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Cabral's Monument

While mystery still obscures the murder of Amílcar Cabral, who was an outstanding figure in his own right as well as leading representative of the National Liberation movement in what used to be called 'Portuguese West Africa,' two things about this crime are already apparent. The first concerns the *prima facie* evidence of its source. All of this points to the Portuguese army or police command. Lisbon understandably rushed in to deny its guilt the very moment after President Toure, in whose capital of Conakry the crime was committed, had said it was the work of Portuguese agents. But Lisbon's disclaimers are very markedly such as guilty men devise in desperation. They offer patently improbable, not to say impossible, alternatives.

One alternative proposed by Lisbon is that the murder was organised by dissidents within the National Liberation leadership. No such dissidence has ever been shown to occur on any serious issue. I have myself known most of these leaders for a good many years, and have just spent several weeks with them. They include Aristides Pereira, practically Cabral's alter ego since 1956; Vasco Cabral, another veteran (no relative of Amílcar's) who

cannot possibly be suspected of dissidence; Amílcar's younger brother Luis, for whom the idea of dissidence would be just as ridiculous; and other staunch pioneers of the same stamp and mind. All these men were solidly united in the past, and could not otherwise have led the PAIGC, the movement they founded, in its remarkable career of success; they were solidly united when I met them in November and December.

Lisbon's second alternative to its own guilt, or to the guilt of its police or army agents, is that the crime was somehow the product of Russo-Chinese rivalry. One can only say that this, if possible, is even sillier than the first alternative; if anything has marked the PAIGC, it has been its staunch autonomy and independence. On the other hand, the fact that is neither silly nor imaginary is that Cabral has repeatedly symbolised defeat for Portugal's generals, and has done so in a peculiarly painful way. His wit and barbed humour, let alone the success of his movement, have floodlit their clumsy failure. And now Cabral was about to step upon the world's stage no longer as the leader of a guerrilla movement, but as the accredited spokesman of an independent state.

His loss must be a sorry one for his comrades as well as for his countless friends up and down the world, not to speak of his bereaved wife and children. Yet, a second point that is already clear is that this loss, however grievous, will not prevent the onward progress of the work that Cabral began. The little that one has so far learned from the PAIGC leaders, since the murder, shows

that they are closing their ranks, that they will have no difficulty in uniting on the choice of a successor, and that they are now likely to work and fight even harder to complete the plan that Cabral had laid. Not only was Cabral's style of leadership emphatically collective; but the men he gathered round him were precisely those who could and did share his own convictions and discernment. They will create the conditions whereby their new national assembly, elected in 1972, can meet inside the country this year; and this assembly, as foreseen, will proclaim the country's independence, 'even while,' as Cabral said when I saw him in December, 'a small part of our country, and our capital, are still in enemy hands'.

It will be a newly-independent state with a difference. This month, January 1973, marks the completion of 10 years since the PAIGC began their armed resistance to a colonial rule that would listen to no other argument. But it marks 10 years, also, since they began promoting the construction of an independent social and political system: since they began building a new society in this long-colonised territory. What they can show, accordingly, is something new in the spectrum of anti-colonial nationalism: a new African state springing from the foundations of its own new system, and not the other way round. The horse, for once, before the cart.

Last November, I entered these regions of established self-rule after an absence of five years. Much had changed: much had developed. In some 17 days, by an easy and roundabout route so as to see people and activities in different sectors I had walked as far as the southern sector of Como, along the Atlantic seaboard. Already it was clear that these village communities had acquired a confident and stable pattern of self-government. They still live simply, often badly, and have many urgent needs: but they have found the way to work together for their common good.

The war still goes wearily on. These communities are much hurt by bombing: and the Portuguese army still occupies the Pissau and many rural centres. I was able to inspect the military situation of several of these. They are held by Portuguese garrisons which have lost all communication with each other or with Bissau, save by sea or air or radio. They occupy their few square miles, and that's about all. One can march past them in complete safety even by day, for they are pinned to their peripheral defences by enclosing units of the PAIGC.

Portuguese offensive actions, aside from bombing, are limited to raids by helicoptered troops or by troops landed from the sea. These are sporadic and of short duration. PAIGC offensive actions, on the contrary, derive from a consistent hold on the strategic initiative. Whenever the widening needs of the liberated regions may require it, the regular units of the PAIGC go beyond their harassment of Portuguese garrisons and eliminate these altogether. A comparison with 1967, in the southern region where I was, shows eight garrisons thus removed. Strictly political objectives govern this strategy. These consist in the clearing and enlargement of wide rural areas, and the assurance of a general security there so that political and social reconstruction can go freely on. 'We are armed militants not militarists' is in this connection the key phrase in the terse but all-embracing *Palavras Gerais* that Cabral composed in 1965, a 40-page document which one day may be seen to rank among the classics of revolutionary theory and practice. Nobody here is fighting for the sake of fighting, or not if the leaders of the PAIGC can help it.

In these liberated regions the visitor can move around in daylight and inspect the various components of a social and political system brought into being over the last nine

years. The Como sector is a good example, not because it is more advanced than its neighbors, for in some important ways it is less advanced, but because the Portuguese were entirely cleared from it as much as seven years ago. What you find in this remote area is little enough of all those things a people need so as to be comfortable and command their own future, but infinitely more than ever existed under the Portuguese. This is a point on which the people of Como are firm and unanimous, and all the available evidence supports them. The peasants say they had absolutely no voice in what was done. They say they had no schools or health service. They speak bitterly of having had to pay taxes for the most elementary rights, such as holding a wake or cropping a palm tree. They say that the marketing of all their rice was at the mercy of a single trader, a man called Pinho Brandao.

'He was the only one you could sell your rice to, and he paid what he wanted, or he paid nothing. And if you took your rice over the water, he found out and you were beaten by the *cipaios* of the *chefe*. 'tein' You can still see where Brandao lived hard by the shore, with his warehouse and his terrified harem of local girls. But there is nothing left now save an outline in the undergrowth. One night in 1963 the early guerrillas of the PAIGC came over the creeks and burnt Brandao's buildings to the ground; the man himself, they think, got away to Portugal. A year later the Portuguese army followed over the creeks and attacked through Como's ricefields for nearly two months. They were defeated. And even though Como is 'only a tide' from the big garrison at Catio, as a fisherman defined the distance for me, they have never come back.

Even before that the political workers of the PAIGC, mostly peasants themselves, began persuading the peasants to form committees to support the liberation struggle. Como now has 15 such committees, and these are the central factors in everyday affairs. They act together with full-time PAIGC workers concerned with the running of schools, clinics, barter trade, political education, local security and the rest. Gradually, over the years, their representative nature has widened and improved, partly by the snowball influence of PAIGC success against the Portuguese, partly by continuing political education, and partly by broader experience of active participation in new responsibilities. This indeed is where one can see how a people long deprived of any recognised responsibility for its community life can regain command of itself.

COMMITTEES'S ROLE

The committees have a hand in everything except military operations. They take part in running local primary schools founded by the PAIGC, arguing with parents who grudge the labour lost when children go to school, supplying teachers with food and lodging. They are represented on the 'board' of Como's PAIGC clinic, a cluster of thatched huts with four beds for in-patients and a staff of 13 nurses, eight of whom are women. All these, after all, have to be fed and looked after, but the 'taxes' so contributed now bring a solid return. Thus the clinic's register for October and four-fifths of November showed a list of 672 names and patients and their ailments. The committees also supervise local trade and, another innovation since 1969, are responsible for the establishment of local courts; consisting of a judge and two assessors, these village courts apply a mixture of customary and new law now being fully codified by the PAIGC's legal department.

Statistics can tell a little of what liberation has come to

mean. By 1972 the PAIGC had founded 155 new primary schools inside the country with about 140 teachers and some 8,500 pupils, of whom about 2,000 were girls, while another 7,000 full-time workers of the PAIGC were attending adult classes. They had 125 mobile medical teams or medical establishments inside the country, with a total of 265 beds (and another 233 beds in PAIGC hospitals in Guinea and Senegal). Built from the bare ground, as it were, such services have now reached a point where they are beginning to feel an acute shortage of more qualified staffs. This at the moment is one of the most urgent problems.

But their greatest achievement has no statistical indicators, and rests in the political field. This is to have set going a process whereby the active participation of ordinary people in the control of their own communities has gained, steadily and widely, over the PAIGC's initial and inevitable act of revolutionary 'substitution.' Beginning in 1956 with exactly six members, the PAIGC was in this way no different from any other party of revolutionary change. Aiming at objectives more or less completely strange to the majority of people, or dismissed as impossible, these pioneers necessarily substituted themselves for 'the will of the nation'; and the substitution was all the more because 'the nation' in no sense existed then.

It proved hard to start the process of winning participation by the peasants among whom they lived and carried on their labour of persuasion. Few took them seriously, or were ready for the risk of doing so. But they worked away, resisting all advice from abroad that they should 'simply begin' their revolt, and that the peasants then would 'rally to the sound of a guerrilla rifle.' Cabral and his comrades were sure, on the contrary, that the peasants would do no such thing. They began their revolt only when they were sure of enough support to survive and expand. And ever since then, with every expansion of their armed resistance, they have like-wise expanded their effort at winning participation as well as mere support.

So conducted, the liberation struggle has entirely shifted the PAIGC from being a party 'claiming to speak for the nation' to being one that really does so, and has thus become, by the steady enlargement of participation, this country's national party of popular and representative self-rule. No one who wanders round these liberated regions—and this particular visit lasted 27 days—will doubt the truth of this, I think, although it would be silly to suppose the process is complete, or that everything is well done. Cabral and his fellow leaders made no such claims. Much is not well done; and another of Cabral's dicta, 'Tell no lies, claim no easy victories,' allows any visitor to see this too. Yet the process of making popular participation gain over party substitution is far advanced. The party's latest major effort in that direction, the general election of 1972 and its resultant institutions, provides another evidence of that.

In August 1971 it was decided that the political system of the liberated regions was mature enough to justify a full-scale electoral consultation. Village committees established everywhere in these regions, covering most of the country by then, already had several years' experience behind them. In 1970, moreover, all the committees of each administrative sector had elected their own sector committees. The time had come to elect committees for the 15 large administrative regions, and, going beyond that, a representative national assembly.

This was done in several stages during 1972. The first was a campaign of political explanation. The second was the drawing up of an electoral register by each sector

committee. The third consisted in direct and secret elections at village level, 'yes' or 'no' votes being cast (by differently coloured cards) for lists of local candidates presented in and for each sector. The fourth stage, at part of which I was present, was the meeting of 15 regional councils thus elected, and their selection of about a third

of their number who will also sit in the national assembly. 'The base' is thus established at 'the top': all the members of the two regional councils whom I met were village farmers, whether men or women, except one who was a tailor. They and their fellow representatives form two-thirds of the assembly, which has sovereign powers, while the PAIGC will at this stage nominate one-third from its full-time workers. The aim is to evolve a constitutional separation of powers.

HOPE FOR RECOGNITION

Due to meet in the near future, this undoubtedly representative assembly of liberated Guinea-Bissau will adopt a constitution and proclaim the independence of their country, though not of the Cape Verde Islands, whose people cannot yet be thus consulted and represented; when they can be the Cape Verdes will be federated with the mainland. Several dozen countries, one is told, have already promised immediate recognition. Apart from most of the African countries, these include

There is one form of struggle that we consider to be fundamental . . . We refer here to the struggle against our own weaknesses. . . Our experience has shown us that in the general framework of daily struggle this battle against ourselves—no matter what difficulties the enemy may create—is the most difficult of all, whether for the present or the future of our peoples.

*Address to Tricontinental Conference
Havana, 1966*

the Soviet Union and other communist states which have given great material aid to the liberation struggle. But they also include India and apparently Sweden (whose aid to the PAIGC in 1973 will total \$2m.); and the policy of the new state will be one of international non-alignment. Backed as they are by African countries such as Nigeria and Ethiopia, the leaders of the PAIGC hope that the reality of their non-alignment will be recognised by the West.

They will also ask for British recognition, as well as looking to their friends in Britain for active help in gaining it. Coming back from Africa, one sees there is plenty of scope for such help. This year is the 600th anniversary of an Anglo-Portuguese alliance that has long been absurd, but is now completely odious. Yet Mr. Heath, one learns, is preparing to spend our money on celebrating this alliance and on providing a state welcome for Marcello Caetano, the current representative of Portugal's crass dictatorship: above all, after the murder of Amilcar Cabral, a man who looked to the British people with an especial hope of friendship it is hard to think of any celebration in this country that could be more odious.

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