REPORT FROM THE MPLA SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE

From Mike Shuster's four and a half month stay in the People's Republic of Angola, we have gotten a first-hand account of the last six months in Angola, and certain points stand out in his report. First, the MPLA leadership of the People's Republic of Angola is committed to transforming Angola into a society where Angola's tremendous wealth is developed and used for the well-being of all Angolans. Second, the revolution now in process in Angola is threatened by continuing invasions of South African troops in southern Angola and of Zairean troops in both Cabinda and northern Angola.

The triumph of the Angolan people in their second war of liberation acted as a catalyst to accelerate an anti-imperialist upheaval throughout all of Southern Africa, witness the recent events in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa itself. Secretary of State Kissinger's recent diplomatic maneuvering in Southern Africa, undertaken to influence the direction of change in Southern Africa to be compatible with Western economic and political interests, must be seen against the background of Angola's victory, a victory which the U.S. government tried to prevent and continues to attempt to sabotage through its support of South African control of Namibia and by its continued massive military assistance to Zaire.

Support for the People's Republic of Angola must continue. We hope to participate in an educational presentation in solidarity with the People's Republic of Angola on the first anniversary of its independence, November 11th. Members of the Committee have prepared a 120 color frame slide/tape and filmstrip/tape presentation on the history of Angola, with an emphasis on recent years. This can be purchased from the Committee, the slide/tape presentation for $50 and the filmstrip/tape presentation for $15, for such an event or for general use in schools or with community groups. Also we ask again for contributions to the Angola Medical Aid project. If you and/or your group plan to organize an event for November 11th, we hope you will try to raise money for this project.

For the moment, this will be the last Angola News Summary. Many of us are working with Southern Africa Magazine, a comprehensive monthly publication covering all current political, economic, and social reconstruction aspects of Southern Africa. We strongly urge you to subscribe. A year's subscription still costs only $6. Their new address is: 156 Fifth Ave. Rm. 707, New York, N.Y. 10011.

The American Committee on Africa (ACOA), at 305 E. 46th St. New York, N.Y. 10017, has just put out a very good 50 page booklet on Angola entitled "No One Can Stop the Rain". Individual copies cost $1.50, and 10 or more are $1 each.

We still have Angola posters and buttons available; posters are now 50¢ each for 10, and $1 individually. Buttons are 25¢ each.
AS ANGOLA EMERGES FROM WAR, THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

A First Hand Report From the People's Republic of Angola
by Mike Shuster

News about Angola in the Western press is scant. Over the past two months, information in the U.S. has been practically non-existent. In Britain the situation has been only slightly better. In the French language press there has been more, for Agence France Press is the only west European of North American news agency with a permanent correspondent in Luanda. For Americans, though, Angola no longer effectively exists in the news.

What little news there has been has emphasized only one aspect of life in Angola -- UNITA's continued guerrilla resistance against MPLA. In a three part series in early September, the usually reliable Le Monde emphasized UNITA's "strengths." "The prestige of Jonas Savimbi among the mass of Umbundus," wrote correspondent Rene Lefort, "remains so strong that the 'Kwachas' still find sufficient support from a part of the population to pursue guerrilla activities." At the same time Lefort complains, "It is impossible to inquire on the spot, after a decision by the Minister of Information at the end of June to prohibit all foreign journalists from traveling to the interior of the country."

Lefort is wrong, though. Not all foreign journalists were prohibited from traveling in Angola. In my more than four months in Angola from April to the end of August of this year I spent time in ten of Angola's sixteen provinces, including the center, south and east. I found Western reporting on Angola to be untruthful, as well as its coverage of the second war of liberation last year.

External Military Threat

The most serious threat is external, not from the isolated groups of UNITA forces that continue sporadic guerrilla attacks. Attacks by the Zairean army in Angola's northern provinces, including Cabinda, and by the South African army across the Namibian border to the south have continued since the war ended in March, and have become increasingly serious. Throughout my stay in Angola, the leaders of MPLA repeatedly referred to military activity in the north and south, simply saying that "our enemies" in these areas were continuing "provocations."

Amidst the wave of American diplomats visits to the African continent, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld - the first American Secretary of State ever to visit Africa - arrived in Kinshasa in late June for several days of talks with Zaire's president Mobutu. Since that time, it appears that military activities against Angola from Zaire have stepped up. In early August, Angola's president Agostino Neto, in a speech in Benguela, mentioned Zaire by name for the first time in describing bombardments in Cabinda province, specifically an attack on the village of Saba Massala. "A short while ago, along the northern frontier in the Angolan province of Zaire, individuals who came from the Republic of Zaire, armed and equipped to attack our territory, were taken prisoner," Neto told the workers of a Benguela sugar plantation. "And on the southern frontier," Neto continued, "at the frontier that we have with Namibia, there have also been violations and attacks on the population that lives principally in Cunene province."

(Mike Shuster recently returned from more than four months in Angola. His reports from Angola appeared in this bulletin and other publications.)
It is in these areas that travel is restricted, but MPLA authorities will not deny that guerrilla activities continue in the central south of the country. Neto himself referred to them in saying, "in the interior of our country, these groups, despite our vigilance, have been wearing down our population. They have been killing men, women and children, they have been causing material damage, burning houses, burning furniture, preventing in certain areas the tranquility that we desire."

It had been reported, however, that it was not possible to travel by car without heavy military escort between Lubango (Sa da Bandeira) in the far south, and Huambo in the central south, and from Huambo directly north to Luanda via the town of Quibala. I traveled with several other journalists from Afrique Asie on a two thousand mile journey by car on these very roads from Luanda down the coast to Benguela, to Lubango, and as far south as Mocamedes and Porto Alexandre; then back through Lubango to Huambo, to Luanda.

UNITA Becoming Desperate

Yet MPLA leaders are not unrealistic about the situation. In Huambo, where the army, FAPLA, maintains its headquarters for the Fourth Military Region, I was able to speak openly and freely with military and political authorities about the continued problems with UNITA. "Yes, there are continued attacks by UNITA bands," the commander in Huambo, Sihanouk, told me. "But they are becoming more and more desperate."

Sihanouk said that UNITA did not have direct supply lines from the exterior of Angola. It continued to function with the massive amounts of military hardware that had been hidden by Savimbi's movement as it saw its "government" collapsing in the face of the MPLA and Cuban assault on Huambo in January.

"But that supply is being gradually used up," Sihanouk said, "and FAPLA is finding some of it. Now UNITA's attacks are against more remote outposts and villages such as the attack July 19 on a 12 man garrison on the provincial border between Huambo and Cuanza Sul. They attack outlying villages for food."

Less than a week before my visit to Huambo in late July, UNITA remnants attacked a large village in the far southeastern province of Cuando Cubango, and it was reported that more than a hundred people, including women and children, had been killed.

"But now this is more a political than military struggle" Sihanouk told me in his office at FAPLA headquarters, once the home of a rich Portuguese settler of old Nova Lisboa. "We are bringing our political programs to the people who were misled by Savimbi in the south. Now they are seeing that they can get free medical care where there was no medical care in the past, and they can send their children to schools, also free, where there were none in the past. And at the same time, they are seeing that MPLA is not massacring the population as Savimbi said it would."

Before his retreat from Huambo in what UNITA then called its "strategic withdrawal" - pledging to return in less than ten days - Savimbi spread panic by announcing that the town would be completely leveled by MPLA bombardments. He also let it be known that when he did return, he would consider "all the inhabitants that hadn't been butchered by the Cubans" as partisans of MPLA. When MPLA took Huambo in February, it was uninhabited.

Savimbi has not returned to Huambo, and there have been no reprisals against the population. In fact, MPLA leaders constantly make clear that former supporters and even soldiers of both UNITA and FNLA will be fully accepted, as long as they are willing to join in support for MPLA and in the reconstruction of the country. "I say we are not against those who were misled at a particular moment," stated Neto in
in Benguela. "All are Angolans, and they have the right to a certain amount of time to be able to reconcile themselves, to be won back, to function as perfect citizens of this country. I will never say that because two or three years ago someone belonged to UNITA or FNLA they can't live here. But," Neto warned, "if someone takes up arms against the MPLA, this will have no pardon."

Border Incidents

In a two week trip in August to the Upper Zambezi region of Mexico province, the only Angolan province that borders on both Zaire and Zambia, I learned first hand of two border incidents. In the first, a Zambian air force reconnaissance plane had entered Angolan air space near the village of Macondo in early August. Although there is a small garrison of FAPLA soldiers at Macondo, "they wisely did not fire on the Zambian aircraft, although they could have", stated Armando Dembo, the Provincial Commissioner (top government official) of Moxico. Dembo, who had been an important political leader in the liberated zones of Moxico during the first war of liberation, told residents at the political meetings of several villages that they must maintain their vigilance against provocations that could come from across the Zambian border. The threat is not from UNITA forces still in Zambia, Dembo said, but from Zambia itself. Dembo said that UNITA does not maintain supply lines to either Zambia or Zaire through Moxico province.

The second incident took place five miles from the Zairean border at Texeira de Sousa, the eastern-most Angolan town on the Benguela Railway. The Moxico provincial delegation that I accompanied learned that a small group of Zaireans had two days previously crossed the border at the recently-reconstructed Dilolo Bridge and had entered Luena. Relationships among Angolans and Zaireans near the border have developed through the trade of what are still contraband products in Angola, and the Zaireans were apparently allowed to visit for "a look around". In Luena the provincial head of MPLA's Department of Information and Propaganda explained "Our people here think this trading is a relatively harmless activity. But they don't realize how dangerous it is. These people who were here are agents of Mobutu, and they are looking for our vulnerabilities, our weak spots."

Dembo, the Provincial Commissioner, was angry but firm with those presently responsible for the administration of the town. "We need much more vigilance here" he said at a dinner which followed almost fifteen hours of meetings to discuss the problems in Luena. "Luena is a particularly strategic point in Angola, and we need people here who understand the situation fully."

South African Invasion

My extensive travels in Angola also gave me a new perspective on exactly what occurred during last year's war, especially the invasion of South African troops across the Namibian border.

Angola is a vast country, and severely underpopulated. Although two-thirds of its people live in the southern half of the country, south of the Benguela Railway, there are enormous expanses of land that have few inhabitants. Between Benguela and the border of Namibia where South African troops entered last October, there is about 300 miles of good road, with only one heavily settled point, Sa da Bandeira. The South Africans encountered no resistance until they reached Benguela ten days after the invasion began, as there were very few points on the road to Benguela where MPLA could have put up resistance. The country is ragged, much like the American southwest: mountainous and dry between Sa da Bandeira and Benguela, and desert south of Sa de Bandeira.
Sa da Bandeira, whose population was predominantly white during the colonial period, had been under the control of MPLA since August, 1975, after military confrontations had forced UNITA and FNLA from the city. Although the news of Angola that appeared in the New York Times claimed that UNITA controlled all of Angola's south, the MPLA held uncontested control of Sa da Bandeira.

Because there had been no fighting for the two months previous to the invasion, MPLA had moved all but a minimal garrison of troops out of Sa da Bandeira. The troops were needed in the outright warfare with FNLA in the northern provinces of Uige and Zaire. Thus when the South Africans entered Angola in October, armed with heavy military weapons that the MPLA had not yet encountered, MPLA had no time to reinforce the city. On October 24th the South Africans, along with members of the "Portuguese Liberation Army" (ELP) were in Sa da Bandeira.

"They entered very rapidly," said one young militant of the National Union of Angolan Workers (UNTA), "so fast that at first the people didn't know who they were. But we soon found out." The city was defended primarily by school boys, many of whom were killed. MPLA withdrew from the city and the province (Huila) and did not return until February 16th, although many MPLA supporters were unable to leave. They were tortured and killed.

"I was arrested by the South Africans," said the young UNTA militant who was wearing a tee-shirt printed with a photo of Agostino Neto. "They said, 'come here black.' In English. They tied my hands behind my back." Later he was released, for although he is eighteen and a large, strapping man, his face is still the face of a young teenager. Fleeing the city, he walked the nearly 250 kilometers to Benguela.

Revolution Underway

What is at hand now for the people of Angola now that the war is over and the MPLA is embarking on the reconstruction of a new Angola, independent and free?

Angola is undergoing a revolution. Having fought two wars to gain political independence, its leaders know that it must now fight an even longer battle to gain economic independence. Five months ago, in a speech during May Day celebrations, Prime Minister Lopo de Nascimento declared that socialism was the only way to consolidate Angola's national independence and to establish a truly just government. "Only when Angola is the owner of its own wealth will it be fully independent," Nascimento said. "This means that the oil, iron, diamonds, the great factories and plantations should be owned collectively by all the Angolan people. To exchange the Portuguese colonialists or the America owners for Angolans would only be to 'Angolanize' the exploitation of the people." Nascimento cited the examples of African countries that reached political independence in the 1960's and opted for the capitalist mode, which he said "is euphemistically called 'growth without development.'" The Prime Minister said that life in these countries was characterized by a greater dependence on western powers, a greater exploitation of natural resources, and the successive deepening of social inequalities.

On the first of May the government announced its first series of nationalizations. First priority is the massive number of plantations and ranches abandoned by the hundreds of thousands of Portuguese who fled to South Africa or Portugal during the war. Without the confiscation of abandoned property in key areas of the economy, especially agricultural exports like coffee, sugar and cotton, it would be impossible to begin the reconstruction of the economy. Angola is the fourth largest coffee producer in the world, but the chaotic events of Angola's decolonization left the coffee harvest uncollected for almost two years. Now the country faces a serious threat to its second largest foreign currency source.
Coffee experts say that without a full coffee harvest this year, new coffee cannot be planted for next year. Failure to regularize the coffee industry once again could have a serious effect on Angola's economy.

Facing similar problems in its sugar industry, the new Angolan government established emergency control commissions for each vital national industry. With President Neto and other Angolan leaders taking their turn in the fields, MPLA is now mobilizing the population to participate in gathering the coffee and cutting the cane.

Foreign Control

In the areas of the economy that are controlled by foreign corporations other than Portuguese the MPLA had been more cautious. No non-Portuguese foreign holdings have yet been nationalized.

"As to petroleum, we have not carried out any nationalizations," Carlos Rocha, the Minister of Planning and Economic Coordination told Tempo, a Mozambiquan weekly magazine. Cabinda Gulf Oil alone pays the Angolan government half a billion dollars in royalties. (A spokesperson for Gulf in Pittsburgh announced in August that its petroleum operation in Cabinda had regained its normal rhythm after the interruptions caused by the war last year. The announcement stated that Gulf was pumping 123,000 barrels a day, compared with 140,000 at the beginning of the war.)

Rocha said that Angola is renegotiating the agreements Gulf had established with the previous Portuguese administration and expects to conclude new agreements some time this fall. "We have already requested to be admitted to OPEC," he said, "and we expect that we will be accepted. We want to align with the politics of OPEC as to the price of oil, supply networks, establishment of taxes on the multinational oil companies, etc."

The bushy-bearded Minister also said that the MPLA is negotiating new agreements with Diamang, the largely British and South African controlled diamond company in Angola, in order to reorganize the production of diamonds in northeastern Lunda province.

As for the Cunene Dam project near the Namibian border, Rocha said/although the Portuguese had displayed maps that previewed a water supply project resulting from the dam's construction that would irrigate an arid area of southern Angola, the project was a creation of the South Africans to benefit South Africa. "The project was really unfavorable to Angola, and even some Portuguese here opposed it. With the unfolding of the war against the Portuguese, however, their dependence on South Africa constantly increased, and in this way plans for both Cabora Bassa and Cunene were born."

In contrast to Mozambique's gigantic single hydroelectric complex at Cabora Bassa, Cunene is a scheme of several dams which affects not only the Cunene River, but also many of its tributaries. It is a massive project, occupying a very large land area. "Portugal was so dependent on South Africa during the colonial war that it just wasn't able to oppose such a scheme. Consequently we must totally revise the plans for Cunene."

Workers' Commissions

While MPLA is renegotiating existing agreements with these foreign corporations, the role of the Angolan workers whose labor maintains production is changing, although relationships between the foreign managements and the newly-formed Workers' Commissions are still cloudy.

The Benguela Railway is still owned by Tanganyika Concessions, and in Lobito, its western terminus, some of the Portuguese directors have continued managing the railroad. But in the railroad yard in Huambo, one of the largest industrial sites in all
all of Angola, not one foreign manager remains. Here, where everything from welding and carpentry to chrome-plating is functioning, and where steel is actually forged into all of the pieces needed to construct boxcars, passenger cars, and even locomotives, everything is controlled by the workers. A Workers' Commission whose members have been chosen by the workers themselves now must confront all of the problems of maintaining the rolling stock of the 938 mile line.

Members of the Workers' Commission here who had worked for the railroad in Huambo for decades opposed Savimbi when UNITA took control of Huambo. They suffered for it. One member who worked for the railroad for 41 years told me that he had been one of only 28 survivors of a group of 150 MPLA supporters that UNITA had imprisoned last year. Now the workers in every shop in the vast railroad yard can respond with raised fists to my greetings during my three-hour visit.

Angola has emerged from almost five centuries of colonialism and a viciously destructive war and now faces massive problems. In Angola, everyone talks about the problems all the time. "Much is said of our lack of transportation, the destruction of our bridges, and of our telephone and telegraph networks, of the disorganization of our production and of the indiscipline in our work," Rocha said in June. "But our most pressing difficulty is, without a doubt, the failure of the Portuguese to teach us how to run things, the failure to teach Angolans to run the enterprises of Angola."

Now MPLA must organize and mobilize the Angolan people to gain control of the riches of Angola. That is an essential element of the revolution in motion: a people and its government organizing to take control of their own society and their own lives.

Henry Kissinger's claims during the Angolan war to the contrary, I don't believe that the American state Department "can live with a Marxist Government" in Angola. Attempts to disrupt Angola's efforts at reconstruction are continuing from without. It is likely that they will continue from within as well.

Furthermore, misleading information will continue to appear. Of course, such distorted information has always been a great factor in the U.S.'s attempts to "destabilize" revolutionary movements. Therefore our support for the People's Republic of Angola is all the more important at this time.

-- M.S.