

PRESIDENT SAMORA MACHEL

Mr Samora Machel, President of Mozambique since the country became independent of Portugal in 1975, died on October 19 when the plane in which he was travelling home from Zambia to his capital, Maputo, crashed in eastern Natal. He was 53.

Unlike most of his contemporaries who led movements for independence from colonial rule in Africa, Machel was trained in guerrilla warfare and took an active part in the fight against the Portuguese in Mozambique. He was at that time a lean, bearded figure in the image and tradition of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, and was well versed in the political and military precepts of General Giap and Mao Tse-tung.

He made use of his success in the field to take over, at an early age, the leadership of Frelimo, the main nationalist movement. In his later years as president he was best known as one of the first African leaders to have dealings with South Africa and to seek a modus vivendi with P. W. Botha; though this was forced on him by a disastrous drought, famine and his country's increasing economic dependence on its powerful neighbour.

Samora Moises Machel was born on September 29, 1933, in southern Mozambique. His father was a minor chief of the Shona but Machel's education at a local Roman Catholic mission school was cut short by the need to go out to work when a wage-earning elder brother was killed in a mining accident in South Africa.

He started as a hospital orderly and in the course of the next ten years rose by hard work and application to a number of more responsible positions. During this time he came under the influence of Eduardo Mondlane, an American-educated political leader who in 1962 founded Frente de Libertacao de Mocambique, or Frelimo, as it was generally known.

This was not the only nationalist movement, but while its main rivals were based in Cairo and Accra it had the advantage of being close at hand at Dar es Salaam, and of enjoying the patronage and support of President Nyerere who allowed it to establish training camps for its guerrillas in southern Tanzania. Having thrown in his lot with Frelimo and crossed the border into Tanzania, Machel was one of the first to be sent to Algeria for training in guerrilla warfare.

When Mondlane launched his armed struggle against the Portuguese in Mozambique in 1964, Machel already had 250 trained men under his command near the border. In the course of the next two years the hit-and-run tactics of his mobile band became a serious embarrassment to the Portuguese authorities.

In 1966, he was made Frelimo's secretary for defence, and two years later became its commander-in-chief. In 1969, when Mondlane was mysteriously assassinated in Dar es Salaam, Machel was one of three men appointed to assume collective leadership. It was a short-lived arrangement and in the following year Machel emerged as sole leader and president of Frelimo.

By 1974 Machel was said to have twenty thousand men in the field, and to have taken control of more than a third of Mozambique. Although he received quantities of communist arms and advice, he owed his success quite as much to military and financial support from the Organisation for African Unity, and from President Nyerere in particular.

In the end, however, it was not so much pressure from Frelimo which brought the struggle for independence to a head as the revolution in Portugal itself, when in 1974 the dictatorship of Caetano was overthrown by the left-wing Armed Forces Movement. A cease-fire was quickly arranged in Mozambique and elsewhere, and negotiations initiated which led to Mozambique's becoming an independent republic in June 1975.

Machel became Comrade President of a one-party Marxist state, the capital, Lourenço Marques, was re-named Maputo, and there was a new flag in red, green and gold adorned with the devices of rifle, hoe, book and cog-wheel.

In his first year as president, Machel committed his regime to fighting for freedom in all parts of Africa, side by side with other socialist states, in what he termed "the liberated zones of humanity". He went on in this vein to identify capitalism, multi-national companies and the Roman Catholic Church as the chief causes of his country's ills and the feudal and colonialist mentality of its inhabitants.

He announced plans to change the entire social structure, with public ownership of all land and buildings, and government control of the press, radio, films and books. He admitted that the benefits of this well-regulated society might take some time to be apparent to everyone, that meanwhile some might have to work without pay, and that those who were paid would be expected to contribute part of their earnings to a Solidarity Bank to help the oppressed peoples of the Third World.

Although this new regime was far from welcome to the long-established settlers of Portuguese descent, successive governments in Portugal offered a helping hand to Machel, providing technical expertise and training in exchange for commercial advantages.

In 1976 Machel attended a



meeting with Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda to discuss assistance to the various movements engaged in the struggle against the white regime in Rhodesia. Machel would not at first support Robert Mugabe or his party, but was eventually persuaded by Nyerere to do so. Thereafter he provided facilities with important facilities in Mozambique.

In 1980 Machel began to make drastic changes in his economy in order to combat "inefficiency, bureaucracy and corruption". He attributed the failure of wholesale nationalization partly to what he called "ultra-leftist policies of excessive state involvement", and partly to lack of effort and a sense of mission on the part of his countrymen.

In 1983 he announced the end of what he had hoped would be a period of "clemency and re-education", and brought back the death penalty and public flogging for political and economic sabotage.

Experience made him no less ruthlessly pragmatic in his relations with other countries. Although he paid several visits to Russia and other eastern bloc states, he had no wish to become a communist satellite or to risk forgoing the wider economic and technical advantages of association with the West.

He made a number of profitable visits to Portugal, Britain, France and Holland, and he particularly welcomed the trade and agricultural agreements which he concluded with Scandinavian countries. But he remained chary of close involvement with the United States, and in 1981 expelled six US diplomats suspected of being CIA agents.

Machel's realism was most marked in his relations with South Africa. Despite his consistent opposition to the regime there, two factors led him to enter into negotiations with Mr Botha. One was his country's considerable economic dependence on South Africa, particularly as a place of employment. The other was the guerrilla activities of the Movimento Nacional da Resistencia de Mocambique (MNR), a rival body of African nationalists which since independence had tried to overthrow Machel and Frelimo.

With arms and training facilities provided by South

Africa the MNR had become a serious embarrassment to Machel, in the same way as, to a lesser degree, the facilities given by Mozambique had allowed the African National Congress to operate across the border inside South Africa. Beginning with unobtrusive discussions on neutral ground in Swaziland and Portugal, the two sides moved cautiously towards a pact called the Nkomati Accord in the spring of 1984. Under this both parties agreed to deny facilities to the MNR and the ANC respectively, and to put a stop to cross-border activities.

Yet the atmosphere of supposed cooperation brought no respite in the MNR attacks. Power lines were destroyed, factories were blown up, and the guerrilla offensive even spread to the suburbs of Maputo, which were rocked by explosions.

Machel became increasingly suspicious of South African good faith. In 1985 he secured Mugabe's agreement to cooperate with him in military action against the guerrillas. The first practical consequence of this was the capture of the "Casa Banana", the largest MNR base in the country. It also provided proof of South African complicity in MNR activity, from incriminating documents found there.

South African embarrassment at these disclosures had no effect on the MNR, however, and the Frelimo government was dismayed when the guerrillas subsequently retook the "Casa Banana", encountering little opposition from demoralised and undernourished government forces.

Though the base was again recaptured with Zimbabwean help, the recent loss of a number of small towns, in spite of a substantial build-up of Zimbabwean forces in the country, illustrated the security problem that continually afflicted Machel.

Even in middle age he retained many of the characteristics of the wiry, guerrilla leader he had once been. Though a Marxist he was no intellectual, and early tendencies towards theorizing soon gave way to the rule of common sense. As a man he was cheerful, and liked a joke. However in his personal life he tended to the austere, eschewing tobacco and alcohol, rising early and keeping fit by swimming, jogging and pedalling an exercise cycle.

By colleagues and subordinates he was considered something of a moralist. On one occasion he ordered the wives of his guerrilla officers to lower the hems of their skirts, and one of his earliest acts in government was a drive against prostitution.

He was three times married. His first wife left him when he became a guerrilla fighter. His second, Josina, died during the guerrilla campaign and was revered as a heroine. His third, Graca Simbine, whom he married in 1973, was Mozambique's minister of education and culture.