

Report On A Trip To Africa - 1978

by George M. Houser

The most recent of my trips to Africa covered about five and a half weeks, from August 24th to October 1st. I spent five days in Geneva, Switzerland enroute partly to attend some of the sessions of an NGO conference against apartheid and partly to talk with organizational representatives in Geneva. But the bulk of the trip was spent in four countries: Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana and Mozambique. I talked with scores of people, many of whom I have known over a period of time, such as representatives of liberation movements, governmental leaders, UN personnel, etc. The purpose of the trip was to get updated information on developments, particularly in southern Africa, and also to discuss projects which the Africa Fund and the ACOA could support.

I kept careful notes on the trip through the use of a tape recorder. I have more than 60 pages of typewritten notes. Obviously, therefore, in this report I can only deal with a few highlights. I shall concentrate primarily on the situation in Zimbabwe, and developments in Mozambique. To begin with let me give a few summary paragraphs about other countries.

TANZANIA

I was in Dar es Salaam for only six days. This is certainly one of the most fascinating and appealing areas in Africa. Dar es Salaam and Tanzania were never Europeanized as a whole to the extent that other countries in East and southern Africa were. The appeal of the country comes from its African atmosphere with a dash of Indian culture, and the tropical beauty of the capital city along the Indian Ocean. But its appeal also comes from Julius Nyerere who has been president ever since Tanzania became independent in 1961. Tanzania is a poor country trying to establish itself as socialist, and maintaining its independence from contending big powers.

There is an air of freedom and uniqueness in Tanzania which is refreshing. For example, earlier this year a student protest led to the temporary closing of the University of Dar es Salaam. But when it was reopened, President Nyerere spent four hours in the auditorium of the University dealing directly with the questions and the challenges the students wished to raise with him. Not many heads of state anywhere would do this.

At least 90% of the people depend on farming. 94% of the population of 17 million, live in rural areas. 70% of the total export earnings come from agriculture. Tanzania is the number one exporter of sisal and number two for cashews. I was able to spend an hour or so with John Malecela, now the Minister of Agriculture, formerly the Foreign Minister and before that the Tanzanian Ambassador to the UN. He feels that progress is being made in agriculture in Tanzania. They are now trying to develop their own industries with eight new cashew factories being constructed around the country.

Within the last few years an unprecedentedly large compulsory move of peasants from isolated homesteads into villages was carried out in Tanzania. About 10 million peasants were so moved. Although it was compulsory, it was virtually without violence. The reason for the move was to facilitate services to the majority of the people who live in rural areas. It was almost impossible to have an effective government program of education, health service, transportation and communication, etc. with the people scattered in isolated homesteads. Although the new villagization program, (with as many as 8 or 9 thousand new villages having been created within a short period of time) is in its initial stages, it seems to be making good progress.

Tanzania is no longer the prime center for liberation movements it was a few years ago, although the Patriotic Front (ZAPU & ZANU), SWAPO, the ANC and the PAC of South Africa all have offices in Dar es Salaam. Also the headquarters of the OAU Liberation Committee is still there. Tanzania is one of the frontline states and Nyerere is the chairman of the front line presidents. The main headquarters of the liberation movements are now farther south in Zambia, Angola, and Mozambique.

ZAMBIA

Zambia has a critical place in relation to the southern Africa struggle. ZAPU, headed by Joshua Nkomo, has its main headquarters in Lusaka. SWAPO has its central office in Lusaka, although Angola is of crucial importance to the Namibia struggle with perhaps 30 thousand Namibia refugees there. Also Lusaka is locale for the Namibia Institute, (an educational program training Namibians for leadership in an independent country) sponsored by the UN. Zambia has probably suffered more from the Zimbabwe struggle than any other African state with perhaps the exception of Mozambique. The closure of the border with Rhodesia for so many years has had a terrible effect on the economy of Zambia at a time when the price of copper, Zambia's main export is at a very low rate. Zambia is confronted with a real economic crisis and this has a decided effect on the political fortunes and popularity of Kenneth Kaunda, who has been president ever since independence in 1964. Opposition candidates for the presidency have been sidetracked, but there is a great deal of criticism of Kaunda growing out of the economic crisis and based partly on the argument that Zambia is doing too much to help the Zimbabwe movement. If other leadership was to supplant Kaunda the probability is that Zambia would play a much less dynamic role in relation to the struggle for independence in Zimbabwe.

The African National Congress of South Africa has its main headquarters in Lusaka.

BOTSWANA

In Botswana, and particularly in the capital city of Gaborone, one feels the presence of South Africa in a very real sense. The economy of Botswana is tied to South Africa. Gaborone is only about a dozen miles away from the border of the Transvaal. South African goods fill the stores. There are hundreds of political refugees from South Africa, many of them students who have left South Africa since the student uprising of June 1976. In addition there are thousands of Namibia refugees and even more Zimbabweans (about 12,000) located in three large refugee camps.

There is a great deal of factionalism among the student political refugees from South Africa. The Botswana Refugee Council, sponsored by five agencies: The Botswana Christian Council, The International University Exchange Fund, The Red Cross, The Lutheran World Federation and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, gives a minimum amount each month to the registered refugees. At the present time there are 40 to 100 political refugees coming from South Africa each month. There perhaps are a couple of thousand present in the country now. They are paid at a rate of 30 Pula (Pula is about \$1.40) for the head of the family, the spouse 20 Pula, and 6 Pula for each child.

ZIMBABWE

I concentrated a great deal of my time on the struggle for majority rule and independence in Zimbabwe. Critical events were taking place while I was in Africa on this trip. I was able to visit the headquarters of both movements composing the Patriotic Front- ZAPU in Zambia and ZANU in Mozambique. Also I was able to talk with the top leadership of both movements including Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe. Let me give in summary form some impressions:

I was deeply impressed by the scope and size of the operations of both of these movements. The headquarters of ZAPU in Lusaka is called Zimbabwe House. This used to be just one house where leaders and other members of the movement lived. But now it is a much expanded area with a wall around a large compound, a network of buildings, a gate guarded by ZAPU troops because obviously security is always a problem, and literally hundreds of people engaged in necessary tasks. The dominant impression at this headquarters is not a military one. The real military headquarters is elsewhere. But here the work with refugees, medical work, the educational work, women's work, youth work are headquartered. One has the feeling at ZAPU headquarters one is not dealing with a small liberation movement struggling for survival but with a movement of size and discipline and a political following that is struggling to give leadership in the effort to establish majority rule in Zimbabwe. One can only liken the atmosphere here and at the Maputo headquarters of ZANU to that at the headquarters of the PAIGC, Frelimo, and the MPLA on the eve of their taking of power in their respective countries.

There are approximately 45 thousand refugees in Zambia. A year ago there were less than half that number. So the refugees are pouring in at a significant rate each day and week.

I visited two refugee camps within 30 miles or so of Lusaka. One was a camp for mothers with small infants. There were 113 mothers and 115 infants because of two sets of twins. Assistance is given through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The women do a great deal of their own work including growing some of their own vegetables in well kept gardens. The buildings there are crowded with as many as five women and babies in a room. But soon, I was told they would be moved to another camp which would be less congested. They will use part of this present camp for mothers and infants for a clerical training center for some of the young people who have come to Zambia in order to volunteer their services to the movement.

I was then taken by Joshua Nkomo to the girls VC (victory camp). This was a companion camp to the one where boys are staying only a few kilometers distance that was bombed by the Rhodesian military on October 19. There were about six thousand young women in the camp I visited. There were more young men in the companion camp which unfortunately my schedule didn't allow me to visit. These were not military camps. Many of the young people there are orphaned or separated from their families because of the war situation inside Rhodesia. They are engaged in educational programs with classes held in the shade of the trees. Some housing is being constructed with the help of the United Nations Development Program coming from member states of the United Nations. Many of the refugees are living in tents yet. I have never been in a place with as much spontaneous singing with as obviously a high morale as I saw here. The cost in food, clothing, medicine, etc. runs into the millions of dollars a year. It would be very good for some of the church people who protested against the \$85,000 contribution which the Program to Combat Racism of the World Council of Churches gave for Zimbabwe refugees to see these camps.

I was not able to visit the refugee camps in Mozambique because there were such intensive bombings taking place almost daily that the Mozambique military authorities said it would be unsafe in spite of the fact that my ZANU friends had paved a way for me to go. Final permission must come from the Mozambique military. There are more refugees in Mozambique than there are in Zambia. I was told by the representatives of the UNHCR that they numbered at least 75,000 in five camps. The largest of the camps is Doerol now with some 30,000 refugees divided into seven different villages in one area. Many of the thousands who are there are among those who escaped with their lives after the Rhodesian forces attacked the Nyazonia refugee camp where more than 600 were killed two years ago.

Many of these refugees are not those who have fled the country in order to escape the ravages of war. They have come to Mozambique or Zambia because they wish to be trained to do their part either in the struggle or in building an independent Zimbabwe. Only a small portion of them can be given military training. The ZANU leadership estimated they had at least a hundred thousand young men and women who wished to have military training. However, they are only able to train about 5,000 every three months. In the mean time they, together with international agencies, have the problem of providing education, health care, and training for creative roles hopefully to be open to them soon in a free Zimbabwe.

Let me mention four incidents, of many others which come to mind, that tell something of the story.

At a refugee camp I met a young man who was identified as a leader in the educational program. As I talked with him I discovered that he came from one of the schools virtually all of whose students and faculty members had crossed the border into Botswana I remember the incident as it was told in the Rhodesian Press. It said that the 400 students and faculty had been kidnapped by the ZAPU forces. The teacher told me that was typical of Rhodesian propaganda.

The students and the faculty at this school, a missionary-related one, had planned their own escape from Rhodesia, had walked across the border into Botswana, later to be transported to Zambia in order to do their part in the building of a free Zimbabwe.

I visited the home of Joshua Kkomo and was introduced to a five-year old lad. It was explained to me that a few months earlier he had been found wandering by himself on the Botswana side but near the border of Zimbabwe. The Botswana police had picked him up. He was not able to give his name or any information about his parents or where he came from. All he said was "I am walking to Geneva to join Nkomo". Joshua Nkomo told me "he has arrived in Geneva". He is now living in Nkomo's home in Lusaka.

When I was in Maputo at ZANU headquarters I met an old friend of mine who had taught in the US. He was spending at least a year while on sabbatical from his teaching post working on whatever he was asked to do with ZANU. He said to me in private conversation "George, I had no idea of the size and the strength of the movement before I came here". Since he was one of the founding members of the movement back in 1963 but had been in the US for quite a few years, this was a comment to make note of.

I was introduced by one of my ZANU friends to six young Zimbabweans all of whom had been wounded in the struggle. They had all lost a leg or part of a leg. Five of them had suffered from land mine explosions and the sixth from machine gun fire. They were in the Maputo area to be fitted for artificial limbs, a program sponsored by the International Red Cross. I was told that it cost about \$500 for each artificial limb. There were at least a hundred more waiting to be fitted at that time.

I was greatly impressed by the authority of the leadership of the movements and by the discipline within the organizations. There was a great sense of unity within the organizations and a commitment which one could feel. Again I was reminded of my contacts over the years with the movements in Portuguese territories, particularly Frelimo and the PAIGC.

What about the relationship between ZAPU and ZANU within the Patriotic Front? It is impossible within a short space to deal with this in any fundamental way. There are strains and stresses without doubt. Some of the tensions which caused ZANU to split from ZAPU fifteen years ago are still present. Yet there is a new situation at the present time. The movements need one another. Neither one of them wishes to be responsible for destroying the Patriotic Front. They have a certain degree of coordination, but their contacts are limited. It came to public attention while I was on the trip to Africa that Nkomo had carried on secret discussions with Ian Smith at the State House in Lusaka without the knowledge of Mugabe and without the knowledge of the front line presidents with the exception of Kaunda. This was an embarrassing revelation. It can be said that the secret discussions came to naught at least in part because Nkomo refused to engage in further discussions without Mugabe being present. The Central Committee of ZANU turned down the idea of these negotiations. But the fact that such discussions had been held did not tend to give the movements a great deal of confidence in one another. The front line presidents and the OAU are doing all they can to strengthen the Patriotic Front. It is hoped that these efforts will be successful.

MOZAMBIQUE

I was in Mozambique about two and a half weeks. A considerable amount of this time was spent on the Zimbabwe situation. Therefore I was not able to concentrate as much on developments in Mozambique as I would have liked. I was last in Mozambique in 1975 only a few months after independence. So, I was very interested to see what changes would impress me. My general impression that Mozambique is one of the most exciting countries in Africa was not dimmed by this brief visit.

A very superficial observation, but one which nevertheless cannot be overlooked, is the change of names. Three years ago Maputo was Lourenco Marques. The names of very many other key cities have been changed from Portuguese heroes of the colonial past to Mozambiquan names and heroes. The names of streets in Maputo are now largely changed. African leaders of the present and the past are honored such as Julius Nyerere, Samora Machel, Kenneth Kaunda, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, and Patrice Lumumba. Also, names of socialist and Marxist figures are prominent such as Lenin, Marx, Engels, Mao, etc.

An indelible impression is a lack of racism in Mozambique. People of Portuguese descent who have stayed and are living and working there are not referred to as Portuguese but as Mozambiquans. It is a racially mixed society and there is no apparent sign of racial tensions. This impression is bolstered talking with white or black Americans there or by discussions with people of Portuguese background, or by black and colored Mozambiquans. I accept Janet Mondlane's statement to me: "this is probably the least racist society in the world".

Three years is not a very long time. Therefore many experiments are being tried which were started only three years ago. Already, in some cases, changes are occurring. One such is in the organization of what were called Grupo Dinamizadores (dynamizing groups). The plan of Frelino right after independence was to have these groups spring up both in neighborhoods based on geographical proximity and in working situations - the schools, the factory, the farm. Apparently, it was discovered that the level of commitment and of education was not sufficient to make them function properly. So it has been decided recently that rather than continuing to organize these groups, that emphasis should be on active units of Frelimo, the political movement which brought independence and which is guiding the destinies of the country at the present time. Party cells are being set up. Elections to membership in the party were being held at the time I was there. Such a meeting for example was being held at one of the state farms I visited. Virtually all of the workers came together (about 1,500) to spend several hours in open discussion and debate. Out of this meeting were to be chosen those who would be honored by party membership and a leadership role in decision-making in this particular place of work. The same process had gone on at the cashew factory I visited. Later the same thing would be done in the rural areas and in the communal villages. The Frelimo leaders are pragmatic. This will have to be tried for awhile and see how it works.

Economic circumstances are difficult in Mozambique. The transition from a colonial dominated economy to one under the control of the people themselves is not easy. There is a great deal of dependence yet on trade with South Africa for example. The Mozambiquan economy has been hurt by the closure of the border with Rhodesia. There are shortages of items which we take for granted whether it be toilet paper or aspirin tablets. But no one is starving. The economy essentially is agricultural. And this sector of economic development is given priority.

I was able to visit one state farm some distance north of Maputo near a place called Umbeluzi. The town is named after the river which flows from Swaziland. The state farm takes its general name from the river. The set-up consists of one experimental farm which was inherited from the Portuguese colonial era and six farming blocks. The whole area is perhaps 4,000 acres with some 1,500 farm laborers. Livestock is raised and grazed on half of this area. Large sections are given over to citrus trees. There are something like fifty state farms in Maputo province. The workers on the farm are paid a monthly wage by the government. The state farms were formerly private commercial farms owned mostly by Portuguese who fled after independence. It is estimated over 4,000 such farms were abandoned.

Major attention is also given in the Frelimo plan to the organization of communal villages. Again this development is new. The traditional way of living for a vast majority of peasants was in separate homesteads, not unlike Tanzania. Frelimo has not wanted to force the move from these separate homesteads into villages. They say it is a process of education to show people that if they are living together they will be better able to develop their agricultural resources more efficiently; they will have better educational, health and transportation facilities. The system of communal villages worked well for Frelimo in their liberated area in Northern Mozambique during the struggle. I visited four communal villages. Their names were interesting - Patrice Lumumba, Marien Ngouabi, Julius Nyerere and the Third of February. Many places are named the Third of February because this is the date when Eduardo Mondlane was assassinated and it is revered in the history of the struggle for Mozambique.

The development of the villages are in their initial stages. There is communal land that the people work together. The proceeds from the sale of what is grown there is divided among the workers. In addition each family has a plot of ground to grow their own vegetables. There are schools, clinics, a cooperative store and other facilities.

Usually the pattern of the village is circular with the common facilities such as the school at the center. The huts in which the people live surround this, and on the periphery is the communal land. It is too early to make a judgement on how soundly the village program is developing. However, there is no question about the desirability of the idea. I was there too brief a time to make an evaluation, but I was greatly impressed by the planning and by the evidence of the growth of these villages within the last three years. I was told that there were some eighty in Gaza province and perhaps as many as 800 throughout the country.

Over the years through ACOA and the Africa Fund we have given what assistance we could to the health work of Frelimo. This started during the years of the liberation struggle when we were able to raise some funds to help build the first Frelimo hospital at Mtwara in southern Tanzania. After independence we continued with this help and over the last couple of years we have been able to send needed medical equipment such as spectrophometers, medicines, spare parts for boilers in the Maputo hospital, etc. So one of my major points of contact in Mozambique was in the Ministry of Health. I spent some time talking with Dr. Helder Martins the Minister of Health. I was able to visit the central Maputo hospital, one of the regional hospitals, a health center and some schools for children with learning disabilities also sponsored by the Ministry of Health.

As in so many other fields, the Mozambique government is developing its own philosophy of dealing with health problems. Strong emphasis is on preventative rather ^{than} curative care. The health posts and the health centers, which are the neighborhood headquarters for dealing with health problems, put a major emphasis on such things as diet, mosquito control, health education, etc. It was impossible for me to know in a short visit just how the ideas were implemented, but every effort has been made to carry them out.

The size of the central hospital was impressive. There are forty buildings in the hospital covering about forty acres. Hospital personnel number about 1,700 and there are just about the same number of patients. There are 60 to 80 operations daily in this hospital and on the average 50 babies delivered every day.

I took a look at the laundry facilities. Having hot water depends on two boilers there. Three to four tons of laundry is done every day. And yet they have antiquated boilers. We were called upon to give assistance a couple of years ago to supply spare parts for these boilers and were able to help out. Unfortunately just a short time ago one of the boilers burned out. So only one was working when I was there to supply the needs of the laundry.

The Ministry of Health through its top personnel, urged us to continue to do anything we could to help. They need microscopes, medicine, stethoscopes, surgical kits for doctors and trained nurses who must travel widely in the rural areas of the country to meet the vast health needs of the people.