

THE MASSACRE IN MOZAMBIQUE

TT (editorial)
10/7/73

Nobody can read Father Adrian Hastings' report of massacres in Mozambique by Portuguese troops of villagers who sympathise with the Frelimo insurgents, without feelings of shock and horror. It will immediately be asked if it can be true. We believe that the specific nature of the details, including names of some of the victims, which are now published, and the standing of the Catholic missionaries who made the investigation, permit little doubt of the substantial accuracy of the report. The further question, of course, is whether Wiriyamu is, as the missionaries contend, only one in a series of such atrocities. We have no such specific details of others, but the charge remains a very grave one.

For it is easy to see the force of Father Hastings' view that the details of the slaughter at Wiriyamu given by the missionaries rivals in horror both the shootings at Sharpeville in 1960, and the My Lai scandal of 1968, and it only remains to be seen whether Wiriyamu will have the same far reaching consequences for Portugal as those two disasters had

for South Africa and the United States.

It will be asked if the authorities in Lisbon have knowledge of these events. This is of foremost concern to Dr Caetano, the Portuguese Prime Minister. He is due to visit Britain in a week's time, and he will surely be asked to comment on this report. It must be assumed therefore that the Portuguese government will make enquiries promptly. Both the army and the political police (which Dr Caetano at the outset of his premiership made a show of abolishing) are implicated. It is fair to remind him, in advance of his visit, that in May this year he told his first party congress that "if there exists any government anxious to guarantee the fundamental liberties, it is mine."

There have been reports in the past of missionaries protesting against brutality by the Portuguese forces in Mozambique, or pleading for justice, and then being silenced after charges of activities against the state. In May, 1971, for instance, the White Fathers withdrew from Mozambique after such charges by the Portuguese Foreign Minister. Two of the Spanish mission-

aries who tried to protest even before the events at Wiriyamu occurred, were imprisoned. Father Hastings states that all missions in the area have been closed, so that information is now hard to get—and at Wiriyamu attempts were made to ensure that no witnesses survived. Frelimo, of course, has made many accusations—though not apparently about Wiriyamu.

The struggle between the insurgents of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) and the Portuguese has gone on for ten years. Periodically the Portuguese have made statements that imply that Frelimo is collapsing for want of local support. But massacres on the scale of Wiriyamu suggest it has support, at least in large areas, and that the Portuguese are resorting in desperation to methods of frightfulness which in the past have usually strengthened local resistance. If Wiriyamu is only one incident of many, the war is not won for Portugal (however many blacks may serve as soldiers) but is probably lost. Most Portuguese, if they accept the facts, would agree. The significance of Wiriyamu is therefore hard to understate.