Letter No. 1

from Edgar (Ted) Lockwood,  
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Dear friends,

This letter is in the nature of a report on my doings over the last two months.

My first ten days were spent in Europe, being briefed by knowledgeable people in London, Brussels, and Geneva. I must say that I was pleasurable thrilled and grateful for the presence of an international network of Friends who arranged appointments, provided shelter, food, and furnished a running commentary on who was who and what was what. So I want to thank especially John and Alma Harding of Quaker Peace and Service, Brian and Pam Stapleton of the Quaker House at the EEC, and Peter and Margaret Whittle of the Quaker U.N. office in Geneva.

I found my briefings on SADCC in London and Brussels particularly useful. One unanticipated meeting in London was with War on Want, which is advocating an NGO conference on SADCC in Africa. It now seems that this may well take place. In Geneva, I was particularly impressed with the refugee information I was able to glean from UNHCR representatives.

On arrival in Harare on February 24, I was immediately faced with a choice: to stay and learn more about the crisis in Matabeleland, or to attend the conference I had been invited to attend in Angola. I decided that the latter was an unparalleled opportunity and really a necessity. With relative ease, I was able to get a visa and reach Angola on March 1.

Let me then make most of this newsletter a report on Angola. The international press has made much of Matabeleland, most of which, unfortunately, seems to have a basis in fact. Sorting out the responsibility for this tragedy is a very sensitive and difficult task, one which I do not feel competent to perform at this point. More important, perhaps, is to explore ways in which some sort of reconciliation can be achieved. The NGO community and the Catholic Church have communicated their concerns to the prime minister and his security officers, and the prime minister has expressed his anger, particularly about the Catholic bishops' statement, and that the churches are making undocumented charges.

Perhaps I should also say a brief word about the conference on refugees which I attended with Pat Hunt from March 20 to 26. It was called by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) with a focus on voluntary agencies' work in Africa. As an inexperienced participant in such diplomatic conferences, I must say I found it hard to follow the convoluted, abstract process of work, most of which was carried on by the "heavies," such as the OAU Commission of Fifteen, represented by the Ambassadors of Cameroon and Rwanda, by the Lutheran World Federation and Service, Euro-Action Accord, and by various legal and policy specialists on refugee matters.
There was a great deal of concern that the upcoming conference of donor countries would not be adequately prepared, and that the donors might be able to get away with duplicitous promises of more aid which turned out to be continued aid. The African countries were urged to ratify the 1981 African Charter on Human and People's Rights (6 have ratified and 17 have signed the charger so far). The meeting emphasized the importance of voluntary repatriation as the ideal solution, and the necessity of more NGO involvement in development work with refugees. One cause for complaint by the African ambassadors was the relative preponderance of attendance by international agencies as opposed to national NGOs. It seemed that financial assistance did not arrive on time for some national groups such as Christian councils, refugee councils, etc. to be present. Another consistent theme was the need to involve refugees in the solution to their problems.

As often happens, some of the most valuable conversations took place outside the conference hall. I was particularly glad to meet Harold Miller of the Mennonite Central Committee, who is stationed in Nairobi, and to hear his insights.

A Visit to Angola

We arrived in Luanda by air, sometime after midnight. Monica Appleby of Church World Service, who shared the flight, had phoned ahead while waiting in Lusaka to get her visa. She felt sure we would be met. Still, we were thankful to find that Rev. Ntoni-Nzinga of CAIE (the Angolan Council of Evangelical Churches, our host) was there to greet us, assist us through immigration, and ferry us to our hotel through the dark streets.

When morning came, I was struck by the contrasts of Luanda, a visible symbol of the crisis of Angola. Luanda by day was full of people, but empty of commodities. Trucks and cars rumbled through the streets as soon as curfew was ended. They had people in them, but not things. I passed shops and offices on the way to the post office, but there were no goods, no customers, and no shopkeepers. The Jornal de Angola was not available; it had sold out its copies as soon as they appeared on the street. (The run is small because of paper shortages.) To be sure, there are busy places where foreigners trade: curio shops, a bookstore near the five-star Tropico Hotel. And the Angolan airline was busy, and so was the bank. But what was so surprising was the lack of things for sale that we take for granted: food, clothing, and consumer goods. An American experiences culture shock. How accustomed we are to having it easy! Angola is having hard, hard times.

And yet, the people are alive and the city seems to be bustling. I was struck by the philosophical good humor, dignity, and national pride of the people we met.

This was, to be sure, only a first impression, but it stayed with me as I worked during the two weeks I was there, trying to see the reasons for this almost desperate situation that Angola is in. Money was available, but it was becoming worthless because it could buy very little unless one were a foreign cooperante and had access to the diplomatic shop. Food was being produced, but not reaching the market. Why not? There were queues outside the hotel when the shop next door started selling trousers. Why was there such a shortage of clothes?
I was grateful to be in Angola at last. Many would-be travelers to Angola have been stymied by a visa problem. Without an invitation and a legitimate reason for being there, you don't get a visa. The fact that the Angolan Council of Churches had invited us there made all the difference. The Angolan consulate in Harare granted it routinely.

The Angolan churches had met in Europe with international church aid agencies. This was the first time for such a convocation to be held in Angola. Part of the rationale for the meeting was the ecclesiastical needs of a growing church: more staff for ecumenical work, funding for adult education, etc. But another reason was to seek support for the church's important role in development. Because of the emergency the Angolan people face, the nation needs all the help it can get. The churches can mobilize their members, especially in rural areas, for the production of food, the country's first priority. This work has already begun in Sanza Pambo, in Uige Province, and in Caxito, an hour's drive northeast of Luanda, but it is in very preliminary stages.

The Council of Churches of Angola is a relatively new venture, having come into existence in 1977. It embraces 14 denominations, including churches with strong historical links to European, American, and Liberian missionaries, and also churches which have spring from African initiatives to make the Christian message their own, stressing self-help, autonomy, and spiritual values.

In the first three days of the consultation, I was privileged to be an observer of a national dialogue within the Angolan church. There were several strong presentations. The Secretary-General of CAIE, the Rev. Ntoni-Nzinga, stressed the importance of working in rural areas co-operatively and not simply in Luanda, reaching areas the government cannot reach, acting in solidarity with those who are suffering the most. Individual transformation implies social consequences. The church, he said, must fight for a better society, reforming institutions, and removing the stumbling blocks which the oppressed encounter.

Bishop Emilio de Carvalho of the Methodist Church recalled the history of the Protestant churches' involvement in the struggle for liberation from Portuguese colonialism. People in Protestant churches had been jailed for reading the Bible. Because missionaries had come from countries where there was freedom, the Portuguese authorities attacked their Angolan congregations as subversive. He argued that the church must now be equally involved in the construction of a new society.

"Churches think it is only up to politicians. Churches have an obligation to study the orientation of the party... As long as the churches stay away, they will not understand. They wait for ships to arrive. Do they expect the government will import all these things?"

Here were some of the comments which were offered in the presence of government spokesmen:

"Angolans are hard-working. But in some places, goods produced are rotting because there is no way to get them to markets."

"We still have a capitalistic mind... socialist policies with a capitalistic mind."

"In some military zones, the military take the corn when it is ripe."
"The church should speak with one voice and one social policy. Are we talking with one voice when we talk about unity?"

Clearly, the leadership of CAIE has agreed with the government on the priorities to be pursued, and on a plan for channeling development aid. The relationship seems to be a co-operative one. I found the discussion relatively candid, all things considered, on both sides. One government spokesman admitted that corrupt elements in the bureaucracy had sold Nissan trucks meant for food delivery to private persons who used them for running around.

Prior to 1978, the government took a relatively hard line of opposition toward religion. Today, while the MPLA continues to regard religion as a "distorted idealist concept of the world," it practices toleration in a free competition of ideology while seeking to encourage the churches to contribute positively to a new and socialist society. At the same time, the government and the party are opposed to churches and sects which are new and foreign to Angola, or which retain a hankering for privileges they enjoyed under colonialism. Fundamentalist churches founded by evangelical mission societies in the U.S., Canada, U.K., and Australia are active in southern Angola, and are suspected of a pro-UNITA, pro-South Africa political bias beneath their pietism.

To one of my colleagues from Europe, the CAIE presentations seemed too authoritative and perhaps staged for the benefit of the government. He felt that the denominations favored a return to a market-run economy, at least for food. I was not sure that he was correct. My feeling was that most of the churches in CAIE strongly support the overall strategy of the government in the national crisis while they are critical of shortcomings in implementation.

After the weekend, CAIE presented the representatives of European and American church agencies with a set of proposals for assistance that totalled more than $5 million in the first year. It was clearly a very ambitious program born, not of desperation, but of confidence and vitality. On the other hand, the international church agencies were facing recession at home in church giving and retrenchment by governments, which in Europe, funnel some development aid through church channels. Hence, they stressed the need for the Angolans to concentrate on self-help development projects, on credit, and not grants for buildings and the avoidance of large-scale capital structures.

A lively and even heated debate took place in which the African churches decried a false dichotomy between small-scale, self-help projects emphasizing training, preventative medicine, etc. and project involving capital, such as hospitals, schools, and churches, as if the first category alone were truly relevant to human needs, and the second were not.

"Without a place to live, people cannot be rehabilitated," said the Rev. Ntoni-Nzinga. Bishop de Carvalho put it to his brother from Africa, resident in Geneva: "How can you say no buildings when you know the church buildings are destroyed? Pastors have no homes, no places to meet--people are meeting under trees."

Pastor Rodriguez of the Baptist Church pointed out that Angolan Christians knew how to contribute, but their money cannot buy vehicles and tractors which are essential for transport and development. "We can only buy things abroad with foreign money," he emphasized.
The international agencies were asked to describe who they were and what they did, as well as what they would be prepared to fund. Naturally, we could make no commitments, but promised to present the projects sympathetically, but we pointed out that with limited budgets, the pie was small and the slices would be small. We promised to keep on exploring what might be done.

One of the most fascinating presentations of the conference came at the very end. Lopo do Nascimento, presently the Minister of Planning and responsible for a new emergency plan just promulgated, gave us two and a half hours of engaging, informative, humorous, and self-critical discourse. It was clear from his presentation that the government is engaged in a period of rethinking and "reflection" on its economic program. The emphasis is on new and vigorous practical steps to cope with the present crisis.

The first priority must be food. With Kunene, the primary source of beef under enemy occupation, and the Central Highlands, the biggest producer of maize, a war zone, the government must mobilize every sector, and especially the individual peasant producers to produce more.

The church can reach people whom the government cannot. While acknowledging that peasants were unwilling to sell food at current official prices, he was not prepared to abandon price controls. Rather the government plans to trade consumer goods such as radios for food and to find ways to encourage traders to bring food to the market.

When Jose Chipenda challenged him to justify nationalization of the land since the private sector seemed to be out-producing state-owned farms, the planning minister said that if the state-owned farms could not do as well or better than the private sector, "they should just give it up." There is plenty of land, he said; the question is production, how to increase food supplies. "I will buy from the devil himself if he produces the potatoes," he said. The government has no intention of nationalizing everything.

Clearly, there are limits to how much the government can afford to import. With the drop in oil prices, Angola suffered a loss of $300 million in foreign exchange from the first quarter of 1981 to 1982. Mr. do Nascimento said, "Every day I am on the telephone to New York to find out about oil prices."

Angola has appealed to Europe and Canada to send food surpluses to Angola. I wondered why he did not mention the United States. (Because the United States refuses to recognize Angola, PL 480 food aid probably cannot be given? Is this the end of the matter? I noted in our Zimbabwe news on March 31 that France had donated 3,000 tons of emergency food aid to Angola. What about the U.S.?)

Another obvious priority is the acquisition of technical and commercial skills. Africans were not allowed to hold jobs in the Portuguese colonial economy and hence there is a tremendous deficiency in maintenance of equipment. For example, 55% of the 23,000 vehicles imported since 1975 are now laid up for want of repairs. Attend­ants in the spare parts warehouses are unfamiliar with what is in the boxes and very often will say "We don't have that" to cover their ignorance. To remedy this and other deficiencies the government has undertaken a crash program of education. One out of three Angolans is a student. Three million Angolans are in school, six times as many as in 1975. But the government still has to spend $150 million on foreign cooperantes, whose needs for a higher standard of living, for good housing and for consumer goods are expensive in foreign exchange and in creating political problems. Angolan technicians resent the fact that foreigners are treated as a privileged
class that can get housing that they find hard to get.

The backdrop is the war, which costs more than 60% of the country's budget. Nsondo do Nascimento, development officer for CAIE, pointed out:

"We cannot get out of the situation we are in unless the north gets South Africa to withdraw and to let Namibia be free. We suffer the consequences for what is decided by outside forces. The action of the first world people can bring relief from the suffering."

The military situation seems to have worsened somewhat in the last six months. UNITA bands are making increasingly bold attacks on cars, trucks and trains traveling in the central highlands area, including church and Red Cross vehicles. Travel outside a perimeter of 20 to 30 kilometers from the major towns and cities of the center is considered unsafe without military escort, although some cars apparently go from Huambo to Bie in daylight hours. Landmines and ambushes are a constant hazard.

It should be understood that many attacks said to be UNITA are actually the work of South African-trained mercenaries. For example, in late January, a group of white commandos, whom eyewitnesses say spoke Portuguese, were responsible for blowing up the Lomaum dam, which supplied electricity to Lobito and Benguela, and the towns of the region. Not only were conduits and transformers destroyed, the main dam itself was undermined and gave way. Its replacement will require major civil engineering work, and replacement of equipment that could take years. This is but one of a series of attacks on vital infrastructures aimed at bringing the Angolan government to its knees.

More devastating still are the effects of the war on the peasant population of the countryside. Jim Kirkwood of the United Church of Canada, who visited the central highlands for a month, told me that Congregationalist pastors were "numb from burying people." One senior clergyman told him that as many as a million people have died. According to the government, there currently are 350,000 displaced persons, but apparently it doesn't count persons as displaced after they have been in one location for six months or so. The World Council of Churches estimated last fall that the figure of 600,000 may be closer to reality.

These statistics became painfully alive for us when we visited Huambo for several days as guests of the local council of churches. While we were not able to visit the camps which the government runs outside the town because the local provincial commissioner, whose permission was necessary was not available, we did meet a group of some 300 displaced persons who had come into a large court owned by the African Apostolic Church. They were a stomach-turning sight: malnourished, listless, ill-clothed, and many in need of immediate medical attention. Sores, swellings, goiters, and various skin problems were only the visible signs of sickness. Children whom one would take to be eight years old turned out, on inquiry, to be 12. At a Red Cross shelter, we met some of the 160 maimed residents, including many youngsters hobbling about on one matchstick-like leg. There were many orphans.

The response of CAIE has been not only to call for help from the World Council of Churches, but also to mobilize their own resources. We were told that almost every family has friends or relatives who have been displaced staying with them. The local churches have set up a commission headed by the Rev. Paulo Samaria to oversee distribution of food and medicines. One of the bottlenecks is transportation.
Quantities of rice and beans which were delivered in Lobito in December have not yet reached Huambo, and are still waiting government transport. The trains are irregular, and subject to attack, although we were told that five trains had recently been able to make it. In fact, we saw one unloading when we were in Huambo. The local council of churches has one truck, but a trip to Lobito would have to be arranged with military escort. Air transport is possible but extremely expensive.

One partial solution which local people suggested was to increase food production locally. For this, the church council said they needed one or two tractors, seeds, fertilizers, and a short-term agronomist who could set up the program to be self-sustaining. We were told roofing material would be helpful. People could make their own bricks. Clothing for children is urgent. There are many illnesses which come from lack of blankets and clothes. Medicines for malaria, cholera, and yellow fever are also needed.

A spokesman for the local churches told us:

"We thank CAIE for what they have done so far. For right now, it is very important. What we saw at the church courtyard is an example of what is happening. In all the provinces, Bie, Huambo, Kunene, Huila, there are many people in similar situations. They have no clothes, food, or houses. People look for food in garbage cans. This is why we ask and insist the CAIE project continue... We have to help because there is nothing there."

On the following morning, we met Isabel Pagado, the Secretary for Social Affairs for Huambo, a very impressive and dynamic government civil servant. She stressed the importance of shifting the emphasis of aid away from simply giving food, and toward the provision of means of self-help such as tools, implements, and seeds for beans, corn, and tomatoes. The government plans to resettle the displaced persons in 25 new villages around Huambo and 50 in Bie. It involves the displaced persons themselves in their own development work, and also in guarding their settlement. So far, however, only one village has been built.

The government is trying to build orphanages for the many youngsters who have lost their families. The local Kimbaguist church, which we visited, runs a shelter house for some 20 orphans with two of the church women in charge.

Even the government social affairs department has only one truck and a Land Rover with no spare parts. When food comes, the department can handle about 12 to 15 tons at one time. She said she could use a Mercedes truck and a van or two, but please not to send any more IFAs (an East German make with a bad reputation in Angola). She is responsible for feeding 90,000 people in the Huambo area. "Be sure to mark it for Huambo!" she said.

The Red Cross and the government are the only agencies which are authorized to distribute food and supplies to the camps. When supplies arrive for the churches, they share them between the government and the churches for distribution. Each party has the right to have an observer to see that the distribution is correctly done, but whether this has been done in practice, I do not know.
A question I have been asked frequently since coming back from Angola has been how much support UNITA has in the country. Knowledgeable people who have visited the center and south-center of the country, where there are strong ties of Ovimbundo loyalty, say that Savimbi and UNITA are still popular, notwithstanding all the slaughter they have wrought. It was almost impossible to confirm this from conversations in Huambo. People don't talk politics. On a practical level, the churches cooperate with the government, and the government obviously knows it must win the loyalty of the Ovimbundo people.

I came away from Huambo determined to see if something could not be mobilized for the people of the Alto Plano, difficult as that might be, since it is the cockpit of war.

But relief and development aid for the refugees are not enough, as Lucas Pohamba, national treasurer of SWAPO, pointed out to me when I visited him on my return to Luanda:

"We are not happy with the United States, which is blocking the decolonization process. The efforts of the U.N., Africa, and peace-loving countries are being banned by the present administration. The United States is encouraging South Africa to stick to its guns.

We want to go back to our country. The United States is contributing to our exile. AFSC can assist us to see if U.S. policy can be changed by breaking this linkage with the Cubans. For how long will we go on receiving aid for refugees? The first thing is to go home."

Clearly, there can be no real chance for peace and development in Angola unless there is a political settlement in Namibia. The devastating war drags on in Angola at incredible cost, but no military solution is in sight. Angola can be paralyzed but not defeated. UNITA and South Africa, with the backing, it would seem, of the United States and its European partners, continue to insist on Cuban withdrawal from Angola as a precondition for Namibian independence, an action which Angola cannot take without risking its own defense. Angola had high hopes that by direct talks with South Africa, it could negotiate a withdrawal of South African troops from Angola and an end to South African support for UNITA, for without South African support UNITA would be manageable. In return, SWAPO and Cuban forces would be kept north of a certain line. All of this preliminary to the implementation of the U.N. plan for a U.N.-controlled and supervised election in Namibia. Now that hope seems to have gone aglimmering. It is possible that the United States may have been insistent that the Cubans must be totally withdrawn and not just from southern Angola. Conceivably, the South Africans may have been momentarily less ideological and more pragmatic than the West.

In any case, it is clear who is being sacrificed on the altar of the cold war. It is the people of Angola and Namibia. And for this, Africa holds the United States primarily responsible.