

Mozambique: The Debate Continues

Michel Cahen Writes...

Last spring (1989) I sent your magazine the enclosed manifesto, "Vaincre la Guerre, Par la Démocratie, Par le Socialisme" [translated below; ed.] signed by Claude Meillassoux, Christine Messiant and Michel Cahen of Paris and Jorge Derluguian of Moscow. Because the war of aggression in Mozambique has been transformed into a civil war, and because, after fifteen years of independence under a one-party system, Mozambican society badly needs democratization – in order, in particular, to revitalize the class struggle – we call for direct negotiations between Frelimo and Renamo and for free elections. Later this manifesto was signed by Samir Amin and Alfredo Nergarido.

SAR didn't publish this document at the time [it is, however, reproduced immediately after this letter – ed.] – that's your right. However, I feel this is part of a more general pattern of *SAR*'s systematically ignoring French writings on Mozambique and Angola, and especially those writings that have been developing

a Marxist critique of those countries from the very beginning – and not merely since the introduction of these countries' new economic programmes. Thus, *SAR* has never published reviews of Michel Cahen, *Mozambique, la Révolution Implosée* (Paris: d'Harmattan, 1987); *Politique Africaine*, #29 (May, 1988), special issue entitled "Mozambique: Guerre et Nationalismes"; and *Laboratoire "Tiers Monde-Afrique," Bourgs et Villes en Afrique Lusophone* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1989), a book with two extended articles on Angola.

I don't write out of a sense of personal grievance but rather because the ignoring of this work affects negatively the quality of *SAR*. Thus, I have read with interest, though also with sadness, Otto Roesch's article, "Nampula: What's Left?" (*SAR*, November, 1989). But what this article criticizes – correctly – is something about Mozambique that has been studied in France for many years! For example, the tendency towards the return of forced labour in Nampula was studied in my book,

Mozambique: la Révolution Implosée, in a chapter written in 1986, while the effects of villagization were studied by Christian Geffray in his writings (published in part) of 1985 (I hope, incidentally, that you will be able to find space to give proper attention to his powerful forthcoming book, *La Cause des Armes. Anthropologie de la Guerre Contemporaine au Mozambique*). In addition, a great many fundamental problems have not yet even been taken up by *SAR*, beginning with the very process of first constructing the Mozambican and Angolan states. The fact that *SAR* is a militant review with limited space does not justify such silence. One can be both militant and critical, but you have been critical – and then only relatively so – for a mere two years. In general, *SAR* condemns only those errors of Frelimo and the MPLA that the two parties have themselves already criticized: re-read your various issues and you will see that this is the case.

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(Translated from the French by *SAR*)

The Cahen Document: Victory via Democracy for Socialism

Beginning in 1976, and particularly since 1984, Mozambique has experienced a horrifying war. Frelimo, whose anti-colonial armed struggle led the country to independence, is set against Renamo in this conflict. At the beginning, Renamo was made up of no more than a few hundred defeated Mozambican soldiers from the colonial army and a handful of turn coats from Frelimo, who were regrouped, financed and trained by Rhodesia and certain sections of the defeated colonial bourgeoisie, and later by South Africa. Imperialism initially, and South Africa until today, bear major responsibility for this situation. But in the thirteen years of conflict, the war of

aggression has become a civil war. Today, even as everyone recognizes that there is no military solution to the war, the Mozambican state's diplomatic offensive to put an end to the conflict has finally run aground.

The impasse of the one-party system

Today Frelimo's leadership confronts a dilemma which is imposed by the constitution of the one-party state.

On the one hand, it can agree to direct negotiations with the enemy. Because of the constitutional make-up of the country, which mandates a one-party system, such negotiations could have no other

goal than the incorporation of some members of a seditious organization into Frelimo and the state it controls. This power-sharing within the Party-State implies major political concessions on Frelimo's part.

On the other hand, if the Frelimo leadership remains faithful to its goals and principles, it can repudiate such concessions and refuse to open political negotiations. It would have no other option then, than to tempt and lure individual members of the enemy to desert, while at the same time pursuing military offensives. Amnesties and pardons which permit dignified surrender are indeed indispensable, and from some perspectives, exemplary and courageous, but they have been shown to be unable to put an end to conflict.

The constitution of the one-party system gives rise to this conflict between negotiations and betrayal of principle, on the one hand, and insufficient amnesties, on the other. But it also has other consequences.

Isolation of the government and comprehensive social crisis

The absence of pluralist institutions, and of parties and other organizations independent of the state and speaking for the diverse and contradictory forces within Mozambican society, has produced a situation in which only the highest party leaders can take the initiative in making criticisms and proposing solutions. This is why President Samora Machel was simultaneously the most forceful critic of the state and also its leader. But if he led the extra-official campaigns to re-establish civic order and productive capacity, it was because no regular procedures existed to accomplish these goals. "Popular power" could be nothing else, structurally, than the power of the party, and in turn, of its leadership. Thus the state and the party which controlled it came to be perceived as exterior and often hostile forces in relation to the population they claimed to represent and administer. A profound demobilization resulted, to the ex-

tent that some of the population felt that the conflict between Frelimo and Renamo was a private war between two rival armies over the rewards to be obtained from controlling the people. Part of the rural population was able to accept the local authority of Renamo without necessarily adhering to its "aims," in order to protect themselves from the most deadly consequences of a politics which had nothing in common with its real aspirations.

The absence of pluralist institutions therefore indirectly played a part in the transformation from a war of aggression to a civil war.

The Democratic Outcome

With the preparatory debates for Frelimo's fifth congress in progress [Ed: the article is dated March 30 and April 15 1989, before Frelimo's congress], and at a time when constitutional change is on the agenda in Mozambique, the leadership has the means to break out of the sterile alternatives of negotiation/betrayal or amnesty. The best solution would be that Frelimo compel Renamo to become a legal political party, and that the international community then monitor its attempts to achieve legitimacy through elections, if such was the will of the people, in competition with Frelimo and any other political organizations. Within this perspective, direct negotiations with the enemy would no longer entail betrayal, because their goal would no longer be power-sharing. It would be only a question of discussing technical arrangements for a cease-fire and for disarming. Frelimo would then have created the conditions for pursuing the struggle by other means than war: no fundamental political concession would have been required on its part, no "reconciliation" would have taken place, and Frelimo would not have withdrawn the political assessment which it has already made of the nature and objectives of Renamo.

Such a process would be uncertain. Whatever its outcome, it

would permit Frelimo and the government to take the political initiative, and to regain its lost credibility with the nation, since it would have had the courage to submit to the will of the people. Taking this road would also reinforce their international stature, as have the initiatives of the Sandinistas when confronted by the Contras.

A party which claims to be the leading force in society must struggle daily and democratically to win this political role, a role which no constitution could, or should guarantee. The view that each class finds its expression in a single party and that the state power of a class can only be materialized in the power of a single party does not belong to the marxist tradition. It is the creation and the inheritance of the Stalin era. Only the pluralist democratization of the nation, through trade unions, associations and political parties, can create the conditions for a new dynamism in the movement of society. This is indispensable if the socialist orientation is to be renewed, since it derives its power from the consent, mobilization, responsibility and sovereignty of the people, instead of from their blind respect for orders.

Anyone who thinks that pluralist democracy doesn't make sense "in Africa" because of its level of social development, is a racist. In the countries of Africa, as elsewhere, the genuine expression of social movements requires pluralist institutions in order to facilitate the dynamic unfolding of the class struggle.

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Michel Cahen (Researcher, CNRS, Bordeaux)
Jorge Derluguian (Researcher, Inst. World History, Moscow)

(Translated from the French by SAR)

Otto Roesch

Replies

Cahen's letter and the manifesto reproduced above (to which Cahen is a co-signatory) raise a number of provocative and important issues about the nature of the war in Mozambique, the options for peace, and the politics of solidarity work and scholarship.

In his letter Cahen charges that *SAR* is "systematically ignoring" French scholarly production on Mozambique and, worse yet, belatedly converting to positions long since advanced by French Marxist scholars, without acknowledging it.

Let me begin by assuring Cahen that there is no conspiracy within *SAR* to ignore French scholarly production on Mozambique and Angola. Of course, limitations of space, the varying availability of suitable reviewers and the dictates of our own editorial judgment regarding *SAR*'s priorities do determine how much we can and will cover. Nonetheless, we welcome the opportunity to present our readers with differing views and analyses of events in southern Africa and are pleased to have the opportunity to do so again with Cahen's own correspondence.

More substantively, with regards to Geffray's pioneering work on the communal villages of Nampula and the role of forced villagization in escalating the war in that province, I am quite willing to acknowledge the influence of his findings on my short article in the November 1989 issue of *SAR* to which Cahen refers in his letter. (For what it's worth, an earlier version of this article actually contained an explicit reference to Geffray's work, but it was edited out of the final published version for reasons of space.) I have also ac-

knowledged the importance of Geffray's work in the context of a debate currently taking place in the pages of the *Southern African Review of Books* with which Cahen is quite familiar, though he may not have seen my contribution before writing his letter. As I make clear in my contribution to this debate, while I recognize the importance of Geffray's work, I do not necessarily share the interpretations which Cahen and others have made of it. It is accordingly with great anticipation that I and others in the *SAR* editorial collective look forward to receiving a review copy of Geffray's "powerful" forthcoming book.

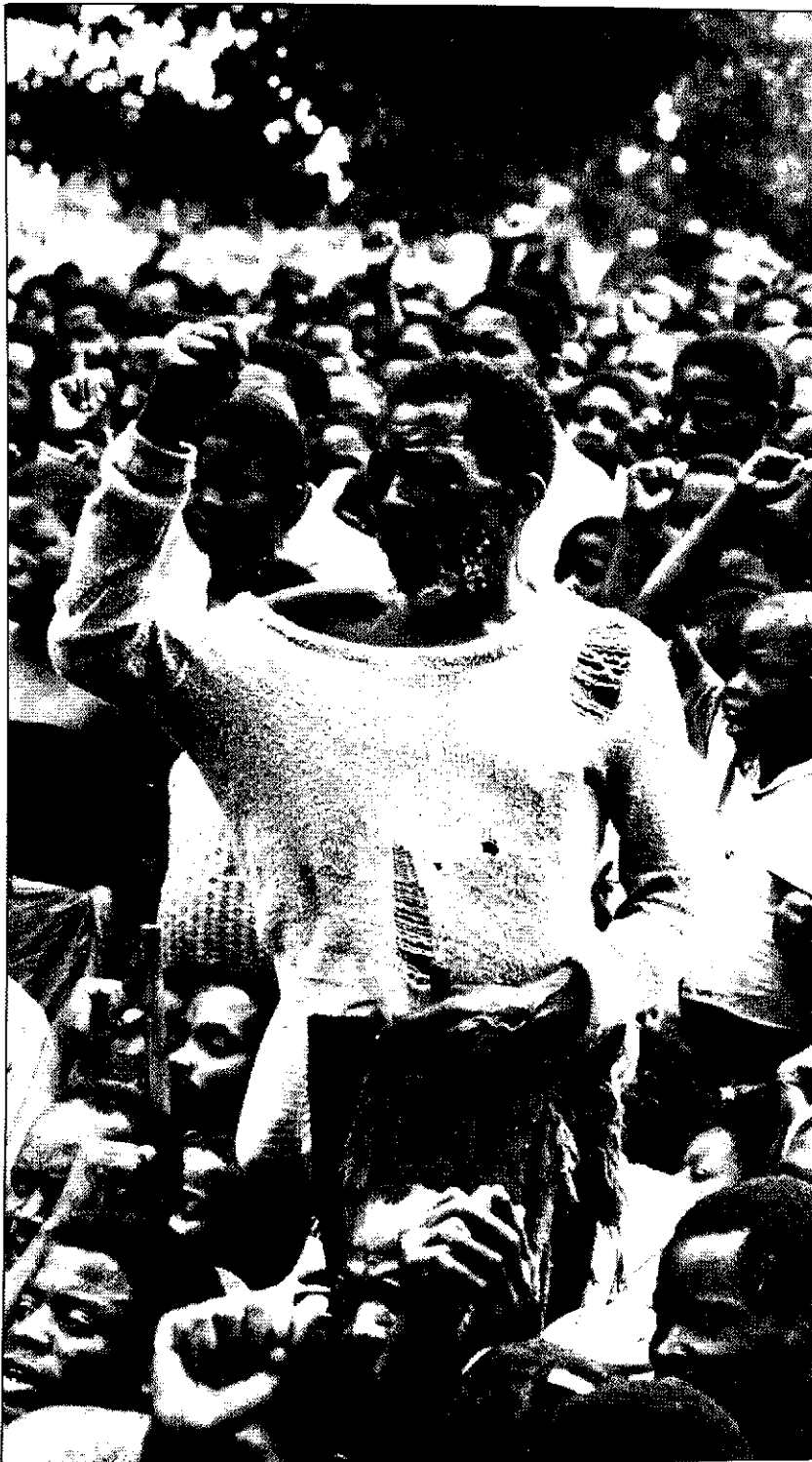
It is perhaps precisely with regard to the question of differing interpretations of Mozambique's current crisis that Cahen's unhappiness with *SAR* should be seen. He accuses *SAR* of taking a critical position towards Mozambique only over the past two years, since the introduction of the structural adjustment programme, and of pointing to Frelimo policy errors only after Frelimo has itself done so. It is our view that our analytical starting point has always been one of critical solidarity, though it is true that our criticisms of Mozambique have become sharper since 1986, as the country's political drift away from a socialist project became increasingly apparent. If Cahen feels that he and other French Mozambique scholars were correct in seeing, from a very early date, some kind of inevitability or inarrestability in this drift then he is welcome to that interpretation - although many of us will continue to find the development process in Mozambique to have been quite a bit more contradictory and contested than Cahen's rather schematic nostrums would permit. Yet as the manifesto co-authored by Cahen itself makes clear, what is at issue here is less a matter of historical analysis than of how Mozambique's current crisis is to be interpreted.

Thus, while many of us here at *SAR* share the concerns expressed

by Cahen and his co-authors about the need for greater democratization in Mozambique, and would concede that in the past we have indeed given insufficient critical attention to the nature of the Mozambican state, we have a number of major reservations about the proposals put forward in the above article and the assumptions which underlie them.

First, the article's characterization of the current conflict in Mozambique, as a war of external aggression now become civil war is, we believe, fundamentally misguided. It is our position that the conflict remains a war of aggression against Mozambique, organized and nurtured by elements within South Africa and right-wing groups elsewhere in the world, and that this externally organized war has generated *not* a civil war, but rather a process of anomie and general social breakdown, especially in the countryside. As Geffray's own early work in Nampula shows, and as my own research in that province continues to confirm, peasant alienation from Frelimo has not entailed large-scale active political support for Renamo, but at best passive neutrality towards both sides. The peasants may be embittered with Frelimo, but they are far from embracing Renamo. Those Mozambicans who compose Renamo's rank and file are either captives, forcibly recruited into its ranks, or alienated peasant youths with opportunistic motives, who see membership in Renamo as merely a vehicle for plunder and personal accumulation. Renamo's recruits give no evidence of being ideologically motivated and are totally lacking in any sort of political commitment or discipline. In short, Renamo does not enjoy a social base in any conventional guerrilla warfare sense of the word and lacks a clearly defined political project. It remains pre-eminently an instrument of foreign destabilization and terror which ultimately speaks for no one inside the country.

The instrumental and artificial



A man who spoke during a rally with President Chissano, Gorongosa, Mozambique, October 1989

Alfredo Mueche/AIM

political nature of Renamo was clearly evidenced in the abortive round of church-mediated negotiations which Frelimo sought to hold with Renamo in Nairobi this past summer [Additional evidence is provided in the article on Renamo in this issue.] Divided and lacking clear political orientation, Renamo representatives were hardly able to formulate a coherent response to Mozambican government proposals. Moreover, up until two years ago, Renamo was an organization dominated by white Portuguese nationals, not by Mozambicans, and only through the efforts of Renamo's western sponsors to groom black Mozambicans for leadership positions, has the organization been able to salvage a modicum of international political credibility.

This being the case, and without wishing to apologize for the authoritarian tendencies in Frelimo's one-party system, what would Mozambican citizens have to gain by dealing with Renamo through a Sandinista-style exercise in multi-party electoral politics as advocated by Cahen and his co-authors? While it would certainly win them the approval of western governments, why should Renamo, which continues to be the external arm of the South African military, be the beneficiary of such a political opening? The Nicaraguan contras clearly represent not only the external interests of the U.S. administration, but also the internal interests of the pre-revolutionary Nicaraguan ruling class and certain sectors of the Nicaraguan middle class. But which internal interests does Renamo represent? Where is its political/class constituency inside Mozambique? If Frelimo chooses to adopt a pluralistic political system and a multi-party system, which may now indeed be the only potential guarantor of real democracy inside Mozambique, let it be for the benefit of genuinely Mozambican political groups, not for the benefit of the South African military and its surrogates.