

# EXCALIBUR INTERVIEW

With John Saul

John Saul was behind the lines with the victorious Frelimo guerrilla army in Mozambique. He is York's resident expert on southern Africa and was interviewed this week by Excalibur. Saul is a professor of Social Science at Atkinson college and a member of the Toronto Committee for the Liberation of Southern Africa (TCLSA). He lived for many years in Africa and has devoted numerous writings to the problems facing its people. He spoke about Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), Soweto and Kissinger, among other things.

By PAUL KELLOGG

**EXCALIBUR:** In dealing with the sudden developments in southern Africa this summer and fall it might be useful to recount some of the more recent events in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia).

**SAUL:** What's most dramatic of course is the intervention of Kissinger into the equation. That is premised now on a whole series of preceding events, such as the liberation of Angola and Mozambique, such as the escalation of the military struggle. For the first time, the Blacks in Zimbabwe (or Rhodesia as the whites prefer to call it) have mounted what promises to be a fully effective military challenge to Smith's rule. The combination of the liberation of those two countries and the escalating struggle in Zimbabwe itself, has brought a change in the international balance if you like, where you have this spectacle now of Kissinger going to Africa and attempting to accelerate the pace of independence in Zimbabwe.

But we have to look at that quite carefully, because this is not to be understood as suddenly the United States discovering the enormities of white oppression in Zimbabwe. I don't think it's even to be seen first and foremost as some response to the global balance of power re: Soviet involvement in Africa. It's primarily to be seen as a rather belated attempt by Kissinger and his colleagues, to preempt a social revolution in Southern Africa.

What we saw in Mozambique and Angola, was that as the struggle for liberation escalated, as the people there were forced to undertake a military struggle, parallel to that, they were forced to clarify things politically, to establish much closer unity with the masses of the population, in whose name they were fighting, and also to sort out their own differences. In fact, paralleling the increased success militarily that the liberation forces in Angola and Mozambique had, was a radicalization politically.

What Kissinger tried in Angola and Mozambique first, was to back the Whites, the Portuguese. When that failed, in Angola he backed other Black right-wing forces. But there and certainly in Mozambique he left it too late. In Zimbabwe he's trying to move in more quickly.

**EXCALIBUR:** The Black leaders that Kissinger is dealing with, who are the different ones and what role do they play?

**SAUL:** It's a bit difficult to know exactly, but I think the general phenomenon is quite clear. As a new military capability has emerged on the part of the Africans in Zimbabwe — operating particularly from Mozambique from military base camps — there has begun to emerge a new and younger leadership of this more radical kind. Simultaneously however there still exists this old-guard leadership which has been in existence since the political struggles of the 50's in Zimbabwe.

They have undergone some struggles and hardship mind you, but their general stance has been to wait for someone else, particularly Britain, to deliver independence to them. The constant reiteration is that it's Britain's responsibility.

Not only that, but they tend to struggle among themselves to determine who will be the successor to Smith, rather than getting down to the business of building an effective resistance to Smith. But that group

is still in the game and I think what Kissinger has attempted to do is to allow them now to come forward. He realizes that if the war continues, this younger more radical force will become predominant on the Zimbabwean side. So before it was too late, he wanted to bring this other group back into the game. By the same token, I think Vorster could be convinced the timing was right to dump Smith and to try and find another Black leader who could play the same role that Black leaders in other neocolonized African countries now play of guaranteeing a very stable status quo.

The key to Rhodesia being able to hang on at all has in the past been the ability to break sanctions and to retain an economic viability by having the Portuguese and the South Africans ignore the sanctions and beyond that having countries like the United States turn a blind eye to certain kinds of infringements of sanctions as well as military support from South Africa.

South Africans have, for a long time, been uneasy with the Smith regime. Their policy has been on the whole to find Black leaders in so-called independent countries that they can work with. Once Smith had dug in and there didn't seem to be any viable Black opposition to him, at least militarily, then they were prepared, in a way almost forced, to support him. It became apparent however, that there was emerging a viable Black opposition that would radicalize, revolutionize the society and militarily defeat Smith.

I gather from press reports that the Americans did very careful analyses of the economic and military situation in Rhodesia, in Zimbabwe, presented these to Smith at the time to show their reading was that he couldn't last anyway. At the point they realized that the alternative was a successful military struggle, possibly a radical denouement to the whole situation, they decided to pull the plug. Once they said "we'll no longer facilitate your economic interchange with the rest of the world, we won't back you up militarily, you're just too much of a liability", then it was game over, and Smith ultimately, though reluctantly, had to face that fact.

**EXCALIBUR:** What do we know of Mozambique after the civil war?

**SAUL:** I had a chance to be in Mozambique last year as "Canadian delegate" (for want of a better term) at the independence celebrations. I've also had considerable contact with Frelimo over the years, visiting the liberated areas in Mozambique in 1971 with Frelimo during the period of the fighting. A number of colleagues of mine have been back to Mozambique recently this summer. The sum of these experiences show as might have been anticipated, a continuation of the kinds of progressive developments that were taking place during the war itself. When I was in the liberated areas I began to see new kinds of patterns of education and agricultural activity of the collective sort, new kinds of patterns of political leadership and relationship between political organizations and the people. They were very impressive.

What I found when I was back last year and what others are finding now, is a continuation of that kind of process of attempting to involve the people in the process of transformation of attempting to defeat any bureaucratization or entrenchment of elites in the post-Mozambican situation and to begin to work out a much more radical and self-reliant economic policy following on from independence.

This is being done in the context of some difficulty. Not only has there been the post-war devastation, but also the fact of an economy that historically was shaped, warped one might say, by the Portuguese, to service the South Africans.

So Mozambique is not going to have an easy transition to an independent economy. But it is doing what needs to be done first.



Paul Kellogg photo

It is creating a popular base by generalizing these political methods it has worked out during the struggle through a device of grass-roots democracy.

**EXCALIBUR:** For the first time in a long time we are seeing the South African peoples actively resisting oppression. What is this resistance, how do the protests against the imposition of Afrikaans and the general strikes we've read about fit in? Are these spontaneous risings, or is there an organized leadership?

**SAUL:** There are elements of both, spontaneity and leadership and it's difficult to know just what the exact blend is in each instance. It's also clear there are not just these kind of activities taking place in the townships in some way but they are also taking place in the workplace. In the last two or three years there has been a growing militancy among South African workers with some very dramatic strikes a couple of years ago in Durban and elsewhere.

There's no doubt also that it has been accelerated by the defeat of South Africa in Angola, by the very near to hand victory in Mozambique, that these things have had their impact on consciousness as I was saying earlier. This has given an impetus to a new generation inside South Africa. Now there is an older generation that has kept fighting, and many of them are to be found in the outlawed African National Congress (ANC) or South African prisons. But the crackdown of the sixties and one mustn't underestimate the brutality of the South African regime, was a tremendous setback, and did effectively stall an entire generation.

There was a lapse in the struggle because of the severity of South African oppression and people's response to it, but what I think we're seeing now is a regeneration of struggle. Some of the people who have been involved in the struggle are of course continuing, and a new generation coming up not scarred by the defeats, but now has a sense of the possibility of the new kind of victory in conjunction with the type of changes taking place in other parts of southern Africa.

There are organizations inside South Africa, student organizations and so on that have emerged out of this kind of new ferment and out of the Black consciousness movement. There's also no doubt that a movement like the ANC is active underground inside South Africa.

Now this is not to be prematurely optimistic. The struggle in South Africa, as I noted earlier, is not subject to an easy resolution either from the left or from the right. It can't be tamed by a neo-colonial

solution as Kissinger is trying to do in Zimbabwe, nor can it easily lead to an escalation of successful military struggle, as Frelimo, not easily, but over time was able to do. It's going to take a greater deal of time and it will be a different kind of struggle. South Africa is more urbanized. Working class organizations figure more importantly, urban activity of various sorts is of the essence, different from the classic sort of guerrilla war we saw in Mozambique. But that there is a significantly renewed determination and organizational capacity on the part of Africans to resist their oppression.

**EXCALIBUR:** During the general strike, one got the impression through the media that the strikes were being led by a bunch of students who were arm-twisting the workers into reluctantly staying off the job. How true a picture is that of the situation?

**SAUL:** As I say, the recent activities of the students follows on the heels of three or four years of industrial militancy, militancy against the strongest of odds. Trade unions for Blacks are outlawed. The militancy was an index of the fact the workers were aware of their oppression.

The kinds of work boycotts we saw take place over the summer, students are not going to intimidate that number of workers. And many of these supposedly "intimidating" students are 8 or 10 years old, some of them killed by the South African police. This is a kind of resistance - not to romanticize it — that is just a beginning and will have to take more concerted political form and acquire more focus. And that will be difficult because the South African police network is probably the most sophisticated and ruthless in the world. Organization is taking place against those kinds of odds.

There is every sign, nonetheless that we shall see growing resistance. At the same time, just to read the paper this week, Vorster and company are not prepared to budge one foot, one inch. He says there's no way Blacks will achieve, equality or power in South Africa.

The system of racial oppression is also the system of economic oppression, and in South Africa anything short of a genuine revolution is going to be very difficult for anyone to achieve.

In Zimbabwe it's just possible that Kissinger will get away with it for the time being, but South Africa is a different kettle of fish. A real radicalization and revolution is in the cards - over a long period of time. And that will be quite brutal, and unpleasant, it is undoubtedly just since there can be no question of the right of the Black population to find their way towards power.