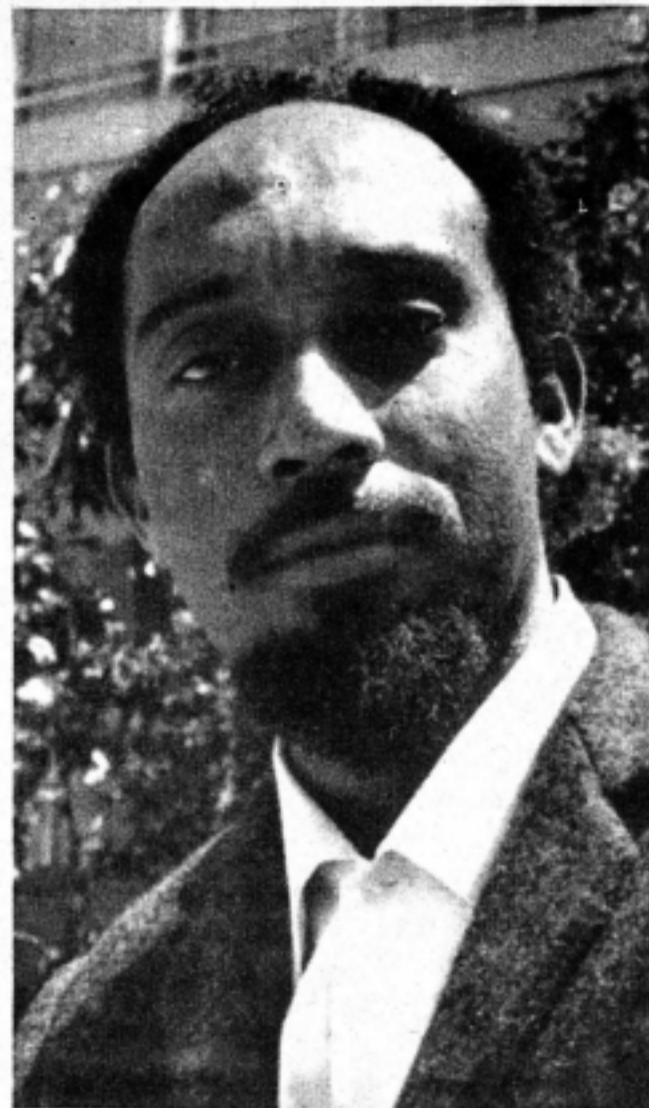


OFF THE CUFF

Marcelino Dos Santos talks to Sechaba



Marcelino Dos Santos

The international community can contribute to the success of the struggle for national liberation of the Portuguese colonies at two essential levels,

said MARCELINO DOS SANTOS, Vice-President of FRELIMO in an Exclusive Interview with SECHABA:

1. Direct help to the national liberation movements;
2. Propaganda and moral support for the struggle.

Comrade Dos Santos spoke to SECHABA in Rome while attending the recent international conference in support of the liberation fighters of the Portuguese colonies.

He said: "Since we are engaged in an armed struggle we require armaments, uniforms, and so on, but then there is also the work in the liberated areas which involves education, health and production.

Of course everybody cannot give arms but there are those who can. We have real needs in this sector, therefore material assistance must cover military aid. There are the Socialist countries who can do this and they do it. With uniforms it's the same. On the level of National Reconstruction we have programmes for education, for health and production. For example in the programme of education in our country, we have to develop primary education, create new schools, produce new books for the pupils, increase the stocks of books, organise training courses for new teachers, improve the level of existing teachers, and expand literacy classes for adults. We also have other sectors of higher education for "cadres", mechanics and other technicians for which we do not have sufficient material means at present, particularly for nurses, electricians, etc.

CADRES

The formation of "cadres" is a difficult problem since we depend on certain material resources which are not always easily obtainable. There are two solutions: either we organise it ourselves with financial assistance or we send the trainees to other countries. The guerillas have undergone such courses in the countries where they trained. What we now want is to do these programmes ourselves in accordance with our needs. We therefore need external aid and we don't know to what extent non-governmental organisations can help. We have found that political organisations and committees of support have great difficulties in finding material resources to help in such programmes, but it is not impossible. It means hard work and the mobilisation of individuals and organisations which are not in direct contact with us. We have already certain religious organisations from which we receive substantial assistance. In our health programme we have a real need to greatly improve our hospitals which are in the bush. Conditions are very poor and there is a great shortage of medicines.

Then we have programmes for the increase of production because we want to produce as much as we can for ourselves by our own labour. We also want to improve the quality of this production, by improving the techniques used and by diversification.

We have a special section dealing with these aspects, but it is not yet of a very high standard. We have a section of production and commerce and we hope to develop it into a Department precisely to increase production. We badly need agricultural equipment. We do not produce this equipment and yet this is the very basis of agricultural work."

SECHABA asked Comrade Dos Santos several questions and his answers revealed in vivid description

HOW FRELIMO LAUNCHED THE ARMED STRUGGLE

Sechaba. We would like to turn to the struggle itself, particularly to the beginning of the armed struggle in Mozambique. Can you tell me how FRELIMO set about the task of launching the armed struggle? Did you begin with political work; did you send cadres in to prepare the ground before you started the guerilla action? What was your "modus operandi"?

Dos Santos. When FRELIMO was created we were almost completely convinced that only an armed struggle would allow us to fulfill our aspirations. We did not make a great discovery, in reaching this conclusion, as Angola had already started, and Guine as well. It was therefore not difficult to see that the Portuguese Government would not reserve some special treatment for the people of Mozambique. Nevertheless we were trying to create the minimum conditions for embarking on this armed struggle. At our congress in September 1962 we had no idea when we would start. But we set ourselves a number of tasks; first, to consolidate the organisation inside the country, the political organisation.

Were the people in the north of Mocambique well politicised before this stage? Had they participated in any kind of political movement before you started laying the basis for the armed struggle?

There were small groups which had been formed after the last war, to be more exact from 1948-49. They were spread quite widely, particularly in the towns, all clandestine and unknown to each other.

IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

But in the countryside?

First they grew in the towns but certain other movements, such as the cooperative cattle movement, were formed in the countryside. They were not at first a political movement but the nature of Portuguese Colonialism forced them into political commitment. There were conflicts with the Administration and the disputes became political. But it was the little groups I first mentioned which had clear political objectives. From 1955 some of these groups learnt about each other and linked up. In this way the political work progressed. There were also organisations such as the Mozambique African National Union which organised in the North at Cabo Delgado, or the Democratic union of Mozambique, formed, around 1960 which organised in the provinces of the centre and the South. But it is in the Northern district that important work was done. All these groups were inherited by FRELIMO, as most of the comrades who worked in these groups in Mozambique left for Tanzania after independence and arrived there after November 1961. These comrades had contacts with the external organisations who managed to organise the meeting of 25th June 1962 and then the Congress of September 1962.

FRELIMO proceeded to consolidate them into a network inside Mozambique whilst defining the tasks of the new organisation.

From the very beginning the task of the organisation was to transform the consciousness of the people, to bring them to accept the idea of National Independence, to have a

clearer idea of the meaning of this and also convince the people that only an armed struggle would make it possible to reach this goal.

MILITARY CADRES

While carrying out this mobilisation for armed struggle and structural activity we were also organising the training of military cadres.

As early as 3rd or 4th January 1962, that is only three months after the Congress, the first group of 80 comrades left for Algeria to learn the art of guerilla warfare. Later we sent other groups to Algeria where about 250-300 guerillas were trained. When we had the minimum military organisation to launch the armed struggle we turned our attention again to the problem of the political structure which would support a minimum military network.

The problem was to establish what was a minimum military organisation - how many comrades? Further, it was not possible to determine the level of political consciousness necessary to support armed struggle. We also realised that it was not possible to develop a strong political organisation under a fascist system. You may have a clandestine political network but at a certain level it becomes vulnerable to enemy action. We therefore created the minimum network to give assistance to the fighters, by supplying food, organising hiding places and to give information to the guerillas. We then felt that it was through the armed struggle that the political organisation would grow.

So at first there was only the political network, then, when our comrades had trained in Algeria we had a military organisation which was received everywhere by the political wing. We then started our action in Cabo Delgado, Nyassa, Zambesi and Tete. But we were forced to stop the action in Tete and Zambesi in July 1965 because of insufficient supplies.

I must say that the political work was essential, the armed struggle being only an instrument, a tool. But it is now the principal action for independence. Others have had to mobilise the masses as their principal action towards independence, but for us it has been the armed struggle, whilst political work has not been neglected and is a determining factor.

NEW CONDITIONS

What was the effect of the armed struggle on the political work? Was there higher morale?

The start of an armed struggle created new conditions for a new development of the political organisation. Under a fascist colonial system there are many militants who are not sure of the other militants. They are not sure who is with or against them. Because conditions are so difficult, people don't trust each other. When the armed struggle starts, two camps are established; the one who shoots at the Portuguese can surely not be on the wrong side. We then have a sure test. Whilst at the stage of political organisation, people are never sure even when somebody makes the right political statements, but when he fires on Portuguese troops and kills them you know who to trust. Secondly this military action creates the conditions for cleaning up and detecting the enemy elements and to destroy them, thereby creating new conditions for more efficient action by the organisation. This is how the armed struggle contributed to the political network.

DOS SANTOS THEN DISCUSSED POLITICAL-MILITARY ORGANISATION IN MOZAMBIQUE

When you made the recent attacks in Tete did you prepare the ground with political work there too or was it a question of the "focus" opening the way?

In our work at the beginning of 1962, we started with the organisation of the political network. At that time there was no military organisation, so it was purely political work. Then when the comrades returned from training we had two sectors: the sector of political work and the one for military work. We tried to establish a coordination between the two but this was not always easy. Its not easy to say exactly why and to establish the link between all the factors. The people who made up the political network inside did not always have the highest political understanding. These were the people who had established little groups even before the formation of FRELIMO.

These organisers gained the respect of the people but they did not have any military training whilst those who had undergone guerilla training had also acquired political knowledge, and we were to find later that the latter were the best militants of FRELIMO, the true interpreters of FRELIMO policy, when the armed struggle was launched. When the comrades of the military sector arrived they were placed under the authority of the political organisation which gave the orders. But new problems arose with the armed struggle and the political organisation could not solve them. At the same time the population were saying that it was the military wing which was killing the Portuguese, not the political wing and this gave immediate prestige to the military wing.

When the Portuguese withdrew from certain areas which became liberated zones the people started to say that before the military wing arrived there was only talk of independence etc, so the prestige of the army grew. In the political network we had Group "Chairmen" at the District level who had previously done useful work educating the people but when the army units grew a certain rivalry started. The Chairmen, because of their lower political understanding, thought that the armed struggle would be short, leading to independence.

They believed that in the independant Mozambique under FRELIMO they would be the leaders of the new administration. Many of them began to behave as traditional chiefs. We must admit that the blame for this situation must be borne by the leadership of FRELIMO for failing to foresee such a situation. It was not the fault of the people but of the FRELIMO Command. We did not foresee these revolutionary problems and conflicts developing.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Once these conflicts came into the open we had to analyse the situation and impose certain solutions. This we did. But certain of the comrades had wrong conceptions about the Chairmen, in spite of their inability to govern the liberated areas. The population was always asking for solutions to problems such as how they were to obtain clothing etc after the departure of the Portuguese.

At this stage did the peasants feel that they were gaining from their new freedom?



Frelimo Women militants

Well, there was no more tax to pay, but where to get clothes, where to get soap? In 1965 we had not yet made provision for this. But the fighters had a good understanding of the situation and this was natural because they were forced to have this full comprehension of the problems. They understood that in the fight against the Portuguese they had to kill the soldiers or they would be killed; they were also forced to discuss and understand what relation they should have with the people.

But the population themselves; there must have been some conflict in their minds between the material conditions under the Portuguese and the new situation, and they had to choose?

They chose the bad conditions.

Why? What factors helped them to choose?

Just one at the beginning – freedom. They said we have nothing but we are free. But to be realistic this stage could not last long. There had to be something else. We had to satisfy their needs. But where to obtain clothes? And other materials? We knew that whatever our efforts we would not be able to supply all their requirements in this field. Therefore we were forced to give them something else – a political awareness. We had to develop political mobilisation. It was simply impossible to satisfy all the material needs. We had to explain this and show that we were creating conditions for improving the situation very quickly.

Were the conditions very bad at this point?

Yes, we had many cases where people went back to using bark to clothe themselves. But we explained to the people that it was a new situation for everybody and that we were trying to find solutions.

What about the urban groups during this period? Was there also struggle in the urban areas or not?

In the towns we only increased the pressure of the clandestine movements but did not take any military action.

THE PRESERVATION OF LEADERSHIP

To turn to another question, what is your policy on the question of preservation of leadership? Clearly a movement has to preserve its experienced cadres, this is an objective requirement, but at the same time there is a necessity to involve the leadership. What is your policy on this question?

Earlier we were talking of the political problems and we said that at the beginning we had two sectors and that we had many problems. We had to solve these problems by putting into practise our ideas of a guerilla movement: namely that everyone is a political cadre and yet everyone is also a fighter. But one must determine the tasks for each sector – for example what are the tasks of the guerilla? First to fight then mobilise the population, then to produce. What is the task of a peasant? First to produce, then fight in self-defence, and defence of the region where he is. For the teacher, his first task is to teach, then mobilise, then produce. The medical orderly, what is his task? First to treat patients, then produce, then fight. Everybody has a common task which is production. At every school there is a field for production, also in every base, in every hospital. It was established that this was necessary. But conditions differ greatly. When we wanted to re-start the fighting in Tete recently, we sent comrades who already had a politico-military formation. But there were islands of mobilised people in certain areas where the terrain was not favourable to an armed struggle. On the other hand where people had not been mobilised the terrain was favourable to guerilla action. With the help of the politico-military cadres we were able to detect the most favourable points for military action in the Tete province and carry out a simultaneous mobilisation of the population in these areas. In this way we were able to correct the deficiencies which had existed in Cabo Delgado and Nyassa and impose the practical solution of the politico-military cadre. We realised that there our tasks were really new. We observed that the problems were quite unpredictable, and we learnt that one must be attentive to all the phenomena and problems as they arise. This means that there must be comrades who are able to detect the problems quickly by observing and understanding the situation. This can only be done by responsible leaders being in the area. This is absolutely necessary. If we can then accept the idea of politico-military cadres and the need for the presence of responsible leaders, we can then talk of the preservation of the leaders. The requisite vigilance which must be assured but in the battle area, this is where it must be done. Every leader of FRELIMO has a security curtain around him, but I had to make this explanation to answer very clearly your question because it is often argued that the security of a leader places him outside the battle area. This is not the case, his security must be assured in this area.

Did you have any requests from the people in the South to introduce guerillas to fight for their defence?

Yes, we had our organisation in the South, clandestine and political, and the comrades trained in Algeria went to the South in 1964.

PROBLEM OF SUPPLIES

In view of South Africa's aggressive military strategy and the proposed base at Lilongwe in Malawi and others in Zimbabwe have you considered the possibility of a military

sealing off at the Tanzanian Border? In that event would you be able to carry on your struggle in Mozambique?

I am convinced that armed struggle cannot exist without supplies, but what are the possibilities of ensuring supplies?

Without any doubt Tanzania and Zambia play an important role but at the present stage of our struggle I think that even if the border with Tanzania was closed, we would not stop our fight. Why? because the resources of our struggle are now very large. Our ability to create at this stage are very good.

It is possible to break through any such barrier and I must say that we would be able to stop the creation of a barrier. Furthermore there are other ways of assuring supplies.

Do you use the coast at all? Are you able to penetrate to the coastline? I understand that some coastline forts have been attacked by FRELIMO forces, have you been able to get to the sea and have you been able to establish some permanent presence on the coastline?

We have already some presence on the coastline.

S. A. INVOLVEMENT IN MOZAMBIQUE

What reports do you get from inside on the SA economic and military presence in Mozambique?

The information which we have is that South Africa is trying to consolidate her position in Mozambique by investing in companies and also by direct military intervention. For example there are SA battalions at Fingue and Chiane,

three batalions of 600 each, in the province of Nyassa there were 25 SA planes two years ago. Then there are the personnel and technicians of SA in the hospitals of Bede and Nampole. Tete has doctors and nurses in large numbers and certain means of transport purely SA. They have their own security personnel and their own camps for their soldiers and police.

I think that the South African's policy is that if the Portuguese Government cannot ensure the defence of Mozambique, South Africa will do it. They say it openly. South Africa is at present an Imperialist nation in Southern Africa and unless she changes her present policies it is SA which will be the great enemy of everybody. Portugal will be the secondary enemy. We are now fighting the Portuguese but it is South Africa which directs the strategy and determines the policy. But we are convinced that if our fight develops in Mozambique, if it continues to develop in Angola, if the South African people develop their liberation struggle with the Zimbabwe people it will be South African forces which we will have to engage in the war. It is difficult to see an Independent Mozambique or Angola whilst there is a fascist South Africa and Rhodesia, unless there is a change in the orientation of imperialism.

So you see your struggle as a protracted war, with a steady increase in territorial power in Mozambique, but at the same time a situation of constant struggle until the whole of Southern Africa is free?

I agree with this perspective. And this points to certain responsibilities which we must shoulder to create greater cooperation. We must learn to coordinate our action to face the enemy and assume our historic responsibilities.

(To be concluded in the next issue)

Frelimo guerillas

