

ON the wall of a school on Vladimir Lenin Avenue runs the slogan, "Viva Marxism-Leninism and Socialism".

Slogans and street names give Maputo a revolutionary feel. But the days of Avenue Mao Tse Tung, for instance, may be numbered.

Frelimo, the once communist movement that won Mozambique's independence from Portugal in 1975, dropped Marxism last year.

It is now promoting a national debate on a new draft constitution, the first since 1975. Some Mozambicans think the draft should be amended to provide for a multiparty system.

Other African countries are embarking on similar discussions, prompted by the revolutionary changes in eastern Europe. But President Joaquim Chissano argues that the changes in his country started before those in eastern Europe.

In 1982, Frelimo made its first contacts with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Five years later, the government signed an economic rehabilitation programme with the World Bank which put Mozambique on the path to a free market system.

In 1984, Frelimo abandoned its Marxist hostility to Christianity. Some churches were reopened and, says Maputo's Anglican Bishop Denis Sengulane, "religious worship was limited only by the size of the buildings".

But Frelimo's sharpest change of direction came last year. Without prior announcement, the 1989 Fifth Party Congress simply dropped all references to "Marxism-Leninism" from the Party programme.

Frelimo followed that up in January, when it unveiled its draft constitution. In a complicated and painstaking procedure, possible changes to the Party proposals will

# Chissano changes direction

***Mozambique's long-desired peace may be realised if peace talks between the Frelimo government and the Renamo bandits, planned for this month, actually take place. As a curtain-raiser to such talks, President Joaquim Chissano has been promoting a national debate on a new draft constitution. KATTY KAY reports:***

be discussed nationwide before they are enacted.

As it stands, the draft proposes banning torture and the death penalty. It guarantees freedom of association and the right to strike. It also provides for direct elections for a fixed-term presidency and legislature.

It leaves out press freedom and any mention of a multiparty state. At the insistence of journalists, the first omission may be one of the things which gets changed as a result of the national consultations.

The multi-party system seems less likely to be included. When Chissano

announced the draft in January, he argued against a multiparty system for Mozambique, saying it could divide the country on ethnic lines.

Peasants living in remote districts are barely aware of which country they live in, and some have never heard of President Chissano. The war has destroyed most communication routes, so rural farmers are unusually isolated.

With some 29 different languages and dialects, on top of a religious divide, Chissano has cause for concern.

He says he is also worried that



Joaquim Chissano

rushing into a multiparty democracy could result in the collapse of the democratic system. He points out that this led to military takeovers in Nigeria and Ghana.

Even without provision for a multiparty system, the draft constitution represents the most radical change in Mozambican politics since independence. The reason for the change lies much closer to home than events in eastern Europe.

Since the late 70s, Frelimo has been fighting a civil war against Renamo. The war has crippled the economy — it swallows 40 percent of the budget — destroying 45 percent of the school network and forcing a million Mozambicans to flee the country.

In 1979, the fall of Rhodesia's white government, which had been supported by rebels, encouraged speculation that the war would end. But South Africa picked up where Rhodesia left off and the war intensified.

Frelimo signed the Nkomati accord with South Africa in 1984, agreeing to a mutual end to hostilities. Again,

people hoped the war would end, but South Africa did not keep to the agreement.

According to a Western diplomat, "six years later, Mozambicans need a new sign of hope. They want an end to the war, and they want it now, not tomorrow".

Last year World Bank economic reforms resulted in inflation of 40 percent. There were more goods in the shops, but most people cannot afford them.

A series of unprecedented strikes over low wages in January revealed the level of frustration.

The frustration seems unlikely to lead to the overthrow of Chissano himself. One reason is that Mozambique is just too difficult a country to run: few would like to be in Chissano's position.

Chissano hopes the draft constitution will help him end the war: the promise of elections goes some way to meeting Renamo's political demands. The World Bank-backed economic reforms meet the rebels' economic demands.

For its part, Renamo has recognised the People's Republic of Mozambique — an earlier block to talks.

Besides economic and political reforms, Frelimo is preparing to meet Renamo. Last year, senior Mozambican clergy met rebel leaders in Nairobi with Frelimo's approval.

President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya and President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe were appointed mediators.

In December, the mediators urged both sides to meet for direct talks without preconditions.

Chissano now promises to do so. The first round of talks is planned to take place this month. — GEMINI NEWS