

Mozambique's Re-education Camps

After achieving independence on 25 June 1975, the government of Mozambique arrested large numbers of people, some pursuant to campaigns against 'prostitution and banditry', others on 'security' grounds.

When the prisons were full, detainees were held in camps, called re-education centres. There are two categories of camps, one for common law criminals and delinquents (marginals), the other for political suspects. Camps were situated in Gorongosa in Sofala Province, at Ruara and Chaimita in Cabo Delgado Province, and in Niassa and Nampula Provinces. The political centres are under control of the SNASP (popular national security services of Mozambique).

It is alleged that some 15,000 people were detained in the first month. Almost all were detained without charge or trial, if only because there were neither the trained lawyers nor the judges to conduct such trials. Many of those detained are reported to have since disappeared and few have been released. Reports have been received of brutal treatment in the re-education centres. Allegations include prolonged detention in underground cells, inadequate and rotten food, torture, frequent beatings

and floggings, and even executions by shooting or by being buried alive.

After President Samora Machel visited the Niassa camp in mid-1979, he announced that he had ordered the release of 600 people, some of them alleged common law criminals and others former Frelimo dissidents.

More recently he again visited re-education centres in Niassa and Cabo Delgado Provinces. A remarkable editorial in the "Domingo" journal provides confirmation of the conditions in the camps by describing President Machel's indignation at the prolonged detention of people who were sent to these camps and simply left to rot and die, as well as allegations of brutality, torture and abuse of power. It is reported that the President has ordered the closing down of some of the centres, and a permanent system of inspection of those which remain.

A translation of the editorial is as follows:

"On Re-Education

The newspapers have at last reported what everybody already knew. This is that

our re-education centres, besides interning delinquents, also unjustly interned many people who were detained without a warrant of arrest, without evidence of any offence and without anyone knowing the reason for their arrest...

In his recent tour of a number of centres in Niassa and Cabo Delgado provinces, the President of the Republic detected serious violations of the spirit that should govern the re-education process.

He saw men who were detained for years for ridiculous offences, without being given any opportunity to defend themselves. Among them there were old men, sick men and cripples, as if re-education were a medieval quarantine to which a person was sent and where he remained forgotten to rot for the rest of his life.

Samora Machel was indignant. He ordered old men, the sick and the weak to be returned to their families, as well as those he found to be in an irregular situation.

Nonetheless, inertia still prevails. The people being released are those who have been specifically ordered to be released, but others in identical situations continue to be detained for "lack of directives". In the final analysis their continued detention stems from fear that they may end up on the "other side". This, by itself, already reveals the idea people have of re-education, how to re-educate and whom to re-educate.

The absence of any functioning system of supervision left people under re-education in the hands of those in command of the centre, who were generally very ill-prepared for the work of re-education. Instead of reforming, it resulted rather in deforming.

In 1978, Governor Aurelio Manave ordered the detention of the Naisseko (Niassa) re-education centre commandant, who

was accused of brutality and abuse of power.

I was informed by former inmates that the commandant frequently ordered them to be tied with ropes soaked with salt. This form of torture, generally meted out to Jehovah's Witnesses, definitely crippled many people and consolidated the fanaticism of many others.

Very recently, the President of the Republic had to order the arrest of the commandant of the Ruarua re-education camp for investigation. The centre was neither re-educating nor producing, notwithstanding that the land is rich.

The lack of self-sufficiency of the centres, albeit generalised, perpetuated their character of a penal colony, in contradiction to the idea of re-education as originally proposed, which was to reintegrate the delinquent into society by making him participate in the process of socialist production.

In reality, how did re-education work?

In his recent visits, the Head of State ordered the closure of a number of re-education centres and laid down guidelines to start turning the centres without delay into future towns.

The work to be done will be based on work done in terms of ideological reconversion. The difficulties of social reintegration will be directly proportional to the mistakes made during re-education.

In future, it will be imperative to assure permanent supervision of the existing centres without necessitating inspection by the President. We must ensure respect for human dignity, which, after all, constitutes the proposed objective of re-education.

Revolutionary legality as an instrument of class domination ought to be taken seriously."