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Some Reflections on Solidarity with Mozambique

Note: These hasty, simple and perhaps simplistic notes are simply for internal discussion.

(1) International solidarity with Mozambique has gone through various phases, and been based on a variety of political and moral justifications. In the first phase, of struggle against Portuguese colonialism, the leaders of FRELIMO could appeal to the international consensus in favor of independence. They sought and welcomed international support against Portugal's refusal to accept this consensus. The solidarity cause gained credibility from Portugal's obvious illegitimacy, and from the personal and political willingness of the FRELIMO leadership to seek international alliances from people of good will. Portugal was supported by the Western countries, and Marxist and radical forces were more willing to support an armed challenge to colonialism. But FRELIMO also sought and accepted support on humanitarian grounds from forces who did not share political perspectives such as support for armed struggle.

(2) In the later years of the war for independence and most explicitly after independence, FRELIMO declared its support for socialist options, even formally transforming itself into a Marxist Leninist party, renamed the Frelimo Party. Those involved in solidarity work with Mozambique, whether or not they identified themselves as Marxist-Leninists (and most of those in the West did not), did identify with Frelimo's goals of building a socialist society, attacking inequality as well as underdevelopment.

(3) In the period after independence, Mozambique also gained international solidarity because of its involvement in the continuing struggle against white-minority rule, in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and then in South Africa. This solidarity was not limited to forces who supported socialism, since the basic demands of the anti-apartheid movement were still the uncompleted tasks of independence and the abolition of apartheid. As the war waged by South Africa through Renamo grew more devastating throughout the 1980s, solidarity for Mozambique was increasingly based on defending the country against this inhumane and unjustified assault. As Mozambique reached out, particularly after Frelimo leaders identified the need to seek increased Western support in 1982 and 1983, the country attracted the sympathy of many forces on humanitarian grounds. This actually included forces that were indifferent to socialist goals, or in some cases hostile to them.

(4) For whatever complex of reasons -- the war, internal weaknesses, the world political situation -- the attempt to build socialism was worn down and replaced by the struggle to survive. Now the Mozambican state is in many ways no different from other African states in crisis -- from the point of view of results for the people, it has failed. And the measures it is forced into in

an attempt to survive and recover are the IMF/World Bank adjustment measures which may save part of the economy but show little future and sacrifice the goals of attacking inequality and building a just society. The Mozambican people and its leadership do not deserve condemnation for this: the multiple assaults to which they have been subjected are enormous, and the capacity for survival deserves respect. But like other African countries, and indeed like the rest of the world, Mozambique does not show a path forward for a prosperous just society people of good will should support, whether it be called socialist or something else. Like everyone else, the Frelimo leadership is groping for ways to adjust to the new situation, and debating how much of earlier goals can be maintained.

(5) Does that mean, then, that the time for solidarity is over? I think not. The Mozambican people deserve not only respect but also concrete support in recovering from the terrible price they have paid during the years apartheid was dying. In the U.S. there is a special responsibility given the way in which the Reagan administration's constructive engagement and the actions of right-wing groups gave indirect and direct support to South Africa and Renamo.

(6) Does that solidarity mean that progressive people overseas should support any and all political steps or socio-economic policies of a Frelimo government? Not at all (and it never should have). Critical support is still solidarity. It means that solidarity groups should defend Mozambique's right to independence, to immunity from aggression and to support in recovery. But the involvement in specific projects or support for specific policies must be judged in specific terms. Some projects will deserve support, others not. Sometimes one may be able to work with the government, sometimes not. As the diversity of opinion within the Frelimo government becomes increasingly clear, and the multi-party option opens up, there will be no simple guide to how solidarity should work. Even more so should a Nicaragua-type scenario be played out over the next year.

(7) Finally, solidarity should not be contingent on the existence of a government or a movement that embodies ideals (of socialism or justice defined in more general terms) that we support. The people deserve solidarity. How to implement that may be increasingly complex, but no less urgent than in previous periods.

-- Bill Minter