ANGOLA: FIVE CENTURIES OF SERVITUDE

Historical Background:

1480s Portuguese explorers begin penetration of northern coastal zone of present day Angola. Local king of the Bakongo people seeks to establish mutually beneficial ties with Portugal.

1500 Portuguese slave merchants raid Bakongo kingdom. Lisbon throne ignores Bakongo pleas for assistance and protection as reciprocal relations give way to wholesale exploitation. Beginning of decline of Bakongo kingdom.

1576 Luanda (capital of modern Angola) emerges as a major slave port in southern Africa. Portuguese invasions and wars generated by the slave trade shatters societies throughout the area.

1845-60 End of 3 1/2 centuries of "official" slave trade. Portuguese now turn attention to military conquest of Angola's interior. Recruitment of forced labor to "develop" Angola to serve European economic interest.

1884-1914 Angola recognized by Europe as a colony of Portugal. Portuguese being to promote settlement by Europeans to secure the territory and keep African inhabitants in check. Educated Angolans begin to voice objections to colonial rule.

1920s Fascist rule in Lisbon revokes freedom of speech and press, at home and in colonies. Angolan protest driven underground.


Five Hundred Years of Portuguese Domination:

For nearly five centuries the people of Angola has labored under the burden of foreign exploitation and domination. Although the slave trade came to a halt in the mid 19th century, the Portuguese continued to make extensive use of forced labor to work plantations and extract mineral resources. In recent decades a system of taxation has replaced cruder forms of labor recruitment, but has had the same effect of coercing Africans into draining their country's resources into the pockets of overseas investors.
Angolan Resistance:

The Angolans have never passively accepted Portuguese domination. Military resistance against the Portuguese invasion continued in the interior of the country into the present century. Resistance movements developing in cities spewed out mountains of anti-colonialist literature before coming under the heel of the ruthless PIDE (Portuguese "Gestapo").

In the late 1950s two movements were launched to rid the country of the colonial menace: MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and the UPA (Union of the Population of Angola). In 1961, Portuguese attempts at suppressing these movements and the violence of white settlers forced Angolans to take up arms. A third group (UNITA - National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) joined the struggle in the mid 1960s. Although hostilities have been temporarily suspended pending agreement with the new Portuguese government, the struggle continues.

An African Treasure Trove:

Angola is by far the wealthiest of Portugal's African colonies, a fact which largely explains why many Portuguese are determined to maintain their hold after her other territories (Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique) have secured their independence. Given the retrograde condition of Portugal's industrial economy, extraction of Angola's vast mineral resources rests largely in the hands of firms based in more advanced industrial countries, including the United States.

American Corporation Involvement - Gulf Oil:

The commercial involvement links the United States business interest directly to maintaining Angola as a Portuguese colony while lending economic support to Portugal's wars of colonial suppression. Gulf Oil, for example, operating in northwest Angola (Cabinda), is the largest single U.S. investor in "Portuguese" Africa. Gulf's payments of $61 million into the Portuguese treasury for Angola operations in 1972 represented 60% of the colony's military budget for that year.

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