



AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL

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October 6, 1978

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Mozambique: Changing tune

When President Samora Machel summed up the debate at the fourth session of the Frelimo central committee in Maputo (August 7-16) it became clear that there has been a striking change of emphasis in government policy. The fundamental message was that the economy is in dire straits and that the need to raise productivity supersedes all other government concerns. Over a year ago, government officials were told that the economic target would be to reach 1973 production norms by 1980. That aim is now tacitly admitted to be optimistic.

The fifth clause of the official summary was probably the most notable: "the central committee pointed out the need to strengthen the support for family agricultural production, which occupies an important place in our economy, and formulated guidelines so as to establish adequate mechanisms for the outlet and exchange of products in that sector of the economy". Machel himself had stated: "We have defined agriculture as the base of our development. We created the village commune, a strategy of rural development. We set up the agricultural co-operative as a means of destroying the individualistic spirit . . . But this cannot mean the abandonment of the family sector, the importance of which . . . continues to be crucial."

He also stressed the need to improve export crops like cashew nuts, sesame, cotton and copra. Since the end of Mozambique's gold windfall, by which Mozambican mineworkers in South Africa were paid (indirectly) in gold at the old fixed price of US\$42.2 per ounce, which the Mozambique authorities could then sell on the open market (current price: US\$217 per ounce), the shortage of foreign exchange in Maputo has become acute. The number of migrant Mozambican workers in South Africa is down from about 120,000 to 35-40,000. Unofficial estimates put the loss at about US\$60-70m a year. In 1976 the Mozambique probably

made a clear profit of US\$100m.

By far the most serious problem still afflicting the economy results from the exodus of over 200,000 white Portuguese during 1974/5, after which not much more than 10,000 remained. There is still a severe lack of trained personnel down even to the level of driver and semi-skilled worker. In agriculture, the now disgraced minister, Joaquim Ribeiro de Carvalho, had concentrated on trying to resuscitate those large-scale farming enterprises which had been abandoned by the departing whites. The ministry overspent on buying hundreds of tractors, for instance, which rapidly fell into disrepair. Amid mutual recrimination between management and government, the Sena Sugar Estates company, once one of Mozambique's largest foreign exchange earners, has now collapsed. This year's important rice harvest in the Limpopo valley was badly set back by the inexperienced use of fertiliser, but the government did ingeniously manage to turn this failure to some advantage: busloads of Maputo citizens, including leading party officials and intellectuals, were ferried out to the rice fields to thresh by hand-scythe and demonstrate their affinity with the land. Machel was himself acclaimed as 'Peasant of 1978'.

Economic links are increasingly being made with Western countries (see *Africa Confidential* Vol. 19 No. 8), although the Soviets and East Germans appear to dominate the mining and fishing sectors. But, in view of the Sena fiasco, it is almost certain that economic input from the West will consist of aid and loans rather than investment. In terms of aid experts, it is beginning to sound very much like the old story: the Russians, who are by far the most numerous, find it difficult to establish good personal relations with Mozambicans on a workaday basis. The East Germans fare little better, though the Cubans generally seem to get on fairly well. Curiously enough, South African

electricians and engineering and harbour experts are also said to enjoy good, formal relations not only with the Mozambicans but also with Cubans with whom they are obliged to co-operate (for instance, in the port of Maputo). Although there are only about a hundred **British** subjects involved in aid schemes—they are mostly doctors, teachers and engineers—they generally seem to have forged excellent relations with Mozambicans.

At the August central committee session, the leadership also called for greater discipline in places of work and promised that the re-structuring of the party would continue. There has been some disappointment among party officials that the drive to increase membership has not been rewarded with greater enthusiasm among ordinary Mozambicans, but the party's top organisers appear content that Frelimo should for the time being remain a tight-knit 'vanguard party'. Except at the very bottom (*localidade*) level, all elections are by indirect suffrage. Even at *localidade* level, lists of candidates are presented by Frelimo committees or by local *grupos dinamizadores*, the party activists. The system is frankly authoritarian and there are still—by the lowest estimates—at least 5,000 people held in 're-education camps'. There appear to be frequent party purges. At the end of the central committee session, five members were publicly disgraced, including Carvalho, the agriculture minister, who seems to have been made scapegoat for the country's farming failures. At the end of July a senior administrator in the northerly Nampula Province was disgraced for 'serious offences against the dignity of the state'. It was significant he was compared to **Uriah Simango** and **Lazaro Kavandame**, former Frelimo leaders who rebelled against Machel and are presumed to be in detention.

The ruling class

Although the Makonde people in the north were the chief source of Frelimo recruits during the war against Portugal, northerners are very poorly represented at senior government levels. Defence Minister **Alberto Chipande** from Cabo Delgado and his deputy, **Sebastiao Mabote** from Niassa, are the only northerners in the top echelon. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that the anti-Frelimo movements which are actively assisted by Rhodesia have engendered anything like enough support to threaten Machel. Indeed, despite occasional reports of division usually emanating from South Africa (for instance, the alleged stabbing of Chief Political Commissar **Armando Guebuza** during a cabinet meeting in May '76—a widely circulated story which proved totally untrue), foreign visitors in Maputo often express surprise at the apparent cohesion at senior government level and also at the prevalent feeling that, despite the economic

headaches, Frelimo has not lost its momentum or idealism as a movement.

In social policy, Frelimo has been notably effective in trying to overcome illiteracy and in insisting on greater rights for women. Though not outlawed, polygamy is officially frowned upon and those who practise it are often penalised. The government is also proud of its evident non-racialism in terms of party posts, though some observers reckon that, as in **Angola**, those who oppose the party will try to whip up feeling against the prevalence of Frelimo members who are not black and have top jobs in government.

A simplistic breakdown of government leaders produces three broad groups:

1. The 'old comrades-in-arms': Machel, Guebuza, Chipande, Mabote, all old guerrilla leaders; and **Joaquim Chissano**, the foreign minister, who organised Frelimo's office in Dar es Salaam for many years.

2. The technocrats, many of them white or *mestiço*, many of whom joined Frelimo only in 1974. They include Carvalho, and Minister of Public Works **Julio Carrilho**, both *mestiços*; Minister of Transport **Dr José Luis Cabaço** and Minister of Finance **Dr Rui Baltazar**, both whites.

3. The ideologues and intellectuals who formed a 'fifth column' in Maputo and engaged in underground activity before 1974. They would tend to follow **Dr Marcelino dos Santos**, Minister of the Planning Commission, the *mestiço* intellectual who helped found Frelimo in exile in 1962. Three extremely powerful men who fit into this (admittedly vague) category are of Goan origin: Governor of the Central Bank, **Sergio Vieira**; Information Minister, **Jorge Rebelo**; and Machel's close confidant **Dr José Oscar Monteiro**. Other powerful intellectuals are **Mota Lopes**, the white director of information, who recently replaced **Muradali Mamudhusen**; and **Janet Mondlane**, the American-born widow of Frelimo's late president and the current director for international co-operation (i.e. aid schemes) in dos Santos' ministry.

With signs that Machel has decided to veer away from ideology and towards pragmatism, it has been suggested that the ideologues may suffer. There has been no overt sign of this happening, although dos Santos is no longer vice-president, a post that seems to have been scrapped. The technocrats are also said to be keen that Frelimo remains a party led by small groups of cadres, while the ideologues want to increase mass participation. But any gaps that may appear between 'technocrats' and 'ideologues', between northerners and the dominant southerners, between old guerrillas and intellectuals—all appear to have so far been bridged by the dominant personality of Machel himself. We hear, incidentally, that he is often exasperated by the inability of **Robert Mugabe's** ZANU leadership to perform the same role.