



**SOME ASPECTS
OF THE
LIVING THOUGHT
OF AMILCAR CABRAL**

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A synopsis of the life, work and actions of one of the most brilliant leaders of the African continent, seen through his still vital revolutionary thought.

TIME and social practice have shown the value of Amílcar Cabral's memorable example. Twelve years after his assassination in Conakry, his political thought is still very much alive and relevant. The correctness of his ideas has been confirmed by the events which he foresaw and helped bring about.

Amílcar was a thinker, in the fullest sense of the term; a revolutionary theoretician. Everyone who has participated in or observed the complex political and social reality of the Third World concurs in the belief that the late secretary-general of the PAIGC was one of the most clear-minded African leaders, who possessed an exceptional analytical ability to extract the truth from confusing and dissimilar socio-political factors.

One of the most apt descriptions of Amílcar Cabral was made by Vasco Cabral, a member of the PAIGC's Executive Committee of the Struggle, who defined the theoretical role Amílcar played in the preparatory stage and in the course of the liberation war. He spoke with the authority that comes from having participated in the struggle to liberate Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, and from his intimate knowledge of the founder of the Guinean nationality.

Vasco said: "Amílcar Cabral's theoretical contribution is very rich and varied. It can be seen for itself through revolutionary practise. His texts . . . , filled with meaning, and based on the Party principles, deal with the problems that fill the lives

of freedom fighters. From *Facts about the Portuguese African Colonies*, published in London in 1960, to *A Brief Analysis of Social Structure in Guinea*, in 1964, to his historic speech at the first Tricontinental Conference held in Havana, Cuba in 1966, where he spoke of the *Bases and Objectives of National Liberation and Social Structure*; in his *National Liberation and Culture* speech in 1970, to his report at a United Nations meeting of specialists on race, identity and dignity in 1972, Amílcar Cabral was always distinguished as one of today's most illustrious theoreticians in matters of national liberation struggles on the three continents.

"The publication of *General Rules* in 1965, showed Amílcar Cabral's extraordinary ability to combine at a high theoretical level an outstandingly scientific, dynamic and realistic spirit."

Thought and action — intellectual and combative — were inseparable in this "simple African man" who wanted, as Amílcar himself said in one of the poetic phrases that dot all of his written and spoken works "to do my duty in my own country in the context of our time". If his philosophy has remained so relevant today it is precisely because the scientific truths he suggested were tried out in practise. Their author was immersed in the marshy lands of his small Guinean homeland, involved in the attempt to extricate it from the violence of Portuguese colonialism. He was in contact with all the problems and tendencies of the liberation struggle throughout Africa and all over the world.

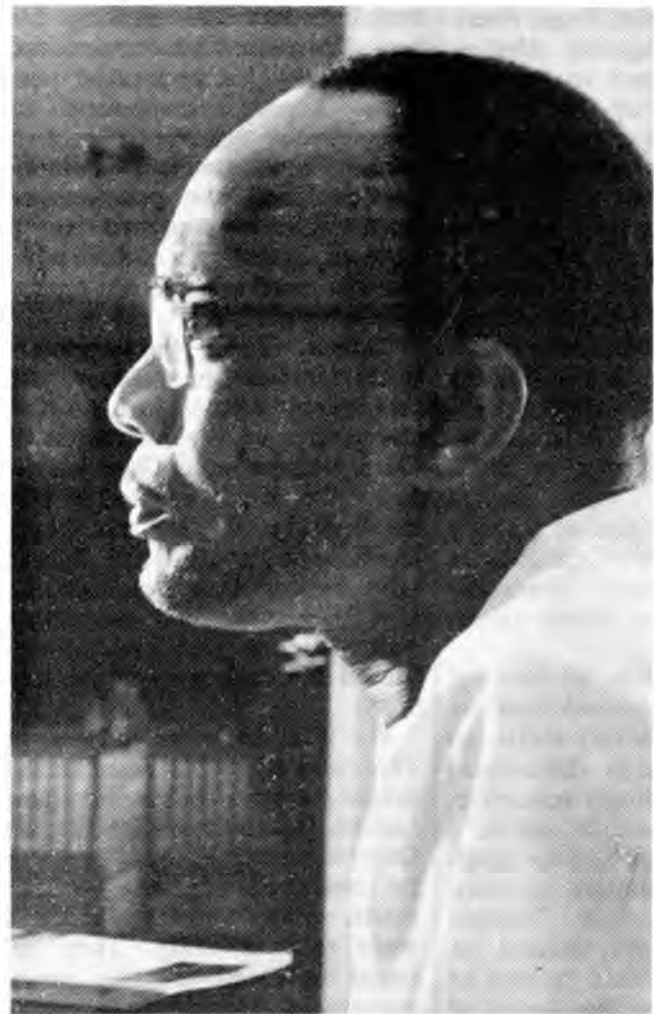
A look at his brief life — briefer than his people and the world's revolutionary movement wanted and needed — shows him to be alert and intelligent, able to collectively take advantage of the opportunity of being one of the 14 Guineans whom the colonialists sent to Lisbon for technical

training. Someone lacking his moral fiber and his deep-rooted bonds with his oppressed people — a people condemned to insuperable ignorance and a miserable existence — would have utilized the privilege of being able to study to enrich himself, to obtain a comfortable life by working as an agronomical engineer.

Cabral chose the opposite path. He put the science and technology learned in Lisbon at the service of the liberation of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. From his first years as a student one could see the tenacious and optimistic fighter who would never halt until he had achieved his country's independence and had consolidated his compatriots' nationality.

He was born in Bafata, in 1924, and in 1945 arrived in the serene, imperturbable and silent Lisbon (as the novelist Eça de Queirós described it). For years he searched for his African roots. Many young Africans were seeking unity. They became involved in the peace movement, which was newly reborn after the Hitlerian-fascist aggression and already threatened by the "Cold War" that international imperialism was then provoking, and which Winston Churchill had inaugurated with his irrational, anti-Soviet speech in Fulton, Missouri (USA) in 1946. Young students from all over Africa were able to revive African House. They initiated various cultural activities and through them began to awaken African consciousness and formulate ideas to help define the struggle against colonialism.

There was to be no rest for Amílcar Cabral. In Cape Verde, during his vacation in 1949, he used the radio to broadcast an influential and mobilizing cultural program which was promptly prohibited by the colonial despots. In 1951 he helped build an institution which had notable influence in the "re-Africanization of con-



sciousness": the Center for African Studies.

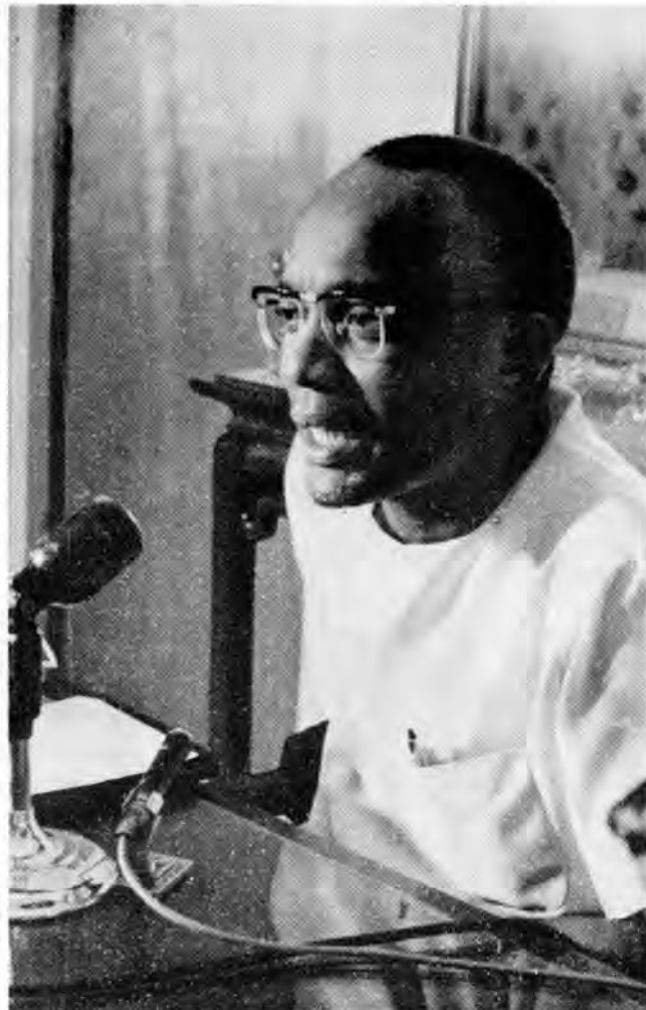
When he graduated he used his position in the Lisbon Agronomical Station not only to investigate soil characteristics or methods of cultivation: he observed, intently and analytically, the social reality of the Portuguese people, whose illiteracy rate at that time was 46 %, and whom he always separated from the Portuguese oppressors. He studied the class structures and the spheres of power, and he came to know in detail the means of colonial exploitation. This also helped prepare him for the future head-on battle for liberation. And he was to learn where best to strike at the metropolis, which was able to exercise colonial domination despite being economically underdeveloped itself, because this served the interests of imperialist pow-

ers such as England. Portugal was no more than an intermediary of the colonial system. Incapable of instituting a perfected model of neocolonial domination because of its economic weakness, Portugal would not be able to resist a prolonged war in its insurgent overseas territories.

When Amílcar Cabral returned to Guinea Bissau he continued applying his penetrating analysis to the situations engendered by centuries of colonialism. He used his technical knowledge to do an agricultural study of his country. He was expelled for political and cultural prosyletizing, and was allowed to return home only once a year. He established ties with the Angolan nationalist movement. On September 19, 1956 Amílcar founded the African Party for the Independence of Guinea Bissau and Cape

Verde (PAIGC), together with five of his old comrades.

Cabral's revolutionary theory and practise reached maturity with the creation of the Party. He knew that the fight for the liberation of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde — along with that of other African countries — was a political struggle. It would adopt various forms until concluding in revolutionary violence, but its actions — whether in the form of discussion or war — would always be political, coherent, premeditated acts guided by a party which was ideologically and programmatically homogeneous, tightly bound to the popular masses. A party whose supreme objectives were the consolidation of national consciousness and the expulsion of Portuguese colonialism. In this way Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde would be masters of their own na-



tional personality and could begin to unfold their "own history". The clarity of Amílcar's thinking, evident in all his anti-colonialist theory, could be typified in his comment that "the basis of national freedom, no matter what formulas might be adopted under international law, resides in every people's inalienable right to be the makers of their own history; the objective of national liberation is the reconquest of this right usurped by imperialism".

The moment came at last to use the only effective means for reconquering these "usurped rights": armed struggle. August 3, 1961 marked the beginning of the open battle against the colonialist military forces. Until that date, the PAIGC had been preparing the subjective conditions, which Amílcar had begun to lay the foundations for ever since his privileged

and rebellious student days when, with his wide brow, exploring gaze, vigorous character and passionate African-ness, it was already clear he would become a prominent figure. The PAIGC was from then on waging guerrilla warfare while at the same time continuing its ideological work among the Guinean and Cape Verdean masses — whose level of awareness was low, because they had been isolated by colonial servitude. Along with gathering the most efficient weapons went teaching, the indoctrination of increasingly complex ideas.

Cabral considered revolutionary violence to be an essential instrument. Given the circumstances of his land: subjugated by thousands of Portuguese soldiers equipped with the genocidal weapons supplied by NATO, and the socio-political

conjuncture in Portugal, where first Cayetano and then Salazar's feudal fascism reigned, the only possible means of carrying on a dialogue with the oppressors and the only way to regain their homeland was by force of arms. Little by little the Guineans and Cape Verdeans took up arms, and shortly before the treacherous assassination of Amílcar — on Saturday night, January 20, 1973 — they had liberated two thirds of the territory. Having done so, they announced to the world — with Amílcar himself as spokesman — that Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde were sovereign nations with a part of their land occupied by foreign troops.

And they really could speak of "sovereign nations" in the strict sense of the term. The PAIGC's military operations and political education were



Amílcar Cabral expressed his ideas with extraordinary clarity, whether talking to a group of guerrilla fighters or giving a speech in a conference hall.

always accompanied by civic actions. Each piece of land recovered was space for building a school, a hospital, for the regulating functions of revolutionary law and government. The Party strategy — made so fruitful by Amílcar's clear-sightedness — was to see that, as freedom was won, the material and juridical bases for enjoying it would be established.

The resort to revolutionary violence does not mean a morbid, anarchic attachment to it. No one repudiates violence more than the revolutionary. But revolutions — acts of mass justice — are like childbirth. To give birth without pain is just a wish, a chimera which doctors have tried to bring about without total success. Revolutionary violence is neces-

sary as Cuba's national hero, José Martí — the most radical and intelligent revolutionary of the 19th century Latin America — explained. And it is necessary in order to oppose the violence with which the oppressor defends his plundered possessions.

Cabral enunciated some basic principles concerning revolutionary violence as the only recourse for recovering "complete sovereignty on the national and international level" only a few days before he was shot to death. They are the fragment of his political testament: "In commemorating a new year of life and struggle, which marks the tenth year in the battle for our African people's independence, I should remind everyone: militants, combatants, and leaders of our Party, that

this is a time for actions, not words. Action that grows stronger and more effective every day ... in order to inflict ever greater defeats on the Portuguese colonialists and destroy any criminal and vain illusions they may have of reconquering our country. Action that is every day better developed and organized on the Cape Verde islands, to move into a new stage of struggle in accord with our people's wishes and the imperative of total liberation for our homeland."

Further on, he stated, "We can't forget for a single minute that we are at war and that the main enemy of our people and of Africa — the Portuguese colonialists — still nourish the criminal intention and vain hope of destroying our Party, wiping out our struggle and

recolonizing our people, by means of the most perfidious maneuvers and most barbarous acts The history of colonial years, like our experience of ten years of struggle, has shown us that the colonialist aggressors, especially the Portuguese, understand only one language: that of force. They take into account only one reality: the number of bodies.

"In a word, the time has come to destroy, by means of an efficient and solid clandestine organization, the human and material resources of the Portuguese colonialists in the urban centers of our country. We are confronting a barbarous enemy that hasn't the slightest scruples in carrying out its criminal actions, that resorts to all means to try to destroy us wherever we may be."

And he concluded: "For this reason, and because we are fighting in our country for our people's sacred rights of independence, peace and true progress, we must at this decisive moment strike destructive blows at the racist, colonialist enemy and their agents and their resources, wherever they are found."

Beyond national liberation

But Amílcar Cabral was not seeking, through the necessary war of national liberation, just what has been ambiguously (in the terms of bourgeois sociology) been called independence. He was seeking independence, yes; his struggle was aimed in that direction. But he was seeking an effective independence, an independence that would mean the end of foreign domination and would exclude new forms of domination through neocolonial mechanisms in the relations between nations. It would eliminate, furthermore, a domestic situation in which one ruling class would reign over other exploited classes. Cabral foresaw a kind of inde-

pendence different from that inherited from the 19th century independence struggles which, except for the revolutionary struggle led by Martí en Cuba — which was later truncated by US imperialism by means of military intervention — sought liberation from the metropolis so the creole ruling class could free itself of foreign shackles in order to more freely and successfully develop itself at the cost of the oppressed classes. He pointed this out with comparative spirit; it would be puerile to condemn an emancipating step that changed the national physiognomy of the Latin American nations. That was as far as things could go 50 years ago.

Revolutionary practise, knowledge of history, as well as contemporary experience, led Cabral to realize that the nature of the independence struggle includes at least two complementary phases. Without the second one, the first would only be a fiction. The independence today means the rupture of the socio-economic framework and classist hierarchies. He expressed this with ideological precision in two paragraphs: "Freedom from foreign domination isn't our people's only desire. They have learned from experience, and under colonial oppression, that man's exploitation of man is the major obstacle to a people's development and progress, beyond national liberation.

"In the case of neocolonialism, where the working class and their allies fight simultaneously against the imperialist bourgeoisie and the native ruling class, the problem can't be resolved by nationalist means. It demands the destruction of the capitalist structure implanted in the country by imperialism, and justly postulates a socialist solution."

In this task of politicizing the Guinean and Cape Verdean masses, Amílcar constantly revealed and denounced the

culpability of imperialism. Little by little he was defining this 20th century phenomenon, which devours peoples and reaches that do not belong to it, which instigates wars, and destroys the environment in its inhuman financial excesses in pursuit of profit. Cabral told how he had to clarify for his peasant comrades the essence of imperialism and its subtle economic suction mechanisms and political tyranny. I've already mentioned his clarity of expression, which is a reflection of his clearness of thought. He who thinks clearly speaks clearly. And Amílcar expressed all the originality of his thought — based on the classics of socialist theory — with equal clarity in an informal circle of guerrilla fighters or a salon in Paris, Rome or Helsinki.

You can find among his writings — which were always tied to the struggle — the following definitions of imperialism: "In the Middle Ages a new system of production and distribution appeared, that was called capitalism. Capitalism arose in some countries with all the contradictions inherent in the development of historical phenomena, and in that development reached a new stage, which was called imperialism. Imperialism is the result of the gigantic concentration of finance capital in capitalist countries through the creation of monopolies; first of all, monopolies of capitalist companies. This domination by the monopolies . . . is primarily an economic phenomenon, with a very characteristic form. Later, implications of a political, social, cultural and moral character are added.

"One must, then, on the one hand distinguish the economic facts of these implications and, on the other, characterize imperialism's relation to the rest of the world."

After describing it theoretically — and naming the United States as the head of that

system — Amílcar went on to specify that imperialist domination is the economic and political domination of imperialism in other countries. And he gave it its exact name: neocolonial domination. Vasco Cabral said that for Amílcar, "the principle of unity is the basis of all successes achieved by the Party in the armed struggle for national liberation. It allowed him to forge over time, little by little, a national consciousness, and to create our African nation." It is equally true that for Cabral, in the battle against imperialist subjugation all over the planet, unity is just as basic. The PAIGC's highly esteemed leader stated: "The unity and solidarity of all the world's anti-imperialist forces is an important aspect of this intimate, dynamic union be-

tween these struggles. Unity and solidarity are decisive for the overall success of the struggle against imperialism."

To be revolutionary is to be internationalist

This concept of unity we have just seen expanded beyond the geographic limits of one's native land dovetails unequivocally with internationalist orthodoxy. Cuban President Fidel Castro — inheritor of Martí's "humanity is my homeland" and Marx's "workers of the world, unite" — said that the state of being revolutionary presupposes the vocation of being internationalist. For the revolutionary — and I use the word in its most authentic form — internationalism is the elimination of all borders, the

overturning of all chauvinist plans, the end of "gazing inward". It is international brotherhood, helpful solidarity, exchange and relations based on equality, with the absolute absence of opportunistic and avaricious national interests.

Internationalism was a pillar of Cabral's political ideology. He gratefully accepted the help of many friendly countries and parties in his anti-colonialist campaign. He spoke often of this primordial aspect of revolutionary theory and struggle. Enemies of the people's liberation and progress would have liked to have seen Cabral enclosed within the narrow confines of strict nationalism. He never gave them that pleasure. "Our task is, first of all, to liberate our country. For us that is a sacred commitment!



At a work session of the Organization of African Unity (ONU).

But we are in Africa, and it is our opinion that as long as there is racism, colonialism, apartheid in South Africa, a minority of European origin ruling an African majority, Africa will not be free, and there will always be the danger that that rule will be reestablished. The task of all independent African countries is to do everything in their power to aid our brothers in South Africa or Rhodesia to carry out their struggles and free themselves.

"We are always ready to cooperate in any endeavor to help our brothers in South Africa, if we should achieve our independence before they do."

When talking about internationalism, he did not forget Vietnam: "We believe that not just the fate of Vietnam, but

that of all peoples struggling for national independence and sovereignty, is at stake in Vietnam. We feel complete solidarity with the people of Vietnam, and we intensely admire their heroic struggle against North American aggression, against the aggression by the reactionaries of South Vietnam, who are only puppets of imperialism."

Of the USSR, he commented: "Our people, like all peoples of the world, understand more and more the great importance of the October Revolution in the development of humanity. We see, and we are convinced more and more every day, that the first observable changes in our destiny, in our march toward freedom and progress, were carried out thanks to the Revolution that

was prepared, led and carried to final victory over the bourgeoisie and feudal forces by the incomparable genius of Lenin."

He went on to comment, on the centennial of Lenin's birth: "In celebrating the birth of Lenin, we believe that the best thing we can do in his honor is create and strengthen the indispensable unity for the final victory in the struggle against imperialism, to follow the example of his combativity, and faithfulness to principles, his clarity of thought and his untiring daily work."

The life and work of Amílcar Cabral — brought to an untimely end when the possibility of greater deeds and works palpitated in the full maturity of his 47 years of creative existence — confirm



Amílcar Cabral giving a speech at the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana in January 1966.



A PAIGC soldier raises the Party flag after the liberation of a piece of land.

the role of individuals in history.

A few years after his death, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde achieved independence, and today are moving forward in national unity and social progress. Other men, filled with revolutionary fervor, committed to the people's cause, continued the work that Amílcar inspired since his early student days. But it was the action, thought and words of Cabral that set in motion a people that until then were invertebrate, steeped in ignorance. He incarnated it, and he put all his intellectual and moral forces at the service of his people. He made a pledge which still makes one tremble, that still causes us to lament the death of a singular man (and also explains why Portuguese fascism decided to murder him); a man who, along with Ernesto Che Guevara, inseparable friend of the PAIGC founder — anticipated the kind of person humanity will produce in the future. "Compañeros, I pledged to myself that no one could ever turn me away from working for my people; I promised myself that I would be ready to give my life, all my energy, all my courage, all the ability I could have as a man, to the last day of my life, serving my people in Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. At the service of the cause of humanity, to make my contribution in any form possible so that people's lives all over the world would be better. This is my work. I have done all I could to achieve this, and I have done so not alone, but by discovering how to inspire men and women to work at my side. I have tried in all possible ways to transmit to them, to their minds, their hearts, their feelings, their thoughts, everything I could do as a man, all my consciousness. Only in this way, comrades, can we be true militants of our Party, fighters for the progress of our people." ●