

# LETTERS

Econ.

4/4/87

## Southern Africa

SIR—You say (February 28th) that “rebels with South African backing are blocking all routes through Mozambique.” The facts are that without South African help over many years the railways and the port of Maputo would be operating at even lower levels of efficiency. I am looking forward to the day when the starvation in Ethiopia is also blamed on South Africa.

You also say that South Africa has pressed hard on Botswana by allowing the “puppet state” of Bophuthatswana to interrupt the cross-border rail link. The facts are that South Africa, as usual, defused the problem between the two Tswana states by arranging for train crews to be changed in Botswana.

The three letters on South Africa published on February 28th indicate how tiresome your prejudices are becoming.

Pretoria

A. D. CROSSLEY

SIR—References to some guerrilla groups as foreign-backed, particularly the “South African-backed Renamo” (March 7th), tend to say more about the preferences of the writer than the group concerned. Terrorists are bad and foreign-backed, freedom fighters are good and indigenous.

The evidence suggests that the South African government genuinely dropped support for Renamo after the Nkomati Accord. Subsequent assistance seems to have come from renegades in South African military intelligence. Now Renamo operates most effectively in Zambezia province in the north and has bases in Malawi—why not Malawian-backed? Their “inadequate” (and Soviet) arms and clothes do not suggest much backing from South Africa. Rather that they get most of what they have from raids and deserters, as they claim themselves.

I suggest that Frelimo’s weakness in the face of the insurgency reflects the fact that they never won the country in 1975—the Portuguese just pulled out. Frelimo did not consolidate a national movement in the manner of, say, the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau. The diversity and disunity of rebel activities suggest a broad opposition to the Frelimo regime (unlike the better defined divi-

sions in Angola).

Renamo is at least one of the strongest and most effective (ie, disruptive) rebel groups in the world today, for all its public relations and policy problems. The South African-backing claim merely obscures the extent of the opposition to the terrorism and incompetence of Frelimo.

London

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