

Nationalist Gangs Battle for Angola

Peasants, Workers Lose

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Nearing the end of an almost year long civil war, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) appears to be on the verge of a military victory over its rivals in the West African former Portuguese colony.

The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) have suffered substantial battlefield losses in recent weeks to the MPLA forces led by 10,000 Cuban troops and most Western military analysts predict a quick MPLA victory now that South Africa has withdrawn its 1,200 troops from the conflict.

Angola is a shattered nation with the corpses of over 100,000 peasants, nomadic tribesmen and workers as the result of the struggle between the three nationalist gangs to see who will rule the new country in the name of capital.

Each group has been armed and financed by a rival imperialism and each operates in the name of “national liberation” and “anti-imperialism.”

What both of these terms mean when their mystifications are swept away is that nationalist movements are active within the regions previously exploited by the imperialisms of the U.S. or Western Europe to expel the domination of foreign capital from their country and to set up a national capitalism which they will control.

The language of revolution is employed in the same manner and for the same purposes as all emerging bourgeoisies have utilized it, beginning with the American revolution—to mobilize the working class and peasantry around the class interests of the bourgeoisies while having them think all the while that it is the “national” interest which is at issue.

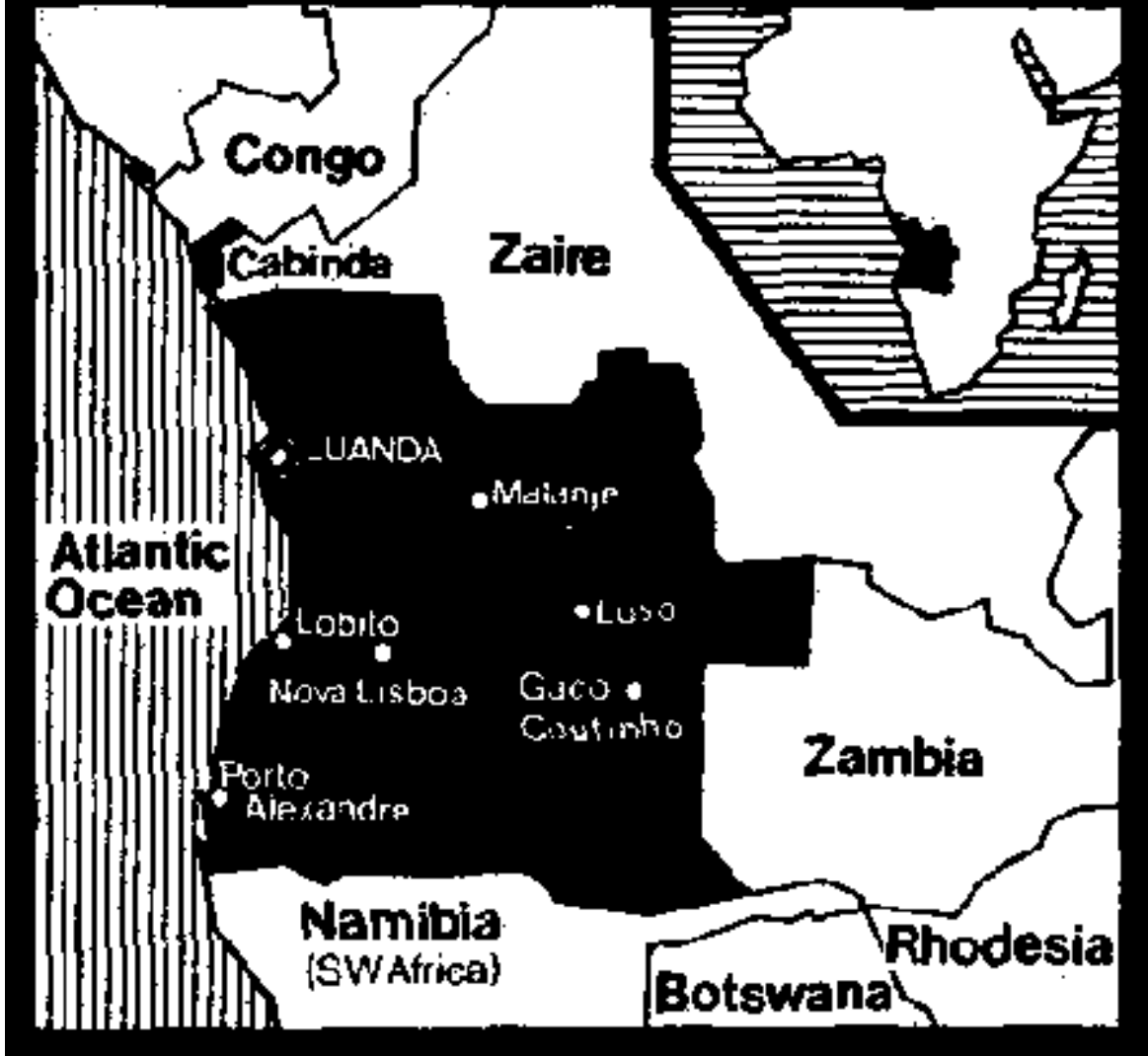
Writing in “Inter-Imperialist Struggle in Africa,” the *Internationalism* group sums up the situation thusly:

“...All national capitals since 1914 have had to fight for each others’ markets in a deadly competition which has characterized this epoch by horrendous cycles of war, reconstruction, crisis and then war again. Since this saturated condition of the world market and the competition over it affects all countries, all countries are imperialist today.

“While the differences in economic development (and hence in political and military power) of the world’s nation states may be immense there is no essential difference between them—only a difference of degree. In such a material reality, all the conflicts between nations are the consequences of the inter-imperialist rivalries of the national bourgeoisies, and are all, without exception, fundamentally anti-working class.”

Since world capitalism is a unified market each area already is dominated by one section of the world bourgeoisie, their removal is necessitated by the “liberation” forces. In the case of Vietnam, capital is being developed under the aegis of the State after expelling French and U.S. imperialism, but now comes within the orbit of Chinese imperialism. In Africa, although many economies feature heavy nationalization, most countries utilize the same foreign capital from the colonial power which had been expelled in so-called wars of “liberation”.

ANGOLA



A domestic capitalist class is created, but the foreign capital is a necessity to finance projects that the new nation hasn't the resources to undertake. Also, a constant feature in areas that have seen a victorious "war of national liberation" is a politically ruthless, one-party police state which operates to enforce the super-exploitation of the working class while the basis of modern capitalism is being created.

The situation in Angola is somewhat different in that the Portuguese willingly granted its former colony political independence, so what remains is a scramble for power among competing "liberation" groups with each faction depending on the support of a larger imperialism.

The MPLA now receives the majority of its support from the Soviet Union while the FNLA and UNITA have received massive funds from the United States and military assistance from racist South Africa.

The latter two have also received some military aid and advisors from North Korea and China, while countries like Romania have aided all sides in the conflict. Thus, even a seemingly local dispute takes on global dimensions where the competing world imperialisms confront each other.

Fools Rush In ... How the left learns the lessons of history

In the U.S., a clattering of "left" groups have fallen over each other lining up with one or another of the nationalist gangs with the majority of them supporting the MPLA as being the most "progressive."

Desperate for an issue after the failure of their short incursion into working class organizing, the "left" has raised high the banner of Angola and is attempting to create a '60's style anti-war movement with a whole new set of leaders to praise, flags to wave and slogans to memorize. Each group has a program of rallies, speeches, demonstrations and manifestos which they hope will bring them the "relevance" they strive for.

Their support for the MPLA appears to be based on little knowledge of the facts of history of the organization, but rather on the fact its opponents are backed by the CIA and South Africa and it talks the strongest brand of "anti-imperialism."

Like the U.S. groups who try to organize American workers to install their parties in power, the MPLA leadership is comprised of university intellectuals. They began developing strategies for the expulsion of the Portuguese colonialists while students in Lisbon during the '50's. After a brief period of armed conflict against the colonialists in the early '60's, the MPLA was nearly eliminated in 1963 after a period of severe Portuguese repression.

During that period the U.S. was heavily financing its NATO ally, the Portuguese fascist regime, and at the same time began channeling funds to the FNLA in Angola and Frelimo in Mozambique, to insure that American influence would not be excluded no matter which way the political winds changed.

The MPLA also applied to Washington for funds, but missed the contamination of CIA money only because they were considered too weak and ineffectual at the time and were turned down. They then sought aid from Moscow and received it in ever increasing amounts through the present.

That any American group sees a substantial difference between the global counter-revolutionary role of the U.S. and that of the Soviet Union is testimony only to their support for one variety of totalitarianism over another. The debate as to which faction of capital enslaves the working class is an argument which only interests those with similar plans.

While still maintaining its anti-imperialist rhetoric, the MPLA has sought, and boasts of receiving, material and political support from several sub-imperialist powers such as the Scandinavian countries, Holland, Belgium, and Canada. Worse yet, the MPLA struck a deal with the Portuguese Armed Forces Movement, which was then still the colonial ruler of Angola, and received military support from the colonial armed forces against the two other rival nationalist groups.

Also, the MPLA received support second only to that received from the Soviets, from Gulf Oil, which has concessions in the enclave province of Cabinda. In September and October of 1975 Gulf gave the MPLA \$116 million and was about to make another \$95 million payment on December 22 when the State Department stepped in and pressured the oil firm to stop its contribution and to cease Cabindan oil production.

Gulf's sums to the MPLA dwarf those of the CIA contributions to FNLA and UNITA, which amounted to only \$33 million. The MPLA has maintained good relations with other companies holding concessions in Angola—even those whose governments support their rivals.

"Today We're All Revolutionaries..."

Gulf Oil has stated in a company position paper that it “recognizes the unalienable rights of native peoples everywhere to attain self-determination.” Sounds downright anti-imperialist, doesn’t it? Which is rather hard for a firm whose existence is based on imperialism.

The point being that Gulf (and they ought to know) sees nothing inconsistent with the assumption of power by the MPLA and their ability to continue to pull profits out of Angola. And they are right.

In a November 10, 1975 speech, Agostinho Neto president of the MPLA, “solemnly proclaims” that, “As for private enterprises, even foreign-owned ones, provided that they are useful to the national economy and the interests of the people, they will, on the latter’s behalf, be protected and encouraged...” Translated that means, “Business as usual” and Gulf was not going to pay \$200 million for anything less than the ability to continue operating as usual.

And in case any of Angola’s working class doesn’t like the new set of arrangements where a domestic capitalist class replaces the old colonial rulers, the MPLA has already shown its ability to “handle” its workers. In Luanda, under MPLA domination, harbor workers have had their hours extended with no increase in pay.

There is obviously worker resistance to this speed-up because during a recent interview in *Le Monde*, Neto announced that “Signs of indiscipline are appearing.” He spoke of “sabotage” and said that “measures will have to be taken” against “misguided elements.”

What Neto means is that the police and the official state union apparatus will have to become more effective in controlling worker discontent. Already a law allowing the government to place workers “under military control, discipline and jurisdiction” has been used to break a dock workers strike. What the mystery in all of this is, is what the social cretins of the “left” find so enticing about the MPLA or the other groups.

(Perhaps it should be indicated at this point that the FNLA and UNITA have not been spared criticism due to any support on our part, but rather because it appears that the MPLA was the grouping that had the most people fooled. The other two organizations are thorough-going tools of the U.S. and South Africa and the workers of Angola would suffer the same fate at their hands.)

Even if there was a substantial difference between the competing gangs, it still would not have anything to do with workers or peasants other than who was going to be their boss. The rivalry in Angola is about who is going to establish domestic capital in that country and has nothing to do with communist revolution. Those seriously opposed to capitalism in all of its forms will see the activity there as simply the squabblings among would-be rulers.

The Real Struggle

In the gang-wars of inter-imperialist struggles, the official “left” in its enthusiasm to root for “its” team, completely ignores the facts that all three nationalist groups are military organizations run in traditional, hierarchical fashion with the total absence of any revolutionary democracy.

The MPLA’s Neto, in an interview with *Afrique-Asia* stated, “I think that in the not too distant future, we will have created the conditions whereby our workers and peasants...can participate most effectively in the running of the country.”

Well, anyone who stakes their liberties on a politician’s promises is indeed foolish. Without revolutionary workers’ and peasants’ democracy being the form of struggle, Angola will simply repeat the model of most other African states with one-party, police state rule.

The stakes are big in Angola—oil, coffee, minerals, trade routes—and the major imperialists—the U.S., China and the Soviet Union—are high rollers who don’t take defeat easily in a period of intensified inter-imperialist rivalries. The assumption of power by the ‘MPLA may end the confrontation in that region or it may be the beginning of a larger and more dangerous stage.

Ultimately what must be seen in Angola is the absolute failure of national liberation within a context of competing world imperialism to create anything other than the carnage and destruction witnessed in that country.

The options open to the workers and the peasants of Angola are basically no different from those available to us in the United States: either continue as pawns within the struggles between different factions of the world bourgeoisie or become part of a world revolution that smashes capitalism in all of its forms and puts an end forever to racial and national boundaries.

FE note: see follow-up in *Fifth Estate*, June 1976.

For further reading on the Angolan situation see "Ethiopia, Angola—Inter-Imperialist Struggle in Africa," an Internationalism/World Revolution pamphlet, 45 cents; available from Ammunition Books, 4403 Second Avenue, Detroit MI 48201, or Internationalism, Box 961, Manhattanville Station, New York, NY 10027

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Fifth Estate #269, February, 1976

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