

# ELECTIONS IN MOZAMBIQUE

## The Reality of Liberty.

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Something remarkable has been happening in the south east of Africa. In a seventy day period toward the end of 1977 new institutions of popular power were created through the length and breadth of the People's Republic of Mozambique. More than twenty thousand delegates were elected to various levels of popular assembly in the first general elections held in the country. The elections conformed with an international pattern of revolutionary state development, but they were also distinctively Mozambican, reflecting not only the particular stage of development of the Republic, but also the characteristic style of FRELIMO.

### Historical Background.

The elections can only be understood if viewed as the continuation of a process begun in the liberated zones during the period of armed struggle. As all FRELIMO documents emphasise, a profound crisis hit the organisation in the year 1966-1967 involving a fierce struggle between two political lines. <sup>(1)</sup> The victory of the popular revolutionary line resulted in the struggle for national independence being converted into a struggle against all forms

2

of exploitation. This involved a definition of the enemy in terms of a system not a people, so that the targets were identified not as the whites or even as colonialism, but as colonial capitalism and traditional feudalism. In the liberated zones it was soon realised that the mere elimination of the Portuguese colonial presence left unanswered the question of what kind of society should be constructed in its place. Opportunist and ambitious elements inside FRELIMO, using a combination of racist and traditionalist arguments, attempted to establish personal power bases in the liberated zones, subjecting the mass of the people to new forms of domination and exploitation. <sup>(2)</sup> It was in opposition to this reactionary group that the FRELIMO Central Committee, led first by Eduardo Mondlane, president of the organisation, and then by his comrade successor, Samora Machel, now President of the Republic, developed the distinctive FRELIMO approach to popular mobilisation and state construction. FRELIMO went beyond eliminating the colonial state apparatus, based on a system of magistrates, forced labour and taxes, ~~but~~ to destroy also the traditional tribal structure, ~~which were being~~ ~~used~~. The struggle was broadened to include

economic emancipation, <sup>3</sup> the liberation of women  
and an end to the subjugation of the young.  
This is a brilliant period in African and world political  
history, the sudden flowering in the bush and forest  
of northern Mozambique amongst people kept for  
centuries in ignorance of the most advanced and  
revolutionary ideas of humankind. Based on its  
experience of creating a new consciousness as it  
created new institutions of popular rule in the  
liberated zones. FRELIMO developed a clear view  
of the principles which should govern state develop-  
ment when the whole of Mozambique was  
liberated. In an education document published early  
in 1974 to summarise the experience of a decade  
of armed struggle, President Samora Machel pointed  
out that their objective could never be to Africanise the  
existing colonial state <sup>(3)</sup> He emphasised that the apparatus  
of power in an exploitative State was not a neutral  
instrument that could be used equally well by the  
enemy or by the people. Therefore the decisive issue is  
not that of replacing European staff with African staff....  
Just as the colonialists have their way of fighting,  
and we have ours, as they have their military science  
and we have ours, so do we have our power and  
they have theirs. There is conflict between us and  
them in the origin, nature, methods and objectives  
of power.... The power which is coming into  
being reflects the new balance of forces which is

emerging in our country <sup>4</sup>, which is favourable for a popular alliance. The exploiting minority's former dictatorship over the people is being replaced by the power of the people, which is being imposed on all colonialist forces and reactionary classes, the overwhelming majority prevailing over the tiny minority and destroying exploitation.

Shortly after these words were written, the military and political successes of FRELIMO and its sister liberation organisations produced a crisis in the Portuguese army that led to the overthrow of the forty year old dictatorship in Portugal. This in turn opened the way for a cease-fire and negotiated independence in Mozambique. At that stage vigorous attempts were made by the colonialist, especially the colonial bourgeoisie, to create a 'third force' in the country, using the cry for elections or a plebiscite as a means of frustrating any hand over of power to FRELIMO. FRELIMO pointed out that as the leader of the national liberation struggle and heir to the age-old resistance of the people to colonialism, as the agency which had directly contributed to forcing colonialism to release its grip on the country, it had no need to seek legitimacy. Elections would follow the transfer of power to FRELIMO as the proved representative of the Mozambican people, and could never be regarded as a precondition for the transfer of power. It was popular power that had created the possibility of elections, and not elections that had created the

rights to power. As the <sup>5.</sup> President of FRELIMO put it:

FRELIMO insisted that it was prepared to discuss with the Portuguese Government only what it called the modalities of the transfer of power and not the form that the new state would take. To have negotiated over the terms of the new constitution would have been a negation of incipient sovereignty. The Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Mozambique, including plans for the holding of elections was accordingly drafted solely by Mozambicans, and was the product not of a team of constitutional experts but of the Central Committee of FRELIMO, which adopted it by acclamation on 20 June 1976, five days before independence. <sup>(4)</sup> <sup>(5)</sup>

The Constitution laid down that the Popular Assembly would be the highest organ of state and the supreme legislative authority, but it did not specify any particular form of elections, stating merely in general

terms that general elections<sup>6.</sup> were to be held within a year of the next Congress of FRELIMO. The third Congress of FRELIMO was in fact held in April 1977, and shortly afterwards an electoral law was drafted with the result that in the period September to December 1977 the first <sup>general</sup> elections ever in Mozambique took place. The electoral law provided for a tiered series of popular assemblies starting with local assemblies elected by direct popular franchise. <sup>6</sup> Delegates chosen for the local assemblies then had the further task of selecting representatives for district assemblies, while in the provincial capitals special elections were held to elect the municipal popular assemblies. Next, the members of the district and municipal assemblies chose an electoral college which elected the Provincial Assemblies. Finally, the Provincial Assemblies in a secret ballot elected the Popular Assembly for the whole country.

The elections had three principal objectives. The first was to create new organs of state at local, municipal, district, provincial and national levels. In the liberated zones and in the ~~state~~ country as a whole since independence, FRELIMO had acted in the triple capacity as creator of policy, mobiliser of the people, and implementor of policy. Now FRELIMO was to continue as the leading political force in the country, but the multifold needs of the people at all different levels would be dealt with by the new

legislative authorities. <sup>7.</sup> These in turn would create a new administration and judiciary, so that eventually all the organs of the colonial state would have been transformed into instruments of popular power.

The second objective was educational. The purpose of the elections was not to choose the form of society Mozambique would have. That issue had already been decided by the armed struggle and the victory of the popular revolutionary line inside FRELIMO which had established a direction confirmed by the massive popular support given to FRELIMO during the transitional period. Weaker than the colonialists in armaments, poorer than the new world-be exploiters in resources, repudiating the obscurantism of the traditionalist reactionaries, FRELIMO all along had only one weapon - the support of the mass of workers and peasants, of revolutionary intellectuals, of all patriotic strata. The elections assumed continuing mass support. What they required the electors to do was to discuss concretely what the new popular power meant in terms of the fitness of candidates. Candidates at each level were in fact listed by groupings of FRELIMO, the Women's Movement (CMW) and the Army. The lists were then put to the people at mass meetings and each candidate was discussed and voted upon. It was these meetings which provided the liveliest and most distinctively Mozambican aspect of the elections.

## The Meetings 8.

Attendance at election meetings established that people's democratic power is not inconsistent with free discussion and vigorous debate. On the contrary, what was striking was that a context of decisive leadership, well-structured meetings and agreement on fundamentals of policy, created a basis for totally frank discussion which in turn gave meaning to the concept of popular affirmation or assumption of power.

The first meeting I attended was organised for residents of an elegant neighbourhood in Maputo. The hall was situated opposite the central prison, close to the Army Club where the fascist generals had worked out their plans to liquidate FRELIMO, not far from the PIDE headquarters where the colonialist secret police had organised torture and assassination. Each of these reminders of the former power had now been taken over by the people - the prison still a prison, but largely run by the prisoners, the Army Club a FRELIMO centre, and the PIDE headquarters a museum. About 500 people attended. If the ~~colonialist~~ <sup>Portuguese dictatorship</sup> had permitted meetings, attendance would have been ninety per cent white, ten per cent black. Now it was the opposite, reflecting the massive departure of the colonial bourgeoisie and the massive rehousing of the poor. But the many non-Africans attending were not participating as a protected minority with either an over-privileged or an under-privileged status. They





Sergio Vieira does not make a speech or deliver an exhortation. Rather, he briefly explains the basic concepts of the election, and then tests the audience with questions: Can persons over 18 vote? Or is it 21? - Eighteen, the audience respond. Can foreigners vote? No! Can former PIDE agents vote? No! Can former chiefs vote? Indunas? No! Can any of them be elected? No! He explains that the electoral law requires the voters to select people who ~~being~~ contribute to the construction of Mozambique, are conscientious in their work, show a high degree of social consciousness and who conduct themselves well. The law also requires them to reject people who (i) are former PIDE agents or who were active in any of the pro-Salazar or repressive agencies of the colonial state (ii) are former chiefs or indunas or who collaborated with the colonial authorities or (iii) have conducted themselves badly. This, then, is what the elections are going to be about. In discussing the attributes of candidates, the voters will be doing more than selecting suitable people for the assemblies, they will ~~be~~ in a concrete way be debating what qualities the new society requires, what changes have taken place and what kind of state is being constructed.

The second meeting about a week later is oriented by the Minister of Justice, Rui Balthazar, a former advocate who had defended patriot during

the liberation struggle and who had maintained clandestine contact with FRELIMO. In his early forties, the first person I have seen in Maputo wearing a tie, his orientation is direct and rather more formal than that given at the previous meeting. About 700 workers at the University have gathered to hear about the elections. The meeting is opened by the Rector, a history professor who had worked in a FRELIMO school in Tanzania during the armed struggle until victimised by opportunist racism from supporters of the reactionary line in FRELIMO. He gives a few brief 'vivas' and hundreds of feet rise into the air: black, white, brown, hard, supple, delicate, the feet of students, cleaners, professors, typists and technicians, all workers at the University. The Minister explains the rather complex election law, stressing that people in the towns could vote either as workers in different sectors of employment or as residents of their boroughs. He invites questions, and someone at the back immediately asks why there is no secret ballot. The Minister explains that the reasons are practical rather than theoretical: there has been no census for years, no voters roll exists, and ninety per cent of the people are illiterate. In future, when these conditions are overcome it would be possible to have a secret ballot. Many more questions are asked, mainly by students, about the Electoral Law. They are put to the Comrade Minister in a direct and un-embarrassed way. Eventually the Minister

leaves and the meeting goes on to discuss a list of delegates to represent the University at a forthcoming youth meeting. The first part of the meeting was informative but not exciting, this part is, indeed, as person after person criticises the way in which the list was composed. A major point of contention is the balance between students and workers, with some workers claiming that they are underrepresented. The secretary of the youth organisation replies that delegates represent the whole community, not just sections, and that in any event there would be many workers coming from other branches, whereas this was the only one that could elect students.

The second meeting is an actual election meeting, to select candidates to represent workers in education in the city assembly. About five hundred teachers, pupils, students, caretakers, technicians, professors and others sit on the ground outside the Faculty of Arts at the University, with voting cards in their hand. The meeting starts at 4 p.m. opened by Osea Ventura, another young veteran of the liberated zones, member of the Central Committee and secretary for Party organisation, now in his late thirties or early forties. His style is informal, putting people at their ease. The twenty-six listed candidates present themselves, giving brief biographical sketches. The first is a teacher who explains that she was born of anti-fascist parents in Portugal, came to Mozambique as a child, was studying in Portugal when FRELIMO asked Mozambican student, to

12 a.

return home, and immediately did so. Then follow the stories of high school ~~student~~ pupils, technicians, students, clerks, workers, teachers and a professor. It is noticeable how broken up the education of the African candidate has been: a year of schooling here, two years there, a correspondence college and so on. The only candidate to be questioned at this stage is the University professor, who is asked whether he has been active in the political life of the University. He says no, but that he has tried to make his contribution through his work. The next stage of the meeting consists of applications by two people to be granted dispensation for their past activities and to be allowed to vote. The first is an elderly African man who says he belonged for some time to a Salazarist organisation and that although he held some position, had not done more than put material in envelopes. Someone who works with him says he is a good worker and a good person who secretly helped FRELIMO. He is asked to give details, and cannot do so. Immediately a queue of people form next to the microphone. The format of the meeting becomes clear. Anyone who takes up a position next to the microphone has an absolute right to speak, at any stage of the proceedings. There are no interruptions, there is no 'dialogue'. The speakers make their points directly, without attempts to be tactful. Most of them say they do not know enough about the applicant to support his

request. The applicant is given a chance to reply. He speaks at some length, rambling about his life, and then Oscar Monteiro sums up. The meeting must decide, he says, but in his view the applicant's past should be more fully investigated to see how active his role was in support of the fascist authorities. This is clearly the view of the meeting, who vote unanimously for further investigation, after which the applicant walks sadly away. The next applicant is a young white student of agriculture, who explains that he was born in Mozambique, went to school in Beira, and then when called up for military service, joined the Commandos. There is a buzz amongst the audience. He had not ~~been seen active service~~ been long in the Commandos and had not seen active service. Since independence he had been at the University where he had tried to study well and contribute to the new society. The meeting is asked whether anyone who has worked with him would like to speak about him. A queue develops, and for more than an hour the merits and de-merits of the application are debated. Several students speak in his favour: he takes part in collective work, he attends meetings and he helps his fellow students. On the 'July' activities, when the students spend a month working with peasants in the rural zones, he behaved in a model fashion, working in a disciplined and effective manner, just as one would expect from a commando, as one African put it to laughter. Then three African workers speak in turn against him. Joining the Commandos was voluntary,

they say, the commander massacred our people, he should not be allowed to vote. The third African speaks in a jaunty fashion: we must show our people like this, there is no place for them in our society. He speaks in general terms, using the word enemy frequently. The audience get restless and he receives virtually no applause when he finishes. Most of the speakers favour granting the vote, a young man that at the clearest time the fascist propaganda machine concealed the truth and confused many young people, but the last speaker opposes, on the ground that the applicant remains arrogant, showing no signs of remorse. This is an echo of words used by President Samora Machel earlier in the week in a now famous confrontation with a former FIDE agent which had been broadcast and which had electrified the city. The President commented on the continuing arrogance of the former agent, ~~but the audience today~~ and the speaker now is making a similar point. The audience seem to feel that the context is quite different, and there is a murmur against her. The applicant is then given his turn to reply. He stresses his regret at his decision to join the commander and mentions that his <sup>real</sup> reason was to save a year's pre-university study, and that he never intended to kill people in the villages. At least two thirds of the audience seem to be in favour of his application, but a knot of workers is clearly opposed. Oscar Minterico sums up, very much like a judge, setting out the two sets of arguments. In his view, the application should not be granted. The commander had been the main force against FRELIMO and had had a vicious record of massacres, and his audience would excuse him if he said

that not even two years' excellent political work at Eduardo Mondlane University could wipe out a period of voluntary service in the commandos. At the same time the applicant had conducted himself well and should be encouraged to integrate himself into the Mozambican nation. His recommendation is ~~is~~ that the vote be deferred on this occasion, but that the applicant be allowed to stay in at the meeting in a non-voting capacity. This proposal seems so principled and fair that it gets total support. During the debate many strong feelings came out, tensions were revealed, people were aroused, absorbed, in a state of constant animation. Oscar Muntoro now delivers a serious exhortation to the audience about the importance of acknowledging the problems which ~~had~~ have emerged, such as continuing racism and elitism at the University, since these could only be eliminated if brought all into the open and dealt with by collective work. The final stage of the meeting consists of a discussion of the merits of the candidate, and for some hours the queue at the microphone is constantly replenished. Only once does Oscar Muntoro interrupt a speaker and that is to tell a student talking about 'petit bourgeois' elements to use a language that everyone understands, not just some phis fellow students. The University professor, severely criticised by a number of workers, he never attends meetings, has no political consciousness, he has one foot in Lisbon, one in Maputo. He replies that he is not a political person, but makes his contribution through trying to help build up the University. A number of tensions clearly exist at



16.  
certain schools: teachers, <sup>16.</sup> workers and pupils criticize each other. Eventually at about 10.30 p.m., the scene lit up by an overhead projector, the vote is taken. Helped a bit by remarks from Oscar Monteiro that persons who are not militants of FRELIMO can be elected if they work conscientiously and have the confidence of the community, the professor is chosen, along with twenty two other candidates. Three candidates are rejected on the basis of having worked in a negligent or improper manner. The atmosphere is strident as they are voted down. Finally, Oscar Monteiro sums up, holding over the microphone ~~at~~ even at this late hour when someone comes to <sup>make a point</sup> in the middle of his final speech. He ~~states~~ <sup>underlines the point</sup> that the reality of Mozambique is not to be found at the University, but consist of ignorance, illiteracy, disease, obscurantism, superstition, tribalism, the oppression of women and the subjugation of the young. At 11 p.m. seven hours after it started, the meeting is over.

Later in the week I notice people all over town listening on transistor radios to live broadcasts of election meetings, as though to a hot match. An accountant is charged with having inflated his expense account, candidates are exposed as ex-FIDE informers, others are accused of sexual misconduct. Eventually this period of intense public involvement in the election campaign which had started so quietly and became dramatic once the issues became concrete, is over. It is announced that there will be a popular festival in the centre of Maputo to celebrate the holding of

the elections. Flags are out, thousands of people gather to watch dancing and gymnastics, hoping that the President will appear. He does, greets the delegates, walks amongst the crowd, with children running after him, makes a brief, radiant speech lead-  
 some singing, and then is driven away. The dancing carries on until well after dark. At the bottom end of a closed off street a band of the People's Liberation Army (FPLM) is playing rock-samba music. Dancing which once had been used by the colonialists as a tourist attraction heavily involved with prostitution, is being re-captured by the people, who literally start to dance in the streets to celebrate the affirmation of people power.

This then had become the third objective of the elections - a popular festival to celebrate the victory of people's democratic power.

The Elected.

Shortly afterward the national Popular Assembly met, its delegates having been elected unanimously by the Provincial Assemblies using a secret ballot. The National Electoral Commission gives a full report on the elections, including a statistical breakdown of the candidates.

- Local Assemblies: 22,300 persons elected to 894 assemblies, including 28% women.
- District Assemblies: 3,390 persons to 112 assemblies, 24% women.

Municipal Assemblies: 460 persons to 10 assemblies, including 21% females.

Provincial Assemblies: 734 persons to 10 assemblies, including 15% females.

Popular Assembly: 226 persons of whom 12% were female.

Altogether more than 2,300 candidates were rejected, about 1,000 for having belonged to the repressive colonial apparatus or puppet bodies, about 100 for having been chiefs and indunas who had voluntarily associated themselves with the colonial state, and about 650 for various forms of misbehaviour.

Well over half the delegates to the Popular Assembly were workers or peasants. The breakdown was as follows: Workers - 31%; peasants - 29%; Army - 15%; State employees - 11%; Representatives of the Women's and the Youth Organisation - 6%; others - 8%.

In a country with a legacy of ninety per cent illiteracy, emphasis on representation of workers and peasants inevitably meant that many delegates were unable to read and write, and one of the specific targets of the 'alphabeticisation' programme for 1978 is to make all members of popular assemblies literate. Biographies given in the weekly journal 'Tempo' indicate the kind of people raised from rags to positions of authority by the revolution. <sup>(9)</sup>

Micas Massingue never had a chance to study as a child. He looked after cattle, and then worked as

a servant for many years, living in the backyards of ~~many~~ <sup>various</sup> employers and being paid about £1 per month with virtually no time off. He slept on the floor in rooms without light, had little opportunity to wash himself, and was blamed for anything that went wrong in the house. Eventually when forced to pay nearly a year's wages for a coal that went missing in the laundry, he abandoned domestic service, and managed to get a job in a factory, where he is still employed. In 1974 during the transitional period the workers requested a school in the factory, ~~where he is still employed~~ and he has now managed to ~~reach~~ reach standard three.

Maria Maissa, another member of the 'People's Parliament' lost her father when she was very young. Her mother had had to look after five children, and whenever she had sought employment, had been compelled to take part in forced labour projects for the administration and the chiefs. Frequently her mother had to flee with the children to avoid ~~working~~ forced labour in rice fields or cotton plantations. Later she fled to avoid taxes; life was better for all of them. The administration would pass on instructions to the chiefs, who passed them down through tribal structures until they reached the field bosses who actually controlled and beat the people. Each worker had to produce a quota - for two or three months of arduous work they would be paid little more than £1. Today her life has changed. 'My greatest

satisfaction, she says 'is that I can write my name ..... Today we work collectively. We all take part in production, and we all eat what we produce. In our district the people are really pleased because we've built a new power. The dairy workers, for example, decided to lay on a festival to celebrate the elections, and we all had a great feast. Our job was to choose the best Mozambicans to be our deputies. Those who'd belonged to the colonial structures, like the chiefs, the indunas, the PIDE agents, we put them aside. Some of them were furious, but we told them: You had your time, now it's the time for the poor, for the exploited to build our power.

Summing up the meaning of the elections, President Samora Machel told members of the Popular Assembly that the success of the process demonstrated the coherence and correctness of the line developed by FRELIMO in the period of armed struggle and continued since. Good planning and the effective fulfilment of tasks had enabled the masses to participate in a manner that was active, free and popular. One comrade had told him: The elections signify the reality for liberty, and he agreed. The elections had been a great school, a great festival, a great means of realising the power of the true democracy in which they lived.

## Conclusion.

The first general elections ever held in Mozambique involved the participation at meetings of three million persons, a very large portion of the adult population. (11) Photographs, films, newspaper reports, broadcasts and personal attendance all testified to the lively character of these meetings. The people were encouraged to speak out, to feel that power is theirs, to take responsibility for the new society. This was a continuation of the policies developed in the liberated zones during the period of armed struggle. Elections were regarded as part of the process of education and mobilisation, as arenas of class struggle. Amongst many specific achievements, FRELIMO has developed a distinctive mode of work. The Mozambican revolution is part of the struggles of the peoples of the world for emancipation, but it also has its own personality, based on the particular conditions of Mozambique. Thus the recent elections represent a distinctive contribution not only to African liberation but to revolutionary practice and theory for the whole world. Within the general context of anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggle, each sector of liberation in southern Africa will have to define its own form, and in countries

where the struggle for the vote has been a central feature of the struggle for self-determination, different patterns of election might derive from those adopted in Mozambique. But what cannot be ignored in any area of southern Africa are the lessons so vividly brought home in Mozambique: that elections themselves can never be a magic device for resolving questions of power, that the class struggle is not suspended simply because elections are being held, and that the true guarantee of deep and meaningful expression of popular will is the destruction of the apparatus of oppression and its replacement with organs of popular power. Strong leadership by a vanguard party with a clear sense of direction does not prevent popular participation in the life of the country - on the contrary, it gives the mass of the working people the confidence and sense of purpose to assume responsibility for transforming their lives, and takes politics out of the realm of personal ambition and into the realm of community advance.

## References

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2nd ed. Maputo, 1975
- 2). Documentos Do 3º Congresso Da Frelimo - O Partido - Report by Samora Moises Machel on behalf of the Central Committee, Maputo 1977, p. 12 - 45.
- 3). Establishing Peoples Power to serve the Masses - Samora Machel, TCLSAC Toronto, 1976; Tanzania Publishing House, Dar Es Salaam 1977.
- 4).
- 5). See Independence Issue of Mozambique Revolution, June 25, 1975 for the full text of the Constitution.
- 6). The terms of the electoral law and other relevant documents are published in a special document of the National Committee to Organise Elections, Maputo, 1977.
- 7). See Documents - footnote 2, p. 112.
- 8). The full text is in Noticias, 24 December, 1977, p. 9-10.



- 9). Tempo no. 379, 8 January, 1978 p. 49.
- 10). The Constitution of the Popular Assemblies is an  
Important Victory over the Class Enemy - full report  
in Noticias 24 December 1977.
- 11). Report of National Electoral Commission, see footnote  
8, at p. 10.

11/1/78

Dear Brian,

This is a draft of the article on the elections, so that you can get an idea of length, theme, style etc. I still have to discuss it here, check for accuracy, balance, appropriateness etc., so please don't use it in whole or part until I specifically say O.K. (I can telex MAGIC to save time). There will be a delay of a minimum of two weeks from today - after that I hope things will move swiftly. If you have any proposals re deletions, additions, changes of formulation etc., let me know as soon as possible. If for any reason you decide not to use it, let me know of that too as soon as you can. Presumably it could be published under my name, or else under 'Cooperante'

Regards,

J.