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A REPORT ON GUINEA-BISSAU, CAPE VERDE & ANGOLA

US: ANGOLA

(Part III)

First Impressions

I was in Angola from the 15th to the 25th of March. I had been in Angola twice before - first in 1954 for two weeks, and then in January 1962 when I visited the liberated area in the north less than a year after the armed struggle began. But over the years I have maintained contact with the liberation movements. The experience of landing in the airport in Luanda and then driving to the center of the city seemed somehow unreal, just as it had in Guinea-Bissau.

The date of my arrival in Luanda on March 15th happened to be the 14th anniversary of the beginning of the fighting in northern Angola. This was a coincidence. In fact I wasn't sure, when the thought occurred to me, if it was a good idea to arrive on that date knowing that conditions were unsettled in Luanda. However, I was surprised how quiet things were generally on that day. Each of the three movements (FNLA, MPLA, and UNITA) all have recognized national days. The MPLA had already celebrated theirs on February 4th, the anniversary of the prison attack in 1961 which inaugurated the armed struggle. UNITA chose December 25th, the anniversary of the attack on the town of Texeira de Sousa in 1966. On their anniversary date FNLA supporters held parades at various points in Luanda, but stayed out of the center of the city. There were no disturbances. This was rather remarkable inasmuch as there had been sporadic conflicts between FNLA and MPLA supporters in the previous weeks. It was thought to be a good omen for a future peaceful relationship.

I went to Angola entirely on my own. Although I had written letters to a number of people whom I knew, I had no regular interpreter and no one helped arrange my schedule. I did the best I could, the main problem being language communication inasmuch as so few people speak English. I did considerable walking around Luanda,

I took a trip to Lobito. Then I had the fascinating experience of riding for twelve hours (from about midnight until noon of the following day) on the Benguela railroad from Lobito to Nova Lisboa. I had many discussions with the leaders including Agostinho Neto, (President of the MPLA) Lucio Lara, (head of MPLA office in Luanda) Saydi Mingas, (Minister of Finance & Planning) Jose N'Dele, (the UNITA representative on the Presidential Council) Jeremias Chitunda, (Minister of Natural Resources) Jorge Valentim, (head of UNITA office in Lobito) Eliseu Chimbili, (ass't head of the UNITA office in Luanda) Johnny Eduardo, (FNLA representative on Presidential Council) Hendrick Vaal Neto, (Secretary of State for Information) and Paul Touba, (ass't to Johnny Eduardo). In addition I talked with Bishop Amilio de Carvalho, the Methodist Bishop located in Luanda. Jonas Savimbi, President of UNITA, was traveling in Zambia while I was in Angola. Holden Roberto, President of FNLA, is still in Kinshasa, Zaire, and has not as yet gone to Angola.

It was not easy to make engagements with party leaders or government officials. The times were tense and the urgency of issues of course took priority. I probably had more engagements broken during the ten day period I was in Angola than in any two months of my experience traveling elsewhere in Africa. Also many people who I had hoped I might see were just not in Luanda, Lobito, or Nova Lisboa when my schedule took me there.

The general atmosphere in Luanda was tense, and yet I had no personal feeling of insecurity even though I walked quite widely around the city. There were soldiers everywhere, the sidewalks, the sides of buildings, benches, almost anything that offered a surface for writing, had political slogans representing one of the political parties scrawled on it. Soldiers guarded public buildings. Also the headquarters of each of the political movements, as well as their sub-offices scattered around the city, had armed soldiers on duty. Many political leaders carried revolvers with them. I was taken out for dinner one evening by a leader of one of the movements who, when we had arrived at the restaurant, took a revolver out of the glove compartment of his car and stuck it in his belt and then covered it up with his shirt hanging loosely. He remarked that he had to take this with him wherever he went because he didn't know when it might be needed. He could not be caught unprotected he explained. In Lobito a political leader with whom I talked carried a revolver in a holster at his side all the time.

I was told that it would be unwise for me to go into the muceques (the crowded African sections of Luanda). Prior to the change which was brought about by the coup in Portugal, there were many Portuguese

who lived in these areas alongside Africans. Some of these people managed small stores. But with the riots that took place in July 1974, all Portuguese had moved out of these sections and their stores were closed. I was told that probably only about 50,000 of the 300,000 to 400,000 Portuguese in Angola had left the country during 1974. Bishop Amilio de Carvalho took me around Luanda one afternoon. I was interested to see the prisons which had been attacked back in February 1961 as the opening blow of the MPLA against the regime. The Bishop had spent 25 months in one of these prisons himself and described something of the ordeal that he and other Protestant clergy had suffered. He said that some 30 of his Methodist clergy brethren had simply disappeared later known to have been killed. Also in this trip around the city I saw the burned-out former headquarters for the small movement headed by Daniel Chipenda which had split with the MPLA in 1974. Fighting in January between the MPLA and Chipenda followers had taken lives and done some damage. The Chipenda faction has now joined the FNLA. FNLA troops were guarding this damaged building.

Although I knew that Luanda was a large city, I had not remembered that it was quite as much of a metropolis as it is. I was told that the population was now estimated at 600,000. Luanda is reminiscent of a busy European city in its large central area. The streets are loaded with cars. There are very few traffic lights or stop signs, and a pedestrian must look very sharply and act very quickly to maneuver across the street in safety. I was interested on a Sunday morning, to watch the traffic from the vantage point of a hill overlooking the city. Cars were bumper to bumper heading for the expanse of beautiful beaches which mark the area. There are very few Africans driving cars. Most of the people are Portuguese. The taxis are almost completely owned and operated by Portuguese. The stores are Portuguese-owned. It is clear that the settlers still dominate the economy.

In many ways life was going on pretty much as it has been over the last many decades. And yet everyone knew that it was different. The freedom of political expression was different. And the freedom of cultural expression was different. I spent a brief time visiting the mission area at Dondi not far from Nova Lisboa where the United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ have been carrying on work for many years. In talking with one of the missionaries here who was in Angola at the time of the coup in 1974, she described the disbelief people felt at first that anything had really happened. But then when it became clear that the new regime in Portugal intended to follow an entirely different policy in Angola, the people gave expression to their feelings. African in-

stead of European dress was worn. The Umbundu language of the area was spoken increasingly, not just in private, but in public meetings and in the classroom. A whole new atmosphere was created.

The Present Coalition

At the present time peace and order in Angola depends upon the preservation of an uneasy coalition. In late 1974 the MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA had critical meetings in Mombasa, Kenya, and in Alvor, Portugal to work out a plan for future political order in Angola. On January 31, 1975 a transitional government came into office evenly divided between the Portuguese, and the three movements. The Portuguese High Commissioner became the Head of State for the interim period before independence on November 11, 1975. A Presidential Council was formed with each of the three movements having one person on it. They rotate the chairmanship on a monthly basis. The Ministries of Planning and Finance, Justice, and Information are headed by MPLA appointees; Natural Resources, Education and Culture, and Labor have UNITA ministers; and the FNLA heads the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, and Interior. The Portuguese maintain the Ministries of Transportation and Communication, Economy, and Public Works, Housing and Urbanization. Altogether there are 26 members of the cabinet of the transitional government. It meets regularly every Thursday and more often if required.

Peace in the country is maintained by a Defense Council. This council is composed of the High Commissioner, the Presidential Council, and the heads of the Defense Forces of the Portuguese, and the armies of the three movements.

The plan on which the government is operating now calls for the integration of the existing armed forces. This process is going very slowly. By the end of March there were in effect five military organizations in the country - the forces of the three movements, the Portuguese forces, and the so-called integrated force. By the end of March there were 3000 in the integrated forces - 500 from each of the three movements and a matching 1500 from the Portuguese. This process was supposed to be stepped up, so that by the time of independence there would be only an integrated force of 48,000 composed of 8000 from each of the three movements and a matching 24,000 from the Portuguese side. The Portuguese forces, under the plan, are supposed to be completely removed from Angola by the end of February 1976.

Under the present plan, elections for a National Assembly are scheduled to be held by October 31st. The Assembly then has the

responsibility of electing a president. The new government will take office on November 11th.

Can the Coalition Last?

As everyone knows who has been acquainted with the Angola situation over the last 15 or more years, the liberation movements have never had a good working relationship with one another. They each arose out of different circumstances: The FNLA in northern Angola essentially among the Bakonga people and has headquartered primarily in Zaire. It has received most extensive assistance from Zaire and "moderate" African countries such as Tunisia. It has not had a clearly worked out program for organizing the country beyond a nationalism demanding independence. The MPLA has had a program akin to the PAIGC and FRELIMO. It has enunciated a socialist position, but is not doctrinaire. Considerable assistance has come from the Soviet Union and eastern European countries, as well as a smattering of African States. It has been particularly strong in the Luanda-Molange areas with uncontested following among the Mbundu. UNITA has had least support from outside the country. It has had a vaguely socialist orientation. It has its main base among the Ovimbundu in the south central part of the country, the largest of the ethnic groups.

Each of the movements rejects tribalism and racism. Yet they have ~~been~~ divided by different ideological tendencies, by the international support they have received, and to some extent by ethnic background. None of these differences has been done away with by the changes in Portugal. With the restraints on political organization removed, the movements have all been working hard throughout the country to win adherents.

The political competition is fierce. Although the political slogans appearing on the streets and the walls of the cities and towns hardly indicate the political preferences of the great mass of people, it does effectively register the intensity of the political feelings of the people. When Jonas Savimbi first went to Nova Lisboa, the estimates of the size of the crowds which greeted him ranged from 500,000 to 800,000. When he went to Lobito, it was estimated there may have been 400,000 at the mass gathering. When Agostinho Neto returned to Luanda, after about 14 years in prison and exile, the estimates were 300,000 people turned out to see and hear him. Large crowds were also estimated in Benguela and Lobito when he was there in March. Holden Roberto has not yet appeared on the scene. The leaders of the other two movements hoped that he would come soon because they feel he may be getting incorrect im-

pressions from the reports which are sent to him. He ought to see for himself, they say. It is the feeling that the FNLA is trying to run a psychologically-focused public relations campaign and to build Holden up as the "mystery man". Pictures and posters of him wearing his dark sunglasses appear all over the country. His name is invoked in the newspapers and on the radio constantly. And yet he has not made an appearance. Perhaps he won't come to Angola until just a few weeks before the dates of the elections in October. The feeling is in some quarters that perhaps this will give him a psychological advantage and that he will not suffer from overexposure.

The political competition is in itself not dangerous. The dangerous part of it is that each political movement is backed by an independent military force at this moment. It is estimated that the FNLA forces are the largest. I saw nothing which made me question that the FNLA was prepared to use the force they have to "protect themselves and their interests". The peace of the country depends upon the integrated forces being built up as rapidly as possible, and yet this is occurring very slowly. Given the intensity of the feelings, the lack of understanding, the different backgrounds and ideological tendencies, incidents are bound to take place. Many of these incidents have been rather highly publicized in the international press. Small incidents were taking place while I was in Angola. Typical was the arrest of two party workers of one movement by soldiers of another. I was told by the leaders of the movement of the two detained party workers that if they were not released in two days, they would send troops into the quarters where they were being held to liberate them. In this case they were released. In other cases they have not been.

Shootings have taken place at the party headquarters where there are always crowds gathered. This leads to a counter-action as an incident escalates into a crisis.

The general political excitement becomes quite apparent if one visits the headquarters of any one of the movements. I visited both the MPLA and UNITA headquarters and saw the FNLA headquarters from the outside. The scene at each of them was similar. Hundreds of young men and women were gathered outside or were standing in line inside volunteering for service, asking for assistance for their economic problems, or just hanging around. At the UNITA offices in Luanda and Lobito it was particularly noticeable that a good minority of Portuguese were on hand going through the procedure of taking out membership.

There were two things agreed upon by all of those with whom I

talked. One was that no party had the following and the power to be able to govern Angola alone. It was agreed that there must be some kind of a working coalition. A second thing agreed upon was that there was a real possibility of civil war. This discouraging thought entered into every conversation sooner or later.

After every incident, the machinery for maintaining peace and order begins to function. This happened several times during the 10 days I was in Angola. The Defense Council convenes a meeting and recommendations are agreed upon for isolating the area where the incident has occurred immediately. About the time I arrived in Luanda meetings of party representatives had been instituted on a regular basis every two weeks to try to maintain peace. On the whole I had the impression that the coalition in the government was working reasonably well. The cabinet meetings are orderly, according to the reports I received, and the procedures agreed upon are accepted. However as incidents take place on the streets, there are responses which cannot be controlled so easily while there are separate armies ranging around the country.

I have the impression that the status of Cabinda will be an issue. Each of the three movements agreed at Mombasa that Cabinda was an integral part of Angola. The MPLA has a military force in Cabinda. UNITA is paying considerable attention to the area. Nzau Puna, the head of the UNITA Defense Forces and Secretary General of the party is from Cabinda, as is Jose N'Dele, UNITA's representative on the Presidential Council. I was told by an FNLA leader that they were planning to send their troops to Cabinda soon. Whether this has happened as yet I am not sure. On the other hand President Mobutu of Zaire has apparently not accepted the position of the three Angolan movements. He is backing FLEC, the independence movement of Cabinda by giving it office space and time on Zaire radio. Inasmuch as Mobutu is giving all-out support to FNLA, does this mean that differences on Cabinda would lead to strains between Roberto and Mobutu, or that Roberto would make a deal with Mobutu for his continued support and give in on the question of the independence of Cabinda.

There are indications of other outside interests playing a role in the Angolan situation. The Peoples Republic of China is continuing to give some support to the FNLA including the training of their troops. The FNLA is expected to open a large military base in the north soon, which will be even larger than their long-time base at Kinkuzu in Zaire. Chinese instructors are expected to come in. There are rumors of Russians giving technical assistance to the MPLA. Who knows what ~~the~~ role of the United States is playing? Gulf Oil probably has an understanding with Mobutu although the official position

of the company is that it is taking a neutral position on the politics of the area.

There is an attempt made to give each of the movements equal radio time and equal space in the Angolan newspapers. Each evening during prime time, each movement has a half hour radio program with which they can do anything they want. The two major newspapers are very careful to give as much space as possible to each of the movements without preference.

The business of government has its difficulties operating under these circumstances. I had a date the last evening I was in Luanda with one of the ministers in the government who was leaving his office just at the time I arrived and rather breathlessly said to me that he had been shot at only an hour before. The Minister of Natural Resources told me that he still had to rely primarily upon Portuguese civil servants for advice on how to act regarding the rich resources of the country. He said that he didn't like to have to do this, but he had no trained people to take their places as yet.

Who will win the election to take place towards the end of October? Of course no one knows. It is assumed by most that no one party will control the government. However it is thought that two parties might join in a coalition to keep the third one out. The two parties thought most likely to form a coalition would be UNITA and the FNLA. If something like this happens, and if any one of the movements is blocked out of participation in a newly independent Angola, it is not unrealistic to assume that a military struggle could continue for many years to come. After all if the Portuguese were not able to drive any one of the movements out of the country during the 13 and more years of guerrilla warfare, it does not seem likely that the forces of a new government would be able to have much more success in days ahead.

It is sobering to realize that there is no country in Africa in which a coalition of parties has been able to form a government and maintain a coalition over a period of time. Without a great deal of optimism, most of the people with whom I spoke hoped that Angola would be able to set a precedent. If this were possible, Angola would be one of the most influential countries on the continent with its vigorous people and its wealth of natural resources, and its rich soil.

One thing seems to be very clear and that is that the Portuguese settler minority are no longer interested in nor able to form an independent political movement which would attempt to go its own way. This would not be backed by Portugal. Such a movement would not have resources. It would be opposed by virtually all the Africans in the country. It would receive no backing from any country in Africa. The future of Angola is definitely in the hands of the majority of the people there.