

THE NKOMATI ACCORD

Non-Agression Pact between Mozambique and South Africa

An Analysis

by

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On Friday March 16, 1984 the President of Mozambique and the Prime Minister of South Africa met at their common border, Nkomati, to sign a non-aggression pact. By the terms of this accord both leaders undertook to ensure that neither territory would be used for hostile acts of aggression against the other nor from a third state. Along with the signing of this pact there has been consultative meetings to discuss (i) The Cabora Bassa Hydro Electric Scheme (ii) Tourism and (iii) Economic relations between the two states. Two weeks later Mozambican soldiers and police raided the homes and offices of the ANC in Maputo.

Indeed the very fact of Frelimo sitting down with the Boers is historic given the fact that for the past ten years Frelimo had consistently been the most outspoken opponent of 'dialogue' with South Africa. But the harsh reality for the rural poor of the region is that the treaty could be a short respite in the midst of the total war strategy of the apartheid war machine. The clear shift in the diplomatic tactics of the Boers which culminated in a peace accord between Angola, South Africa and the U.S.A. indicates the fact that the Reagan administration is more than a disinterested party in this year of electoral debates within America.

There are those in Southern Africa who compare the Nkomati Accord to the Brest Litovsk Treaty of 1918 between the USSR and the Germans to bring peace to the young Soviet Republic. However there are significant differences between the two agreements not in the least the level of mobilisation, organisation debate and political work which went on in the Soviet Union symbolised by the open split between N. Bukharin and Lenin on the need for peace. To date there is no such discussion and debate within Mozambique though the workers, peasants and urban poor know that there is a need for peace so that the society can attempt some form of economic construction and the distribution of food to the poor. In many respects the Mozambican society have been at war for the past twenty years (a) the war of national independence (b) the war against the Rhodesians up to 1980 and (c) the war against the South African forces of destabilization which persists in 9 of the 10 provinces of Mozambique.

The war in Mozambique

The war against the MNR has been a supreme test for Frelimo and the Mozambican people. This so called Movement for National Resistance armed, supplied, supported, trained and fed by the South African army has carried out murders, wanton destruction, disruption of road and rail services and generally derailed the resources of the society towards a costly counter-insurgency war. The campaign of the MNR involved a well thought out plan by the South Africans to ensure that the states of the region were to remain dependent on the South African economy. So the havoc caused by the MNR compounded the drought, floods and shortages of food and basic items such that there is unprecedented impoverishment in Mozambique today. In February the food harvests of the South were destroyed by a massive cyclone and consequent flood which swept through Mozambique, Swaziland and the South Eastern parts of the apartheid republic.

The MNR had made it clear from its operations that it was not about to attempt to win the political argument with Frelimo. Its radio station beaming from South African repeated the crude anti-communist rantings of the Boers but in the main the MNR distinguished itself as the cruel and crude arm of the South African army in Mozambique which could attack from the sea or from bases in Malawi or from South Africa. Originally the MNR was formed by General Walls of the Rhodesian combined forces during the period when the ideology of racism worked for the reversal of the process of decolonisation in Africa. Essentially the ideology which propels the MNR, is still the same vision of the past so that the MNR is held as a weapon of economic destabilisation and as an ideological tool over the masses of the region of warfare. As part of the psychological warfare against the imprisoned majority in South Africa the purpose of the MNR is to show that Africans cannot rule themselves. So the damage of more than US \$ 3 billion Mozambique caused by the MNR completes the picture of hunger, famine and mismanagement which is reproduced internationally by the visual media to reinforce the argument of the failure of Marxism-Leninism in Africa.

The Party the State and the War

The Nkomati Accord between Frelimo, the Marxist-Leninist Party, and the Boers raises fundamental questions about Frelimo. Foremost is the nature of the relationship between the party and the state and to what extent Frelimo had become isolated from the masses in their effort to consolidate state power? The inescapable fact is that in the process of building up the state Frelimo was cut off from the rural poor to the point that one leader, Jorge Rebelo, could say in 1980 that the party does not have a

presence in the rural areas. And it is precisely in the rural areas where the party was weak or non-existent that the MNR set out to disrupt the society.

A conventional war against the MNR involved a particular notion of war and reflected the road Frelimo had travelled from the period when it was a guerilla army based among the rural masses. Between 1977-79 the army was reorganised with ranking, hierarchy and armed with offensive weapons from the Soviet Union. The selection process for officers of this army excluded former guerillas.

The very army which was supposed to fight the MNR was also carrying out atrocities when army commanders took reprisals against villagers who were supposed to be harbouring the MNR. These 'errors' were admitted by Samora Machel at the Fourth Congress of the Party in April 1983, and the Commanders were removed. This was especially the case in Zambezia province where Frelimo publicly repudiated the militarist approach of the governor. The party has since then fallen back on the old guerillas of the war of liberation to fight the MNR and to return to the mobilisation and organisational methods which had proven successful in an earlier period. Since the party congress in April, there has been a marked turn around in the fortunes of Frelimo against the MNR.

That the old guerillas had been excluded from the state is but one indicator of the problems of the assumption of power by a national liberation movement. And yet for the war against the MNR to achieve a clear objective the party must involve the masses in the discussion of tactics and not simply exhort the people to make more sacrifices. The commandism and militarism which surrounds the whole politics of Frelimo, symbolised by the Field Marshal Stature of Samora Machel, the President, is a political thrust which must be halted if Mozambique is to participate in the frontline of the struggle beyond poverty, famine and drought.

In 1975 when Frelimo assumed power in Maputo the need to consolidate power meant that the best cadres in the party were transformed into state functionaries while the educated assimilados and the urban declassé elements joined Frelimo in order to service the bureaucracy. Any analysis of the processes involved since 1975 must bear in mind the fact that in 1975 there was a concrete need for Frelimo to quickly establish itself in order to

deal with the anti-African, settler forces who had internalised the idea that Portugal would be in Africa for another four hundred years. However in the process of consolidating itself in the State Frelimo drew on some of the elements who served the Portuguese, especially in the coercive and bureaucratic organs of the state; prisons, police, civil service, immigration, teachers and administrators. It was the organisational and ideological clarity of Frelimo which placed the party in the indispensable position of political power in 1975; but there was inadequate preparation by the party for the new tasks.

While grappling with the establishment of popular power the Third Congress of Frelimo declared for Marxism-Leninism in 1977, but there was no evidence that this verbal declamation of Marxism had derived from the history and culture of the Mozambican people. More importantly there was little evidence that the party had developed concrete measures to counteract the statist approach to fundamental problems despite the establishment of dynamising groups and production councils. Because Frelimo had matured within Tanzania where verbal declamations of socialism and ujamaa had been developed as a tool to immobilise the workers into a dependent cash crop economy, Frelimo should have been alerted to the limitations of deepening the structures of the colonial state.

The examples of Tanzania is a clear case of society where rhetoric about socialism has strengthened the position of anti-socialist elements in the absence of the ability of the state to provide the poor with the basic requirements of social reproduction, soap, water, cooking oil, transportation and food. In effect Frelimo had an excellent opportunity to build from scratch new popular structures for the whole apparatus of the Portuguese state was anti-Africa and anti-worker. The task of Frelimo was to conceptualise a process of transformation where the slogans of peoples power could have been translated into clear economic and social gains for the people. But because this was not done the anti-communists propaganda in the region point to the empty shops in Maputo, the food crisis in socialist Mozambique while there is 'plenty' in capitalist Malawi and South Africa.

Because the masses cannot eat ideology, the despair, apathy and alienation brought by the crisis created an uphill task for Frelimo.

Construction and Reconstruction in Mozambique

The process of reconstruction poses new hurdles for Frelimo for though the South Africans may temporarily sign a peace accord and close the radio station of the MNR, the leaders of the party are still faced with the question of whether it is possible to develop economic ventures within

the area called Mozambique before liberation in South Africa. The level of integration of the Mozambican society into the apartheid economy ensured that Mozambique was principally a labour reservoir for South Africa. The road and rail networks served Rhodesia and South Africa while the whole structure of industry and agriculture was dependent on the South Africa and the metropolitan Portuguese economy.

The break up of this integration or the reintegration of Mozambique into the circuit of accumulation inside South Africa will be watched very keenly after the Nkomati accord. The 'mistakes' of Frelimo in its economic policies call for a more thorough discussion of the possibilities of the transformation of the labour process within Africa. After independence Frelimo thought that the state could take over the settler farms as state farms; but soon it was clear that the form of settler agriculture involved a whole system of farming, marketing, processing and distribution of food and cash crops which needed more careful thought. The failure to take over the massive scheme in the Limpopo valley showed that extension into a section of the socialist camp and the importation of heavy tractors could not take the place of a fundamental transformation of the process of agricultural production.

Significantly the state farms which must become a part of the future of Mozambique could not in the short run absorb the thousands of mine workers who were displaced when Frelimo terminated the contract to supply cheap labour to the South Africa mines. Between 1902-1977 Mozambique was the most constant and largest single source of mine labour for South Africa. There is no family in the southern part of Mozambique that has not sent a father and a son to the mines. Research done at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo documented in a book called Black Gold by Ruth First, the fact that, "as mining capital accumulation took place on the basis of labour extracted from the peasant economies, the reproduction of the peasant economies in turn became dependent on the village income channeled back by the migrant miners. Mine wages were needed to ensure the reproduction of the peasant economy; and the peasant economy in turn reproduced successive generations of miners".

The contradictions engendered by the centrality of migrant labour in the Mozambican society, the forced cultivation of cash crops, cotton and cashew nuts, and the need of the peasants for food led to cumulative crisis when the collapse of colonial agriculture meant a severe shortage of food for the towns and on the other hand the break down of the marketing systems and thus of commercial opening for peasant produce with the running down of wage labour openings and sources of cash investment in agriculture. This double crisis in agriculture led to the drought and famine in Inhambane, Gaza and Maputo and to the severe food shortages in the urban areas of Mozambique.

The short term accord with South Africa, coming after the extensive tour of Western Europe by Samora Machel in October 1983, must be understood within the context of the agricultural crisis, the famine and the war of the MNR. This new posture of Frelimo emanated from disillusionment with sectors of the socialist community and the failures of imported and mechanised agricultural policies. However it is not known whether large scale investment by South Africa and Western Europe into the vast agricultural potential of Mozambique can compensate for a thorough and well thought out policy of agricultural transformation.

Thus far Frelimo has not yet come up with the kind of programme nor discussion with the masses which could deal with the specific problems of the relationships in the African countryside. The Vietnamese in their programme of agricultural diversification and food self sufficiency in the development of New Economic Zones had to bear in mind the balance between state farms and private plots and more fundamentally to pay close attention to specific questions of social reproduction relating to inheritance extended family, arranged marriages, dowries and those forms of social relations which are specific to their history. These same considerations are needed in Mozambique along with the pressing problem of the control of water, irrigation and planning to break the cycle of drought flood and famine in the rural areas.

Unfortunately the only recent answer to this problem has been the commandist exercise of 'operation production' when thousands were forcibly relocated to the fertile but underpopulated Niassa Province, but sent there without the means to become productive; without hoes, machetes, and the minimum technological requirements for engaging in agricultural production. It is this sort of exercise and use of force which has distinguished the society even after the frank discussions of the need for democracy at the Fourth Party Congress. A style of personalised leadership, 'offensives' and arbitrariness are becoming the feature of the political culture in Mozambique.

It is this insistence on commandism and force which causes disquiet and concern among those who had hitherto held high the banner of Frelimo in Africa. And it is this disquiet which ensures intellectual passivity in the face of the reversals of the Accord in this the year of thought control.

It is also clear from the discussion on the Gabora Bassa hydroelectric scheme that Frelimo has not placed the considerations of the people at the forefront of the discussions. As one of the most ambitious hydroelectric schemes undertaken in Africa the power from this dam on the Zambezi river provides cheap electricity for South Africa. And if this were not enough

for the Mozambicans to use this power at present they have to convert the grid in South Africa and buy electricity from South Africa. This is on top of the potential ecological imbalance created by the dam and the potential dangers of schistosomiasis from the collected water. Frelimo needs to give more attention to the bio-technical issues relating to the scheme than to the military protection of the pylons.

The pact and South Africa

For the South Africans there was also an urgent need for an agreement. Contrary to the 'propaganda' and the news from the western agencies which presented the accord as a victory for South Africa and the USA, the Boers have been overstretched in their war on five fronts -- Mozambique, Lesotho, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe -- and did suffer major military setbacks in their recent incursions into Angola, December 1983. The costs to the economy and the widening of the war reached dangerous levels in 1983. Hence what the South Africans have failed to achieve militarily they now want to ^{achieve} diplomatically and economically. The drive for profits ensures the expansion of the South Africans into the neighbouring states and beyond. It is this imperative along with the need for the South Africans to undermine the elementary initiatives of the Southern Africans development coordinating council which impels to South Africans to seek accords in the region.

But a discussion of the motives of both Frelimo and the Boers cannot hide the fact that there can be no peace in the region of Southern Africa as long as the system of apartheid, forced removals, bantustans and super exploitation exists in South Africa. The spontaneous and organised battles within South Africa will not cease and the response of the Boers to these struggles will test the seriousness of the accord.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Nkomati accord represents a setback for the oppressed peoples of Southern Africa. Although in a real sense the present period presents an opportunity for a reappraisal of the ideology, tactics and strategies needed for the major task of human emancipation -- the struggle against apartheid. It is also clear that a reassessment of Frelimo is necessary so as to transcend the idealism which has been associated with dynamic leaders such as Samora Machel or Maurice Bishop. For ^{though} progressives have condemned the cowardly invasion of Grenada there is a clear need to learn the lessons of Grenada; viz, a society embarking on a left path cannot do so without the deepening of a democratic

political culture. For too long leaderism the cult of the personality and vanguardism over the working poor have been advanced behind slogans of Marxism-Leninism. The clear gains of Frelimo in the struggle for national independence has been undermined in the struggle to consolidate the state; a state alien to the people with an alien language, culture and economy.

It is precisely these lessons which must be learnt by those who are fighting in Namibia and South Africa. It is clear that the Nkomati Accord deny the ANC the opportunities for logistic coordination which may have been possible before 1984. Now the ANC and other forces fighting for change will have to relocate both ideologically and practically. The leaders of the movements for change emerged in the period of nationalist policies. In so far as this nationalism, however progressive was conceptualised in the seizure of state power the struggle in Southern Africa requires a transcendence of this nationalism. It requires a social movement which will be able to harness of the racial consciousness of the blacks into an ideology consistent with racial tolerance, a movement which breaks the tribal ideology of the bantustans into a new internationalism, a movement will be able to break the forms of alienation and backwardness now entrenched in the society.

At the forefront of this struggle are those elements from the working class who want to transcend the system of job reservation, pass laws and human degradation. These workers have already made important gains but the liberation movement need to be able to combine the industrial, political, cultural and social struggles into a profound movement for social change. A form of guerilla warfare which emerged in Zimbabwe and Mozambique may not be the most appropriate form of struggle inside South Africa which is a highly industrialised society with a growing working class. The lesson of the Nkomati Accord is that the era of idealism and nationalism is drawing to a close. As Bob Marley sang "Until the colour of a man skin is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes there must be war!" The question is how the war is to be fought.

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