

Angola and the New Imperialist Strategy in Southern Africa

Hugo Menezes

Article by a member of the MPLA, in Faulha (Accra), 1, July 1965. Translated from Portuguese.

June 1960. The year of Africa and of Patrice Lumumba. And, less than a year later, a group of nationalists launched an armed struggle for the liberation of Angola. It was in Luanda, on 4 February 1961.

In spite of all sorts of limitations and mistakes of different kinds, the Angolan nationalists were able to free, in a short period of time, a great part of the North of Angola and reached the outskirts of Luanda.

The events of the Congo were still fresh in the memory of the Portuguese. The colonists and the colonial administration panicked; the economy of the country was paralysed or destroyed in great part; colonists and capital fled. Portuguese colonialism was thus almost defeated. Not because it had been taken by surprise. In fact the colonial government had been preparing intensely for a long time, and engaged in quite spectacular military demonstrations, in the hope of intimidating and thus countering the growing threat of the Angolan underground organizations, which were becoming more active every day. Besides, the colonial government had been careful to arrest all those Angolan personalities, who were potential leaders of the rebellion. The Portuguese colonists simply found themselves outstripped by events, unable to handle a popular uprising of such a size, despite the fact that it was poorly organized, poorly led, and possessed only rudimentary armaments.

The armed struggle in Angola did not affect only Portuguese interests but it affected just as much and just as directly the interests of the other imperialist powers in Angola. It was thus essential to circumscribe the Angolan events, to avoid at all cost a chain reaction in the southern part of the continent, to put an end to the serious threat which imperialism was facing in this vital part of Africa.

The armed struggle and the success attained in such a short time by the Angolan nationalists, reverberated far beyond the borders of Angola. In fact, at the same time that it constituted an important factor of demoralization in colonial and reactionary circles, it acted as a catalysing and mobilizing element in the other Portuguese colonies, and even in liberal and progressive

circles of Portugal. On the other hand, the war effort for Portugal, in Angola, due to its economic implications, was leading directly to the weakening of the Portuguese bourgeoisie and of its position in Angola and in the other Portuguese colonies, as well as in Portugal. The imperialist powers quickly understood that Portugal in trying to 'maintain' Angola would end by losing it, and mortgage itself to foreign interests.

Shortly thereafter the epic national liberation struggle of Guinea and later the liberation struggle of the people of Mozambique were to begin.

It was necessary to keep Angola, not so much because it was a territory essential to Portuguese colonialism, but mainly because it was a primary base in the economic-military strategy of imperialism.

Leaving thus to one side secondary divergences, imperialism decided to take upon itself, as a whole, the solution to the Angolan problem.

Thus entered NATO, jet aircraft and napalm bombs, military 'advisers', Spanish and South African 'volunteers', followed by loans of hundreds of millions of dollars to Portugal, and by investments of hundreds of marks in Portugal and Angola.

Imperialism stepped forward then in all its glory, decided not to make any concession, but to drown in a sea of blood the slightest cry of rebellion or the slightest demand of the Angolan nationalists.

And Portuguese colonialism, which in reality was nothing but a collective colonialism, came to be a simple subtitle.

Meanwhile, North American imperialism, which had just made its appearance in the Congo, needed to strengthen its positions, to play cleverly, to negotiate.

American imperialism thus mounted on the back of African nationalism, taking advantage of it as a vehicle of penetration in the competitive struggle with the interests of the European bloc in the Congo, so closely associated with the Portuguese interests in Angola, in the other Portuguese colonies, and in Portugal.

Via Angolan 'nationalism' it would be possible to find a supplementary door to the Congo, mainly through Katanga, by means of the Benguela railway and the port of Lobito.

The United States thus played on two levels, and with the greatest cunning. It sought, on the one hand, to support strongly Portuguese ultra-colonialism, while at the same time condemning some of its secondary aspects, in order to be able to satisfy the demands of world-wide public opinion and especially the clientele of the new African countries who defended so strongly the Angolan cause and who were used so effectively as a means of pressure against Portugal and the European group, to the undoubted advantage of the United States!

On the other hand it was essential to preserve the future. In this way, there arose the need to create a false leadership of the Angolan nationalist movement, in order to make it deviate from its real goals. This false leadership, constituted by approved 'nationalist' elements, would on the one hand permit the channelling of the aid destined to the people of Angola, and thus remove it

from the real nationalists. Public world opinion would be channelled the same way.

This is thus the context in which Holden Roberto was brought forth, having been conceived in Washington, born in Leopoldville, and having Mr. Cyrille Adoula, then the Prime Minister of Congo, as a godfather.

Holden was undoubtedly a product of the contradictions of American imperialism. He would similarly become one of its victims.

Holden Roberto had two faces. In the interior, at the price of a few exchanges of fire at the border and a few small more or less fortuitous encounters with the colonial army, combined with dithyrambic war communiques, Holden played the role of an irritating fish bone, a permanent pressure point, a most effective means of persuasion, a factor of consumption, which forced Portugal to mortgage itself more and more to outside interests, especially the United States. Yet in the interior, Holden Roberto and his organization really contributed to the sabotage of the national liberation movement, by instigating divisions, by leading one group of nationalists against another, using racism, tribalism, religion, and the variety of political viewpoints.

To the outside world, Holden was presented as being the real enemy of Portuguese colonialism, as the spokesman of Angolan nationalism, while at the same time he attempted to stifle and isolate the real national liberation movement of Angola, represented by the MPLA.

Holden was thus, essentially, a means of pressure, which was used by the USA in the framework of the competition between the imperialist powers in Angola and mainly in the Congo. At the time of the secession, Holden constituted a potential weapon perpetually directed against Katanga and the interests of the European group. We must remind ourselves that Holden had received at the time all the instructions, technicians, and explosives required to sabotage the Benguela railway, which is a channel whereby much of the mineral wealth of Katanga is evacuated.

If there were, as we have seen, relative divergences among the imperialist powers in the interior, these became more apparent once they were projected on the international scene, and mainly, on the Congolese screen, of which the situation in Angola soon became a projection.

Thus, to American 'liberalism' and 'anti-colonialism' which found expression in Cyrille Adoula and Holden Roberto, there stood opposed Anglo-Belgian-Portuguese colonialism, embodied in the personality of Moise Tshombe.

The situation today has become clearer, especially since the elimination of some secondary conflicts among the imperialist powers in Congo, the USA having substantially strengthened its position in this country. Today the imperialists are trying to build a united front, from Pretoria to Leopoldville, from Lourenco Marques to Luanda, and going through Salisbury. One and only one front, one and only one ideology – ultra-colonialism. The era of Cyrille Adoula is over. It is not the best atmosphere for Holden Roberto, with his 'Revolutionary Government', his devastating war communiques, and his

delirious press declarations. Today they certainly do not perturb the relations among the members of the colonial holy alliance.

But does imperialism really wish to destroy Holden Roberto? Possibly not, since no one knows what surprises the authentic Angolan nationalism will bring, nor even how long the present imperialist modus vivendi in Congo will last.

What is urgent at this moment is to decrease the flow of oxygen with which Holden has been kept alive by imperialism ever since he was born. It is necessary to put him to sleep, to make him hibernate, to put him in moth balls, waiting for a more wintry season – for imperialism. There is no doubt that the ‘revolutionary’ Holden Roberto is willing to accept this new role which his masters have assigned to him.

These are the reasons why Holden Roberto ‘fell into disfavour’, and why his colleague of Leopoldville, Prime Minister Moise Tshombe, at the Council of Ministers of the OAU in Nairobi, did not vote for him, but preferred to abstain.

The recent anti-Holden demonstrations in Leopoldville, those in which the headquarters of the Provisional Government was invaded by dozens of Angolan ‘nationalists’, must be placed in the same context.

This tactical change in imperialism is certainly the result of the resistance it finds in the national liberation movement in Africa. In effect, imperialism was forced to unite, in order to fight the liberation movement. Imperialism was forced to abandon its ‘liberal’ masks, to tighten its ranks, to take the positions called for by its most reactionary elements. Imperialism started openly to defend direct intervention, and became conscious of defending the last barricade, the last stage of colonialism.

But let us be vigilant. Those victories obtained in Leopoldville, the removal of Holden Roberto from the African and Angolan political scene, do in the last analysis constitute important victories for Angolan nationalism. But such victories are more than anything else an affirmation of ultra-colonialism.