



cfm news & notes

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Information is ammunition for your struggle. A fighter without ammunition is not a fighter. And for you, a fighter without information cannot speak.

Samora M. Machel, President of FRELIMO to CFM delegation, Dar es Salaam, 8/71.

American Observations Within Liberated Mozambique

An Afro-American journalistic crew, Robert Fletcher and Robert Van Lierop, entered Mozambique at the end of August, 1971 and spent six weeks traveling with a column from the FRELIMO army. They lived, marched, ate, and slept with the popular forces and the local population throughout that period. They traveled in a region which is noted for its mountains, rivers, and rugged terrain. The purpose of this journey was to observe, experience, film, photograph, and record as many aspects of the struggle as possible. The Committee for a Free Mozambique interviewed the crew upon their return. The interview will be used on local radio shows and has been reprinted here for our readers.

Both Robert Fletcher and Robert Van Lierop are available to speak to groups about their experience. Their film, "A Luta Continua," is an excellent documentary of the armed struggle and will be ready for distribution this spring. Besides the film they have still photographs and color slides. Their slide presentation vividly depicts the actual situation that exists in the liberated areas of Mozambique. If you are interested in having one or both of them speak to your group, please write to them in care of the CFM address. In order to facilitate their work, it will be necessary for organizations to provide travel expenses. In addition, a honorarium would be appreciated.

CFM: Could you give one example or incident which symbolizes what FRELIMO is all about?

Bob V.: Well, one theme that developed while we were inside the liberated areas, quite without design, was the fact that we witnessed a trilogy of transplants, three transplants that FRELIMO was involved in that really tell a great deal about the movement.

The first of these involved the children who are the seedlings of the revolution, the "continuadoras" which is a Portuguese word which doesn't translate very easily into English; literally it means the "continuator." And the comrades of the present generation, the older generation, told us that they don't expect to see all of the fruits of their labors, that many of them will die or be killed as the struggle progresses, and that, therefore, it's up to the young children, the "continuadoras", to continue the work that has been begun by the present generation. And these children, these seedlings of the revolution, will receive a revolutionary education and will sprout the ideology and develop the political line of the party, as they grow older and are placed in different places of the country.

The second was a cultural transplant where FRELIMO has adopted the slogan, "to die a tribe and born a nation". None of the songs and dances that are traditionally performed by the people of Mozambique belong to any one tribe or any one region. They are part of the new national culture and belong to all of the people. As a result the guerilla army has carried the songs and dances of all of the tribes of the liberated areas and so you see people from different regions performing the same songs and dances now.

The third transplant is an agricultural transplant where, for example, the cashew nut tree which originally grew only in Cabo Delgado has been carried by members of the guerilla army --or rather the seeds have been carried to other liberated areas. You can find the cashew nut tree growing throughout the liberated areas and this transplant is demonstrated by the fact that every guerilla carries seeds and when not engaged in fighting or practicing reading and writing and other things is engaged in agricultural production.

So those transplants tell a lot about FRELIMO as an institution in the lives of the people.

CFM: It sound like an exciting way to promote unity among the people. Did you have an opportunity to visit the children's nurseries or schools where these children as transplants are?

Bob F.: Yes, we visited a place called the "Infantarillo Josina Machel" which is the nursery school where children whose parents have been killed by the Portuguese stay. It's also a day care center where the parents who are militants of FRELIMO can leave their children and go out on missions if necessary. We saw the children in relationship with the militants for a couple of days. We saw them playing, we saw them studying. We also saw, incidentally, their having to draw in the dirt to learn how to count and to learn their ABC's.

One of the things that we noticed, too, was the teacher, the role of the teacher. He was, one, a militant, a combatant, but, two, he was more than a teacher. We saw, at one time after we were attacked that there was a regrouping, a setting up of provisional villages, and we noticed that the teacher that we had seen in the schoolhouse before was going around the various villages talking to the parents and saying that it was kind of important, you know, that school kept on going. And they set up schools out in the bush, out under the trees, and we realized that there was something really important there when we think about the teachers back here and the kinds of things that teachers don't want to do and don't find themselves doing, and the aggressive way that teachers take responsibility for children there.

CFM: What you're describing about the teacher sort of suggests to me that roles and differentiation among roles is different there than it is here...

Bob F.: Yeah, the whole concept of leadership is quite different there and it revolves around, I think, two things. One is discipline and the other is development. There is an ongoing process of development in the minds of the people, an understanding of what the struggle is about, who is the enemy, what kinds of work are necessary, what are the various ways that one fights, you know, struggles in a revolution. And this has become quite internalized so that leadership as we know it where people stand up and speak for people is not what goes on there. People kind of speak to each other, work with each other, coordinate things between each other much, much more. We were showing some of the rushes of our film a couple of weeks ago, and somebody said, "Wow, what strikes me is where are the leaders. We see a lot of activity going on but we don't see people standing apart and directing things." It's as if everybody has a sense of what has to be done and how to go about doing it.



The people of Niassa show their hospitality with gifts for the visitors.

Bob V.: As a matter of fact, the leaders are not really leaders, they're not really chiefs, they're not bosses, they're not officers. There's another Portuguese word that is used to describe them, which doesn't again translate into English, literally it means "the responsables." And rank in FRELIMO, in fact, does have more responsibilities than privileges and a person doesn't inherit a job forever. There's a great deal of flexibility. People are assigned to jobs based upon their ability to perform, and they are very often moved around until they are fitted into the best possible slot, a slot that would benefit the revolution and the people rather than further that individual's political career.

CFM: I wonder how, when you are in the middle of a war, you can have this kind of leadership ability. After all, we are talking about two distinct groups, FRELIMO and the Mozambican people, and how is it that you have this kind of flexible leadership?

FRELIMO as the people

Bob V.: Well, I think the first reason is basically because they are not two distinct groups. There is absolutely no distinction between FRELIMO and the Mozambican people. In fact we heard responsables say, depending upon their job, "Today I have this job; if tomorrow FRELIMO wants me to go somewhere else in the country and merely be a party militant, organizing, I'll do that. If tomorrow FRELIMO wants me to go to Tanzania and represent our struggle in that country, I will do that. If tomorrow FRELIMO wants me to go to the United Nations and represent our people in presenting their case before that world body, I will do that." In other words, the commitment is to FRELIMO and to the struggle and to the people of Mozambique, and that's a very, very important concept to grasp because the participants in this revolution have decided to participate in a revolutionary process as opposed to an event. Many people involved in the movement in the United States tend to view revolution as an event, but in Mozambique, as in Angola and Guinea Bissau, where PAIGC and MPLA are leading revolutions against Portuguese colonialism, revolution is much more of a process, a complete process that continues from day to day to day without romance, without glamour.

Bob F.: It's that revolutionary process that is reflected in the question, What is FRELIMO? It started out as a front, a combination of people who were resisting Portuguese oppression. It's much more than that, it developed into something much closer to a party, but now it's a party, it's an army, it's a number of institutions that are kind of interwoven so that it's very difficult to separate FRELIMO as a guerilla group and FRELIMO as a party from FRELIMO as a committee or groups of committees among villagers.

CFM: These concepts seem quite different from anything that we experience in our political structure and I am really curious as to how people have been educated to fit in with this wholly different way of life.

Bob V.: The revolution was described to us as being a university, and the university has educated many of the people. For the first time they know what a school is; for the first time they know what a hospital is; and for the first time they can engage in agricultural production to feed themselves rather than to grow cotton to feed Portugal's textile industries. And every single day, dealing with these pragmatic, real things that affect people's lives, the things that FRELIMO brings to them, the people develop a collective political consciousness towards the party and towards the struggle in general.

FRELIMO under fire

CFM: Did you have an opportunity--I'm not sure it was an opportunity, actually--did you have a chance to see some sort of action, military action, on the part of the Portuguese or FRELIMO?

Bob F.: Yes, there was one day that we had taken the day off and we were talking and all of a sudden somebody jumped up and ran outside of the hut that we were in, yelling "avion, avion." By the time we got outside--we hadn't heard anything--by the time we got outside to see or find out what was happening up in the sky before the planes were in sight we noticed everybody mobilized, completely mobilized, with everything in the camp in their hands or on their heads or on their backs, moving out of the camp, getting ready to deal with an air attack. Helicopters came over, fighter bombers came over, selected certain areas, dropped bombs, dropped troops and I guess in about a six-hour period we witnessed FRELIMO shifting, forming a rear supply base and a front military attack base. People had moved out in every direction just to move out of the initial base which they figured was a target for the attack, then regrouped in no time. There was tremendous organization involved in that. There was all kinds of equipment moved out in all directions; all of that equipment was relocated, reorganized--nothing was lost.

CFM: What kind of morale did you witness among the villagers during this kind of thing?

Bob V.: Oh, very, very high. The comrades knew that it was only a matter of time before the enemy was driven out of the liberated areas again. In a war like this, the enemy can always temporarily reoccupy liberated territory because he's got control of the air. The people don't have any airplanes, no navy to speak of, and not that many antiaircraft weapons. So, as in Southeast Asia, where the Americans can temporarily reoccupy the Mekong Delta, let's say, until they're driven out within a period of ten days or two weeks. The same thing happens in the liberated areas constantly, and the Portuguese use the very same tactics in launching their full-scale offensives, which is what we witnessed. These are typical search-and-destroy type operations, where they have the objectives of destroying --first of all--of destroying as much food as possible, so that they can try to starve the people out. Secondly, trying to terrorize the local population and make them feel that their life is not secure in the liberated areas and that FRELIMO cannot protect them. Thirdly, to destroy as many of the institutions of national reconstruction as possible, the schools, the hospitals, the nurseries, the fields where agricultural production goes on. But the people know, they have supreme confidence in their army and they know that once those soldiers are out of those helicopters, are on the ground and they have got to go out on patrol and try to set up ambushes, that the comrades of FRELIMO and the local militia are masters of the terrain and that it's only a question of time before the Portuguese are defeated. And you know those pictures that appeared in the newspapers last year showing the Saigon mercenaries scrambling and kicking and clawing to get on those helicopters out of Cambodia? The Portuguese army, after every single one of these offensives goes through the same thing in Mozambique, in Angola, and in Guinea Bissau, literally running to get out of the liberated areas and to get back to their posts where they figure they are safer.

CFM: How did you feel when you saw, initially, a sophisticated Western army coming at you and you were with this band of guerillas, in a sense, and villagers. I mean, what did you think?

Bob V.: We had a lot of confidence, a great deal of confidence in FRELIMO from the very beginning and naturally you begin to wonder what's going to happen, but when you're right there in the middle of it, and you see that the comrades are still in complete control of the situation, no panic at all, no carelessness at all, everything carefully thought out; some comrades immediately taking up ambush position around the suspected places where the enemy soldiers were trying to land, other comrades immediately grabbing equipment and moving out, other comrades immediately mobilizing the local population and moving up into other strongholds where the defense lines are being established, and everything very, very organized and done in a very controlled, orderly, disciplined manner.

CFM: I wonder---you said the Portuguese were coming into an area just like in Vietnam and they would attack and destroy everything they could find like food and schools and such. It sounds like the Mozambican people literally have to transplant a whole school.

Bob F.: Right. The mobility of the people works to a great advantage, in that the tools, the materials that they use for their housing is very light and it's a very simple matter to move an entire village, an entire base, to another area. You leave those houses up, you go and you build some more houses someplace else. And consequently, you have all through the bush places there that's possible, just in travelling, sometimes, to stop at as bases.

Bob VI: And the enemy, coming from a materialistic society, feels that if they burn and destroy a hut, that they have destroyed a school; if they burn and destroy a hut, they have destroyed a hospital; if they burn and destroy five or six huts, that they have destroyed a base. They don't understand that the schools, the hospitals, the base, all of these things really exist in the spirit of the people, in their determination and their will to resist. Therefore, during one of these attacks, everything is grabbed; blackboards, pencils, paper, chalk, everything is moved out into the bush and the school continues under a tree, in the bush; the hospital continues under a tree, in the bush; the base, the village. Everything moves and continues and life continues to function as normally as possible under trees, in the bush and it's their inability to understand this that so typifies the enemy's activities not only in Mozambique but also the activities of the Americans in Southeast Asia. You constantly hear these statistics about so many structures being destroyed and so many bases being destroyed. This is perfectly meaningless because the people are more concerned with people as the institution rather than the structure as the institution.

Booklet on Corporate Activity in South Africa Available -

"The American Corporation in South Africa" by Tim Smith is available for 50¢ from the Council for Christian Social Action, the United Church of Christ, 815 2nd Ave, NYC 10017. The 65 page booklet is a report on the role of U.S. corporations in the Republic of South Africa from an analyst who interviewed 25 U.S. companies while in South Africa.

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U.S. COMPANY PLANS NEW FACTORY IN MOZAMBIQUE (Standard, Tanzania 1/22/72)

"The U.S. Firestone Tire Company is awaiting a license to build a 108 million dollar tire factory in Mozambique with an estimated production capacity of about 1,000 tires a day. Production is expected to begin in 1974.

The output of the factory would be sufficient to supply 90% of Mozambique's needs but the proportion exported would depend upon competition."

NEW YORK JUDGE CRITICIZES CONDITIONS IN NAMIBIA (New York Times 2/15/72)

"Judge William H. Booth (a black New York judge of the Criminal Court) described living conditions in the Ovambo compounds of Namibia as appalling. Judge Booth is in Namibia as an observer for the International Commission of Jurists at the trial of 12 Ovambos and another man on charges arising from the strike by Ovambo workers in Windhoek in December.

"He said that United States corporations should be persuaded to withdraw their investments from South Africa and Southwest Africa (Namibia), or force changes to be made. Namibia, formerly a League of Nations mandated territory, is controlled by South Africa, which has rejected United Nations demands that it surrender its authority."

GUERRILLA MOVES WORRY LISBON (New York Times 2/11/72)

"The Portuguese are troubled over an upsurge of nationalist guerrilla activity in western Mozambique, where the vast Cabora Bassa hydroelectric dam is being built on the Zambezi River. Yesterday morning the Mozambique Liberation Front blew up a truck of explosives, killing nine persons and injuring five, on the road between the site and Tete, capital of the district.

"Portuguese military headquarters in Nampula announced in a communique that the guerrillas had won the "complicity" of part of the population to carry out their action. This was a serious admission for the Portuguese, who have been arduously trying to win over the people and regroup them into strategic settlements. The authorities are building strategic settlements north and south of the Zambezi but the program is said to have met considerable resistance."