



A DISCUSSION  
WITH AMALCAR  
CABRAL -

P. A. I. G. C.

(Summary of a discussion on Feb. 23, 1970, staff and friends of the American Committee on Africa, in New York City with Amilcar Cabral of PAIGC.)

Mr. Cabral needs no translator whatsoever; he is an articulate, expressive, and impressive person, with rare gifts of personality and commitment. His hour-long chat seemed to last only 10 minutes. Cabral stressed that the struggle in Guinea-Bissau is an indigenous one, a struggle grounded in the realities of the country. He also emphasized the necessity of linking Guinea-Bissau with the Cape Verde Islands in any fight for self-determination from Portugal.

The following is a general outline of what he said, though not exhaustive and not a direct quotation:

The struggle began in 1961 with sabotage. We began our fight a bit early, but that was done purposely to support the struggle initiated in Angola. Part of the difficulty was the lack of mountainous areas in GB (Guinea-Bissau), and the necessity of using the forests. This was initially difficult because many of our people regarded the forests as sacred and not a place where a man should go. This has been overcome now, however. . .

There were many cultural and/or religious

aspects that were contrary to a guerrilla struggle, such as the place of woman in the society. Also, the Portuguese had convinced many people they were not indigenous (the Africans, that is). We had no facilities to produce weapons. Thus the process of the struggle has had to develop from the realities of the country...

Our strategy has been centrifugal-- starting from the center of the country and working towards the borders, relying always on the peasants. We did not start in the cities as they did in Algeria, because we knew European strategies would not work for us, such as strikes, demonstrations, etc...

Six months after the beginning of the fighting, the Portuguese Minister of Defense stated that the guerrillas controlled 15% of the country. The very next day he was asked to rescind his statement, and to say instead that it was merely a small rebellion, now under control by the Portuguese. They have continued to release occasional similar statements, but now we control 60% of the country, and they won't fool the world much longer...

There was also never any specific "decision" to include women in the struggle. It came about out of the struggle itself, very naturally. Since 1962 women have held high positions both in our political and our military organization. In this one decade we have passed two centuries so far as the role of woman is concerned. It is now required that if a village committee consists of 3, 1 must be a woman; if it consists of 5, 2 must be women. The size of the village committees depends on the size of the village...

In 1964 we held the first Congress inside the country. Zones were created, all being responsible to the top leadership. There are three major zones of fighting: North, South and East. As soon as an area is liberated, a Popular Militia is created to enforce the security and protection of the liberated zones. The Popular Militias are composed of 80% women...

Now we have a Regular Army (Army Corps), a Council of War (7 people from the Central Committee of the Party, including the Secretary General of the Party who serves as President of the Council of War). We have a Commander or Commandant of each military front, each of whom have some autonomy, but who are largely responsible to the Council of War.

There is a permanent delegation from the Central Committee on each front, consisting of 3 people. Each Army Corps has a Commandante and a Political Commissar. The Popular Militia is linked to the political organization of the party also...

Each region also has a committee, with an officer for various divisions: political, security, education, civil and administrative, health, supplies, and the Popular Militia.

In answering questions, Mr. Cabral expanded many of his preceding comments. When asked about the economy of Guinea in the liberated zones, he said that the process of building new economic systems is to be a long one. The utilization of land traditionally within the country has been on a communal basis and this is true in liberated areas. Production has been increased, cooperation is greater, and a few new structures, such as cooperatives, are beginning. The people must depend on the barter system at this time, and can only sell skins, bee's wax, and lighter weight goods to Guinea (C.) and Senegal. But that the economy of GB has changed because of the success of the revolution is clear because while more rice is being grown in the liberated areas than ever before, the Portuguese now have to import rice to feed the people still under their control. It seems that nowadays the Portuguese import guns and foodstuffs and export only blown up trucks!

When asked why the Portuguese bothered to hold on to GB given its lack of mineral resources and its smallness, Cabral stated that he believed that the Portuguese were "prisoners" of their own ties and their own provincial theory. The theory that the colonies were provinces, integral parts of Portugal, would be dispelled if there was independence granted in GB. In addition, the Portuguese had to defend their total imperialist aims in Africa, and could not afford to be defeated by anti-imperialists.

Speaking on the state of the Portuguese Army, Cabral mentioned that there were 14,000 defectors/deserters per year. Thirty Portuguese soldiers have deserted from the Army in Guinea-Bissau. He saw some positive changes occurring within Portugal, particularly among student and church individuals.

Discussing Portugal's strategy, Mr. Cabral said that the wars had made Portugal accelerate education for Africans and that the Portuguese were made to act with "respect" towards Africans unlike before. Also the government is building mosques for the Muslim population and sending individuals for the hadj to Mecca. Yet the truth of this policy is that the bombing, the napping, the attempts to set up fortified hamlets continue, to the point that the Portuguese are viewed in fact as terrorists, who kill the people.

To illustrate how the Africans are beginning to appreciate the PAIGC, Cabral said: There was a time when an African woman went into a store, she had to give way and wait til all Europeans were served. Now the European shopkeepers call our African women "Madam." They serve African women immediately these days. When the shopkeeper serves our women, they always say: "Jarama PAIGC." This means "Thanks to the Party." Our people realize that whenever their lot has been bettered, it is thanks to the Party.

With regard to the necessity of violence Cabral described briefly the nature of Portuguese colonialism: that Guinea cannot be called underdeveloped since it is not developed at all. That when the PAIGC began its fight illiteracy was 99.7%, etc. That colonial domination is a condition of violence and can be removed by violence only. That one is a fool not to take up arms against an armed man and that you cannot fight a gun with a stick.

When asked about the determination of PAIGC to hold on to Cape Verde, Cabral spoke seriously about the absolute unanimity of the struggle on the mainland in GB and that on the offshore islands. The linkages between these two areas are those of history, of blood, and complementary economies. But also he said that strategically the non-independent and African-controlled Cape Verde would be a continual threat to all of the independent Africa, and that in particular the fact that the islands are back up positions for the Portuguese airforce now shows their potential importance. Since the inception of the struggle the two areas have been united, and offers of independence for the mainland alone are meaningless.

There have been stories that PAIGC has troops training in Senegal and that this is the reason for Portuguese incursions into Se-

negal to bomb Senegalese villages. Mr. Cabral said that there were no PAIGC troops in Senegal.

Reflecting on the role of U.S. corporations in his country, Cabral said that Standard Oil (ESSO) has negotiated a concession in the area of the Bissagos Isles and set up an American installation on Caravel Isle. The PAIGC very clearly sees this cooperation with Portuguese colonialism and militarism as detrimental to its own aims. When told by an American that the company would be the "first" to welcome a new independent Guinea-Cape Verde, Cabral commented that more likely the "first" in this case would probably be the "last"--would not in fact be there. He mentioned that German-Dutch Bauxite interests in Boe region of Guinea have been lost and that the companies have left the region.

Cabral was asked about the significance of the Portuguese Navy in the struggle in Guinea, considering that the U.S. has acknowledged that it trains Portuguese naval personnel in this country. Cabral stressed that given the importance of Cape Verde and the other islands, it should be obvious that the Navy and naval strategy is significant. In addition, his country's coast line is a series of estuaries and rivers so deep that 10,000-ton boat can go into GB for about 150 kilometers. The Portuguese bombard the shore from boats (pocket destroyers), supply their camps by boat, and have armed boats to protect the islands and the coast. So the training of the navy in the U.S. is specifically for the colonial war.

When asked what Americans could do to help the people of Guinea-Bissau in their struggle Cabral said first that there was no doubt that the PAIGC would eventually win. If Americans wanted to help, they could of course send medicines, textbooks, etc. But most important the U.S. should cease its support of NATO, through which Portugal is supplied the weapons it uses to kill the people of Guinea-Bissau.

