

THE ZAMBEZI

An Interview with Samora Machel, President of FRELIMO.



Samora Machel addressing a meeting in Tete.

A. militant from the start. Samora Machel went underground in 1950 and played a part, alongside Mondlane, in the formation of FRELIMO, of which he quickly became one of the main political and military leaders. Elected president of FRELIMO after the assassination of Mondlane, Machel is still almost unknown abroad, for he has always avoided publicity. He describes here the struggle for liberation waged by the people of Mozambique.

Q. We know now that, for the first time in recent months, the FRELIMO fighters have operated south of the Zambezi, very near the Rhodesian frontier. How do you see the military situation?

A. Excellent. The Portuguese have defined the Zambezi as a "natural barrier". Last year we

stepped up the mobilization and organization of the masses in Tete province; this effort enabled us to penetrate beyond the Zambezi, in a southerly direction. Our presence in this region is particularly important because at this point Mozambique has common borders with Rhodesia and Malawi. It is an industrially developed area, which allows us to mobilize the people easily, and involve them in the armed struggle. We began military operations last August, but we waited before issuing communiques on our activities beyond the Zambezi because we were not sure of making advances in the struggle. We are now certain that we can keep our positions and make further advances on the ground. We have launched attacks on several Portuguese strongholds and we have captured substantial amounts of military equipment. We can above all count on the fact that FRELIMO controls large sectors of the people who give open support to the struggle. The people of this region stick to FRELIMO as the only force able to liberate them.

Q. Has the military offensive south of the Zambezi reduced your activities in the area where the Portuguese are trying to build the Cabora Bassa Dam?

A. We stepped up new operations in April and May, but we have certainly not lost sight of our target of stopping the building of Cabora Bassa. But Cabora Bassa is our only preoccupation; we want to control Tete, and to control the whole country. Portugal deploys huge forces in defending Cabora Bassa at any price, with helicopters, artillery, bulldozers, armories, and the building of the road between the capital and Cabora. But we are not fish to be taken on the hook: when they want to lead us into activity at Cabora, we operate elsewhere, and vice-versa.

Q. There's a lot of talk about the attack on the Portuguese vessel "Angoche", which was carrying munitions in the Mozambique channel. It's said that this operation was a joint effort between the Portuguese anti-fascists and FRELIMO.

A. We've always been on good terms with the Portuguese left-in-action because we believe that

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the Portuguese people are our strongest ally. Our collaboration grows with the struggle.
Q. Is there really a danger of Mozambique becoming "Rhodesianized"?

A. It's too late. It's absolutely impossible. One couldn't even conceive of the thought that there are whites in Mozambique today who want "independence", like that in Rhodesia. In the heart of FRELIMO whites are fighting, who feel themselves to be Mozambicans and who are members of FRELIMO. Our work as regards giving a political consciousness to the people goes deep, and we give it absolute priority. Throughout, we don't identify the enemy by the colour of his skin. We regard as comrades all those who support our struggle, all those who work for the independence of Mozambique; that's why a lot of white Mozambicans fight among us. We don't answer the question of who the true Mozambicans are in terms of colour.

Q. What's the opinion of FRELIMO on the Portuguese situation, taking into account the rumours of a military coup d'etat?

A. Deep contradictions exist among the Portuguese rulers... There's a risk, in Portugal, of a tight struggle for power between Caetano and the extreme right. That the leaders are occupied in trying to resolve these conflicts is useful to us, but whether the power goes to Caetano or Nogueira makes no difference to our programme. The struggle between imperialists is like dogs scrapping over a bone...

Q. All Africa debates the "dialogue" with South Africa. How do you see this tendency?

A. A danger exists, and it is serious. A threat of disrupting the liberation movements. We neither want nor are able to conduct this dialogue, but we can already see the moment when somebody proposes a similar "dialogue" with Portugal. As for South Africa, there is the African National Congress. Why doesn't South Africa try talking to that movement? We can't see any possible dialogue with an enemy who only

knows the language of armed force.

Q. What is, in your opinion, the role of those who promote this dialogue, and what is the role of the western countries that support South Africa?

A. It's clearly a question of an initiative taken in agreement with the imperialists. With regard to the African nations, they speak of "economic necessity". That's an unacceptable excuse. Which are the countries that press for dialogue? Madagascar? But Madagascar, although its geographically not far from South Africa, is in reality much nearer to France. It is ideologically and economically in line with France. What, therefore, are the economic reasons? We find also the Ivory Coast. Houphouet Boigny is just as far from South Africa and near to France. The same is true for Bokassa and the Central African Republic.

Q. What's the position and the role of Malawi?

A. Malawi adopts a negative position from our point of view. Malawi is friendly with Portugal; it entertains a Portuguese ambassador, Portuguese soldiers use its ground, and they supply Malawian planes. Their helicopters land there, and Portuguese military vehicles move around freely. Malawi is really a last base for Portugal.

Q. Do you think that your principal allies, Zambia and Tanzania, will continue to suffer from political pressures and military reprisals?

A. It is enough to look at a map to take count of the threats to Tanzania. It's necessary to keep a watch in Tanzania, and we can't do more than recognize the value and the cost of the solidarity of Zambia and Tanzania. At the time of the last Party Congress, in Zambia, they adopted very firm positions in favour of the liberation movements, in spite of external retaliation and internal problems. Zambia hasn't changed its position at all, in spite of the constant threats to which it is subjected on the part of the imperialists.