

AFRICA:

"Neo-colonialism, Military Coups and Liberation"

BY: JACK WOODIS

It is impossible to consider the struggle of the people of Southern Africa and the Portuguese Colonies in isolation from what has happened in the rest of Africa. The policy pursued by the imperialist powers towards the independent African States is not something separate and apart from the wars the imperialists and white settlers are waging against the peoples of Southern Africa and the Portuguese Colonies, but two wings of an overall aim and strategy, notwithstanding the inter-imperialist rivalries arising from the particular aims and interests of each imperialist power.

One can only appreciate this if one takes an overall look at the developments in Africa in the past ten to fifteen years.

In the first decade after 1960 Africa made great advances in its struggle for independence and an end to direct colonial government. The struggle was conducted in various forms, by mass demonstrations and processions, by boycotts and strike actions, by peasant resistance to official agricultural schemes or to seizure of land by white settlers, by elections and the formation of political parties, by the publishing of newspapers and the issuing of manifestos. In a number of cases armed struggle was waged before independence was won, the longest and most bitter battles being those in Algeria (1954-1962) and Kenya (1952-1957), but armed conflict also ensued in the Cameroun, clashes took place in Morocco and Tunisia, there was a revolt crushed by appalling ferocity in Madagascar (now Malagasy), and in Egypt (1952) armed action by patriotic officers was necessary to overthrow the corrupt regime of Farouk, backed by imperialism.

Even in those African countries where armed struggle did not take place—and this, in fact, was true of most—struggle was nevertheless waged, and not a single African country became independent without its martyrs to the cause of anti-colonialism. Nowhere did the imperialists, as they like to claim, 'grant' independence to the people of Africa. Any retreat on the part of the imperialists was forced on them by the mass movement of the people. The winning of independence by Ghana



in 1957 and Guinea in 1958 had a great impact on the whole of Africa. The dam of colonialism was broken; in quick successions in both the former British and former French colonies independence was secured in a number of States. Congo entered the same path in 1960, only to fall a victim to new forms of domination.

But, overall, 1960 was a year of advance, 'Africa Year' as it came to be known. Soon there were to be more than thirty independent African States. That the Western powers were compelled to retreat in the face of the advancing national liberation movements, and that they recognized the need to come to terms with reality and to seek a new basis from which they could retain their economic grip and prepare for new offensives, is clear from the statements at the time by their leading spokesmen. Thus, it was on February 3, 1960, speaking in Cape Town, that the then British Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, made his famous 'wind of change' speech in which he spoke of the 'strength of African National consciousness' blowing through the continent and compelling the British Government to 'accept it as fact'. In the same way, General de Gaulle, in a speech on December 9, 1960, to French officers at Bled a year before the cease-fire agreement with the Algerian National Liberation Front' (FLN), pleaded with his officers to understand the new situation which made it impossible to hold on to the control of Algeria. 'There is', he declared, 'the whole context of emancipation which is sweeping the world from one end to another which has swept over our Black Africa, which has swept without exception over all those which once were empires, and which cannot but have considerable consequences here...'

By 1964, there were 34 independent African States, there was an Organization of African Unity with a positive Charter; and, perhaps still more significant, a group

of advanced States —the United Arab Republic, Algeria, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, the Congo (Brazzaville), Zanzibar-Tanganyika (later Tanzania)— which were beginning to cut themselves loose from the imperialist orbit and make radical changes in their economic, social, and political patterns, restricting the growth of indigenous capitalist forces and so facilitating a march towards socialism without passing through a stage of full capitalist development.

The years 1963 and 1964, had alarmed the imperialists. In August 1963, the puppet government of Fulbert Youlu was overthrown in Congo (Brazzaville) by the mass action of the people, and a new popular government came to power. In October 1963, a widespread movement of the people helped to precipitate the fall of the reactionary government of Dahomey (though the military were able to step in and take over). A similar move of the people against the Government of Gabon was thwarted when French paratroops reinstated the unseated government January 1964, an armed people's uprising overthrew the government of Zanzibar. And in October 1964, the military regime of General Abboud was overthrown.

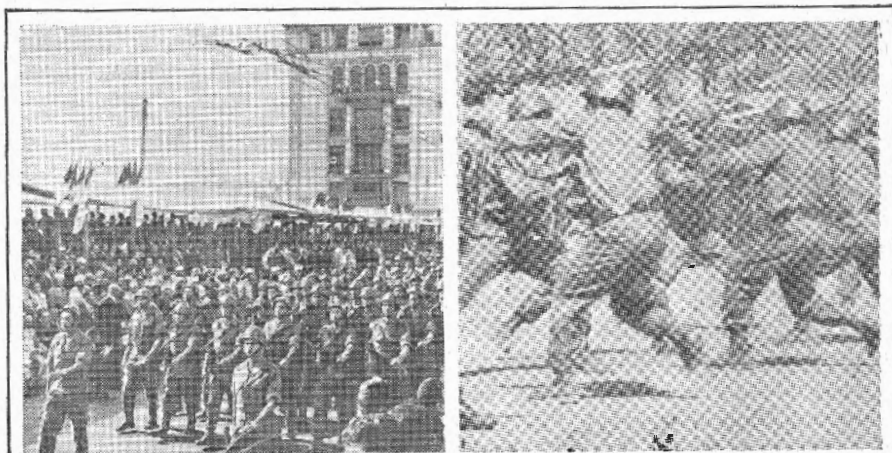
Thus, in little more than twelve months five unpopular governments had been overthrown. Only in one case, that of Gabon, which had been more in the nature of a coup from on top than a genuine wide movement of the people had the imperialists been able to intervene openly to restore the status quo.

But that was not all. There had been a significant general strike in Nigeria, embracing nearly a million workers, followed a few months later by a political crisis in connection with the general elections. The Liberation Army in Guinea Bissau, led by Amilcar Cabral and the PAIGC, had won important gains, liberating nearly two-fifths of the territory and winning international acclaim. In Angola, the MPLA had regrouped its forces and launched a new offensive. Armed struggle was openly begun by the national liberation movement, FRELIMO, in Mozambique in September 1964; and a week later the Sawaba Party announced that armed struggle was taking place against the Government of Niger. Meanwhile, guerrilla war was spreading in Congo (Kinshasa).

It was to halt these historic advances that the imperialists began their counter-offensive in Africa. Central to their intrigues was the parachute attack on Stanleyville in the Congo, in November 1964. On February 18, 1965, the *Tribune des Nations* revealed the intentions of the imperialists. The landing of the paratroops in Stanleyville, it wrote, was only part of NATO's strategic plan in Africa. The aim was a much vaster intervention, which would transcend the frontiers of the Congo. The months that followed certainly confirmed such intentions. There was assassinations of progressive leaders, plots to overthrow popular governments, military action to intimidate governments, attempts to confuse and divide the people by beating the drum of anti-communism, and open drives in particular countries against the most consistently anti-imperialist and forward-looking leaders.

On January 15, Pierre Ngendandumwe, Premier of Burundi, was assassinated and the assassin turned out to be a former employee of the U.S. Embassy in that State.

On February 1965, three national leaders of Congo (Brazzaville) were kidnaped and later found murdered, their corpses shockingly mutilated. On February 24,



1965, one of Kenya's outstanding national leaders, Pio Pinto, was assassinated by gunmen outside his house. It is rumoured that the names of other progressive leaders in Kenya, including Oginga Odinga, Adhieng Oneko, and Bildad Kaggia, were on the gunmen's list.

A few weeks later President Nyerere announced the discovery of an anti-government plot in which, it was alleged US Embassy officials had been involved. In Congo (Brazzaville) the deposed President, Youlou, was smuggled out of the country in preparation for a new plot to restore him to power. In Malawi, all the progressive Ministers were forced out of the government or compelled to flee by the President, Dr. Hastings Banda, and the country fell into almost open British control, with British officers, running the army, police force, intelligence services, and with British officials guiding all the ministries and other departments of state.

During the same period, US planes attached to the Tshombe forces in the Congo attacked neighbouring Uganda, and violated the frontiers of Sudan. In a strong statement from the Uganda Government, the Prime Minister, Dr. Obote, openly accused the United States of complicity in the attacks. A few weeks later the Guinea Government was complaining of attacks across her frontiers by Portuguese troops from Guinea-Bissau.

So serious had the situation become that in an address to the Ghana Parliament on March 22, 1965, President Nkrumah declared that his Government had "unmistakable evidence that plans are in an advanced state of preparation for the overthrow of the progressive government of the Congo (Brazzaville) and other States by certain powers." He also stated that he had had recent discussions with the Presidents of Guinea, Mali, and Algeria, during which they had agreed 'to continue to maintain great vigilance against increasing penetration of imperialists and neo-colonialists in Africa.'

Since that warning, a series of military coups have taken place in Africa, and in February 1966, President Nkrumah himself was deposed by an armed coup while he was out of the country.

Further coups and drives against progressive forces took place in that year and the following two years in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Dahomey and other countries, culminating before the end of 1968 in the military coup against Modibo Keita in Mali.

There are two main aims in Africa as far as the imperialists are concerned. First, to ensure that the countries that have won independence remain under imperialist domination, independent States, influence their politics, and control their military forces and strategy, and, at the same time, subvert and overthrow all those governments which are striving to pursue an independent course, to build up their independent economies and assist the struggles of those African peoples not yet free from imperialist domination and settler rule. Secondly, to maintain *under direct rule* the Portuguese Colonies and Southern Africa, not only in order to stop the tide of liberation in these regions, and to be able to continue their inhuman exploitation of people and resources, but also to use these territories as a bastion of white rule in Africa as a *place d'armes*, a centre of intrigue and conspiracy, a base for intimidation of the independent African States and a jumping-off ground for aggression, especially against those States which challenge imperialist aims and stand to the fore in helping their brothers who are still fighting to win independence for their countries. Coupled with this goes the economic absorption into the southern imperialist base of the nearest states, such as Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, and Malawi, which are becoming linked to the whole complex of the apartheid system of South Africa.

The launching of armed struggle by the ANC-ZAPU alliance and by the liberation fighters of Namibia (South West Africa), together with the struggle waged in the Portuguese Colonies in Africa, is a challenge not only to the existing governments of that region, but a blow against the whole strategy of using Southern Africa as a military, political and economic launching pad against the independent States lying to its north.

For this reason, any help which the independent African States and their peoples give to the liberation fighters is in their own basic interests, in the interests of their own sovereignty, independent development and progress.

There is one common front for all African peoples, those living in independent States and those still battling for their independence — a front of the people against imperialism.

Since the struggle is against those monopoly forces which maintain power in the Western world, and exploit the workers in Europe and North America as well as in Africa, it is in the interests of the working people of Europe and North America, too, to join hands with their brothers in Africa who are battling against the same common enemy.