

The People's Forces for the Liberation of Mozambique

Part One

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On the 25th September 1964 a small group of men in the north of Mozambique crept through the garden of an administrative post, and opened fire with rifles. Several of the soldiers guarding the post were killed - you can still see one of the bullet holes in the ceiling. The armed struggle for the liberation of Mozambique had begun.

In the Museum of the Revolution there is a photograph of some of the early combatants of the People's Forces for the Liberation of Mozambique (FPLM), barefoot, in ragged clothing, armed with ancient rifles. The leader of the first attack - Alberto Chipande - is today Minister of Defence in free Mozambique, and others of that group also survived ten years of hard combat. How is it, they ask, that with a total of only 250 poorly-armed soldiers they were able to take on and defeat a highly-trained and well-equipped colonial army of 30 000 backed by the might of NATO?

EDUARDO MONDLANE AND THE FIGHT FOR UNITY

FRELINO was founded in 1962 by Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane with the goal of uniting all Mozambicans in the struggle for complete and immediate independence. Its programme defined the enemy as Portuguese colonial domination and imperialism, and referred to the necessity of gaining full economic independence for the country.

Many of those at the founding conference fell by the wayside. Some, who had lived in exile in former British colonies, fell victims to constitutionalism, ignoring the fact that Portuguese capitalism was too weak to be able to attempt neo-colonial solutions. Others, willing to accept armed struggle but ambitious for personal advancement, and starting off with ultra-Africanist declarations, ended up by collaborating with the enemy. But from the start there was a vanguard core that not only remained staunch to the founding principles of FRELINO, but developed and deepened them in response to the

new phases of the struggle.

Now that independence has been won, the Mozambican leaders insist that they inherited nothing from colonialism. FRELIMO was not only a political organisation, it was the creator of the State and the builder of the nation. Eduardo Mondlane's great contribution was towards unity: he united three organisations into one, insisted on the territorial integrity of Mozambique 'from the Rovuma to the Maputo', and opened the doors of FRELIMO to all Mozambican patriots, irrespective of race, sex, region, tribe or religious belief.

From the start, he organised a vigorous combat against all forms of tribalism, regionalism or racism within the organisation, and did so not only at the level of theory, but by welding together Mozambicans of diverse origin through all political and military structures. To this day, the almost total absence of racial awareness in Mozambique is one of the most striking tributes to FRELIMO and the vision of its founder. Contrary to the myths about so-called Luso-tropical culture spread by colonialism, racism in Mozambique was vicious and institutionalised: the people were humiliated and despised at every level, with perhaps even more day to day physical brutality than in South Africa, and subjected to a total contempt for their history and culture. The absence of formal colour bars, and the existence of a tiny elite of 'assimilados' incorporated into colonial social life, only slightly disguised the reality of forced labour (chibalo), compulsory crop quotas and physical punishments (palmatoria).

It was FRELIMO that destroyed racism in Mozambique, and it did so not by proclamations, but by the force of example of collective work, of constant struggle. As Eduardo Mondlane pointed out, the issue was not simply one of drawing the maximum number of talents and energies to the struggle, but of defining who the enemy was, and laying the foundations of the new Mozambican society. To new recruits to the army, he tirelessly explained: the enemy was not a nation, even less a race, the enemy was a system and their job as soldiers was to destroy that system and the instruments of its power, and not to attack any race.

Eduardo Mondlane did not live to see the liberated Mozambique for which he worked so tirelessly. But today in the Government and armed forces, there are Mozambicans of all races and backgrounds and no one says: this Minister is African, that one is white, that one is coloured, that one is Asian. They are all Mozambicans, they do not represent racial or tribal groups. What they are judged by or praised

or criticised for in their commitment, their competence and their comportment. Promoting racial, sexual or religious division is a crime. The schools are integrated, sport is completely non-racial, and there has been a vast cultural upsurge in terms of which all Mozambicans learn the formerly despised songs and dances of the people.

For a South African it is almost dream-like to be in this atmosphere of a new Mozambique, to feel liberated from complexes, to be living in the world of the Freedom Charter. And South Africans can take a special pride in the fact that Eduardo Mondlane, founder of FRELIMO, developed some of his first-formed political ideas when he was a student at Wits University, in touch with comrade Nelson Mandela and other outstanding leaders of the African National Congress.

But not everyone inside FRELIMO shared Eduardo Mondlane's outlook. Like all great leaders, he advanced with the struggle he was leading. A whole series of concrete problems arose that required answers: what to do with captured Portuguese soldiers, should women be allowed into the army, how production should be organised, what the connection was between the struggle of the peasants of Niassa and the struggle in Vietnam, and so on. A profound crisis struck FRELIMO, practical in its manifestations, but ideological in its essence. As head of the consistently non-racial, democratic and increasingly revolutionary trend, Eduardo Mondlane was chief target both of the Portuguese colonialists and of the ambitious elements inside FRELIMO. They combined their forces, and on February 3, 1969, he was blown up by a parcel bomb in Dar-es-Salaam. The plan was that Uriah Simango, Vice-President of FRELIMO, arch-Africanist, eager for power, would take over the leadership.

THE CRISIS INSIDE FRELIMO (1966 - 1970)

In the meanwhile, the armed struggle was being extended. Three factors contributed towards its rapid advance in the northern provinces of Mozambique: an extensive border with Tanzania, then the most progressive of the newly independent states; forests; and in some parts a relative absence of colonialism in the physical sense. But the most important factor, the fourth, was correct political leadership, since inside Tanzania there were reactionary elements trying to deviate the Mozambican struggle, while the forest provided shelter but no food, and the absence of colonialism meant that tribalism and 'traditional feudalism' still had strong roots. It

was those most oppressed by colonialism, the workers of the towns and the victims of forced labour in the countryside, who were the most willing to fight. And it was in this context that the leadership of FRELIMO developed the concept of the Liberated Zones, not to solve abstract questions or conform to some programme or another, but to deal with practical problems raised by the struggle.

What was a Liberated Zone? It was not simply an area from which the enemy had been expelled. That was a pre-condition, but not the substance. A Liberated Zone was an area in which the people exercised power of a new type, in which they liberated themselves from all forms of exploitation. It was in the Liberated Zones that the struggle for national independence was transformed into people's revolutionary war. And it was the problems of how to organise food, health, justice, education and transport in the liberated zones that provoked the crisis inside FRELIMO. The crisis developed bit by bit.

One of the first questions was whether women should be in the military. The reactionaries said: terrible, women can't fight, they only cause problems, and in any event it is against African tradition. The revolutionaries - led inside the army itself by the new Secretary for Defence, Samora Machel - replied that if women could not fight it was because they had never been trained, that if they misconducted themselves it was because men officers abused their positions, and that if tradition was against the women, the tradition was backward and had to be changed. So, the Women's Detachment was formed, and to this day women play an active role in the People's Forces. (One of the members of the General Staff is a woman).

Then came the question of captured enemy soldiers, some white, some black. The reactionaries wanted to parade them through the villages and execute them, but the revolutionaries insisted that captured soldiers be treated as prisoners of war. Under the direction of Secretary of Defence, Samora Machel, the captives were given blood transfusions and food, even when the FRELIMO soldiers were desperately short of both. The whole FRELIMO policy of clemency and re-education developed out of this experience, something the reactionaries could be grateful for, since after their own later betrayals, they were to be put in re-education villages rather than executed. Spies and informers, however, were treated with the full rigours of military discipline, just as today captured spies and mercenaries are sentenced to death and executed.

It should not be thought that the reactionaries were liberals fearful of confrontation with the enemy. On the contrary, they were full of fight, and accused the army of timidity because it refused to attack enemy strongholds and go for the towns. They claimed they were the true revolutionaries, adding sometimes that they were uncompromised by having white wives. (This was their way of attacking the revolutionary leadership of Eduardo Mondlane and Marcelino dos Santos, married to American and South African comrades respectively). They stirred up the students to rebel against the white teachers at the FRELIMO school. They opposed the strategy of protracted war, of popular mobilisation, of a politicised army that studied and grew food as well as fought. Lazaro Nkavandame, Provincial Secretary in the largest and most important liberated zone, had a long history of anti-colonial struggle, which had included organising peasant co-operatives. Uriah Simango, vice-President of FRELIMO, adopted the concept of narrow black power, and declared that his role was to unite all African revolutionaries, and not divide them by talking about class struggle within the national liberation movement or the need to take sides on Vietnam. He even contributed hypocritical articles to the African Communist!

Yet behind all the populist rhetoric, lay the concept of simply Africanising exploitation, of replacing white exploiters by black ones. How shallow and opportunist their revolution was - and they deceived many people outside of Mozambique - was proved by their subsequent careers, when Nkavandame, after his expulsion from FRELIMO, broadcast on the enemy radio and directed enemy attacks against FRELIMO. Similarly, Simango, avid for power, let himself be used as a cover for capitalist millionaires when they put him forward as an alternative to FRELIMO in the period after the 25th April coup d'etat and before independence.

Daniel Chipenda, who recruits mercenaries in Portugal, Nito Alves, who released mercenaries in his abortive coup, the traitors of Zimbabwe who call in South African troops, members of the Gang of Eight expelled from the African National Congress, all imbued by racism and personal ambition, start off by importing enemy ideas into the ranks of the revolution, and end up by fighting physically on the side of the enemy.

How was it that the manoeuvres of the reactionaries, orchestrated by the Portuguese fascist police, were defeated inside FRELIMO?

THE LIBERATED ZONES

The ideological battle between the revolutionaries and the reactionaries inside FRELIMO was always conducted primarily at the level of practice. The revolutionaries won not because their texts or arguments proved superior, but because it was their ideas, their methods of work and their codes of behaviour which solved the problems of the revolution and led the struggle forward. The debates were not conducted over questions of programme or doctrine, but what kind of life should be organised in the liberated zones, and by implication, what kind of society was going to be built in a free Mozambique.

During the course of the war, more than a million people came to be living in the liberated or semi-liberated zones. At first the problems were seen as simply those of bringing health and education to the people, stimulating production, finding recruits for the army, solving disputes. But then it was realised that what was needed was a whole new approach to health in which the people became the primary agents of preventing and managing disease; a whole new kind of education, in which the students became self-reliant and knowledgeable participants in the struggle rather than an elite waiting to take over once independence was gained. Many of the students rebelled. They did not want to grow food or look after animals - that was for the peasants. Neither did they want to go to the liberated zones during vacations - that was for the soldiers, not the future leaders of Mozambique, as they styled themselves. They succeeded in forcing white teachers out of the school (one of whom is now Rector of the University), but FRELIMO closed the school down, and reconstructed it firmly within the principles of the organisation.

Acute struggles developed over production. The army noticed a decline in support from the peasants. Men and women who had walked for days through the bush carrying mortars and shells, braving enemy bombs, suddenly were less active in carrying loads. The army traced the problem to its source: Nkavandame, Provincial Secretary, had installed a network of tribal 'chairmen' under his control, and set himself up as a new overlord of the peasants. After a ten day dangerous march, a peasant would receive a tin of condensed milk or a skirt for his or her trouble. To use a word much employed in Mozambique, the peasants were being 'de-mobilised'. They would accept any sacrifices for true liberation, but not to replace white exploiters with black ones. The 'Chairmen' began to sabotage

the war effort, stopping supplies. When a Commission of Enquiry was sent, one of its members was murdered. After the murder of Eduardo Mondlane, Mkavandane fled. Production was organised on co-operative lines, all tribal structures were completely destroyed, and trade with the exterior was channelled through FRELIMO.

The struggle between two lines, and the victory of the revolutionary line, resulted in a new, deeper definition of the enemy: not simply Portuguese colonialism, but 'colonial capitalism' and 'traditional feudalism'. The chiefs were swept aside - to this day they are ranked with former police agents as unworthy of the vote - and a vigorous campaign was conducted against what were called feudal ideas. The vision of the African past was two-fold: on the one hand, class societies like the Kingdom of Monomatapa, in which the masses were exploited by the ruling class, societies in which women were oppressed and the youth kept subordinate, a world of superstition (obscurantismo), division and backwardness. On the other hand, a world of vigorous popular culture, of work, of music, of dance of struggle. The first world was to be fought against, the second elevated. Thus the politics of FRELIMO were firmly placed in the context of scientific socialism, of universal revolutionary theory, and repudiated even the faintest hints of African exclusivism. At the same time, the culture that was dynamised by FRELIMO was deeply rooted in the people, and directed at overcoming the alienation and depersonalisation produced by colonialism. The remarkable upsurge in popular creativity, especially in the field of dance, is one of the thrilling features of the new Mozambique.

At the centre of all the dynamising processes within the revolutionary struggle, was the army.

To be continued...



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VIGILANCE!