

CABRAL IN



From Amílcar Cabral's speech at the Central Hall, Westminster on Tuesday 26th October.

'You have been told that I am a great revolutionary man - I am not, I am simply an African man doing my duty in my country in the context of our time. You have been told that I am a hero - we have no heroes in our country, the only heroes there are the African people.

'From your moral and political support here tonight I have learnt of your warm attitude in regard to our fight. Through you we would like to salute all anti-colonialist people in this country first, without regard to their origins or tendencies. In politics you have to go step by step, and we think that to have solidarity it is necessary to have unity. Without unity it is not possible to give consistent moral, political or material solidarity. We would like to salute, in particular, the workers of this country - white workers, black workers, intellectual workers also - and tell them that we expect from them a united front in the struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa. I would like to salute also the students and young people who represent for us a great force of progress in every part of the world. I would like to salute all anti-colonialist women, and tell them that one of the principles of our fight is that our people will never be free until the women are also free. I hope that the non-African people here will understand if I address special greetings to all Africans present, and all descendants of Africans, calling on them to be aware of the struggle in their own country, and of their situation wherever they are. The unified action of the workers and all groups of anti-colonialist people together will perhaps teach them unity for the new struggles in this their own country.

'I wouldn't like you to think that we are warriors - we don't make war because we like it. We want peace, but peace means nothing without freedom. We are freedom-fighters - our aim is the independence of our country and the total freedom of our people.

'What is Portuguese colonialism? Some people talk of 'Portuguese imperialism' - but there is no Portuguese imperialism. Portugal has never attained the economic development you can call imperialism - because imperialism is the result of the development of capitalism. One day a comrade - an old sailor - was at a meeting where I explained this idea, that the Portuguese are not imperialists. He was astonished and said,

"But Cabral, everybody says that we're fighting imperialism. We're fighting the Portuguese, so we're fighting Portuguese imperialism". I explained that imperialism is seen in imperialist countries. In our country there is imperialist domination - a very different thing. The two are closely linked, but different. The truth is that Portugal has never been an imperialist country - Portugal is an agent of imperialism. Since the beginning of the 18th century Portugal herself has been a semi-colony. If you know history, you will know of whom. Portugal dominated our country, and preserved that domination, because she was protected by Britain during the partition of Africa and at the Conference of Berlin. Portugal did not at that time have enough force to keep the colonies. The reason that Portugal is not decolonizing now is because Portugal is not an imperialist country, and cannot neo-colonize. The economic infrastructure of Portugal is such that she cannot compete with other capitalist powers. During all these years of colonialism, Portugal has simply been the gendarme, the intermediary in the exploitation of our people.

'Portugal, as you know, is the most backward country in Europe. This is not the fault of the Portuguese people, but the fault of the ruling classes in Portugal. The Portuguese people have never known the meaning of human rights, of freedom of democracy. The ruling class of Portugal has an imperial mentality, and a culture full of ignorance and superstition. And at the heart of it lies a lack of respect for the African people. You remember that the Portuguese said 'Africa doesn't exist - a very high level of racism!

'As you know, Portugal has pretended to assimilate the African people. This is a lie. In my country, during 500 years of the Portuguese presence and more than 10 years of Portuguese exploitation, they assimilated, according to their own estimation only 0.3% of the population. And before the war they were promising us that they would continue to assimilate. But to be assimilated one had to have had four years at primary school. To go to the official primary school you have to be assimilated. They created a vicious circle in order to prevent our people from developing.

'The Portuguese divided our people in Guine into two groups - the indigenous and the 'assimilados' or 'civilizados'. 99.7% were indigenous, and the rest were 'assimilados'. And what does 'indigenous mean? It means that people can be taken away for forced labour. They can be made to pay unjust taxes. They can live a life worse than animals. If you study Portuguese colonial law, you will see how cynical and evil people can be in creating new forms of exploitation. In the Cape Verde islands they established what they called 'contratados' - indentured labour - a new form of slavery, sending people to Angola or Sao Tomé.

'If you read books written by honest Portuguese doctors, you will see that in the Cape Verde islands the common characteristic of all people is undernourishment, and sometimes starvation. In the Cape Verde more people have died from starvation than the actual population of the country. And in Guiné the lack of protein and all kind of basic food creates great difficulties for the development of our people. In some regions we had an 80% infant mortality rate. And throughout the golden age of Portuguese colonialism we only had two hospitals in the whole country and only 18 doctors - 12 of those in Bissau.

'And as for schools - they had only 45 - and they were Catholic missionary schools, only teaching the catechism. There were 11 official schools for 'assimilado' children. We had no secondary schools at all in Guine until 1959, and there were only

BRITAIN

2,000 children in these schools throughout the whole country. And you can imagine the kind of teaching. They had made a conscious decision to stop any possible development among our people.

'If you know about political life in Portugal, you can imagine what the political life in our country is like. Portugal has been under a fascist regime for half a century. That means no political parties at all, no trade unions, nothing. In Guinea we couldn't create any kind of association: in 1953 when we went back to the country, we tried, with other compatriots, to create what we called an African Sport and Recreation Club - but we put one thing in the statutes - that un-assimilated people could also be members. It was banned.

'Our party was created in 1956 by 6 Africans from Guinea and the Cape Verdes. We created an underground party in Bissau, and extended it to other urban centres. We believed at that time that it was possible to fight by peaceful means. With the help of an underground trade union organization we launched some strikes against the Portuguese, and we held some demonstrations, but the Portuguese always answered with guns. And on 3rd August 1959, during a workers' strike in Bissau, they killed 50 African workers and wounded more than 100 in 20 minutes. That finally taught us a lesson: in the face of Portuguese colonialism and, we think, imperialism in general, there is no question of whether you use armed struggle or not. The struggle is always armed, because the colonialists and imperialists have already decided to use their arms against you. We decided at an underground meeting in September 1959, in Bissau, to stop our demonstrations, to retain our underground organization but move it to the countryside, mobilize the people, and prepare ourselves for armed struggle.

'First of all we had to prepare our people politically for the struggle. We mobilized the people, we prepared cadres and we declared direct action against the Portuguese in 1961 - but even then it wasn't armed struggle - only direct action against Portuguese stores, against bridges, cutting the telephone wires, and so on. The Portuguese answered this with a great repression. They killed many people. They drowned people in rivers, they burned people with petrol, they destroyed villages suspected of being the centre of our party. And at that time they imprisoned about 3,000 people throughout Guinea. The Portuguese colonialists do not believe in dialectics - they didn't know that repression also has its dialectic. Instead of preventing our fight they contributed to its development. And in 1964 we were able to hold our first congress in a liberated area inside our country.

'We have two types of armed forces - what we now call local armed forces, who are concerned with the defence of the liberated regions, and national armed forces, who are concerned with increasing attacks on the remaining positions of the Portuguese in our country. Both these armed forces are integrated into the population - about 90% or more of these armies are made up of peasants. And if in the beginning of the struggle the leaders were from the petty bourgeoisie - like me- and only a few workers, gradually new people came to lead the party, and today most of the leaders are workers and peasants. We now have a state in our country - people like Bastião Davidson and others who have come to our country did not have to ask the Portuguese authorities for a visa.

'We are doing our best to reinforce the sovereignty of the people in our country. This is why we decided at the last meeting of the Supreme Council of the Struggle to create the election of local popular assemblies - and a national popular assembly. We think that these initiatives can

open up new perspectives for our political work inside the country and in the international field. We want to strengthen our party more each day - to spread the principles of the party, and do our best to improve the links between the party and the population. Some people think that when we speak about the creation of the popular assembly, that we are diminishing the value or the role of the party. It's not that. We are increasing democracy in our country, but under the leadership of the party.'

'I can summarize for you - yes, we want independence in our country, but independence is not only acquiring a flag and an anthem to sing. Independence for us means the liberation of our motherland and the liberation of our people. But we have to ask: what does 'liberation of the people' mean? It is the liberation of the productive forces of our country, the liquidation of all kinds of imperialist or colonial domination in our country, and the taking of every measure to avoid any kind of new exploitation of our people. We don't confuse exploitation with the colour of one's skin. I don't need to remind you that the problem of liberation is also one of culture. In the beginning it's a culture and in the end it's also culture. The colonialists have a habit of telling us that when they arrived in Africa they put us into history. You know very well that it's the contrary - when they arrived they took us out of our own history. Liberation for us is to take back our destiny and our history.

'You might ask what we want from this visit to England. One thing is that the moral and political support of your presence here is very encouraging to us. But we are waiting for one thing: that the English act according to the principles that they proclaim. We would like the English to remember the responsibility that England has for our colonial situation.

'I want to finish by saying that I am very touched by your presence here, and to tell you that we hope that one day soon we will be able to receive our friends and comrades in the liberated areas and in the towns of our country.'

Pick your friends with care...

No wonder Lord Lothian, under-secretary at the Foreign Office refused to see Amílcar Cabral - for a few days after Cabral's visit, he was to make a toast to the Portuguese government at the annual dinner of the Anglo-Portuguese society at the Savoy hotel on November 8. During the dinner he stated that the British government does not approve of the use of violence to achieve political ends - 'the cult of confrontation must give way to the habit of dialogue' and 'we [BMC] will follow with vigour the efforts of Portugal to establish a dialogue with its African neighbours' (Rhodesia? South Africa?). Lothian seems singularly uninformed - all the liberation movements have announced their readiness to discuss the future of the Portuguese colonies through negotiations with the Portuguese government.

Among those present were the following superstars: the Brazilian Ambassador, Earl and Countess St. Aldwyn, Lord Rathcavan, Baroness Emmet of Amberley, Lord Mayor of Westminster, Viscountess Davidson, Anthony Kershaw (Junior Foreign Office Minister), Sir Colin Coote (one-time editor of the Daily Telegraph), Duncan Sandys MP (one-time Tory Colonial Secretary), Benjamin Ford MP (Chairman of the Anglo-Portuguese Parliamentary Group), and Albert Roberts, Labour MP (conveniently forgetting that his party now supports the liberation movements).

The Portuguese Ambassador crowned these leprous proceedings by giving thanks for Britain's understanding of Portugal's position in Africa, and for the friendly relations between the two countries.

