

The Rise and Fall of Nito Alves

Part 2

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Nito Alves as the Minister of Interior

For the Angolan masses in 1975, it was not easy to differentiate ideological differences between President Agostinho Neto and together with all consistent members of the MPLA on the one hand and the ultra-leftist spellbinding demagogue called Nito Alves on the other hand. During this time, however, one of the immediate main aims of the MPLA was to expel the FNLA bandits from Luanda, and the organisational abilities of Nito Alves particularly in the ghettos of Luanda were indispensable. As a result of his success in securing Luanda as a stable MPLA base, Nito Alves became the Minister of the Interior in the first government of the People's Republic of Angola. The failure of the masses to see the essence of Nito Alves and not only to judge him by his appearance, is common in many revolutions, more so because counter-revolutionaries have learnt through history and experience that it is only when they utter revolutionary phrases that they can attract the people, even though they repeat them in parrot fashion. Nevertheless, the people must learn to separate the essence from phenomenon, the real from what appear to be. It is under this consideration that the Strategy and Tactics of the African National Congress says:

"The revolutionary-sounding phrase does not always reflect revolutionary policy, and revolutionary-sounding policy is not always the

springboard for revolutionary advance. Indeed, what appears to be 'militant' and 'revolutionary' can often be counter-revolutionary".

Declaring himself an unflinching partisan of class struggle, Alves' politics was at this time highly influenced by the works of the Albanian leader, Enver Hoxha (whose works were being distributed in Angola by small bands of Portuguese Maoists) as well as influenced by Mao Tse-tung's early writings of Chinese class structure. Moving from this pseudo-scientific analysis, Alves failed to define the classes within the Angolan social structure and thus found himself exploiting the sentiments of the people in their response to the racism of the Portuguese colonialists who had just been defeated. It is hard for one not to see a simile in the present trend in the leadership of the withering Pan Africanist Congress which now claims to be guided by Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tse-tung thought. His attendance of the 25th Congress of the CPSU on behalf of the MPLA was because he was verbally a partisan of the Soviet Union.

His position as Interior Minister gave him wide powers to appoint his stooges as Provincial and District Commissars, and thus entrench himself in power. The real reason for his close association with the Ministry of Internal Trade as well as the very Minister responsible, became apparent when after he had infiltrated it with his own supporters, goods started to fail to arrive at their destination and when attempts were made to pin down responsibilities a cunning system of shoving the problem over to a different sector was employed and certain documents were mysteriously destroyed by fire. In this way the actual cause of the problem was hidden. All this was a deliberate economic sabotage.

When the majority of the members of the MPLA leadership worried seriously about Nito Alves' behaviour as the Minister of the Interior, a Plenary meeting of the Central Committee was called from the 23rd to the 29th of October 1976, in which Nito Alves was accused of factionalism. Although he denied the accusation, a Commission of Enquiry was set up to investigate his activities - a Commission that finally recommended that his own Ministry be abolished since there was no longer any necessity for the Provincial Commissars to be co-ordinated by the Ministry of the Interior since there is in the Government structure a Council of Ministers. Nito Alves remained being a member of the Central Committee but no longer of Political Bureau. Following this demotion Nito Alves and his lieutenants hastened to carry out his coup d'Etat plan. It still

remains a vital test of the genuineness of a revolutionary to serve the revolution in any capacity.

The attempted coup and its aftermath

Alves' attempted coup was a carefully planned operation. He withheld food supplies, arranged for one FAPLA Officer in the Ministry of Defence to hoard five month's salary of FAPLA who would be agitated to blame the Ministry of Defence and as a result commit acts of insubordination and mutiny. More than that, he planned that when the artificial people's grievances are worsened, he would then woo them into a mass demonstration in the streets. The aim of the demonstration was to present President Neto with so-called people's demands. Should he 'reject' them, it was planned that he would be arrested. As for the other MPLA leaders like Lucio Lara (Secretary-General of MPLA), Iko Carreira (Minister of Defence) and so on, they were to be killed with immediate effect of the order. Then a Government would be formed with Nito Alves as President and Van Dunem as Prime Minister, then the Central Committee would be replaced by a "Politico-Military Revolutionary Committee".

Because Nito Alves was still a Member of the Central Committee, a special meeting of the Committee was called on the weekend of 20-21 May 1977 to consider the further worsening of events. In this meeting Nito Alves, using Lenin's quotations out of context, attempted to prove that Angola was being led by the incompetent leaders to class collaboration. Attempts were made in this meeting to dissuade him from factionalism. Infact, during a lunch time break. President Neto took Nito Alves and Van Dunem aside for a private discussion. He asked them to do honest self-criticism and to consider the continuing imperialist threat to Angola and the need to hold MPLA together on the basis of national unity - all this to no avail, for the factionalists had already decided to go ahead with their plans. The discussions, however, continued until the following day when the Central Committee resolved to expell them from the Committee. This, of course, added more fuel to the fire.

The date of the coup was finally set for the 27th of May. The aim was to capture the Radio Station while the 'masses' would be demonstrating, and 'discontented' FAPLA would march with the demonstration on the pretext of protecting the masses and the revolution. Alves would then address the people over the Radio and announce that the Government has been overthrown, and recite his accusations of hunger, poverty, etc., to just-

ify the counter-revolution. According to the final plans Neto would then be killed.

Early in the morning of the 27th May Alves' men attacked the Sao Paulo Prison and released there hundreds of common criminals together with UNITA and FNLA bandits as well as the British and American mercenaries who had been imprisoned by FAPLA. At about 08,00 am they had seized the Radio Station and they began broadcasting attacks on the Government and appealed to the masses to demonstrate outside the Presidential Palace. Seven members of the Central Committee were treacherously murdered by the factionalists. The plan, however, turned sour and the whole scheme met with dismal failure because the demonstration was able to attract only about 500 people. The overwhelming majority of FAPLA combatants and DISA (the security services) stood on the side of the Government. By 11,00 am FAPLA had dispersed the small crowd outside the palace. About an hour after that the People's Army stormed the Radio Station building and recaptured the transmitter.

The attempted coup took a very short time and it was foiled by the MPLA. Many of its leaders were captured almost immediately. Van Dunem was able to hide for only two weeks. Nito Alves thought that by running to his hometown, Piri, in the North, he would be safe - but after six weeks of wandering, already tired and hungry, the peasants took him and handed him to FAPLA to meet revolutionary justice.

It is only those who identify themselves with history and not history with themselves that are truly revolutionary. Factionalism is an evil that can occur in all revolutionary organisations, and our ANC is no exception. Factionalism often manifests itself in the appearance of small groups of ambitious opportunists, attempting under various pretexts, to undermine the confidence of the army or members in their leaders, using slander or exploiting the difficulties that still exist. Our people's army, Umkhonto we Sizwe, should never fall victim of pseudo-revolutionary verbosity, tribalistic or regionalistic sentiments in attempts by the counter-revolutionaries to provoke discontent against the revolution.

The argument is still that there is no effect without a cause. Counter-revolutionaries do not come out of the blue. The catch word is: BE VIGILANT AGAINST APPEARANCE, LOOK FOR THE ESSENCE, which can only be proved by time and consistency - for all revolutionaries shall be absolved by history.