

# The Origins of the Angolan Insurrection

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*From an article by Mario de Andrade (MPLA) that appeared in Revolution africaine (Algiers), 74, 27 June 1964, (and reflects on analysis of organizational strengths as of that time). Translated from French.*

The insurrection of the Angolan people has, over the past three years awakened a sense of solidarity in Africa and the rest of the world with the struggle against Portuguese colonialism.

Portugal's refusal to admit the inevitability of independence for the colonized peoples leads to her isolation, while the Western alliance oscillates between its obligations and the needs of its African policy.

One thing is sure: the regime in Lisbon, economically dependent upon the resources of its 'overseas provinces', could not engage itself in a process of *decolonization* which might undermine its structures. Thus it spends its time elaborating vain formulae for survival. Similarly, the alternatives suggested on this subject by certain movements of opposition to Mr. Salazar scarcely move away from the colonial ideology.

However, the liberation movement in Angola, torn apart by political differences in its ranks, is presently [1964 – Eds.] undergoing a crisis whose essential components may well be worth discussing.

There exists at its origin a difference in the way various protagonists acquired their national consciousness.

Furthermore, it should be noted that structural deficiencies and external factors stemming from imperialist plots have hindered the efforts of one of the main organizations to orient the insurrection along revolutionary lines.

And finally, the regional context in which Angola is placed, and particularly the nature of the regime installed in Congo-Leopoldville, add to the complexity of the matter.

It is obvious that the war of liberation is affected by these divisions which beset the nationalist movements. Thus the success or failure of unity in action against the primary enemy, and the establishment of a national front are basic to the future of Angola.

The original distribution of popular support between the MPLA and the UPA, the former being more deeply rooted in the urban areas and the latter in

the rural communities bordering the Congo, may have appeared to some observers as being the determining factor in the division of Angolan nationalism. Some went so far as to identify the MPLA as an 'urban party of the elite' and the UPA as the 'party of the radicalized peasant masses'.

The evolution of events, from the beginning of military operations, not only illustrates the falsity of such an assertion, but also that it is impossible to establish a 'class border-line' between the social basis of the two nationalist movements. Especially since both share at present the adherence of the various social strata in Angola, from the forced labourers, the landless peasants, to the *assimilados* — a privileged fringe without real economic power.

In adding our opinion to this picture, we do not wish to re-open a controversial argument, but rather to outline a method of approach.

None of the political machines can claim today to lead by itself all the social strata affected by the insurrection towards revolutionary action. Such is the essence of the matter.

The aggravation of the colonial situation, the acuteness of the forms of exploitation especially noticeable in the practice of forced labor in the rural areas in particular, have caused an exodus of the border populations. This exodus, towards Northern Rhodesia, South West Africa and the river bank areas of the two Congos has gone on for two centuries, and has consequently created a real Angolan diaspora.

The emigrants who settled in Congo-Leopoldville comprise the most stable group, and here always played a major political role.

The settlement of the majority of the emigrants who came from the northern parts of Angola among the Bakongo has shown itself to be a strong factor of solidarity in the fight of the Congolese against Belgian colonization.

One can distinguish two moments in the genesis of their national rebellion. While the first still took the form of a messianic movement, the second was directly political.

It was around 1949 that the prophet Simao Toco began to spread his religious ideas in Congo-Leopoldville. These ideas, known by his name, are in the line of Kibanguism. Tocoism, located in the beginning among the Angolan refugees, eventually gained converts and organized cells in large parts of the north, central and southern parts of the country. This is especially true once Simao Toco, expelled by the Belgian police in January 1950, began to undergo successive persecutions at the hands of the Portuguese colonists, and changes in the locations of his detention.

Just as Kibanguism found its biggest audience among the detribalized peasants in the Congo, so Tocoism awakened a strong current of opposition to forced labour in the plantations of Angola.

The memorandum which 24 'representatives of economic activities' from the district of Uige (Carmona) addressed on March 7, 1957 to the Governor-General of the colony spoke of the influence of disciples of Simao Toco, and complained about the systematic refusal of the peasants to permit their 'voluntary' mobilization for labor on the agricultural plantations.

The Protestant missions (the first Baptist one dating from 1878) took

advantage of this climate to encourage and sometimes channel African demands in these areas, since they were very responsive to the propaganda against the official religion of the colonial authorities.

The administration often manifested fears concerning the anti-Portuguese influence of the pamphlets and books distributed by the Protestant missions to the 'native' populations. Confidential circulars seem to acknowledge a striking difference between the native brought up under the influence of the Catholic missions and one brought up by Protestant missions. 'The latter exhibits an insulting arrogance, a peculiar pride manifested in every act of his life. . . . Some of them go as far as to be ashamed of being Portuguese, and speak of themselves as being American or English, on the simple excuse that they belong to an American or English mission.'

Also beginning in 1950, emigration was structured around specific groups, based upon ethnic, cultural or regional affinities. It is the second moment of rebellion. From 1954 on, there appears a real proliferation of these organizations, imitating the model of the Congolese: *Union of Populations of the North of Angola*, *Aliazo* (Union of the Zombo), *Ngwizani in the Congo*, etc. Only the first one of them, which became in 1958 the *Union of the Populations of Angola* (UPA), later on took positions which resembled a political doctrine.

The declaration of the UPA executive published in 1960 and which is its platform affirms the following in its preface:

After the liberation of Ghana, Guinea, Cameroun, Togo, the Congo, and Somalia, European colonialism has been in swift retreat.

Accordingly, no people in Africa has any longer the right to mark time or to play around with the ruling powers. Thus Portugal must stop dreaming of subjugating millions of Africans indefinitely and must realize, as have all other European states, that the Angolan people and all others under its control will be present at the rendez-vous, having understood that freedom is an inalienable right which the Creator has accorded to all human beings to enjoy in this earthly sojourn.

In the first section, often with well-turned phrases, the text denounces the conditions of colonial exploitation in Angola in order to derive from them the conclusion that 'immediate independence of the territory appears as a normal solution, suitable to all the problems of Angola.'

In its second section, besides appeals directed to the peasants, the unemployed, forced labourers, women, traditional chiefs and youth, it defines the objectives of a struggle for independence, and defines its political positions vis-a-vis the settlers, the Portuguese people and State, African peoples and world public opinion.

Within the framework of the struggle against Portuguese colonialism for the national independence of Angola, this declaration does not, in terms of fundamental options, postulate anything that is inconsistent with the essential points in the program of the MPLA.

But thereupon the UPA, wishing to ignore other political forces in Angola, claims that it covers the gamut of nationalist tendencies in itself and that therefore it *alone* represents the aspirations of the Angolan people.

To overtake, by ignoring them, eventual competitors, this is the tactical shortcut of the UPA leadership. This position has a certain psychological effectiveness.

However, when one looks at it more closely, one discovers the underlying causes of the firm hostility which the UPA maintains against the united front proposed by the MPLA: a traumatism aroused by its limited knowledge of the realities of the country, the intellectual void due to the lack of cadres, and a base of support among masses whose sense of national identification is limited to the horizon of the Bakongo.

The close links between the leaders of the UPA and the Congo has created, in the specific context of imperialist intrigue in Leopoldville, an Angolan nationalism primarily concerned with the immediate securing of large financial support from Western sources. This is nationalism as business. The UPA harmonizes its diplomacy with that of the Congo. The latter, while tolerating officially the existence of an MPLA office [not since 1963 —Ed.], seeks to deepen and prolong the division amongst the main nationalist forces of Angola.

We will return to this question later.

Encouraged by the positive evolution of the general situation on the continent, Angolan patriots inside the country welcomed any appeal whatsoever to begin direct action that was suggested by 'leaders' outside.

The UPA's logistic advantages due to its base in the Congo, as well as its efforts in mobilizing the Bakongo border populations, were factors which made the UPA in March, 1960, the main beneficiary of the popular insurrection. The orientation to be taken in the war against Portuguese colonialism became a sudden issue. . . .

Since 1957, there was ferocious repression against nationalistic movements in the interior, and the wave of arrests has affected especially the cadres of the MPLA and its sympathizers who worked for the most part among the urban masses. If political clandestinity was a given fact, due to the nature of the Portuguese colonial regime, it was nonetheless the case that the organizational structures of the nationalist movements were not prepared to resist efficaciously the Fascist machine. It thus proved necessary to reconstruct after the dismembering of the internal executive. Two principal realities had to be dealt with by the external delegation of the MPLA, which was reconstituted in 1960:

Firstly, there existed in the country an explosive situation, in which the masses were ready to assume fully their responsibilities in the move to armed action, despite the dispersion of nationalist efforts and the arrest of numerous leaders.

Secondly the UPA had undeniable support among the forced laborers from the Northern regions, and among the Angolan organizations in the Congo. We knew, incidentally, that it was encouraged by various groups to launch

military operations immediately.