

Determined to Resist

Guerrilla Struggle in Guinea-Bissau

*Amilcar Cabral*¹

(We print below extracts from an interview granted by Amilcar Cabral, Secretary General of the PAIGC (African Party of Guinea and Cape Verde) to Tricontinental in Conakry, on returning from the Eastern Front. It is reproduced from Tricontinental, No. 8, 1968.)

What is the State of the struggle in the cities of so-called Portugese Guinea, particularly in the capital Bissau, and in Cape Verde?

We have had a great deal of experience in the struggle in the cities and the urban centres of our country, where the struggle first began. At first we organised mass demonstrations, strikes, etc. to demand that the Portugese change their position in regard to the legitimate rights of our people to self-determination and national independence. We found out that in the cities and urban centres the concentration of the Portugese repressive forces—military, police etc., was causing us serious losses. For example in August 1959, during the Bissau dock workers and merchant seamen's strike, in just 20 minutes the Portugese shot to death 50 African workers and wounded more than 100 on the Pidjiguiti docks. At that time our Party decided to hold a secret conference in Bissau and it was then that we changed direction. That is, we began to mobilise the countryside, and we decided to prepare ourselves actively for armed struggle against the Portugese colonialist forces.

Later we decided that the Party's underground organisation would continue in the cities. The same leaders are still active in the urban centres, among them the present Party President, who, after 18 months of underground work in Bissau, was arrested by the Portugese authorities and is still under house arrest. We decided that the popular masses in the cities should not organise any event that would give rise to criminal reprisals on the part of the Portugese colonialists.

Today, in Bissau, Bafata, Farim, etc., our country's main urban centres, we have an underground Party organisation, but we still have not gone over to any kind of direct action against the Portugese colonialists in the cities.

It is necessary to explain that our country is a purely commercial colony and not a colony of settlers; therefore, the Portugese civilians themselves, the *colonos*, have no great interest in establishing themselves on our lands. A few are government employees, and others are simply businessmen. From

the beginning they took a somewhat vacillating, if not indifferent position on our struggle and many of them wish to return to Portugal. Therefore, we have no reason to take action, from the standpoint of terrorism, against the Portugese civilians themselves on our lands. For that reason, our urban action should be aimed at the Portugese military infrastructure and military forces. We are preparing ourselves for this, and we expect that if the Portugese fail to recognise our right to self-determination and independence after four years of armed struggle we will be forced to attack in the cities, also.

And we will do it, since we know that the Portugese are determined to continue their criminal acts against our peaceful forces in the liberated areas. Thus far, we have not carried out any action in the cities but we are determined to do so insofar as it constitutes an advance in the struggle as well as reprisals for the savage acts committed by the Portugese against our population in the liberated areas.

As for Cape Verde, we consider that the fight there is of prime importance for the progress of our struggle not only in Guinea but in all the Portugese colonies, and we can guarantee that our party is getting ready to unleash armed struggle in the Cape Verde Islands. During the past few years many political advances have been made in the Cape Verde Islands. The Party leadership functions properly. We have

¹ Amilcar Cabral was born in Cape Verde and had the rare opportunity of obtaining a college education in Portugal. As well as studying agronomy he became a militant revolutionary, and leader of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC)

As an agricultural engineer Amilcar Cabral covered vast areas of his country, and found the way to speak to the people, mobilise them and prepare them for combat. That is how the basis for the first guerrillas were prepared, that started to operate in 1961-62, with the aim of unleashing in 1963 armed struggle on a national scale against Portugese colonialism.

Since then the first armed groups have become powerful units, and two thirds of the country is today under PAIGC control.

excellent communication with the Cape Verde Islands and, as I said before, we are ready to begin armed struggle; the decision depends simply on the Party leadership, which must consider the favourable factors as well as the unfavourable ones for beginning total armed struggle there.

What is the strategic aim of the armed struggle? Are there any possibilities of negotiating with Portuguese colonialism?

The strategic aim of our armed struggle of national liberation is, obviously, to completely free our country from the Portuguese colonial yoke. It is, after all, the strategic aim of all the national liberation movements, which, forced by circumstances take up arms to fight against repression and the colonial presence. In our struggle, we set down our principles after having become thoroughly acquainted with our country's conditions. For instance, we decided that we should begin the struggle within the country and that we should never struggle from the outside for which reason we never had armed forces outside our own land. And for the same reason, in 1963, we started the armed struggle in the centre of the country both in the south and in the north. This means that, contrary to what has been done by the peoples in Africa or other places who are fighting for national independence, we adopted a strategy that we might call centrifugal; we started in the centre and moved towards the periphery of our land. This came as the first big surprise to the Portuguese who had stationed their troops on the Guinea and Senegal borders on the supposition that we were going to invade our own country.

But we mobilised our people secretly in the cities and in the countryside. We prepared our own cadres, we armed those few that we could with both traditional and modern weapons and we initiated our action from the centre of our country.

Today, the struggle is spreading to all parts of the country, in Boé and Gabu and in the south; in the north, in San Domingos, in the Farim zone; in the west, near the sea, in the Mandjakos region, and we hope to be fighting within a short time on the island of Bissau, as well. Moreover, as you were able to see for yourselves in the southern part of the country, and other newsmen and film-makers have seen in the north and east, we have liberated a large part of our national territory, which forms part of the framework of our strategy.

As to the possibilities for negotiations, we can say that our struggle seeks a political objective: we are not making war because we are warlike or because we like war. We are not making war to conquer Portugal. We are fighting because we have to in order to win back our human rights, our rights as a nation as an African people that wants its independence.

But the objectives of our war are political: the total liberation of our people of Guinea and Cape Verde and the winning of national independence and sovereignty, both at home and on the international plane.

For this reason it is of no importance when—today, tomorrow or whenever—the Portuguese colonialists, forced by our armed forces, by the heroic struggle of our people, recognise that the time has come to sit down to discuss the situation with us; it does not matter when—today, tomorrow or whenever—we are willing to enter into discussions. Therefore, the possibilities for negotiating, since the UNO was unable to get Portugal to negotiate, depend fundamentally on the Portuguese themselves. We are also convinced that such possibilities depend on what we ourselves are able to do within the framework of our armed struggle. That is our position in regard to the possibilities of negotiating with the Portuguese, in the sure knowledge that, given what we have done, the sacrifice of our people during this difficult but victorious struggle, given the fact that Africa is marching towards total independence our position today is this: to negotiate with the Portuguese whenever they want, whenever they are ready, but to negotiate for the total and unconditional independence of our people.

That does not mean that we are not interested as a politically aware people and in spite of the crimes committed by the Portuguese in our land, in establishing with Portugal itself the most excellent relations of collaboration and co-operation on the basis of equality on the basis of absolute reciprocity of advantage, but likewise on the basis of the highest regard for our sovereignty.

Could you tell us something about the tactical principles followed by the PAIGC guerrilla army?

At present, to carry out the national liberation armed struggle it is not necessary to invent much along general lines. Already a wealth of experience has been gained in the national liberation armed struggle throughout the world. The Chinese people fought. The Vietnamese people have been fighting for more than 25 years. The Cuban people fought heroically and defeated the reactionaries and the imperialists on their island, which is today a stronghold of progress. Other peoples have struggled and have made known to the world their experience in the struggle.

You know very well that Che Guevara, the great Che Guevara for us, wrote a book on the guerrilla struggle. This book, for example, like other documents on the guerrilla struggle in other countries, including Europe, where there was also guerrilla struggle during the last World War, served as a basis of general experience for our own struggle.

But nobody is committing the error, in general, of

blindly applying the experience of others to his own country. To determine the tactic for the struggle in our country we had to take into account the geographical, historical, economic and social conditions of our own land, both in Guinea and Cape Verde.

It was by basing ourselves on the concrete knowledge of the real situation in our country that we set down the tactical and strategic principles of our guerrilla struggle.

We can say that our country is very different from other countries. In the first place, it is quite a small country, about 36,000 km. in Guinea and 4,000 km. in Cape Verde. While Guinea is on the African continent, Cape Verde is in the middle of the sea, like an archipelago. We took all of this into consideration, but, in addition, Guinea is a flat country. It has no mountains and everyone knows that in general the guerrilla force uses the mountains as a starting point for the armed struggle. We had to convert our people themselves into the mountain needed for the fight in our country, and we had to take full advantage of the jungles and swamps of our country to create difficult conditions for the enemy in his confrontation with the victorious advance of our armed struggle.

As for other tactics, we follow the fundamental principle of armed struggle or, if you prefer, colonial war: the enemy, in order to control a given zone is forced to disperse his forces; he thus becomes weakened, and we can defeat him. In order to be able to defend himself from us he needs to concentrate his forces, and when he concentrates his forces he allows us to occupy the areas that are left empty and work on them politically to prevent the enemy from returning.

This is sure to happen, because our people are mobilised. They are aware of what they are doing. Also, the liberated regions of the country where we are developing a new society are a constant propaganda for the liberation of other parts of our country.

What are the principal tactical and strategic anti-guerrilla principles used by the Portugese army?

If we had not had to invent a great deal in the course of our struggle, the Portugese have invented even less. The only thing that the Portugese do in our land is to follow the tactics and strategies used by the US and other imperialists in their wars against the people who wish to free themselves of their domination. The Portugese first attempted to work politically after having experimented with the art of repression, armed repression, police repression, murder, massacres, etc. All of that has not stopped the struggle. Then they tried to work politically. They exploited tribal contradictions. They even exploited racism on the basis of lighter and darker people. They exploited the question of the civilised and the

uncivilised etc., as well as the privileged position of the traditional chiefs. That did not lead to the desired results. The Portugese then unleashed a colonial war, and in that colonial war they used the strategy and tactics that are common to all imperialists who fight against the peoples.

Against us, they used the most modern weapons given them by their US, German, Belgian, Italian, French, etc. allies. They used every kind of bomb save the nuclear ones. In particular, they used napalm bombs against us at the beginning of the war. They also used armoured cars. They used B-26, T-6, and P-2V planes and fighter jets—Fiat 82s, Fiat 91s, and Sabres supplied by Canada through Federal Germany, etc. None of it worked. Lately they have been using armed helicopters for combined operations with the Navy and Infantry. We are sure that they will not work either.

The Portugese find themselves in the position which you have already been able to observe, since you came to our country in a way that, unfortunately, no Portugese has done since you came as journalists. They are closed up in their barracks; once in a while they try to make sallies to carry out criminal actions against our people. They do battle against our forces, and almost every day they bomb our villages and try to burn the crops. They are trying to terrorise our people.

We are determined to resist and the tactics and strategies of Portugese colonialism—which are the same as those imperialism uses for instance, in Vietnam—just as they do not work in Vietnam, will not work in our country, either. . . .

You mentioned Che Guevara's Book "Guerrilla Warfare". In this book Guevara divided the guerrilla struggle into three phases. According to this what phase do you think the struggle in so-called Portugese Guinea is in?

In general, we have certain reservations about the systematisation of phenomena. In reality, the phenomena always develop in practice according to the established schemes. We intensely admire the scheme established by Che Guevara essentially on the basis of the struggle of the Cuban people and other experiences and we are convinced that a profound analysis of that scheme can have a certainty that, in fact, the scheme is absolutely adaptable to our conditions.

Within this framework, we believe that, in the present phase of our struggle, we are already in the stage of mobile warfare. This is why we have been reorganising our forces, creating units more powerful than those of the regular army, and surrounding the Portugese forces, thus diminishing the importance of the guerrilla positions in order to advance against enemy positions. But today an essential characteristic

of our struggle is the systematic attacking of Portuguese fortified camps and fortress warfare. And we hope that the time is not far off when, advancing with this mobile warfare, we will at the same time have the conditions for launching a general offensive to end the Portuguese domination in our land.

Can you tell us something about the development of guerrilla communications and propaganda work?

We have many difficulties in our propaganda work. First of all, thus far we do not have a radio station—which could play a role at least as important as or more important than many guns. Our Party is actively working on getting a station so as to be able to speak daily (or, if not every day, at least several times a week) to our forces, to our people and even to the enemy. Meanwhile we are convinced that friendly peoples who do have stations—such as the Republic of Guinea, Senegal, Cuba and others—will also be able to work in this area because their broadcasts are heard in our country. They will be able to help us with broadcasts in favour of our struggle. To do so we need not issue many reports because all are familiar with the justice and the *raison d'être* of our struggle.

Moreover, once in a while we communicate the results of our armed struggle. We cannot put out these communiqués with as much frequency because communications are difficult between the different fronts of struggle and the centre that co-ordinates these communications (we do not as yet have an effective radio communication) and for that reason our communiqués at times come out with some delay. But that does not mean in the least that the struggle is not progressing in any sector. On the contrary, what happens is that our communiqués in general do not reflect the great intensity of the struggle the frequency of the combats and often the victories we achieve against the enemy.

In relation to communications, our struggle has very special characteristics: we cannot fight riding in jeeps or trucks; we are the first to know that our land does not have good roads, as we ourselves have cut down the few existing bridges, we have destroyed many sections of highway, and our people felled trees to block the highways. In fact, the enemy today can travel on almost no highway in our country. Therefore, we do not have trucks, jeeps etc. to occupy highways to travel along the highways that we ourselves mine.

As you saw, we must move on foot within our territory. This makes communications extremely difficult.

As I said we are working actively to improve our radio communications in such a way as to not only give daily reports on the progress of the struggle on all fronts, to make our armed struggle progress.

Can you tell us something about the difficulties met during the development of the struggle with relation to tribal and linguistic problems difficulties, with feudal chieftains in Guinea-Bissau?

The difficulties of our struggle were mainly those inherent in our situation as an underdeveloped—practically nondeveloped—people whose history was held back by colonialist and imperialist domination. A people that started with nothing, a people that had to begin the struggle almost naked, a people with a 99 per cent illiteracy rate—you have already seen the effort that we have to make now to teach our people to read and write, to create schools—a people that had only 14 university trained men, this people was surely going to have difficulties in carrying out its armed struggle.

You know that this was the situation with Africa in general, but it was very pronounced in our country. Our people were not only underfed but also the victims of many diseases because the Portuguese never concerned themselves with decent public health in our land. All this caused difficulties at the beginning of the struggle.

Another difficulty is the following: our own African culture, which corresponds to the economic structure we still have, made certain aspects of the struggle difficult. These are the factors that those who judge the struggle from the outside do not take into consideration but that we had to consider because it is one thing to struggle in surroundings where everyone knows what rain, high tide, lightning storms, typhoons and tornadoes are, and another to fight where natural phenomena can be interpreted as a product of the will of the spirits.

That is very important for a struggle such as ours. Another difficulty is as follows: our people fought as one, opposing their traditional weapons against colonial domination at the time of the colonial conquest. But today we must wage a modern war. A guerrilla war, but a modern one, with modern tactics. That also creates difficulties for us: it is necessary to create cadres, prepare the combatants properly. Before, we had to prepare them during the struggle itself because we did not have time to build schools. Only today do we have schools for combatants as you know.

All of this created difficulties for us—that is, in training for the armed struggle. Whilst the Portuguese officers who led the Portuguese fight have seven years of training in military academies, in addition to the other basic courses they receive, we have to bring to the struggle young people from the cities or the countryside, some of them without any education, who have to gain in the struggle itself the necessary experience to confront the Portuguese officers. Suffice it to say that the Portuguese government had to change its General Staff in our country five times and some

of the chiefs of staff were even punished. This shows that after all it is not necessary to go to a military academy to fight in one's country to win a people's freedom.

As for tribal questions, our opinion on this is quite different from that of others. We believe that when the colonialists arrived in Africa the tribal structure was already in a state of disintegration due to the evolution of the economy and historical events on the African scene. Today it cannot be said that Africa is tribal. Africa still has remnants of tribalism, in particular as far as the mentality of the people is concerned, but not in the economic structure itself. Moreover, if colonialism, through its action, did anything positive at all, it was precisely to destroy a large part of the existing remnants of tribalism in certain parts of our country.

Therefore, we have had no great difficulties as far as tribalism is concerned. We did have trouble in creating in our people a national awareness, and it is the struggle itself that is cementing that national awareness. But all the people in general, from whatever ethnic group, have been easily led to accept the idea that we are a people, a nation that must struggle to end Portuguese domination, because we do not fall back on clichés or merely harp on the struggle against imperialism and colonialism in theoretical terms, but rather we point out concrete things. It is a struggle for schools, for hospitals, so that children won't suffer. That is our struggle. Another goal of the struggle is to present ourselves before the world as a worthy people with a personality of our own. This is the motivating force of our people. We also know that the vestiges of tribalism in our land have been eliminated through the armed struggle we are waging. Moreover we want to stress that in general the African people both in our land and in the Congo, where terrible things took place from the tribal point of view, are not tribalist. Among the people of Africa the tendency is to understand one another as much as possible. Only political opportunists are tribalists: individuals who even attended European universities: who frequented the cafés of Brussels, Paris, Lisbon and other capitals, who are completely removed from the problems of their own people—they may be called tribal, these individuals who at times even look down on their own peoples but who out of political ambition take advantage of attitudes still existing in the minds of our people to try to achieve their opportunist aims, their political goals, to try to quench their thirst for power and political domination.

In regard to our land, we want to add that the armed struggle is not only wiping out the remnants of tribal ideas that might still exist but that it is also profoundly transforming our people.

You must have had the opportunity to see how, in spite of the fact that we still live in poverty, in spite

of the fact that we still do not have enough clothing and our diet lacks vitamins, fresh foods and even meat and other protein foods—all of this a part of the colonial heritage and our state of underdevelopment—a great transformation is going on in many places. And you must have found the new man. The new man who is emerging in our land; the new woman who is emerging in our land. And, if you had the opportunity to speak to the children, you would see that even our school-children are already politically and patriotically aware and desire the struggle and independence of our country. An awareness of mutual understanding, of national unity and unity on the African continent.

We want to emphasise in particular that the women of our country are winning an independence for which so many have fought unsuccessfully. You saw, surely, how there were women in charge of the committees in the tabankas (villages) and the zones and even of interregional committees. These women are conscious of their worth and their role within our Party and I can say that there are women at all levels in our Party.

Could you tell us briefly how the political and military leadership of the struggle is carried out?

The political and military leadership of the struggle is one: the political leadership. In our struggle we have avoided the creation of anything military. We are political people and our party, a political organisation, leads the struggle in the civilian, political, administrative, technical and therefore also military spheres. Our fighters are defined as armed activists. It is the Political Bureau of the Party that directs the armed struggle and the life of both the liberated and unliberated regions where we have our activists. Within the Political Bureau is a War Council composed of members of the former who direct the armed struggle. The War Council is an instrument of the Political Bureau of the leadership of the armed struggle.

Each front has its command. On the sector level there is a sector command, and each unit of our regular army has also its command. That is the structure of our armed struggle and it is true that the guerrillas are installed in bases and that each base

CORRECTION

We apologise for a misprint in the first paragraph of the article on "Workers' Control" by Tony Topham and Ken Coates which was printed in the January 1969 issue of Marxism Today (p. 24). The authors wrote of "alien pressures" such as "rationalisation schemes", but this was wrongly printed as "nationalisation schemes".

has a base chief and a political commissar. In relation to organisation proper, a Party Congress is generally held every two years but within the framework of the struggle it is held whenever it is possible. The Party has a Central Committee and a Political Bureau which directly leads the local bodies—that is, the northern and southern inter-regional committees and the sector and tabanka committees. That is our structure.

In the cities and urban centres, the Party organisation remains underground, in general under the leadership of a very small number of individuals.

Since outside aid is so important to the national liberation struggle and particularly to that of Guinea-Bissau, we would like to know which countries are giving aid to your guerrilla struggle.

A basic principle of our struggle is our counting on our own forces, our own sacrifices, our own efforts; but, considering the characteristic underdevelopment of our people, of our land, the economic backwardness of our land, it is very difficult for us to produce weapons. Taking into account these circumstances, taking into account the fact that in our country 99 per cent of the people are illiterate, which makes the immediate existence of cadres difficult; and also taking into account that the enemy which has no scruples is aided by its NATO allies, in particular the USA, Federal Republic of Germany, and some other countries, and above all by its South African racist allies, taking into account all of this and also the essential characteristic of our time which is the general struggle of the peoples against imperialism and the existence of a socialist camp which is the greatest bulwark against imperialism, we accept and request aid from all the peoples that can give it to us. We do not ask for aid in manpower: there are enough of us to fight and defeat colonialism in our country. We ask for aid in weapons, in articles of prime necessity to supply our liberated areas, in medicines to heal our wounded and cure our sick and to provide medical care to the population of the liberated regions. We ask for any and all aid that any people can offer us. We also ask different countries for aid in preparing our cadres. Our aid ethics are as follows: we never ask for the aid we need. We expect that each will conscientiously give what help he can to our people in our struggle for national liberation. As part of this aid we point above all to that of Africa. Through the OAU, Africa has granted us some aid. We consider that this aid, thus far, is not sufficient to meet our needs, to provide for the development of our struggle, which is today a real war against an enemy that possesses powerful weapons to use against us and which receives aid from its allies. For example, Federal Germany even sends aviation technicians to

train the Portugese in Bissau, and, in addition it receives Portugese wounded for treatment in Germany to prevent the Portugese people from seeing how many we have wounded in our country.

Our opinion is that aid from Africa is good, but insufficient. Therefore, we hope that the African peoples, the African states through the OAU, can increase their aid, both financial and material.

And on the financial plane, we want to point out that today our expenses are enormous. In gasoline alone, we use almost 40,000 litres to supply the fighting fronts. All this involves large expenditures, and thus far we have not received the financial aid necessary to cover the costs of the war, while Portugal, in addition to its state budget, receives fabulous aid in dollars, marks and pounds from its allies.

We want to add that within the framework of Africa, there are some countries that aid us bilaterally. For example, we receive the greatest support from the Republic of Guinea, the greatest facilities for the development of our struggle. Algeria continues to help; the UAR also. At the beginning of the struggle Morocco helped, and we don't understand why it no longer gives us the help it gave us at the time.

Other African countries have aided us. For example, Tanzania, which aids the people of Mozambique, and the Congo (Brazzaville) which aids the people of Angola, also aids us.

We want to mention the special aid given to us by the peoples of the socialist countries. We believe that this aid is a historical obligation, because we consider that our struggle also constitutes a defence of the socialist countries. And we want to say particularly that the Soviet Union, first of all, and China, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and other socialist countries continue to aid us, which we consider very useful for the development of our armed struggle. We also want to lay special emphasis on the untiring effort and sacrifices that we deeply appreciate, that the people of Cuba a small country without great resources, one that is struggling against the blockade by the US and other imperialists—are making to give effective aid to our struggle. For us, this is a constant source of encouragement, and it also contributes to cementing more and more solidarity between our Party and the Cuban party, between our people and the Cuban people, a people that we consider African. And it is enough to see the historical, political and blood ties that unite us to be able to say this. Therefore, we are very happy with the aid that the Cuban people give us, and we are sure that they will continue increasing their aid to our heroic national liberation struggle in spite of all difficulties.