

REPORT OF THE HAVANA SEMINAR
(February 25 - 29, 1976)

by: George M. Houser

About the Seminar

This seminar was initiated by the MPLA. The MPLA requested the Cuban government to act as host. The MPLA felt that it was important to make some contacts with American organizations generally sympathetic to their struggle in Angola and with the American black press. There were 26 Americans who attended the seminar. Attached to this report is the list of participants and the representatives of the MPLA. Obviously the Americans invited represented a fairly broad spectrum politically and ideologically. The Cuban government did not inject itself into the discussions at all. There was a Cuban observer from OSPAAAL (The Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America). At no point did the Cuban representative speak in the seminar.

The seminar was conducted by Commandante Dibala who headed the MPLA delegation. He made an opening speech of perhaps 15 or 20 minutes and then requested that each organizational representative speak for a few minutes explaining the purpose and the function of their particular organization. Following this the Angolan delegation opened the seminar for all kinds of questions. The bulk of the time then was given over to the MPLA delegates answering questions which were raised. The concluding two sessions of the seminar were devoted to a discussion just among the Americans about follow-up. The conclusions reached will be summarized in this report.

Of course a very important added element of the seminar was its venue in Cuba. There was very little time to see much of Cuba other than some museums, housing developments, a school, etc., in the Havana area. There was some opportunity to talk with Cuban officials about developments in their country. However the results of these discussions and observations would be subject for another report.

The discussions in the seminar were carried on in English and Portuguese with simultaneous translations through the earphone system and with Cuban translators. Two members of the American group representing Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans, spoke in Spanish except in private conversation. Two members of the MPLA delegation spoke good English, but during the seminar spoke only in Portuguese.

Summary of the Discussion

I shall not attempt to give a lengthy report of the substantive discussion. Rather I shall only put in capsule form things that were said under various subjects touched upon.

(1) About the MPLA

The MPLA is not a political party, but it is a peoples movement. It does not represent one ideology, but many. It has a general socialist orientation, but one which is attuned to the particular situation that exists in Angola. The basic work in the community by the MPLA is done through local MPLA committees. These are organized in all communities and probably will grow rapidly as the MPLA expands the area of its influence and control.

Historically the MPLA has had both a minimum and a maximum program. Under the minimum program the nationalist objective of independence had to be accepted and the

necessity of struggle (including armed struggle) against Portuguese domination. The maximum program outlined more in depth what the MPLA hoped to build in the future. All tendencies were represented in the MPLA from communist and socialist to liberal and church-oriented people.

The principal priorities of the MPLA at this point are: (a) The development of the agricultural potential of the country. The MPLA recognizes Angola as primarily a country of peasants. The emphasis will be on collective agricultural pursuits with adjustment being made to the realities which exist in various sections of the country. Part of the country, it was explained, has been dominated by a capitalist economy and there will not be any attempt to quickly and rigidly impose a socialist approach. (b) The second priority is the development of health and medical facilities of the country. (c) The third priority is education and cultural development.

(2) Relations with other countries

The MPLA will follow a policy of non-alignment. It wants to establish relations with all countries under the principle of non-interference and reciprocity. This includes relations with the United States. The MPLA delegation made quite clear that they would like to be recognized by the United States. The MPLA delegation said, "We believe that the interest in having relations must be bilateral, and mutual, and therefore if the present government of the United States is not interested in acknowledging the Republic of Angola and to establish relations, we don't want to beg this kind of acknowledgement and this type of relation." (Any direct quotes here are based on the Cuban translation from the Portuguese into English through an earphone system.)

On relations with Zaire, the delegation commented that they share a 2000 kilometer border. The Benguela Railroad is important to Zaire as an outlet to the sea. Good relations cannot be established with Zaire until it ceases its support for puppet groups.

Zambia was put in a different category. Dibaba observed that Zambia had given aid to the MPLA during the struggle against Portugal. Zambia also had given some assistance to UNITA, but the MPLA was certain that recognition would come and that good relations would again be established.

On the question of a possible invasion of Cabinda by Zaire, Dibaba commented that he did not think this was a danger anymore. He said that the Zaire army had suffered enough in the fighting in Angola and would not enter into any military adventure against territory of the Peoples Republic of Angola.

Speaking of Zambia and Zaire, the MPLA delegation said that they are not going to attempt to export their revolution to other countries. They said that neither their Angola army nor their Cuban friends would invade any other country. "We will not allow our territory to serve as a base for foreign invasion of other countries," Dibaba said.

(3) Relations with Portugal and the Portuguese people

The MPLA delegation made a real distinction between relations with the Portuguese people and the Portuguese government. "The relations existing between Angolans and Portuguese people are very close", Dibaba said. "The common cultural interest is great and even the experience of a common struggle against fascism. Many Angolans had the privilege of going to Portugal to study and to spend important periods from adolescence to adulthood in which they were able to find great understanding on the part of the progressive youth of that country. Even in Angola there were Portuguese who had a correct attitude towards the people. They participated in the Angolan revolutionary process."

On the other hand the MPLA delegation was critical of the posture of the present government of Portugal during the decolonization process. They were critical of the government for putting the three movements on an equal footing. They were critical because Portugal allowed the regular army of Zaire and of South Africa to invade their territory. They even had some Portuguese troops in Angola when these invasions took place. "The day of independence arrived, November 11th, and the Portuguese authorities took their suitcases out of the country without transposing the power to the legitimate authorities there. Evidently our relations with this government, with this regime existing in Portugal, cannot in fact be very friendly nor fraternal. But it is evident that relations between governments have nothing to do with the feelings existing between two peoples."

Many Portuguese people who left the country are now applying to come back. Dibala said that they are going to study these cases very carefully and they will not accept people back if there is anything in their record indicating they previously were involved in actions against the people.

(4) Relations with South Africa

The MPLA delegation spoke at some length about the possible confrontation with South African troops in southern Angola near the Cunene River hydro-electric project. They said that they thought South Africa would be intelligent enough not to leave their troops in Angola. They said they would be willing to enter into discussions with South Africa through intermediaries, that is third parties such as France, Holland or England. They said that they would not allow a South African military force to remain in Angola and would remove it by force if necessary. They said that if they had need of Cuban troops, or of aid from other friendly countries, they would not hesitate to ask for it and they felt sure that the help would be forthcoming. South Africa has been condemned not only in Angola but also by the OAU and even the United Nations. They commented that "Cuba has been close to us as no other country."

(5) The liberation struggle in Namibia

The MPLA delegation spoke of their solidarity with SWAPO. But they went on to say "We consider revolutions are not exported and therefore we are not going to export our revolution." They spoke of the fact that examples are followed and that perhaps their Angolan experience could serve as an example to Namibians or other peoples who are engaged in a liberation struggle. Dibala said, "We Angolans are not the ones who will go to Namibia to liberate Namibia. The independence of Namibia will not be correct or complete if the people themselves will not die for that independence."

(6) Mercenaries

The MPLA referred to the public information available about agencies in England, Belgium, Germany and in the United States recruiting mercenaries to fight in Angola. They indicated they did not understand how anyone could agree to fight only for money. Also they did not understand why some governments allowed this sort of activity to take place. Dibala said that frequently they faced white mercenaries in battles in Angola. Mercenaries were captured and also identifications were taken from the bodies of white mercenaries. The majority of them, he said, did not have any identification card. The only ones that did were Europeans. He indicated that they had no concrete evidence of either white or black mercenaries from the United States in Angola.

(7) Guerrilla warfare against the MPLA government

The delegation said that they did not believe guerrilla warfare could be carried

on successfully against their government by UNITA and the FNLA. They pointed out that successful guerrilla warfare demands massive support on the part of the people. They must be supported by food for example. They did not think this would be forthcoming. Also they said that a successful guerrilla movement demands rearguard support. They felt this was only conceivable from Namibia, that is from South Africa. But they felt that the people of Angola would not support guerrilla warfare that was dependent on racists of South Africa. They were convinced that neither Zambia or Zaire would lend themselves to this kind of rearguard support. Furthermore they pointed out that there was no record of successful guerrilla activity against an independent government, even in a neo-colonial one, in Africa. As examples they mentioned the failure of efforts led by such movements as Union of the Populations of Camerouns and various Lumumbist movements in Zaire.

(8) Foreign interests

MPLA had never had any difficulty, we were told, as far as the diamond mines in Lunda province (in northeast Angola) were concerned. This area was always under MPLA control. Most technicians left because of the war and this curtailed the activity of some of the mines and some of them were closed. Likewise the MPLA had always controlled Cabinda. Actually the MPLA had defended Gulf facilities at times. During the recent internal struggle, the MPLA had had two contacts with Gulf officials. The Gulf officials indicated that it was not their decision but pressure from the State Department that caused them to stop paying taxes and royalties. Other companies have offered to come in and take over the facilities, we were told. The government of Angola will demand new agreements with Gulf because it was the Gulf Oil Company and not the United States government that violated the agreements which had existed.

(9) UNITA and FNLA

The leaders of UNITA and FNLA are looked upon as criminals. But those Angolans who were ordinary members or supporters are put in an entirely different category. They will participate in the process of national reconstruction. The MPLA has no intention of putting thousands of people in prison. Those who are in UNITA and FNLA will play their part in building the new nation.

(10) Women

The principle of absolute equality is essential. The MPLA does not look upon this as "granting" women anything. The women knew what they wanted and organized for it. They participated in the liberation struggle. The women are liberating themselves. Their liberation is not a gift from the government.

(11) Foreign aid

The MPLA delegation made clear that they are going to need foreign assistance, both financial and technical. "We don't have the know-how and so it must come from abroad." There is a large team of Cuban doctors working in Angola now for instance. Another large group was arriving soon from Yugoslavia. There are also doctors from Algeria and two Brazilian doctors. Dibala said, "I am absolutely convinced that we are going to receive aid from technicians from all over the world. These technicians will take the place of many Portuguese who have left. The Angolan government might be open to U.S. government aid, but certainly not unless there is recognition.

Angola will also welcome non-government aid from friendly organizations. They would seek advice from their friends abroad about the advisability of any particular

non-governmental person who applied to come to Angola to be of assistance. They would not want any persons to come who would in any way interfere in Angolan matters.

(12) Coffee

Coffee has been the main export crop of Angola (surpassed by oil only recently). It brings a great amount of currency into the country. The main coffee growing area in the north was greatly affected by military confrontations because this area was for a long time under FNLA control. The coffee crop could not be handled properly because of the military and political situation in the country. Therefore a great part of the coffee was not picked. This will affect not only this year's coffee production but also next year's. The delegation indicated that the FNLA and also Zaire troops had stolen some of the coffee and taken it to Kinshasa.

(13) MPLA visits to the United States and American visits to Angola

The delegation said that they were in agreement about sending a delegation to the United States to tour the country and to explain to the people of the United States what the MPLA is. They also indicated that they would like particularly to have a delegation from the black press in the United States visit Angola. Other visits can be arranged at the proper time.

Agreements of the American Representatives

The American representatives participating in the seminar did not attempt to form a new organization. Nevertheless there were some agreements reached about what should be done in the United States. The main points were:

- (1) Efforts should be made to urge the United States government to recognize the Peoples Republic of Angola.
- (2) We should do as much as possible to support national reconstruction. This includes supporting medical, educational, agricultural projects, etc.
- (3) We should try to dispell incorrect information about Angola and the MPLA.
- (4) We should oppose any economic pressures which the U.S. government puts upon Angola.
- (5) On practical procedures it was agreed that we should (a) explore possibilities of a national conference dealing primarily with the Angolan situation and (b) invite an MPLA delegation to visit the United States, meeting important segments of organizations and people here with a speaking schedule.

PARTICIPANTS OF THE HAVANA SEMINAR
(February 25 - 29, 1976)

MPLA

Commandante Dibala - a member of the Central Committee and Political Commissar of the Eastern Front

Sra. Olga Lima - Director of Political Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Relations

Pedro Zinga Baptista - from the Department of Foreign Relations of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)

Organizations represented at the Seminar were:

1. Amalgamated Meatcutters and Butcher Workers of North America (AFL-CIO)
2. American Committee on Africa
3. American Friends Service Committee
4. Black Economic Research Center
5. CASA - General Brotherhood of Workers
6. Coalitinn of Black Trade Unionists (NYC)
7. Coalition for a New Foreign Policy
8. MPLA Solidarity Committee
9. National Anti-Imperialist Solidarity Movement for African Liberation
10. National Conference of Black Lawyers
11. National Council of Churches (Africa Office)
12. Partido Socialista Puertorriqueña
13. Prairie Fire Organizing Committee
14. Third World Coalition/Southwest Workers Federation
15. U.S. Out of Angola Committee and Chicago Committee for Liberation of Angola, Mozambique and Guiné
16. Venceramos Brigade
17. Washington Office on Africa
18. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
19. Youth Against War & Fascism

Members of the Press represented:

1. Afro-American Newspapers (Baltimore Afro-American)
2. Bilalian News (two journalists attended)
3. Black Scholar
4. Freedomways Magazine
5. San Francisco Sun Reporter

One free-lance journalist also attended.