

Mozambique:

The Failure of Socialism?

BY JOHN S. SAUL

Active with TCLSAC since its founding in 1972, John Saul is a member of the editorial working group of Southern Africa Report

"Capitalism," Berthold Brecht once observed, "has an address." Capitalism's no mere abstraction, he was saying, but real live individuals in control of very concrete economic institutions, reproducing, more or less self-consciously, the exploitative social system of which he disapproved. For Brecht, that's where the buck, the blame, the abstraction, had to stop. And that's where the on-going struggle to develop a more humane system had to be "addressed."

For western radicals, "the failure of socialism" — this latter phrase so pervasive a talisman of political discourse as we enter the 1990s — has an address as well. For some, that address is close to home, no further away than the constituency office of their local social-democratic party where they have come to see organizations ever more deeply enmeshed in and compromised by their historic bargain with capitalism and the most "bourgeois" features of democracy. For others, particularly many of an older generation, the Soviet Union itself has provided the postmark for "failed socialism." Here was a peculiar brand of socialism, authoritarian and smug, but with promise perhaps of an "alternative," of some counter-weight to imperialism. And yet, for those with eyes to see (and not in every case merely with the advantage of hindsight), no real promise at all.

China, Cuba, Nicaragua and, for many of us in the anti-apartheid movement, Mozambique. My own association with the Mozambican revolution began in the 1960s when I moonlighted, occasionally, from

my job at Tanzania's university and helped out with English-language translations at FRELIMO's headquarters in Dar es Salaam. My commitment to the Mozambican struggle was deepened by a trip to the liberated areas of Mozambique in 1972, first-hand participation in 1975's dramatic independence celebrations in the newly-renamed capital of Maputo, numerous subsequent visits to the country, including attendance at several key Congresses and meetings, and even a spell of full-time employment there, teaching at the Eduardo Mondlane University and in FRELIMO's party school.

Through these years I passed close enough to the flame of Mozambique's revolutionary process to see how real was the sense of humane purpose that came to motivate so many FRELIMO's cadres, how sincere, too, their grasping for a Marxist methodology that would help further to codify the radical thrust of their undertakings. I had seen enough, in any case, to insulate me from both the ultra-left abstractions of a Michel Cahen (*SAR*, May, 1990) and the crass cynicism of a Heribert Adam with his suggestion that recent developments have "reduced Frelimo's ... versions of freedom ideology to rhetorical socialism ... In a crunch, the elite therefore adjusts ideological interpretations as arbitrarily as they adopted them. No conversion is involved, as is frequently assumed, because a collective ideological commitment hardly existed in the first place."

Yet my more recent visits had also revealed the progressive decay of Frelimo's high promise, a decay by now self-evident to all observers but one that has been particularly well documented, over the past few years, in the various articles by Mar-

shall, Roesch, Loxley and others in the pages of *SAR*. Still, I had not been back to Mozambique myself since 1986 when I travelled there this summer to attend a conference and to visit friends. It very quickly became apparent that even the instructive contributions of Marshall and the others had not quite prepared me for what I was about to witness.

The conference itself was a revelation. Officially convened by the Frelimo party and the Ministry of International Relations, it was entitled "Rethinking Strategies for Mozambique and Southern Africa." The number of delegates invited from western establishment circles was remarkable enough. Even more remarkable was the strong pitch in favour of adopting quite unalloyed "free market" policies to deal with Mozambique's development problems that was formally presented by each of the three senior governmental ministers who addressed various sessions (Pascoal Mocumbi, Jacinto Veloso and Armando Guebuza).

Guebuza was particularly hard-boiled in this respect, acknowledging the hardships that the structural adjustment programme has brought to many in Mozambique with the matter-of-fact assertion that the market economy solution does in fact make the rich richer and the poor poorer, bringing with it more social injustice as "the price of progress." Indeed, it was the World Bank's own representative in Mozambique who sounded more of a warning note. He suggested that the Mozambique government had become rather too naive in its dealings with international capital, not being willing or able enough to drive the kinds of hard bargains with firms and western agencies that might actually defend the country's interests.



Chiziane/AIM

Central Committee of Frelimo voting changes to constitution

Not that this representative himself queried the premise that a wide range of benefits could flow from more or less total immersion in the international market-place. But it was rather disconcerting, as I said in my own address to the conference, to find the World Bank standing marginally to the left of spokespersons from the Mozambican government! Equally disconcerting, I continued, was the small inclination on the part of any of the Ministers to take seriously the fact that, even if a certain kind of socialism could be said to have "failed," there was still good reason for measured scepticism as to whether capitalism could succeed under the conditions in which Mozambique finds itself.

Most remarkable of all, however, was a briefing given exclusively to conference delegates by Mozambique's President, Joaquim Chissano. Chissano seemed to be

addressing himself most directly to the more establishment-style delegates from Germany and the United States (in particular, perhaps, the extremely right-wing former Reagan ambassador to South Africa, Herman Nickel). In doing so, however, he also starkly revealed just how supine Mozambique has been forced to become *vis-à-vis* western dictate:

"The US said, "Open yourself to OPIC, the World Bank, and IMF". What happened? ... We are told now: "Marxism! You are devils. Change this policy." OK. Marxism is gone. "Open market economy." OK, Frelimo is trying to create capitalism. We have the task of building socialism and capitalism here.

We went to Reagan and I said, "I want money for the private sector to boost people who want to develop a bourgeoisie." Answer: \$10 million, then \$15 million more, then another

\$15 million. You tell me to do away with Marxism, the Soviet Union and the GDR and give me [only] \$40 million. OK, we have changed. Now they say, "If you don't go to a multi-party system, don't expect help from us."

Chissano did note that the structural adjustment programme being followed by the Frelimo government has deepened the hardships of the Mozambican people at least as much as it has produced economic advance. And he warned that "the readjustment programme must start showing results. Or we must take other directions." But what "other directions"? In fact, Chissano said rather forlornly in capping this threat, "we don't see which other way. We are totally dependent on inputs from outside. If they are not forthcoming in the correct manner, it is no use."

The debate will continue about what has brought Mozambique to its current sorry pass, what combination of an unpromising historical starting-point inherited from Portuguese colonialism, a relentless siege imposed upon the country by outside forces (notably the architects of South Africa's destabilization strategy), and a Frelimo development project marred by significant failings of its own. Old Frelimo friends, people of genuinely left instinct and intent, were in a reflective mood, prepared to discuss more openly than had sometimes been the case the party's failings. Not that anything I heard or saw caused me to revise my earlier opinion: first and foremost amongst the causes of Mozambique's so-called "failure of socialism" has been the ruthlessness of the aggression launched against it and the destruction, quite literally, of a society that has been attendant upon that aggression.

Indeed, I came to feel that I had, if anything, underestimated the broader imperialist underpinnings of the grim destabilization of Mozambique. At the seminar itself, as well as in other discussions, a pithy epigram about Mozambique attributed to the Caribbean social scientist Horace Campbell took on ever increasing resonance: "The IMF is the economic wing of the armed bandits!" There have been many indications, over the years, that South Africa's destabilization tactics dovetailed neatly with the Reagan doctrine of Third World "roll-back." After all, these tactics had been applied in earnest only upon Reagan's entry into the White House. Now private discussions with Frelimo veterans underscored the extent to which Samora Machel had premised his own tactics in the early 1980s on his grasp of the fact of US/South African connivance in destabilization. The neutralization of American hostility was thus front and centre in the calculations that underlay the signing of the Nkomati Accord.

As things turned out, Machel had underestimated the extent to which South Africa was an independent actor. South African and American policies as to the best methods of dealing with Mozambique diverged after the Nkomati Accord – the Americans apparently accepting it as rather more of a supine Mozambican surrender to the reality of *force majeure* and the logic of the international marketplace than the South Africans were prepared to do. As a result, destabilization continued. Yet Chissano's words, quoted above, give some further measure of the ruthlessness with which the Americans (alongside other western powers) have been prepared to follow up economically on the advantage bequeathed them by South Africa's direct physical weakening of an "enemy regime."

At the same time, some Frelimo veterans were also prepared to discuss, more frankly than ever, the weaknesses of their own project. Perhaps the mistake was in going for the vanguard party structure in the first place, one of them said. Certainly, he continued, we were wrong, all of us at the top, in fostering a cult of personality around Samora, whatever his undoubted virtues and the particular strength of his dedication to a popularly-based development strategy; this personality cult he saw as being the biggest change, politically, in the transition from the Mondlane period to the Machel period and the most questionable one. My friend also referred to a long series of discussions he and I had had over the years (including during the period when I had taught at the FRELIMO party school) in which I had often emphasized the costs of FRELIMO's embracing the particularly lifeless brand of Marxism on offer from the Soviets as the ideological instrument for codifying its radical intentions. We should probably have listened more to you, he said lightly, then – in a wry voice – "Of course, you didn't have in your briefcase the military hardware that we also felt we needed"!

As our talk flowed along these lines, I got a fresh sense of the costs – perhaps far outweighing the benefits – of Mozambique's having had to turn (inevitably?) to the Eastern bloc for support of its attempt to escape subordination to western capitalist dictate. Moreover, in this and other conversations, I found concern expressed that the regime's original attempt to systematize its revolutionary nationalism within a Marxist frame of analysis had had less depth intellectually than it needed to have (and less depth, certainly, than I had myself dared to think at the time). Perhaps this is also what makes it so easy for Chissano now to suggest that "marxism [not, be it noted, "Marxism-Leninism"] was creating problems for us" (*Expresso*, May 12, 1990) – and to leave himself so little conceptual middle-ground for blunting the charge of the most unadulterated of free-market nostrums.

A number of more concrete subjects were also broached, notably in a discussion of the importance of Samora's failure, in the breathing space provided by the end of the Zimbabwe war, to do something about the military. In particular, this might have involved moving out the dead-wood amongst the army's commanders, both those who were not up to meeting the novel demands of the independence period (so different from the days of the liberation struggle) and those who had failed to resist the temptations to corruption. Did Samora feel too close, from guerilla days, to members of this leadership cadre to take the necessary steps? Yet a transformed army might have made a great difference in containing Renamo as South Africa first began to reactivate the latter group.

Then, as the war escalated, Samora seemed himself to lose his nerve and his self-possession, the period from 1983 to 1985 revealing particularly graphically, Frelimo friends argued, some of the costs of excessively centralized and per-

mozambique

Peasants planting corn in Chokwe, Gaza Province



Children play in Chibropulo, Gaza Province

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sonalized rule. True, a vibrant and critically-focussed meeting of the Central Committee in 1986 did see the beginnings of a revitalization of Frelimo – and of Samora. Moreover, it seems quite plausible that it was precisely as Machel now began to move to transform the situation, giving promise, for example, of at last shaking-up the army, that the South Africans determined to kill him. But how could the situation have been allowed to degenerate so far in the first place?

Unfortunately, my time in Mozambique did not permit a full exploration of all the questions that Mozambicans should now be asking themselves about the contribution of their own errors of omission and commission in the demise of their experiment. Certainly, one was tempted to cavil at times about what was being said – and about what was being left unsaid. For example, were even my most reflective Frelimo friends sufficiently self-critical about the extent to which party/state directives and controls had tended (with whatever good intentions) to straitjacket initiatives from below and had thus failed to facilitate vitalization of unions, women's organizations, "civic associations," media? And yet it was refreshing to find that for some Mozambicans – though perhaps not yet enough of them – work has begun on a task that is now essential to the left the world over: that of studying, self-critically and with more effective tools than have been available in the past, socialism's setbacks.

Moreover, given some of the realities just touched upon, one can scarcely argue, from a progressive point of view, that all the recent changes in Mozambique are pure retreat. Indeed, in some instances they seem more a case of too little change too late. Stronger steps towards effective democratization, if that is what is happening in Mozambique, are certainly welcome, capping a lesson socialists have had

to take more firmly to heart everywhere in recent years. And there may be a general kind of wisdom, too, in seeking to let markets do some of the work that has broken the back of the planning apparatus in Mozambique. Regrettably, however, one senses that these changes are not being made in some measured manner, the better to deepen the effectiveness of a popularly-rooted project. Instead they seem more the grasping at straws of a leadership left reeling by the pounding it has taken, a leadership desperate to keep afloat on the turbulent seas of (continuing) destabilization and ever deeper reintegration into the global capitalist system.

In some cases, too, it seems that the weakest attributes of many Frelimo leaders have become magnified, benevolent authoritarianism now turned into something much more overtly non-benevolent. Take, for example, the hard version of Mozambique's present development strategy cited earlier from Minister Guebuza's remarks at the conference. As I pointed out in my own conference intervention, it may be no accident that the Minister who once offered up to the people of Maputo the hardship and high handedness of "Operation Production" (a programme of forced urban removal in 1983) in the name of socialism, is now prepared to offer the hardship of extreme polarization of incomes to that same people in the name of capitalist development.

Not all were on quite this wavelength, even if it did seem at times that the most salient division one could discern within the Mozambican leadership lay between those who favour a quite crude and aggressive project of entrepreneurial greed and corruption (exemplified most clearly by Guebuza himself and apparently packaged by those around him in crypto-racist terms as exemplifying the best kind of "African advancement") and those who favour a somewhat softer, more technocratic and "rational" version

of "free market" strategy. Does there, in addition, linger, within the Frelimo system, something of Samora Machel's left-wing populist sense that Mozambique's development strategy should benefit, first and foremost, the poorest of the poor?

President Chissano himself may not have lost sight of this bottom line of Frelimo's historical project entirely – however impossible he is finding it to give meaning to his best instincts in this regard. And even the senior leader who commented to me ruefully that "the Samoran project is over" did suggest that the Mozambican state remains a site of struggle where some remnants of Frelimo's socialism might still be defended. For him, however, the main "deposit" of the first fifteen years of Mozambican independence may need to be sought elsewhere, in something equally real if rather more amorphous: "in the minds of the people" and within the folds of a Mozambican culture still in-the-making.

He did look, concretely, to some of the cooperatives that have been established in the Green Zones and to some of the strikes that had been triggered, earlier this year, by the worst enormities of structural adjustment's impact. These were possible sources of bottom-up regeneration that might yet place a more successful radicalism on Mozambique's historical agenda. But from where, in turn, did they draw their inspiration? Wasn't it in part from some residue, still alive in Mozambique, of "the Samoran project" at its most positive, at its most socialist? Doesn't the best of that project survive as one positive point of reference for progressive endeavour, survive as precisely the kind of historical bench mark that few other African peoples can find in their post-independence past to take sustenance from? His conclusion: perhaps in this oblique way, if in no other, the Frelimo struggle really does continue.