

# THE CONSTITUTION OF MPLA INTO A PARTY OF THE WORKING CLASS



Why is a new Party necessary?  
What will it mean in practice?  
What will be its relationship to the Movement?

## Introduction

If the formation of the Party was not to lead to a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding, with the risk of undermining the cohesion of the Movement and alienating the people, it was crucial to spell out as clearly as possible the answers to such questions as these. The decision to form the Party had to be taken consciously by the militants, in full realisation of its significance, not just out of traditional loyalty to the Central Committee and trust in its leadership.

There is no doubt that for many militants, the new Party was a mere slogan; at a Seminar of Political Activists in Luanda in mid-November, Lucio Lara (Secretary of the MPLA Political Bureau) attacked some of the negative attitudes being taken by MPLA members. Among these, he highlighted a growth of 'routine' - many members of MPLA Action Groups had long since ceased to be active and merely 'carried the card', he said, "they talk cynically of the 'fever of the Congress' and stand on the sidelines waiting to see how this thing is going to turn out". Others were showing signs of elitism, asking "why all this insistence on the working class, the peasants? How is a bunch of illiterates like them going to run the country?". Then there were always the opportunists: "we must be sure to get in on this so we can be director of this and that, and be in charge of such and such... ", and the sectarians: "that one's religious so he can't be a true Marxist-Leninist - out he goes!", and finally the factionalists, presenting petty-bourgeois ideas as 'ultra-revolutionary' and undermining the Movement from within. With all these controversies arising about the Party, he said "the Congress has already begun!".

The document on 'The Constitution of MPLA into a Working Class Party' was published and widely discussed in advance of the Congress, where it was approved along with the Party's new Programme and

Statutes. The document seeks primarily to explain the need for the organisation to be constantly evolving so as to reflect the principal contradiction at any given moment in the struggle. The membership and strategy of the organisation must depend on the definition of the main enemy, since its essential role is to unite and lead all classes and social forces who, despite differences among themselves, share a common opposition to that enemy. In Angola, as the character of the enemy changes from primitive colonialism based on the slave trade, to colonial capitalism, to imperialism, so does the character of the opposition, throwing up new organisational forms.

As well as showing how the liberation movement developed, and must continue to develop, in response to concrete Angolan conditions, the document also clarifies the relationship between internal Angolan factors and the growth of progressive forces internationally: developments in the international scene play a crucial role in determining the potential for advance of the liberation forces inside Angola.

Finally, the document tackles some of the misunderstandings that have arisen about the Party, with concrete explanations of points which have given rise to confusion.

Through the following extracts, we aim to show the development of the argument on the historical inevitability of the Party. The linking commentary summarises the omitted sections. We regret that space does not permit the publication in full of this fascinating document.

## The onset of colonialism and the impact of the October Revolution

The opening section deals with the pre-colonial societies - mainly tribally based - making up the Angolan nation in the fifteenth century. These were almost all organised states engaged in commerce, agriculture and craftwork.

"The development of these societies was violently interrupted by the arrival of the Portuguese, aggravated by the introduction of the slave trade which did not die out completely until the beginning of this century and which brought the destruction of the organised states and the paralysis of all economic and social development as a consequence of the criminal exportation to other continents of millions of worthy men and women.

The 'scramble for Africa' at the Berlin Conference, entailing "administrative and military occupation" was the point of departure for the slow introduction into Angola of the capitalist mode of production which would inevitably create conditions for a greater development of productive forces. . . .

In the face of the colonial presence, the development of class contradictions in Angolan society was slow and was only perceptible in class

position led to collaboration with the foreign oppressive classes. Itself dependent on other imperialist powers, Portuguese colonialism was late in promoting its own development which would speed up the development of productive forces in Angola. The eruption of fascism in Portugal was reflected in Angola where fascist colonialism interrupted the evolution of an active nascent bourgeoisie which had already begun to emerge at the end of the nineteenth century.

The eruption of the October Revolution occurred at the moment when the states making up Angola were locked in the occupation wars launched by the Portuguese. While in some regions nationalist forces were already appearing, the Portuguese wanted to take full advantage of the territory which had fallen to them at the Berlin partition.

The repercussions of the October revolution were not felt immediately in Angola, but the fact that it had been victorious, that it meant the realisation of the theses of the Communist Manifesto on the assumption of power by the proletariat and on the liquidation of colonial situations, launched new bases for the movement for national liberation which would come to spread more and more widely in all continents. . . .

By stating correctly the national question, by facilitating alliances of exploited peoples on an international scale, by permitting the growth of Communist Parties in the colonialist and imperialist countries, enlarging the ambit of the movement for national liberation - all this bringing with it a general crisis for capitalism - the Great October Revolution paved the way for the alliance which was to come about between the proletarian revolution and the struggle of the oppressed peoples for their liberation. Lenin fought for this alliance by establishing tasks for Marxist parties in the oppressor countries in relation to the oppressed colonies and countries and by drawing up the tactical principles of revolutionary parties in the oppressed countries.

In one of the conditions for entry to the Third International, it was stipulated that any party which was a candidate for entry had 'the duty to be implacable in unmasking the crimes of 'their own' imperialists in the colonies; of supporting in practice and not merely in words the whole movement for colonial freedom; of demanding that the imperialists of their nation should be expelled from the colonies; of creating in the hearts of workers a feeling of sincere fraternity for the working people of the colonies and oppressed nations; of developing systematic agitation among the troops of the colonising power against the aggression waged on the colonial peoples. "

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"In the period between the October revolution and the end of the Second World War, the peoples making up Angolan society had to fight the ferocious 'occupation campaigns' launched by colonial hordes and later to fight against the development of mercantile capitalism based on the institution of the most degrading forced labour, the real lever of

capitalism. All the wealth extracted in the colonies through forced labour, to which the population was violently subjected, was taken to the 'metropolis' where it came to function as accumulated capital.

As the MPLA Manifesto states: 'The massive export of capital to the colonies and the dependent countries with the aim of greater exploitation of raw materials, the widening of 'spheres of influence' and of colonial dominion to monopolise the world, the transformation of capitalism into a world-wide system of colonial oppression and financial enslavement of the huge majority of the world population by imperialist countries, were events which divided the world into two camps: the small camp of a handful of imperialist, exploiting and oppressing countries and the immense camp of the colonies and dependent countries who became obliged to struggle to free themselves from the imperialist yoke.

The end of the second world war gave a new impulse to the liberation movement of the African peoples. Many Africans had taken part in the victorious war against fascism, which made them feel more intensely the dimension of oppression and gave them an awareness of the need to fight to put an end to the abhorrent colonial system.

Portuguese fascist-colonialism, surviving the second world war, intensified its exploitation of the Angolan people, spreading it to new areas of stolen land, forcing the peasants into mono-culture to the detriment of their own subsistence agriculture, and installing a policy of white settlement which would relegate the Angolan workers to mere producers of surplus value.

In the face of a movement of challenge from the Angolan people against the weight of colonial exploitation, Portuguese colonialism opened the doors to financial capital from the European and North American monopolies and trusts."

## The beginnings of organised opposition

"At the start of the 1940s, Angolan patriots tried feverishly to find an organisational model which would allow them to resist the already alerted colonial administration which brutally repressed the patriots' first attempt at organisation in Luanda, Huambo, Benguela and Bie.

With the use of varied agitational methods over national problems, by organisations like the African National League, the Association of the Angolan Born, the Association of those born in Southern Angola and other cultural and recreational fellowships, along with campaigns for literacy or health, a favourable climate was being created for the birth in 1953 of the United Struggle Party of Angola, and later an ephemeral Angolan Communist Party.

Throughout Africa, ideas of independence were bubbling. The

Bandung Conference in April 1954 marked one of the most important stages in the liberation struggle of colonised peoples. For the first time in history, the peoples of Africa and Asia took the initiative of meeting to define a new strategy of common struggle against imperialism, for national independence and peace.

It is in this context that on 10 December 1956, the MPLA was founded, with a Manifesto which took as its starting point a scientific, anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist analysis of the situation in Angola and of its people. It proclaimed: 'Portuguese colonialism will not fall without a struggle'. Consequently, there was only one way for the Angolan people to free themselves: by revolutionary struggle. This struggle, however, would only triumph through a single front of all the anti-imperialist forces of Angola, regardless of political shades, the social position of individuals, their religious beliefs or philosophical views - that is, through the broadest **PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT FOR THE LIBERATION OF ANGOLA**. . . . .

The appearance of MPLA marked a decisive turning point in the history of the Angolan people's struggle for emancipation. For the first time, they were to fight colonialist oppression and exploitation guided by a scientific doctrine which put aside all tribal, regional, racial or religious prejudices which might impede unity; one which set at nought the myths of the superiority and invincibility of the colonialists, asserted national consciousness and situated the liberation movement in terms of class struggle. . . .

At this moment the principal contradiction developed between the colonial bourgeoisie, and its related social groups, and the different classes making up the Angolan people - all of them subjected to the most vile exploitation. . . .

## The birth of the Angolan proletariat

Capitalist penetration, once slavery was abolished, introduced currency and sought to obtain mainly agricultural products (rubber, wax, castor oil, cocoa, palm nut) in exchange for manufactured goods. The development of this barter led capitalism to invest in roads, ports, railways, and even in some minor industrialisation (oils, pottery, saw-mills, joinery) which did not create competition with industry in the metropolis and assured maximum profits. . . .

In the cities and in the countryside, in ever-growing numbers, the first groups of wage-earners appeared, the proletariat in embryo, living exclusively from the sale of their labour-power.

The peasant origin of the majority of workers did not favour the ripening of their class consciousness, but, by the same token, facilitated an alliance with the peasantry. This fact, and the migration of peasants

to swell the growing proletariat, had an influence on the unification of the proletariat and on the breaking down of some tribal reflexes.

The colonial-fascist factor put a brake on the development of an Angolan bourgeoisie, while allowing the more rapid growth of a proletariat linked directly to the growth of enterprises backed by foreign capital.

## The roles of other classes

The Angolan peasantry which includes the great majority of the population is based on small family holdings, mostly engaged in quasi-subsistence production, while others are linked to the capitalist economy in cultivating export crops.

The retrograde character of Portuguese colonialism was based on unbridled exploitation of the peasants, whose land it usurped and whom it subjected to humiliating forced labour.

This factor contributed to a situation where the Angolan peasantry would play a role of decisive importance in the armed national liberation struggle, through the large numbers coming forward as fighters in the various regions, and where the Angolan peasant would show himself very receptive to revolutionary ideas and to the principles of collectivisation of land.

The development of Portuguese colonial capitalism did not give rise to a significant comprador bourgeoisie, allowing only the skeleton of a vacillating national bourgeoisie, lacking enterprise, made up of some middling proprietors, whose interests always clashed with those of the coloniser, being jealous of his prerogatives.

In the context of the weakness of the embryonic national bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie took on greater importance. It mainly comprised intellectuals, students, members of the liberal professions, small traders, civil servants, artisans and agricultural small-holders.

Benefitting from greater access to schools and the privileges that followed from this, the Angolan petty-bourgeoisie, heir to the movement of challenge of the first Angolan intellectuals, and author of the first city and countryside revolts of the first decades of the twentieth century, acquired a spirit of initiative which constituted an important factor in the liberation struggle.

But from its origin and composition as a vacillating class, its members frequently fell in to opportunism, personal ambition, the race for privileges, tribalism, racism, alienation and demagoguery, becoming a medium in which counter-revolution could easily recruit its agents.

The centuries of oppression and exploitation unleashed by Portuguese colonialism relegated to a secondary place the contradiction between the various Angolan classes, sharpening antagonism between colonised and

colonisers, well shielded by an increasingly dynamic colonial bourgeoisie."

## The armed struggle

(The efforts of the Angolan patriots to organise peaceful opposition to the colonialists were met with increasing violence, massacres and arrests, tending contrarily to speed up the revolutionary process. The MPLA was beginning to build strong relations of friendship and collaboration with progressive countries and organisations. This was a natural step in the light of MPLA's statutes and programme which, in 1956, already asserted the principles of democratic centralism and proletarian internationalism. The launching of the armed struggle on 4 February 1961 and the response of the colonialists and their allies, led to a gradual radicalisation of MPLA's methods and organisation in the course of the struggle.)

"In the years 1968-70, the noteworthy development of the armed struggle, with the enlargement of the liberated areas and the adherence to the movement of many workers, mainly peasants and students, on a massive scale, the growth of Centres for Revolutionary Instruction and the international prestige the MPLA won in progressive circles, are factors which contributed to a considerable raising of the ideological level of the mass of the people and of the combatants. It is in this period that the question of forming a Vanguard Party and holding a Congress arises with great urgency. In the discussions held in February 1968 in Regional Assemblies of the First and Second Regions (where the establishment of People's Power in regions and areas where it was not yet implanted was also debated) it was felt that the creation of a Vanguard Party was premature, and instead the strengthening of the party structure of the Movement was proposed, since the development of a broad national front policy had still to be pursued."

(Later on, in September 1971, concern was again mounting for the Programme and Statutes to be revised. A Congress Preparatory Commission was set up but, as in the past, the concrete difficulties of distance and liaison under war conditions coupled with a big new enemy offensive, made the holding of the Congress impossible.)

"The situation created by a great enemy offensive, with the use of defoliants, provoked a crisis of starvation and led to the emergence of tribal groups, which were not free from enemy infiltration.

To overcome this crisis, the Readjustment Movement arose, first in the Eastern Front (August 1972) and later in the Northern Front (December 1973). The Readjustment Movement was basically founded on two principles: the adoption of a 'theory of revolution' and the

consideration that 'the masses are the point of departure and arrival of the whole structure and all the actions of the organisation'.

The application of these principles had the immediate effect of producing a broad and healthy movement of criticism and self-criticism and the adaptation of the structures and working methods to the demands of the political moment which was being lived, the development of the qualities of the militants and the raising of their political and ideological level.

In the course of the Readjustment of the Eastern Front, the phenomenon known as the 'Chipenda Revolt' occurred and towards the end of the Readjustment of the Northern Front, the self-styled 'Active Revolt' manoeuvre - both subtle instruments of imperialism which, in collusion with the colonialists, launched a vigorous offensive of a new kind against MPLA, on a military level and through the infiltration of agents into our midst. Both the 'revolts' appeared as a result of the ideological clarification which came about with the Readjustment Movement. The two 'revolts' confirmed our prediction in the readjustment Movement that 'imperialism, our principal enemy, tends increasingly to become the direct enemy'."

(The MPLA was strongly pressured to take part in a pseudo-Congress in Lusaka, with the Chipenda revolt and Active revolt factions, but broke from this and decided to hold a genuine Congress inside Angola. In the event, a Congress was again impossible and instead an Inter-Regional Conference of Militants was held. President Neto opened the Conference which, he said, was taking place at a crossroads in history "when the progressive forces are trying to overcome the epoch of colonial enslavement and enter a new life of dignity and freedom, while at the same time the reactionaries are trying to maintain domination through neo-colonial formulae". He went on to say that the main ideological concern of the Conference was how "to achieve the necessary unity at this stage and at the same time trace a path that will not allow this unity to be diluted by formulae fatal to the revolutionary teachings that have always guided the MPLA." The Programme of Action approved by the Conference explained that:)

"The MPLA is a movement and not a Party or a Front. Not being a party, the MPLA is fairly broad and includes Angolans of all classes and ethnic groups who are in agreement with its programme and prepared to obey its statutes. Not being a front, the MPLA, while it allows trends within it, cannot allow the forming of factions, that is of organised trends."

(The emphasis on developing the political education of members of MPLA over the next two years led to an increasingly clear line of demarcation between the activities of the MPLA militants and the puppet movement, emerging openly as agents of international capital during the transitional period in 1975.)



# The Second War of Liberation

(After the departure of the colonialists with the formal proclamation of independence in November 1975, the anti-imperialist nature of the struggle became clear.)

"The Movement now shows itself as a 'broad front' which includes all the patriotic forces committed to the anti-imperialist struggle. This front, as the legitimate representative of the Angolan people, takes on the social, economic and political leadership of the Nation.

In an independent country, with more than half its territory occupied by Zairean and South African troops supported by puppets and mercenaries, the antagonistic contradiction between the Angolan people and imperialism reached its highest point, speeding up the awakening consciousness of the working classes, strengthening their revolutionary ideology already tied to Marxism-Leninism, and relegating to a secondary plane their contradiction with other patriotic and anti-imperialist social groups."

(The Proclamation of Independence itself defined the position of the Movement in relation to the newly-won state power:)

"The force of the people's will, the long armed struggle and the defence of the interests of the most exploited strata, confirm the MPLA as the sole representative of the Angolan people and the leading force in the People's Republic of Angola.

The State organs of the People's Republic of Angola will be guided by the highest directives of the MPLA and the primacy of the Movement's structures over those of the State will be ensured. . . .

And the Movement itself can never be a petrified body. Endowed with great vitality, the dynamics of the revolution will profoundly change it qualitatively and quantitatively until the great leap which will transform it into a party within a broad revolutionary front."

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(After the expulsion of the South African invaders in March 1976, new problems confronted the Movement; firstly, the class struggle took on a new dimension with the interests of some sections of the petty-bourgeoisie (anxious to seize the opportunities created by the departure of the colonial elite) diverging sharply from those of the workers and peasants.

The unity of the Movement was being undermined by an upsurge of individualism and factionalism, as diverse interests sought to assert themselves as soon as the immediate military threat was removed.

Secondly, despite their clear defeat in the 1975-6 war, imperialist

interests continued to seek the overthrow of the MPLA government and were clearly on the alert to take advantage of any internal disunity.

MPLA had, therefore, to preserve the broadest possible national unity in the face of imperialist aggression, and at the same time to consolidate the worker-peasant alliance as the vanguard force in the context of sharpening class contradictions within the country.

The Programme of Action approved at the Third Plenary of MPLA Central Committee in October 1976 contained a strategy for tackling this dual task. Considering that the stage of socialist construction could not start until a first phase of national reconstruction had been completed, the Programme stated:)

"Our principal obligation at the present hour is to act energetically to cure the wounds of war: to put into operation the paralysed sectors of the economy; to redeem for our people the abandoned goods and enterprises. . . to guarantee the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation and the security of the State. . . .

The social forces of Angolan society whose interests are identified or essentially coincide with the aims of national reconstruction are grouped in MPLA and comprise the working class, the peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie and the revolutionary intellectuals. "

(The widest sectors of Angolan society were thus drawn into the reconstruction effort, opposed only by some sections of the petty-bourgeoisie, anxious to preserve their privileges or who maintained links with the puppet groups seeking to sabotage the MPLA government.

The process of recovery, involving bringing important parts of the economy under state control, met with growing opposition, under various guises, from these internal reactionary forces, and called for a more precise definition of the revolutionary movement.)

"The historical inevitability of a Vanguard Party therefore arose with greatest sharpness when the Angolan people, launched with determination on the tasks of national reconstruction, proposed the realisation of their socialist option within the framework of the sharpening of the internal class struggle and the permanent external threat. Only a party which expresses the interests of the working class and of all the working people can lead the masses in the struggle for the realisation of a socialist-oriented programme, capable of overcoming the contradictions of a society still divided by class and tribal differences. . . . "

## What becomes of MPLA (Movement)?

"The constitution of MPLA into a Vanguard Party is, then, the step forward that had still to be taken. Other formulae were examined for this step forward:

1. Maintaining MPLA as a front for all patriotic forces while creating a Vanguard Party with the best militants was an attractive formula which appeared to ensure the ideological purity of the Party while preserving the strength of MPLA in attracting and mobilising the people, as a nursery for cadres who would join the Party once they were hardened in the struggle and had gained the consciousness of good militants.

Such a formula presented a series of disadvantages:

- a) Fascism had not allowed the Angolan people any political life which would enable them to arrive at independence with an experience of organisation: this is obvious from the difficulty MPLA now faces in creating its structure. With two organisations of different character this task would be still more difficult;
- b) A large section of the working masses would have difficulty in understanding the purpose of two organisations since they are already used to seeing MPLA as the revolutionary vanguard struggling for People's Democracy and Socialism;
- c) If the Movement and the Party both existed, the structuring of both in the armed forces would be highly confusing, and even more complicated if we take into account the Party Youth within the armed forces.
- d) Many members of MPLA would not understand why they could belong to MPLA and not belong to the Party;
- e) With the complexity of the tasks of national reconstruction, it would be difficult to allocate cadres to ensure the functioning of two organisations as well as that of the State;
- f) There would be a danger of confusion of the respective missions and competencies of the two organisations, giving rise to misunderstanding which could lead to a breach of unity between the militants and leaders of each organisation;
- g) Many other problems of adaptation might arise, with unforeseeable consequences.

2. A formula whereby MPLA was simply abolished to give way to the Party - given that not all members of the defunct MPLA could be admitted to the Party - would bring problems of demobilisation among those who were not chosen for the Party, and the final result would also be division within the MPLA.

3. 'To transform the MPLA into a Party' is a formulation which does not exactly correspond to the solution now proposed that 'the MPLA should constitute itself into a Party'. As has been explained at length, the transformation of MPLA began long ago and has been continuing systematically since its foundation. It would not be at this moment that MPLA would transform itself into a Party, as if it was an immediate process. After all, it may be said that its transformation into a Party has been taking place since its foundation and is now reaching its term.

4. To create a Party, call it MPLA, and put an end to MPLA(Movement)

would not facilitate the task of explaining the historical inevitability of the Party, the reasons for the disappearance of the MPLA or the method of incorporating the membership.

SO THE MPLA CONSTITUTES ITSELF INTO A VANGUARD PARTY, preserving all the rich experience gained in twenty-one years of struggle as the revolutionary vanguard of the people.

## What happens to MPLA's present members?

The thousands of MPLA members have not had an equal opportunity of contact with historical materialism and dialectical materialism. Their adherence to scientific socialism is empirical and relies much on the trust they place in the MPLA and in the guidance of Comrade President Agostinho Neto.

On the other hand, capacity for training political cadres is still inadequate, with the result that there are still not enough activists to cover all the important centres of workers and peasants, to encourage their militant activity and to raise their political and ideological understanding.

There is a trend which demands that anyone who is admitted to the MPLA-Party should already be a convinced Marxist-Leninist. To be a convinced Marxist-Leninist one must know a minimum about the scientific theory of the proletariat. But we cannot be so demanding, we cannot be so sectarian. Just as it is the duty of the militant or aspirant to study Marxism-Leninism, so it is the duty of the MPLA-Party to provide the opportunity for this study.

For this reason, the militants and adherents of MPLA(Movement) will become respectively militants and aspirants of MPLA-Party. The sympathisers will be given the opportunity of joining one of the mass organisations, like UNTA or OMA, where questions of ideological order do not decide the category of member.

Sympathisers may apply to join the Party. All candidates must pass through the category of Aspirant, unless they have already proved themselves in the Party Youth, which recommends their direct entry in the category of militant.

A decisive factor in the assessment of a militant or aspirant will be his attitude to productive work: he should be an exemplary worker in carrying out work schedules and helping to solve problems at his workplace. "

(The final section deals with new organisational norms, the Party Youth and Young Pioneers, support for the mass organisations and the role of the Party press in spreading the principles of Marxism-Leninism.)