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MOZAMBIQUE

Through rose tinted glasses

Whatever the *Rand Daily Mail*'s Benjamin Pogrund may say about Mozambique, you *do* have to be a Marxist to be sympathetic to the economic and social depredations of the Frelimo government of that country.

In the eight years of its rule, Frelimo has turned what was once a viable economy into a land of starving and persecuted wretchedness. It, to use Pogrund's words, begs the world for food. In addition, it arbitrarily executes people in public for going about their business as traders, and forces others into labour camps.

As Pogrund himself points out in a tendentious series in the *RDM* this week, the only progress is a reduction in infant mortality, a marginal increase in literacy and a substantial rise in the provision of latrines. Not even this is a result of pragmatic Marxism, but of foreign aid.

It is not open to argument, as Pogrund claims, "whether Marxism is helping or hindering" the country. It is, beyond a shadow of doubt, the root cause of everything that has happened there during these past eight years of Frelimo's hegemony.

He argues that it is the drought and a hangover from Portuguese colonial times that has spurred Frelimo of necessity into the achievement of collectivist degradation. That is patent nonsense. The first point, the drought, is a phenomenon of the last few years. Had the economy not been ruined before then by Marxists, the country would most likely have been able to cope with a natural disaster even of this proportion.

The colonial "burden" he describes as "a society which had been largely geared to meeting the needs of 250 000 settlers and the requirements of metropolitan Portugal, is now having to serve 12,6m people . . ." How, in that case, did so many millions live and prosper (relatively speaking) under colonial rule?

The Portuguese may not have been the most gentle or far-sighted of colonists. But they departed leaving a land that could at least feed itself and had surplus production to export (though under imperial preference). It was a land in which there was at least a semblance of personal freedom and justice as we know it in the West. Today, not even the socialist idea of freedom — freedom from basic want — applies to any significant degree.

The "collapse of the trading economy" after the flight of the whites was a result of Marxism. What store owner is going to wait patiently in a climate of increasing violence knowing the state is, in any event, going to rob him of his asset?

"Frelimo is using Marxism as the tool for progress," Pogrund writes. Yet, apart from the increase in lavatories, there is no progress. His series of articles is a chronicle of shortages, food queues, high prices and even the failure of "a system of large state farms" to which labour is coerced

The peasants, he says, are "freed of the arbitrary assaults of the past." That does not tie in with his tale of mob trials of "black marketeers," executed for supplying no more than basic human needs, and the forced movements of citizens that makes the application of our own Group Areas Act look tame.

You cannot deplore the forced removal of squatters in the Cape and justify forced agricultural labour in Mozambique and the public hanging of small traders for making a profit.

This is the famous "rise in the provision of latrines" story.