

# Marking Machel's legacy

*York University social science professor John Saul has made many friends over the course of his two decade-long involvement with the anti-colonial movement in southern Africa. One of them was Mozambique's downed president Samora Machel.*

By JOHN SAUL

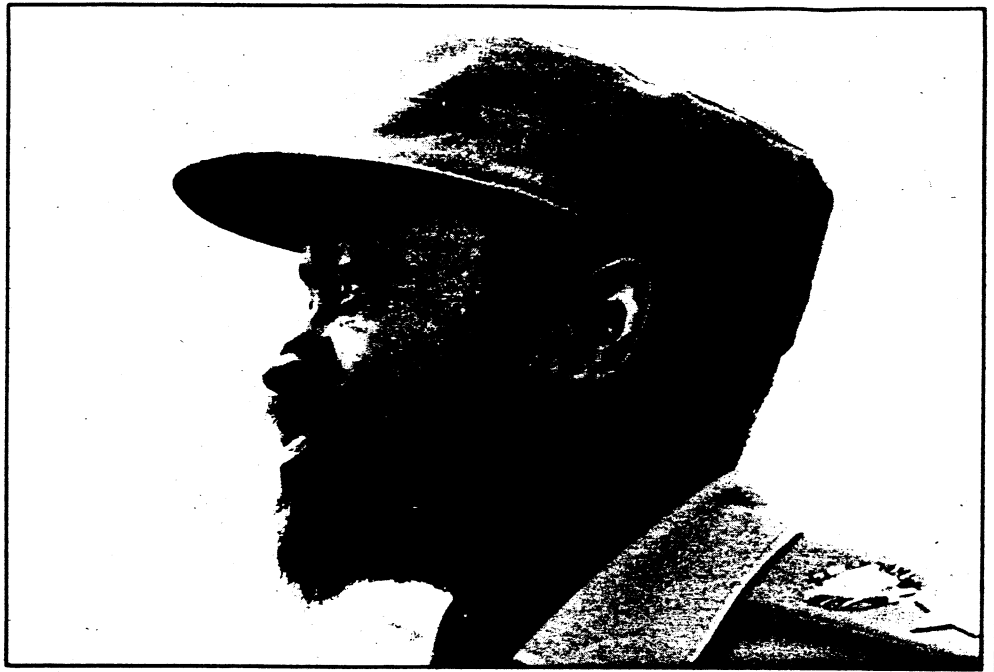
We may never know the true circumstances surrounding the air crash which killed Mozambique's president, Samora Machel. Accidents do happen, after all. Yet the fact that so many observers could immediately suspect the South Africans of having helped to engineer it, is itself no accident. For such an act would be perfectly consistent with South Africa's brutal record of aggression, assassination and destabilization. Indeed, Samora Machel's own country has been one of the principal targets of such South African activities.

A man of astonishing energy and intelligence, Machel played the key role in spearheading Mozambique's 10-year war against the armed might of Portuguese colonialism. Then, with independence in 1975, Machel and his Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) turned to the even more daunting task of launching a popularly-based development effort along socialist lines.

Under the best of circumstances this would have proven a difficult enough task, given the grim inheritance left to Mozambique by Portugal. But even more significant have been the persistent attacks from outside, most importantly South African sponsorship of a counter-revolutionary movement which it has continued to supply and orchestrate right up to the present — and in spite of the peace treaty between the two countries signed at Nkomati in 1984.

Machel and his colleagues did make errors of their own. But they also demonstrated a marked capacity, over the years, for reflection and self-criticism, an ability to rethink many basic premises. Unfortunately, South Africa's unrelenting economic and military assault has allowed Mozambicans little room to manoeuvre, little room to learn from errors made and to launch fresh policies.

Of course, such has been FRELIMO's continuing legitimacy and Samora Machel's own popularity that the South Africans have never tried very hard to present a real po-



Mozambique's president Samora Machel, who was killed last week in a suspicious air crash, is being mourned by many as an inspiration in Africa's long battle with colonialism.

litical alternative. Rather, theirs has been a scorched earth policy, one of destroying economic infrastructure and terrorizing villagers, one of creating chaos and checkmating progress. Not the least of Samora Machel's recent achievements was his capacity to fight on — with vigour, enthusiasm, even good humour — against the lengthening odds South Africa imposed upon his country.

## Creating chaos

I mourn Samora Machel as a friend of 20 years standing, and as a source of personal inspiration and political stimulus for myself and many others, in Mozambique and abroad. Equally I mourn for his country, bereft now of his leadership and bereft, as well, of so much of the rich promise of its hard-earned liberation. I contrast the high hopes of Independence Day in 1975 with the grim reality I witnessed when I returned to Mozambique last year for the 10th anniversary of that independence.

And I echo the thought that Samora himself shared with me on that last occasion when we spoke together: as long as South Africa's apartheid state straddles the region, club in hand, the promise opened up by the ending of colonialism in Mozambique will never be fully realized. This is one more good reason why Canadians must support whatever needs to be done to bring down South Africa's cancerous system.

Surely one of the most galling things about the general run of media coverage of Samora Machel's death this past week has been the sudden discovery by the media that he was not in fact the stereotypical tin-pot dictator of some "Soviet backed" "Marxist regime" in Darkest Africa they had often

presented him as being. Rather, they now revealed, he was a man of intelligence, humour, energy, "charisma." Yet many of us knew this all along, had they but cared to ask.

## Bid goodbye

I could recount many incidents which reflected Machel's deft sense of humour and his keen intelligence .... But I can also speak at first hand of the remarkable energy of the man, of his charisma, of the power of his personality. In particular, I remember vividly a conversation in my garden in Dar es Salaam in 1972. A few weeks earlier he had arranged for me to accompany FRELIMO guerrillas on a visit to the liberated areas of Tete province and now had come to bid me and my family goodbye as we packed to leave Tanzania.

"You have now seen something of our struggle," he said. "But for most Canadians their knowledge of it is at point zero. You must try to do something about that when you return home."

It was not an order exactly yet I could literally feel his will galvanizing me into action, communicating to me personally the kind of drive and purpose I have seen him communicate to Mozambicans, singly and in large gatherings, both before and since that day. It was no accident that on my return to Canada I would soon find myself working with others to launch the Toronto Committee for the Liberation of Portugal's African Colonies, TCLPAC (later to become the Toronto Committee for the Liberation of Southern Africa, TCLSAC).

I think it fair to say that TCLPAC was successful in realizing some of the goals Machel wished for us. Certainly, too, the power of his per-

sonality — though he never did visit Canada himself — has continued right up to the present to have an impact on Canadians who came in contact with him, either directly or indirectly. For his part, he never forgot the "Toronto front" of FRELIMO's struggle, even inviting a TCLPAC delegation instead of the Canadian government (then tied to colonial Portugal through NATO) to represent "the Canadian people" at the independence celebrations in 1975. Small wonder that no one in TCLSAC finds it easy today to think of Samora Machel as being gone.

I find this difficult myself. But then I find it doubly difficult to conceive of yet another death dogging the heels of the Mozambican revolution. Over the years so many unknown Mozambicans have died unnecessarily, victims of the madness which is white minority rule and racial capitalism in southern Africa. I think of such Mozambicans, but I also think of specific individuals whom I knew well.

I think of my friend Eduardo Mondlane, FRELIMO's first president, killed by a book bomb during my years in Tanzania. I think of my friend and colleague at the University of Eduardo Mondlane, Ruth First, killed by a letter bomb in her room just down the hall from my own office in Maputo. I think of my dear, dear friend Aquino de Braganca, director of the Centre of African Studies in Maputo, deafened by the bomb that killed Ruth First, now dead himself in the recent crash. And, of course, I think of Samora himself.

## Bloody hands

Too many have died — though even one would have been too many. We cannot let this madness continue. It is true, of course, that

we do not know for certain whether this time South Africa pulled the trigger. But then Machel would not have been in Zambia in the first place were it not to help rally the front-line states of southern Africa against South Africa's latest threats. In any case, so much Mozambican blood is visible on South Africa's hands that the point is almost academic.

How, finally, to cope with this loss? As I asked myself that question this week I thought of FRELIMO's own 1969 eulogy to an earlier fallen president, Eduardo Mondlane. Once again I found it moving and, as an example of how Mozambicans have sought themselves to deal with such setbacks, personally helpful. Since it seems, almost eerily, to speak of Samora Machel as well, I will repeat it here:

"Thus we commemorate his life and we mourn his death. We knew, as he knew, that this could happen, even if it seemed impossible that all that energy, all that strength and vitality could be crushed. How full of life was his body, how free and at ease his way of moving and doing things, how sure his voice.

## Another step

"We mourn the death of these physical things which cannot survive as other aspects of him can. We mourn him as a man. And as a man, we know that he was not free of fault or error, or of shortcomings. The Revolution will build better men, but he worked to build the Revolution. And he fought — as we continue to do — in this hope: that our descendants can be better men than we were ever given the chance to be. But they will carry with them the memory of our leader.

"By his death they will under-

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## Machel

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stand that for us the principle 'Independence or Death' was not devoid of meaning. But to it we add that it has been a physical death; it will be another step toward independence. We will make it so. We will be more determined, more stubborn and implacable than we ever were .... Our enemies must not forget that the guerrilla fighter returns to battle with increased rage when he sees a comrade fall."

Surely this is the spirit in which we must come to terms with the loss of Samora Machel. But is it the case that the Mozambican revolution — if it is allowed to survive — really will produce a better person than Samora Machel? Perhaps, but it would not be easy to do, even in the best of times. Such was the strength of character of the man we mourn.