

Hundreds Arrested After Angolan Coup Attempt

By Ernest Harsch

In the wake of an abortive coup attempt in Angola May 27, the regime of President Agostinho Neto has launched a major crackdown against suspected dissidents. The extent of this new wave of repression testifies to the depth of the internal crisis that has shaken the ruling Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA—People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola).

In a speech broadcast over Luanda radio May 31, Neto announced that "hundreds of factionalists" had been arrested, including members of the army's women's section, of the youth wings of the armed forces and military police, and of the Organization of Angolan Women. He said that "some members of the political commission of the FAPLA¹ have likewise been detained in Luanda."

The day before, Neto declared that several MPLA leaders, including two high-ranking military officers, had been implicated in the coup attempt. Neto has charged that the leaders of the coup were Nito Alves and José van Dunem, two members of the MPLA Central Committee who had been expelled and arrested May 21.

Neto has accused Alves of leading a "black racist faction" within the MPLA. Resorting to some of the MPLA's standard slanders, Neto denounced the rebels for employing "violence, racism, tribalism, and regionalism." In addition, he condemned Alves and van Dunem as "agents of international imperialism and internal reaction and lackeys of the FNLA."²

The dissidents, Neto said, would be punished "with utmost severity." He warned that "in the following days, other elements will be arrested for having participated actively in this factionalist activity. . . . A serious battle against factionalism is necessary. In every neighborhood, in every village, we will search out the factionalists and see that justice is done."

Neto indicated the kind of "justice" he had in mind when he said, "We don't want to waste time on trials, we want to get this over with as quickly as possible."

The regime has tried to convey the

impression that things in Luanda have returned to "normal," but a May 29 Reuters dispatch reported that strategic points in the city were still heavily guarded and police were searching vehicles and passersby. The regime has forbidden foreign journalists from transmitting anything but "official" news.

Shortly after suppressing the coup attempt, the government-controlled radio urged the population to get back to their jobs. It broadcast a song that went, "Let's go to work, let's go to the production line. Blacks, whites and mestizos [those of mixed African and Portuguese ancestry], let's go to work. Whites, blacks and mestizos, let's go to the production line."

The factors behind the factional conflict in the MPLA have not yet been made clear.

According to a report in the May 29-30 *Le Monde* by René Lefort, Alves had built up a base of support among the 400,000 inhabitants of Luanda's *muçeques*, the poverty-ridden shantytowns that surround the city on three sides. He also reportedly had some support in the Dembos region northeast of Luanda, where he served as an MPLA guerrilla leader during the struggle against Portuguese colonial rule. Moreover, as minister of internal administration, he was in a position to place his supporters in key posts in the administration, secret police, and army.

Alves, a member of the Mbundu nationality, tried to portray himself as a champion of Black slum dwellers and denounced the inclusion of whites and mestizos in the MPLA regime. In particular, he attacked Neto's three main aides, MPLA General Secretary Lucio Lara, Economics Minister Carlos Rocha, and Defense Minister Iko Carreira, all of whom are mestizos.

Although Alves relied heavily on "socialist" rhetoric, he played a central role in the MPLA's crackdown against leftist forces in late 1975 and early 1976, which included a campaign against "the partisans of Trotsky and Bakunin."

In October 1976, Alves was dropped from the MPLA's Political Bureau, and the ministry of internal administration was abolished. The secret police was purged and some of Alves's supporters were arrested. Finally, on May 21, Alves himself was purged and arrested, leading to the coup attempt by his followers.

On the morning of May 27, the rebels seized the Luanda radio station for a few hours and attacked the presidential palace,

army headquarters, and São Paulo prison. According to some unconfirmed reports, Alves was freed by the rebels. The June 1 *Le Monde* reported that the 9th Armored Brigade had mutinied.

Heavy fighting reportedly took place in several parts of the city, including in some of the *muçeques*. Neto later admitted that fighting also occurred in the town of Malange, east of Luanda. After progovernment troops suppressed the coup attempt, the regime charged that six MPLA leaders, including Finance Minister Saydi Mingas, had been killed by the rebel forces.

The crisis in the MPLA comes at a time of growing discontent with the Neto regime. Most industries are operating at about one-third of their capacity. There are frequent food shortages in Luanda. Despite its anti-imperialist rhetoric, the MPLA regime has nationalized only those companies abandoned by the Portuguese. The biggest imperialist interests, the Gulf Oil concession in Cabinda and the diamond fields in northeastern Angola, remain untouched.

Lefort noted that "the inhabitants of the *muçeques*, in their vast majority, believed that the proclamation of independence would open the doors to an Eldorado. Their illusions have quickly soured."

According to Lefort, part of this bitterness and discontent has been directed against mestizos:

The mestizos community, which has a cultural level far above the average, seems to have been in a position to fill the vacancies left by the departure of the Portuguese, in the state apparatus as well as in business. The Black "common people" have become frustrated by seeing the jobs they had hoped to occupy go to men who often have little concern for the public welfare.

At a time when the MPLA leadership has run into immense difficulties, the contrast between the misery into which the shantytowns have been plunged and the growing affluence of a class of "nouveaux riches" becomes more pronounced.

It was these sentiments that the Alves grouping apparently sought to take advantage of in its factional struggle with the rest of the MPLA.

Lefort noted that the MPLA's crackdown on leftist critics and its dissolution of the neighborhood self-defense committees that had arisen spontaneously after the 1974 coup in Lisbon has further undercut the MPLA's base of support in Luanda. □

110 Sentenced in South Africa

The South African Institute of Race Relations has reported that since July 1976, 110 persons have been sentenced to a total of 666 years in prison by the Vorster regime under the country's security laws. These political prisoners, many of whom are teen-agers, were charged with offenses connected with the massive Black protests that swept the country last year.

1. Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola (Angolan People's Liberation Armed Forces), the Angolan army.

2. Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (Angolan National Liberation Front), one of the MPLA's principal adversaries in the civil war.