

CARIBBEAN - NOBODY'S BACKYARD

Excerpts from a talk over Radio Freedom by Comrade Alex La Guma, ANC Chief Representative in the Caribbean.

What is described as Caribbean consists of a number of small islands, each one containing a very small population - and these islands are mostly ruled by conservative governments who have allegiances to the old British imperialist connection and who carry on the neo-colonialist policy which is directed by big corporations in Europe.

One must of course add at the moment that these islands are also involved in opposition to these conservative governments on the part of the groups of democratic, progressive, revolutionary people who are determined to change the situation in this part of the Caribbeans. At the moment activities take the form of electioneering campaigns, agitational work and creating of political organisations of the people. In countries like Trinidad, Tobago and Barbados, etc., at the moment people are preparing for elections and it is hoped from the point of view of the democratic organisations operating there that change will come about.



Alex La Guma

In Jamaica where the pro-US imperialist Labour party ousted Mr. Manley's People's National Party in the last election, this latter party is active in regrouping itself to make a come-back.

Most of these small islands which mostly are English-speaking have taken the example from Grenada where people led by the New Jewel movement which in turn is headed by Maurice Bishop seized power from the old Gueri régime and established

a democratic regime in its place and is now engaged in social transformation which is directed at raising the standard of living of the people, extending democracy and creating new conditions for the masses...

In terms of what is taking place in the Carribeans and the Central America, the US has adopted an attitude of its own which proves to be bellicose, warlike and threatening. In terms of the US strategy, it views the Carribean as its so-called backyard and Maurice Bishop replied to this by saying very firmly, "We certainly, that is, people of Grenada, are in nobody's backyard."

The Carribean is also strategically vital to the US and its program and policies in that as we all know from looking at the map it describes the entrance between the Atlantic Ocean and the Central American area. It is sort of a gateway to the Panama Canal and it leads from Central America to the Pacific.

CUBAN EXAMPLE

Politically, the Cuban example has proved to the Central America and Carribean in particular that no small people, no small country need hesitate in the fight for liberation... irrespective of the presence of vast US arsenals. Cuba proved to the people to be capable of continuing the struggle. As a result of this the US has adopted this increasingly hostile attitude and in particular since the Reagan administration moved in this attitude has become more and more harsh, more and more severe.

Recently of course the struggle in El Salvador, has in particular reached a new impetus resulting from the tyrannical and murderous regime of Napoleon Duarte. Over the years and up to now guerilla actions which have been carried out on a local basis have now developed into a war on a national scale. The FML Front, we learn, at the moment controls about one-fifth of the national territory and the population has already started a program that should give encouragement to the rest of the population still under the heel of the fascist dictatorship. They have, for example organised land to improvise food and supplies both for the population and guerilla fighters. Medical aid is being organised and at the same time illiteracy is being dealt with and political schools have been opened and

military training is taking place among the population. So that it is quite clear that the people of El Salvador have established a substantial base and also ensure that they will be able to advance from this base.

LOCAL REACTION

Of course all this has given the local reaction and US a really uncomfortable time and has resulted in the growing awareness on their part of the inevitability of the victory of the popular forces led by the FMLN. In order to counter this of course they have tried their best to project a picture of a democratic process reigning in the country, but all the dead bodies that pile up in El Salvador do not hide the fact that the regime is corrupt and only exists because the US props it up. Anyway in order to project the so called democratic image, the regime and Napoleon Duarte has been talking about holding elections which is encouraged by the US with the hope that the popular forces, given general participation in these elections and the endorsement of the regime will be gained. However the revolutionary forces have pointed out that while they are not against elections, it is of course impossible to hold elections on the conditions that prevail in El Salvador today.

First of all, there is a reign of terror by the government which results in thousands of people being killed, actually butchered by the fascist forces. The country is therefore being placed in a state of civil war. More than 2 000 000 people have had to flee the country to escape the battle, the war and terror that have been the usual feature of the society. There are no proper electoral rolls by which voters can be organised the usual way and all these factors contribute to a situation where nobody believes that an election in a normal way can take place. Hence, I said the indications are that the revolutionary forces led by FMLF are prepared to find a political solution to the terrible situation prevailing in the country.

At the same time this can only be carried out if a normal situation prevails. They are prepared to negotiate for a peaceful settlement of the dispute between the democratic forces and those who stand in their way... This attitude has been supported by the reasonable forces, peoples internatio-

nally, but these conditions have been refused and Duarte and the US hope that irrespective of the fighting that is going on, this election that is about to take place soon - the so called election - will help to give them a sort of an aura of respectability and licence to carry on as they have done before.

Of course the US is devoting hundreds of millions of dollars to arming the fascist junta in El Salvador and giving it economic aid in order to carry on boosting the country for as long as possible, under the pretext that the government there is upholding human rights and deserves to be assisted. In the neighbouring states of Guatemala in Central America, the people also suffer under a dictatorial regime. We know that in 1954 the democratic government was overthrown by the reactionaries with the assistance of the CIA and as a result all freedoms have really disappeared in this country. There is no such thing like individual freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of political activity, etc... In addition of course all revolutionary organisations are banned in Guatemala and the people live under a barbarism carried out by the military who have no compunction to kill off whole populations of villages if they find to be harbouring or engaging in helping the revolutionary forces and the democratic movement.

In Guatemala, some weeks ago, ... many popular organisations came together to form a united front to face the regime in an organised way and to advance towards a democratic state supported by the people. It has been reported last month that the revolutionary movement and guerilla struggle have achieved certain victories that have shaken the regime. For example at the moment the guerilla movement controls certain localities in the country and last month it was reported that they conducted two house raids at army barracks and police stations and seized four radio stations in the capital and broadcast from them over a certain period. And so it is expected that the struggle in Guatemala will take on significant proportions and that the victory of the Guatemalan people is on the cards.

US STRATEGY

As I have said, in this whole area Central America is important to US strategy as well as for the economic resources which exist there and as a result of this the US continues an offensive against the popular movement in this area. And in the face, however, of obvious failure, Reagan is trying to now justify outright intervention in Central America by blaming

the so called assistance which countries like Nicaragua and Cuba are giving to El Salvador, for example.

These are of course lies and untruths about Nicaraguan - Cuban participation in El Salvador; no, there is no direct material aid nor troops of men in the guerilla armies of Nicaragua or Cuba. Reagan is obviously lying to justify himself since he can't produce an evidence of this so-called intervention of Cuba and Nicaragua. Whether Reagan can actually intervene, sending troops into that area, that of course is another matter. In spite of all these things, Reagan is unable to convince his own friends or anybody else in the US. The US intervention of El Salvador, everybody feels, can only result in aggravating an all-out offensive by the entire democratic forces of Central America which could possibly lead to another Vietnam-like situation which will involve the very broad strata of the Central American and Latin American people and of course in addition, the entire democratic forces of the world are on the side of the Salvadorian people.

However, we believe that whatever attempts Reagan tries to make to undermine the successes of attempts of democratic forces in the Caribbean and Latin America are doomed to failure. The world balance of forces has changed in favour of independence and people are in favour of progress and peace. In addition, these countries, Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada are ready to defend themselves and expose the hypocritical role of Reagan and his associates who profess to uphold human rights, who are still prepared to attack small peoples. The US foreign policy is based on seeking solutions to the profound crisis of its own economy and that of world capitalism as a whole. In old times they could engage in world wars, today that is impossible because of the presence of the Soviet Union, the Socialist countries and international peace forces. War as it has always been known is not possible. No matter what threats are made, no matter how many nuclear weapons are brandished, any action on the part of the imperialists will meet with serious rebuffs for which they will pay very heavily. Nevertheless the US continues to try with what it calls exporting counter-revolution to those countries which are daily exposing the violence, cynicism and hypocrisy of the US administration, and who are revealing the reactionary policies of the US which continues to support reactionary and counter-revolutionary movements everywhere.

Reports reveal the US government supports the fascist juntas of Central America, El Salvador, etc., in Guatemala and Paraguay and other places. Support for the military junta-governments is inevitably reflected in other parts of the world as in Africa; the support for UNITA for instance in Angola in order to strengthen counter-revolutionary movements to try and replace the revolutionary government by counter-revolutionaries led by Mr Savimbi. In addition of course, it is also reflected by the Reagan administration's outright support for the apartheid and racists of South Africa which Reagan has openly described as a faithful ally of the US...

The US still hopes to act as a gendarme - a policeman who controls all countries of the world who try to move out of the grip of the reactionary role and out of the grip of imperialism. But this in terms of the part of the reactionary on the pay of imperialism only brings the democratic forces together in a solid united front in the face of world-wide attempts of imperialist forces. For this reason we see a growing solidarity between the people of the Carribean and the people of South Africa even though the Atlantic Separates us geographically - on the level of our struggle we are together.

70TH ANNIVERSARY

Recently with the commencement of the ANC's 70th Anniversary year, the Cuban mission of the ANC received many messages from organisations and movements in that area, e.g. Antigua, Tobago, Guyana, Barbados, Jamaica. In addition from Latin America, from the Chilean anti-fascism movement, from Uruguay, from the Sandinista Front of Nicaragua, from Socialist Party of Puerto Rico, etc. - all these view our struggle as part of the world-wide struggle against imperialism and against national oppression and independence, freedom and peace. And for these reasons they pledged their solidarity with the people of South Africa struggling against the fascist apartheid regime. This underlines our call for unity in action and we are sure that thousands, millions of reliable allies of the ANC and the oppressed of South Africa, people in the Carribean area and in Latin America, I believe also that the solidarity which we are experiencing can do a lot for the mobilisation of sanctions against the racist regime of South Africa as have been called for by the United Nations. We know that governments and enterprises in that area have relations with South Africa and the work that our friends in that area are doing in development of the liberation struggle is a demonstration of their solidarity

and their successes are sure to bring about the end of the connection between Central America, Caribbean and Latin America as a whole with racist South Africa.

And for this reason, obviously we of the ANC pledge to do what we can on the one hand to overthrow the regime inside our country, are confident, that the people of Latin America, Central America and the Caribbean are with us. For example with relation to the mobilisation of sanctions against the racist regime on the week-end of March 8 which was the International Womens Day, the democratic women of Jamaica for instance called conference and mass rally around the theme of sanctions against the South African regime so that these activities continue in that area in spite of the fact that we are geographically divided. But we believe that our South African people, people of Namibia, the people of Angola will in the end see victory, progress, stability and independence with the aid the brothers and sisters in the Caribbean, Central and Southern America.

HEROES OF OUR REVOLUTION

P.J. HODGSON (1910~1977)

-Juba Mfene

When the ANC marks the 70 years of revolutionary undauntedness, steeled in the heroic struggle of the oppressed but fighting people of South Africa. we take pride in the heroism that our people have displayed throughout the centuries from the ancestral past to the Wars of Resistance to the present day struggle. The count of moments of heroism is infinite: from the Gonemas of Core, the Makanas and Sekhukhunis, the Moshoesoes and Cetshwayos to the Bram Fischers, the Basil Februaries and the Solomon Mahlangu who have blazed a trail of unsurpassed selflessness across South Africa.