From Chibalo to the Liberation of South Africa

From **chibalo**, the characteristic form of forced labour of Portuguese colonialism to problems of the socialisation of production in a rural producers' collective in Nampula Province. From a study of UNITA's Jonas Savimbi as a vehicle of counter-insurgency in angola and in the sub-continent to the **Declaration for Economic Liberation** of the independent states of Southern Africa. In this second issue of **Mozambican Studies** through a disparate set of articles, we try to confront aspects of what we see as a principal task of a journal of social science for this country: how to analyse the workings of colonial-capitalism, not as any indulgence in a dead past but in the service of the transformation of society by the Mozambican revolution? And not only within Mozambique but in Southern Africa as a whole.

We return to aspects of one of the key themes we posed for ourselves for a study of the colonial political-economy: which specific forms of labour exploitation were enforced by Portuguese colonial-capitalism: with what impact on class formation and on class struggle; and, by implication, with what significance for a strategy of social and economic reconstruction?

The system imposed on Mozambique was without doubt a capitalist system, though a capitalism of a special type which imposed distinctive methods of exploitation on both workers and peasants. It is these forms that we explore, to show their distinctive character and also that, while they co-existed, they

were in a certain tension one with the other, and produced crises for the system which it never resolved.

The most characteristic form of labour exploitation in the former Portuguese colonies was, of course, **chibalo** or forced labour. The origins of **chibalo** go back initially to the Portuguese legal code of 1899, which followed the work of the commissions of the previous year headed by Antonio Enes then 'Comissário Régio'. It was a labour code enforced in all the Portuguese colonies; revised periodically, as in 1928; applied with variations to the different colonies, as in the special 'Regulamentos' approved for Mozambique in 1930; and ostensible abolished in 1961, by when the system had left an indelible imprint on the economy, the society and its people.

This issue contains a series of interviews with the victims of the **chibalo** system. Here are accounts of the manhunt for **chibalo** labour which whole families and entire communities were organised to evade; of the experiences of rounded-up **chibalo** workers, some of them men now in their eighties; of how, as onerous as the provisions for six months forced labour out of every twelve, yet the law was exceeded and the period of labour forcibly prolonged. Yet although **chibalo** was perhaps the ultimate and most extreme form of bonded labour, and the workers were rightless and unorganised, yet they nonetheless found the means and the courage to struggle against **chibalo,** even, as the interviews by Alpheus Manghezi show, to stage strikes.

Colonial Mozambique's capital city Lourenço Marques, now Maputo, was largely built on **chibalo** labour. The article by Jeanne Penvenne, who did her field work in Mozambique in 1977 and 1978, is an edited and abbreviated version, compiled by us, of her seminar paper 'Forced labour and the origin of an African working class: Lourenço Marques, 1870-1962'. It shows how the use of **chibalo** labour affected the structure of the urban working class; how the system was used to keep that class marginal and powerlessness, for a group of **chibalos**, or 'sub-workers' was created and used to undercut the demands of other sectors of the working class. This was the importance of **chibalo** as an instrument of both state and private capital. It guaranteed the state virtually free labour for public works; it supplied private employers, from the construction industry to the plantations and settler farms, with guaranteed, tied supplies of labour at absolutely minimal

wage levels. When volunteer labour for public works was not forthcoming, men were pressed into work by the administration; when employers could not maintain their labour force at the wage levels offered, the apparatus of law and state ensured that men not only filfilled their contracts with employers but were presented again for further spells of labour in successive years. This was the building of colonial-capitalism on the cheap, and **chibalo** labour must be analysed as a system of labour use which Portuguese state and capital resorted to not out of strength but out of weakness. Settler farms in the south; plantations in the centre; industry in the cities could not compete with the wages paid in South Africa's mining industry, even in the years when these were pitilessly low. **Chibalo**, then, was the system of labour enforced by a state and an economy unable to compete in the regional, Southern African labour market.

This takes us back to the connections between **chibalo** and the use of migrant labour which, as we showed in our first issue, was the dominant form of labour use not only in Mozambique but in all Southern Africa. Migrant labour, as we know, is labour forced to oscillate between domestic agricultural production within the peasant economy and between recurrent periods of wage work. In fact, **chibalo** labour could also be categorised as migrant, for men were conscripted for labour far from their homes. But at one and the same time as **chibalo** labour had to migrate necessarily to supply the principal labour needs of the various sectors of the economy, a great part of Mozambican labour migrated out of the country precisely to escape **chibalo**. We have previously discussed the sale of migrant, contract labour by the colonial state to South Africa. As the article by Adams, Davies and Head in this issue shows, Mozambican migrants also worked in te economy of colonial Rhodesia. This labour came chiefly from Manica, Sofala, Tete and Zambesia, and the article shows how this flow resulted from a competitive struggle for labour between the plantations of central Mozambique and Rhodesian mines and agriculture.

Towards the latter part of the colonial period, the colonial state enacted various measures to reduce the flow of workers from Mozambique to Rhodesia. But by then changes within the Rhodesian economy — of increasing mechanisation and thus lower labour requirements — resulted in legislative measures to prohibit 'foreign' African workers from employment.

There was then a displacement of Mozambicans from the Rhodesian economy — as there was of Mozambican labour from South Africa's mines after 1975. By then large numbers of peasant producers had been made critically dependent on cash wages. So that, as this article suggests, the crisis of the colonial economy left independent Mozambique with pressing under- and unemployment problems not only in the three southern provinces but also in the central ones.

Colonial capitalism, then, prospered on cheap and forced labour. but it also prospered on the production of cheap commodities, and it instituted rigorous forms of exploitation of peasant production in order to guarantee these. **Chibalo** law conscripted labour by assuming that all African peasant farmers were idle and needed, therefore, the 'moral' obligation to work. Yet simultaneously the colonial state imposed forced agricultural production on this same peasantry. Unlike the processes of the installation of capitalism in Europe, this was not a peasantry expropriated from the land and converted into 'free' workers, 'free' to sell their labour power to capital. Rather colonial capitalism ensured a certain reproduction of peasant production for tw reasons: firstly, to transfer part of capital's costs of the reproduction of the migrant, or **chibalo** worker and his family to the peasant household, and secondly, to coerce the peasantry into the production of cheap food and raw materials. The same peasantry which had to furnish **chibalo** labour was forced to produce stipulated quotas of cotton, rice and other crops. It is clear that this double burden of exploitation, which extracted both cheap labour and cheap commodities from the same worker-peasants, had, in its nature, to set critical limits on peasant agricultural production and on labour efficiency. The colonial system could in fact never resolve this tension between its double requirements. It is also clear that under this system Mozambique's peasantry laboured under a particularly onerous oppression. During the latter years of the colonial period, the peasant sector not only grew its own food, laboured for the plantations and settler agriculture and for the economies of South Africa and Rhodesia, but it additionally provided about 15 per cent of the total marketed production for internal consumption and for export. Here, of course, should be explored for once and for all the myth of the traditional, subsistence African peasantry.

Cotton was the principal forced crop, for it was the raw material needed for the rapidly growing textile industry in Portugal,

and it was during the 1940s that the Portuguese bourgeoisie, supported by Salazar's New State, enforced forced cotton growing on the peasantry. This is the background to the article on the co-operative of Netia, whose peasant families took over an abandoned settler farm, announced **'Já não queremos ser explorados'** (We don't want to be exploited anymore) and began, slowly and painfully, to build a co-operative as a revolutionary new form of production organisation.

This is to make the point that it is through the organisation of collective forms of production that the peasantry must begin to build the means by which it can begin to direct its own history. The Eripele collective shambas are examples of peasants deeply engaged in the process of building collective production; they make plans for the expansion of collective fields; they emphasise their own responsibility and self-reliance; they know from their experience how the economic results of co-operative production are inextricably linked to political mobilisation. For the co-operative is not a firm which hires and fires wage labour to fit its production schedules; co-operative members voluntarily determine their own work schedules, and if they are not directly involved both in the planning of production and in co-operative production itself, the economic results of the co-operative will never be good, no matter how skilful the technical planning at the level of the state.

The article on the Netia co-operative is a small part of the research material generated by field studies conducted by the Centro de Estudos Africanos in Nampula Province in 1979 and in Zambezia Province in 1980 into the character of peasant agriculture and problems of the transformation of family production into co-operative production. Why this concern with peasant agriculture, and the case that this kind of research makes for detailed studies not only of the rural economy in general, but of the family household, and the co-operative, as production units to which principles of economic calculus must be applied: who produces? with what results? at what cost? for which measure of surplus?

It needs to be said of these studies that the intention is not to idealise peasant agriculture, to advocate some populist archaic form of rural socialism; on the contrary, the intention is to study and analyse peasant agriculture so as to transform it. For without the transforming of peasant agriculture, and its

low productivity of land and labour, there can be no improvement in the basic material conditions of the rural masses.

But the strategy for the co-operativisation of the countryside should not be stated at the level merely of the raising of productivity, as though production and politics are separate. FRELIMO's strategy of rural transformation gives priority not merely to raised production but to the development of new forms of production organisation: the communal village with its base in collective production, and the party and mass organisations which link the peasants and workers as the class base of the new society, and dynamise the process of transition. In the rural economy the struggle for political power by rural producers consists in learning to build socialism in practice in such a way that every producer takes part in the struggle. The new social system in Mozambique will emerge with the backing of specific producing classes, the working class together with the great mass of Mozambique's rural producers.

Mozambique's strategy, as she enters the development decade, is not only to transform Mozambican society but also to fight the battle for development on a far wider front, that of Southern Africa as a whole. The inclusion in this issue of **Southern Africa: Towards Economic Liberation,** the declaration of the government of the nine independent states of Southern Africa, speaks for itself. The colonial political economy was distorted not only by Portuguese colonialism but also by the subordination of the Mozambican economy, together with that of its neighbouring states, to South African capital. The nine states of the region are now committed to reducing their dependence on the apartheid economy, and to forging links for genuine regional integration.

This is an economic battle but a political one too. Witness the fact that it was the liberation of Zimbabwe which made possible this unprecedented regional offensive. It is because of the links between the economic and political struggle for the completion of the liberation of Southern Africa that Aquino de Bragança's article addresses itself to the complex problem of the nature of counter-insurgency in the sub-continent. Jonas Savimbi's UNITA is a declining force; it is already virtually impossible to separate UNITA from the South African armed forces, and all recent evidence points to the fact that the strategy for the destabilisation of MPLA-led Angola is decided not

in any of the pockets of southern Angola which have hosted UNITA supporters, but in Pretoria. That is precisely the issue we wish to explore: what is the nature of the enemy in this case? Whose forces does Savimbi really serve now and whose has he served in the past? How to reconcile his claims to represent a national liberation struggle, admittedly regionalist, parochial, tribal and reactionary but claiming certain evidence of having some local following, at least in the past: how to reconcile this role with the role of Savimbi, here graphically documented by Aquino de Bragança, as agent?

Imperialism uses those forces which can be rendered more effective, more powerful, through outside instrumentation ; in other words, the function of agent and political ally of imperialism need to overlap. This is the importance of the Savimbi case, and what is arresting in this case is the way in which, once he could do no more for counter-insurgency mounted by PIDE, he was so readily adopted by South African counter-insurgency.

A.B. and R.F.