

Now the Germans are leaving Mozambicans out in the cold

MAPUTO.

MOZAMBICANS once queued up for jobs in the German Democratic Republic factories which brought millions of dollars of hard currency to their government.

Young Mozambicans welcomed jobs as a chance to see a bit of the world, learn a trade and buy stereo equipment and other European consumer goods.

But nowadays no one visits the patch of waste ground in Maputo where Mozambican labour ministry officials used to read out the names of the lucky few chosen to fly to East Berlin

By Iain Christie

and begin four-year stints as migrant labourers.

The deal between the GDR and Mozambique is just one casualty of the political changes which have swept Europe in recent months.

East Berlin has stopped recruiting Mozambican workers, and there are rumblings of apprehension and discontent among the 15 500 who are still in Europe. They say post-communist Germany is now a breeding-ground for racism.

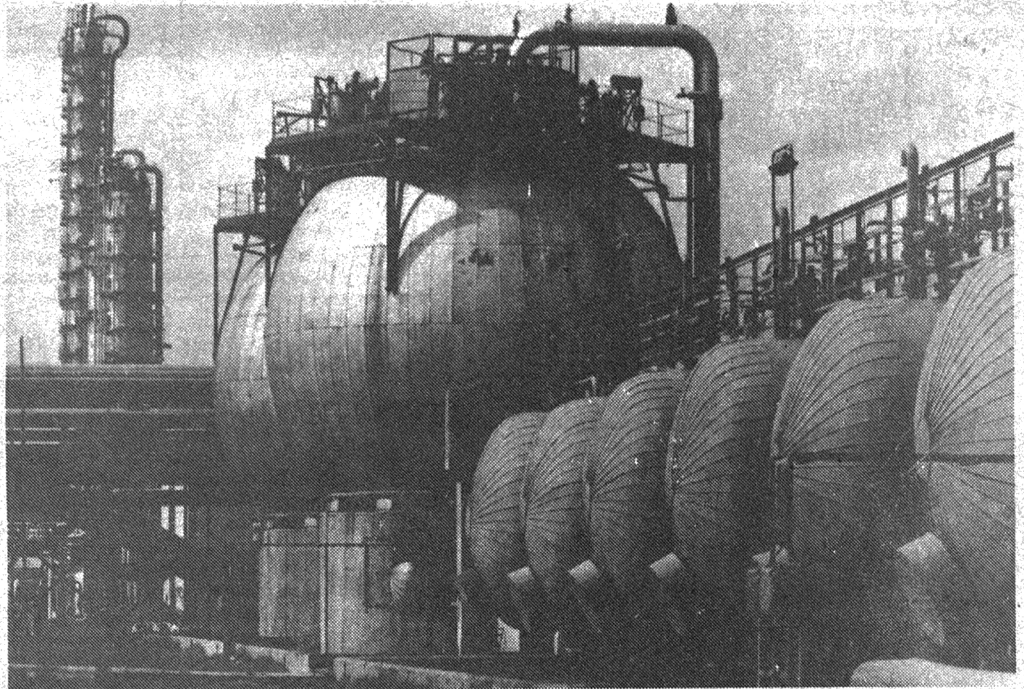
"We Mozambicans here in the GDR are having a hard time . . . We are afraid of the capitalism that is being introduced here," wrote 19-year-old factory apprentice Cde Paulino Gulamundine in a letter to the Mozambican news magazine Tempo.

Cde Gulamundine's letter is typical of complaints being aired in the Maputo Press by Mozambican "guest-workers" in the GDR who claim that racism has surfaced along with the rebirth of capitalism.

It is a far cry from the days when the then Marxist governments of the two countries were the closest of allies.

In 1979, when the labour agreement was signed, Mozambique was trying to win admission to Comecon, the communist trading bloc.

The GDR was almost alone in supporting Mozambique's application, against strong resistance from Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.



THE huge petro-chemical plant in Frankfurton-Oder, in the German Democratic Republic . . . migrant are workers no longer welcome.

The situation now is dramatically different.

In May this year, frightened Mozambicans wrote home to say that thousands of Germans had staged two demonstrations in the commercial centre of East Berlin, protesting against the presence of Mozambican and other foreign workers in the GDR.

Cde Paulino Gulamundine says he was threatened with a knife by three German youths who abused him because of his race while he was travelling in a bus in the town of Walzwerk.

He says he fled from the bus after a policeman on board refused to help him, saying the youths were "only playing".

Other attacks were described at a news conference here in May by Cde Pedro Taimo, the Mozambican labour ministry's delegate in East Berlin.

Among other incidents, he said there are attacks on dormitories housing Mozambican workers in Cottbus and East Berlin in which two residents

were wounded.

A GDR government delegation which came to Maputo at the end of May to discuss the migrant labour situation was apologetic about racist violence and abuse, and promised to step up security for Mozambican workers.

But delegation leader Cde Almuth Berger, the GDR's State Secretary for Foreign Citizens, brought only bad news for the Mozambican treasury.

"We are opening up a market economy and that implies the modification of some agreements," she said.

One of the first modifications is to the 1979 agreement governing the sending of Mozambican migrants to fill a labour shortage in the GDR.

The two sides agreed that the accord, valid until the end of this year, will not be extended but will remain in force as long as Mozambican workers are in the GDR under the existing deal.

No more Mozambicans will be

recruited this year, said Cde Berger.

Mozambicans in the GDR have 60 percent of their net pay deducted and sent home to Mozambique in their currency. On their return they receive the equivalent in hard currency.

In an interview last month, Mozambican Finance Minister Cde Abdul Maguid Osman spelled out what the changes will mean if the present trend continues — a Mozambican treasury loss of about US\$16 million a year in wage remittances from the GDR.

That is a blow to an economy staggering under the burden of a national debt officially estimated since the end of 1988 at US\$4.2 billion.

It is also a blow to the young Mozambicans who would have been crowding that patch of waste ground outside the Maxaquene Football Stadium in Maputo.

They are now queueing up in a local job market which offers very few prospects of training and steady work for young men without skills. — Ziana-Reuter.