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SOLOMON MAHLANGU FREEDOM COLLEGE (SOMAFCO), MAZIMBU, TANZANIA

"Our people in South Africa know that they hate apartheid. They are fighting against it. But after apartheid - what then? That is the question we are trying to answer here." These words from the Principal of SOMAFCO summed up the main lesson of the few days I spent at the College.

For years in Britain we had been raising money and material aid for "the ANC school". What I did not really appreciate until I went there was what kind of school this is, and how much more than a school. Mazimbu is now a community of 1,400 people, expected to rise to 2,000: it is not only a school with related projects, but very clearly part of a liberation movement working out the future. ✓

The 1982 - 3 SOMAFCO Report explains that the school was begun after the Soweto uprising of June 1976, when black South African students and schoolchildren rebelled against apartheid in general and particularly against the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in the already inferior Bantu Education system.

Police repression of the uprising was ruthless. Hundreds of young people and children were killed, hundreds more were arrested, tortured and imprisoned. Some of those arrested were no more than eight years old. Thousands fled from South Africa into neighbouring African countries, and many are still leaving. The exodus presented the ANC with responsibility for the welfare and education of these young people.

The ANC's response was to establish SOMAFCO. Solomon Mahlangu, after whom the College was named, was one of those who left South Africa after the 1976 uprising. He later returned as a member of Umkhonto We Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC, and was captured in action and executed by the apartheid regime.

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"Our people in South Africa know that they hate apartheid. They are fighting against it. But after apartheid - what then? That is the question we are trying to answer here." These words from the Principal of SOMAFCO sum up the most important lesson to be learnt at Mazimbu.

When, in 1978, a handful of ANC members began work on an abandoned sisal estate at Mazimbu, the only facilities were a few derelict buildings; the area had no water, electricity or roads. Today the community numbers 1,400 and is expected to rise to 2,000: more like a small town than most people's idea of a school. There ~~is nothing~~ are tarred roads, electric light, piped water and architect-built houses. Nothing is makeshift. The ANC has deliberately built for the future, intending, when it finally returns to South Africa, that Mazimbu should be returned to the Tanzanians as a fitting reminder of their generosity towards the liberation struggle.

Despite the high standard of the housing, the life is austere: food is sparse and the community battles constantly with shortages of essentials. Although it is moving in the direction of self-sufficiency, Mazimbu depends heavily on international solidarity: grants from the United Nations; buildings donated by the Swedish teachers' and students' unions; a hospital from the Dutch people; food and equipment from Italy; second-hand clothing from Scandinavia; a range of goods from Britain; and much more besides.

Everybody at Mazimbu works - teaching, learning, producing or organising - and the working day is followed by housework, adult education and more work. A number of projects have been established: a carpentry workshop (producing all the community's furniture), a leather workshop, motor repair shop, welding shop, photographic workshop and arts centre. A small modern garment factory produces goods for cash sale and community use, and a sewing workshop handles

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The Tanzanian government, fully appreciating the ANC's need, was quick to respond with the gift of a 250-acre stretch of land at Mazimbu, near Morogoro - an abandoned sisal plantation. In 1978 a small group of ANC members began work on the site, which at the time had no facilities except a few abandoned and derelict buildings. The area was malaria-prone, and had no water, electricity or roads. x

Today, the site has been transformed. Water is piped from Morogoro, and there are tarred roads and electric light. I suppose I had naïvely expected to find a school building surrounded by a few teachers' houses. What I found was more like a small town than my idea of a rural boarding school.

The second surprise was to find that there is nothing makeshift or temporary about Mazimbu. The ANC debated in the early stages whether to use prefabs or put up proper buildings, and decided in favour of the latter. It wanted something which would not deteriorate or look shoddy after a few years; something which when the ANC returns to South Africa can be handed back to the Tanzanians as a going concern and a fitting reminder of the Tanzanian government's generous support for the liberation struggle. A Danish architect who had been working in Tanzania designed the original buildings, and the work was subsequently taken over by the present ANC architect.

Consequently, Mazimbu is not only providing housing and education for the ANC's young people; it is also a place of dignity and beauty and a foretaste of the transformation which will one day take place in the lives of the entire South African people.

Teachers and other workers are housed side by side, without distinctions. The housing is enviably solid, well built and well proportioned, with ample garden space. The furniture, which is made at Mazimbu, is

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day-to-day sewing work. The horticultural centre supplies fruit, vegetables and garden plants. A 4,500-acre farm nearby produces meat, eggs, sorghum, maize and sunflower. All the ANC workers, regardless of rank, receive food, housing, clothing and a small monthly allowance, and all elect representatives to the Works Council which runs the community. All the projects have a double function: as well as producing co-operatively, they are developing some of the technical and managerial skills, and the political orientation, which will be needed in the South Africa of the future.

Even within the narrower definition of education, Mazimbu has expanded far beyond the original secondary school. The bright, modern Children's Centre provides a creche and nursery school for 150 children from ten months to six years. This day care is necessary~~is~~ to enable parents to work, but many parents are also away on missions, in the army or studying. This separation, one of the inevitable sacrifices involved in the struggle, results in an outstanding socialisation of the children, for whom the ANC acts as an adoptive extended family.

The Primary School, housed in two of the old estate buildings, contains 200 children aged from six to sixteen. Despite cramped and difficult conditions, the children are disciplined and obviously enthusiastic about learning, and the teachers (both ANC and foreign volunteers) clearly dedicated to their work and producing excellent results.

The Freedom College proper, and the centre of the community, is the Secondary School, which now has 300 students housed in dormitories. The curriculum is carefully designed to counter the effects of the Bantu Education system, both in the technical quality of the ~~xxx~~ education given and in its political orientation. Bantu Education was designed by the apartheid regime

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to produce hewers of wood and drawers of water; the ANC is concerned to give an education appropriate ~~to~~ both to the present struggle and to the future of South Africa. SOMAFCO puts great emphasis on mathematics and the sciences, and on the development of societies and the history of the struggle. The students meet every evening for a résumé and discussion of the day's news as monitored from the radio. The College practises a number of sports, and has an active cultural group. Academic and non-academic achievements are valued alike, with the emphasis on co-operative effort, respect for others and anti-racism. Discipline problems, though they occur outside the classroom, are virtually non-existent in class, such is the students' eagerness to learn. Where necessary, discipline is dealt with by an elected body of students; corporal punishment is avoided - "because", say the students, "that is one of the things we are fighting against in Bantu Education." The College has to overcome more than the education disabilities and mental poisoning produced by Bantu Education, for the emotional traumas and bitter experiences of the struggle also leave their mark. A recent issue of the College magazine carried an article entitled "My Experiences in Detention", in which the author recounts his detention, torture and subsequent imprisonment on Robben Island. The result, for the College, is both a challenge and an incalculable asset, for these are students with a rare level of revolutionary understanding.

~~Supporters of liberation in South Africa have long been aware of the role of the ANC in uniting the people against apartheid. We have been able to follow the different aspects of the struggle: the coming-together of trade unions, students, women, church, neighbourhood and other groups; the development of the armed struggle and the role~~

Supporters of liberation in South Africa have long been aware of the ANC's role in uniting and leading the people's struggle against apartheid. What is being put into practice at Mazimbu is yet another aspect of that struggle.

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good-looking, solid and well designed.

Everybody at Mazimbu works - teaching, learning, producing or organising - and works very hard. The working day is from 7.30 am to 3.30 pm, and is followed by housework and for most people political meetings, adult education classes and more work.

Despite the high standard of the housing, life is austere: the houses have no hot water, food is basic and sparse, the clothing though of good quality is second-hand. The community battles constantly with shortages, not only of things which might be regarded as luxuries, but also of essentials such as toothbrushes and underwear. ✓

Mazimbu depends on international solidarity on many levels: grants from the United Nations; a teaching block funded by the Swedish teachers' union and another funded by Swedish students; a new, modern hospital given by the Dutch; food and equipment from Italy; clothing from Scandinavia; a whole range of equipment from pencils to mosquito nets painstakingly collected in Britain; and much more besides.

This support is indispensable, but Mazimbu is also moving in the direction of self-sufficiency. A number of projects have been set up on the main site. A carpentry workshop, using local wood, supplies all the woodwork and furniture needed by the community. A leather workshop produces footwear, watch straps, travel bags, briefcases and belts. The welding shop when I saw it was producing animal pens for the farm. Motor repairs are done in the motor workshop; the stores handle and distribute goods arriving from elsewhere; the sewing workshop does day-to-day sewing work. The photographic workshop produces photographs for community publications and external publicity, and also trains a stream of photographers. A modern garment factory employing about 40 people produces goods for cash sale outside and for community use. The electricity station is currently working on

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transferring the electrical supply from separate metering to overall control, so that more rational use can be made of sometimes erratic supplies.

All the workers, in whatever area ~~X~~ educational, administrative or productive - elect representatives to the Works Council and thus have a say in the running of the community. All the projects I saw combined different functions: as well as producing co-operatively to meet the community's needs, they also train workers in both production and organisation, and thus represent a move towards providing both the skills and the political orientation which will be needed in the South Africa of the future.

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The function of Mazimbu, educational and productive, thus goes far beyond what is normally suggested to us by the notion of "a school". Small wonder that the Director - who obviously loves his work - remarks ruefully, "I've always been in education, I love teaching, but now I'm really more like a Town Clerk." ~~X~~

Even returning to the narrower definition of its educational function, Mazimbu has expanded far beyond the bounds of the secondary school which was the original reason for establishing the community. One project which was very quickly developed was the crèche, and Mazimbu has now become the ANC's main centre for expectant mothers and mothers with babies. Unmarried mothers, and mothers whose husbands are away studying or on missions, are housed along with the other unmarried workers in their own "suburb". Here the houses, rather than being detached in their own unfenced gardens as elsewhere, are set in rows facing each other, with gardens in between the rows. People live here in extended "family" units, but the atmosphere is even more communal than in the rest of Mazimbu, and indeed a communal kitchen and dining hall are under construction. The children scamper happily through the gardens, safe from any traffic and confident and at ease with their large family of adults.

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* As well as the ANC community, Mazimbu also employs 600 local Tanzanians in construction work, on the farm and in the school kitchens. Links with the local community are strong, ranging from this provision of employment to participation in seminars at the new University of Morogoro.

This socialisation of the children is an outstanding feature of ~~the~~ life at Mazimbu. The freedom struggle unavoidably imposes many hardships and sacrifices on ANC members, and one of these is the separation of families. Mothers or fathers, sometimes both, may have to leave their children for long periods when they go away on missions or to study. In these circumstances the ANC acts as the family, and the care of the children is organised by the community. Even when the parents are not away, the pressure of work is such that child care has to be shared. While I was at Mazimbu a friend dropped in to see me at 11 o'clock one night, explaining that this was the **first** chance she had had that day: she had worked from 7.30 am to 3.30 pm, then gone on to teach an adult education class, then to an ANC women's meeting. "We never stop!" she said: "I don't even get time to spend with my kid." Such are the sacrifices which the situation demands of the activist. In other circumstances, the price paid by the child would be unacceptably high; but the child in fact was well adjusted, loved her mother, and also felt secure and happy with her "aunts" and "uncles".

Because everybody at Mazimbu^u works, day care of children also has to be organised. At ten months, children can start attending the day care centre, and they stay there until they graduate to the nursery school at the age of three.

The day care centre currently has about 45 children, divided into groups according to age. Since the centre began, the ANC has noted a marked improvement in child health, particularly in weight gain. The centre has a small qualified staff, and a number of mothers also work there. Here as elsewhere, the aim is not only to have people working, but also to teach the skills of motherhood and child care.

The nursery school has 96 children aged from three to six, divided into

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four units of 24 children. Each unit covers the whole age range, but is divided into two groups, one of 3-4-year-olds, the other of 5-6-year-olds. The two groups in each unit share a house, with an "academic room", art room, sleeping room and general activities room, as well as washing facilities and teachers' preparation area. There are three teachers for each unit. The houses are grouped round a central garden, with a sand-pit and play equipment. While I was there some of the older ANC students were working with the site architect to paint a series of huge, cheerful animal murals on the outside walls.

Everything in the day care centre and the nursery school is light, bright, cheerful, well designed and well built. For most of us in Britain, the idea of seeing our pre-school children in such surroundings seems like an impossible dream. But it has all been achieved against great odds, and with continuing difficulties. External funding has built the Children's Centre and supplies its basic running costs, but there is a constant need for more. The nursery school teachers mentioned toys, paint, crayons and glue as particular needs, while the day care centre^{staff} cited baby equipment, clothes and toys.

The primary school, started in 1980, now has about 200 students aged from six to sixteen, most of whom are the children of ANC members in exile. There are six grades, and a seventh is likely to be added soon. Building of the secondary school has had to take priority, and the primary school is still waiting for its new building. For the moment it is crammed into two of the old houses remaining from the sisal estate. Despite the cramped and difficult conditions, the children are disciplined and obviously enthusiastic about learning. When I visited, the youngest children were drawing pictures

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of the poultry unit which they had visited the previous day (they were obviously particularly impressed by the day-old chicks which had just arrived from Denmark). A slightly older group had just come in from morning exercises and were studying nutrition. One teacher was absent, so one of the higher classes was studying alone, quietly and with obvious concentration. Other classes were doing mathematics. The teachers, both ANC and overseas volunteers, were clearly dedicated to their work and were producing excellent results.

A mile or so from Mazimba, the ANC has a 4,500-acre farm. This comprises a piggery of about 450 pigs (formerly kept near Morogoro), a poultry unit (producing over 175,000 eggs per year), a herd of 60 cattle, and around 1,500 acres of crops, mainly maize, sorghum and sunflower. X There is a computer-controlled milling shed producing animal feed and maize meal for the community; Mazimbu is now self-sufficient in maize meal and some stock feeds. The sunflower seeds up to now have been produced for animal feed, but it is hoped within the next year or so to supply the community with cooking oil, which at present is very scarce.

The farm is complemented by a large horticultural centre on the main site supplying the community with fruit, vegetables, herbs and garden plants. As with all the other projects, the farm and horticultural centre have several functions; they exist not only to produce and to supply the community, but also to train a range of skilled workers and as a working example of co-operative enterprise.

The Freedom College proper, of course, is the secondary school, and whatever the diversity of the Mazimbu community, it is the College which is its centre and its reason for existing. There are at present about 300 students, housed

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in four dormitory blocks. Within the blocks, the students live together in groups of eight, each group sharing a communal day room and a bedroom, with a strip of garden behind and a large communal garden in the centre of the block. Some of the communal gardens are still undeveloped, but one in particular is already quite mature, with flowering shrubs, a giant chess set and a striking mural depicting the freedom struggle. Each block has a large dining hall with a stage.

To one side of the dormitory complex is an old building housing the tuckshop (the students receive the equivalent of about £5 per month each in pocket money) and the arts centre. Here a small group of artists, working in very cramped conditions and constantly short of materials, produce an impressive range of T-shirts and posters. One of the dormitory blocks also houses the news room, containing radios, tape recorders and a range of publications from around the world, including Anti-Apartheid News. X

The school itself already has several blocks of classrooms and offices, and an administrative block and laboratories are under construction. Work has begun on a library, which will house around 25,000 volumes and serve the whole community as well as the school. There are also plans for a "School Square": a roofed area with raked seats capable of accommodating the entire 2,000-strong community for special meetings and cultural performances.

The students explained their system of self-government. Each group of eight elects a commander, and the commanders' committee deals with day-to-day student affairs and shares with the staff in deciding on matters of policy and discipline. Disciplinary problems are dealt with by persuasion and discussion rather than punishment: corporal punishment is avoided "because that is one of the things we are fighting against in Bantu Education".

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The school curriculum, too, is designed to counter the effects of the Bantu Education system. There is great emphasis on mathematics and the sciences, which are neglected in South Africa, and an important place is given to the study of the development of societies and the history of the struggle; the Bantu Education system is combatted not only in the technical quality of the curriculum and teaching, but also in the orientation. Bantu Education was designed by the apartheid regime to produce hewers of wood and drawers of water. The ANC is concerned to give an education appropriate both to the present struggle and to the future of South Africa. Academic and non-academic achievement are valued alike, and the emphasis is on cooperative effort, respect for others, and anti-racism.

The students are of a wide range of ages and educational levels. In a third-year English class I spoke to one student who told me that he had never spoken English before coming to SOMAFCO - he was now perfectly fluent and well able to cope with English as the medium of instruction.

The Bantu Education system produces both educational disabilities and mental poisoning, and these have to be overcome. The emotional traumas and bitter experiences of the struggle within South Africa also leave their mark. It is not just that these students have been cut off from their families at what we should consider an early age. A recent issue of the school magazine carried an article entitled simply "My Experiences in Detention", in which the author recounts his detention, torture and subsequent imprisonment on Robben Island.

There are many problems, but there is also a very positive and determined attitude to the struggle. The atmosphere of the college is lively and enthusiastic, and as I sat in on classes I was struck by the students' obvious eagerness to learn. "I've forgotten what it's like to have

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discipline problems," said the school's one British teacher.

The majority of the staff are now South African, but there are still a few foreign volunteers, picked not only for their qualification but also for their attitude to the struggle. X

I attended a first-year History of the Struggle class which was studying the story of Makgana, who led the fight against the British, was imprisoned on Robben Island, and in 1820 was drowned while trying to escape. The students were obviously interested, and occasionally put in questions which were always carefully thought out and, though they sometimes led far afield, always elicited clear explanations (for instance of the reasons for the Napoleonic Wars in Europe). "And so you see," said the teacher in conclusion, "there is a very important lesson here. Makgana was not afraid to sacrifice everything for his people, and we must learn from this, because one day we too may be asked to sacrifice. Not yet, as far as you are concerned, because for the moment you have to study, but it may happen in the future, isn't it?"

The students have a long day, beginning at 6 am and ending at about 10 pm. Classes run from 8 am to 1 pm; the afternoon includes a rest period, "projects" (one group was working with the Geography teacher on constructing a weather centre) and sports - football, basketball, table tennis or running. A swimming pool is planned; chess is popular, and there is a very active cultural group. In the evening there is a two-hour study period followed at 9 pm by "The News", when two students who have monitored the day's radio news present the main items to the rest of the student body. This is followed by discussion and questions, and the meeting closes with the singing of freedom songs.

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Sixty kilometres from Mazimbu, at Dakawa, the ANC has another 7,500-acre stretch of land, also given by the Tanzanian government. At present it is a daunting prospect - a huge stretch of uncultivated bush, where for the most part ^{the} only signs of life come from the occasional itinerant Masai herdspeople with their cattle. The land is being used, however: with help from Noraid the ANC is building a vocational training centre, and it has set up a reception centre for personnel coming into the area. I spent 24 hours at the Ruth First camp, where about 90 young people were spending a few months preparing to enter SOMAFCO. X

As at SOMAFCO, the majority were male. The male students live in army-style tents, scrupulously clean and tidy, and classes are held under the trees. There are two houses with dormitories for the female students and the teachers, a common room for the teachers, and a dispensary which is used by the local people as well as the ANC. A large hall, partly walled and with a corrugated iron roof, provides shelter for evening meetings and for classes during the rainy season. The camp has a mobile workshop in a van, a communal kitchen where brigades of students take turns to do the cooking, a generator and pit latrines a couple of hundred yards away. Water is pumped from a well with an Italian pump. The camp is almost inaccessible during the rainy season - I had a glimpse of what this is like, since it rained unexpectedly during my stay. X

The students spend the morning on physical work - agriculture and construction - and the afternoons in classes, and as at SOMAFCO they gather together in the evening for The News. Both at SOMAFCO and at Dakawa I attended The News and was asked to talk about anti-apartheid work in Britain; the students' questions showed that they had a good grasp of the British political scene.

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At Dakawa, where many of the students were relatively recent arrivals, they expressed particular pleasure at the fact that people outside were interested in them. The whole camp at Dakawa ran like clockwork under the guidance of the co-ordinator, an unassuming and very efficient woman in her mid-twenties.

The co-ordinator showed me the ANC's plans for Dakawa: ten villages, each housing 80 - 100 families, each with an industrial area and sports, cultural and medical facilities, and an inter-village centre with a primary school and vocational training centre, sports and cultural facilities. Looking out at the empty bush, I was struck by two thoughts: firstly that if I had not already seen what had been achieved at Mazimbu I should find ~~these~~ these plans unbelievable. As it is, I am convinced that only the coming of freedom in South Africa, and the mass departure of the ANC for home, can prevent them from being realised. Secondly, the sight of Dakawa made me appreciate even more fully the stupendous courage of the first handful of ANC members who started to build Mazimbu in similar surroundings. Their achievement is like a reversal, or a righting, of the terrible epic of the Voortrekkers.

For many years before visiting Mazimbu, I had been aware of the tremendous role of the ANC in uniting the South African people to overthrow apartheid. Like other members of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, I had studied the different aspects of the struggle: the coming together of trade unions, students, women, church, neighbourhood and many other groups; the development of the armed struggle and the role of the heroes who have accepted death or long years of imprisonment to further the cause of their people's liberation.

What I saw being put into practice at Mazimbu, and in the plans for Dakawa, was another aspect of the struggle. Mazimbu and Dakawa gave me a

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glimpse of the future of South Africa: a society based on democracy, cooperative ideals and equality; a society which is productive, efficient and concerned to provide for its members not only a decent material standard of living, good health ~~care~~ and education, but also beautiful surroundings and a rich communal and cultural life. Everything, in fact, which apartheid has striven so hard to deny to the South African people.

Mazimbu gives a glimpse of the future of South Africa: a society based on democracy, co-operative ideals and equality; productive, efficient and concerned to provide for its members not only a decent material standard of living, but also beautiful surroundings and a rich communal and cultural life. Everything, in fact, which apartheid has striven so hard to deny to the South African people.

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