its policies, had so devastated the country that the Mozambican government was reluctantly forced to negotiate a Non-Aggression Pact with South Africa. The Nkomati Accord was signed with great flourish at a carefully orchestrated, lavishly organised public ceremony in March 1984. Mozambique undertook to reduce the ANC presence on its territory to a small, very tightly supervised diplomatic mission. Pretoria committed itself to end support for Renamo and to provide substantial assistance and investment in Mozambique's devastated economy.

The Nkomati Accord represented a major reversal of FRELIMO's past politics and rhetoric. The government was so embarrassed by this retreat that instead of

saying to its people: 'We were forced to do it, it's not something we wanted to do', they tried to make virtue of a necessity and presented the Accord as a major victory for the 'socialist policy for peace'. The incredulous party members and *cooperantes* who could not quite make this leap were bluntly told that anybody who said otherwise was an imperialist agent, a Trotskyist counter-revolutionary, a petty bourgeois defeatist and a myriad other nasty things that no-one wanted to be. This was the first time such language was used in Mozambique and it sapped what was left of the critical spirit in the party and amongst the intelligentsia. It also destroyed what was left of the political credibility of FRELIMO.

So while the Nkomati Accord marked the real political demise of FRELIMO as a vibrant, critical socialist party, it did not achieve what the Mozambican government had hoped for it. Instead of halting the war, it made things even worse as South Africa simply failed to implement its side of the agreement (admitted in September 1986). When the Accord was signed in March 1984 the war had seriously affected four of the ten provinces. Three months later, it was impossible to move out of any urban concentration in any province in Mozambique. By late-1986 Renamo launched a division-strength invasion of central Mozambique from Malawi in an attempt to split the country in half around the strategic Beira corridor - itself the only route to the sea still functioning. The attempt was eventually contained with the help of Zimbabwean and Tanzanian troops, but the war escalated.

By the beginning of 1989 Renamo was essentially operating in large concentrations of well-armed, well-trained, well-supplied and highly mobile conventional formations. The social fabric in the rural areas had collapsed to such an extent that warlordism had emerged throughout the countryside, with bands of ragged but armed men roaming the rural areas and plundering food in classic but very brutal banditry, sometimes operating with the large Renamo formations, but mostly on their own account. The poorly-supplied, badly-equipped FPLM was unable to fight a highly mobile war on anything like the scale needed to defeat this kind of enemy. Over a million Mozambicans had been killed or starved to death, and more than six million were displaced from their homes. There is not a family in Mozambique which has not lost a relative; not a village nor a town which has not been affected. In a country where 70% of the population is under age 30, and has never known anything other than war, the long-term psychological consequences and cultural scars of this particularly savage war will mark Mozambican society for decades.

The litany of destruction, of economic, social and political collapse, of the desperate attempts of FRELIMO to mobilise international support, all of this is too long to recount here. I will simply note that the appalling state of what was

left of the economy by 1987 - total dependence on external grants and aid, and huge and growing foreign debt (the debt service ratio in 1987 stood at 160-190% of *planned exports*) - forced FRELIMO into a wholesale acceptance of the IMF programme of Structural Adjustment. A new economic rehabilitation programme ended food subsidies and the policy of virtually free medical service and education. Rents were raised and all price controls lifted, thereby legitimising the black market. While the major cities were now well-supplied with food, a kilogram of tomatoes cost close to one month's minimum wage.

The decline of the 1980s has clearly been devastating for FRELIMO's sense of its mission. FRELIMO has always exhibited a striking degree of political integrity at most levels of the party. Almost none of the senior party or government officials got rich. Those who did were dismissed and, occasionally, shot. The level of corruption must easily have been the lowest in Africa. What has emerged in the past two years is something of a bifurcation in the senior levels of party and government. A very small core are still true believers, who argue that what is happening now is a period of necessary retreat and that sometime in the future when Mozambique has come through this crisis, it will be able to rediscover socialism. There is, however, a different kind of cadre with a very different outlook. This tends to be found among the people who have - I was going to say control, but there is no real control - access to what is left of the state machinery, the provincial governors, the deputy ministers, many of whom have absorbed entirely the ideology of the IMF programme. Many now believe that they are engaged in a mission of national salvation to rebuild their country, to recreate Mozambican society, and enrich themselves in the process. Socialism is no longer a word that they use, let alone believe in. The market is the prevailing ideology. So this experience has destroyed a very strong cultural impulse towards egalitarianism in Mozambique. It has destroyed a politics which went the furthest in Africa towards building socialism and it has led to the effective recolonization of Mozambique by South Africa in ways of which South Africa could only have dreamed in 1975.

## Conclusion

Socialism has suffered a profound defeat in Mozambique, from which I do not expect it will recover. While FRELIMO is likely to remain the ruling party, the Fifth Congress scheduled for July 1990 can almost certainly be expected to change the political line of the party in a fundamental way. And given that Mozambique saw the most serious attempt yet to build socialism on the African continent, this is an historic defeat of devastating proportions, one which has profound implications for socialists throughout Africa and the Third World, but particularly for the large militant left still engaged in a struggle against

capitalism in South Africa. Unfortunately very little has been said about Mozambique on the South African left, and much of what has been said is either woefully ignorant of the real conditions in Mozambique, or simply reflects something of the regional great power chauvinism which extends even to South African socialists.

As I hope I have begun to show, this defeat of Mozambican socialism is a complex, contradictory tragedy. It cannot be explained simply by blaming it all on South Africa, nor by effectively ignoring South Africa's role, still less by a smug evaluation of the class and ideological shortcomings of FRELIMO. FRELIMO's mistakes, its early arrogance and excesses, played a fundamental role in creating the conditions which made Pretoria's intervention so devastating. In this sense there is some justice in the charge that it sowed the seeds of its own destruction. But, until the end of 1983, FRELIMO was still capable of great innovation and self-criticism. As the Fourth Congress showed, it was able to reverse itself and to recognize its own mistakes and move to correct for them. Destabilisation was not the sole cause of defeat, but was certainly the decisive factor. It drastically limited FRELIMO's options, reduced its capacity to implement its corrected policies virtually to nil, and placed such intense and brutal pressure on the people and party that it wore down and then destroyed their ability to respond, not only creatively, but at all.

We will never know whether FRELIMO would have been able to salvage something of Mozambican socialism after 1983 had there been no destabilization to contend with. But what is absolutely certain, however, is that destabilization rendered any such salvage operation impossible, and in assessing the forces which led to the final destruction of this socialist experiment, Pretoria's barbaric war of destabilization must be seen to have played the overwhelmingly decisive role.

Which is what makes any attempt to equate FRELIMO and Renamo so obscene and plain dangerous. Whatever the grave errors and sometimes crazy excesses of FRELIMO, they have never included the vicious terrorism, mass slaughter, wilful destruction and appalling inhumanity of Renamo and its South African backers. One sought to build a country and a better future for its people; the other came only to destroy and kill. Whatever its mistakes, FRELIMO stood for the brightest of human hopes; Renamo for the depths of human savagery. While the road to serfdom may indeed be paved with good intentions, the purposeful and vengeful barbarism of Renamo and its backers crossed boundaries which few human beings have even dared contemplate. And it also must never be forgotten that Mozambique stood virtually alone. With the honourable exceptions of Zimbabwe and Tanzania, all the socialist countries, all the Western democracies and indeed the entire international community basically stood idly

by and allowed apartheid South Africa to wreak its destructive will on Mozambique and its socialist experiment.

**Note**

1. This is a presentation made at a *Research Seminar on Lessons of 'Previously Existing' Socialisms* at Concordia University, Montreal. It was made before the FRELIMO congress of June 1989, at which the party formally abandoned Marxism. Though this congress, and the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' throughout Eastern Europe had rendered some details and observation out of date, I feel that the broad thrust of the analysis still holds.

## **CONFERENCE ON 'MARXISM IN SOUTH AFRICA - PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE'**

A three-day conference on 'Marxism in South Africa - Past, Present and Future' is to be held at the University of the Western Cape, under the auspices of UWC's Marxist Theory Seminar, from Friday 6 to Sunday 8 September 1991. The conference provides a forum for assessment of the achievements and limitations of Marxist theory and practice in SA, and debate on the way forward in the changed conditions of the 1990s.

Contributions are invited on topics concerning the historical development of Marxism in SA; theoretical issues of Marxist economics, politics, philosophy, etc., especially as these relate to SA; and problems and prospects for building a Marxist tradition in SA today.

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