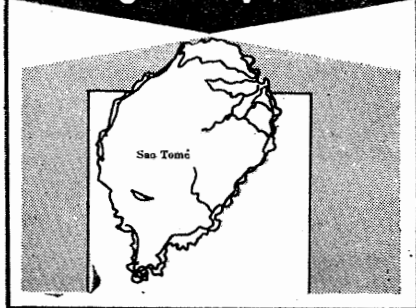


## tricontinental scene

### St. Thomas and Prince: the people's resistance to the Portuguese presence



*In the present context of the armed struggle that is developing in the three fronts represented by Angola, Guinea and Mozambique, the Saint Thomas and Prince Islands have not escaped the repressive vigilance of Portuguese colonialism. In addition to the increase in the armed forces established in the territory, the PIDE (International State Defense Police) have imprisoned a great number of nationalists.*

*The political events occurring in Nigeria,*

*dominated recently by the secession of Biafra, have given St. Thomas a new importance as a key air link for planes heading toward Port Harcourt to aid the secessionist forces.*

The archipelago of St. Thomas and Prince Island form part of a volcanic whole that, extending from the continent, culminates in the Cameroon Mountains. It is situated in the Gulf of Guinea.

The two principal islands of the archipelago (St. Thomas and Prince) are separated from each other by a distance of 82 miles and, respectively, are 180 and 150 miles from the African continent. The total surface area of the territory is 996 sq. km, with a population estimated at 70 000 inhabitants. The archipelago is made up of the two above-mentioned islands and a group of islets: Cabras to the north; Santana, Quiziba and the Seven Stones (the Seven Stones are really 14) situated next to the eastern coast; Rolas, to the south; and Gabado and Coco, along the western coast.

The arrival of the Portuguese at St. Thomas Island dates back to 1470. Fifteen years later, Joao de Paiva, whom the Portuguese king had named lord of the island, shared with the first group of colonists, the dowry of privileges that included the "power to carry out commerce on

the mainland on the five rivers that are beyond the St. Jorge de Mina fortress. Thanks to their privileged position, "in the middle of the Atlantic, as far as possible from the dangerous vicinity of the coasts," a base or port passage for the slave trade was constructed on the island.

The first economic cycle of the archipelago was dominated by the slave trade and the cultivation of sugar cane, introduced in 1501.

Cultivation of sugar cane and the slave trade developed rapidly. Between 1506 and 1507 there were already on the two islands 2000 slaves on the sugar cane plantations, not counting those in the market, whose number waivered between 5 and 6000. In 1517 the production of cane was of such magnitude that it became necessary to establish a "sugar sale law."

In the cities and on the plantations, the relations between whites and blacks was established on the basis of the royal decree which stipulated that "each colonist take one woman and give her sons." The owner of the plantation represented, from the beginning, the privileged group that developed during the usurpation of land and property. To the black man fell the lot of carrying out the work,

From the begining the great interests characterized the unstable equilibrium of the society: the struggle between the civil government and the Church for control of commerce and government, and between these and the slaves for the liberation of the land.

The cultivation of sugar cane declined in the second half of the 18th century. In 1601 the exodus of plantation owners began toward Brazil. The development of the cultivation of sugar cane in this part of the American continent, the invasions of foreign pirates, and the social climate

created by successive slave revolts, brought the island's economy to a state of decay. The first cycle, ended; there then began a long fallow period.

The search for slaves increased the struggle for possession of land and the monopoly of trade. England, France and Holland, which possessed colonies dedicated to the cultivation of sugar cane, for which they needed slave labor, coveted the Portuguese, position in the archipelago. In 1555 the English attacked the island; in 1641 the Dutch succeeded in occupying it and in 1709 there was a new attack by the French.

The island ceased to offer the conditions of security necessary for the Portuguese establishment, and in 1753 the capital was transferred to Prince Island.

At the beginning of the 19th century the island had a reduced population, in which the preponderant element was represented by the descendants of the Portuguese.

The economic rebirth of the island began in 1800 with the introduction of coffee and, in 1822, of cocoa. A new cycle began, a phase sharpened by the struggle for the possession of land and securing of great profits.

The method of reconversion of small properties, based on the new Portuguese capital introduced on the island, the new credit system with the introduction of the bank, the impossibility of mechanizing the agriculture and the set of influences brought the descendants of the Portuguese to abandon their mode of life, shared by all of them, and to unite their destiny with that of the freed slaves. At the same time, there was the triumph of great property, with the installation of the great companies.

The abolition of slavery in 1869 found the agriculture of the island in a state of complete development. The Portuguese



farmers were faced with a dilemma: either to carry out the elevated objectives of abolition, suddenly declaring free all the blacks who were then slaves, which would signify the immediate ruin of the colonial economy, or to preserve their structure and domination by continuing with slave labor.

In spite of having declared the cessation of slavery in its colonies, the Portuguese continued clandestinely transporting new cargos from Accra, Cameroon, Gabon, Angola and Mozambique. This fact immediately brought on universal repulsion and the rapid intervention of the anti-slavery powers.

In 1906 the slave labor on the cocoa plantations was denounced by Henri Nevison. In 1909 the Cadbury chocolate factory, deeply interested in the development of cocoa in the Gold Coast, confirmed the declarations of Nevison. Later Basil Davidson, Cunther, John Dufy and other journalists revealed the humiliating conditions of the recruitment of slaves in St. Thomas and Prince.

International public opinion demanded sanctions against Portugal. Since 1909, British and German importers boycotted "the slave cocoa."

Although slavery was sufficiently unmasked and condemned, there still remained vestiges of it in the Portuguese plantations, since they couldn't have cocoa without slave labor. In 1903, the Portuguese government published the rest of its law concerning of blacks from Angola, Mozambique and Cape Verde to the plantations of St. Thomas and Prince Island. They wanted to make people believe in a "free" emigration, of "free citizens" from one "province" to another, within the same country. Miraculously, the "free" labor replaced the slave labor.

The agrarian rebirth brought about by

the introduction of coffee and cocoa created a new order in the island and distinguished two forms of economy: an omnipotent capitalist sector dominating a stagnant non-capitalist sector.

The great plantations represent the central nucleus of the island's agrarian life, linked to the exploitation of the profitable crops. They inherited the ancient plantations in which sugar cane was grown, the lands and frequently the name. In their general characteristics as well, they are juxtaposed to the economic and administrative structure of the old plantations. They occupy 93% of the cultivable land.

The small properties of the natives, numerous and miniscule, are grouped to the northeast of the island. Their economic activities are very narrowly limited. Such properties occupy scarcely 7% of the cultivable land and 52% of the autochthonous population lives on them.

The National Bank of Ultramar and the Union Fabril Company, the great Portuguese monopoly, control some of the principal agricultural companies.

The National Bank of Ultramar (BNU) owns: Companhia Ilha do Principe (Infante D. Enrique, Agua Izé, Nova Olinda and Traz-os-Montes Plantations), Companhia Ilha de S. Tomé (Angla Toldo, Angolares, D. Augusta, Bom Retiro, Guayaquil, Soledade Plantations), Companhia Agricola Ultramarina (Praia Grande, Novo Brasil, Perseveranca Blindia, S. João and Uba Budo Plantations).

The Union Fabril Company (CUF) owns: Milagrosa (Caridade, Cruzeiro, Milagrosa Companhia de Principe, Sociedade da Rocas and Santelmo Plantations), Companhia Geral de Angola (Maria Emilia Plantation, general commerce, representing the Colonial Navigation Company) as well as Silva y Gouveia (general commerce).

### *The National Resistance*

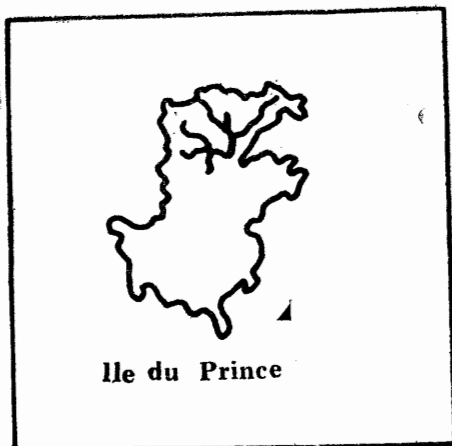
The popular resistance to the Portuguese presence dates back to the slave period. Subjected to strenuous work on the sugar plantations, deprived of all their liberty, the slaves did not passively accept the role that colonialism imposed on them.

In 1530, Yoan Gato, old and blind, led the first uprising. However, the best known of these was that led by the black slave Amador. Taking advantage of the conflicts that existed between the Bishop and the governor, Amador unleashed a revolt, liberated two thirds of the island, was proclaimed king of the island and kept it under his control for nearly a year.

The emancipation of the slaves was ephemeral; but their defeat which forced them to seek refuge in the forest, did not concede a moment of tranquility to the Portuguese, nor did it mark the end of their eagerness to struggle for liberation. They reunited in "quilombos,"<sup>(1)</sup> and frequent new attempts were launched. They weren't defeated until much later, after 300 years.

The abolition of slavery, with no modification of the economic structure and philosophy, could not bring about a positive change in the life of the blacks. "In a certain sense," said Henrique Galvao, "the situation is more serious than that which was created by pure and simple slavery. As a slave, the native was bought like a simple head of cattle and represented, for his owner, certain investment of capital: owing to that, he was treated in such a way as to keep him in good health, strong and agile, just like a horse or a bull." With the abolition of slavery, "the native isn't bought, but rather hired out by the govern-

<sup>1</sup> Forest encampments in which the fugitive slaves gathered.



ment, although he is supposedly a free man. It doesn't matter much if he is sick or dies, as long as he is capable of working while he is alive..."

The small nucleus of Portuguese descendants, thanks to the struggle of the masses, were the first to benefit by the small modifications imposed by the system. This nucleus obtained representation in the policy and the administration, the modest success of its students established in Portugal, etc. But this role was not long in disappearing. The old privileges were snatched away by the new land owners. The conflicts were intensified, which created an explosive situation.

Beginning in 1947 there was a growing political consciousness which finally led to a correct perspective. The local problems began to be studied and placed in their true context.

The historical and geographical context of this period has permitted a long maturation: In Asia and in Africa, de-colonization is on the march.

Faced with this situation —new in the

history of decolonization—the government reacted violently. It has created a “state of exception,” completely arbitrary, to attack the best-known elements among the elite of the country.

The youth of the country have always put up resistance to the system of forced labor. Various attempts carried out by the representatives of the Portuguese colonial government to enroll them in the work of the plantations has met with popular resistance.

The production of cocoa and coffee diminished considerably at the beginning of 1953, at the time when these two products, on which the life of the archipelago depended reached the highest prices in the world market. On the other hand, the balance of payments was endangered, not reaching enough to cover the deficit resulting from the Plan of support for the Portuguese government with respect to the “development of St. Thomas and Prince.” To re-establish the economic equilibrium, of course in accord with the interests of the Portuguese, a solution was imposed: the dizzying increase in production. For this it was necessary to find sufficient and cheap manpower.

In fact, the manpower imported was insufficient to assure the desired rate of production. Governor Carlos Gorgulho then carried out a new attempt at imposing the regime of slavery on the natives of the archipelago by force of arms. The violent reaction of the masses forced the farming companies, having spoken with governor Carlos Gorgulho, and with the consent of the minister of the Colonies, to seek an armed solution to the problem.

On February 1st, 1963, pamphlets appeared in the main buildings of the city announcing the revolt of the inhabitants of the island and the intention to kill the governor. The

maneuve attempted to demonstrate the complicity of the natives and, principally, of the best known elements.

The colonial government began to take certain measures. The soldiers of the country were disarmed and demobilized. A general mobilization of the settlers proceeded. On the third of February, public establishments, businesses and plantations ceased their activities.

The mobilized settlers patrolled the streets of the city and all the access roads to the interior of the island.

On the fourth day, the mercenaries were directed to the small hamlet of Batepa. The pursuit of the blacks was intensified. Those that survived the bullets were sent to the concentration camp at Fernao Dias beach. The Portuguese troops and the armed settlers assassinated the defenseless population, burning the houses, looting them, raping the women, etc... The prisons were filled. And one night 45 inhabitants of St. Thomas were asphyxiated in the gas chamber. The higher officials were deported to Prince Island.

The plantation workers were utilized in the massacre. In less than one week, 1032 natives were assassinated.

And the problem of slave labor continues without a solution.

The massacre of Batepa supplied the elements for the beginning of collective consciousness and established the need for coordinated action among the natives of the archipelago and the slave laborers.

In order to translate the aspirations of the people of this archipelago into the free determination of their destiny, in September 1960 the St. Thomas and Prince Liberation Committee (CLSTP) was founded, which now devotes the most important part of its energy towards the creation of the struggle against Portuguese colonialists,