

GUINEA-BISSAU: PACESETTER FOR AFRICAN LIBERATION

When speaking of Southern Africa, that portion of the African continent still under white minority or settler rule, it is often forgotten that there is another country, far away from Southern Africa geographically, but closely linked with it politically, a country where the liberation struggle is now more advanced than anywhere else in white-ruled Africa. That country is Guinea-Bissau ("Bissau", ~~the~~ the name of the capital city, is added to distinguish it from Guinea-Conakry, the neighboring, ~~progressive~~ African country).

For the peoples of white-ruled Africa, the 60s were years which saw political struggle expand into the realization of the necessity to take up arms, to begin an armed liberation struggle against their white rulers - Portuguese colonial authority in Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique, the white settler regime of Rhodesia, the South African bulwark of white supremacy, in direct control of its own Black population, and of the country of South West Africa (Namibia), which was theoretically a United Nations trusteeship. In 1961 in Angola, 1963 in Guinea-Bissau, and 1964 in Mozambique, African peoples took up arms against the Portuguese. In 1967 fighting began in Namibia, and ~~freedom~~ fighters of Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and South Africa launched ~~had~~ ~~severe~~ a series of attacks. In 1972 military action ~~by~~ liberation forces is still severely limited, except in the Portuguese colonies. There, in Angola and Mozambique, MPLA and FRELIMO have gained control over substantial areas, most spectacularly in FRELIMO's move south of the Zambezi River beginning last year. South African and Rhodesian troops have already had to intervene to help the Portuguese.

Guinea-Bissau has several advantages for the liberation forces - it is small, located between two independent African states, and the

political organization of its people, under the leadership of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) and its Secretary-General Amilcar Cabral, is very advanced. It is in Guinea-Bissau, it seems, that the liberation struggle is closest to victory. PAIGC counts among its liberated areas more than 2/3 of the country, and in that area its political organization, agricultural development, medical and educational programs, are well established, in spite of the constant dangers from the war, especially of Portuguese air raids (in planes that come from NATO countries). This year PAIGC is holding nationwide elections for a national assembly. In April a mission from the United Nations Decolonization Committee (from which the United States resigned last year) visited the liberated areas, in spite of intensified Portuguese attacks during their visit, and reported their conclusion that PAIGC should be recognized as the only legitimate representative of the people of Guinea. It is probably only a matter of time until a PAIGC-established liberation government gains admission to the United Nations (unless blocked by a veto from the U.S., Britain, or France). Whether or not this happens, international solidarity with the people of Guinea-Bissau is growing (such as the aid from the Scandinavian countries) and the struggle is advancing towards the final expulsion of the Portuguese from the mainland, although on the Cape Verde Islands it will be more difficult.

The white powers of Africa, and especially Portugal, of course, see Guinea-Bissau as the first domino that must not be allowed to fall. That is why they resorted to the desperate measure of trying to invade Guinea-Conakry in 1970, and continue pouring money into the fighting there although they can no longer exploit the resources of the country.

Any simple "domino-theory" would be a mistake, however, although it does serve the Portuguese as a strong excuse to hang on. The distance alone ensures that the effects of liberation victory in Guinea-Bissau cannot be direct, immediate, or decisive. The struggle in the southern part of the continent must continue to develop, until eventually the closely united white regimes are attacked at all points. But indirect effects the struggle in Guinea-Bissau can and will have, most of all for the other larger Portuguese colonies, Angola and Mozambique. It will show that the Portuguese can be defeated in a protracted armed struggle, in spite of the support they receive from the western powers. And this realization will have its effect, both on the confidence of the African peoples, and on the Portuguese situation itself, where resistance to the war, in spite of its suppression by the police state, easily matches the kind of resistance to the Vietnam War that built up in this country. And the international support ~~for~~ the legitimacy of PAIGC's struggle, and its right to represent the people of Guinea-Bissau, sets a precedent likely to be followed by the oppressed peoples in the other countries of white-ruled Africa.

In Madison this fall several groups, including the Afro-American Community Services Center, the Madison Area Committee on Southern Africa, and the Movement for Political and Economic Democracy, are supporting a fund drive to support PAIGC, raising funds particularly for its medical and educational programs. Watch for announcements of films and a benefit dance. Send your contributions to:

MACSA
731 State St.
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