

Plenty of power—not a drop of glory

An international consortium is rapidly completing the £200 millions Cabora Bassa Dam in North-west Mozambique as it becomes clear that the Frelimo nationalists have reluctantly accepted their future role as a major supplier of power to South Africa.

The dam, which is wedged in a deep gorge that funnels the Zambezi River down to the city of Tete, will virtually have become a South African powerhouse by the time that Mozambique gains independence on June 25 next year.

The waters will begin to build back into a 180-mile-long lake in November. In January the hydroelectric generators will be tested, and early in June two of the five turbines will send the first megawatts down 400 miles of powerlines into the Apollo converter substation near Pretoria.

It was this tight timetable that faced Frelimo when the Nationalists effectively took power in Mozambique's transitional Government last week. The party's sudden elevation to Government had led to a conflict between a radical ideology that demanded an end to links with the white minority Governments in Rhodesia and

South Africa and the realities of a bankrupt economy that was heavily dependent on both countries.

Cabora Bassa neatly illustrated this conundrum. The dam is geared almost entirely to supply South Africa with electricity. The power supply will provide valuable foreign exchange for Mozambique and it will also open up the whole Zambezi valley for planned agriculture as the river flow is controlled to meet the needs of irrigation.

But Frelimo had made the project a major propaganda issue during the 10-year war with the Portuguese and had frequently accused the Lisbon Government of tightening commercial links with South Africa through a big business enterprise that would do little for the people of Mozambique.

Frelimo delegations have twice visited the dam, the last time three days ago when a four-man team from Lourenço Marques let slip the outlines of a compromise that had been evolved to make use of the dam without compromising the political principles of the movement.

One of the two military members of the delegation

stressed the need to finish the dam when told that the 3,000 Africans in the workforce which had been threatening to strike. "I have not fought a war for 10 years to hear complaints about a 12,000 escudos salary (£200 a month). The dam must be finished on time."

Although the delegation made no public reference to the electricity supply, technicians and executives from the German, French, and Italian companies involved emerged from talks with the delegation confident that they had not been working on a white elephant for eight years.

In June Frelimo's president, Samora Machel, also gave an indication of the dam's future when he told the French magazine, *L'Express*: "We shall be free to sell the energy to whom we want and to negotiate with those who wish to buy it. We shall not force South Africa to change its system, but who says that South Africa and Rhodesia will continue to be the enemies of Mozambique?"

Frelimo's likely answer will be some form of nationalisation of the dam after independence, so that the project can be shown to be working for the Mozambique people. Tech-

nically, this would pose appalling problems for Portugal which faces heavy penalties if contractual obligations to South Africa and the remainder of the consortium are not honoured.

Lisbon financed the dam by raising money from international banking concerns with interests in the four foreign countries which are engaged in the project. If this circular system of financing breaks down for lack of profitable electricity sales, it is the Portuguese Government which will be floundering to raise the indemnities.

Although 80 per cent of Cabora Bassa's final electricity output will go to South Africa the hydroelectric scheme will also pump power into Mozambique's own system in the accessible areas between Beira on the Indian Ocean coast and Vila Pery near the Rhodesian border.

This output is expected to be spread more widely when Frelimo gains outright control of the country next year and it is also certain that Rhodesia will not benefit from the high tension cables that run tantalisingly close to her eastern border.