

The

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members of the
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program

Byline: Wilfred Burchett

Historic events in Africa

By WILFRED BURCHETT

After a most rewarding 37 days in Angola, I am back home in Paris, but with my thoughts still very much concentrated on the great, unfolding drama of southern Africa.

If there was one reason more than another that I was aboard the first plane which flew into Lisbon from Paris three days after the "captains' coup" in April 1974, it was because radio reports had indicated that the main motive of the "captains" was to wind up Portugal's African empire. A glance at the map sufficed to show the shattering impact of this not only on the peoples within that empire whose stubborn and heroic struggles triggered off the "captains," but also the shock waves which would rock the racist minority regimes lording it over the blacks in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), in Namibia (South-West Africa) and in South Africa itself. All of them had common frontiers with one or another of the Portuguese colonies—absurd, straight-line, European-drawn frontiers which cut through races and tribes, handing the people over like cattle to the mercies of German, British, French, Belgian and South African colonialists.

EMPIRE DISMANTLED

My first inquiries among the captains was to find out if they meant what they said, and if they did—could they get away with it. The proof that they did—and could—was that within 19 months, the 500 year old empire was dismantled and, among others, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Angola on the African mainland, were independent. (That some of the captains, including some of their most outstanding leaders, were soon to be disgraced and jailed was a reflection of the fury within the Portuguese former ruling class that this had been done.)

And if I was aboard a Luanda-bound plane from Paris on Feb. 7 this year, it was to get a whiff and a feel of the situation for Guardian Sustainers and readers on the eve of a second great wave of liberation struggles which will sweep away the minority regimes and open up a great new era of majority power in black Africa.

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FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Dealing with tasks ahead

Well, it's out—and I hope you're pleased.

We view the expanded paper as a step in the process of development toward greater achievement. It represents the best we're able to do at the moment but I have a feeling we're going to do better as time goes on.

The feedback we've gotten so far on the expansion has been highly positive.

Now we have to concentrate on improvements within the present layout and page number context. From the Sustainer mail—only a small sample of which do we have room to print in The Guardian Sustainer—the following criticisms seem to be shared by a good number of people:

1. Labor coverage. People want more rank-and-file news and more inside accounts of labor struggles.
2. Women. A number of people said that our coverage is superficial and must be expanded.
3. Domestic news in general. While people recognize that our coverage has broadened, some say it hasn't deepened; that in many articles, particularly about local struggles, we're too removed.

Of course the paper has many other shortcomings which need to be corrected, but these three in particular are the areas in which Sustainers have often expressed criticisms. We're going to try to make improvements in these areas over the next four months. Keep sending us your criticisms.

Another trend I've noticed from the Sustainer mail is that people keep asking about how to start political discussion groups and how they can get in touch with other people in their vicinity who generally share their identity with the Guardian's political views. We're taking these questions quite seriously but as yet haven't figured out a workable solution. Clearly, a great many readers and an even greater proportion of Sustainers want the Guardian to take some steps to intervene more actively in the political process and to play more of an organizational role on the left. Some have expressed disappointment that the new communist movement has fallen into such sectarianism and are looking to the Guardian to provide an alternative.

In this regard, our Viewpoint of March 17 sought to address itself to some of these problems. As we said then, "a large number of antifascist anti-imperialists exist in our country who do not as yet find their revolutionary aspirations spoken for by any existing national political organization." At issue is just how the Guardian should use its independent political perspective and influence to contribute toward the development of such an organization. As Sustainers you should give thought to this as well and we look forward toward receiving ideas from you.

Another question that keeps cropping up in reader and Sustainer mail is that of China's current foreign policy. As you know we've had a lot to say on this subject in the past but have not been so informative of late. Of course the Guardian has always had some differences with China on this question and we've developed a couple of more, particularly in the last year or so—Angola being the outstanding example.

The Guardian has the greatest of respect for the Chinese revolution and for its construction of socialism and we share many of China's views on international matters as well. We think the Chinese are absolutely correct in their struggle against revisionism and superpower hegemonism. But we don't believe both superpowers are equal or that the USSR is the main danger. We're doing our best in trying to come up with an analysis that we feel is adequate to the new situation.

So, as I talk about our "success" in getting out a better paper I've also raised a number of problems—many of them posed by you—that we have to deal with. None of these problems is easy but if we all work together on them maybe we'll come up with a few answers.

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Historic events in Africa

(Continued from page 1)

Does that mean that whites have to tremble for their lives? If Angola of the MPLA is any example, it most certainly does not. The whites have to tremble for some of their privileges, notably that of minority political power and exploitation of black labor at rates of a fifth or a tenth of that paid to whites doing the same work.

But, by what I could observe in Angola, the African Angolans have an infinitely more civilized attitude to Europeans, including mainland Portuguese and Angolans of Portuguese origin, than official Portugal had ever displayed towards Angolan Africans. The black hand of friendship—but based on real equality—has been extended to all whites who have decided to stay and contribute to the building up of the economy. And this is a hand of comradeship to the many Portuguese or Angolans of Portuguese origin who joined the ranks of the MPLA and its armed forces.

MPLA AND ITS RIVALS

In this context, a major distinction has to be made between the MPLA and its two former rivals for power—the FNLA and UNITA movements. Only the MPLA had an all-Angolan multiracial concept of the country's future; an all-African concept of Angola's future role in relation to its neighbors; a true international concept in relation to world affairs. "The MPLA Pioneer always feels as his own the victories and defeats of the peoples of the world. He is an internationalist" is the 9th of the 10 Principles of the Pioneers—the MPLA's youth movement. From that level up to the MPLA leadership, great emphasis is placed on a true internationalist outlook.

Both the FNLA and UNITA had narrow tribalist concepts which became more and more outmoded as the armed struggle developed on a national level. The FNLA based itself essentially on the Bakongo tribe in the North, with a frankly racist attitude towards all non-Bakongo. UNITA had its base among the Ovimbundu tribe in the center-south. Both courted the Portuguese for opportunist reasons. FNLA's links, through President Mobutu of Zaire, were with the monopolies and big plantation owners; UNITA became the champion of the small Portuguese settlers and shopkeeping class.

From the beginning the MPLA fought against tribalism, racism and regionalism, in

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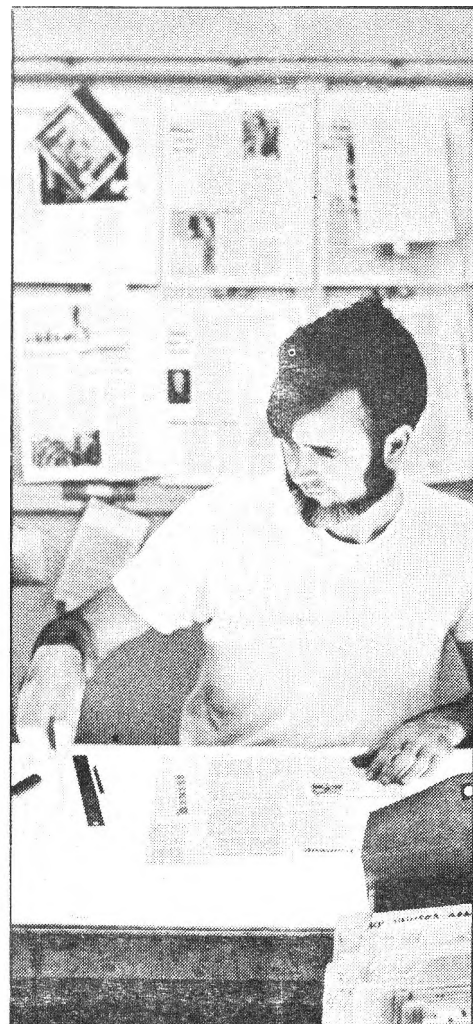
favor of national unity—including with progressive Portuguese—as the only means of beating the common enemy, Portuguese colonialism. It also had an all-African line which set the Angolan national liberation struggle not only within the framework of the struggles in the other colonies but also those in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. It is this which gives the Angola of the MPLA a very special place in the events which are starting to shake the whole of southern Africa.

'UNITY' IMPOSSIBLE

Neither Holden Roberto nor Jonas Savimbi, leaders of FNLA and UNITA respectively, believed that Angola could stand on its own feet. One of Holden Roberto's early schemes—once independence was on the agenda—was the incorporation of the oil-rich province of Cabinda and other parts of the north into a "Greater Zaire," of which he would become vice president. At one stage he and Savimbi agreed on a three-way partition of the country—the north going to the FNLA, the center-south to UNITA, the center-north to the MPLA. Later this was changed to eliminate the MPLA—the north and north-center to go to the FNLA-plus-Zaire; the south and south-center to go to UNITA-plus-South Africa! It was because of such concepts that three-way unity was absolutely impossible.

By everything I could learn, it was the all-Angolan appeal of the MPLA and the fact that it waged military-political warfare from the start, that was decisive in the defeat of the FNLA-UNITA forces—not the presence of a few thousand Cuban troops and a few hundred Soviet tanks which were used almost exclusively against South African armor and artillery. And it is the all-Angolan grassroots base of the MPLA which makes any talk of FNLA-UNITA guerrilla warfare nonsense. I travelled by car, at night as well as by day, a thousand miles in what were supposed to be the heartlands of the FNLA (the Carmona-Uije districts) in the north and of UNITA (the Huambo-Bie districts) in the south. From the viewpoint of topography and vegetation, both areas were ideal for guerrilla warfare. Apart from one incident in which a band of half-starved, former FNLA troops had tried to steal some chickens—surrendering with their arms at the first challenge—I never heard of any armed activity. In fact, I was assured that over 95% of FNLA and UNITA troops turned in their weapons and returned to their villages when their leaders and top officers fled after losing their headquarters towns and bases.

As for the all-African aspect of MPLA policies, the fact that both SWAPO (the Namibian national liberation movement) and the ANC (South African anti-apartheid African National Congress) were able to set



Production chief George Finlay working at the art room light table putting together the expanded paper. Some "flats," pages in preparation, hang on the wall behind him. Our art crew consists of George, Arbolito and Marjorie Waxman.

up missions in Angola within a month of the declaration of the People's Republic speaks for itself. President Neto and other MPLA leaders have repeatedly stated their determination to give every possible aid to the armed struggle of these movements and also to guerrilla fighters struggling to overthrow the Smith regime in Rhodesia.

If I have written such a long letter, it is because I am convinced that we are on the verge of further great historic events and changes in southern Africa which many of us never expected to see within our lifetimes. In all this it is rather absurd to see Dr. Kissinger in the role of a King Canute trying to sweep back the mighty, irreversible tides of change with his tattered anti-Cuban broom!

The writers of our various new departments—Black News, Civil Liberties, etc.—would deeply appreciate receiving news and information pertaining to their assignments. Send in newspaper reports or clips from local papers. It will help improve coverage.

National Question *On Black liberation*

The Afro-American national question is an important one in our movement. The Guardian has published considerable material on the question (series of articles by Irwin Silber and former staffer Carl Davidson).

Within the Guardian the question was discussed by the staff for several months—a couple of years ago and quite recently. We have not resolved whether we view Black Americans as a nation or a national minority in the Black Belt South and the subject will probably come up again. We have found unity on the following formulation regarding Blacks:

“The cornerstone of the united front against imperialism is the alliance between the working class (and its allies) in the advanced capitalist countries and the peoples and nations of the third world.

“In our country, the united front is based upon the alliance of the multinational working class and the oppressed nationalities and national minorities, most particularly the Afro-American people.

“While the overwhelming majority of Black people in the U.S. are part of the multinational working class, Black people as a whole are the victims of national oppression. This is the political basis for the Black united front which unites all classes among the Afro-American people in the struggle against national oppression. The communists have the strategic objective of bringing the Black workers into the leadership of the Black united front.

“The struggle for Black liberation in the U.S. is a revolutionary struggle because the just demands of the Black masses—for full democratic rights, against all the institutions of white supremacy and racism and for those special demands that arise out of national oppression—cannot be realized without proletarian revolution.

“It is essential for communists to win the white workers to support the struggles of the Black masses around the immediate questions that arise in all three of these areas. The basis for Black-white unity within the working class is the commitment by the white workers to take up the struggle for democratic rights, against white supremacy and for the special demands of Blacks and other oppressed nationalities and national minorities.”

FROM THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Fightback against suppression

By IRWIN SILBER

In the days of the Spanish Inquisition, political nonconformity (religious in form but unquestionably political in essence) was summarily dealt with on the scaffold or at the stake.

In some sectors of the U.S. left political differences are also treated in summary fashion—not nearly as extreme but no less crude.

During the month of March the proprietors of China Books & Periodicals in San Francisco and New York decided to stop selling the Guardian. They claimed that they were getting numerous complaints from their customers because they handled the Guardian, although the New York store sold some 75 copies and the San Francisco shop roughly 40 each week.

Selling the Guardian, they said, was inconsistent with their role as “agents” for the distribution and sale of materials from and about the People’s Republic of China. The reason? No one said it in so many words, but the answer is obvious. Despite a long history of friendship and fraternal support for the People’s Republic of China, the Guardian continues to maintain an independent view of many questions. In the international area, our views do not coincide in some important respects with those of the People’s Republic.

ANGOLA IS THE ISSUE

What has brought this all to a head, of course, is Angola.

But the Guardian’s “nonconformity”—if one wishes to call it that—is hardly new. We have long held different views from the People’s Republic of China on a number of key international questions. This does not come as a surprise to anyone in Peking concerned with the political opinions of the U.S. left. We have long held, as has the Chinese Communist Party, that such differences are normal and to be expected—even among close friends.

These self-appointed “protectors” of the People’s Republic of China are violating the essence of China’s own views on how relations between fraternal parties and organizations internationally should be conducted.

One measure of the mentality of these political poseurs is that they have also decided to discontinue selling the newspaper Claridad, the official organ of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, a revolutionary organization which plays a leading role in the independence struggle of the Puerto Rican people.

Well, of course, we will not knuckle under to these political vigilantes. Guardian staff and bureau members in both New York and San Francisco have been distributing free copies of the paper to people outside the two establishments. Readers who used to buy their copies of the Guardian from China

Books are being told of other convenient locations where they can get their paper.

We have had cancellations from a few other shops elsewhere—although we have been most encouraged recently by a spurt in new subscriptions, bundle agents and book stores that has more than made up for these cancellations.

Nevertheless, these attacks hurt. It will take some time before all those who used to buy their papers at these outlets find other places convenient for them.

Sustainers can help. Many of you who live in San Francisco or New York are probably regular customers of these stores. Some expression of your indignation at these actions ought definitely to be registered in an appropriate fashion. Many of you may be patrons of these shops by mail, but even if you are not, a letter of protest would undoubtedly be read with interest by the proprietors. (If you decide to write to them, why not send us copies of your letters?)

Equally important, you can help us get new readers and open new outlets. We think our new Guardian is better than ever and that there are undoubtedly many bookstores whose owners are not afraid of a little controversy who would be interested in offering the Guardian for sale to their customers.

We have no apologies for the stand we have taken on the political questions involved here. To the contrary, we are proud of our continued and consistent support for national liberation struggles—in Angola, in Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

Neither do we apologize for our long-standing friendship with and respect for the People’s Republic of China, an expression of socialist solidarity which encompasses both unity and struggle and which clearly is beyond the ken of those dogmatists who have confused Marxist-Leninism with the doctrine of papal infallibility.

Come on, help out

Many Sustainers live in the New York City area but we only hear from them by mail.

Some others we’ve gotten to know quite well because we see them a couple of hours every week or so. They volunteer at our office at 33 W. 17 St. in Manhattan.

Obviously we can’t afford to hire as many people as are necessary to get the paper out. Thus, many of those who help to produce the paper in one way or another are volunteers.

Come on down and help out. We always need proof-readers, for instance. We’ll show you how to do it. Our greatest need for help is Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning but there are jobs to do at other times of the week as well. If you have any questions, call George Finlay at (212) 691-0404.

Letters from our Sustainers

This spot in The Guardian Sustainer will be reserved for your letters every month. Try to keep them as brief as possible. All letters will be printed with the author's initials but you must send in the communication with your full name.

DISCUSSION GROUPS

W.S., Kingston, N.Y.: I just received the first expanded issue. I thank the Guardian for its being. It was very unfortunate about China Books, though.

I give you encouragement for the larger paper; every inch is valuable.

I thoroughly endorse the Guardian's Marxist-Leninist party building concerns through discussion groups and the Sustainer program mentioned in Jack A. Smith's article in the Sustainer newsletter. I would like to participate in a discussion group in the area; however, I'm new here locally. Do you know of any readers nearby that might be interested?

The Guardian replies: If there are any other Kingston area readers who may wish to get in touch with you they should let us know and we'll arrange it. We'll be talking more about the discussion groups idea in the future.

WOMEN

K.S., Eugene, Ore.: I was pleased to note at the end of Irwin Silber's column on International Women's Day in the last Sustainer that you are aware your coverage of the women's struggle needs improvement, and that you are working on it.

I was disappointed in your treatment of International Women's Day. I had hoped to see articles on women around the world—the issue previous to March 8, so that the information could be used in the celebrations that were planned. Instead, nothing appeared until afterwards.

In general, I have really appreciated your coverage of the struggle in southern Africa. Congratulations on getting 200 new sustainers so quickly. I'm looking forward to an improved, expanded Guardian. By the way, how many subscribers do you have now?

The Guardian replies: We have a paid circulation of over 21,000. Many more people read the paper than that, however. We figure every Guardian is read by three to four people on average.

NIXON TRIP

M.L., Rochester, N.Y.: Because I am called upon to "defend" the Guardian on many occasions, I find the omission of any comment on Nixon's trip quite inexcusable.

The Guardian replies: Sorry. We thought the best comment might be no comment. Nixon is a small matter, really. His trip was part of the general question of China's international perspective of the last year or so, a question we are studying at the moment.

SUGGESTIONS

N.O., Washington, D.C.: Congratulations on reaching your goal for expansion of the paper. I'm looking forward to the expanded content with great anticipation. I think it will be a real boon for the communist movement in the U.S. Having read the first expanded issue, I would like to add my suggestions for things that I believe are essential if the Guardian is to provide American Marxist-Leninists with the additional tools they need to reach correct decisions both on international questions (e.g. Angola) as well as domestic issues (e.g. party building).

(1.) There should be more material in the Guardian pertaining to other M-L organizations, both those having friendly relations with the Guardian and those not. It is not enough for Irwin Silber to regularly flail the October League, however eloquent (and wordy) he is. This material could take different forms: (a) Excerpts of positions or analyses that other groups have taken on specific issues (e.g. Angola, Puerto Rico, party building) that are of particular concern to Marxist-Leninists. Printing these statements would sharpen the struggle much better than paraphrasing their positions can ever do. (b) Critiques of the positions and analyses described above. In some cases, these statements will stand (or fall) on their own. In other situations a response may be necessary.

For example, printing some of the OL material on Angola and pointing out its totally undialectical, unmaterialist approach would be very helpful for those comrades who do not read The Call and can't see this nonsense directly for themselves. Another example is the lengthy article in the recent issue of the RCP's Revolution purporting to show how Cuba is no longer, if it ever was, a socialist country. Despite being a sloppily written article, it does present some disturbing facts and raise some serious questions about the direction of the Cuban revolution that need responding to other than in the form of blind support for the Cuban comrades.

(2) On critical international issues such as Angola, the Guardian should publish the positions and analyses of other socialist countries besides the People's Republic of China. If available, the analyses of countries such as the DPRK and DRV would be very useful in expanding our understanding as well as exposing the untenable positions of the OL, RCP and the like. The logical extension of their positions on Angola is to consider the DPRK and the DRV to no longer be socialist countries for their recognition of the MPLA.

(3) The Guardian must begin to openly criticize the People's Republic of China

Welcome back, old friend

From time to time people leave the Sustainer program because of political disagreements. These friends remain readers of the paper but no longer support it. And from time to time some of these friends come back. Following is a communication we received from a reader in Dorchester, Mass., April 2, who came back to the Sustainer program.

Dear Guardian Sustainer:

A few months ago I sent notice to cancel my Sustainership with the Guardian. This decision was mainly due to the Guardian's position on Angola. Over a period of time I found myself leaning toward the October League. I accepted OL's position, also China's position, without knowing all the facts.

After reevaluating my political line on a number of questions I have come to the conclusion that the Guardian holds the correct line on Angola. The only legitimate representative of the Angolan people is the MPLA! I regret the harsh words I had for the Guardian and I criticize myself for it. Criticism and self-criticism is something OL isn't very good at.

Although I may disagree at times on certain positions and hold positions on questions such as the gay question (pro) and the Black national question (pro) where the Guardian doesn't have a position, I support the Guardian's stand against unprincipled attacks by certain forces in this country who are becoming increasingly dogmatic.

I wish to rejoin the Guardian Sustainers as I feel the Guardian is playing an important role as an important source of information and an independent Marxist-Leninist voice in the U.S. A large number of Marxist-Leninists in this country, myself included, have not found our aspirations spoken for by any existing national political organization as the Guardian stated recently.

when its foreign policy positions are clearly in contradiction with the principles of proletarian internationalism.

GOOD ENOUGH

V.D., De Land, Fla.: The Guardian Sustainer newsletter is such a good idea! It gives a feeling of close participation with you folks. As for making the Guardian "bigger and better," I find it big enough and good enough already, excellent really. I am very thankful for your coverage and analysis as is. I'd have been disappointed if you had taken any stand on Angola, for instance, other than the one you took. It's so hard to understand how China could support the other side.