

Angola

ON BUILDING A PARTY

This is an excerpt from an interview with Lucio Lara, Secretary-General of MPLA by Elisabeth Hedborg and Hillevi Nilsson which was published in Sweden. We are reprinting it because it raises very important questions about building a party. We plan to have further material on this subject relating to Angola, Mozambique and Guine-Bissau in the future.

Q: *Lately there have been discussions whether the MPLA will form a party. What was the result of those discussions?*

Lara: At the meeting of the Central Committee in the beginning of November this year it was decided that a congress is to be held in 1977, at which the question of forming a party will be studied. There are various opinions about what such a party should be like and what place it should fill, and for that reason a congress has to decide this. Earlier on the dominant opinion in the Central Committee was that the MPLA should be transformed into a party. But now more and more members seem to think that the MPLA should continue to exist as a movement,

and at the same time a completely new party should be formed. In that case it will be a Marxist-Leninist cadre party. We feel that it would be politically unwise to abolish the MPLA, which has such a good reputation among the population of this country, in order to turn it into a party. Our people are not used to political parties, and it would be very difficult to explain to them that "now the MPLA is going to disappear, and a party is to be formed, but you are not allowed to be a member of it." It would be easier to change the MPLA into a mass party.

Q: Then why don't you do that?

Lara: The struggle between the classes in Angola has not as yet reached its most intensive phase. A movement like the MPLA, where all classes are represented, can not solve class conflicts and build up socialism. In such a case we would have conflicts between ourselves, and that would prevent us from realizing our political aims. Already we must think of creating a party that can become an instrument for the working classes and with the help of which we can build up socialism. The MPLA could never be such an instrument, even if it has filled—and during many years to come will fill—a very important place as a front organization. But in order to build up a socialist Angola it is necessary to have a party that is clearly defined in terms of classes.

Q: But what do you do if others want to form parties as well?

Lara: That we will not allow.

Q: Isn't there a risk that this party will become a party for an elite, while the masses remain in the MPLA?

Lara: That risk does exist, of course, but it can be avoided by means of the criteria laid down for party membership. Party members will be only those who are self-sacrificing and devoted, persons who humbly accept to carry out the difficult tasks we have in front of us.

Q: What important changes has the MPLA gone through from the days when it was a liberation movement up to now when it is an organization with government responsibility?

Lara: The problems, thus, are the same. They have only got other dimensions, and at the same time the MPLA

has become much bigger. When the MPLA became legal, a large number of new members joined, but their political conviction rarely was as strong as we could have wished. They often had opportunistic or emotional motives. We have not yet managed to do very much about this opportunism. We have called for watchfulness, and we have made a certain selection among the applications for membership, but the methods have not been very effective so far. From now on we will be much stricter when accepting new members. (Within the

"We will create a party as an instrument for the working classes and build up Socialism." (fragments from an interview with Lucio Lara, by Elisabeth Hedborg and Hillevi Nilsson)

—Kommentar (Sweden), no. 1, 1977

MPLA there are three kinds of membership: *simpatizantes*, *aderentes*, and *militantes*. The kind of membership we have translated with "member" in the interview is the *militante* group. Being a *militante* means that already during at least one year you have been working for the MPLA, displaying "a consequent revolutionary practice." A *simpatizante* can every Angolan become who accepts the program and covenant of the MPLA. The requirements for activity are much more modest here. —Note of Kommentar.) We will even purge within the movement. It is not enough for an MPLA member to have a membership card that can give him certain advantages. A real MPLA member is only the person that takes part in the everyday political work, that is the person that belongs to an action group and takes

part in its discussions, studies and work. Those who do not meet these demands will be expelled as members, and then we will consider if they may remain in the organization as sympathizers.

Q: How do the action groups function?

Lara: There are action groups in nearly every place of work and they function well. The groups in the residential areas function less well. There the work has not got properly started. We now attach less importance to the number of members and stress quality instead. This is part of the plans on the eve of the MPLA congress of 1977, so that gradually we shall be able to form a party. During the guerrilla stage people joined the MPLA almost instinctively, and there was no selection worth mentioning—now we build up the movement more systematically and on a scientific basis.

Q: But haven't you met with resistance from certain social strata?

Lara: . . . There is also resistance from the Catholic Church, not from the Catholics in general but from the leaders. It is quite clear that they are very worried by our policy, and that they oppose us directly in certain fields. They think that there is a conflict between the Marxist ideology and Christianity. But it is not necessarily so. The bishop of the Methodist Church, Emilio de Carvalho, recently pointed out in a very convincing way that there is no antagonistic conflict between Marxism and Christian teaching. To us it was important that a Christian Angolan leader in this way agreed with the idea that the most important common task is to build up the country. □



Shuster

Members of the Young Pioneers, an organization of MPLA in Luanda.