

“We Are Working for One Angola”

JONAS SAVIMBI

At the time of the 1974 coup in Portugal there were three principal Angolan independence movements: the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), under the leadership of Holden Roberto; the Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), led by Dr. Agostinho Neto; and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), headed by Dr. Jonas Savimbi. In January, 1975, Neto, Roberto, and Savimbi signed an agreement with Portuguese representatives calling for the independence of Angola on the following November 11 and providing for interim rule by a Portuguese high commissioner. But in the days that followed the FNLA and UNITA formed a tacit alliance against MPLA, whose forces soon came to control Luanda, the capital. When the Portuguese high commissioner departed on November 10, Neto announced the establishment, under MPLA auspices, of the People's Republic of Angola. Some two weeks later FNLA-UNITA formed the rival Democratic People's Republic of Angola, with Huambo as its capital. Dr. Savimbi was later named president.

By late November, Cuba had dispatched more than 18,000 troops to aid MPLA, and during the next month these troops, equipped with Soviet armored vehicles and rocket launchers, were effective in turning the tide in favor of the MPLA. Several thousand South African troops that had been operating in support of the Huambo regime were withdrawn.

In early February, 1976, the MPLA launched a southern offensive, capturing Huambo and some other key cities. FNLA and UNITA declared that their forces would now resort to guerrilla warfare. The Organization of African Unity admitted the Luanda government to membership shortly thereafter, and within less than a year (the U.S. had exercised its veto in an earlier vote) the government was admitted to membership in the United Nations.

In mid-1978 President Mobutu of Zaire agreed to end his support of Zaire-based anti-MPLA forces in return for a similar pledge from President Neto about Zairean dissidents operating from Angola. There were prospects for a peaceful settlement in Namibia, to the south, and this raised hopes in some circles for a lessening of Angola's dependence upon the Soviet Union and Cuba.

Dr. Savimbi visited the States in late fall, 1979, and was the guest of honor at one of CRIA's biweekly Conversations. What follows is a portion of his talk and of the conversation that followed.

I was educated by American missionaries and got a scholarship to study in Portugal. My family, and the missionaries who were paying for my studies abroad, wanted me to become a medical doctor, and I studied medicine in Portugal and Germany. When I saw that even as a medical doctor I could not aid in the liberation of my people, I decided to go on to study politics. But

even with a degree in political science and law I was still unprepared to fight. So I went to China, trained there for nine months, and became a guerrilla leader.

It's not that I had a choice about where to go. I had wanted to be trained in Africa, but that was 1964-65, when no one there was prepared to train me and my fellows. Even Nasser, who was my friend, refused. Before going to China, though, I went to the Soviet Union, because Nasser felt I ought to get the friendship of the Russians too. But I got bad treatment there, and I don't think they are really good friends to have.

People tend to think that freedom fighters who have relations with the Russians or Chinese become Communists. True, some get support because they agree with their ideology; others get it because they need support, but try to remain what they are. That's what we try to do. There are some lucky others who got support from Western countries to fight colonialism, but in the 1960s there were very few.

During the colonial struggle in Angola the Protestant churches—ministers and members—were giving more support to the liberation movement than were the Catholics. The proof is that Neto himself was a Protestant, his father was a pastor. I am a Protestant. Holden Roberto is a Protestant. The reason, of course, was not that Catholics did not want to join the struggle but that Catholicism was the official religion of Angola and the Catholics were given more facilities by the government. The set-up was such that for the Protestants it was easier to look beyond Portuguese colonialism.

Now, when Cubans and the Russians are in my country, there is a change and the Catholic Church is resisting much more than the Protestants. Much more. The bishops and the priests are speaking out openly, not only in Portugal but in Angola itself.

It is the duty of religious leaders to oppose oppression. They should awake to the oppressive government that is in place. The Portuguese missionaries who spoke out against the Portuguese government were not allowed to return to Angola. They went to America and to Canada to criticize the government and then could not get a visa to return. It is a sacrifice one has to accept. But if you are complaisant because you want to get along with the regime, even when the regime is oppressing the people, then I am convinced that you become absolutely inconsistent with your own beliefs. We can't have two interpretations of justice. We can't have two interpretations of freedom. They are one. I think in Angola

we have the task of liberating our country again—this time from Cubans and Russians.

I am a Protestant, but I am not against our African beliefs. One thing I did immediately when colonial domination was over was to go home and go to the grave of my father and tell him that we won—my father was killed in jail by the Portuguese. For my family this visit was important. We don't feel that we meet only when we die; we believe that we are with those who have gone. Spiritually, we are together. Now I am convinced that, though we fought for our independence, we missed it! I am convinced the dead are not satisfied.

People are saying that Savimbi came to America to wreck the possible agreement on Namibia. That is not possible. I have participated fully in the struggle for the liberation of Namibia. I am the one who trained the first SWAPO guerrillas—in my area in 1968. Before Russia trained them, before Cuba trained them, before anyone else. I am with the Namibians. They have to be freed.

There are people who think I came here to persuade Americans, maybe even the administration, not to extend diplomatic recognition to the state of Luanda. First of all, I have no power to do that; it is expressly within the sovereignty of the U.S. But I will say this: There are people in the U.S. who want to recognize the MPLA because, by doing so, they think they will encourage a peaceful resolution in Namibia. But this will also encourage the Cubans to remain in Angola. And remember that though talks are going on in London, we have no solution yet in Namibia. If the Cubans remain in Angola, they will have a base to operate from. If something goes wrong in Namibia, the Cubans and the Russians will have no need to get troops from Cuba ten thousand miles away; they will have them at hand. It would be in the best interest of America to wait. If you play cards, you know you don't give up all your cards until you get something.

When Castro came to the States (I was following his visit on my radio), he said that he would not withdraw his troops, his boys, before he settled the Namibian problem. Who gave him the right? First they came to Angola. We did not want them! He said that he had been helping MPLA from the beginning. But in 1974, before we negotiated with the Portuguese, the MPLA was divided into three factions and there were enough forces. Castro did not send forces then. When we had completed our negotiations with the Portuguese, he came in with what are now 34,000 Cubans. Castro has kept the world on permanent alert and it is building him up. But we are beating his boys in Angola—for four long years now. I am speaking both from conviction and from optimism. They are afraid to enter the bush. They keep along the Benguela railway. They keep to the towns. Now they don't dare to go into the bush because they have hostility from both sides—confrontation from us, and from the MPLA hostility, because they are fed up. Technically, the Cubans have proved to be of very poor quality. They cannot rebuild the Angolan economy. Why are we giving them a chance to continue to oppress us? I am convinced beyond any doubt that no African leader—not one—wants the Cubans in Angola. We are waiting for a state-

ment of the position of the United States—a friendly position: Cubans must leave Angola. Then many African leaders will be encouraged to speak out.

When people say the Cubans are stabilizing our country, that is absolutely inconsistent; they are not. Even Neto himself wanted to get rid of them. The churches here, and there, can play a role, but they need courage.

QUESTION: The United States Government had hoped all along that whatever government was established in Luanda would be a coalition government. Apparently, that proved to be impossible during Dr. Neto's lifetime. Now that we have a new president in Angola, have the prospects of a coalition government increased?

DR. SAVIMBI. Neto died in September. According to my information, he wanted to talk to me. I don't know if the new president, Eduardo dos Santos, has the courage to open up talks with me or with UNITA because he is weak and Neto was strong. To take such initiative you need to be strong. We are waiting until May, when they are going to have a congress, to see whether or not they confirm Eduardo dos Santos as president.

One of the reasons that your movement is not recognized now by the Organization of African Unity and by much of Africa is because—it is said—your movement is very heavily dependent on South African financing and arms, and that South Africans are continually in Angola. Can you respond to that?

First of all, the information you have is incorrect. The OAU could not recognize our movement when Angola became independent. My movement was recognized by the OAU when we were fighting. They do not recognize any opposition movement in any independent country in Africa. Secondly, I agree with you that we got a bad name because of the South African intervention. What happened was this—and I think that the diplomats and other people here who have followed this know that I am telling the truth: When we saw the Cubans arriving in Angola in April, 1975, and when we saw the arms from Russia coming into Angola, I addressed myself to America, to France, to West Germany, to Britain, but not to South Africa. But the Western countries decided to encourage, if not support, South Africa to enter Angola. That idea was also backed by ten heads of state in Africa—some who today call themselves revolutionaries. We said, "This is wrong!" We knew the Russians, how they manipulate information. And we said: "When they arrest their first South African, then our cause will get a bad name." But they said, "No, it's a quick operation. They support you; the Cubans are out, and they go home." But immediately the news started to come out that South Africans were in Angola.

They came in 1975 because they were sent by somebody to whom I went to request support. They're out now. And no arms. It is not true. It is not true. I have not a single rifle from South Africa. My arms are equal to those of MPLA. I'm getting them from somewhere, but not from South Africa.

It's difficult for some Americans to sympathize with

and support the reliberation effort. And one reason, in addition to the South African connection already raised, is that the wisdom of Andrew Young—whom, I assume, you were referring to when you were talking about the stabilizing influence of the Cubans—seems to have prevailed over the wisdom of Henry Kissinger who, at one point in the declining months of the Nixon administration, appeared eager to direct U.S. intervention. Many Americans felt that, had that course been followed, Angola could have become another Vietnam. Why are you confident that if the U.S. woke up with respect to the Cuban presence there, the other African leaders would join—that this would be a successful course for the U.S. to pursue?

It's a matter of principle. The Portuguese are gone, the South Africans are gone. The Cubans have to leave, even if it takes ten years. Andrew Young advocated the presence of Cubans in Angola (he was so simple) because he felt they are defending Gulf Oil. The only interest of America in Angola and Africa is just that, Gulf Oil? You don't have another interest? But what I am saying is: If America spoke out against the presence of Cubans—not money, not arms, not GIs dead, because we don't need that—it would encourage many African leaders.

Even Neto was fed up with the Cubans; even Paulo Jorge was fed up with the Cubans. Obasanjo, the former president and military ruler of Nigeria, did not want the Cubans there. Obasanjo's not my friend, but even he does not want the Cubans there. I know that there were moves to replace the Cubans by Nigerians, but Neto refused. He refused because he did not want them at that time, or because he had no confidence in the ability of Nigerians to fight the guerrillas. And Bongo, Mobutu, Kaunda, who are my friends, are against the Cubans there. They are. They are. I know Africans. They don't want foreign troops on the continent. That's the point.

Have you some indication that the Cubans have suffered very heavy losses, or is it possible that the Cubans have effectively secured control of the country without the bush?

If the Cubans have in their mind that by being in town and by leaving the bush to us they are in control, then they are not guerrillas—they are stupid. Because where is the food produced? Not in the town but the bush. That is why Angola is now importing food. We control the rural areas. If they think that they will hold on, it is absolutely against any theory of a revolutionary war. It will not work.

Can you tell us—you are an Angolan—on what passport you travel?

I have not one, I have several. They are all African, independent countries, and they're diplomatic. I don't travel on an ordinary passport. And if you ask the State Department to say "he's traveling on a South African passport," it's a lie. But on a diplomatic passport of an independent country. And I have three.

The continued situation on the Benguela railroad, the denial of its use, is weighing very heavily on the econo-



David Gambale

mies of Zambia and Zaire. It is reported that your forces are the principal reason the trains are not able to come through to the Shaba area and the copper belt in Zambia. Under what conditions would you allow trains to run through that area?

I like your question. In four years there were four agreements between Zambia, Zaire, and Angola to reopen that Benguela railroad, but they failed. The railway is so vulnerable! It does not take much sweat to destroy it. One breach—I do it in twenty minutes; it takes them four months to repair it. A rail—I can blow it up in ten minutes. Only a political agreement can reopen the Benguela railroad, not a force. My intention is not to stop the Zambian people. But I don't have any alternative. Zambia's leader and Zaire's leader, they know that I am not doing it against them; I am doing it against the presence of the Cubans. Then I have one condition. Let us start talking with the Angolans in Luanda. About the railway. Even about that.

I can well understand that you don't want to discuss your present sources of arms supplies. I wonder if you can tell us, however, when you were able to stop taking arms from South Africa.

I never, I never took any!

You never took arms from South Africa?

No. When the South Africans came to Angola, they did not even give us arms. They had their own arms, and they came in armored cars. Why, I could not guess. You can't fight with an armored car. They came with planes. And they did not come only to be friendly. Then they went back. When South Africans came to Angola, their sympathy was toward FNLA. I think you need to know that. Only, when they came to the south, they found there was no FNLA. They were hostile to UNITA. It took us quite a while to convince them, to say, "No. You are on UNITA land. You have to cooperate with us." But they finally learned that in that part of Angola the popular movement was UNITA.

After they went back we had arms we got from you Americans. During the civil war I had 25,000 rifles. I got some from Rumania, some from China, some from Zambia, some from Tanzania. I had a lot of arms that I could really fight with. Maybe I could be short of ammunition—but not arms. But this was only 1976. In 1977 I got more support.

The South Africans never left me arms. But even when they left I got the blame, because they were in my area and I had cooperated with them. When they accepted this area as UNITA's area, we cooperated with them. But when they left, they still refused to leave us fuel.

I understand you to believe that the removal of Cuban troops is the first and necessary step for an end to war in Angola and presumably the end of Soviet involvement. But I hardly think that that would be a sufficient condition. What else, particularly, does UNITA have to win vis-à-vis the other two indigenous forces? If not, what kind of accommodation or settlement is possible?

Even when we are saying that we want the Cubans out, it is not a precondition. What we want is MPLA to recognize that there is no peace in the country. So the first thing to do is to ask for peace, then we meet. The first thing we are going to put on the table in the conference is the withdrawal of Cuban forces. Then I think a timetable will be set for their withdrawal. But the principle has to be that we don't want Cubans in our country. And I think the African countries will be so pleased to see them off. Then, though today the most active movement against Cubans and Russians is UNITA, we cannot forget that there is FNLA. Because if we want it to be a lasting peace, we are three. The three of us fought the Portuguese. No one of us will control alone. It's so complicated. When you hear the word Angola, from here you take sides—"I am pro-MPLA," "I am pro-UNITA." Unfortunately. Without knowing what Angola is.

Angola has been all the time, during the Portuguese time, made up of three parts. There is always North, Center, and South. Even the white Portuguese were involved in that problem. "I am from the South, I am from..." because we speak different languages, we have different customs, we have different traditions. But we are not working for three Angolas. We are working for one Angola. But the one Angola has to be built up. No one will control. Can't. Can't.

UNITA was not intransigent. FNLA cannot be intransigent. Who was intransigent? MPLA! And if MPLA recognizes that the Cuban operation has not paid off, it cannot be intransigent. We have never been. I am the one who went to see the late President Kenyatta, who is a man I respected very much, so that he could accept us in Mombassa. I am the one who went to Dar es Salaam to meet Neto. I am the one who went to Kinshasa to meet Roberto. We are not intransigent! Who was intransigent? MPLA!

I am not fighting for the presidency. I am fighting the Cubans. It is enough for me. But fourteen years of fighting! Now the socialists say: "No, we are tired of fighting. Let us just talk." Now they are going to find a solution. All of them are tired of fighting. I am not yet tired. But I think the Angolan people will reach a stage where they will say, "No. Stop fighting." Even on the side of MPLA. "Stop fighting." At that time we have a solution, a conditional government.

Ever since the South Africans officially left Angola two-and-a-half years ago they have constantly and increas-

ingly attacked southern Angola by air and by land. Have they at any time attacked you and your camps? If so, have you retaliated against them?

Well, they attacked Kassinga. We had sixteen of our soldiers killed. But to ask me to retaliate against South Africa! To fight the South Africans and the Cubans! I don't think you can find Clausewitz or Moltke or anyone to say, Fight ten enemies at once.

Can your organization survive? And survive after you?

They will survive. They have been united all along. Sometimes one man alone cannot decide many things. The group is united, and the MPLA are not.

I'd like to know the effect of the continued internal fighting on the Angolan people, on their economic condition, on farming. Are there large numbers of refugees as a result of all this dislocation?

Definitely. We have many refugees in Zambia, in Zaire. The economy of the country was almost destroyed. And definitely the people are suffering. When we saw the Portuguese leaving, we thought that the end had come to our pain. But then it was not the end because the Cubans are there. But can we advise our people to cease the struggle, the resistance, so that their children—there are now six thousand in Cuba—will be fifty thousand in Cuba? The people called us and they said, "Come. They are snatching kids here to go to Cuba." Then who will resist? It's a long-term policy of the Cubans there. If there is no resistance, the people will be better off? What is going to happen, what worries me now, is that the Cubans are trying to work for a cultural genocide of my people. We have to resist.

You said earlier that the Protestant churches generally were more sympathetic to the MPLA.

I don't say so, but they are reluctant to take a position. They are not sympathetic. The Protestant Church in Angola is in the bush. Out of fifty pastors I have thirty-five. And they are with me in the bush. But those who remain are in the minority of minorities. The Church is with us. But they are—how can I put it?—they are afraid, friends. The term is, they are afraid.

In Uganda—I come from Uganda—there is the same problem of groups that can't come together, cannot agree, cannot form a coalition. Do you see this as a peculiarly African problem?

Correct. One, we are young in politics. We have our own ways of solving our own problems. There were tribal ways. We had wise chiefs who really led their communities, but now we are in modern politics. We have to learn. But don't be worried. Look at the French. They fought for centuries on a tribal basis. Don't be worried. When we grasp the real basis of modern politics, we are going to understand each other. Don't be worried. They fought longer than we are doing. Even in France they are still bombing, after how many centuries? It is a pity that we shan't reach our goal earlier, but we shall reach it. It is difficult, but we are going to reach it.