

Election Meeting III

Workers in Education.

26/11/77.

Held on Saturday afternoon, on the campus in the open air, from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. About 500 persons present, arriving by car, on foot and by special buses. The buses bring teachers, functionaries and pupils from two schools in town: Polana and Malangene. Quiet singing of Frelimo songs as we await the arrival of the 'platform' party. There is one soldier 'on guard', with weapons. People queue for voting tickets and then sit in semi-circle in open space in front of 'Letras'. There are some rows of seats for the candidates and behind them for visitors, pregnant persons etc. I am directed there, and sit behind the candidates. An official with a list checks that all are there, and quieters the singing while he calls out names.

Oscar Monteiro, member of C.C. & St. Political Com. & Chief of <sup>Organisation</sup> Education in the Party, arrives with 3 or 4 other persons. Everyone rises, claps with the standard rhythm of approval - in unison, becoming faster & stopping. It has the advantage of showing approval & bringing the applause to an end.



Monteiro speaks, quietly, in a friendly way, reiterating the objectives of the meeting, stressing the value of being able to vote for the first time. He must be  $\pm 40$ , is dressed in beige 'kukhi suit' with short sleeves, of Asian descent, & speaks with intelligence, humour and fluency. Low-key, town-to-town presentation. Applause at beginning and end only - no attempts to rouse the audience. Next is the presentation by the candidates (for the City Electoral College) of short autobiographies. Before they start, an elderly African man approaches the platform (on the same level as the audience - 3 tables with red cloths), & is politely told that he can say his piece later. The first candidate is white, female in her 30's - explains she was born in Portugal of progressive, anti-Fascist parents, came to Moz. as a child, went to study in Lisbon & returned in Sept. 1975, when asked by Frelimo to interrupt her studies. O.M. asks if there are any questions - there are none, she is applauded & sits down. The other candidates follow, some giving long histories, others very brief - most mentioning their schooling (noticeable how interrupted this was for all the Africans), and then their recent political activities. Prof. Alcántara, of the Centre for Scientific Documentation (?) at the University (Director of it, and quite an important University figure) gives his professional qualifications only.



He receives the only <sup>3</sup> question: has he been politically active? He says no. The other 20 or 25 candidates range from two older African functionaries to a member of schoolchildren, and include students, teachers, pupils, and functionaries. All dressed casually except for the one older African man with jacket and tie. Seven females, about 8 non-Africans.

So far the meeting has been relatively routine. It is getting dark, and an overhead projector is brought out to illuminate the 'platform' section. Photographers come and go, there ~~are~~ is a loudspeaker system.

### The Second Part: Asking for dispensation.

The elderly African man returns to the platform & is given the microphone. He is a technician of long standing at the University, and apparently belonged for some time to the APN, ~~a pro-colonialism organisation~~ <sup>the Salazarist single party.</sup> He says that he only did routine office work for them, like putting leaflets into envelopes. He now asks the meeting to grant him dispensation to vote. O.M. asks if anyone who knows him at work can speak about him. A middle-aged African woman says she has worked with him for some years - he is a good person, who works well and who helped Frelimo <sup>people</sup> secretly before independence. He is asked by O.M. to confirm this - he says 'yes' - O.M. then asks him precisely how he helped, & he is unable



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to say. O.M. then throws the matter open to the audience. A number of people line up in a little queue near the microphone. It becomes evident that anyone who wishes to speak need merely join the queue, & then gets an absolute right to the microphone. There is some support for the man, but some opposition, & mainly statements that not enough is known about his record. After about 7 people have spoken - mostly students and lecturers - O.M. 'sums up', but first gives the man a chance to reply to all the points made. He replies quietly and at some length. O.M. then says that the basic problem is that the people present don't know the activities of the man well enough to confirm or refute what he has said. In his view, the vote should be withheld until further investigations have been made. If these confirmed his story, and if he continued to work conscientiously, then he could expect to be allowed to vote next time. O.M. asked the meeting whether or not they agreed, & put his suggestion to the vote. His view clearly reflected the opinion of the meeting, & it was voted on & accepted without opposition. The old man walked away slowly and quietly, and the meeting heard the next application.



A young white man, in his mid-twenties, said he had been born in Beira, told of his schooling, & mentioned that before April 1974 he had spent his 2 years military service in the commandos. The man sitting next to me drew in his breath, & repeated the information to me. Since 1975, the young man said, he had been in the Faculty of Agronomy & had taken a full part in the educational, work & political life of the Faculty. A group quickly formed. A number of his fellow-students, including many active in the political structures, testified to his hard work, his good conduct generally, his participation in collective activities and contributions to meetings. Three students - 2 white, 1 black - who had been with him on his 'July' activities (vacation work in the rural areas of the north) spoke warmly of his conduct then. The African got a laugh when he said: 'he worked hard and effectively, as one would expect from a commando.' Then 3 Africans spoke. The first said that the vote couldn't be given to someone who had volunteered for the unit that massacred the people. The second - who had intervened rather inappropriately at an earlier stage to call someone an 'enemy', & had been seized - now called the young man



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an enemy who right to be chucked out of everything. The audience is <sup>clearly</sup> hostile to what seems a rather shallow, demagogic appeal. The issue is grave, people are concerned, stirred, worried - but they don't want slogans or a simplistic punitive line. <sup>they jeer this speaker.</sup> The third African reiterates the point about the commandos being murderers of women and children. The audience are applauding now, for the first time. The majority clearly favour the applicant, but there is a cohesive minority, mainly African non-University people, it seems, who feel more severely <sup>about him</sup>. The last speaker is a white who says that the applicant appears to be arrogant. The bulk of the audience groan, perhaps because they regard her remark as a cheap echo of the President's use of the phrase with a former secret police person earlier in the week (the President's confrontation had been buzzed about for 2 days - it had been on the radio & in the press, and <sup>she had heard</sup> many people ~~had~~ referred to it). She emphasises - appears to be arrogant, but doesn't get much support. About 15 people have spoken, roughly 4 to 1 in favour of the vote.

O.N. 'sums up'. The issue, he says, is that on the one hand the 'element' - he is careful not to say 'commando' - voluntarily joined the crack unit



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of repression, on the other hand his department was good & he worked well. People had said that at the time he joined the commandos, his conscience had been immature, & that this had been during a period when information about the true nature of the commandos had been withheld. But everyone had known that the commandos had been the elite unit of the Portuguese army, specialists in maintaining colonial domination. In his view, one could not wipe out 2 years <sup>of repression</sup> on the commandos by 2 years political work at Eduardo Mondlane University. At the same time, the 'element' had worked well and should be given every encouragement to be re-integrated fully into the Mozambican community that he had attacked. His suggestion was that the applicant be denied the vote, but be allowed to attend the meeting and be allowed to continue with his work and other activities. O.M. spoke with considerable feeling - quite different from his lighter earlier style, which had contained many quick jokes and had been intended to relax the audience. Now he seemed intent on touching deep feelings. The show of hands was unanimous in support of his suggestion. This, I thought, was the real vote of the election. It was in support of the



fairness of O.M.'s 'judgment'; viz. that he had listened properly, given everyone a chance to speak, maintained the dignity of the proceedings, summed up the issues properly, and made a recommendation that was in accordance with principle. The persons present were not given the chance to debate the Electoral Law - its principles, modes, criteria etc. were taken as given, but within its terms of reference even though very (clearly defined in terms of socialist legality, 'narrow' in terms of bourgeois parliamentary theory) there was total freedom of debate. The applicant, who had stood gravely and impassively while he was being discussed, & who had responded quietly to the criticisms, insisting with a little bit of feeling that he had never had the actual intention, desire or knowledge when joining the comrades to go in for killing, moved to the side of the meeting, without indications of emotion.

The Third Phase:

The qualifications of the candidates discussed. Altogether about 30 people spoke, about 5 controversial candidates. A strong attack was made on Prof. Aleintara by an African man - who seemed



to be a functionary - from <sup>9</sup> Agronomy. He had two criticisms - the prof. failed to turn up to meetings in Agronomy, and secondly, he was not interested in the political life of the country or the university. Another African speaker said the professor had one foot in Maputo and one in Lisbon. Others criticised, none supported him. He sat impassively in front of me - there was no scope for withdrawal, walking out in a huff, demanding the microphone there and then. He would have his turn later. He belonged to the sense of the meeting.

A white teacher criticised one of the pupils who was a candidate, as undisciplined, unreliable and unworthy to represent his school. A <sup>black</sup> functionary criticised the teacher as being the one who failed to attend meetings and work collectively. There always seemed to be 3 or 4 people in the queue. As some finished, others joined. Another pupil was criticised, as was one of the teachers. There was a complex explanation of the procedure whereby one candidate had been chosen as a substitute for another, who in fact was available and should be re-instated. O.M. said please and thank you to each speaker, never putting anyone under pressure not to speak, or to desist once started. Only once did he ever interrupt, and that was to tell a young (Asian descended)



student who was speaking about 'the petit bourgeoisie' to speak to the whole audience and not just his fellow students. Even when he was summing up right at the end, when people took up position in the 'queuing spot' near the microphone, he looked off and handed the microphone to them. It was as though they had an absolute right to speak (like the tribune meeting in ancient Rome?)

It seemed to me that sometimes the issues became confused because so many different people were being talked about in the one session - someone suggested dealing with the candidates one by one, but this was not taken up. I got the feeling that there were heavy problems at the schools, more so than at the University, especially about relationships between teachers, pupils and functionaries. The chance to speak out at this meeting was seized by many - they did not speak generally about the problems, but <sup>were</sup> always disciplined by the need to discuss the qualifications of particular candidates. Nevertheless, the issues were usually general ones: the weight, the importance to be given to different factors. The right to speak out with total candour in the serious atmosphere of the meeting was clearly an important factor in itself for getting issues aired.



When all the critics and <sup>11.</sup> supporters had concluded, the criticised persons were called on to respond. Prof. Alcántara spoke gravely, a little nervously. O.M. asked him about non-attendance at meetings in Agronomy - he explained that he had been at other meetings, attended exams, etc. At this stage an elderly African functionary from his Centre came forward to speak in a rather rambling way about ~~the~~ Alcántara's hard work. O.M. asked the main critic if he was satisfied with this explanation. The critic said 'yes' but was still unsatisfied about the Prof's lack of political consciousness. O.M. asked the Professor about this, & Alcántara conceded that he was not very politically minded but that he tried to make his contribution to the University and the society through his work. O.M. then explains that the Electoral Law did not require candidates to be active in FRELIMO or to be political militants working with FRELIMO. Someone in the audience challenges this, and asks for the terms of the Statute to be read. The key provision is read: it refers, <sup>inter alia,</sup> to persons of high political consciousness. O.M. stresses that what really matters is whether the candidate has won



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the confidence of the community in which he works - if so, and if his work is regarded as making a contribution to the welfare of the community, then he (O.M.) thought the terms of the statute were wide enough to include someone like the Professor. Whether he as a particular candidate should be accepted was up to the meeting. The critic said he was content with the explanation, and would withdraw his opposition to the Professor. I felt that O.M. had bent the words of the statute just a little, but had really been intent on making, through the particular case, a wider point about collaboration with people who had special skills and worked well. His position towards the Professor was basically affirmative. Discontent had been aired and dealt with in an open and apparently just way. Prof. Alcantara went forward without opposition, presumably a little scoured by the criticisms, but also reassured by the support he <sup>had</sup> eventually received. In that atmosphere of frank disclosure and straightforward defence, with the orientador and the audience equally serious and eager on the basis of the evidence and ~~of~~ in the framework of principle to arrive at the correct conclusion, the exposure and analysis of the individual did not seem humiliating. Everything depended on the basic fairness, within the appointed context, of the proceedings -



they had to be authentic, no ganging-up, no pre-arranged plays, no manipulation. The 'orientador' clearly had a crucial role, both in terms of supervising procedure and in terms of his 'summing up'. The restraint upon him was not so much that he would be directly repudiated by the meeting, as that people would go along with his suggestions, but without conviction. His objective was evidently far more extensive than merely to 'win' - it was to create a forum in which the people assembled could speak out with absolute candour, and feel that they had both the right and duty to do so, and that once the true problems on people's minds had emerged - in relation to specific issues over which they could exercise control - a resolution could be arrived at by the application of principle. It was an ambitious undertaking, pre-supposing great confidence in the meeting, in FRELIMO's principles and in the 'orientador' himself.

O.M. summed up in relation to each of the controversial candidates, recommending one substitution and two negative votes. All the candidates lined up in front of the platform, and each was voted on separately. Although there was no doubt about how the voting would go, I sensed that people were eager and proud



to raise their ballot slips<sup>14</sup>. There was a sense of occasion, and it was unifying after the vigorous debates to re-affirm a sense of community, to underline consensus. The two rejected candidates were voted down with the same unanimity. They stood there impassively, not handed out, but severely rebuked, as had all the persons being discussed. For me it was a totally new atmosphere - it was all very extraordinary, enthralling; so much came out, real issues of how people regard each other, grievances, objectives, problems of timing and priorities. At one level I felt protective towards people being criticised, I sensed that tact and sentimentality would have been far more destructive. The atmosphere was very pure, the judgments, because based on open and vigorous speech, seemed very just. In seven hours, there were no interruptions, no scenes, no traumas, no ganging up, no cliques. The views and feelings that came out seemed truly authentic. I came away deeply stirred and impressed; also aware of possible dangers - ~~the~~ so much depended on the calibre of the 'orientador', his or her capacity to give direction when required, and to let the meeting develop its own momentum and character when appropriate.



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O.M. on a couple of occasions, after decisions had been made, offered his comments on the wider issues, referring especially to the fact that racism still existed at the University and in the schools. At one level the whole character of the meeting went against this point: black, brown and white spoke with equal freedom, whether as candidates or critics. For me it was wonderful to see yet again in Maputo how easily the vicious racism of the colonial era - and the ~~the~~ mean, aggressive racism which I had picked up from rightist Portuguese in Europe - had been overcome. People worked together, spoke out, criticised each other with total ease, to my mind a triumph for the anti-racial line of FRELIMO. For me there was enough for congratulations several times over, but O.M. was referring to something deeper, which related not so much to public life or personal encounter, as to who ~~he~~ tended to have what kind of jobs, what kind of life-style. He thought it better that these problems inherited from the past be acknowledged, so that through collective discussion and work they could be erased. He also attacked elitism, sectionalism, tribalism, cynicism, bureaucratic and arrogant behaviour, laziness and lack of application to work.



The slogans were to <sup>16.</sup> study hard, <sup>and</sup> work hard with a sense of the community's needs.

Conclusion: In some ways the meeting represented a paradox. The toughest criticisms were being offered not of those who were most selfish, or out of touch or high-handed in the educational structures, but of those with generally the best records who offered themselves as candidates. The other simply stayed away - there was no compulsory attendance. So none of the criticisms I had heard from time to time of this personality or that, this Faculty or that, this mode of administration or that, came out at all. A certain sense of discontent remains unresolved, and in the absence of more electoral meetings, it is not clear how the issues can be raised in a public way. So everything depends on the structures, ~~and~~ <sup>where</sup> there is frequently scope for manoeuvring, or prepared positions. But nevertheless, in a very dramatic and concrete way, without apparent damage to the individuals concerned, new standards had been formulated, standards of conduct and procedure; a bracing atmosphere of openness, freedom and responsibility had been created which presumably must carry through to other sectors of University life. And also, FRELIMO was underlining that its own



structures must be pure<sup>17.</sup> It would not be enough merely to have the correct policy - the people who have primary responsibility for implementation must enjoy real trust, must be fully worthy as individuals. There are many other features of life here, problems of transition, of organisation, of information and so on, which must basically be repetitions of experience in other countries, especially the socialist ones. But somehow I sense that ~~the~~ these meetings are distinctive to Mozambique, that FRELIMO has created something quite of its own, something that grew out of practice in the liberated zones, a mode of work that seems to be as effective and even inspiring, for all its possible dangers, in the context of the University as it is in the context of the village.

Afterwards, rather moved and amazed by what had been for me a special experience, I asked a student whether the meeting had been extraordinary for him as well. Oh no, he said, we often have these sort of meetings.



## Election Meeting II

## University Workers

Recollected 28/11/77.

Perhaps 700 people attended the meeting one afternoon in a large hall. People came in quietly, and were shown to seats, with cooperantes in front. Some quiet singing of FRELIMO songs, which all students, staff, functionaries etc. seem to know, including all the many verses. Xavier Mandlate, a leading administrator from the Rectorate, encourages the man leading the singing to put more spirit into it.

The Rector, a presumably member of some University political council, arrive with the Minister of Justice, the first person I've seen in a suit since my arrival. The Rector leads some 'Vivas' and makes a short, effective speech. The Minister then explains the electoral law in some detail, and takes questions. The first is: why isn't there a secret ballot? In a lengthy and discursive answer, the main point is that with 90% illiteracy, no recent census and no voter's roll, a secret ballot didn't make sense. Consideration had been given to the use of symbols, as had been tried elsewhere in Africa, but this had been rejected as too confusing. Other questions are about the levels of representation and whether persons elected are delegates of the electors or not.



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The Minister takes each question seriously. His demeanour is straightforward, but he doesn't make lively contact with the audience. The questioning is very direct.

The second part of the meeting concerns elections for a forthcoming Youth Conference (O.J.M.). There is considerable criticism from the floor about the speed with which the candidates had been chosen, and also some criticism ~~of~~ by functionaries of the fact that the team consisted of: 3 students, 1 ~~of~~ doctra and 2 functionaries. The secretary of O.J.M., who seemed rather nervous and a bit ~~shaky~~ woolly, made some effective replies on this: the delegates would represent all youth, not just students, and, further, the functionaries' special interests would be looked after by other functionary delegates from other sectors, whereas there was only one University. Eventually, after lengthy discussion, the slate was accepted, since their task was to last only 2 weeks.