



An outstanding figure of the African national liberation movement. The founder and General Secretary of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). An activist in the African and Asian peoples' solidarity movement and a member of the World Peace Council.

Amilcar Cabral was born on September 12, 1924 in the town of Bafata (Guinea-Bissau) into the family of an employee of the colonial administration. His father owned large plots of land on the Cape Verde Islands.

Cabral studied at the lycée on the island of San-Vincente. In 1945, he entered the Lisbon Higher Institute of Agronomy, from which he graduated in 1952 with the degree of engineer-agronomist. As a student, he took an active part in the democratic movement in Portugal.

In 1953 he began working as an engineer-agronomist at the Pessuba experimental station in Bissau. He was sacked in 1955 for 'anti-colonial activity' and exiled from Guinea-Bissau.

In 1955-56 he worked as an agronomist on Angolan sugar plantations. He took part with Agostinho Neto and other Angolan patriots in the organisation of the Popular Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA).

On September 19, 1956, Cabral founded and became the leader of the African Party for the Independence and Union of the Peoples of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAI). In 1960 it was renamed the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). In 1957 in Lisbon, he took part in the setting up of the Anti-Colonial Movement (MAC), the first illegal organisation of Africans in Portugal to make their objective the struggle against colonialism. From the middle of 1960 he headed the bureau of PAIGC in Conakry (Guinea).

He participated in the work of the Second All-African Peoples' Conference which took place in 1960 in Tunis. In April 1961 he was elected deputy General Secretary of the Conference of National

Liberation Organisations of the Portuguese Colonies (CONCP).

Cabral visited the USSR on more than one occasion.

In September 1961, he participated in the Conference of Non-Aligned Countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America in Belgrade.

On January 20, 1973, Cabral was killed in Conakry by mercenaries of Portuguese colonialists.

The active political work of Amilcar Cabral helped his colleagues to lead the country and its people to complete victory—the declaration of independence in September 1973.

In 1975, the World Peace Council posthumously awarded Cabral the Joliot-Curie Gold Peace Medal.

Guinea-Bissau is a small country on the south-west coast of Africa. It is not rich in natural resources and does not lie in the centre of international politics. But it is wellknown because of the long, selfless armed struggle waged by its people for more than ten years against the Portuguese colonialists. This struggle was led by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), whose creation in 1956 was termed by its founder and leader Amilcar Cabral a major event in the history of the Guinean people.

Amilcar Cabral was a leader of the liberation movement who enjoyed great authority not only in the PAIGC and among the population of Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands, but all over Africa and throughout the democratic movement of the world. Yet he was devoid of any personal ambitions and made no claims to the role of ruler of men's minds or ideologist of the contemporary national liberation movement. Cabral was marked by exceptional modesty, and complete concentration on the task of liberating the two countries and peoples linked by a common fate. He understood that the colonial yoke could be thrown off above all as a result of their joint efforts, their political, ideological and armed struggle, and that the organisation of this struggle required deep knowledge of the conditions of life, the history and the traditions of the people. He would have nothing to do with isolationism, national seclusion, and the denial of the decisive role of solidarity among progressive forces, and of the international experience of revolutionary struggle. Cabral was convinced that all the achievements of progressive revolutionary thought and practice should be taken into account in the course of the liberation struggle and adapted and applied to the concrete conditions.

This synthesis of a wide mental horizon and a thorough knowledge of his own people ensured great success in the struggle for national independence and bringing about social change in the areas liberated as a result of the armed struggle against the colonialists, and also gained international recognition for the activities and ideological and political platform of the PAIGC. Cabral's work was vital in helping

the two young republics (Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde Islands) to take up a worthy place among the progressive African states. He left a rich theoretical legacy, using the example of these two countries to examine important socio-economic and political problems arising in states no longer under colonial rule.

Cabral's father came from Cape Verde, but he himself was born in Guinea-Bissau, and lived there almost all his life. He thus personifies the unity which is the aim of the peoples of the two countries. Cabral was one of the few Guineans who received their education in Lisbon. There, together with natives of other Portuguese colonies, he organised a Centre d'Etudes Africaines, whose activities combined scientific and educative aims with the political aim of amalgamating the then still rather modest forces of the liberation movement in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. Having trained as an engineer-agronomist, he returned to his country and carried out a census of the rural population, which gave him a deep knowledge of his country and people. His account of the census is an invaluable source for the study of the agrarian economy and social structure of Guinea. Later, Cabral used the document to analyse the actual alignment of class forces at various stages of the liberation movement.

Meanwhile, a revolutionary organisation was set up in Guinea. The anti-colonialist African white-collar workers drew the workers of Bissau into the underground Movement for the National Independence of Guinea (MING). In September 1956, with the active participation of Cabral, the PAIGC was founded, also aiming for national independence. For two years the underground organisation was built under the extremely difficult conditions created by the fascist colonial regime. In 1958 the PAIGC stepped up its activities among industrial and professional workers, laying stress on traditional methods of legal economic and political struggle—demonstrations and strikes. The brutal shooting down of strikers at Pijiguiti in August 1959 convinced the leadership of the PAIGC of the inadequacy of such tactics, however. Legal methods of struggle proved to be not only ineffective, but often turned the best members of the organisation into targets for repression.

In September 1959, a PAIGC conference took the historic decision to mobilise the rural masses, prepare for armed struggle, and continue and extend conspiratorial work in the towns. The conference called for the rallying of all ethnic groups and social sections round the PAIGC and for ties with other national liberation movements in Africa to be strengthened. The aim was now to turn the PAIGC into an efficient fighting organisation covering the whole country. Party activists were sent into various regions to mobilise the population.

From then on there was careful preparation for armed struggle against colonial rule. The Party leadership was moved to Conakry, where cadres were trained. After a short course, the patriots immediately returned to Guinea-Bissau to organise the resistance movement.

Widespread armed activity broke out in 1963 since when the

history of the PAIGC's armed struggle was an unbroken chain of difficult experiences, partial defeats, and ultimately—growing success. Beginning with acts of sabotage against colonial rule and subsequently going over to large-scale guerrilla warfare, the PAIGC demonstrated to the world the ability of a people, full of determination to fight and defend their freedom and honour, to come out on top of a well-trained and armed colonial army against all the odds.

In 1964 the PAIGC held its First Congress on liberated territory. The congress reorganised the Party, making it more democratic and effective. The country was divided into zones and districts, each with its own party committee. The congress emphasised the political nature of the armed struggle and the direct responsibility of the party committees for the course of the guerrilla activities. It was decided to set up a regular insurgent army—the People's Revolutionary Armed Forces—which signified the start of a new stage in the struggle. The congress called for organs of popular power to be organised, for the economy to be improved, for education and health care to be developed in the liberated areas, and for the all-out development of political work among the masses to explain the aims of the PAIGC, mobilise the people against colonialism, and step up economic activities.

Even before the First Congress of the PAIGC, armed resistance was well under way all over the country. Fighting had begun in the south, and now new fronts were opened in the east and west. The patriots attacked the colonialists' fortified bases.

The successes of the liberation movement were largely due to the reforms of 1964. In 1964-65, the new political and administrative structure, based on the initiative of the population and the PAIGC leadership, was put into action in the liberated areas. In these areas a new social system took shape, proclaiming the abolition of inequality and exploitation, the establishment of comradely relations and the strengthening of discipline—a system based on mutual assistance and selfless collective work for the common cause. The enthusiasm and trust with which the people responded to the socio-political transformations were no less an achievement for the PAIGC than the military victories. In the final analysis it was they that decided the outcome of the war. Feeling themselves to be the masters of their country, the people could no longer come to terms with the colonial yoke. The popular trust won by the PAIGC also ensured it victory in the struggle against the dissenting pseudonationalist organisations which tried to contest the PAIGC's right to represent the peoples of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. It was precisely the support of the broad masses and the PAIGC's close links with them that cut the ground from under the dissenters' feet, depriving them, after the fall of fascism in Portugal, of the chance of exerting any kind of serious influence on the course of decolonisation, as happened in other countries.

The PAIGC gained more military successes every year, and by the

end of 1972 controlled two-thirds of the country. All that remained in the hands of the colonialists were the towns of Bissau, Bafata and Bolama, and some military bases. The state had been reached where the PAIGC had sovereignty in a country occupied in part by a foreign power. To bring the political superstructure into line with the existing state of affairs, the PAIGC organised elections to the National Popular Assembly in 1972, which would declare the birth of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

Cabral was not destined to see this day. In January 1973 he was treacherously assassinated by hirelings of the Portuguese colonialists. The death of the leader of the liberation movement was a grave loss for the PAIGC, for the peoples of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, and for the whole of Africa, in its hour of waking. But this bloody crime by the agents of imperialism did not achieve its main purpose—it did not lead to a crisis in the PAIGC nor stop the advance of the patriotic forces. As though foreseeing his own death, Cabral once said that a man could not consider his business complete if there was no one to carry it on after his death. Cabral was survived by hundreds and thousands of faithful followers, rallied in the PAIGC, united by years of hard struggle.

After a short hitch, caused by the death of their leader, the liberation movement surged on with new strength. In September 1973 the first National Popular Assembly in the history of the country declared the creation of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau. It was clear that the complete and final military defeat of the Portuguese colonialists was not far off. The fall of fascism in Portugal sped up the course of events and allowed the PAIGC over the negotiating table to consolidate recognition of itself as the sole and rightful representative of the peoples of Guinea and Cape Verde. This was achieved by the Party after many years of selfless struggle for freedom, independence and social progress.

The leaders of the Republics of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde repeatedly declared that their policies would be based on the ideas of Amílcar Cabral. The Third Congress of the PAIGC in November 1977 again confirmed their loyalty to the principles and theories of the Party's founder and acknowledged leader.

The national liberation movement of Guinea-Bissau was faced with conditions of extreme backwardness (even by Tropical African standards). The task of mobilising the people in such conditions, and of arming them with an understanding of the aims and methods of struggle, required careful preparation of the political vanguard, devotion and selflessness on its part, its affinity with the people and knowledge of their lives and moods, skill in organisation and propaganda, and unity of word and action.

That the PAIGC honourably coped with this difficult role was in many ways due to the clarity of the ideological and political doctrines which Cabral gave the Party, to the attention he paid to political work, to his theories, his gift of foresight, his thorough analysis of

the laws of the revolutionary process and his ability to affect this process purposefully. For Cabral, theory was an integral part of revolutionary work, and the most important means of knowing and changing the world. He opposed in principle voluntarist, empirical and pragmatic approaches to the national liberation movement.

At the beginning of the sixties, when one African country after another was gaining independence (1960 was declared the Year of Africa) and the prospects for universal decolonisation seemed to many people more favourable than ever before, Cabral spoke of the crisis in the African revolution. 'It seems to us,' he said at the Third All-African Peoples' Conference in Cairo in March 1961, 'that far from being a crisis of growth, it is principally a crisis of consciousness. In many cases, the practice of the liberation struggle and the prospects for the future are not only devoid of a theoretical basis, but also more or less cut off from reality. Local experience, and that of other countries, concerning the achievement of national independence, national unity and the basis for future progress, has either been forgotten or is still forgotten.'¹ The successful development of the anti-imperialist struggle required, in Cabral's view, concrete knowledge of the actual conditions in each country and in Africa as a whole, and also of the experience of other peoples, plus the scientific elaboration of strategic principles.

He saw the essence of the crisis in the African liberation movement in the fact that in many countries it had not taken a revolutionary course, and the hopes of the popular masses had been deceived by an illusory independence which merely concealed new forms of neo-colonialist exploitation. Cabral's ideal was the transformation of the national liberation movement into a revolution, both in the sense of total liquidation of all forms of imperialist oppression and in the sense of the abolition of inequality and exploitation of local origin.

In defining the nature of colonialism and imperialism, and of the tasks of national liberation, Cabral—like all the best representatives of the anti-imperialist movement in the sixties and seventies—used the experience accumulated in Africa as his starting point. He did not reduce colonialism to political dependence on the metropolis, and, of course, did not suggest that the formal ending of such dependence and the achievement of external signs of sovereignty would make colonialism a thing of the past. Lenin's theory of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism was used by Cabral and many other fighters for genuine independence. Cabral saw colonialism as the natural consequence of the capitalist economy, as the result of the policies of state-monopoly capitalism and the aspiration of the monopolies for guaranteed and high profits. The obvious conclusion was: so long as the capitalist economic system persists, its expansion into

¹ Amílcar Cabral, *Unité et lutte*, Vol. 1, *L'arme de la théorie*, François Maspero, Paris, 1975, p. 270.

backward countries will continue, and only the forms of exploitation will change. The developed capitalist countries move from 'classical' colonialism to neo-colonialism.

Cabral contributed to the study of the forms of neo-colonialist exploitation. He stressed that under the new conditions the imperialist strategy is to pursue a policy of 'aid' towards the former colonies which serves 'to create a false bourgeoisie to put a brake on the revolution and to enlarge the possibilities of the petty bourgeoisie as a neutraliser of the revolution'.¹ In other words, in an age when direct political dictates are becoming impossible, the aim of imperialism is to encourage, as a counterweight to revolution, the local exploiter elements in the developing countries, elements which pursue a policy of national reformism and conciliation with international capital. For this reason, Cabral saw the anti-colonialist movement as the liberation of the national productive forces from all forms of direct and indirect exploitation. In particular, he underlined that 'the principal aspect of national liberation struggle is the struggle against neo-colonialism'.²

Cabral preferred not to use the term socialism, considering it inopportune for the historical stage at which the country found itself, but he admitted that the goals of the Guinean revolutionaries were akin to those of a socialist revolution. Yet he did not base this view on the ideas (which were widespread in the former colonies) of the exceptional development of the peoples of Asia and Africa, and of the stability and primordial socialist character of their way of life, but on a scientific study of the course of history. He shared the historical materialist conceptions of the development of mankind from the primitive communal system, through the slaveowning, feudal and capitalist systems, to socialism and communism, and supported the Marxist conclusion that in our age the general social progress of the world offered backward peoples the unique chance to avoid capitalism. Cabral pointed to two factors which allowed the peoples of Africa and Asia to omit the stage of developed capitalism on the way to socialism: 1) the power of modern technology to tame nature, and 2) the emergence of socialist states which have radically changed the face of the world and the historical process.

Cabral was in no doubt that the peoples of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, and of Africa in general, had no prospect of progress, freedom and prosperity other than socialism. The whole of Cabral's theoretical and practical work was, in the final analysis, aimed at transforming the anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist struggle into a social revolution, taking into account the country's lack of direct economic, social, political, material and spiritual prerequisites of socialism. This was his great theoretical contribution. He understood the con-

¹ 'Revolution in Guinea. An African People's Struggle. Stage I', *Selected Texts by Amilcar Cabral*, London, 1969, p. 60.

² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

tradictoriness of the development of the former colonies, knew how to combine faith in the socialist ideal with an awareness of the need for interim stages in the revolution, and planned them so as to make them a means, not a hindrance, in the pursuit of the ultimate goal.

Cabral found the key to these problems in his deep knowledge of historical laws and of the specific situation in Africa, particularly Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

He made a truly scientific political analysis of the social structure of the two countries. He was a firm believer in the need to unite all the patriotic forces of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde to combat Portuguese colonialism and imperialism in general. Given the weak class differentiation, this union of national forces should, in his view, have embraced all social strata, almost the whole population of the two territories, and the PAIGC's slogan was 'Unity and Struggle'. At the same time, Cabral considered it essential to make a thorough study of the economic positions of all social groups, in an attempt to find an explanation there for their political behaviour, realising that this could not be identical at different stages of the revolution. The economic foundation, the position in material production, and the development of the revolutionary process, which passes through two stages—the struggle for independence and the struggle for the liquidation of exploitation—these are the two main coordinates in Cabral's definition of his attitude to various social strata.¹

Of particular interest in his analysis is his examination of the specific features of the social structure and revolutionary strategy in the most backward colonies and dependent countries. He rejects several of the conceptions common in some newly-free countries as a result of the exaggeration of national peculiarities, and takes up a position basically similar to scientific socialism.

This was particularly so in his definition of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and working class. Cabral did not accept Frantz Fanon's idea that the peasantry was the main revolutionary force in the colonial world. He insisted on drawing a clear line between physical and revolutionary strength. Cabral knew better than anyone else that the peasantry constituted the main contingent of armed resistance to the colonialists, and that without drawing it into the struggle there was no hope of toppling colonialism. But he did not idealise the peasantry like Fanon, seeing that its backwardness hindered the spread of national and social political consciousness and knowing how difficult it sometimes was to raise the peasantry for action.

Cabral was convinced that the peasants' position prevented them from fully understanding the revolutionary prospect, and that to revolutionise them a catalyst was needed, in the form of guidance by townsmen bearing the progressive ideology. Cabral considered Fanon's assertion that the peasantry was essentially a colonial proletariat

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

mistaken for his country. This conclusion undoubtedly has methodological importance. It is particularly weighty and symbolical as it was made by a revolutionary, theorist and practical man from a purely peasant country, whose views were confirmed by the successes of the liberation movement.

Together with the idealisation of the peasantry, he rejected the associated nihilistic attitude of Fanon to the 'embryonic proletariat', which had supposedly become an adjunct of the colonial system and benefited from it. Noting the weakness of the colonial proletariat, Fanon counted it out as a revolutionary force. Cabral proposed raising the level of consciousness of the working class, bearing in mind its special historic mission. 'This working class,' he said, 'whatever the level of its political consciousness (given a certain minimum, namely *the awareness of its own class needs*), seems to constitute the true popular vanguard of the national liberation struggle in the neo-colonial case.'¹ At the same time he called on the working class to close ranks with the other exploited strata—the peasants and nationalist petty bourgeoisie.

The latter, given the weakness of the working class, had a special function. It should, according to Cabral, compensate for that class's inadequate experience and revolutionary activity, and take on itself the mission of the 'ideal proletariat'. He supposed that the revolutionary part of the petty bourgeoisie (the rest being the conciliatory and vacillating elements) was capable of playing this role and merging its interests with those of the workers and peasants. But he did not ignore its natural tendency to embourgeoisement, and realised how difficult and contradictory the petty-bourgeois revolutionaries' path to socialism was. Seeing no alternative at that stage, Cabral understood that 'this specific inevitability (the leadership of petty-bourgeois groups) in our situation constitutes one of the weaknesses of the national liberation movement'.²

This weakness, and in general the insufficient socio-economic and political premises for social progress, had to be, in Cabral's opinion, compensated for by increased ideological, political and organisational work. His concentration on this work was a distinctive feature of Cabral's activities at the head of the PAIGC. He constantly emphasised the political character of all the tasks carried out in the course of national liberation, including in particular in the armed struggle. It was precisely the combination of military activities with clearly defined long-term goals and ideological and political preparation that ensured complete success for the patriots of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, and laid the basis for social progress in the two countries.

Cabral never called himself a supporter of scientific socialism or Marxism-Leninism. But fidelity to the ideals of socialism is by no

¹ 'Revolution in Guinea. An African People's Struggle. Stage 1', *Selected Texts by Amilcar Cabral*, p. 86.

² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

means always measured by declarations. In his theoretical and practical work, he was guided by the principles of scientific socialism, and all his work for the happiness of his people was undoubtedly in accord with Marxism-Leninism.

‘Whether one is a Marxist or not, a Leninist or not, it is difficult not to recognise the validity, not to see the brilliance of Lenin’s analysis and conclusions,’ said Cabral. ‘They are of historical importance because they illuminate with a life-giving light the thorny path of peoples fighting for their total liberation from imperialist domination.’¹

The life and work of Amilcar Cabral are vivid examples of the beneficial influence of scientific socialism on the national liberation movement. They show that the future belongs to those champions of the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America who honestly and consistently unite the national liberation movement with socialism.

After 1963, I had occasion to meet Amilcar Cabral fairly often at international forums, conferences and seminars held by the Afro-Asian Solidarity Organisation. This was when the armed liberation struggle of the peoples of the Portuguese colonies was at its height. This was a peak of the national revolutionary war against the colonisers. Cabral devoted all his heart, all his designs and all his outstanding abilities to this struggle. He was a frequent and welcome guest in the USSR, and he had very close relations with various Soviet mass organisations, especially the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee. Cabral had profound respect for and maintained friendly relations with the CPSU. Both publicly, and privately with his Soviet friends, he often expressed deep gratitude for the extensive help of the Soviet people to his heroic people, who for more than ten years fought against the Portuguese colonialists supported by the imperialist countries of NATO.

It was wonderful to see how boundless was his belief in the victory of his people and how often he dreamt of how after this victory, he, an agronomist, would fervently set about changing the countryside and educating the peasants. Cabral awakened their consciousness and led them in their struggle, and tens of thousands of peasants and poor people from the towns of Guinea joined the ranks of the liberation army, rightly declaring him to be their supreme commander.

Amilcar Cabral invited his Soviet friends to come to Guinea after its victory, and promised to show them all the country’s natural beauty, the diligence and hospitality of its people, its customs, generosity and sincerity. He himself was not to see the victory which he had passionately awaited, for whose sake he had lived.

By writing this sketch of Cabral’s life, I have expressed what I have wished to for a long time—my attitude to this outstanding man and most adamant fighter. In the pantheon of fighters who died for national and social liberation, stands the figure of Amilcar Cabral, a thinker and a passionate revolutionary convinced of the victory of his people.

¹ Amilcar Cabral, *Unité et lutte*, Vol. 1, *L’Arme de la théorie*, p. 315.