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Mozambique: The body politic

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Within the confines of its official Marxist-Leninist ideology, Mozambique's first post-independence elections were held between 25 September and 4 December 1977. The poll, held under tight one-party ground-rules, capped three years of organisational work (since the Lusaka accords with **Portugal** brought Frelimo into government) to root the party's apparatus throughout the country, especially in the cities and in the south, where its organisational presence had been minimal during the war, and to guarantee its complete political supremacy. "We must intensify the structuring and organisation of the party," President **Samora Machel** said last June, repeating a theme that has been at the centre of Frelimo leaders' attention.

● It was not until the end of last May that Frelimo set up a fully-structured party apparatus at provincial level for the first time. Conferences were held in each of the ten provinces. They elected 30-member provincial party committees whose first task was to organise party committees at the subordinate district level.

● Measures have been taken to increase the party leadership's control over the army, the Mozambican People's Liberation Forces (FPLM). A year ago, in March 1977, several high-ranking army officers were arrested on charges of "causing a separation between the population and the armed forces". Among those

arrested were commanders, deputy commanders and political commissars of the 1st and 2nd battalions and the commanding officer of the company stationed at Montepuez. Then, on 29 June, a political commissariat, headed by **Armando Emilio Guebuza**, was set up to exercise political control over the security forces. At the same time a party central committee secretariat for defence and security was set up under **Sérgio Vieira**.

● Since Frelimo's 3rd Congress in February 1977, which adopted a very strict set of organisational statutes, the Frelimo leadership has been building the party as a small, highly-disciplined formation, in marked contrast to the type of mass-membership parties common in African one-party states. Over the past year, the establishment of party cells, for which the groundwork had been laid since 1975 by the looser *grupos dinamizadores*, has been a slow and carefully-nurtured process. "At the moment this whole process is in its initial phase, a transition phase in which the *grupos dinamizadores* are our party everywhere," noted **Marcelino dos Santos**, the powerful Minister of Economic Development and Planning, last August. "The creation of party cells will take place in all places of work. In work places, the *grupos dinamizadores* will give way to party cells. In the suburbs, the residents' organisation will be the *grupo dinamizador*, that is to

say that even when the party cells are formed in the suburbs, the *grupos dinamizadores* will remain. They are the mass organisation in the suburbs.”

● The regime has been constructing other mass organisations to flank the party and act as conveyor belts to transmit party policy to the population. Thus the *Organização da Juventude de Mocambique* (OJM) was launched at a founding conference in Maputo on 28 November.

The Frelimo central committee, meeting in Maputo on 28-29 August, decided that the political and organisational groundwork had by then been laid: the long-awaited general elections could be held. During the first two years of independence there had been no elected legislature at national level — and not even any elected municipal bodies. The central committee approved a draft electoral law, which was ratified on 1 September by a make-shift nominated People’s Assembly (for which provision had been made under Article 42 of the constitution). The electoral law provided for assemblies at five levels: *localidades*, cities, districts, provinces and the nation.

Elections were held in over 1,000 *localidades* between 25 September and 13 November, each *localidade* assembly having between 15 and 35 members, with a 2½-year mandate. The city and district assembly elections had been completed by 27 November. Then, following the election of ten provincial assemblies, the national people’s assembly was elected on 4 December.

Little choice

The elections, held in the one-party framework, offered little real choice to voters. Lists of candidates were presented at *localidade* level by the local Frelimo committees or, where these had still not been established, by the local *grupos dinamizadores*. However, candidates had to receive at least 50% ‘positive votes’ to be elected, a hurdle which led to a number of candidates being rejected. In Maputo, 53 candidates were rejected at *localidade* level and 820 elected.

The elections were *indirect* above *localidade* level, with each tier of assemblies electing those in the tier above it. Not even the city assemblies were elected by direct universal suffrage. In Maputo, for example, there were direct elections in 100 *localidades*, which sent 820 delegates to a citywide electoral college, which, in turn, elected the Maputo city assembly. Even election by a *localidade* was insufficient to guarantee participation in the city electoral college. In Maputo, eight delegates were ejected from the electoral college when it met on 27 November after it had made (in the words of Radio Maputo) a “critical assessment and analysis of the

political personality and moral behaviour of each delegate.” (Two of the eight were actually arrested). The national people’s assembly was elected on 4 December by the 10 provincial assemblies after a 226-member slate had been presented by the Frelimo central committee.

Meanwhile, several thousands of Mozambicans, almost all blacks, are languishing in ‘re-education camps’, often apparently for trivial offences, such as failure to present identity cards. The total number is hard to assess. We have had first-hand reports that, for instance, in Niassa Province alone, there are six camps containing about 500 people each. Hundreds of Jehovah’s Witnesses have also been sent to camps. There is no clear mechanism for release. Arrest is often arbitrary, with the proverbial nocturnal ‘knock on the door’, especially in the cases of better educated inhabitants of Maputo who were not active followers of Frelimo before independence.

Frelimo believes that these sweeping authoritarian methods are needed to prevent opposition at a time when economic conditions are rough for most Mozambicans. The existing known opposition groups, however, appear to be weak, largely because many of their leaders, most of whom are in jail, discredited themselves by their support for the failed white settler putsch in September 1974 and by their links with the Rhodesian regime, whose “*Voice of Free Africa*” radio station — or *Radio Kizumba* (‘Radio Hyena’), as it is nicknamed by Frelimo — gives them strong support. No group associated with Salisbury is likely to get much of a hearing from Mozambicans, whatever the economic situation, at a time of constant and often bloody Rhodesian border incursions.

Despite regular attacks on institutionalised Christianity in the magazine *Il Tempo*, the churches are reluctantly tolerated and indeed are often full. There are no longer any church newspapers. Bishop Pinto de Nampula has remained a free man after his outspoken attack on the regime for abusing civil rights.

The best-known oppositionist is **Domingos Arouca**, whose United Democratic Front of Mozambique (FUMO) has maintained an office in Lisbon and has tried to buy arms in the West for an anti-Frelimo guerrilla campaign. This group decided last year to change its name to the Mozambique National Resistance Army (ERNM). It claims the allegiance of six former Frelimo commanders. According to sources in **Malawi**, another group calling itself the *Partido Revolucionário de Moçambique* (PRM) claims to be active in Niassa and Tete provinces. But as yet there is little evidence that these groups constitute a serious threat to Machel ●