

angola in perspective

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IN 1954 I MADE MY FIRST TRIP to Angola. Shortly after I had been informed that I was being followed by the Portuguese PIDE (secret police), an incident occurred quite unexpectedly. As I walked through a residential area of the beautiful port city of Lobito—presumably with the secret police trailing me, but around the corner—an African lad bounded toward me from a hedge and thrust a sheaf of papers into my hands. He disappeared as rapidly as he had arrived, with PIDE apparently none the wiser.

The writer was appealing for help, desperately. The letter was not specific, and it was not in the name of any liberation movement, but I remember well one part of it. It said: "Sometimes when Africans catch grasshoppers they pull their wings off. We are like grasshoppers who have had our wings pulled off and don't know how to fly anymore."

Less than seven years later, in early 1961, the armed struggle against Portuguese domination began in Angola. Two years later the guerrilla struggle was launched in Guinea-Bissau, followed a year and a half later by the same in Mozambique. It was this combination of political and military struggles that was to produce the coup of April 1974 against the reactionary regime in Portugal.

The transition to independence in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique proceeded smoothly. Portugal recognized the independent republic of Guinea-Bissau in September 1974 and the Peoples Republic of Mozambique in June 1975.

It may be helpful to an understanding of current events to review briefly the developments in Angola which have given rise to the present crisis.

Portugal's "Tradition" in Angola

First, Angola's size and wealth have given the problem there a significance which would be almost unnoticed in a less well-endowed country. The territory is about twice the size of Texas and has a population of at least 6 and a half million people. The diamond mines in the Lunda district of north-eastern Angola produce more than 2 million carats a year of mostly gem diamonds with an export value of about \$110 million. The crude oil of Cabinda registers about 150,000 barrels a day worth about \$575 million annually. The largest agricul-

tural produce is coffee, which has accounted for almost 50 percent of Angola's exports and about \$154 million annually. Each year more than 7 million tons of iron ore are produced. In terms of both mineral wealth and agricultural produce Angola is one of Africa's richest territories.

These resources and the climate have attracted large numbers of European, mostly Portuguese, settlers. During the 20th century Portugal particularly encouraged immigration. In 1913 there were only 12,000 Europeans in Angola. By 1940 there were 44,000, and in the next 20 years this number quadrupled. By the time of the Portuguese coup, there were at least 300,000 Portuguese there.

Portugal's exploitation of Angola over the centuries has also contributed greatly to the present problem. For about 300 years, from the 16th to the 19th century, the slave trade in large part determined the relationship between the two. Slaves were the only resource from which Portugal reaped a profit. Its economic development overseas was focused on Brazil, and this development depended on slave labor. By the early 17th century it was estimated that about one-third of Brazil's population were slaves from Angola or their children. Possibly as many as seven million Angolans were either sent from Angola to Brazil or the Caribbean, or died enroute.

Despite the effective end of the slave trade and of slavery itself in Angola by 1878, something akin to it was perpetuated. As early as 1861 a compulsory labor system was inaugurated. The rationale was that African labor was needed for the work to be done. This so-called contract labor system was instituted to procure workers for plantations, road repairing or construction, and for the mines. A contract usually ran for two years. Caetano gave the rationale for this system while teaching at the University of Coimbra: "The natives of Africa must be directed and organized by Europeans but are indispensable as auxiliaries. The blacks must be seen as productive elements organized . . . in an economy directed by whites."

In spite of the fact that the Portuguese prided themselves on having a nonracial policy, practical racism prevailed. Although about 90 percent of the Angolan Africans made their living from the soil, Europeans occupied 16 times more acreage. In 1968 550 European plantations produced 75 percent of the coffee. The annual per capita income of African independent coffee farmers was \$12 in 1968. Their coffee sold for \$175 per ton, but the price paid to the European exporter was \$630 a ton. While the average unskilled migrant worker might earn up to \$116 a month, the minimum monthly subsistence for a family of five in Luanda was set at \$200.

About 90 percent of the Angolan people were

still illiterate at the time of the Portuguese coup. In 1968 only about 30 percent of the children between the ages of 6 and 14 were in primary school, and a progressively smaller number were in advanced grades.

Given the tradition of Portugal in Angola and the exploitation of land and people practiced for centuries, rebellions to shatter the seeming political silence should have been an expected development. But many misinterpreted the quietness of the people as satisfaction with the status quo rather than as a veneer of fear to cover a smoldering resentment. Political organization by the people was prohibited, and any sign of protest was dealt with expeditiously and brutally. Organized opposition to Portuguese domination had to be carried out either clandestinely within the country or abroad.

A third crucial factor in understanding the present crisis is the division among the three liberation movements: the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), the Peoples Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Other movements have existed over the last decade or so, but these three have been distinguished by their commitment to the overthrow of the colonial system through armed struggle. Each of them has had a unique origin and existence and has arisen out of indigenous factors. They were not created through a split in either of the other movements, although leaders in one have in some cases been members of or leaders in one of the others.

Their competitiveness towards one another also goes back to their origins. It has been complicated by the fact that Portugal did not allow open political relationships to exist among Africans during the period of their colonial domination. Forces external to Angola have frequently had the effect of pulling the movements apart. Each movement has tried to rise above the circumstances that have helped to create it; each has been committed to independence and to the defeat of the Portuguese, and each, in formal statements at one time or another, has stated its opposition to tribalism, racialism and regionalism. They have all been committed to unity of some sort, but so far efforts to achieve it have not been successful.

A Brief History

The FNLA had its organizational beginnings in the then Belgian Congo. Hundreds of thousands of Angolans from the northwestern section of the country—an area in which the Bakongo predominate—migrated into the Belgian colony, partly to avoid the system of contract labor and partly because of higher wages. By 1957, with the wave of nationalism that began to spread over Africa following World War II, the Angolan émigrés had organized the Union of the Populations of Northern Angola. A year later—particularly after participating in the All African Peoples Conference held in the newly independent Ghana—the “northern” was dropped from the title, and the Union of the Populations of Angola (UPA) made a formal commitment to the liberation of the whole country.

With the Congo's independence in July 1960

the prospects for a successful struggle in Angola increased immeasurably. Holden Roberto became the head of the UPA. He had lived in Zaire (former Congo) most of his life, and he developed and maintained a close relationship with virtually all of the Congolese political leadership from Patrice Lumumba through Cyrille Adoula to Mobutu Sese Seko. (He never had good relations with the regime of Moïse Tshombe.)

The beginning of the armed struggle for Angola's liberation, as far as the UPA is concerned, came on March 15, 1961, the day that the United Nations Security Council met to consider the Angolan question. In late March 1962 the UPA became the FNLA and then created a Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile (GRAE) by joining forces with another small regional organization composed mostly of émigrés from northern Angola. The FNLA's main support over the years has been the Zaire Government.

Although some of its leadership was drawn from other ethnic areas during the long years of the guerrilla struggle, the FNLA's essential base has been the northwestern section of the country and the Bakongo people. In addition to Zaire other African countries, such as Tunisia, have helped. During much of the struggle more hidden support has come from the United States as well. Since 1972, when President Mobutu opened diplomatic relations with the Peoples Republic of China, assistance has come from Peking in material aid as well as through Chinese instructors at the FNLA's main military base in Zaire.

The MPLA was founded under quite different circumstances in late 1956 in the capital city of Luanda. Because of the nature of the Portuguese regime its work was completely underground. It was entirely internal to the country and urban-based, with only a small nucleus originally involved in its formation. One of those who helped launch it was Amílcar Cabral from Guinea-Bissau who was working in Angola briefly then. The key figures in the MPLA's formation were among the better educated and came from both the African and the mulatto communities. Many of those who later took leadership roles were in Portugal when the MPLA was organized. Some were involved in the Center for African Studies in Lisbon and were familiar with anti-Salazar politics as well as European left-wing politics.

Agostinho Neto, a medical doctor, became the MPLA president after he escaped from prison in 1962. The MPLA has always had uncontested strength in the area around Luanda, most particularly among the Mbundu people. The MPLA's armed struggle against Portugal began in early 1961 when it inspired attacks on several prisons in the Luanda area where political prisoners were being held. It was this conflict and the subsequent violent Portuguese military response that occasioned the previously referred to March 15 Security Council meeting.

Throughout the struggle the MPLA lacked a strategic friendly border from which to base its operations. The repressive Portuguese control forced it into exile almost immediately. Its first temporary base in Conakry—the capital of the newly independent Republic of Guinea a thousand miles or more to the north—was too distant

to be effective. The movement tried, but never managed, to establish either a working relationship with the leaders of Zaire or a united front with the FNLA. Thus it opened a military front in Cabinda and a headquarters in Brazzaville across the river from Kinshasa, Zaire's capital. In 1966 it established a base in newly independent Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) and opened up what was called the third front in eastern Angola. Here it had considerable military success and also established effective political organization in liberated areas.

UNITA, the youngest of the movements, held its first congress in March 1966 in eastern Angola. Its president from the beginning has been Jonas Savimbi, who comes from the Bie district in southern Angola. The Ovimbundu people, the largest ethnic group in Angola with approximately one and a half million people, predominate in this area. Like many other Angolan leaders, Savimbi had joined the UPA earlier. He was the Secretary General of the UPA for a time, and when the GRAE was formed, he became its Foreign Minister. Dissatisfied with Roberto's leadership and the progress of the struggle against Portugal, he openly attacked Roberto at an Organization of African Unity (OAU) meeting in July 1964 in Cairo. This marked his break with the UPA-GRAE.

The decision to set up a new liberation movement was made after consultation with other Angolans—particularly from southern and eastern Angola among the Ovimbundu and the Chokwe. At First UNITA's external headquarters was in Zambia, but it was banned there following several military attacks on the Benguela Railroad in Angola on which Zambia was dependent for the export of its copper. From 1968 onward UNITA prided itself on the fact that it had no external headquarters, that its leadership, Savimbi foremost, remained inside Angola in the liberated area which it called "freeland of Angola," and that its arms were almost entirely captured from the Portuguese (and sometimes from the MPLA). It received a bare minimum of assistance from other African states or elsewhere.

Attempts at a Working Unity

The movements' ideological tendencies differ. The MPLA has been most precise. During the long years of the struggle it avowed its intention of building a socialist Angola. In its liberated areas in eastern Angola it established Centers of Revolutionary Instruction aimed at influencing the thinking of its adherents. It has an ideological emphasis akin to the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau and FRELIMO in Mozambique with which it was joined in a loose continental coalition. Its commitment is to a practical socialism, not slavishly imitating other systems of social and political organization, and to an independence of action.

FNLA was influenced by Zaire where foreign capital, including American, has had great leverage. Its leaders are African nationalists who have not been heavily ideological, and the educational system in its liberated areas in northern Angola has been devoid of economic theory. FNLA has talked *vaguely* of land redistribution after the struggle.

UNITA has had a policy somewhere in between. Its leaders have not hesitated to talk of achieving a socialist objective, but the educational system has not been heavily ideological.

Innumerable unsuccessful attempts were made from 1961 onwards to work out a plan of unity, particularly between the MPLA and the FNLA, which were the strongest movements and the only ones recognized by the OAU. The MPLA was committed to a united front not only in principle, but also because it needed it to have access to the most viable military base, which Zaire offered. Holden Roberto was basically opposed to a unity for both ideological and practical reasons. His organization looked upon the MPLA as a Communist-oriented party. The latter, in turn, charged the FNLA with being a creature of imperialist countries, particularly of the US. Roberto was also unalterably opposed to giving the MPLA a Zaire base, and consequently he and the FNLA frustrated practically every attempt to create a unified movement.

The most serious and almost successful attempt at unity came as a result of pressure from the OAU. On December 13, 1972, following many weeks of negotiations, Roberto and Neto, representing the two movements, signed an agreement in Kinshasa to set up a Supreme Council for the Liberation of Angola. A Unified Military Command was to be a critical part of the Supreme Council. This agreement was looked upon as a great success, but it was never implemented. The Supreme Council had not had its first meeting before the coup in Portugal changed the entire situation.

Before the coup a working unity among the movements would have been a great convenience. It would have increased the effectiveness of their struggle against the Portuguese and made it much easier for organizations and nations to give them assistance. After the coup in Portugal, however, some sort of working understanding among the movements became a necessity. Portugal knew precisely whom to negotiate with in Guinea-Bissau and in Mozambique in order to make the final arrangements for independence. But in Angola the lack of unity made immediate successful negotiations impossible.

Months of careful discussions took place. First of all, the OAU recognized UNITA as a valid movement along with the MPLA and the FNLA. Then a several-day session was held in Mombasa, Kenya, with the leaders of the three movements preparing the ground for final sessions with representatives of the new Portuguese Government. Finally, on January 17, 1975 the three movements met with the Portuguese delegation at Alvor in southern Portugal and agreed upon a formula that would lead to Angola's independence. The agreement called for establishing a transitional government set up on a coalition basis. A High Commissioner was appointed to represent Portugal's interests, and a cabinet of 12 ministries was set up, three appointed by the Portuguese and the other nine divided equally among the liberation movements. A Presidential Council—consisting of three members, one from each movement—presided over the transitional government. During the months this transitional government functioned the groups took turns chairing cabinet meetings.

Over the 11 months in which the transitional

government was to operate, an integrated armed force was to be established. It was agreed that by the time of independence there would be a unified military command composed of 48,000 persons—8,000 from each of the three movements and 24,000 Portuguese. By February 1976 the Portuguese military would be completely withdrawn. It was further agreed that late in October national elections would be held for a National Assembly. This Assembly would bring in the independent government of Angola and would choose the president, who in turn would be responsible for choosing a cabinet that would form the government's executive branch.

Present Discord/Future Prospects

The problem with this plan was not in its conception. If there was to be any peace and stability in Angola it would have to arise out of an agreement among the three movements. Despite their differences it was unlikely that any of them would have the strength to govern the whole country without the acceptance and agreement of the other two. (The FNLA had uncontested strength in the northwestern area among the Bakongo. The MPLA had a mass following among the Mbundu people in central Angola and strength in the coastal cities from Luanda south. UNITA apparently had a majority following in the south among the Ovimbundu and in the east among the Chokwe.) Each movement had built up a considerable military force and was feverishly expanding its effectiveness. The Armed Forces Movement of Portugal tended to favor the MPLA. Zaire continued to give overwhelming support to FNLA, with the US suspi-

cioned to be involved. The Russians and Eastern Europeans gave material support to the MPLA, while the Chinese gave some support to the FNLA. UNITA had no visible external support of any size.

I spent several days in Angola during the latter part of March. At this time it was obvious that distrust among the movements, far from being lessened, was increasing. The real power lay not with the transitional government, but with the individual movements. The separate military forces—not the integrated forces as had been agreed upon in January—represented the real power.

What began as sporadic fighting in February expanded into large-scale onslaughts toward the end of March and in succeeding months. Various statistics were given, but it was pretty well agreed that thousands of lives were lost, most of them civilian. The political headquarters, particularly of the FNLA and the MPLA, were attacked by the military forces of the other movement. The MPLA took military control of Luanda, rendering the transitional government helpless.

The situation had deteriorated so seriously by June that Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta called an emergency conference. On June 21, after almost a week of discussions in Nakuru, Kenya, the representatives of the three movements again signed an agreement promising to end all violence and intimidation, to integrate their private armies into a national armed force and to disarm the civilian populations. According to all reports, the spirit of the discussions was good. Yet within days fighting among the forces of the FNLA and the MPLA broke out again.

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