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A REPORT ON GUINEA-BISSAU, CAPE VERDE & ANGOLA

US: CAPE VERDE

(Part II)

It takes about an hour and twenty minutes to fly from Bissau to the International Airport on the island of Sal, Cape Verde. The Portuguese airline, TAP, makes the roundtrip from Lisbon to Bissau by way of Cape Verde twice a week. Sal is located about 400 miles west of Dakar, Senegal. Although I knew a little bit about the islands before this trip, I had no real knowledge of them. I only knew that they were part of the Portuguese colonial empire in Africa, that historically the islands were tied in with the Portuguese administration on the mainland, that there were many Cape Verdians in Guinea-Bissau and also scattered in various places around the world. I had heard a great deal about the periodic famines which have plagued the Cape Verde Islands over many years.

There are ten larger islands and five islets in the archipelago. They are scattered over quite a wide area in the Atlantic Ocean. Ray and I spent the week visiting three of the islands - Sal, Santiago, where the capital city of Praia is located, and Sao Vicente which has the principal deep water port at the city of Mindelo. To go from one island to another is not like taking the Staten Island Ferry. It took about an hour and fifteen minutes in a small military plane across open water for us to fly from Sal to Santiago. It took another forty five minutes by regular Cape Verdian commercial airline from Praia to Mindelo.

A natural question is: with these islands several hundreds miles removed from Guinea-Bissau, why is there a sense of identity between them and the mainland? The simple answer of course is that they were both under Portuguese domination for some 500 years. Guinea-Bissau was first "discovered" by Nuno Tristao in 1446. The islands were "discovered" some 14 years later in 1460. Some Portuguese settled there, began to develop farming and procured slaves from the mainland. During the centuries of the slave trade, the Cape Verde Islands served as a springboard for shipping thousands of slaves to the Americas. The Cape Verde

people are, for the most part, a mixture of African and Portuguese. Just about 70% of the people are of mixed ancestry, about 28% are African, and a little more than 2% are Portuguese or white. The political identification of the two areas has been implemented by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea & Cape Verde (PAIGC). Many Cape Verdians were sent to the mainland to hold various positions under the Portuguese administration. Thus many leaders and members of the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau are of Cape Verde origin.

There are something less than 300,000 people on the islands. Many more than this are scattered around the globe, driven abroad during the periodic droughts and famines. There are perhaps as many as 300,000 people of Cape Verdian origin living in the United States alone. This is one reason why there should be a special concern in the United States for the Cape Verde Islands. The strategic location of the islands both for plane travel from north to south and as a stopping point for ships going across the Atlantic gives some importance to the islands. For many of us there is a special interest for the islands because of the tie between Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde through the PAIGC and the unusually creative political leadership of this liberation movement.

Before saying a little bit about the political situation on the islands, I will give some factual background and make a few observations:

1. First of all I was deeply impressed by the beauty of the islands. They are of volcanic origin. There is only one volcano which is still active located on the island of Fogo. Unfortunately we were not able to visit this island and to see this spectacular view. The volcano peak is over 9000 feet. It last erupted in 1951. Most of the islands are rugged, mountainous and barren. They rise out of the blue waters of the Atlantic with many peaks over 3000 feet in altitude. They remind one of the Rockies or even the Alps without vegetation. Some have observed that the terrain is moon-like. There are spectacular drives along the cobblestoned roads on Santiago from the capital of Praia to Santa Catarina going along the sides of the mountains with precipitous drops to the valleys, and with rocks and boulders everywhere. Only three of the islands are fairly flat - Sal, Boa Vista, and Maio. These islands consist almost entirely of rock, sand and salt.

2. The islands are arid for the most part. With the ocean all around, this seems like a paradox. Nevertheless it is true. The archipelago is roughly on the same latitude as the Sahara and is affected by the same drought which caused the famine in the Sahel. The prevailing winds, which are very strong during at

least six months of the year including the time we were there, are from the northeast. We saw many sand dunes, particularly on Santiago. We were told that this sand had been blown some 400 miles or more all the way from the Sahara.

The present drought on the islands began in 1967 and has entered its 8th year. This is only the latest of many droughts. I looked up a press statement made by Amilcar Cabral in Stockholm in April 1972 in which he pointed out that from 1747 to 1972 there had been 58 years of famine claiming more than 250,000 victims. Only four of the islands have regular supply of water throughout the year. Ordinarily the rainy season is from July to October. Even with the scanty rainfall, particularly during the last seven or eight years, the lack of vegetation means that most of the rain washes off the eroded land into the ocean. Some of the mountainsides used to be well forested, but during the Portuguese colonial era, these were cut down for wood. Land erosion is an inevitable result.

The economy of the country is mainly agricultural. We were told that 90% of the people are peasants and depend upon what they can grow for their sustenance. With drought conditions prevalent, the plight of the majority of the people is indeed pitiful. On the island of Santiago we saw both the desert-like conditions in areas where there was no water, and lush farms where irrigation was possible. On the island of Sao Vicente there are small farms of a couple of acres or so along the road leading from one end of the island to the other. Wells have been dug and windmills supply the power to bring the water to the surface for irrigation purposes. However we were told that this water had a salt content and although it could be used for irrigation, it could not be used for human consumption. We stopped at one such small farm and talked with the farmer. He said that his acreage covered 500 sq. meters which he had been working since 1968. There were palm trees, maize, cabbage, sweet potatoes, bananas, tomatoes and other vegetables. When he started working the land seven years ago it was the same dry, dusty, rocky surface as the surrounding land. The windmill was working hard in the northeastern wind and bringing up a trickle of water which was deposited in a large vat or a small reservoir. By opening sluice gates, he said that he watered the various sections of his garden every five days. Bugs were attacking the cabbage, but he said he had no insecticide to stop it. His whole family works on the place, including his wife, his brother, a son and daughter. Other children around were too small. He also raised a few animals. We saw a dozen goats and a few chickens. He said he had just sold his pigs. Every day his wife goes to the market

and takes whatever produce she can. He told us it was a hard life. His experience showed that even with saline water gardens could be grown.

Until about five years ago Sao Vicente with a population of about 30,000 people had no water supply other than what was imported from the island of Santo Antao, only a few miles distant and one of the few islands with running streams and good wells of fresh water. Now there is a desalination plant. Water is purchased for about \$1.00 a ton, we were told by the head of the hospital in the city. We visited this plant. Apparently it does not offer a ready solution to the problem of water for the islands because the process is so expensive to operate. Oil to run the plant must be imported and the problem is how to pay for the fuel.

Agricultural production is so low under the present conditions that it can not even sustain food for the people at a subsistence level. Most of the food has to be imported. Principle crops are bananas and sugar cane. The cane is used primarily for local consumption, large parts of it going for the manufacture of rum. Bananas are mainly for export. The staple of the Cape Verdian diet is maize, but only approximately 4% of what is needed is grown on the islands. We had a long discussion with Corentino Santos, the assistant to the administrator of the economy and with an agricultural specialist who had worked for eleven years in Mozambique by the name of Horatio Soares. They felt that in many areas of the islands, the soil would be quite good if water and fertilizer were available. They said where they were producing bananas, they could get 60 tons per hectare whereas the average elsewhere in the world is only 50 tons. But they pointed out the problem is overwhelming at the present time. Only 7% of the crops are being raised now compared with the period prior to the present drought. 90% of those who work on agriculture, which is almost 90% of the population, are unemployed. We were told that the average adult got only about 1200 calories per day, whereas the amount necessary for good health is about 3000.

3. Although agriculture is the main sector of the economy, there is limited industrial development in other areas. On the low-lying islands of Sal, Boa Vista, and Maio, salt is extracted from the sea water. We saw this process not very far from the International Airport on the island of Sal. There are two companies involved in this extraction, one Portuguese and the other French. The rate of production is limited and aside from the several hundred men employed in the industry, does not do very much for the economy of the islands. The other extraction industry is pozzolana

mining on the island of Santo Antao. Pozzolana is a kind of dirt cement. The industry is owned by a Portuguese company and employs about 70 persons.

4. Perhaps the industry with the greatest obvious potential for the islands is fishing. It seems ironical that people should be starving and that there should be such a protein deficiency in the diet when the waters surrounding the islands are teeming with fish. We saw men fishing, but they were using pathetically rudimentary techniques quite unsuitable for commercial fishing. Off the coast of Praia, we saw quite a few small boats, the size of large row boats with two or three men fishing. Actually these boats depended upon oars and did not have motors. But the fishermen were using poles, lines and hooks. On the island of Sao Vicente there are two fishing companies which have been owned by Portuguese. Both of them are going bankrupt we were told. Since they borrowed money from the government, their limited equipment will revert to the government. According to one of the employees on the managerial level with one of these companies, there are only about 80 men employed as fishermen. He said that they usually only go out in small boats and fish fairly close to shore. However there are a lot of tuna and the few tuna boats do go out for periods up to 15 days. Under this system, much of the fish which is caught is exported and costs more to buy in Cape Verde than it would in Portugal.

5. The overall impression one gets is of extreme poverty. Exports are only about 5% of imports. It is possible for the mass of people to survive because Portugal has given funds which have amounted to about \$12,000,000 in 1974 and 1975. This will dwindle with independence only weeks away. Another \$20,000,000 is sent to Cape Verde from members of families working abroad. Portugal many years ago inaugurated a public works system to employ thousands of the unemployed on building the cobblestone roads. These road teams are a common sight even now as one drives through the countryside. We saw men, women and children involved in the process of gathering rocks from the surface of the land, breaking them up with heavy hammers, putting them in piles along the side of the road and then skillfully planting them on the sandy surface to make an amazingly smooth road but not one on which one would try to rollerskate. Prior to the coup in Portugal we were told the daily pay amounted to something less than the equivalent of a U.S. dollar. Now, we were told, it has gone up to near \$3.00. Dr. Manuel Boal, the head of health work in Guinea-Bissau who was in Cape Verde, told us he calls these cobblestone roads the "pyramids of Cape Verde".

The disbursal of Cape Verdians abroad has resulted primarily from the very adverse economic conditions on the islands. It is the unusual Cape Verdian who does not have a relative, or at least a close friend overseas. There are somewhere between 30,000 and 60,000 in Portugal, 35,000 in Senegal, and some 5,000 based primarily in Holland many of them working as sailors. There are almost 300,000 here in the United States, many now third generation whose grandparents or great grandparents came over to the United States in the 1880's. While Ray and I were eating breakfast at the hotel in Mindelo, we got into a conversation with a young Cape Verdian who told us that he was coming home on a holiday after six years of working in Holland, and was excited about seeing his family.

6. Health conditions and medical facilities reflect the general poverty of the islands. There are only two regular hospitals on the islands. The one in Praia serves the southern group of islands and the one in Mindelo serves the northern group. We visited the ancient health facilities at Mindelo on Sao Vicente. The hospital was built in 1899 and has only 140 beds. There are four doctors on the island, one of whom is a surgeon. The equipment was grossly inadequate. Praia has four doctors. Altogether there are twelve doctors on the islands. There are no doctors on three of the islands, Boa Vista, Maio, and Sao Nicolau.

7. The educational picture is not very encouraging either. There is about 75% illiteracy according to statistics we were given. Primary school attendance has been compulsory since 1971 for children between the ages of 6 and 12. There are some 60,000 children attending 406 primary schools. 2000 students are in secondary school. There are only two regular high schools although there are additional vocational, and government schools with another 5000 students. According to a high school teacher who had attended a university in Portugal and who was now teaching in the school at Mindelo, there is a small charge for school attendance. Each child in primary school pays about U.S. \$.20 every three months, a high school student about \$7.00 every three months. In a situation of extreme poverty this is not an insignificant burden.

#### The PAIGC and the Government

The natural beauty of the islands does not relieve the seriousness of the economic and social picture. During the 500 years of Portuguese colonialism, virtually nothing has been done to develop the islands or to give first importance to the welfare of the Cape Verdian people. Economic circumstances can not, of course, be changed abruptly. Yet there is new hope as the political picture

changes rapidly. The PAIGC has uncontested control of the political future of the islands. Independence has been set for July 5th. A transitional government is exercising general administrative control until independence. Elections are set for June 30th to choose a National Assembly to usher in independence.

At the present time the transitional government is composed of six persons headed by a Portuguese High Commissioner. The High Commissioner assumes responsibility for Defense, Communication, and is Commander-in-Chief of the military. The Portuguese also have the Ministries of Public Works and Environment, and Internal Administration. The PAIGC appointed ministers have Justice, Education and Culture, and Economic Coordination and Labor.

If there had been any question about the popular support of the PAIGC, this would have been dispelled by the mass reception for Aristides Pereira when he arrived in Praia on February 26th. Pereira is the Secretary General of the PAIGC and is of Cape Verdian origin. He had not been to the Cape Verde Islands since 1960. The Visiting Mission from the United Nations (on a tour of the Islands at this time) estimated that 30,000 to 50,000 people greeted Pereira at the Praia airport and 20,000 heard him speak in the main plaza of the city later that same day. Such an outpouring is quite remarkable when one realizes that the total population on the island of Santiago is only about 135,000, and that people had to travel many miles by foot to get to the capital city. We arrived in Cape Verde while Pereira was still there and sensed the enthusiasm his presence aroused.

The first government of post-coup Portugal under the presidency of Spínola, was reluctant to recognize the PAIGC as the dominant political force on the islands. The PAIGC organized two political strikes to force the Portuguese government to change its appraisal. The first strike took place in September when Spínola held discussions with President Mobutu of Zaire on the island of Sal. The protest strike started in the port of Mindelo and spread throughout the island for a 24 hour period. The second strike was more total. It occurred during December when the PAIGC delegation was meeting the Portuguese in Lisbon to settle the status of the Cape Verde Islands. Up to this time Portugal had tended to favor one of the small opposition movements called the Democratic Union of Cape Verde (U.D.C. - Uniao Democratica de Cabo Verde). This organization had formed an alliance with another movement called the Union of the People of the Islands of Cape Verde (UPICV - Uniao Povos Ilhas Cabo Verde). These movements never had mass following and were certainly not apparent during our visit. The

political graffitti on the sides of buildings, on sidewalks, etc., hardly made mention of any opposition movements at all. The PAIGC alone received public support.

Another public demonstration of PAIGC support must have also impressed the Portuguese. On December 11th the PAIGC followers in Mindelo non-violently occupied the radio station. A small clique of the UDC had operated the radio station up to this time as their personal reserve. They aroused mass indignation by attacking the PAIGC frequently on the radio. In protest thousands of PAIGC supporters gathered in front of the radio station. Then leaders of the movement simply walked in and quietly occupied the station. No violence took place. The UDC crew left without resistance.

During the long years of the armed struggle in Guinea-Bissau, (with many Cape Verdians participating on the mainland) the PAIGC worked underground in the islands. Guerilla warfare never began. Many of the PAIGC activists talked with us about their organization and activities. Informers were everywhere. The PAIGC members operated in small cells, the members of one cell not knowing who might be in another. We talked with a young man by the name of Pedro Rolando dos Reis Martins who was the head of party work in Santa Catarina on the island of Santiago. He was still in his mid-twenties. He started working for the party while he was in high school in Praia. In 1970 he was arrested on suspicion of opposing the regime and was sent to prison for four years. He was released on May 1, 1974 just about a week after the coup took place in Portugal.

One of the principal party leaders in Mindelo is Luis Fonseca. Ray and I had met him briefly in Praia. When, several days later, we arrived at the airport in Sao Vicente, he was there to meet us. We spent most of an evening talking with him. He had been in prison for five years. Most of the Cape Verdians, many from Guinea and some from Angola were incarcerated in the prison at Tarrafal on Santiago Island. For two and a half years Fonseca was simply waiting in his cell for trial. His trial took only a few moments and was a farce from a legal point of view. The prison experience included torture and unspeakable conditions which he said he didn't even like to think about. He was arrested because an informer had infiltrated into the cell of which he was a part and had given his name to the police. Almost all committed party members had a similar story to tell.

The President Director of a newly formed institution called the Solidarity Institute, (Instituto Cabo-Verdians de Solidariedade),

Lineu Miranda, gave us his story. We talked with him at length in Mindelo. He was a man who appeared to be near fifty. For 21 years he had been a teacher in Portugal. In 1966 he had gone to Conakry to join Cabral. He was told to return to his home on the island of Santa Antao. He he was arrested in October 1967 and served two years and two months before he was put on trial. Then he was given a five year term at Tarrafal. The charge against him was inciting a movement against the Portuguese government. He told us that when he was at Tarrafal there were 28 Cape Verdians, 2 Guineans and 57 Angolans.

The first organizer of the PAIGC on the islands was Abilio Duarte. Originally I had met him here in New York in 1973 when he came over as part of a PAIGC delegation to the UN. By happenstance, Ray and I ran into him in the airport in Dakar and we rode on the same plane together from Dakar to Bissau. He had been close to Cabral and was assigned the responsibility in 1958 of going to Cape Verde to organize the party. The party worked entirely underground. Duarte is now one of five leaders of the party forming Permanent Secretariat. Each one of these five men played an important part in the organization not only in the islands, but in Guinea-Bissau. Pedro Pires, is the top leader of the party in the islands, and was a commander in the PAIGC forces in Guinea-Bissau. We talked with him in Praia, and I saw him again in Lisbon. Silvino da Luz had been a lieutenant in the Portuguese army, but deserted in 1963 when he was in Angola. He joined Cabral in Conakry and then participated in the struggle inside Guinea-Bissau. Oswaldo Silva was also a PAIGC commander in Guinea-Bissau. Olivio Pires rounds out the Permanent Secretariat of the party. He also was a leader in Guinea-Bissau. He also served as PAIGC representative in Holland.

The policy-making body of the party is the National Commission of Cape Verde, with about 32 members.

After independence a close relationship between Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau will be formed. However in answer to many questions we raised about this with various leaders both on the mainland and on the islands, the same reply came. After July 5th the National Assembly of Cape Verde will appoint a commission which will meet with a commission appointed by the Guinea-Bissau National Assembly. They will make joint recommendations which will then be considered by the people of the two countries. We were told that they did not wish to make the same mistakes some other African countries had by announcing the formation of unions prematurely only to see them collapse. Of course Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde

have what none of the other countries had - a common political organization which knows where it is going and how it hopes to get there. My impression certainly is that whatever finally eventuates in the relationship between the two countries will be worked out carefully and soundly.

The Solidarity Institute of which I spoke, was established in September 1974. It is a non-governmental agency working both with the Cape Verde transitional government and with the PAIGC. Its responsibilities are to help meet the social and economic problems of the people. We were urged to give whatever assistance we could through this agency just as we have worked with the Mozambique Institute, or with the Friendship Institute of Guinea-Bissau.

We were impressed by the commitment of PAIGC members. Amelia Sousa, a young party worker, was typical. She is probably less than twenty. She spends several afternoons a week meeting with a class of 20 or 30 youngsters, acquainting them with the PAIGC, with the life of Amilcar Cabral, with the problems of their country and what they must do to solve them. They gave expression to their enthusiasm in beautiful singing of PAIGC songs.

Ray and I were saddened to hear that the young man by the name of Ludgero Lima, who had been our guide and interpreter when we visited Sao Vicente, was killed in an accident a few days after we left. He had taken us, among other places, to visit the high school in Mindelo. This school is now named after him.

# CAPE VERDE ISLANDS

SANTO ANTÃO  
MINDELA  
SÃO VICENTE  
PORTO NOVO

SÃO NICOLAU

SAL  
SANTA MARIA

BOA VISTA

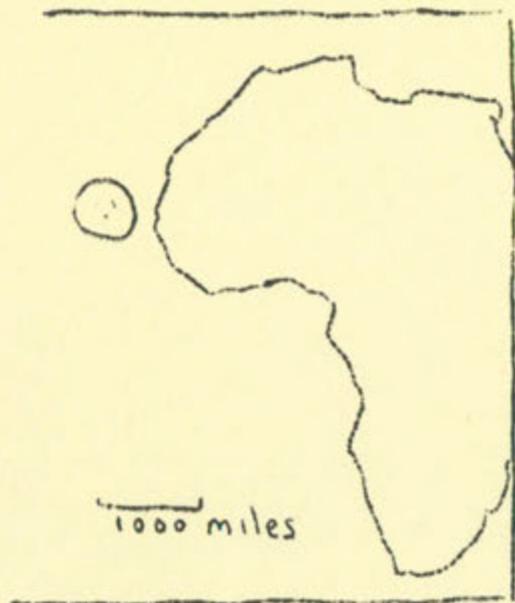
ATLANTIC OCEAN

SANTIAGO

MAIO

PRAIA

FOGO  
BRAVA



0 20 40 60 miles