

Angola: coup crushed, 'factionalists' jailed

By Ernest Harsch

A group of dissidents within the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) made an abortive coup attempt on the morning of May 27. The rebels seized the Luanda radio station for a few hours and attacked the presidential palace, army headquarters, and São Paulo prison. The June 1 *Le Monde* reported that the 9th Armored Brigade had mutinied.

Heavy fighting reportedly took place in several parts of the city, including in some of the muçeques (the slums surrounding Luanda). Angolan President Agostinho Neto admitted that some fighting also took place in the town of Malange, east of Luanda. The government charged that six MPLA leaders, including Finance Minister Saydi Mingas, were killed by the rebels.

There have been signs of a growing factional struggle in the MPLA for nearly a year. Neto charged in July 1976 that "there are comrades in the Popular Movement who create groups that meet in secrecy. They report neither to the central committee nor to the politburo."

The conflict came to a head after a two-day central committee meeting in May. Nito Alves, the former minister of internal administration, and José van Dunem, a political commissioner in the army, were expelled from the central committee. They were then arrested. Neto claims that Alves and van Dunem organized the attempted coup.

The factors behind the coup attempt are still not clear. However, some of the charges leveled against Alves and van Dunem may be a reflection of the differences within the MPLA.

Neto has accused Alves of leading a "Black racist faction" within the MPLA. According to a report in the May 29-30 *Le Monde* by René Lefort, Alves had built up a base of support among the 400,000 inhabitants of Luanda's muçeques.

He has tried to portray himself as a champion of Black slum dwellers and denounced the inclusion of whites and mestiços (those of mixed African and Portuguese ancestry) in the MPLA regime. In particular, Alves attacked Neto's three main aides, MPLA General Secretary Lucio Lara, Economics Minister Carlos Rocha, and Defense Minister Iko Carreira, all of whom are mestiços.

Neto also claims that Alves and van Dunem had accused him of being hostile to the Soviet Union. Neto denied this, stating, "We cannot forget



MPLA support rally after Angolan civil war. Today many slum dwellers are disenchanted with MPLA regime.

that we gained independence because we obtained aid from countries like the Soviet Union."

In the wake of the abortive coup, Neto's regime has launched a major crackdown against suspected dissidents. The extent of this new wave of repression testifies to the depth of the internal crisis that has shaken the MPLA regime.

Neto announced in a speech broadcast May 31 that "hundreds of factionalists" had been arrested, including members of the army's women's section, the youth wings of the military police and armed forces, and the Organization of Angola Women.

Neto also said that "some members of the political commission of FAPLA [Angolan People's Liberation Armed Forces] have likewise been detained in Luanda."

The dissidents, Neto said, would be punished "with utmost severity." He warned that "in the following days, other elements will be arrested for having participated in this factionalist activity. . . . A serious battle against factionalism is necessary. In every neighborhood, in every village, we will search out the factionalists and see that justice is done."

Neto indicated what he had in mind when he said, "We don't want to waste time on trials, we want to get this over with as quickly as possible."

The coup attempt by the followers of Alves and van Dunem is only the latest crisis in the MPLA.

In 1962 Viriato da Cruz, one of the founders of the MPLA, split, taking the majority of the membership. He later joined the FNLA (Angolan National Liberation Front).

In mid-1974, shortly after the coup in Portugal that overthrew the Salazarist dictatorship, another factional dispute shook the organization. Two groups—the Eastern Revolt led by Daniel Chipenda and the Active Revolt led by Joaquim Pinto de Andrade—challenged Neto's leadership. Chipenda's group was expelled, and he later joined the FNLA.

In April 1976, a few weeks after the end of the Angolan civil war, Neto moved against the Active Revolt. Pinto de Andrade and other dissidents within the MPLA were arrested, as well as members of the Maoist Angola Communist Organization and other leftist groups, including "the partisans of Trotsky and Bakunin." More than 100 persons were arrested that month and taken to prison camps.

Ironically, the central figure in that purge was Nito Alves. Employing the same charges that were later to be used against himself, Alves had condemned the dissidents as "reactionaries" and "divisionists."

The crisis in the MPLA comes at a time of growing discontent with the Neto regime. Most industries are operating at about one-third of their capacity. There are frequent food shortages in Luanda. Despite its anti-

imperialist rhetoric, the MPLA regime has nationalized only those companies abandoned by the Portuguese. The biggest imperialist interests, the Gulf Oil concession in Cabinda and the diamond fields in northeastern Angola, remain untouched.

Lefort noted that "the inhabitants of the muçeques, in their vast majority, believed that the proclamation of independence would open the doors to an Eldorado. Their illusions have quickly soured."

According to Lefort, part of this bitterness and discontent has been directed against mestiços:

"The mestiços community, which has a cultural level far above the average, seems to have been in a position to fill the vacancies left by the departure of the Portuguese, in the state apparatus as well as in business. The Black 'common people' have become frustrated by seeing the jobs they had hoped to occupy go to men who often have little concern for the public welfare.

"At a time when the MPLA leadership has run into immense difficulties, the contrast between the misery into which the shantytowns have been plunged and the growing affluence of a class of 'nouveaux riches' becomes more pronounced."

It was these sentiments that the Alves grouping apparently sought to take advantage of in its factional struggle with the rest of the MPLA.