

Change of Policy in the Vatican?

FRELIMO

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On July 1st, 1970 at 12.30 p.m. Pope Paul VI received in private audience leaders of the Liberation Movements of the 'Portuguese' colonies, FRELIMO was represented by Comrade Marcelino dos Santos, Vice-President; PAIGC by its Secretary-General, Comrade Amílcar Cabral; and MPLA by its President, Comrade Agostinho Neto.

In principle, there is nothing strange in this audience. FRELIMO, MPLA and PAIGC are the organizations which truly represent the peoples of

Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau. Many countries recognize us as such. Many heads of state, not only in Africa but in Asia, Latin America and even in Europe, receive our leaders in their capacity as the only and legitimate representatives of our peoples and our countries. In principle, therefore, the audience granted by the Pope to our leaders was nothing out of the ordinary.

However, one circumstance of this act of the Pope caused multiple speculations. It is the fact that the Catholic Church has always, consistently and openly, supported Portuguese colonialism. Considering the agreement between the Holy See and Portugal, statements of high dignitaries of the Catholic Church, concrete acts of support from the Vatican to the Portuguese Government, we see that no other power has ever so unabashedly supported the colonial fascism of Portugal. The high point of this support was the visit of the Pope himself to Portugal in 1967. During that visit, the Pope made a gift of \$150,000 to the Portuguese Government to be specifically used in the 'Overseas Provinces'. He decorated the head of the Portuguese Gestapo (PIDE), Major Silva Pais, and his very presence in Portuguese territory implied approval by the Catholic Church of the policy of the Portuguese Government which is fundamentally characterized by colonialism.

In this context arose the speculations regarding the Pope's action of receiving leaders of the Liberation Movements of the 'Portuguese' colonies. Two positions basically developed: one pretended to divest the Pope's act of all its political meaning; thus, the Pope would have been deceived by his advisers who did not inform him as to the quality of the persons he was going to see; or the Pope decided to receive them as religious persons and not as politicians. Others defended the idea that the Pope received our comrades fully conscious of the fact that he was receiving leaders of the Liberation Movements of the Portuguese colonies; and that he received them in that capacity, not as religious persons; through this act the Pope wanted to indicate his condemnation of Portuguese colonialism and his recognition of the right of the people of Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, and Mozambique to independence.

It is impossible to decipher the real intention of the Pope. However, an objective analysis of the facts leads us to the conclusion that *at least* the Pope could not deny that he was receiving leaders of the Liberation Movements: the fact that the preparations were underway for about one month and that in the request for the audience it was specifically declared that it was the leaders of FRELIMO, MPLA and PAIGC who were seeking an audience with the Pope; plus the fact that at that moment a Conference of Solidarity with the peoples of the 'Portuguese' colonies of international significance had just taken place in Rome in which hundreds of delegates participated. The Pope obviously knew whom he was receiving. To think otherwise would be to offend the Pope and to insinuate that he does not know what he is doing, that he does not assume his responsibility. Another proof, although more indirect, was the sabotage attempt made by a Monsignor of Portuguese nationality a

few moments before the audience. He talked to our comrades in the waiting room at the Vatican and advised them not to address the Pope 'because you do not know our protocol and surely you will not know exactly what to say; or if you absolutely want to speak to the Holy Father, let me serve as interpreter because he does not speak Portuguese.' Our comrades replied that they would address the Pope and that they would use French which is a language that the Pope knows, and therefore they would not need an interpreter. Not giving up his sabotage attempt the Monsignor then said: 'Well then, in order to save you from a blunder, you must look at me during the audience; when you say something which must not be said, I will give you a sign for you to stop.'

But if it is so, if the Pope voluntarily and intentionally received our comrades, having to overcome the opposition of some of his staff, knowing that the visitors were leaders of Liberation Movements fighting against Portuguese colonialism, what then was the significance of his gesture? We are inclined to think that it was a political gesture of condemnation of Portuguese colonialism, and recognition of the right of our peoples to independence. Despite the fact that '*Osservatore Romano*', the official organ of the Vatican, tried to minimize the importance of the audience, certain other facts suggest that very political intention of the Pope:

(a) Radio Vatican itself declared, commenting on the meeting, that 'the pacification – or the liberation through arms according to the sides on which we find ourselves – is a source of misery and death as any other form of war. May Angola, Guinea and Mozambique know *peace in justice*. The problem is posed again to the Christian conscience.' Radio Vatican stressed further that: (i) the audience with leaders of the three most important movements fighting against the Portuguese authorities in Africa was possible only because the Pope agreed to such an audience; (ii) Delegates of the Decolonization Committee of the United Nations as well as delegates of innumerable countries participated with the three leaders in the Anti-Colonialist Conference which had taken place in Rome a week before (Radio, press and TV gave enormous coverage of the Conference); (iii) The position of the Church concerning the independence of the new nations is constant and well known, expressed in the documents of the Council, in the encyclicals and the addresses of Pope Paul VI.

(b) The Sunday following the recall of the Portuguese Ambassador to the Vatican by Lisbon, the Pope, addressing the people in St. Peter's Square said: 'How can one close his eyes on what is going on in the world, on what is weighing on our society, on the equilibrium necessary to progress and peace? Grave thoughts are mixed with good hopes; for both of them we cannot neglect the help of God.' On that day, the Pope was acclaimed with particular warmth by the thousands of pilgrims among whom were many Africans.

(c) The tone of the Portuguese protest itself may help us also to find out the real intentions of the Pope. Words like 'deep wound' and 'terrible insult' are used to qualify the act of the Pope or its consequences. And the Pope was surely conscious of this reaction when he behaved as he did against his

traditional ally.

(d) The words addressed to our comrades by the Pope are conclusive, too. He declared that 'the Catholic Church is concerned with all those who are suffering, particularly the African peoples, and that *she supports the struggle for justice, for freedom and national independence.*' When our comrades told him of the massacres that the Portuguese carry out against the people, the Holy Father answered shocked: 'I will pray for you!' Obviously, only a deliberate misinterpretation might claim that these words of the Pope referred only to the three persons in front of him and not to the peoples and to the cause they represented.

All in all, we are led to believe that the Vatican's position of support for Portuguese colonialism is now experiencing the influence of the evolution of the times. It was in this light that FRELIMO interpreted the gesture of the Pope, using it as an instrument to mobilize our people:

Therefore, Comrades, let us continue and intensify the struggle, being certain that our struggle causes even those traditional allies of Portugal, such as the Holy See, to initiate changes in their position and to condemn the Portuguese colonialist policy. The struggle continues!