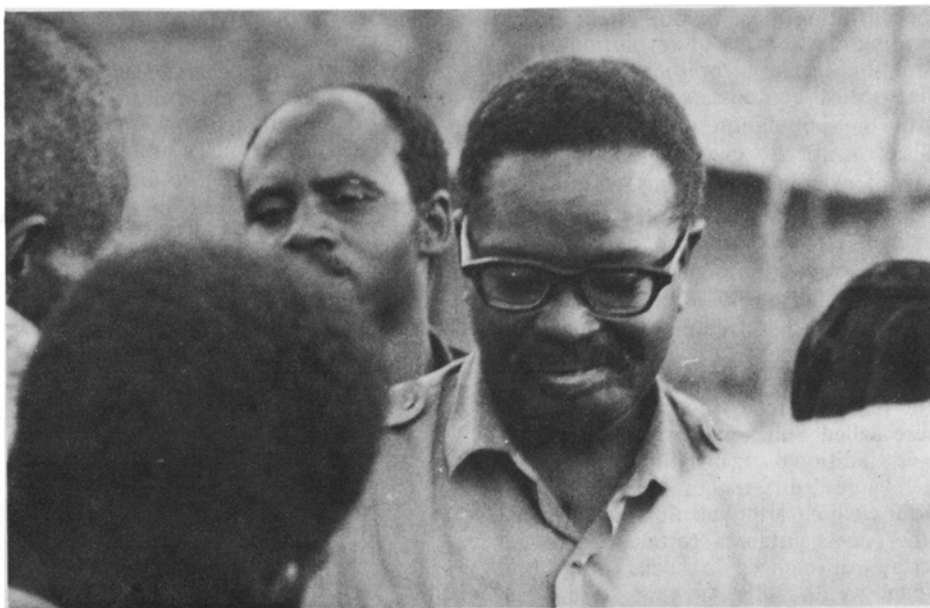


ANGOLA: facets of the freedom struggle



Dr. Agostinho Neto (above), President of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, talks to FRELIMO about MPLA's successes and problems.

Q: Comrade President Neto, can you describe the present situation of the struggle in Angola — in particular, the pace of development, the extent of fighting and of territory controlled by MPLA, and numbers of population liberated so far.

A: Our movement, MPLA, is currently fighting in 10 districts, principally in the north and east of the country, including Luanda, Cuanza Norte, Huige, Zaire, Malange, Moxico, Kwando-Kubango. The colonial occupation, which lasted for 5 centuries, is becoming more and more difficult to maintain, the situation of the colonialists more precarious. Up to the beginning of last year, we had tremendous difficulties in the intensification of the war, especially logistic difficulties, but this year the situation is much better and we have made enormous progress. The colonialists have been expelled from some positions, our military structure is better following the creation of larger units than existed previously, discipline within the Organisation has strengthened and production for the population and for the guerrillas has greatly improved.

Of course we still have many problems. These stem mainly from certain difficulties at the level of the Action Committees which are the organs of the people's power that must rule the administrative life. They must take care of production, establishment of schools, medical services, etc. Some of these Action Committees are not yet accustomed to administer themselves and have some shortcomings, but we consider it is a very important achievement for our people, namely the existence of that people's power through the democratic election of Action Committees which handle the affairs of the local populations.

Although we have mentioned great advances in production, we must say that we are still not producing enough for our revolutionary struggle because some secondary conditions are missing for that development to be carried out at the pace we want. We are marching, but not as quickly as we would like. The area we are controlling is the least inhabited part of the country apart from the districts of Luanda and Cuanza Norte where there is a very high density. The total population in the districts we control or who come

from the areas we control is about one million, although these are of course not all located in one place. Many have emigrated, either to Congo Kinshasa or Congo Brazzaville or Zambia, running away from the difficulties of the war. Thus when we speak of one million, this includes part of those refugees who are in neighbouring countries.

Q: How much importance does MPLA give to national reconstruction, why, and what have been the results achieved in this field?

A: National reconstruction is one of the fundamental factors of our revolution. We are leaving the colonialist right to enter the day of independence. We are abandoning the traditional forms of social organisation in order to build a modern society and to put an end to the exploitation of man by man. To build the country does not mean, in our view, just to construct buildings or roads, it is principally to change the mentality of man so that he considers himself a dignified man, a man useful to his society, and it is mainly on this aspect that we are

concentrating most of our attention, organising the centres of revolutionary instruction, using our political activists and the political commissars who work either with the population or with the guerrillas, specifically in order to change the way of examining problems, attitudes to life and to offer new perspectives to our people. There is, for example, the structures of traditional organisation with traditional chiefs who were all powerful dictators. This structure was to a certain extent broken by colonialism, but some chiefs were kept to collect taxes and recruit forced labour. These chiefs were called Sobas and Sobetas. We still have traditional organisation in the occupied areas, differences between ethnic groups which although not fighting each other do maintain a certain rivalry and certain differences in social life. And when, we the MPLA, want to lead the way to a single nation of the whole people, we must make a considerable effort for everybody to understand that we are integrated within a political unit which cannot be split into tribal groups. On the other hand we have a very underdeveloped society, a society where industry almost does not yet exist, a society which lives virtually from day to day without seeing the progress the rest of world is making. Because of the colonialists we were very isolated from the world. It was them who kept us in this isolation which thereby helped them to keep quiet our war of independence. But in order to keep up with the pace of world development, it is necessary to raise the level of education, the level of political consciousness and also the concept of the nation. And therefore there must exist within each militant, within each Angolan, that new mentality. Education is a fundamental problem; more than 90 per cent of our people are illiterate. Those illiterate people were kept as such by the colonialists. Only after 1961, did the colonialists hurriedly start building schools to show the world that they were developing our country. Only recently have they built high schools and some secondary schools and technical schools, but the great majority of our people do not use these schools, and it is we the MPLA, who have to organise education for the people. We have set up primary schools, and since last year we have had a secondary school and gradually we are introducing technical instruction, professional preparation for our young people. This is one of the aspects of national reconstruction to which we pay a great deal of attention, that is, making men conscious and aware, men aware of

the necessity of defending what we are gaining at the cost of our blood – independence. After independence there will of course still be much work to make our country a modern state. We must maintain a high revolutionary mobilisation of all the people in order to undertake the important tasks required for the development of the country. We must not think that with independence everything will come. It will be necessary to work, and work hard, greater and greater efforts will be needed to preserve the conquests of the present struggle and to advance further. In material terms, obviously to reconstruct means to establish industries, to increase the expansion of the cultivated areas, to train the workers for new tasks. It means to organise the administration of the populations, to have well established organised machinery to direct the whole struggle, a struggle which has many forms and which therefore presents many problems requiring daily attention. But I stress again, that for us the essential is the reconstruction of man by man himself, the fundamental factor of our revolution.

Q: Enemy action in Mozambique has been directed towards «winning over» the people in the war zones in three ways. First, brutal repression to intimidate them; second, their concentration in strategic hamlets; and, third, promises of political and economic privileges and advantages. What are the main enemy tactics towards the people in Angola?

A: As far as the people are concerned, the enemy acts in Angola precisely as he acts in Mozambique, using the same tactics and with the same strategic goals. They have formed units which are called «Special Groups» to fight against us. They have tried to corrupt our people by offering them better standards of living than they had before. They have tried to offer positions in the civil service, much better than those offered before the war. They have tried to foster among our people the idea that sooner or later Portugal will leave Angola and there will be autonomy. All of us know the meaning of Marcelo Caetano's proposal which pretends to change the constitution in favour of a greater autonomy for the colonies. This is a guise the Portuguese use. They use material and moral corruption on the one hand, and on the other hand they repress the people with total violence. As regards repression of the people, there is a distinct difference in their actions now compared with the beginning of the war. At the beginning of the war, the Portuguese

used to massacre, destroy everything. They used an indiscriminate scorched earth policy. Today they do not destroy everything immediately, but investigate first what may be of use to them. Thus, if they attack a village, they do not destroy everything in it immediately. First of all they arrest some and take others to the strategic hamlet, and only then do they act, and with a great violence, committing atrocities, killing those who show themselves firm patriots, who do not give in to their methods of corruption. And the colonialists keep the other part of the population under their domination, their control, so that they can use them against the patriotic forces. Sometimes former guerrillas and members of the movement after passing through this process of corruption betray the organisation and give information not only on the location of bases, but also on the structure of the organisation itself. This does not happen often, but it must be emphasised that it does happen sometimes, thus a constant awareness of conspiracy must be maintained in our organisation so that we are not undermined by the weaker elements in our struggle, those who are politically weaker, or who have the spirit of betrayal. The enemy uses these methods, but we observe with pride that in the case of the strategic hamlets, for example, called «Ndandandas» by our people, they cannot keep these for any length of time. In the beginning they used to give enough food and good means of life to the people in these strategic hamlets. But now they lack these means. The Portuguese are embarrassed by the population which they have to gather around themselves to protect their headquarters. For the people are in fact put there to protect the military installations, not to be protected by them. And so there is lack of food. Yet at the same time in our zones our people are much better dressed than the people who live in the «Ndandandas» – who have to come to our fields to get some cassava or to hunt in areas which we control. Thus a large proportion of those who are captured by the Portuguese Special Commandos in helicopters to go and live in the Ndandandas, immediately go back to a free life in the independent territory of Angola – not only because living conditions are better, but because their patriotism forces them to return to the areas where the people exercise control. In this way the situation in Mozambique and Angola is similar. Moreover, there is also a great similarity in the attitudes of the people who are fighting for their independence in Angola and Mozambique – their firm determination to win their freedom.

Q: In Mozambique, the enemy recently abandoned several posts of great strategic importance. Although their withdrawal was forced on them by our encirclement and consequent isolation of those posts, there is no doubt that the Portuguese could continue there, supplied by air as they used to do up till then. We have heard from MPLA comrades that the enemy has also withdrawn from several posts in Angola. We think there may be several reasons for this. For example, maybe they want to implement a policy of scorched earth. How do the cadres of the MPLA interpret the withdrawal of the enemy?

A: It is true in the past few months, especially since the beginning of this year, the Portuguese have abandoned some military headquarters which were being attacked very strongly and hence where the enemy soldiers spent more of their time in the shelters than in the open air. To live in the shelters, the impossibility to leave because of our encirclement, the constant imminence of an attack — all these are factors which demoralise, which tire, they play on the nerves of the soldier so that later he will have to give up. I believe that the action which is simultaneously taking place in Angola and Mo-

zambique, I mean the withdrawal from certain posts, has a strategic aim, but we can already say that it represents a defeat for our common enemy who are forced to leave important parts of our countries in our hands. For example, it was a question of prestige and honour for the Portuguese troops to maintain the military post in Karipande near the border with Zambia, a post which will always remain in our memory, not only as one which the enemy attached great importance but also because it symbolises for us the resistance and heroism of our fighters. It was there that on the first assault, commander Henda, the beloved son of the Angolan people and heroic fighter of the MPLA died. After several attacks against that post, the enemy was forced to leave. But we must remember that about one year earlier, because of an attack against that post, the Portuguese attacked and robbed a train coming from Lobito with goods for Zambia. They did that as a reprisal so that Zambia would not give support to the MPLA. That means that they attached some importance to that post and yet were forced to leave. It is possible that they are regrouping their forces, that their present tactics no longer correspond to the needs of repression against our forces, which have developed

and transformed themselves. But I repeat, it represents a great defeat, a significant defeat to the enemy forces and they will never be able to recover from the retreat they were forced to undertake, because the psychological consequences of that retreat are enormous, quite apart from the material consequences. It will be difficult for them to justify to their people the losses they suffered in those posts. It will be difficult for them to tell their soldiers to return to those positions. It will be even more difficult for us to convince ourselves that we are not able to defeat the enemy. All these are factors which we must take into consideration. And today our soldiers, our militants, all the population in the controlled areas are more and more conscious that with more effort and more determination we shall win this war. And we have already started to defeat the enemy who run away into areas where they are more protected.

Q: The Portuguese are building a hydroelectric dam at Cahora-Bassa in Mozambique, against which the progressive forces of the world have launched a strong opposition movement. Now the Portuguese are building another dam in Angola on the Cunene River, which just like the



MPLA guerrillas on march to an attack

Cahora Bassa Dam, will have negative implications for the Angolan people. What exactly is the objective of the enemy in building the Cunene Dam and what has been the action of the MPLA to prevent it.

A: The Cunene project is part of a complex of projects which Portugal, South Africa and Rhodesia are undertaking in the Southern part of our continent in order to achieve their objectives of exploitation of the peoples of different countries and the domination of that part of Africa. Like the Cahora Bassa Project, the Portuguese are intending to build along the river Cunene a series of dams in order to create conditions for immigration to the areas which are along the shores of the river, not only from Angola, but also from South West Africa. They also want these dams to provide power for their industries and especially for the mines of Tsume in Namibia. The Cunene is a river which borders Namibia and Angola. It is a river which rises up to Nova Lisboa where it has its source, and in that whole area, the Portuguese aim at establishing colonialists, not only Portuguese settlers, but also South African and other nationalities. We heard recently that some Italians wanted to settle in that area to grow bananas. This kind of settlement in Angola and Mozambique and in particular the association with South Africa reveals a political tendency to transform Angola, to transform Mozambique into new South Africas where power will be in the hands of white minorities who will continue to oppress our peoples. The Portuguese government is naturally trying a series of solutions for the problem of Angola and Mozambique. I think they have not yet reached what they can consider a "proper" solution, so meanwhile they are studying ways to strengthen their position. Building of dams fits into that kind of plan as well as the building of roads. For example, a road which is being built from Luanda to Pretoria has clearly a strategic purpose. This is to link the two countries more closely so that the colonialists and the racists of Southern Africa can help each other more easily against the peoples of Angola, Rhodesia South Africa and Mozambique. We think, therefore, that all the activity which FRELIMO has been undertaking to fight the Cahora Bassa Project is just and we have praised the great results achieved by you internationally with the withdrawal of companies and capital involved in the building of the dam. This represents an important diplomatic victory. It also

means an important defeat for those who plan to build the dam. We have praised your efforts to stop its construction and we are absolutely certain that this Cahora Bassa project, as the late President of FRELIMO, Comrade Eduardo Mondlane said, is a project which is doomed and must be fought by the whole world. The power of mobilisation of FRELIMO in this respect has been really great and we hope it will continue to bear fruit so that the Portuguese will be deprived of one more instrument for the repression of the Mozambican people. In Angola we shall act in the same way, the most correct way, but we have not yet organised a similar campaign to FRELIMO in the diplomatic field. We still have not paid enough attention to the problem of the Cunene Dam, it is even little known in the world outside. It is being built in silence, but this is because of other preoccupations we have had until now, preoccupations of political and military nature, which have demanded our energy and our attention, so for the moment we do not consider it the main objective of our struggle, of our present tactics, to make a frontline attack against the Cunene Dam. But of course, we shall fight against its construction, certainly the colonialists (some of whom are already there) will be forced to leave, and I am absolutely sure that our cannon and mortar shells will not let those individuals who come to exploit our people, remain on the land as owners, as capitalists who do not want anything but to fill their pockets at the cost of the blood and sweat of the African people.

Q: The Portuguese colonialists have recently intensified the use of herbicides against the zones controlled by the MPLA. What are the effects of these barbaric actions? This certainly corresponds to a new phase of the war, a desperate measure of the Portuguese government similar to what the Americans are doing in Vietnam.

A: The use of herbicides goes back as far as 1962. They did not just start using herbicides now in the northern front. In the districts of Cuanza North and Luanda the herbicides have often been used since 1962, 1963, 1964 in particular to destroy the cassava and deprive the populations in the liberated areas, and thus force them to return to the Portuguese control. However, after 1970, this action was intensified – vast areas of the Eastern region were also affected by herbicides entailing particular damage, because the herbicides affect our basic food-stuff – cassava, and one cannot plant and grow crops of cassava in a short time. When

using this tactic I think the Portuguese colonialist government believes that by creating more difficulties for the people they will surrender in order to live better. On the other hand they also consider that without the people the guerrillas cannot fight. This is the main reason why the enemy uses herbicides. There is no doubt that they have destroyed vast areas of land but their calculations were not correct, for they did not consider certain other factors. First of all they didn't take into account the determination of the people to fight, whatever the difficulties, until independence. They didn't expect the leadership's decision to do everything so that this use of herbicides would not cause too extensive damage, could not harm the struggle. They didn't consider the counter measures which we took so that there would be no food shortages. They did not anticipate the international solidarity which played a crucial role in ensuring that the populations of the affected areas continued to have food and did not suffer hunger. In fact, on this point, I must say that several countries in the world offered food for the areas affected by herbicides, which represents a new victory for our movement and for all liberation movements, and a severe blow to Portuguese policy.

They thought about depriving us of the vital supplies for the guerrillas in the areas where they have no control. But on the contrary it was noticed that these conditions increased and improved thanks to international solidarity. When they decided to halt the guerrillas with their planes and herbicides a general movement of sympathy with the people who suffered this inhuman attack started throughout the world. Even in the UN (where there is still a majority which does not allow that organisation to act within the spirit of the 1960 Declaration of Independence of the Colonised Peoples) we saw a movement of sympathy for our people, particularly in the specialised agencies like FAO, UNESCO, WHO. They are giving support to the liberated areas so that the effects of the herbicides will be lessened. That means that Portugal suffered yet another defeat when she used that weapon, a defeat which was inflicted both by our people and also by all the peoples of the world. And what she thought would be a means of oppression, of demoralisation of our people, became instead a means of encouragement, because we saw we had friends throughout the world and we saw that we could rebuild what was destroyed by the Portuguese. This world response helps us even more, to reiterate and support with all

our strength that which we defended at the Rome Conference last year, namely recognition of a political personality for the liberated regions of the countries which are fighting for their independence. We think that the liberated regions already have a structure developed enough for them to be considered as developing countries on matters such as relations with various parties and organisations, and that they must have the right to participate in international life and have normal international relations as any other underdeveloped country. This question of herbicides, therefore, represents a step towards that international recognition and it will contribute towards helping the political independence of our country come sooner.

Q: In the past the MPLA has faced great difficulties abroad created by imperialist forces who have attempted to confuse the meaning, the significance of the Angolan revolution. But the MPLA knew how to overcome those difficulties, developed the struggle, built a free Angola which we know today, and established its position in the international field. What is the fundamental reason, what explains the victory of the MPLA despite all of the difficulties?

A: Thank you for a question which is formulated in such a way as to give me an opportunity to explain some of the phenomena which are taking place in Angola, but also a question which on the other hand reveals the high understanding which the comrades of FRELIMO have for the struggle which is developing in Angola. We have had to face some difficulties, as all organisations sooner or later have to face, difficulties imposed by the imperialists. In Angola things were in a way perhaps more spectacular because of certain factors, particularly geographic, which prevented us from acting in time. Since the 4th February, 1961, when we launched our armed struggle in Luanda, the imperialists have been active in trying to destroy our organisation. Even before the armed struggle began, there was already action of imperialists against the patriotic movement. That caused the fragmentation of the forces which thereby became inefficient. With the beginning of the war, there was soon founded that so-called organisation which exists in Kinshasa, calling itself Union of the Peoples of Angola, which worked only to liquidate the MPLA (we must not forget the 8,000 Angolans who died in the fratricidal war launched by UPA led by Holden Roberto, a man everyone knows as an American agent, completely sold to the

imperialists). When we opened the front of Cabinda in 1964, there was also a group of counter-revolutionaries led by Alexander Tati, an individual who had been also a member of UPA. When we opened the Eastern front in 1966, the same phenomena was repeated again: a former member of UPA, Jonas Savimbi came to the east to form a counter-revolutionary group to liquidate our movement. All these examples and others show that the imperialists have always tried to divide our organisation by paying their agents to form tribal groups which would oppose the MPLA. We have succeeded in defeating these tribal groups by the correct orientation of our organisation, by constantly defending national unity, by fighting the enemy and despising as much as possible those counter-revolutionary forces, directing the essential fight against the main enemy, making

the population dedicate themselves principally to the war of independence and not to the fratricidal struggle. Also ensuring that abroad other nations understood what was going on. We had great difficulties after the recognition by the OAU of the so-called GRAE. The OAU made a tremendous mistake in recognising GRAE. All our difficulties have stemmed from the actions of imperialism. There was never any difficulty in the internal field which was not a reflection of the difficulties in the international field. In conclusion I would just like to stress that our movement has progressed enormously in the past few years and it will do whatever is necessary to eliminate the effects of counter-revolution; liquidate all those bad weeds which are there in the fields we are building, so that our people will be able to live in a really democratic and independent Angola.

