

Nationalist Groups on Brink of Civil War in Angola

By Ernest Harsch

The Portuguese military junta's Revolutionary Council held an emergency session July 14 as the fighting flared again between rival nationalist groups in Angola. The council later announced that it had discussed reinforcing its army of 24,000 troops still stationed in the colony.

"Some 2,000 men consisting of an infantry battalion, an armored battalion and an artillery battalion, plus some paratroop and marine units, were reported to have been earmarked for Angola," *New York Times* correspondent Henry Giniger said in a July 15 dispatch from Lisbon.

According to a United Press International dispatch, a Portuguese military representative in Luanda, Angola's capital, said July 15 that two planeloads of Portuguese reinforcements had already arrived in Angola.

A Portuguese air force major in Lisbon, José Costa Martins, claimed the reinforcements would be used only to maintain Lisbon's "neutrality" in Angola until the colony is granted independence next November 11. "Active neutrality" is the phrase used by the Movimento das Forças Armadas (MFA—Armed Forces Movement) to cover continued intervention in Angola. The aim of the MFA is to safeguard Lisbon's imperialist interests there and to ensure that an independent Angola remains tied to the capitalist market.

Before leaving Lisbon for Angola July 13, Portuguese Foreign Minister Maj. Ernesto Melo Antunes said that the Portuguese troops in Angola might have to intervene in the fighting to prevent "massacres."

The MFA's forces had already taken part in the clashes, according to a Reuters dispatch filed the day before. "Portuguese troops and a joint force of the three nationalist movements sought to quell the fighting," the British news agency reported. "Some of the troops were ordered to shoot on sight any armed civilians." On July 14, it was reported that ten Portuguese soldiers had been wounded in the fighting.

Unrest in Portugal itself makes it difficult for the MFA to intervene massively in Angola. "The dispatch of more troops," Giniger noted, "was considered an almost desperate measure because of its unpopularity both with the troops themselves and the civilian population."

If the MFA is unable to control the situation in Angola, the junta may turn to its imperialist allies. On July 13 Major Antunes said the MFA might ask the



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United Nations to intervene. The dispatch of such a UN "peace keeping" force would be a major setback for the Angolan independence struggle.

The resumption of armed clashes in Luanda between the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA—People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and the Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA—Angolan National Liberation Front) began July 9, marking a complete breakdown of the cease-fire accords reached June 19. They soon escalated into major battles in which automatic weapons, bazookas, and heavy mortars were used. Some reports described the situation in the city as one of "open war."

It appears that the MPLA launched a concerted drive to force its main rival from Luanda, where many of the clashes between the feuding nationalists have taken place since the MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA (União Nacional para Independência Total de Angola—National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) entered a coalition regime with the Portuguese in January.

The FNLA offices in Luanda were reported to have been destroyed after five days of fighting. In addition, the July 15 *Washington Post* reported, FNLA "bases were set on fire as mortar and artillery bombardments continued in the city." By July 14, most of the FNLA's military forces were reported to have been driven out of the capital, with the

exception of several hundred troops garrisoned in the São Pedro da Barra Fort overlooking Luanda harbor. As of July 19, the fort was under an MPLA siege.

In a July 16 dispatch from Luanda, *New York Times* reporter Charles Mohr said the MPLA appeared to have gained control of the *muceques*, the African slum areas surrounding Luanda. "One indication of its [the MPLA's] new dominance," Mohr said, "was last evening's national radio broadcast, which carried only its political statements."

It was estimated that 300 persons, most of them civilians, have been killed since the fighting resumed on July 9. About 1,500 were thought to have been wounded.

"Life in Luanda was reported to have come to a halt," *Manchester Guardian* correspondent António de Figueiredo said in a July 14 dispatch from Lisbon, "with many buildings on fire and only one hospital still in operation. Food supplies were completely disrupted and many hotels, restaurants, and other services had had to close."

Thousands of refugees, both African and Portuguese, fled the *muceques* for the downtown area. In addition, many of the Bakongo living in Luanda were reported to be fleeing the city for northern Angola. (The FNLA gets much of its support from the Bakongo.)

The FNLA charged July 11 that the MPLA had provoked the fighting. It put its military units throughout the country on a "permanent state of alert" and ordered its troops to "resist the military coup launched by Lisbon and its agents in Angola."

The National Defense Council, on which the three nationalist groups and the Portuguese are represented, condemned the MPLA for the recent clashes. However, the Portuguese high commissioner in Angola, Gen. Silva Cardoso, also accused the FNLA of attacking civilians.

Although the bulk of the FNLA's forces were driven from Luanda for the time being, Interior Minister N'gola Kabangu and other FNLA leaders in the coalition regime remained in the city, participating in talks with the MPLA, UNITA, and Portuguese officials.

Charles Mohr reported from Luanda July 17, "Well-informed sources said they believed that only a face-saving formula that would permit the political leaders of the locally defeated National Front [FNLA] to remain in the city could prevent a breakup of the transitional coalition government, which was formed to prepare for full independence from Portugal on Nov. 11."

Whatever temporary agreements the rival nationalist groups may sign, the expulsion of the FNLA units from Luanda has thrown the fragile coalition regime into a crisis that may be the prelude to full-scale civil war. □