

On the Ropes: Socialism & Frelimo's 5th Congress

BY JUDITH MARSHALL

Judith Marshall is a member of the SAR editorial working group who has worked for many years in Mozambique. She recently returned from a working visit there.

We are witnessing the putting into operation of a vast plan ... against the people's government ... a combination of aggression, subversion, economic sabotage and general destabilization ... to affect the living conditions of the masses, create problems of supplies, fundamentally to create discontentment on a broad level.

FRELIMO 1977

[Low Intensity Warfare] is total war at the grassroots level - one that uses all of the weapons of total war, including political, economic and psychological ware, with the military aspect being a distant fourth in many cases.

Col. John D. Waghelstein,
former head, U.S. Military
Advisory Team, El Salvador

The Fifth Congress of the Frelimo Party in Mozambique gave stunning and sobering glimpses of how much Frelimo's earlier project of building "people's power" has come apart. The low intensity warfare to which Mozambique has been subjected has been terribly effective. Dramatic as Renamo's butchery may be, in the long run we may look back on it as less destructive than the insidious day-to-day pressures of economic destabilization and disinformation campaigns. As analysts of low intensity warfare in Central America have observed, LIW works to penetrate the logic of a revolutionary process, deciphering its internal cohesion and the tactics it employs to meet popular needs. LIW then devises a strategy to warp this logic, to undo the cohesion, to roll



Alfredo Mueche/AIM

back popular gains, in short, to turn the revolution against itself. And the American military personnel tutoring Central American dictator-

ships have had apt South African trainees in their courses.

During the 1980s, forces in diplomatic, IMF, emergency aid and

mozambique

church circles have engaged in subtle psychological warfare, casting doubt on the viability of Mozambique's original policy options and political leadership, distancing people from their own political project. Actual Mozambican control of the process has been seriously eroded. With the adoption of an IMF-sponsored structural adjustments programme in 1987, economic policy has shifted to the IMF/World Bank. Social policy finds UNICEF playing a preponderant role. The "emergency" is dominated by a coterie of international organizations; at the time of the Congress, 7.7 million Mozambicans were wholly or partly dependent on food aid. Eighty percent of what Mozambique eats comes from abroad: the US is the largest donor.

The war itself is taking dramatic turns totally outside of Mozambique's control, buffeted as it is by

the changing geo-political relations of the Soviet Union and the United States in southern Africa. Over the past six months two of America's historic allies in Africa, Mobutu of Zaire and Arap Moi of Kenya, have been cast to play leading roles in peace initiatives while the Front Line States manoeuvre to keep their foot in the door.

The Congress itself, held from July 24 to 30, culminated a lengthy preparatory period. Seven draft theses were launched in November 1988. These passed through months of discussions in party cells. District and later provincial conferences were held, each electing delegates to the next level. Finally nine provincial delegations, led by the provincial governors, joined the Maputo province and city delegations for seven days of debates full of formalities and ceremony, songs and presentations.

The quality of pre-Congress debate varied tremendously. If Maputo city delegates were vociferous in criticizing corruption and party inaction, Nampula delegates maintained a dramatic silence. The Nampula government had received an unusually sharp public criticism four months earlier for its passivity to the rising death count in one of its war and drought-stricken districts. No mention was made of the 5,200 who died in Memba at the pre-Congress meeting.

These debates pointed all too clearly to the prevailing climate of war-weariness and dramatic individual survival schemes. There was little desire to talk about more abstract questions, the proposed shift from Frelimo as "the vanguard of the worker-peasant alliance" to "the vanguard of the Mozambican people," or the change in foreign policy



Delegates to the Frelimo V Congress

Alfredo Mueche/AIM

priorities from privileging the international working class movement to defending Mozambique's immediate national interests. Delegates wanted to talk about the war, the economic situation, abuses of power and corruption.

Wages of war

The pre-Congress conferences presented a very troubling picture of ordinary Mozambicans' experience of the war. Manica delegates condemned the arbitrary recruitment of young people by rounding them up on the streets, a practice they felt better suited deserters. Maputo province delegates noted the failure to provide troops with basics like food, clothing and footwear, even in operational zones, leading inevitably to soldiers' taking what they needed from the local population. "This damages the image of our army and blurs the distinction between soldiers and bandits," warned delegate Inusse Noormahomed, a doctor in the provincial health services.

Allegations of corruption in military logistics were common, a theme taken up strongly by the 150 delegates to the armed forces party conference. Lt. Patricio Gimo from the border troops stationed on the Beira Corridor harshly condemned senior leaders. "Many high-level officers are busy with private business deals and this goes against the principles laid down in the statutes and the party programme. ... How can an officer who spends his time inspecting fish in the market have any time for leading his troops?"

There were complaints about long delays in notifying families of soldiers killed in action and the absence of jobs, medical treatment and schooling for veterans. A Maputo conference delegate complained, "Those who massacred the people receive support, but those who have lost limbs in defending the people do not."

Talks with Renamo were an important issue. President Chissano had visited many provinces in

the months preceding the Congress where conversations with the crowds during mass rallies gave a resounding "no" to dialogue. A month before the Congress, however, this position began to change, a fact not unrelated to the emerging peace plan in Angola. Niassa conference delegates in mid-June spoke strongly for negotiations, arguing that people were "tired of the war." There were complaints that the one-year amnesty granted in December 1987 had been extended without any consultation with party rank and file. Delegates argued that only an amnesty combined with strong military action forcing the bandits to

with people using whatever means come to hand, legal or otherwise, to fight for individual and family survival.

State vehicles are used for private transport deals, state goods are sold on the black market. Nampula teachers exact chickens or money from peasants in return for primary school enrollment. Teachers survive by private tutoring or selling exams, yet they go months without receiving salaries and an entire month's pay barely buys shoes and a shirt.

Maputo delegates criticized illegal road-side vendors, a feature of contemporary urban life, selling everything from drugs not avail-



"Dumba Nengues," illegal markets, in Maputo

Joel Chiziane/AIM

surrender would be effective. Since the amnesty, however, the military situation had deteriorated further.

Economic recovery programme - for whom?

The IMF/World Bank-sponsored economic recovery programme came under severe scrutiny, particularly in Maputo city where its negative impact on the urban poor is most sharply felt. The report distributed to the Maputo conference spoke of sharply increased unemployment, crime, juvenile delinquency and prostitution. The texture of social relations has hardened to "looking out for number one,"

able in the health posts to clothing meant for emergency relief. In Maputo they are called "dumbanengues," meaning "run for your life." Their owners have definitely developed street smarts - and insider contacts - for outwitting all attempts at control. In Nampula, within 12 hours of a provincial government decision to investigate vendors selling beans from the emergency programme, not one stall selling these beans could be found in the Central Market.

Rank and file at the Maputo city conference were not satisfied with descriptions of the problems, how-

ever, and demanded to know what actions party leadership had taken in response to state policies causing such hardships. They queried the Party's role in the government wage and price commission, for example, where price increases were all immediate, while the few wage increases took months to come into effect. A factory worker asked pointedly: "When they put the prices up on May Day, are they inciting workers to strike?"

The theme of high-level corruption re-appeared, this time focussed on the state apparatus. A delegate to the Maputo conference, Gabriel Simbine, got loud applause when he urged that the findings of recent commissions of inquiry into theft and misuse of emergency goods be published, with the trail of corruption being followed even up to the Frelimo Political Bureau if necessary.

The Congress - from "idealism" to "realism"

The frankness of pre-Congress questioning and the active role of the media in publicizing these critical debates seemed to augur well for the Congress. The critical debate was not sustained during the Congress itself, however, which became a one-issue congress focussed on peace. On July 17, President Chissano broadcast nationally confirming that religious leaders had been contacting Renamo leaders over several months, sifting out those with some control over fighting forces inside Mozambique from those whose main presence was in foreign capitals. These church representatives were currently awaiting internal Renamo leaders in Nairobi.

The pre-Congress focus on war, economy and corruption shifted to endorsement, however qualified, of these newly-announced peace initiatives. The crafting of the resolution on peace and unity required an all-night session at the end. The resulting text underscores the difficulties in dialogue with a surrogate force

with Renamo's savage track record and speaks of "a peace that does not constitute a prize for terrorism."

In the end, the Congress adopted far-reaching policy changes which mark considerable shifts from earlier positions, all with little debate even though privately some party militants voiced strong critiques. Jorge Rebelo, Secretary for Ideology, presented the new Draft Programme to the Congress. On accepting it, President Chissano suggested it put the problems facing the country in "a real framework, not an ideal one." The main features of this new "realism" distinguish it markedly from the commitment to "people's power" of an earlier era. There is no longer any reference to a "leading role of the working class." Party membership is opened to property-owners, provided they are "citizens of exemplary conduct, respected by the community," and religious believers, provided they share a commitment to building socialism. Restrictions on membership for polygamists are softened. The restrictions limiting party members involved in agriculture to three labourers were lifted, with the argument that party members should lead the drive for food production.

Skepticism was voiced outside the Congress about these measures but virtually no voices queried from within. Some questioned whether the new criteria simply provided justification for party members now owning big farms or construction companies, and cited the strong critique launched by President Celina Cossa of the General Union of Cooperatives in Maputo in March. She tackled City Council and agriculture officials about coop land being handed over to private farmers, because these farmers would "bring tractors and increase production." The coop movement argues that these are not "farmers" who bring agricultural "know-how" but bureaucrats and traders with the "know-who" to manipulate land titles.

Strikingly absent in the Congress documents was any reference to Marxism-Leninism. Senior party leaders indicated off the record that they had made a strategic error in declaring themselves a Marxist-Leninist party "without the necessary pre-conditions being in place." given Frelimo's difficulties over the years in going beyond slogans and set formulas to creative ways of interpreting Marxism-Leninism in Mozambican circumstances, its disappearance may not be altogether negative. More troubling is the vagueness of the socialism being espoused. "In socialism we express our desire for a true and profound social transformation, based on a scientific analysis of reality, on defining the social base of the revolution and on the need to guarantee that the interests of the broad masses of the people prevail."

The content of this socialism is presumably to be found in the actual policies and programmes adopted by the Congress. These, however, seem to indicate policy shifts that legitimize already privileged social groups in further consolidating their positions, a more egalitarian socialism defending the "broad masses" being put on hold while the economy and society are rebuilt from the ravages of war.

The structural adjustment programme has dramatically speeded up the process of social stratification. A highly visible privileged group is benefiting while the great majority sink back into poverty, their monthly salaries forcing them to scams or outright theft just to feed their children. One prominent trader with commercial enterprises in three provinces and business connections into South Africa and Swaziland told me proudly that he had made more money in the two years of the structural adjustments programme than in the entire previous decade.

The Congress made official the re-introduction of private education,

private tutoring and community schools. It seems hard to interpret these as anything except measures that will allow those with money to resolve the problems of quality schooling for their children while the poor are relegated to sub-standard government schools. Provincial education officials assumed that the churches would resume the role they had had in operating schools prior to their 1976 nationalization. If the main problems that have plagued the rapidly expanding state system have been the lack of qualified teachers, school administrators and sufficient budget allocations for school buildings and teachers' salaries, it is hard to imagine the churches having the means to resolve these problems beyond operating a handful of model schools funded and staffed by foreigners, accessible to a tiny privileged minority of the faithful.

Similarly the new housing policies adopted seemed to leave far behind the old commitment to making housing accessible to all and to preventing profiteering from people's housing needs. There is no denying past incompetence and corruption in the state housing authority, APIE, created in 1976 when rentable property was nationalized. It seems likely, however, that the specialized public or joint-venture companies now being promoted herald an era of much up-graded housing stock in the "cement city," both old and new, while the already over-crowded shanty towns deteriorate still further.

Health seems to be the area where the old commitment to popular needs held out despite pressures for privatization and growing instances of medical personnel giving treatment and dispensing drugs privately within state institutions. The Central Committee report tackles the argument frontally, insisting that privatization "will not resolve the problems of most health workers, nor will it raise the general quality of care . . . Our state and our people are prejudiced as a result of the robbery and abuse of medicines and equip-

ment, and the illicit use of installations." It further suggests that privatization "would make the efforts and sacrifices of many cadres and doctors useless."

The loophole left open was that of "special services" in "urban centres." Already in Maputo there is a clinic tucked away in a wing of the Central Hospital for patients who pay in dollars. The Mozambican health personnel in attendance offer efficient and courteous treatment in immaculately clean and bright surroundings with availability of drugs and good nursing care for those admitted, all hard to come by in other health facilities. Diplomatic personnel have received a registry of Mozambican doctors available for house calls also payable in dollars. Clearly it is a fraught issue - the need to hold on to highly skilled professionals, the pressures to provide quality health services for a large foreign community, yet at the same time the logic of a tiered health service in which the sick who also happen to be poor get inferior services.

If there seem to be genuine struggles over health policies, the agricultural policies from the Fifth Congress were more ambivalent, some of the tensions being played out on the Congress floor itself. The Congress stressed that post-war rehabilitation requires the "active participation of various property regimes - state-owned, cooperative, and peasant family property, and private or joint-venture forms of property." A surprising amount of attention however, went to cooperatives, perhaps not unrelated to the strong message from the cooperatives immediately preceding the discussion of the Economic and Social Directives. President Celina Cossa surrounded by singing coop members, mainly women, offering produce from their farms, referred to the "double war" fought by coop members. They face Renamo bandits and also "opportunists" wanting to take their land, leaving them "condemned to lose their fields, to

have no access to technical or financial assistance, because they are accused of being illiterate and ignorant."

The amended Economic and Social Directives prioritize peasant family farms and cooperatives. The final document suggests more detailed programmes to support peasant cooperatives including specialized bodies at district level, while reiterating the need to avoid any attempts to direct the cooperatives from outside, by party, state or other organizations.

In the end, then, the Congress marked a return to a broad nationalist front strategy to end the war and reconstruct the economy and society. Despite the strong criticisms of corruption in high places and the call to "learn from Zimbabwe" where top-level government officials have recently been purged for car deals, there were few changes. The stress was all on unity, in keeping with the theme of the Central Committee report, "For a National Consensus to Normalize Society."

Privately some senior Frelimo leaders explain this nationalist front phase as a necessary short-term strategy with a sufficiently strong socialist core guiding it to withstand its perils. They anticipate a return to more egalitarian policies once the war is over and the economy moving. What seems to be forgotten is low intensity warfare's effectiveness in human terms. For countless Mozambicans, LIW has served to create weariness, demobilization, killing the dream of "people's power." For others, however, LIW has provided the space to fight openly for private privilege once again. Just as colonialism had little purchase on people's lives until it moved beyond crude foreign domination to having its African intermediaries, so these contemporary forms of domination need their local allies.

Given that there is no clear signalling of the current strategy as a strategic retreat, no political education either inside or outside of

mozambique

the party to analyze ways to work to maintain a socialist core, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify whether and where the struggle actually does continue. If there

should be a point in future when a socialist core wants to reassert its earlier policies of people's power, it seems fair to assume that some of its greatest foes will be those who have

used the present opening to amass personal wealth and power – and that many of them will be firmly entrenched in both the state apparatus and the Frelimo Party itself.

Mozambique – The Quest for a “Dignified Peace”

The uneasiness of Fifth Congress delegates about the peace process provoked a marathon final session, ending at six a.m., to hammer out the resolution on peace and national unity. The peace process has lurched forward uncertainly since the Congress. Four Mozambican religious leaders met with a six-person Renamo delegation led by Afonso Dhlakama in Nairobi on August 8. Presidents Arap Moi of Kenya and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe in a communiqué issued a day earlier stressed that this meeting would take place within the framework of Mozambique's 12 point set of principles. These principles stress that the destabilization confronting the Mozambican people “should not be confused with a struggle between two political parties.” They make the “stopping of all acts of terrorism and banditry” a first step for establishing the conditions to normalize conditions so that “all may participate in political, economic, social and cultural life.”

Renamo for its part advanced a 16-page document in which it presents itself as an active political force in Mozambique that “stands for the people uncompromisingly . . . against any action which violates the people's physical and moral integrity, as is the case with massacres, looting . . .” Renamo also states that the “presence of foreign troops brought in by Frelimo has not

brought peace and well-being” and claims this is an obstacle to peace and constitutes a loss of national sovereignty.

Despite the widely disparate opening positions, the period since has seen further direct contacts and a flurry of behind the scenes shuttling. Military operations have also continued. At Armed Forces Day on September 25th in Mozambique, President Chissano spoke of significant victories by combined Mozambican and Zimbabwean forces just prior to the Congress, actions in which the main MNR headquarters in Maringue, Sofala were destroyed, thus creating (in Chissano's words) “irreversible conditions for peace.” Nonetheless, Renamo atrocities have continued throughout the country. And Renamo members who have availed themselves of the amnesty in recent weeks report that there is continued support from South Africa!

The Congress resolution on peace stresses that behind Renamo actions “lie the designs of those who make use of banditry in order to force us to renounce our struggle for a society without discrimination, a society of equals.” For southern Africa solidarity activists, it is clearly a moment to mount campaigns putting maximum pressure on South Africa to end its role in supporting Renamo.