

an interview with marcellino dos santos - vice president of frelimo

Marcelino dos Santos was a founding member of Frelimo and of CONCP (Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies) and the latter's first general secretary in 1961. He has held several leadership positions within Frelimo and has been a member of the central committee since its formation in 1964. In addition to his being a revolutionary leader, Comrade dos Santos is also a revolutionary poet of world stature.

LSM -- Frelimo has just held a Central Committee meeting, which you have just come out of. Perhaps you could tell us what decisions were taken at this meeting?

DOS SANTOS -- Yes, the meeting of the Central Committee has just ended. It was a very important meeting, primarily because we had to make an evaluation of our present position, or rather, an evaluation of this past year during which we counted great successes in our struggle for national liberation - political and military successes as well as those in the area of national construction. Still, during the year, we had to face certain problems caused by the attitude and practice of some Frelimo members. So our Central Committee reviewed and analysed all that happened in the struggle this year as well as the problems we have had to face.

We noted during the meeting that within Frelimo there is still a battle to fight; that during the past year a struggle continued which we characterize as the war between two lines. The wrong line, represented by Uria Simango, aimed at a war of national liberation which would lead to the expulsion of foreigners from Mozambique but would retain the same system of capitalist exploitation that presently appears as colonial exploitation. The correct line, long represented by President Mondlane, is based on the total commitment of the whole population in the national liberation struggle and aims at the realization of the fundamental aspirations of the people and the creation of an independent country where there is no exploitation of man by man. This struggle between lines had become quite intense over the last year, but the revolutionary line triumphed.

By this I mean that the orientation which Frelimo has followed since the beginning has been maintained. During the meeting we were able to see, even more clearly than at our meeting of April, 1969, that during the whole history of Frelimo, at every critical juncture, the correct line has triumphed. It is true that not all of the decisions taken have as yet been realized in practice; but the essential point is that the decisions taken were always guided by respect for the interests of our people. The unfolding of the struggle itself has revealed a number of contradictions, which became particularly evident from the moment our guerrillas had established liberated zones, free territories. From that point on we had to solve the problem of building a new life. That is to say, not only did we have to continue the fight against Portuguese colonialism, to destroy the repressive forces of colonialism, but we also had to start building and producing and creating wealth. It is precisely from that moment, an important moment in the history of our fight, that there

clearly appeared the fundamental contradiction which existed - not in the Mozambican population, but within the governing leadership of Frelimo and between a faction of that leadership and the people as a whole.

So the struggle itself performed a demystifying function, showing who was really for a genuine national liberation struggle and who wasn't. It revealed Lazaro Kavandame, who tried to impose his own conception of the liberation war upon our forces. He wanted our guerrillas to achieve independence within a few months, recommending from the beginning that we attack the big urban centers. But we didn't have the means for it and, in any event, guerrilla warfare in its essential principles doesn't allow for a quick victory. Again, when we started to establish an export-import trade between the liberated regions and Tanzania, so that we could begin to satisfy the needs of our population in the interior, Kavandame tried (and for a time even succeeded) to transform this trade into a private profit making business. And we experienced the same attitude and line from Simango, who eventually joined forces with Kavandame in an effort to shape Frelimo into an organization which aimed at a nationalism which was both primitive and reactionary - which held that the independence we sought could be achieved by the mere substitution of the colonialists, of the whites, by the blacks and by having our own Mozambican flag and national anthem. It was irrelevant to them whether this "independent" Mozambique retained basically the same system of capitalist exploitation which we have so long experienced in its colonial form.

After trying by force to impose a change of direction on Frelimo, and failing, Kavandame finally surrendered to the Portuguese and openly betrayed the revolution and his own people. Simango too, since he was in the same clique as Kavandame, tried to forcefully impose his ideas on the organization and, after failing, left the Movement.

But let me repeat, what is essential in all this is that Frelimo has always taken the correct position, basing its decisions on the genuine interests of the whole Mozambican people. Our goal from the beginning has been to achieve victory in the struggle for national liberation, a victory which would allow for the realization of our people's aspirations but which at the same time would enable us to create a really new society. This means that we have to fight against Portuguese colonialism and imperialism, but that we also have to fight those Mozambicans who want to maintain the same system based on man's exploitation of man. Even more, we are convinced that the building of a new society in Mozambique demands a full scale war against all those negative aspects, all the vices and corruption which, as we know, characterize the colonial society from which we come. This involves, among other things, a strong individual effort, a continual self-criticism. The transformation of man himself will only be achieved if each of us understands clearly that genuine liberation means liquidation of all the inequalities which exist among the many different groups in our country. This can only be accomplished, in the present phase of the struggle, if we accept an identification of everyone, a unity, in defense of the interests of the people. And only if each of us commits himself completely to revolutionary action; that is, assume a complete involvement in the everyday struggle, in real concrete practice - which cannot be done spontaneously or at random, but needs to be defined and disciplined.

Today in the national liberation struggle we have one essential aspect which is armed warfare, but another aspect just as fundamental is production. It is necessary that each of us understands the absolute necessity of involving ourselves in this task. For instance, the principal duty of the guerrilla is to fight, but a guerrilla must also produce. The duty of the peasant is to work in agricultural production, but the peasant must also fight, must be prepared to engage in armed village defense.

Again, we must understand clearly the phenomena which occur during the development of this struggle. We must always bear in mind that our goal is the liberation of the people, and that it is important for us to shape human relationships which will mirror what we want Mozambican society to become later. We have to create relationships of perfect identification between the fighters and the population, and between the leaders and the guerrillas. All this constitutes the reality of our work. And if the revolutionary struggle has so far triumphed it is because we have always respected these principles; because we were able to understand that it was only in this way that we could, through the various stages of the struggle, promote a constant development or unfolding of the revolutionary process of national liberation. All of the requirements have issued from the development of the struggle itself, because from the beginning our fundamental resolve has been to achieve national independence and to respect the interests of our people. And it is because we have been able to live the fight day-by-day, to interpret every situation, every change, that we have been able to come to these conclusions and to find practical ways of transforming our society and the human beings who compose it.

Today in our country we have begun to shape a reality which is itself a great conquest. It is this transformation which the Central Committee has reviewed and analysed. Take our women, for example. Today, Mozambican women speak and are heard. Before, in the councils of elders or within other types of leadership bodies you never saw a woman. Now there are women members of Frelimo's Central Committee, there are women guerrillas, women technicians, etc. Again, take the traditional chiefs. We have managed to integrate most of them - those who have not betrayed their people and sided with the Portuguese - and they are now militants in Frelimo. These are a few of the great conquests of the revolutionary process in Mozambique within the liberation struggle, and they reveal clearly how our society is being transformed.

In the liberated regions of Niassa and Cabo Delgado and parts of Tete, we have already established the bases of popular political power and administration. We are engaged in an evolutionary process in which we don't allow or tolerate the exploitation of man by man; where all the roots of the negative values of colonial society have been eliminated - crime, rape, drinking, profiting on the labor of others. These roots do not exist anymore in the liberated regions of Mozambique, where we have done away with the fundamental causes of vice and selfishness. That is why, despite all of the difficulties and problems which have arisen within the leadership (not among the people, or the guerrillas - those who have lived the day to day struggle), our revolutionary struggle has advanced. The Central Committee noted these facts about the development of the armed struggle and we can now say with confidence that the situation is under the people's control, that it is good, and that our future prospects are better than they

have ever been.

Having expelled Simango, and with the general situation now more stable, we also discussed the question of the presidency. In April, 1969, we created a Presidential Council in order to maintain the continuity of the line represented by comrade Mondlane, treacherously assassinated on February 3rd. We created a collegial central body, the PC, composed of three persons: Samora Machel, Simango and myself. Simango was now gone and we viewed this as quite a natural phenomenon: the rejection of impure elements which every revolution carries within itself. Revolution, as you know, is a process of rejection and assimilation - rejection of reactionary ideas and practices and assimilation of revolutionary ideas and praxis. In any event, with the situation now improved and more stable we decided it was best to return to the original Frelimo structure as stated in our Constitution; that is, a president and vice-president whose selection is ratified by a National Congress of Frelimo representatives. The Central Committee thus elected comrade Samora Machel as interim president and myself as interim vice-president until a National Congress can be called.

LSM -- Perhaps you could discuss the economic situation in the liberated zones, especially the international trade that already exists between Tanzania, an independent country, and the liberated territories of Mozambique?

DOS SANTOS -- Our economic activity is based mainly on agriculture and crafts. We have tried to organize our economic activity in the form of cooperatives and have already had considerable success. We are also trying to diversify our products, introducing new crops as well as trying to raise traditional crops in new areas. All of this, of course, is governed by the demands of the war. And there are a number of needs that we cannot satisfy through our own productive efforts, at least at present, such as clothes, soap and farming implements. We now export oil seeds, cashew nuts, castor oil plants, sesame, groundnuts - with the first three being the most important. We get large orders from one or two countries, but are not yet able to export on a very large scale. On the other side, we have to import the commodities mentioned above as well as war materials, school and medical supplies, etc. And of course we have to establish priorities, since we cannot afford to import all that we need. Inside the country we have methods of distributing goods to the population - clothing for example, since everyone needs clothes. We are also considering ways in which to make products such as cloth inside the liberated areas, but this is still in the planning stage. As you have seen, we are faced with many problems which will severely test our capacity to shape our own destiny and we will obviously have to utilize our own resources to the maximum.

In the liberated zones, aside from production, we also have programs in the areas of health and education. This year we have succeeded in organizing four years of primary education in the interior of the country, whereas previously our school only went through the third year. We have also launched a teacher-training program and school in one of the liberated zones.

As regards health, we have built hospitals and have though not without severe difficulties - developed a method of training staff. There are still many inadequacies in this area, but there is also constant development and pro-

gress. Another problem we are trying to solve is how to care for the children of people who have died in the course of the armed struggle. These are some of the demands of our present situation, which we have to deal with and satisfy because they influence the future development of the armed struggle and revolutionary process.

ISM -- What is Frelimo's position regarding Mozambican students and professionals, doctors, engineers, lawyers, etc., who are out of the country at present, preferring to continue their studies or practices instead of returning to join the struggle inside Mozambique?

DOS SANTOS -- Of course we condemn Mozambicans with this attitude, which is obviously selfish and elitist. But it is not just a matter of condemning, but of understanding the concrete reality. (By the way, this problem is not unique to Mozambique; many independent countries in Africa face the same difficulty with hundreds of skilled citizens remaining in the capitals of Europe or North America rather than returning home to apply their skills to their own people's problems. But this is too vast a question to go into here.) For one thing, we have to consider the very rapid transformation which is taking place in our country. Our Mozambique, the vast liberated areas, used to be part of a colonial society where a colonizing power ruled over a number of tribes. These tribes were very far removed from the colonizing industrial power. Liberation for us means facing this power which comes from the industrialized capitalist world; it means being able to understand the phenomena which occur in that society, to understand the modern world. Many of our comrades have gone abroad to study, but they left without really understanding what was happening in their own country. When they now express opinions about the building of a new Mozambique, they still have in mind a picture of Mozambique as it was when they left it. They aren't able to picture a peasant fighting, on his own soil, against Portuguese colonialism; they don't picture the heroic guerrilla, or the peasantry which understands that in order to produce enough for all, collective action is necessary. These people don't have in mind the Mozambican who thinks, "I want to learn because it will make me more capable of helping to make the revolution."

The real truth is that most of these students and professionals cannot understand what is happening in our country today; they don't know and therefore cannot understand the problems our country is faced with. Therefore, they are quite incapable of conceiving or promoting the necessary solution.

We believe that it is absolutely necessary to revise the principles and the ideas concerning the formation of our professional or highly trained personnel - not only in Mozambique but also in the independent African countries. The new policy which Frelimo is advancing demands, makes obligatory, the integration of professionals into popular action, integration not only at the level of theory but also in concrete practice. The professionals must understand that there is no such thing as "important" and "unimportant" tasks, small jobs and great jobs, but that we all are shaped and educated so that we can better serve our people.

Today, no student in Frelimo is allowed to go and study abroad without having first worked in the revolution and become an integrated part of it. Even then, our students cannot stay abroad for too long at a time. They are asked to come back after two or three years at the most in

order to be retrained, reintegrated into the revolution; then they can go and continue their studies. In this way we are more confident that they will be moulded in a progressive and revolutionary fashion.

The main point, the fundamental aspect, for everyone to understand and believe is that each of us must do what the revolution demands. We must abolish the idea that one is more intelligent or superior because one is a student or an engineer. We are against the idea that there is and must be an elite. If someone studies to become a doctor, it is only because he or she is capable and desirous of making a contribution to the health of our people; of doing their duty to the people in a medical way. Such are the elements of the new educational policy that we need in Mozambique and that we have already started to implement.

Unfortunately, we have come to this position only in the last two or three years, which means that we too have made many mistakes in the past as far as educational policy is concerned. Today, for example, there is not a single Mozambican doctor here in the country; there are only two Bulgarian doctors, whose services we of course appreciate very much. But the point is that there are quite a few Mozambican doctors abroad who have so far refused to come home and serve their people.

LSM -- What position does the Church take regarding the liberation movement in Mozambique - both within the liberated areas and those still under Portuguese domination?

DOS SANTOS -- Their attitude is entirely negative; the Church remains on the side of Portuguese colonialism just as it did at the turn of the century. Some priests, of course, especially the foreign priests - the Dutch, for instance - were in favour of Mozambicans achieving independence. But the Portuguese Church is for Portuguese colonialism. We believe that their attitude corresponds very much to the politics of the Vatican. Experience shows us that the Church always remains on the side of Portuguese colonialism.

I would like to add a few final words concerning the transformation of our societies and to repeat what I was saying about the duty of each and every one of us. Every fighting man and woman must fight, and must also mobilize the population and work in production. In the same way, every peasant must produce and must also fight. And the same for each student, doctor, nurse, etc. A teacher, for example, must teach, must produce and must fight. Every military base, every school, every hospital, has its agricultural plots or fields and aims at self-sufficiency in basic food stuffs.

If we seem to place undue importance to the area of production it is because we believe that this activity, productive labor, has the best educational value for our militants in the revolution. The fact that everyone, without exception, works in the fields - the president, vice-president, military commanders, and other Frelimo leaders at all levels - has helped to create good communications and good relationships among the revolutionary Mozambican people, regardless of their particular areas of training or responsibility. And this has been of great benefit in the development of our struggle.

The kind of human relationship which is being created in liberated Mozambique today corresponds more or less exactly to the plan we have for our future society, for the whole of Mozambique tomorrow.

What about captured Portuguese soldiers? What is your attitude towards them and towards white civilians who live in Mozambique?

When we capture Portuguese soldiers we do not kill or mistreat them. Our people know that these men are participating in the war because they were forced to. They are not defending their own interests or the interests of the Portuguese people, but the interests of Portuguese capitalists and international imperialism.

Then there are the Portuguese soldiers who desert to us. These we consider our allies. Their desertion is an act of support to our struggle.

And there are whites born in Mozambique who want to join our ranks. We do not consider these as foreigners who support us. Such a man is one of us and it is his duty, just as it is my duty, to liberate Mozambique.

Our policy regarding civilians is clear. We do not fight the Portuguese who are in our country because they are Portuguese. We fight the forces of colonial occupation.

This policy is not new. Since the beginning we have said our struggle is not against the Portuguese people but against Portuguese colonialism. And now in Tete one begins to feel this more strongly. There are more concrete cases there because the Portuguese population is much larger in Tete than in the other two provinces where we are fighting. They have shops there and plantations. There are traders. We don't harm them. We attack the colonial war machine of repression.

Of course, if those people co-operate with the colonial authorities against us we have to take action against them. We do the same with Mozambicans;

Sometimes civilians get killed when we attack a convoy. But we attack these convoys because in them are troops and arms, and these aren't carried only in military vehicles. Civilian cars are used for this purpose too, so it is impossible to differentiate, to know which is the military car and which is not. That is why civilians sometimes get killed. But it is not our policy to kill civilians. Our targets are military or with a military relevance.

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