

The First Steps

FRELIMO

Analysis in FRELIMO's Mozambique Revolution (Dar es Salaam), 51, April-June 1972.

The first process which merits examination is that of the structuring of the movement. As President Mondlane said in his report to the 2nd Congress, the first task we had to face was that of constituting an executive body capable of putting into effect the programme of action drawn up at the 1st Congress. True, a Central Committee with executive duties had been created, as well as departments, each headed by a secretary, in some cases aided by an assistant.

But what remained to be determined was not only the internal structure of each department, but also the allocation of duties of the various members of the Central Executive, and the division of labour between the Presidency and the departments; the latter was a particularly crucial problem because it raised the whole question of the degree of centralisation of leadership which is necessary at certain phases of the struggle. In short, the organisational methods best suited to the concrete fulfilment of the programme drawn up inside our country remained to be determined.

There were problems which could not be solved theoretically; their solution was largely dependent on the nature and the extent of our experience. Of course, we did know that a revolutionary struggle could not be led using anti-democratic structures, without collective methods of work. We were aware that a popular programme requires a revolutionary structure. But what sort of tradition had we built up in this respect?

This calls for a keen appraisal of the organisations which had existed previously and which came together to form FRELIMO. They all displayed the same weaknesses, reflecting their similar origin and tradition.

First, both the leadership and the rank and file consisted mainly of people who had lived abroad for a long time, either as refugees or as migrant workers in adjacent countries. Thus MANU operated in Tanganyika, bringing together people from the northern provinces of Niassa and Cabo Delgado, most of

whom worked on the sisal plantations of British settlers. Their principal activity was holding meetings with these workers, issuing membership cards to them and collecting funds. However, they lacked any clear perspective on concrete work inside the country, apart from the distribution of membership cards, which was done in Cabo Delgado Province.

Similar features characterised UDENAMO, though it grouped together people from the centre and the south of the country. These Mozambicans were, on the whole, rather more urbanised and they lived in Rhodesia, either as refugees from Portuguese campaigns of repression or as employees in the service sector. A substantial part of UDENAMO's activity involved recruiting militants inside the country and sending them to Tanganyika or helping political refugees to go north. As for UNAMI, it had somewhat limited activity in Nyasaland and Tete.

A second feature followed: the very fact that most of the members of these organisations had lived abroad for some time meant that they had no very deep understanding of the true conditions prevailing in the country. Not only was there a loss of direct contact with the living conditions and the feelings of the people, their information being garnered instead from reports and from the stories told by the refugees, but above all, there was scant knowledge of the true nature and dimensions of the enemy's machinery of repression.

Thirdly, and this is perhaps the most relevant point in our analysis, because they lived abroad these parties were greatly influenced by the kind of organisation typical of the British colonial tradition. Therefore, in their structural organisation and in their very concept of the work to be done, the example of the NDP in Rhodesia, the Malawi Congress Party or TANU was followed.

Carried away by the euphoria of the 'wind of change' and by the achievements of these parties in neighbouring countries, they believed in the inevitability of change. They therefore misinterpreted the political and economic nature of fascist Portuguese colonialism, ignoring the fact that it could never accept any degree of political freedom or peaceful evolution to independence. Under such conditions it is not surprising that the decisive role of bringing the three organisations together and in shaping the new organisation, came to be played by other militants coming from inside the country where they had been working clandestinely. Undoubtedly, the political consciousness and, above all, the concrete knowledge of this latter group was much surer, though it is also true to say that they lacked the tradition of organisation which the special conditions of clandestine struggle had never allowed to develop.

Such, therefore, was the sum of experience that nationalist militants from various backgrounds could draw upon in structuring a political party at the time of FRELIMO's creation.

The constituent Congress drew up a programme which can be summed up in three points:

- (1) mobilising the people and heightening national consciousness;
- (2) launching an education programme to increase combat effectiveness;
- (3) drawing up a plan for military action taking into account the nature

of Portuguese colonialism.

It was through the implementation of these programmes that FRELIMO was going to transform itself into something entirely new in relation to the organisations that preceded it.

The last point was decisive. While appeals for a peaceful solution to the problem were made from international platforms, we could not be under any illusions: war was already being waged in Angola, and in Mozambique the enemy was reinforcing his police and army apparatus.

It was under such conditions that the military programme took concrete form. We needed a sound and consistent programme, and this presupposed both a detailed study of the country, and of the control established by the enemy and, at the same time, a survey of the political and social traditions of each region. Another aspect of this task was the creation of a body which would be able to ensure the recruitment and training of a large number of solidly united and well-organised militants to spearhead the programme of armed action.

But the manner in which this organisational and operational stage was tackled was decisive. Our people had already had bitter and painful experience of mass demonstrations, strikes and peaceful protests which ended in repression and massacre. It was therefore vital to create an organ capable of undertaking consistent and effective action against the colonial military apparatus. We had learned that it was not sufficient merely to have right on one's side when confronting Portuguese colonialism!

The aims and scope of our activity having thus been defined, political organisers who were already established inside the country were entrusted with the task of mobilising and recruiting young people wishing to take up arms; there was a large and enthusiastic response to this call. From that moment political action ceased to be the prerogative of a restricted group and for the first time involved a great number of militants. In fact because they thus demonstrate the process of affirming the popular content of the movement through the growing participation of the masses, it is worth describing these first phases of the formation of the liberation army in some detail. In this process we can also see a clear example of the way in which our overall programme of activities has been put into effect ever since in the formation of the army; there the three elements of our programme – mobilisation, education and the training of cadres – were all combined in one. Finally, the whole process and the way in which it has unfolded, also explains much about the present character of our movement.

The initial steps were relatively straightforward. Militants were recruited and sent to friendly countries for military training. But on their return there was the very much more complex task of structuring all these militants into a homogeneous body imbued with the movement's political line, which they had to be able to interpret and represent among the masses.

This was an immense task, given the differing experiences, geographical backgrounds, customs and traditions. In most cases the only common denominator among the militants was the fact of their being oppressed by Portuguese

colonialism and having a common desire for liberation. Although these shared feelings made it possible for people to take a stand, they were nonetheless insufficient foundation for sustained action. It therefore became necessary to go to the very roots of unity, to explain the size and complexity of our country and the logic of having people from different linguistic and tribal groups live together. Such discussions made it possible for old divisions and antagonisms exacerbated by colonialism to be collectively analysed and overcome.

It became essential for each militant to be thoroughly acquainted with the lives and customs of other groups. In this way militants came to identify aspects of the enemy's activities which differed from what was known in their own regions, and this enabled them to fight the enemy anywhere. These efforts were decisive to the consolidation of national unity, even though they required more time and more thorough work and despite the great temptation to take the easy way out and send each militant to fight in his own region.

Thus, the first task was above all to consolidate national unity within the movement itself. It was important to bring together all the separate experiences of militants – in villages, in plantations, in mines, in prisons and in towns – in order to gain an overall picture of the colonial system. This made it possible at last to define accurately the scope of the war, the many faces of the enemy and the need for unity.

But experience had already taught us that mere talk could not give rise to an effective political line. Theoretical courses and discussions, however profound, could never make up for lack of experience or efface the marks left on us by the evils of colonial society. A new social morality, a new way of life, had to be internalised and fully exemplified in our behaviour and our day-to-day activity.

This need to confront this further challenge also arose out of the very character which our struggle had come to assume. It was clear that at the start we would never be able to mobilise an army of militants capable of confronting the colonial machinery of repression with equal tactical forces. The then few dozen militants armed with light arms would have to draw their strength from the people and act on the basis of this strength in order, through the development of their potentialities, to change the existing balance of forces.

Hence, it was necessary to reinforce the popular character of the army. This was to a great extent ensured by the deep interpenetration between the movement's structures and the people out of which the army had come. But to strike deep roots among the people, it is not sufficient to have come from the people. In its behaviour, methods and structures, the army had to be a people's army. Only in this way would the rules of revolutionary conduct be observed in relations with the people and their full confidence and support ensured.

Realising this goal meant defining and establishing new relations within the army and developing a spirit of criticism which would eliminate lack of confidence and create a collective method of work. Many meetings were held for this purpose at which such methods of work, as well as military preparedness

and individual comportment, were thoroughly discussed. Each militant recounted his own experience and described the traditions of his region. This served to supplement the work of our reconnaissance teams of course, but the chief importance of this kind of discussion was in helping to perfect the type of relations which would be established with the people.

In order to strengthen in the army the feeling of belonging to the people, and counter the tendency for membership of the army to become a privileged position, productive work was made a part of the army's programme of work from the very start. Later on, when the progress of the struggle led to a considerable increase in our numerical strength, this practice proved extremely valuable in that it prevented the army from being too much of a burden on the people where food was concerned.

Of course, this programme also had to do with the need to prepare for a protracted war and to mobilise ourselves for such a war. Faced with such a challenge, it was necessary to clarify the aims of our struggle in terms other than those slogans which might be useful for purposes of rapid mobilisation. For some militants, for example, the initial feeling was one of hatred for the white man as the source of all ills. This feeling had to be transformed into political awareness of the need to fight oppression and to direct our weapons against the system of oppression, not against mere skin colour.

We saw that it was only with this type of mobilisation and on the basis of this level of political awareness that it would be possible to sustain a protracted war, one which would enable us progressively to mobilise all the resources of our people and country and to liquidate, little by little, the enemy's material and human resources, their economy and their morale.

Developing national consciousness, strengthening the movement's popular character and clarifying the political line were therefore, the first tasks that our army and our movement as a whole, had to face. These are undoubtedly the first steps many nationalist movements have had to take in their political activities. But, over and above programmes and formal statements, in them we have come to find the essence of an increasingly progressive political line and the direction for the advance of our movement, our militants and our people.