

1956 to 1976

THE ANGOLAN REVOLUTION

A Chronology, Compiled by Beth Youhn and Steve Goldfield

1956

December 10: The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) forms in Luanda from the fusion of two nationalist organizations. With the creation of MPLA, the struggle in Angola is, for the first time, directed not only against Portuguese colonialism but also against imperialism. For the first time an Angolan nationalist organization argues that the Angolan struggle is a class struggle and not a racial conflict. MPLA begins the protracted task of increasing the political consciousness of the masses in and around Luanda, Angola's capital.

1957

FNLA's forerunner, UPNA (Union of the Peoples of Northern Angola) forms in Kinshasa. Its base will remain largely among Bakongo refugees from Angola in southern Zaire.

1958

When UPNA finds little support for its stated aim of secession of the old Kongo Kingdom, it becomes UPA, dropping the "Northern" from its name to project a nationalist rather than tribalist image.

Gulf Oil receives exclusive exploration rights in Cabinda Province and begins paying the Portuguese government millions of dollars in annual royalties.

1959

March: PIDE (Portuguese secret police) launches its first of many repressive campaigns against MPLA in response to growing popular support for programs such as clandestine literacy classes in Luanda's *museques* (shantytowns) and leafletting urging Angolans to prepare themselves for an open independence struggle. Several dozen MPLA patriots and scores of sympathizers are arrested, tortured and murdered. Meanwhile, Portuguese air force, paratroop and infantry units pour into Luanda.

1960

May: MPLA issues its first call to all Angolan organizations to create a single united front against Portuguese colonialism.

June 8: Dr. Agostinho Neto, MPLA leader, is arrested for the third time by the PIDE in his medical offices in Luanda. Villages from Bengo, Neto's birthplace, and neighboring Icolo, stage a massive peaceful protest against his arrest; the Portuguese respond by killing thirty patriots, wounding two hundred, and burning both villages to the ground.

June 13: MPLA sends to the Portuguese government a declaration demanding the right of independence. Portuguese dictator Salazar responds with silence, a massive number of Portuguese troops, and new waves of arrest and repression in Luanda, Lobito, Malange and Dalatondo.

November: Twenty-eight nationalists from Cabinda are shot to death in Luanda Prison.

1961

January: The people of Baixa de Kassenje, exploited by the Belgian company COTONANG, go on strike against forced cotton cultivation. The Portuguese napalm the Malanje region and massacre more than 20,000 agricultural workers.

February 4: MPLA militants, armed only with clubs and knives, lead the people of Luanda's shantytowns in a heroic assault on the main Portuguese prison to free political prisoners. Beaten back by police with guns, forty Africans die along with seven Portuguese. Luanda's

white settlers go on a rampage, killing Africans indiscriminately. February 4th marks the beginning of the armed phase of the Angolan national liberation struggle.

March 15: UPA, now under the leadership of Holden Roberto, initiates and directs an uprising in the North in which Bakongo peasants attack white and *mestizo* civilians, as well as black intellectuals, Catholics and peasants of other tribes. This poorly planned and racist rebellion has no clear objectives and is crushingly defeated by the reinforced Portuguese army, equipped with fragmentation and napalm bombs supplied through NATO. The Portuguese army and settlers then begin a ruthless massacre of many thousands of Angolans, which amounts to genocide. By summer it is estimated that 30,000 Angolans have been slaughtered and tens of thousands of refugees have fled into the Congo. Meanwhile, MPLA-led resistance in the northwest area of Dembos and Nambuagongo (MPLA's First Region of politico-military action) continues despite isolation from other MPLA forces and heavy attacks by both the Portuguese and UPA.

October: UPA hostility toward MPLA leads to UPA's capture and murder of an MPLA detachment of 21 fighters attempting to enter Angola from the northern Zaire border. This is the first of many such attacks by UPA/FNLA which, closely allied with the reactionary Mobutu regime of Zaire, will spend most of its military energies attacking, murdering and jailing MPLA militants.

1962

March: UPA and the PDA (Democratic Party of Angola, formerly Aliazo) form the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA). Soon after, they proclaim the "Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile" (GRAE), with headquarters in Kinshasa, Zaire.

US President Kennedy secretly chooses Holden Roberto as the man to back for future Angolan leader when Portugal can no longer hold Angola. Roberto then receives a \$10,000 secret CIA annual retainer plus arms through 1969. Much of these funds, and those from other sources such as the OAU, are used to consolidate Roberto's position as a prominent Kinshasa businessman.

November: Agostinho Neto, with the aid of anti-fascist Portuguese, escapes detention in Lisbon and arrives in Kinshasa.

December: First MPLA National Conference is held in Kinshasa. Neto is elected President. The decision is made to concentrate on organizing the peasants inside Angola, and the necessity for armed struggle is affirmed.

1963

January 9: MPLA opens its Second Region of politico-military activity in the Cabinda enclave, north of the Congo River.

Summer and Fall: The reactionary Zaire government, in league with FNLA, harrasses MPLA in Kinshasa, arresting top leaders and closing down MPLA's medical clinic for refugees.

November: MPLA is expelled from Zaire altogether and sets up headquarters in neighboring Congo-Brazzaville.

1964

The Portuguese continue their terrorist repression in the North, forcing thousands more to flee. By 1969, there are an estimated 400,000 Angolan refugees in Zaire.

January: At the MPLA Conference of Cadres in Brazzaville, the movement leadership criticizes itself for problems of poor coordination and planning - in particular, they point to the lack of a strategy to provide the population adequate military protection from Portuguese assault. Growing privilege and opportunism are also criticized among some in the movement. Defining new structures and modes of operation, the conference maps out MPLA's future strategy of protracted people's war.

July: Jonas Savimbi, foreign minister of FNLA, resigns, denouncing FNLA's "flagrant tribalism," indiscipline and US backing.

July: Second OAU meeting of chiefs of state recognizes FNLA/GRAE but also decides to recognize MPLA.

1965

MPLA opens an office in Lusaka, capital of newly-independent Zambia and begins sending

political cadres into eastern Angola to prepare the population for the launching of armed struggle there.

The Portuguese send a new force of 45,000 soldiers to Angola, and government military expenditures increase to about \$900 million.

1966

March 18: MPLA opens its Third Region of politico-military activity in eastern Angola. Prevented from securing access through Zaire to northern and central Angola by FNLA/Zairean sabotage, MPLA turns to the vast, sparsely populated Eastern Region, which affords a long and difficult supply line from the Indian Ocean through Tanzania and Zambia. *March:* Savimbi forms UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola). UNITA, tribally based among the Ovimbundus and working solely in a limited area of northern Moxico, will claim at times to be Marxist-Leninist and will enjoy Chinese support for several years, but is later exposed as having collaborated extensively with both the CIA and the Portuguese against MPLA.

1967

MPLA launches the slogan, "Generalization of the armed struggle over the entire national territory," in order to mobilize increasing numbers of the people into the struggle and to weaken Portuguese resistance by forcing a greater dispersal of enemy troops.

1968

The Portuguese launch a major offensive against MPLA in the First and Third Regions. In the East, the Portuguese strategy is to contain and try to destroy MPLA through scorched-earth bombings and helicopter attacks.

January 3: MPLA's leadership announces the decision to move its headquarters from Brazzaville to an MPLA-controlled region inside Angola thus enabling the movement leadership to work permanently and closely among the people.

August 22-25: The First Eastern Regional Conference is held by MPLA inside liberated eastern Angola. Decisions include expanding political education to work toward long-range transformation of MPLA into a political party, working to immediately expand the anti-colonial nationalist front, working toward forming a regular army, immediately uniting political and military functions in the Steering Committee to combat militarist tendencies and affirming the acceptance of patriotic Whites into MPLA.

1969

Following initial losses from last year's Portuguese offensive, MPLA regains the initiative in the Eastern Region and resumes westward penetration by first sending political cadres to form action committees and prepare the population, then following with military units and arms. (This contrasts with UNITA, which promised the people arms that never came and then fled after attacking the Portuguese, leaving villagers defenseless against brutal Portuguese reprisals.)

June 6: First battle in Bié extends armed struggle to 10 of Angola's 15 districts. MPLA's semi-liberated and operational zones cover about 2.5 million people, or roughly half Angola's population.

Official Portuguese figures show there are now about one million rural Angolans forced into barbed-wire concentration camps designed to "protect" them from the liberation movement.

1970

The Portuguese launch an offensive to halt MPLA's advance into central Angola. Using sophisticated weapons and methods - defoliants, helicopters, armored cars, "assassination squads" of conscripted Africans, and South African advisors - they construct an "invulnerable" defense line at the Kuanza River in Bié and systematically attack MPLA's supply lines. Nonetheless, MPLA advances as militants initiate twice as many combat actions as the previous year. MPLA, however, faces a chronic shortage of good weapons (perhaps half of the 5000 fighters in the East are without modern weapons) and a three-

month roundtrip footmarch to the Zambian border for supplies for the central districts. Meanwhile, MPLA's control over the liberated areas is consolidated, as democratic and social service institutions are extended to more areas. There are now over 150 village action committees in the Eastern Region, and MPLA's Medical Assistance Services and Centers of Revolutionary Instruction continue bringing the population their first taste of the rewards of independence.

1971

September-October: MPLA's Steering Committee meets in the Eastern Region. The main slogan is "Intensify the mobilization of the people! Reinforce People's Power!" The task of mobilization is given to the mass organizations: Youth of MPLA (JMPLA), Organization of Angolan Women (OMA), National Union of Angolan Workers (UNTA), and Organization of Angolan Pioneers (OPA). The MPLA leadership reaffirms its militant solidarity with the oppressed peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East who are struggling against international imperialism.

December: US and Portugal sign a new Azores Agreement which gives Portugal a \$435 million aid package in exchange for continued use of the US base in the Azores Islands.

1972

January 12: MPLA launches armed struggle in the region of Cunene, the extreme southern province of Angola adjacent to Namibia where thousands of Angolans travel to work in the mines. The uprising is coordinated with Namibian liberation forces.

March: Portugal and South Africa announce launching of the Cunene hydroelectric dam project, intended to provide electricity for South Africa and Angolan white settlers.

August: MPLA launches the "Movement of Readjustment," a vast campaign of criticism and self-criticism aimed at raising ideological, political, military and organizational levels. The campaign includes the formation of Groups of Active Militants which are to debate pressing organizational problems and thus strengthen the link between leadership and the people.

December 13: MPLA signs a unity agreement with FNLA as a necessary tactical step to open the frontier between Angola and Zaire to its forces, thus allowing enlargement of the military front and better logistical support. FNLA, however, soon breaks it, jailing and torturing MPLA militants in Kinshasa.

1973

September: MPLA's Steering Committee announces the discovery of a counterrevolutionary conspiracy within MPLA, called the "eastern revolt" led by Daniel Chipenda, and declares that Chipenda abused his authority to attain personal objectives in the following manner: while responsible for MPLA logistics, he organized a subversive tribal network to divert arms to UNITA which was collaborating with the Portuguese army against MPLA; using divisive tribalist tactics, Chipenda's subversive group organized two assassination attempts aimed at President Neto and other MPLA leaders; finally, Chipenda created difficulties between MPLA and the government of Zambia.

1974

A second faction within MPLA, calling itself the "active revolt" and led by Mario and Pinto de Andrade, emerges in Brazzaville. MPLA leadership charges that the "active revolt" faction is comprised of militants who have long since removed themselves from the struggle among the masses and so have no base of popular support. Eventually most elements of this faction reintegrate with MPLA.

April 25: Anti-fascist coup by the Armed Forces Movement overthrows Portuguese dictator Marcello Caetano, ending 50 years of fascism in Portugal. The crisis resulting from over a decade of three-front colonial war in Africa, deploying up to 160,000 Portuguese troops, brought about the coup.

June: General Spínola, who took over command in Portugal after the coup, and President Nixon meet in the Azores to agree on a plan of decolonization with "safeguards." Spínola wants to impose a neocolonial "Lusitanian Federation" on the people of the

Portuguese colonies. MPLA armed resistance continues in response to this stance.

July: Widespread racial violence develops as settler vigilantes attack Luanda *mugeques*. MPLA calls a general strike to protest these attacks and accuses former PIDE agents (later found to be working with FNLA) of provoking disorders. White Angolan and South African press begin a propaganda campaign to promote Savimbi.

August 1: MPLA proclaims the formation of a regular army, the FAPLA (Popular Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola).

August: The First Congress of MPLA, planned in 1971 but delayed by the demands of the armed struggle, is held in Zambia under strong foreign pressure to unite the Neto-led MPLA with the two "revolt" factions. However, the opportunistic conduct of the factions, including their refusal to hold the Congress inside Angola and the fact that members of the FNLA are revealed to be integrated into the delegation of the "eastern revolt" (Chipenda) faction, oblige the MPLA leadership to invalidate the "Congress" and announce that the First Congress would be held at a later date inside Angola.

September: The heads of state of Zambia, Zaire, Congo and Tanzania meet with Neto and "revolt" factions in Brazzaville. Neto is reconfirmed as MPLA President and a fragile agreement for unity is reached, which Chipenda later denounces.

September 12: Inter-Regional Conference of MPLA Militants is held in Angola to review MPLA's policies and conditions for negotiations with the Portuguese and to elect a 36-member Central Committee and a 10-member Political Bureau, both led by Agostinho Neto.

September 15: Spínola meets in the Cape Verde Islands with President Mobutu of Zaire, Holden Roberto and a delegation from the Chipenda faction. They plan a provisional coalition government for Angola to include FNLA, UNITA and Chipenda but not MPLA. Spínola's plot fails when he is ousted from power in Portugal at the end of the month.

October: Right-wing coup attempt in Angola by white settlers and conservative Portuguese officers fails.

October 21: Cease-fire agreement is signed between MPLA and Portuguese armed forces.

October-November: Series of violent incidents in Luanda between Whites and Africans is linked to FNLA/UNITA attempts to destroy MPLA power in the city.

November 8: MPLA official delegation arrives in Luanda to set up its office.

November: Separatist forces under the long dormant FLEC (Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave) attempt to take over Cabinda with heavy Zaire backing.

December 16: Daniel Chipenda is formally expelled by MPLA for treason.

1975

January 3: MPLA, FNLA and UNITA conclude the Mombasa Agreement which makes possible negotiations with the Portuguese government.

January 10: Alvor Agreement is signed which determines the form of the new transitional government of Angola with responsibility divided among Portugal, UNITA, FNLA and MPLA, each of which has three representatives on a 12-member cabinet headed by the Portuguese Governor-General. Integration of the three movements administratively and militarily is to lead to an election of a constituent assembly in November which is to elect a president to accept transfer of power from Portugal on Independence Day, set for 11 November 1975.

January: The "40 Committee" (top-secret US government body overseeing all CIA activities) agrees to the CIA's request to grant increased covert aid of \$300,000 to FNLA following the Alvor Agreement.

February 23: Chipenda announces his "faction of MPLA" will be integrated into FNLA.

March 22-26: Over 1000 people are killed in a week of unprovoked FNLA attacks on MPLA troops and civilians, as FNLA attempts to curb the growth of people's militias and neighborhood committees under the MPLA-supported People's Power movement.

March-May: FNLA receives unrestricted amounts of arms, mostly of US origin via Zaire, and uses them to launch attacks on MPLA, driving them out of the North with massive assistance from Zaire troops.

April: Significant Soviet military supplies for MPLA start to arrive.

June: 230 Cuban advisors arrive in Angola to assist in training MPLA troops.

Chronology cont. on page 19

Chronology cont. from page 14

June 21: Nakuru Agreement is signed as the last of several attempts to establish a fragile cease-fire between Angolan movements. When it is violated by FNLA and UNITA, MPLA prepares to expel all imperialist agents of FNLA and UNITA from Luanda and to take the struggle to the entire country.

July 17: The "40 Committee" approves CIA request for \$30 million aid for Roberto and Savimbi in cash and arms to be sent via Zaire and Zambia.

FNLA declares war on MPLA.

July 26: MPLA's Political Bureau proclaims the Popular Generalized Resistance in response to FNLA attacks including massacres of the Angolan population. National reconstruction is begun or continued in all liberated areas, where democratic forms of People's Power are constructed.

July 27: CIA is authorized by President Ford to begin large-scale covert aid, mostly arms, to UNITA.

August: UNITA and FNLA are expelled from Luanda by MPLA. US covert military aid to FNLA/UNITA greatly increases through stepped-up airlift via Kinshasa; NATO and US weapons from arms depots in the US and West Germany, routed through the Azores, are flown to Kinshasa in US C-141 transports.

FNLA now controls the North, pushes toward Luanda with heavy Zaire assistance and US arms supplies and takes Caxito, 50 kilometers north of Luanda. UNITA declares war on MPLA. MPLA moves south and takes Lobito and other southern towns from UNITA. South African force, including 800 Portuguese mercenaries, enters southern Angola on the pretext of "protecting" the Cunene Dam from SWAPO and MPLA attacks.

September: MPLA captures all major southern towns except Huambo from UNITA. MPLA now controls 12 out of 16 provinces. Savimbi calls on South Africa for assistance. France gives a \$3 million interest-free loan to UNITA. First Cuban troops begin to arrive in Congo-Brazzaville, ready to aid MPLA.

October: Ford Administration seeks \$81 million aid to Zaire, including \$19 million in direct military assistance, in an attempt to indirectly increase aid to FNLA/UNITA.

October 23: Large-scale South African invasion of Angola from Namibia begins. The force includes at least 500 white mercenaries. In early February, Defense Minister Botha, reversing previous denials, admits that 6000 South African troops had penetrated "a very long way" into Angola.

October 30: OAU nine-nation conciliation commission recommends government of national unity and non-recognition of any one movement. MPLA refuses to negotiate with FNLA and UNITA because they represent foreign interests.

November 11: ANGOLAN INDEPENDENCE DAY - MPLA proclaims the establishment of the People's Republic of Angola (PRA), immediately recognized by over 30 countries. The Portuguese withdraw, recognizing Angolan independence but refusing to acknowledge any Angolan movement as the legitimate government.

November 14: The heavily armored South African forces, joined with UNITA/FNLA troops led by Chipenda, advance up the coast, covering 500 miles in nine days and inflicting serious losses on MPLA. Many major towns are captured, including the ports of Lobito, Benguela and Novo Redondo. Cuban troops are airlifted to help MPLA meet the emergency. Renewed FNLA/FLEC attack on Cabinda is repulsed by MPLA. The FNLA drive southward is stopped 15 miles north of Luanda.

November 17: Nigeria becomes the 21st African country to recognize the PRA.

November 23: FNLA and UNITA proclaim a joint government named the Democratic People's Republic of Angola with capital at Huambo (Nova Lisboa). This government is never officially recognized by any foreign government.

November 27: China announces withdrawal of support for FNLA alone and calls for a government of national unity.

December 11: CORE's (Congress of Racial Equality - US civil rights organization) Roy Innis is revealed to be recruiting black US mercenaries to fight with FNLA/UNITA.

December 15: MPLA, assisted by Cuban troops and Soviet rockets, begins to retake its positions. The South African advance is turned back in the South; MPLA begins advance

against FNLA in the North, moving toward Ambriz. There is now mounting public evidence of extensive US involvement: US Navy task force is reportedly placed on alert; US spotter planes are flying missions over Angola from Zaire; US cargo planes are air-dropping supplies to the South African column.

December 19: US Senate votes 54-22 to cut off all aid to FNLA/UNITA.

December 20: Savimbi meets with South Africans "at the highest level" in Pretoria to urge them to remain in Angola.

December 22: Fidel Castro, in a speech at Cuba's First Party Congress in Havana, states that Cuba is carrying out its proletarian internationalist duty by supporting the Angolan people and its vanguard, MPLA.

1976

January 2: Three hundred US mercenaries recruited by CIA-financed front groups are discovered to be fighting in Angola with FNLA/UNITA. These include US Special Forces personnel put on "indefinite leave" or recently discharged to enable them to fight in Angola. 150 took courses in weapons and Portuguese at Fort Benning, Georgia.

January: In New Year offensive, MPLA, reinforced by Soviet supplies and Cuban troops, moves against FNLA/Zaire forces in the North and captures key towns such as Uige (Carmona, FNLA headquarters), Ngage (FNLA airbase) and the port of Ambriz (FNLA's northern airbase for CIA supplies) in the first half of the month. By the end of the month, FNLA/Zaire troops are driven back almost to the northern border, and widespread looting and murders are reported as their forces retreat.

January 12: OAU meeting deadlocks on Angola - 22 nations out of 46 recognize MPLA Government, 22 support a reconciliation position, none recognize the FNLA/UNITA "government."

January 27: US House of Representatives approves Senate vote to cut off all covert US aid to FNLA and UNITA. Kissinger announces that Ford Administration will try to secure overt aid for them.

January 31: PRA Prime Minister Lopo do Nascimento states that the US is waging economic warfare against MPLA-led Angola, citing Gulf's refusal to pay oil royalties and the State Department's cancellation of delivery of two Boeing 737's already paid for by Angola's privately-owned airline.

February 3: Retreating in the South, 6000 South African troops dig in along a defense line 50 miles inside Angola stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Zambian border; another 20,000 South African troops are stationed just over the border in Namibia.

February 5: São Antonio do Zaire, FNLA's last stronghold near the Zaire border, falls to MPLA. FNLA/Zaire forces have now been virtually driven out of Angola and MPLA controls the North.

February 7-10: MPLA takes Huambo, Angola's second largest city and UNITA's abandoned capital. Then, in rapid succession, the ports of Lobito and Benguela, the towns of Silva Porto and Luso in the East, and finally Moçamedes and Sa da Bandeira in the South are liberated. MPLA now directly controls virtually all areas of the country except the South African-held strip adjacent to the Namibian border. Throughout the war, MPLA's administration functions effectively despite many problems. Now, with Angola's "2nd War of National Liberation" nearing complete victory, MPLA moves to establish People's Power throughout the whole of Angola.

February 12: 28 African states now recognize the People's Republic of Angola, which is accepted as the OAU's 47th member.

February 17: France recognizes the PRA as the other EEC countries, including Britain, and Canada follow suit. More than 75 nations now recognize the PRA.

March 27: South Africa withdraws from southern Angola. Angola is free all the way from Cabinda to Cunene.