ANGOLA: FIVE CENTURIES OF RESISTANCE

History:

1480's  Portuguese begin penetration of northern coastal zone of Angola. King of the Bakongo people seeks to establish mutually beneficial ties with Portugal.

1500-1845  Years of the slave trade. Portuguese slave merchants raid Bakongo and neighboring kingdoms. Luanda (capital of modern Angola) emerges as a major slave port.

1884-1920's  Angola recognized by others as Portugal's colony. Portuguese use forced labor extensively on roads, plantations, and later railroad and mines. Angolan protest driven underground.

1930  Portuguese temporarily subjugate all of Angola.

1956  MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) formed. FNLA (National Liberation Front of Angola) also founded.

1966  UNITA (Union for the Total Independence of Angola) formed under the leadership of Jonas Savimbi after leaving FNLA.

War of National Independence:

After unsuccessful efforts to end Portuguese colonial rule solely through political means, MPLA attacks Portuguese prisons to free political prisoners on February 4, 1961. MPLA begins mobilization of population into workers' committees, peasant cooperatives, and women's organizations. For thirteen years, beginning in 1961, the Portuguese with support from the U.S. and other NATO nations attempt to crush the Angolan revolution. The U.S. supplies arms and training to the Portuguese military. At the same time, CIA bankrolls Holden Roberto (FNLA) as insurance against Portuguese collapse. FNLA leadership remains in Zaire, with minimal organization and sporadic fighting.

Gulf Oil in 1969 begins the marketing of oil from the province of Cabinda. Oil sales yield $11 million in royalties to the Portuguese government in 1969, over $400 million in 1974. This amount exceeds the military budget for Angola and permits the Portuguese to fight three wars in Africa.

In 1974, there is a coup in Portugal, attributed to the success of the liberation movements in Africa. Released Portuguese military documents reveal collaboration between the Portuguese army and UNITA to attack MPLA from 1969 to 1974.
Events of 1975:

January
A transitional agreement for MPLA, UNITA and FNLA to govern jointly Angola with Portuguese until independence in November. Agreement collapses amidst renewed conflict among three groups. U.S. government secretly escalates military aid to FNLA and UNITA.

April
Soviet Union increases its assistance to MPLA.

August
South African troops invade Angola to "protect" dam in UNITA area.

October/November
FNLA and UNITA combine forces and enlist massive South African aid, troops and materiel, to fight against MPLA. U.S. increases support to FNLA/UNITA and Zaire. Coveting oil, Zaire claims that Cabinda is not an integral part of Angola, increases both aid and troops to FNLA. MPLA invites Cuban assistance.

November
Angola becomes independent as the People's Democratic Republic of Angola, led by President Agostinho Neto of MPLA. As of January 1, 1976, 38 nations (among them 18 African nations) have recognized it. NONE has recognized UNITA/FNLA.

December
U.S. government admits part of its covert, CIA-led involvement — mercenaries, pilots, advisors, military materiel. U.S. Senate votes overwhelmingly (54-22) to cut off all covert and overt assistance to Angola in fiscal '76 military appropriations only. Kissinger and Ford announce that U.S. will continue covert and overt assistance to FNLA/UNITA no matter what Congress does.

1976 Outlook:

* South Africa on full military alert. Increased forces in Angola and on border.

* Mercenaries recruited in larger numbers. Trained by (or at least paid for by) U.S. Fighting with FNLA/UNITA, but not clear whether Angolans or South Africans are in control.

* Important vote(s) in U.S. House of Representatives, soon after reconvening in mid-January, regarding U.S. military intervention in Angola.

For further information:
Southern Africa Liberation Committee
East Lansing Peace Education Center
1118 S. Harrison Road,
East Lansing, MI 48823.
(phone: 517-332-0861).

Created by SALC 1975