

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RKM-5
 Angolan Nationalism:
 The Two Main Trends

28, rue Fosse-aux-Loups
 Brussels, Belgium
 November 13, 1963

Mr. Richard Nolte
 Institute of Current World Affairs
 366 Madison Avenue
 New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The Portuguese consul here was certainly exaggerating the other day when he said with a smile of pleasure and wishful thinking, "You know Senhor, the Angolan revolutionaries don't hate us nearly as much as they hate each other." But surely there was an element of truth in his statement. The Angolan revolutionary groups have certainly wasted enough emotional, diplomatic, polemical, machinational and even military energy combating each other to seriously weaken the cause they all assert to be their goal, the elimination of Portuguese rule. Reconciliations and common fronts have been sought, discussed and formed only to break wide apart in the debris of the most bitter recriminations. The efforts of outsiders - African diplomats mainly - have been in vain.

Aside from personal enmities and ambitions, this disunity lies in the historical and ethnic background of the two major movements, the União das Populações de Angola (UPA) and the Movimento popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA). There are many unanswered questions, many large gaps in information concerning these two groups, but nonetheless certain lines of cleavage emerge clearly. And these lines of cleavage mark the present revolution as much as they are bound to mark an independent Angola of the future. I shall attempt to discuss them here.

The UPA: From available information it appears that in 1954, when a new king was to be chosen by the Kikongo people around São Salvador in northern Angola, a conflict broke out as to whether the candidate should be Protestant or Catholic. This is not particularly surprising since Catholicism had existed in the region since the earliest entry of the Portuguese and a Kikongo king had been converted to this faith the year before Columbus discovered America. The Protestant faction was the result of over a century of Anglo-Saxon missionary effort. In this dispute about the faith of the prospective king, or Ntotela, no compromise was reached. Noting the impasse, the partisans of each side formed themselves into mutual aid societies to promote their aims and eventually get a king of their own choice and faith elected. The Protestant faction, calling itself the União das populações do Norte de Angola, felt that its candidate, a Baptist, should be as well acquainted as possible with the modern world. To this end the royal aspirant,



UPA guerrillas in northern Angola. The Kikongo bands that control much of this coffee-growing region can easily melt into the jungle when the Portuguese advance. Such is not the case for the urban-based MPLA militants.

a clerk, born in São Salvador, but at the time working for the financial department of the Belgian Administration in the Congo, was sent off to Ghana. His name was Holden Roberto. Ghana was not the best place to train tribal kings, and Roberto was soon converted to revolutionary pan-Africanism. On his return he told his astonished tribal supporters that monarchy and chieftdom were dead, that it was old-fashioned to think in terms of tribes, and that it was essential to press for national independence.

Shortly thereafter, he returned to Ghana where he pressed for the recognition of the importance of the Angolan problem among African leaders such as Nkrumah and Bourguiba. On the eve of Congolese independence he returned to Leopoldville and was received by the large Angolan expatriate community as something of a messiah, the leader who would lift the bondage of Portuguese rule from his people. It was obvious at this time that he was the most influential leader of the 500,000 Kikongo-speaking people. It only remained for him to translate this influence into the anti-colonialist movement he had already vowed to create. In this task he was enormously aided by the sympathy of the non-independent Congolese just to the north of Angola who supplied a protected sanctuary. He was also aided by the very real discontent of the peasants of northern Angola. As Portuguese immigration increased (the number of Portuguese in Angola more than doubled in the decade of the '50's) and coffee, grown mainly in the north of Angola, became the main economic pillar of the Angolan economy, the African peasant saw more and more of his land expropriated and the needs for forced labor mount. He was not happy, and recruitment for revolution was thus greatly facilitated.

Almost the entire military action of the UPA has taken place in areas where Kikongo-speaking people dominate, and almost all the UPA guerrillas are peasants. A very large part of the leadership is Kikongo, often Kikongos who have lived for years across the frontier in the Congo. French is often their second language rather than Portuguese. Despite Roberto's vehement disclaimer to the contrary, the UPA, as it now stands, is primarily a regional party, and to a large extent a tribal party.

At the same time, it is only in the north where the UPA operates that the guerrilla war is well entrenched, so the UPA is unquestionably the leading military force in the Angolan revolution. Since Roberto controls the movement almost completely, he certainly wants this state of affairs to continue. Hence his disdain for the rival MPLA, and his contempt for other nationalist groups. As an Angolan-born journalist for Leopoldville's Courrier d'Afrique put it, he "wants to stand out amidst all

the Angolan leaders, as if it is his party alone which is fighting...and that he alone is the leader of the rebellion."

The MPLA: Whereas the UPA has had a very special history in connection with the specific problems of a specific region, the MPLA is much more the typical product of colonialism, the elite created by it - and by its greatest contradiction. As the MPLA has evolved it has been dominated by the most Europeanized elements of the African population. This is even true physically; there are many mulattos in the organization. The level of education of its leaders is higher than that of the UPA; its president is a medical doctor and a poet in the Portuguese language. Its program is elaborate and fairly sophisticated. Many of its leaders have studied in Portugal or elsewhere in Europe, and many have been classed by the Portuguese colonial authorities among that tiny minority of Africans known as assimilados who are granted the rights and duties of Europeans. The MPLA thus represents at once the glaring failure of Portuguese racial policy and a basic contradiction of colonialism everywhere: the more the colonized become familiar with the colonizer, the more forcefully and efficiently they reject this colonizer. It is - or was - just this small minority and its assimilation of and dedication to Portuguese rule that formed the key-stone of official justification for the colonial policies of Dr. Salazar's Estado novo. But instead of coming up with good black Portuguese, it has produced bitter and articulate revoltés.

As could be expected from the above, the MPLA is urban in its origins. Since the cities of Africa are its chief de-tribalizers, it is less ethocentric than its rival. It is more doctrinaire, less practical, more unitarist, more socialist. Its models are Sekou Touré, Ben Bella, Nasser.

Although the MPLA leaders are fond of linking their struggle with the tribal revolts of the first two decades of this century, the two have nothing in common, either ideologically or organically. The MPLA has its origins in the small groups of educated Africans, government employees, clerks and artisans, mainly, who, beginning in the '20's, started publishing sporadic journals and tracts discussing African problems. The members of this earliest black Angolan intelligentsia in general belonged to the Liga Africana, a government-sponsored organization designed to channel African complaints and desires for reform to the appropriate authorities in Lisbon, "without any appeal to violence and without leaving constitutional limits," as the organization's charter states. When Dr. Salazar came to power in 1928, these constitutional limits were steadily reduced. Thus the Liga was faced with a decision: should it still operate legally within these increasingly narrow confines, or should it go underground? The Liga split over this question, as it did over the related one

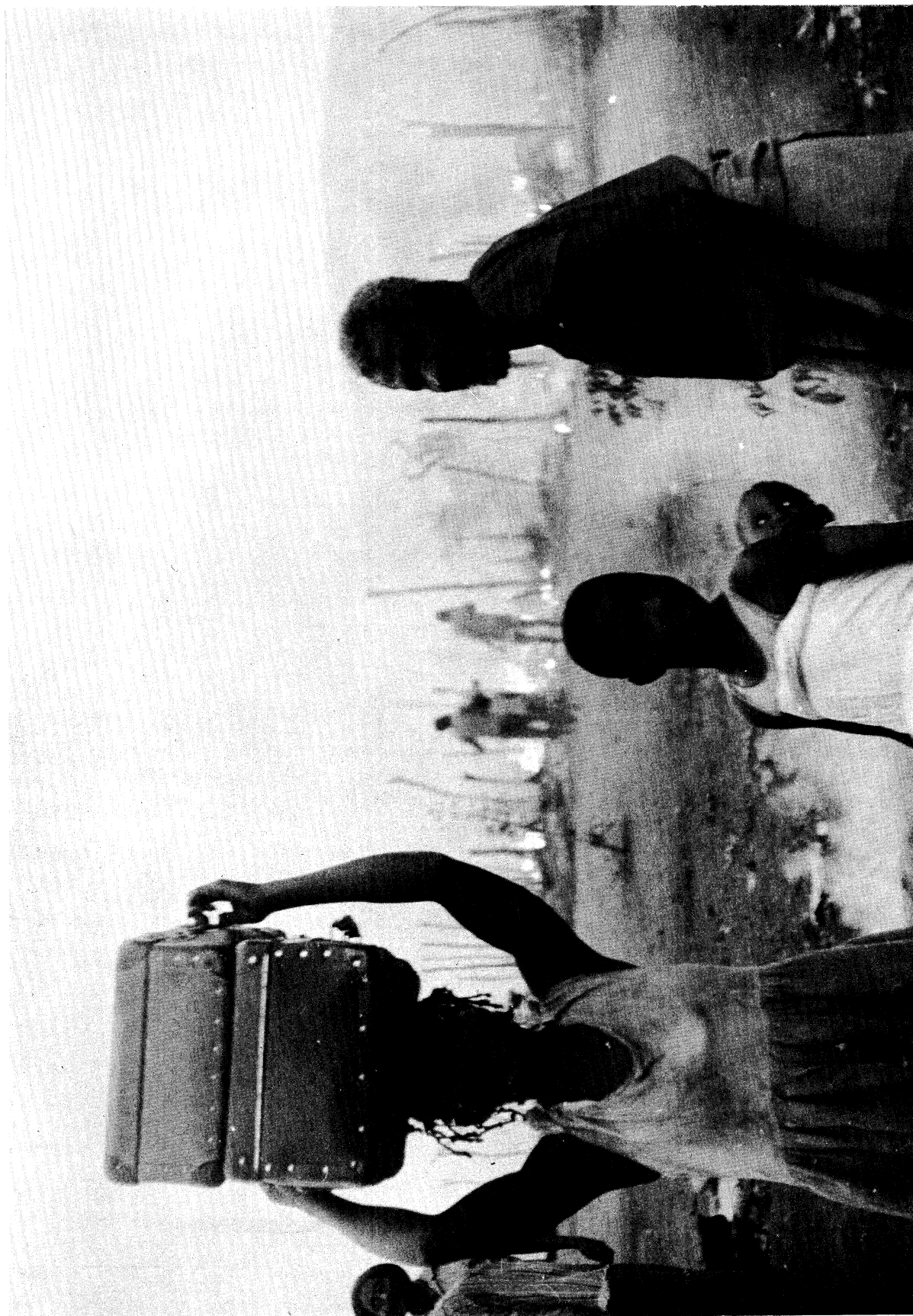
of whether to include the unlettered masses of the African population. The Liga's more radical wing which favored underground action was also in favor of organizing, as far as possible, the workers and peasants. One of this group's first projects was a modest campaign against illiteracy, which even today is over 95% in Angola.

During the '40's there seems to have been a lull in African political activity, though this may reflect primarily one of the numerous lacunae of information. In any case, in the late '40's and early '50's ferment was again evident. The general discredit of fascism after the war and the rising star of anti-colonialism in other parts of the world had their dim echo in Angola. Brazilian books treating these subjects were circulated, and the European population of the colony, which included many opponents of the Salazar regime, added to the dissent.

In 1953 the Partido da Luta Unida dos Africanos de Angola, the first mass revolutionary party, was founded in Luanda. Its first manifesto called on Africans to form underground cells which would be called upon to participate in the fight against Portuguese rule. Three years later the Partido da Luta fused with several smaller organizations to form the Movimento popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA). In the new movement's charter, Mário de Andrade, the MPLA's most articulate leader, denounced the evils of Portuguese rule and called for its liquidation "by any means." He speculated that Portuguese unwillingness to change policies voluntarily would necessitate armed revolution. In the charter, as in most subsequent statements, the MPLA stressed the paramount need for unity among all Angolans so that the fight against the Portuguese might succeed. This constant stress on the need for unity is obviously posed as a counter-position to the more regional and ethnic UPA. But, more important, it reflects the prevailing attitudes of its urbanized, detribalized and better educated leaders.

The MPLA got off to a slow start, but by 1958 it was actively distributing propaganda and had established clandestine schools. According to de Andrade, during 1958 the growth of African political agitation was only out-distanced by the growth of apprehensions among the Portuguese. The latter decided to import the most efficient and modern branch of their government, the secret police, from the Metropole to Angola*. Soon they had planted informers in MPLA ranks, and the result was the arrest on Easter, 1959 of 57 leaders of the movement. The MPLA was thus decapitated for the time being.

* The Polícia internacional e de Defesa do Estado (PIDE) represents an interesting case of pre-war technical aid to underdeveloped countries: in the late 1930's the Gestapo sent Salazar some instructors and experts to help and modernize it.



Angolans whose village has just been burned by Portuguese gasoline bombs. I was 100 yards east of the village when the planes arrived, on the trail that will lead these homeless people to refuge in the Congo. The village is Fuesa.

But it still had members and militants and was in search of an opportunity for direct action. This opportunity soon arrived. In January, 1961 Captain Henrique Galvão pirated the Santa Maria, and since it was rumored he would sail down to Angola, many journalists were waiting in Luanda. Now was one of the few times in history when this lost chunk of Africa was news. To take advantage of this, MPLA militants attacked the prisons where their leaders were incarcerated. Terrible violence broke out and a casualty figure in the hundreds resulted. From a tactical point of view the attack on the prisons was suicidal. But politically it was wise for two reasons: it showed the outside world that all was not Lusitanian harmony south of the Congo. And above all, by the violence of the attacks in the first place, and the panic and blind revenge they created in the European community in the second place, they succeeded in drastically enlarging the wall of hate and distrust between the two communities. In such an atmosphere the myth of the loyal black Portuguese, of the whole policy of assimilation ran aground. The moderates on both sides were shunted aside. Such a situation of mutual intolerance is a precondition for revolution and a precondition for the impossibility of reform; both the FLN and the Secret Army in Algeria realized this very clearly.

The following month, March 1961, the UPA began its own direct military action which spread these same conditions into the interior. Significantly, it was from among the Kikongo-speaking peasants of the north that the UPA recruited its guerrilla bands. The UPA's greater military success depended - and depends - on the factors of terrain and proximity to the refuge the Congo provides. Whether the increased influence and prestige the UPA derives from its greater military power, can offset the appeal of the ideologically more coherent and modernist MPLA, remains to be seen.

Sincerely,



Richard Mathews

Received in New York November 20, 1963.