

Mozambique: Between revolution and pragmatism

BY BRIDGET BLOOM,

IMMACULATELY COIFFURED Portuguese dowagers sip tea in the Polana Hotel, at Lourenco Marques between the hours of four and six. A few hundred yards away, down the Avenida de Nossa Senhora de Fatima, Black garden boys water the luxuriant gardens of 30-room mansions. At pools dotted throughout the leafy suburbs, slim young women, their banyans watched by benevolent Black nannies, gossip away the hours as their tans deepen.

Independent Black ruled Mozambique was four months old on October 24. Has nothing changed since the days when the Portuguese ruled their East African colony? First impressions of minimum change are very misleading. The new Mozambique flag flies above the elaborate curlicues of the Polana's facade. Frelimo troops guard the ministries scattered about the town. In good Portuguese fashion, there is a plethora of posters on walls and shop fronts, while huge pictures of President Samora Machel and Frelimo's founder, the late Dr. Mondlane, stare down from the Town Hall and the Railway station.

It may be fanciful to see in the dowagers a parallel with the Russian aristocracy immediately after the Soviet revolution. But the new Government is more uncompromisingly socialist than any black Africa has yet seen, in intention at least, and quite probably soon in practice. This fact is gradually coming home to Black and White Mozambicans alike, but in these immediate post independence days there is an air of unreality, confusion and, just under the surface, tension.

The unreality comes partly from the speed of the transfer to Black rule—it was after all only 18 months ago that the Caetano Government in Lisbon, fighting Frelimo "terrorists," swore it would never give up in Africa, and only a year ago that the Mozambique transitional Government, with Portuguese in the cabinet and Portuguese troops still in the country, was set up. But the unreality—and the confusion and the tension—comes mainly from the imposition of a Black and, more important, a toughly Marxist Government on top of an avowedly capitalistic and colonial bureaucracy and economy. What the new Frelimo Government intends for the country is clear to anyone who reads the newspapers. In speech after speech, the President and his Ministers make the point that the structures of Government and the mentality inherited from the past must be destroyed so that a new society, for the benefit of the masses, can be created. There can be no reforming these structures—they must go, even though the country's lack of trained personnel will lead the country into crisis. "We shall become

technically qualified in the process of the revolution, as we learnt to win the war by fighting the war," declared a key statement, issued at the end of a three weeks' Council of Ministers meeting in July.

This is tough medicine indeed: if administered it would mean destroying the country's economic institutions; it would mean abandoning not only the present bureaucracy but the people who man it (90 per cent. of whom are White and were there under the Portuguese). No other African country, not even Tanzania, has taken such a drastic course. The question now confronting Mozambicans is whether the victorious Frelimo (which for the time being is only a tiny minority of the country's 9m. people) will follow its ideology through.

In the last four months Frelimo's ideology has been tempered with pragmatism. The prime concern of the new Government appears to be domestic, in particular the consolidation of its power base. On the one hand is the attempt to get the Frelimo message down to the people, both through the formal organisation of the party at central, provincial, district, and community level, and through the "groupas dinamizadores," small groups of militants operating within factories, hotels and offices whose aim seems to be a mixture of political education and worker control.

On the more formal side comes the reorganisation of the army, the police, and an extremely tough new security law. Observers believe that the army, which was perhaps up to 10,000 when the Portuguese coup put an end to the war, may be doubled over the next couple of years, but only recently was the decision finally taken to pay the troops and apparently to introduce some form of regular army grading. The police, apparently incorporating many of those who served the previous regime but not the 600 Portuguese officers whose contracts end in December, are also being reorganised.

But the new Government's concern with security and perhaps its intention to brook no opposition to its ideology can be seen from its decision, made public earlier this month to create the National Service or Popular Security or SNASP. Responsible only to the President of Frelimo, who is also President of the Republic, SNASP's task is to "detect, neutralise and combat all forms of subversion, sabotage, and acts directed against the People's Power and its representatives, against the national economy or against the objectives of the Popular Republic of Mozambique." Its director may determine whether anyone apprehended for any of these reasons should be "given over to the competent police authority, sent to court, or to camps for re-education." There

is no appeal. The article of the inherited penal code procedure, which permits recourse to habeas corpus, does not apply. SNASP's powers are retroactive to September 1974.

This law is one reason why many Mozambicans believe that Frelimo will put its tough ideology into practice. (Though it is impossible to prove, it is said that the jails in Lourenco Marques are already full.) Another reason is the tough stand that Frelimo has taken on the churches, on privately owned schools and clinics, and on doctors and lawyers. Foreign mission activities are being firmly discouraged (there are at least five foreign missionaries in prison at present) with a particularly tough line taken against Jehovah's Witnesses. The bank accounts of these missions, and private or mission schools and clinics have been frozen and investigated, as have those of the lawyers in private practice (those who have not left are required to work for the state).

Among the estimated 80,000 White population who remain, (of 200,000 two years ago) it is the nationalisation of medicine which has caused most alarm. The measure is in many ways understandable from Frelimo's point of view. Medical services for Africans were almost non-existent under the Portuguese and the intention is to equalise and to create new and more suitable para-medical services. But the nationalisation has had two principal effects. First, the doctors themselves (almost all White) have begun to leave the country at an alarming rate (against some 300 two years ago there now are about 60 and may only be 30 by the year's end in the whole country). Second, their former patients (again mainly White) are also leaving in greater numbers because they cannot get the medical attention they are used to. Can it be, some Mozambicans ask, that Frelimo has nationalised the doctors in the knowledge that they, and particularly their patients, will leave without having to be thrown out? Is this what they mean by "destroying the inherited structures of the past?"

For the time being the question is unanswerable—although if this measure, and possibly others to come, does result in an even larger White exodus, there can be no doubt that the economy of Mozambique, and many of its modern services, will go into serious decline. As it is, the future looks far from bright. In its first year of semi-independence (that is from the installation of the transitional government) the economy was helped by increased prices for its main exports—sugar, cotton, cashew and sisal—by the continuation of the transit trade with South Africa and Rhodesia, and most of all, by the presence in South Africa of some 130,000 Mozambican miners. Part of their pay, under an agreement with the Portuguese dating back to 1909,

is remitted in gold at the official price, which is then sold on the free market to the advantage (for the last year) of Mozambique's foreign exchange reserves.

However, on the agricultural front, there has been a serious decline in production, partly as a result of the White exodus, partly because worker productivity has declined. Estimates by the Agricultural Department suggest that this year (the planting season is just beginning) maize and other local foodstuffs will be as much as 70 per cent. below 1973-74; most of the export crops will be down at least 30 per cent. Already Mozambique has had to import foodstuffs (from Rhodesia and Romania among other countries); there are currently bread and meat queues in Lourenco Marques.

As long as Mozambique can pay for food imports, the decline in food production need not be too serious, particularly if (as Frelimo hopes) the difficult few years ahead are used to restructure the agricultural system. But agricultural exports are also declining, which will mean that the country is more than ever dependent on the transit trade with its White neighbours, and particularly on South Africa continuing the gold payments.

This is obviously the main reason why the new Mozambique, ideologically hostile to White minority rule, has decided to adopt a wholly pragmatic approach to South Africa and Rhodesia, both of which still have consular (now renamed "trade") officials in Lourenco Marques. Rhodesian traffic through Mozambique has substantially declined in the last year, principally because Salisbury wanted to guard against eventual sanctions. But it could well be that within a year, with the decline of its own economy, Mozambique will become almost totally dependent on South Africa for foreign exchange earnings. That could give Mr. Vorster enormous power over his Black Marxist neighbour.

Of course Frelimo might decide that it was strong enough within the country, despite food problems and the increased unemployment which would result from stopping the miners going to South Africa, to cut all economic relations and "close" the economy. That would depend partly on what help would be forthcoming from elsewhere—and while there are many missions from Communist (and Western) countries in Mozambique to-day, there is no evidence that Frelimo is particularly dependent or willing to be dependent upon any of them.

If such a step were taken, Frelimo would be following its ideology with a vengeance. Mozambique's new rulers are determined people. But they can have few illusions about the difficulties of their situation and are bound to try, for the time being, to temper ideology with pragmatism. On four months' showing, it is impossible to say whether one would triumph over the other if it came to the crunch.

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