

## REPORT ON VISIT TO GUINEA-BISSAU

On June 11th I left Dar es Salaam to attend the Ad Hoc Committee of 17 meeting which was convened under the auspices of the OAU in Dakar, Senegal. Together with T.X. Makiwane and under his leadership, we constituted the two-man ANC delegation to the conference.

After waiting for seven long days while the experts met in closed session we were finally granted an audience which lasted not less than eight minutes. It is as yet difficult to assess the outcome of the discussions. It can be stated, however, that quite a number of delegates made constructive contributions or sought pertinent clarifications.

Taking advantage of the get-together, the comrades from PAIGC, MPLA, FRELIMO, ZAPU and ANC met to discuss issues and problems of common interest. The meeting was conducted in a businesslike tone and there was unanimity on the need for closer co-operation among these liberation organisations. Frequent meetings were urged, particularly for the organisations in Southern Africa.

It was at this meeting that Comrade Cabral, Secretary-General of the PAIGC, extended an invitation to visit the war zones in Guinea-Bissau. I consulted with, and obtained the permission of, T.X. Makiwane to undertake the trip to Guinea-Bissau. Thus on the 24th July I flew out to Conakry where I was heartily received at the PAIGC Provisional Headquarters.

### CONAKRY

Owing to the shortage of English interpreters I waited for seven days in Conakry before proceeding to the "front". This turned out to be a blessing in disguise for, in the intervening period I made some interesting observations.

Stationed in Conakry were some three hundred odd people, engaged in a diversity of activities. The Head Office, a four-roomed building comprising the Secretary-General's office, the Publicity and Information Department and several other functionaries, is well guarded right round the clock by sentinels armed with A.K. Sub-machine guns and in battle colours.

Some five hundred metres away from the office are the stores, the tailor shop and the motor vehicle repair shop. The library and printer are also situated in the same vicinity. The places of residence are scattered. Two or three people share a room depending on its size and spaciousness. Comrades who are married, with both parties stationed in Conakry, are allocated rooms where they enjoy complete privacy. I noticed that quite a few male comrades - and the majority of the women who have come of age - were married. Happily, in all cases, both parties are intimately involved in the struggle and work under the direction of the party.

PAIGC also operate a secondary school whose entire teaching staff is composed of militants. Here are taught children who are selected on merit from the various schools organised by the PAIGC in the liberated areas. On completing their education in Conakry the students are sent to universities in the socialist countries, where they study courses relevant to the development of Guinea-Bissau.

There is a common "canteen" or dining room where all the PAIGC revolutionaries based in Conakry have their three meals a day. It is filled up with small tables which take four diners a-piece. I saw revolutionaries of all stations - members of the Politburo as well as drivers of the huge 7-ton Zil trucks; teachers at the Secondary School and their pupils, office workers and motor machenics, the married and the single - yes, I watched them all file past to collect their plates in the kitchen and then proceed to take their place at table during meal-times. Tea or coffee and bread are served for breakfast; rice and meat or fish for lunch and for dinner.

In one of the many conversations we had, Comrade Araujo, a member of the Central Committee and Head of the Propaganda Department, stressed the importance of the leadership identifying itself with the revolutionaries and other people it led. The PAIGC concept of leadership was that it entailed heavy and onerous responsibilities while it offered no privileges in return. Their leaders experienced the same difficulties, sufferings and inconveniences as the men. They virtually lived under the same conditions, ate the same food and received the same

cigarette rations. It was inconceivable, he went on to say, that anybody could receive a salary or remuneration simply because of his status in the PAIGC. What would he alone do with the money? How were the others less entitled to that pay? PAIGC provides food, clothing, shelter and all the needs of revolutionaries. In this manner the Party not only economises on the ever-meagre funds but also honours a fundamental principle of revolutionary theory and practice, namely, that there should be no gap between the leadership and the led. For correct leadership, the leaders must thoroughly know, understand and even share the experiences and hardships of the revolutionaries. This ensures the leaders the respect and confidence of their followers. It also eliminates stratifications within the Party ranks and precludes the potential for wrangles over positions of leadership. I was, to say the least, highly impressed by this arrangement. I experienced for the first time the practical translation of a theory I had known for so long.

#### STUDENTS

I arrived in Conakry at a time when the students studying overseas were on holiday. Some had completed their courses in Medicine, Agronomy and Political Science and were getting ready to go to the field. Explaining the PAIGC policy on students, Comrade Gil Fernandes, himself an ex-student who completed his studies in 1968, stated that the Party demanded a high standard of discipline, dedication and loyalty from the students and just as it did from other revolutionaries. The Party sends the students to countries which offer courses which will benefit the people of Guinea Bissau. Needless to say, it is mainly the socialist countries which offer scholarships and avail the aspirant students of such opportunities. When the students complete their courses they await the instructions of the Party. In a predominantly illiterate Guinea-Bissau, the PAIGC has been able to produce no less than twenty doctors. There are qualified engineers, lawyers, agronomists, teachers, etc.

A practical problem has been that of students wanting to marry foreigners they meet in the course of their overseas studies. Experience has taught the Party to rule against such marriages - at least until independence is won.

On the whole, the PAIGC students are a fine detachment of determined, dedicated and conscientious revolutionaries who are prepared to render their selfless services to the nation and are firmly pledged to the revolution and to carrying out Party instructions.

#### DEPARTURE TO GUINEA-BISSAU

I left Conakry for the war zones on 31st August, 1969. Dressed in an army uniform and wearing military boots, I had in my knapsack a military shirt, two bedsheets (they serve as blankets in tropical Guinea-Bissau), a mosquito net and tinned stuff provisions. We reached the small town of Boke after traversing 300km of extremely bad road. I found this town swarming with PAIGC militants who are carrying out different tasks for the Party. There is also a hospital which was donated and equipped by the Yugoslav Trade Union Congress. There are several Guinea-Bissau doctors and nurses serving on this hospital in addition to the Cuban and Yugoslav doctors. It caters for PAIGC militants wounded in action at the front-lines, as well as for victims of napalm and other bombings. I saw the patients at this hospital and was able to appreciate both the crippling effect of war and the high efficiency of the doctors and nurses working there.

Boke is also a junction for the roads leading to the Eastern Region and the Southern Region. We revictualled here and after two days drove for another 55km to reach the border between the Republic of Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. Here again there are scores of PAIGC militants. They man the anti-aircraft guns cleverly concealed along the route to the frontiers, engage in production work, ploughing rice-fields and maize and also serve on the communication lines. There are other tasks of a confidential nature that they execute. Skilfully camouflaged among the trees, small shelters and houses dot the route immediately before the frontier post.

#### The Republic of Guinea

From what I saw and heard, the Republic of Guinea whole-heartedly supports the struggle waged by the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau. The PAIGC is given free rein to conduct their affairs in the Republic. They receive, without

any farce or red tape, their materials which they store in depots organised and supervised by themselves in the Republic. The Government of Guinea fully appreciates their demands for transit facilities, that is, passports and travel documents. There is active co-operation between the PAIGC and the Government of Guinea. They exchange information. The hospital at Boke is a vivid and practical demonstration of such co-operation. So also is the permission granted an embattled people to defend their offices, leaders and personnel in general against possible attacks by the enemy and to construct and man anti-aircraft defences in Guinean territory. There are numerous other arrangements between the two parties that I have not listed, some of which I may not know.

#### UNAL

We left the frontier base at Kanjafra at about 4pm on the 4th August bound for UNAL. We were a party of eight lightly armed guerrillas. No sooner were we fifteen minutes inside Guinea-Bissau than I saw a disused forest-road on which stood three wrecked and abandoned Portuguese army trucks: The PAIGC engineering squad had done a thorough job some two years back. Further along our winding forest-path huge broken tree-trunks, burnt patches of bush, a jettisoned napalm canister, - all told the story of a concentrated air-raid. In fact, on the 2nd and 3rd of August there had been Portuguese air-raids at a place not far from our route. But I was warmly assured by the comrades that in many places air-raiding was about all the Portuguese could do. They dared not land paratroopers as the guerrillas were in firm control.

Two and a half hours after departure we were at a river ready to take a rowing boat and continue on the second lap of our journey. This was not before we had crossed two rivulets whose rushing water came well above knee-level and some half a dozen swamps. It was the rainy season and everywhere there was water, water, water.

About 7.30pm the rowers started the boat out. For ten long hours, moving at snail's pace, knocking at the over-hanging tree branches that often hindered our progress, losing our way in the maze of rivers that branched into and

out of our mainstream, disturbing the fleeting slumber of mosquitoes on the water surface and receiving a bite in return, we finally reached a point where we abandoned the boat and headed towards a village. In fact, we had missed the landing point on the river but soon re-orientated ourselves. The rice paddies were all covered with water. The peasants hardly raised a brow as we passed them in the fields. Some had rifles strapped on their backs. After two hours of walking we reached a village where we rested and had a good rice-and-chicken meal prepared by a PAIGC peasant militant.

At five p.m. we resumed our journey to the Command Post at UNAL. It was the same story of crossing angry rivulets and swollen swamps. At 9pm we arrived at the Post. The Commander absent, we proceeded to a hospital, ten minutes away. 60-year old Comrade Viera, the Commander at the hospital and Political Commissar Benjamin received us.

#### The Hospital

I was to await the arrival of the Regional Commander at this hospital. The following day Comrade Viera introduced me to the staff and inmates of the hospital. There is, in addition to the Commander and the Commissar, a Medical Officer who is a qualified doctor, trained in the Soviet Union. He is assisted by three qualified nurses while four others were under training. There is also a literacy school run at this centre. Both the Commissar and the Commander stay with their wives and there are several womenfolk who assisted in cooking for the patients, the staff and the sentinels.

Several thatched, four-walled structures constitute the hospital "wards". To minimise risks each hut caters for a maximum of three patients. For considerations of security again, only the militants are treated here. Located in a well camouflaged site, the huts are about fifty metres from each other. One boy, about 14 years of age, was responsible for the concealment of medicines and was the only one who had access to this secret place. The doctor treats the patients and transfers serious cases to the Boke hospital.

Retreat routes in case of a surprise attack are clearly

defined. The armaments for the protection of the hospital are submachine guns and semi-automatic rifles.

The Command Post is used by the Regional Commander when he visits UNAL in the course of executing his duties. It consists of several simple structures often without walls, the roofing resting solely on four pole supports. There is a well-planned guarding system. When the Commander is around emissaries and couriers from various groups and bases pour in to submit reports and receive instructions.

A mosquito net is an indispensable item in Guinea-Bissau, so also is a raincoat during the rainy season. Of course, all this is obtainable from the stores in Conakry.

When the Regional Commander finally arrived six days after I came to UNAL the interpreter had to return to Conakry for an outstanding appointment. This proved to be a very unfortunate circumstance for I was to be robbed of reliable communication with the comrades for nearly the rest of my stay. I made a belated yet valuable effort to study Creole, the language spoken by all the comrades and most of the people of Guinea-Bissau.

Through negligence my interpreter and guide had not provided sufficiently for me. Every visitor to the war-front is supplied with two pairs of boots and two uniforms. I only had one of each and, curse my extraordinary height and size of foot, I could not be offered much help. The result was that whenever we went out of base I had to wrap myself with a bedsheet on attaining my destination. By then the trousers and shirt were dripping wet, what with the rivers and swamps that lay every two kilometres of the way. It was an untenable situation and my boots and feet remained wet virtually throughout my stay there. But for the worms which bore their way through the toes (they penetrated into three of my toes) I would have walked about bare-footed.

### The Bases

In the company of the Political Commissar we visited some fighting groups. There are bases in Buba-UNAL, Mam-pati, Ambushkada, etc. The unit of military organisation in all these areas is a group which is somewhat equivalent to a platoon. It consists of about 26 men. The Commander and

Commissar are first officers of the group. There is a Chief of Staff as well.

In practice, the first three officers plan the operations, be it raids on the enemy fortifications, ambushes or marches. When the operation has been planned and agreed upon, the Commander is given the sole charge of the group in the accomplishment of its objectives. Then every soldier awaits, and listens to the voice of the Commander.

The Commissar, after full participation in the operational planning, exhorts the men just before the mission to fight bravely and drive the "tuga" (enemy) out of the motherland. He may invite any member of the group to address his colleagues. My experience was that whoever arose had very brave and stirring words to say.

Ordinarily, the Commissar is the recipient of complaints and grievances which he often settles amicably. He is the interpreter of the Party policy to the group and informs it of the latest directives and relays current news.

The men are well fed on the staple rice diet usually with wild game meat but on certain occasions without the benefit of any soup or meat.

The group is equipped with three bazookas, three light machine guns, sometimes one 51mm mortar, six sub-machine guns and four rifles. The Commander, the Commissar, the Chief of Staff and the bazooka personnel are each additionally armed with a pistol.

In many bases, the groups are combined into Bi-groups. This is dictated by the nature of their military objectives and the enemy strength in their sector of operation.

ALL THE POLITICAL COMMISSARS ARE APPOINTED BY THE PARTY. They are experienced cadres with fairly long service in the struggle and are known for their untiring work and adherence to the Party policies. They are subject to dismissal by their Superior military Commander, that is, the Regional Commander if the need arises. But the latter immediately notifies the Regional Commissariat and awaits its approval or rejection of this action.

The Commanders are appointed by their superior military Commanders and are liable to dismissal by them. Lately.



they are also trusted and dedicated members of the Party who owe their positions of command to bravery, initiative and other qualities of good leadership.

A number of Groups and Bi-Groups in a given area constitute a front or Region. They are administered by a REGIONAL COMMAND of three, all of whom are appointed by the PAIGC Politburo, the highest and directing organ of the struggle. The head of this trio is the Regional Commander.

#### DISCIPLINE AND MORALE

The militants maintained an impressive level of discipline. There is high political consciousness among the comrades. The majority of them have very clear ideological goals.

All the commanders stressed the difficulties they encountered in the initial stages of the struggle. Then, it was extremely difficult to assert Party control over some of the men. Mainly through politicisation and persuasion the recalcitrant elements were won over. Nearly all the people I talked with stated that during the infancy of the armed struggle third degree measures had to be employed to enforce discipline and maintain cohesion within the ranks. Such methods were said to comprise corporal punishment, forcing the offender to squat within a circle for a stipulated time, etc. But, as a rule, the PAIGC shuns these coercive methods. Today, they are very rarely used.

Authorised punishment today comes in the form of disarming the offender; imprisonment (this is practically not used); hard labour, carrying materials repeatedly from the frontier with minimum rest, etc.

The relationship between those in command and the ordinary militants is very cordial. During leisure hours one can hardly distinguish the one from the other. There are many who bear battle scars. Those who are invalidated command the respect of the militants.

In spite of the existence of many tribes - Fulas, Manding, etc. the plague of tribalism is not in evidence.

### THE ENEMY POSITION

Throughout the areas I saw - the liberated areas - there is virtually no enemy activity on the ground. There remain, however, several garrisons, small towns, and fortifications. These are mostly in a state of siege, like the garrison at Madina. The country's poor network of roads is hardly used today. Navigation is carried out but always heavily guarded with cannon and air-cover. The guerrillas carry out special ambushes, relying on bazookas, to blockade this traffic. There are plenty of navigable rivers in Guinea-Bissau many of them wider and deeper than the Zambesi. Helicopters covered by jets and bombers are the sole means of supplying the beleaguered garrisons. The comrades pointed out rather pathetically that if they had more sophisticated weapons the enemy entrenched in these fortifications would go in no time. Since the enemy enjoys air superiority there is no wisdom in capturing the towns as this would provide a wholesale slaughter of the civilian population by the Portuguese air raiders.

### FIGHTING ZONES

I did not go to the fighting zones. But I was reliably informed that the partisans were steadily gaining ground, securing one hard-fought victory after another. Twice I saw wounded comrades being brought to the hospital for treatment. Throughout all my stay only one comrade died in action.

### THE POPULATION AND CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION

There is not the slightest doubt - even in the minds of the Portuguese - that the population fully supports the PAIGC. The militants are counted by the thousand; huge areas are under the PAIGC control and there is already a civilian administration in the liberated zones.

In every village there is a village committee elected by the village community. Five members are elected to this committee and have the power to mediate in disputes and impose light fines on offenders. They are also empowered to arrest and detain spies and suspects.

Above the village organisation is a sector, which is composed of several villages. Members of the Sector Committee are appointed by the PARTY. They are in charge of the

administration of the villages under their control and also act as marriage licencing officers. They register births and deaths and listen to more serious civil cases. One member of this committee is a specialist in civil administration and to some extent in legal affairs.

There is a mobile JUSTICE COURT headed by a President who is a qualified lawyer. It convenes in the appropriate place to settle and judge serious cases. They have the power to impose any penalty, including death. There is a right of appeal to the Secretary-General of the PAIGC.

### THE FRONT COMMISSARIAT

The executive organ in a region is the POLITICAL COMMISSARIAT headed by the Regional or Front Commissar. This body is in charge of all activities in the region including political affairs in the armed forces. In the Southern Front, where I was, the FRONT COMMISSAR is a woman.

Because military operations are of a highly specialised and confidential nature the Politburo issues war directives directly to the REGIONAL COMMAND.

With the administration of an entire population in a liberated area - and this entails the para-military defence force, the militia; the Production Sector, the literacy classes; the civilian hospital and medicine etc. - the Commissariat has immense responsibilities on its shoulders.

### SUPPLIES

Whenever the fighting forces need to replenish material and food supplies, the Commissariat is asked to provide the manpower to secure the stuff from the frontier bases. The Sector Committee is accordingly instructed to provide the needed personnel. In each Sector there is a SUPPLIES Chief who is militarily trained but is not engaged in active military operations. He organises storage dumps (which are kept secret) and is in charge of a supply group.

The PRODUCTION Sector is engaged in the cultivation of rice, peanuts and maize field. The accruing harvest is used for the maintenance and feeding of the fighting forces. Game shooting for meat supplies also comes under this department.

Recruitment of personnel for the armed forces in the liberated areas is carried out under the direction of the Political Commissariat. After completing their training courses the newly recruited take an oath of allegiance to the PAIGC. They swear before the flag that they will fight till freedom or death for the liberation of the motherland. They are then dispatched to the various fighting zones.

In the liberated areas all able-bodied men and women (civilian) are given weapons for self defence. There is a well organised militia.

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After staying for a month I departed for Conakry on the 3rd September, I had suffered a few limitations in my mission because of

- (a) the lack of sufficient clothing. Very often the Commander argued against my going out on certain missions as I would not have dry clothes to put on when I reached the base of destination.
- (b) the absence of an interpreter for almost three weeks prevented me from asking as many questions as I would have wished to, thus depriving me of a wealth of information.

However, at the end of it all I was confident that the authorisation of my trip had been a good investment in our revolution. It had always been clear to me that we had a lot to learn from the military experiences of our PAIGC colleagues. What I had never anticipated was that we had so much more to learn from their political organisation, party discipline and revolutionary outlook.

On my way back I met Comrade Cabral in Boke. He was proceeding to the Eastern Region to carry out "important political work". He was extremely pleased that the African National Congress had sent somebody to study the situation on the spot. He stated that he would be happy to welcome more of our colleagues if, and whenever, the organisation wished to send them to Guinea-Bissau.

Before I parted company with these humble yet illustrious revolutionaries I was interviewed over the radio. I

used this opportunity to explain in a few words to the people of Guinea-Bissau the situation in Southern Africa in general, and in South Africa in particular; to tell them what the A.N.C. fought for; the ZAPU-ANC alliance; and lastly, to convey my sincere congratulations to the heroic people of Guinea-Bissau on their persistent struggle and the telling blows they continue to deliver on the colonialist enemy. I urged them, on behalf of ZAPU and the ANC, to continue undaunted in their sacred fight for freedom and national independence. In tribute to their glorious sacrifices and valiant contribution to the common anti-imperialist struggle, we of the A.N.C., I solemnly declared, would strive relentlessly to open up and strengthen a front in our sector of operation. Although we are still chasing an elusive opening blow, revolutionary optimism emboldens me into believing that in time, perhaps sooner than later, this pledge will materialise.

SOME GENERAL NOTES:

1. Comparison: There are basic differences between Zimbabwe, South Africa and Guinea-Bissau as far as the development of these countries is concerned. In contrast to the first two, Guinea-Bissau has been left virtually undeveloped by the colonialists. What little agriculture there was consisted of rice, nuts and sugar crops. Actually, the Portuguese never made a settlement but only established a trading post and used the Cape Verde Islands as a slave staging post.

The result was that no industries were developed and the roads and other communication lines remained very poorly developed.

Many peasants have not been deprived of their land and may cultivate as much of it as their limited human resources can allow. The local population, prior to the development of the armed struggle, was overwhelmingly unlettered.

The opening up of bush schools has, in my opinion greatly enhanced the prestige of the PAIGC. There are no mountains but the country is covered with vast jungles which provide excellent opportunities for the waging of guerrilla warfare. There are numerous navigable rivers.

2. Deserters: Soldiers who desert from the enemy ranks are accorded very good treatment. They are naturally questioned, cross-examined and thoroughly scrutinised. They are then handed over to the Democratic Front of Portugal which arranges to have them accepted and employed in other countries.

PAIGC never accepts them as fighters alongside its revolutionaries despite numerous requests to that effect from some deserters.

#### Prisoners of War.

Are kept under tight security. I saw several of them, including ranking officers. I learnt that some had already been released.

#### MEMBERSHIP

As a rule, all the patriots who volunteer to fight for their country under the direction and leadership of the PAIGC are regarded as members of the PARTY. On being recruited they take an oath of allegiance by which they inextricably bind themselves to the struggle. They pledge to fight for the eradication of colonialism and the restoration of the motherland to its rightful owners.

However, the Party leadership, basing themselves on a close study of an individual's active contribution to the struggle, his consistent adherence to Party policies and his thorough understanding of, and willingness to, carry out, the programme of the Party, invites that particular person to rededicate himself, and he is issued with a card and given greater responsibilities.

Congress is the highest body in the PAIGC. Under the abnormal conditions of war it is extremely difficult for this body to meet.

There is a Central Committee of more than forty-five members. For purposes of the efficient direction of the armed struggle the Central Committee has empowered the Secretary-General of the Party and a small core of revolutionaries around him to direct the day to day affairs of the PAIGC.

The leader of the PAIGC is the Secretary-General. There is also a President.

P.A.I.G.C. stands for Partido Africano de Independencia da Guinea e Cabo Verde.

ROLE OF WOMEN

Women participate actively in the struggle waged by the PAIGC. They feature in almost all spheres of activity. Many are members of the Central Committee; they are in the Information and Propaganda Department; they are found in the library and in clerical jobs; there are many nurses, teachers. They also feature prominently in the underground work inside the country and are important functionaries in the liberated areas. They feature in the production Sector, work as courier. Literally everywhere I went I found that women made their contribution and played second fiddle to no man.

Submitted by:

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