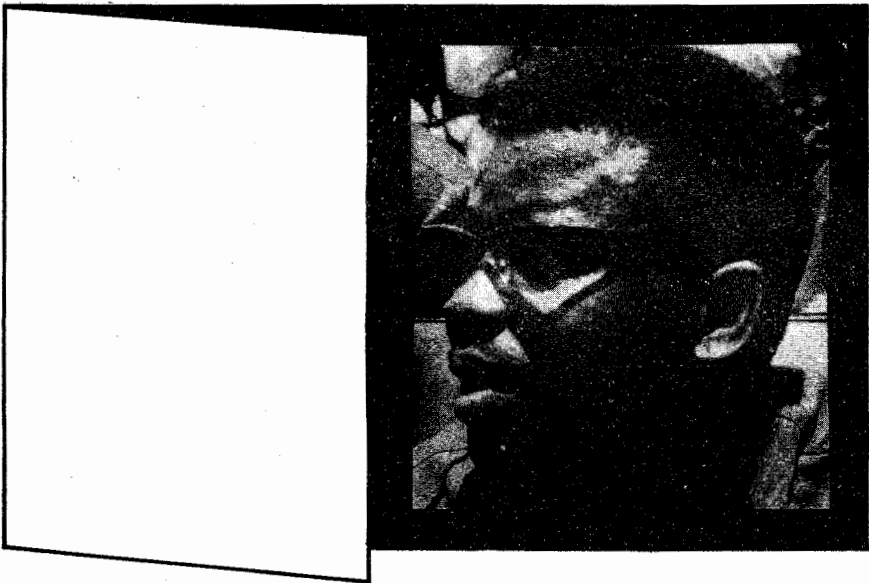




man and
his word

Congo (B): The African Example

Marien N'Gouabi



On March 23 of this year, a group of counterrevolutionaries, headed by ex-lieutenant Pierre Kiganga and proceeding from Congo Kinshasa, attempted a coup d'etat in Congo Brazzaville. The plotters occupied Radio Brazzaville for some hours but were quickly eliminated.

In the present interview, the President of the People's Republic of the Congo and President of the Central Committee of the Congolese Labor Party, Marien N'Gouabi, explains for **Tricontinental** the circumstances of the frustrated plot and reiterates the intention of the young African republic to continue on the revolutionary road.

The interview with the Congolese leader was conducted in Brazzaville by the journalist Mary Simon, correspondent for Prensa Latina in that capital.

Do you consider the attempted coup an isolated incident or do you believe it is part of a general plan of imperialism against the People's Republic of the Congo?

The recently aborted attempted coup d'état led by the reaction to overthrow our revolution is part of a general plan of imperialism against the People's Republic of the Congo. Its leader, Kiganga, came from Kinshasa, where all his expenses were paid. The coupists were also supported by the police, which is why they were dissolved. So it is not an isolated incident but part of imperialism's general plan in Africa, and especially in Kinshasa, against Congo Brazzaville, following its option for socialism.

Since its assumption of power on July 31, 1968, the Movement has insisted on the struggle against tribalism and regionalism. What are the practical measures taken in this matter?

Regionalism and tribalism appear in Black Africa with colonization. Before that they did not exist. For example, the people of the North could marry those of the South. The colonizers prohibited this in order to sow division and to weaken the native struggle. Later, the ruling classes used their power to apply favoritism, offer the best possibilities to their tribes or regions, and thus maintain their people in power, such as Tchikaya in the South, Opongo in the North.

In Black Africa we have examples of this imperialist intervention in the Nigerian war, in Katanga in Congo Kinshasa, which is a separate state. The measures that we have taken to combat it are political and ideological education beginning with the children's pioneer organizations, then the youth, and finally the Party, which is composed of leadership cadres who represent the entire people and who, by their conscientious and revolutionary work, assist the political-economic development of the country and do not favor any single part of it.

Another question that the revolutionary leadership has raised was the need to base the Party in the popular masses. Do you believe it has succeeded in this and to what degree?

Every revolution has its stages. When a revolution takes place in an underdeveloped country there are many problems that present themselves and organization is not easy. After the revolution of 1963, we had a party that was called National Revolutionary

Movement (MNR). The intellectual revolutionary comrades made up the political bureau, but we realized that this movement was not mass-based and that they were not organized according to concrete revolutionary principles but only out of revolutionary enthusiasm. In July 1968 we tried to revive the old MNR federations and, at the end of a year and a half, recognized that the problems were the same. Then we thought that we needed to start with the masses, go to the masses, study their problems, understand them, study the problems of the sociology of our society to establish a program that would respond to national realities. We believe that the creation of the Congolese Workers' Party (PCT) would contribute to organizing the base — that is to say, organizing the masses and the peasants.

We have thought of making village groupings. Our country has many villages that are not organized because they are very far apart and isolated from each other. We must regroup them in locations near the highways and roads and, once regrouped, it is necessary to make agricultural cooperatives, state farms, nurseries, and to defend the interests of the masses by modernizing agriculture. When people are grouped together it is easier to organize them, educate them ideologically, politicize them. In the city, there are syndicates for the workers, although we think that they are not sufficient to sustain the revolutionary struggle in all its magnitude. In the capitalist countries there are also syndicates that fight for rights, for advantages, and for better living conditions, and frequently when these are satisfied, they forget to carry the political struggle any farther. We think that, in our country, along with the material gains to improve the living conditions of the workers against the owners, it is necessary to organize the workers in revolutionary enterprises so that they will understand that the struggle does not end in gains, but must be carried on to overthrow the ruling class, the capitalist class installed in our country.

The worker must reach the understanding that he is controlled by the foreign capitalist, that our commerce — interior and exterior — continues to be controlled by foreigners and that the worker, better than anyone, is destined to carry out this struggle to seize from the foreigners what they have taken from us and so that the means of production better serve the collective interest. First we have to organize the base, the workers, the peasants — politically and ideologically — and mobilize the entire Party since, if it is not organized on the basis of revolutionary principles of struggle, the Party will give directives that are not going to be well understood by the masses and it will fall into the same formula as the MNR, and the revolution would be on the skids.

You have spoken about the economic blockade against the People's Republic of the Congo. Could you tell us how you expect to counteract this blockade?

Yes. We speak about the economic blockade, which is very

strong, but when a country wants to carry out a national liberation struggle, this struggle is against the foreigners who hold a strong economic base in the country and who dominate the national economy. If we state the real problems, the control of our country's foreign trade — that is, the key sector of our economy — it will be clear that the interests of the capitalists are being threatened. Under these conditions, imperialism has no other way of acting except through aggression, and an aggression is very difficult to win. Imperialism either prepares it by activating reactionary elements against the revolutionaries, in order to say that there is internal subversion, that political instability exists, that things are not going well, that the people are not in agreement with socialism. Or else it resorts to direct aggression, armed intervention by the imperialists who send mercenaries. But this is an extreme solution. Today, the country that directly attacks an independent African country, however small, runs international risks. But there are methods of asphyxiation, methods of reprisal, and these are what the imperialists use on the economic plane. In Africa, for the moment, food and merchandise of primary necessity are essential. These are imported. They come from abroad, from the West. To sow discontent among the people, to incite them to rebel against the progressive power they cut off supplies of these products. So oil, soap, canned goods, tires, and spare parts for machines will be lacking. Imperialism will try to prove that with the new regime there are difficulties and that the population should rebel to correct them.

But we do not make compromises with imperialism and we will not get down on our knees before the capitalists. It is they who must withdraw. The PCT will take the measures necessary to achieve this. We will succeed whatever measures are taken against us because we have the experience of Cuba, Algeria, and the regrettable experiences of Ghana and Mali, where imperialism, seeing that these countries could liberate themselves from its clutches, blocked them economically. In the case of Mali, which has no outlet to the sea and has great difficulties importing large quantities of merchandise by airplane, the results are well known.

Congo Brazzaville has every chance of breaking the blockade. We trade with all friendly countries, especially the socialist countries. We can buy oil, soap, clothing, and vehicles anywhere. The population uses products of primary necessity which are manufactured by private industry within the country, but if they do not respect our sovereignty, if they do not place the interests of the Congolese people ahead of their own, it is clear that their interests will be endangered. In general, it is the PCT work groups that are now studying what measures to take. We are not going to fall into the same situation as Mali and Ghana because we already have that experience. I think that just as Cuba was able to take measures against the difficulties imposed by imperialism, Congo Brazzaville will succeed in doing the same.

Notwithstanding the good will of the PRC in maintaining peace in Central Africa, do you consider that the constant infiltrations of commandos coming from Kinshasa as well as the arrest of fishermen may be a factor against this policy of peace?

The repeated commando attacks from Kinshasa which have occurred since the beginning of the revolution, since 1963, are a type of tactic practiced by imperialism which uses its satellite to say that the two countries don't understand each other, that it is necessary to go to war at any price. If there is armed conflict between the two Congos, then the revolution will have to attend to another mission — that is, territorial integrity. Under these conditions the mobilization of the masses, the organization, the control of the capitalist means of production by the people will be discarded because there will be another more important task to carry out: the war. The commandos always come to impede the accomplishment of the objectives outlined by the revolution. We are faced with the task of making a concrete analysis of the situation in order not to fall into imperialism's trap. They push us toward a struggle in which there is nothing to gain. On the contrary, we will lose even if we win the war because it may last as long as Nigeria's war and our economic plans will be halted during the time the war lasts. Or they can try to involve us in a conflict of a national liberation struggle, year after year, hoping that the people wear themselves out, and finally say that socialism is not going well.

Mobutu's US airplanes violate Congo Brazzaville territory and will repeat these attacks until we have to respond. But we will make our war defensive just like Viet-Nam. The Vietnamese attack no other country; they are engaged in a defensive war, a people's war. We are preparing for the same kind of fight because our radicalization disturbs the capitalists. The road is already laid out for them. It is a provocation and as such we must organize ourselves to carry forward the popular struggle.

You have spoken recently about going to Paris. Does this decision of yours still stand? Is this trip due to some particular aspect of Congolese relations in the heart of the French zone?

It is known that numerous African states were under French domination and that after independence they found they had debts which weren't theirs. Until then our country was called Middle Congo, with a French government. If the French built roads, bridges, it is not logical that after independence these debts have to be paid. The government of Youlou, after independence, signed for debts that belonged to the French Government before independence. We believe that these debts no longer exist. Another matter is the attitude of the French citizens still living in our country who give the impression of being against us. We want to know whether that is the position of the French Government, in which case we would suspend the trip which could be undertaken at the ministerial level, for example. It would not be necessary for me to make the trip even if it were to a friendly

country. Because it is understood what happens with every country that wishes to be socialist: as was the case with Ghana, where Nkrumah was surprised while on a trip. The most recent case is that of Cambodia. It is not worth going right now. The struggle in the interior of the country must be organized and the masses in the interior consolidated. In any case I believe that the trip has been postponed, if not cancelled.

How do you see the integration of the popular masses within the country in the revolutionary process now going on?

The popular masses inside the country live principally from agriculture. For the popular masses the first thing is agricultural production. The means of production have to be modernized, there are insufficient roads, technical methods for agriculture, and social problems that exist among these people. But since the beginning of the revolution the masses participate actively because they perceive that changes have been made. We think the peasants are more interested in the revolution than other groups because the revolution thinks more about them. Before, their products in the interior were not commercialized. Under colonialism, their products were taken without scarcely any pay, and they were forced to pay taxes. After the proclamation of independence, these products were negligently commercialized, but with the revolution we have created units like the National Office for the Commercialization of Agricultural Products, whose mission it is to go and buy the peasants' products to sell them and export them. Now the peasants work and know they have their products sold. In the interior of the country we have created schools, colleges, dispensaries. We have constructed roads and we are soon going to modernize the cities. There will be water and electricity in every corner. The peasants are now more politically active, as is shown by the last attempted coup d'etat this past March 23, when there was an immediate spontaneous reaction in all regions and the reactionary elements in the interior of the country were seized and sent by truck and plane to Brazzaville.

What positive results do you consider the recent Extraordinary Party Congress has had?

First, the unity of the left. This is an essential element. Before the coup d'etat of March 23, the Central Committee had met and there were rumors that there would be a coup d'etat. The attempted coup occurred on March 23 and was provoked by the extreme right. Then the comrades of the left, the conscientious elements that had previously abandoned the Party for various reasons, joined us. We believe this is a great step for the Congolese revolution to have recovered those elements which had previously formed a part of the political life of the country and who responded at the moment to the Party's call. With the mobilization of the masses we believe we can achieve real objectives — that is to say, that the Congolese revolution is not only a matter of enthusiasm but that we are assured of the conquest of real objectives.