

LONG LIVE THE SPIRIT OF AMILCAR CABRAL

The Portuguese agents who assassinated Amilcar Cabral, Secretary-General of the PAIGC destroyed not only a brilliant political leader but a memorable human being. When he visited the U.S. briefly last fall several New York Southern Africa Committee members spent an evening with him at a small meeting. He talked to us quietly, with no rhetoric or ringing phrases, but with a strong, clear analysis of the situation in his country, and with the most compelling qualities of all—intense honesty and a serious respect for his fellow men and women. He never talked down to anyone, nor was he ever deliberately "chummy." He simply believed that all people were equal—and he acted on that belief.

These qualities, as much as the outstanding depth and clarity of his political analysis, contributed to his almost unique qualities as a political leader, and to the tremendous respect in which he was held, in Africa, in many countries of the "third world" and in both Eastern and Western Europe. He never compromised on principles but he had a lack of rancor and personal bitterness that added an extra dimension to the quality of his political message.

Honesty, respect for the people, and a driving insistence on the importance of the broadest possible base of political understanding and participation were essential elements in the policy Cabral consistently advocated for the PAIGC. Thus for example the 1965 *Party Directives* began with a detailed and open examination of many mistakes made, before going on to outline organisational directives.

"In various regions—and indeed everywhere in a general sense—political work among the people among our armed forces has not been done appropriately . . ."

"On the military plane . . . as proof of insufficient political work among our armed forces, there has appeared a certain attitude of 'militarism' which has caused some fighters . . . and leaders to forget the fact that we are armed militants and not militarists."

"Oppose among the young, especially those over 20, the mania for leaving the country to study elsewhere, the blind ambition to acquire a degree, the complex of inferiority and the mistaken . . . belief that those who study will thereby become privileged in our country tomorrow . . . But also oppose any ill will towards those who . . . wish to study—the complex that students will be . . . future saboteurs of the Party."

"Educate ourselves, educate . . . the population in general, to fight fear and ignorance, to eliminate little by little the subjection to nature and natural forces which our economy has not yet mastered. Convince little by little . . . that man is the strongest force in nature."

"Learn from life, learn from our people, learn from books, learn from the experience of others. Never stop learning."

"We must practice revolutionary democracy in every aspect of our Party life, . . . exacting from others a proper respect of his work and properly respecting the

work of others. Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories . . ."

These were not empty slogans but the principles on which Cabral insisted that the movement must be built—because he recognized that without them no political theory, however correct, could serve to radically transform the lives of his people. The aim of the PAIGC is not to change the faces of the Masters, it is to eliminate all masters, so that the people come to control their own future.

Cabral was also an important theoretician, who once said ". . . if it is true that a revolution can fail even though it is based on perfectly conceived theories, nobody has yet made a successful revolution without a revolutionary theory."

Cabral had used his post as an agronomist in 1952-54 to travel around his country and acquire an intimate knowledge of the life of his people in the villages. Thus he combined, in a most unusual way, theory, observation and practice. When he and a few comrades formed the Party in 1956 they embarked on a long and careful assessment and analysis of the various social forces in their country. Out of this grew the understanding that "the peasants would be the mainstay in our struggle" but also the recognition that it would be necessary to "struggle fiercely for peasant support." In 1959, after the massacre of striking dockworkers in Bissau, Cabral realised that a new stage of political action had been reached in which, in order to save and strengthen the people's struggle, it was necessary to organise underground. In the years between 1959 and 1963, when the PAIGC finally felt ready to embark on armed struggle, Cabral made a fundamental contribution to the future of his country, by carefully building a widening base of political education, creating consciousness among the peasantry so that they could become the engine of the revolt. He recognised that nothing could be achieved by a small group of leaders, however militant. Without the political preparation that would mobilise the mass of the people "nothing of lasting value can be done. This political preparation is the toughest, most daunting but also most important aspect of the whole campaign for national liberation."

History has proved the validity of Cabral's beliefs. Actual fighting against the Portuguese began in 1963, and now, ten years later, three-quarters of the country is under PAIGC control. When he was here last fall, Cabral reported that 1973 would be the year in which Guinea Bissau declared its independence. In 1972 the Party had initiated elections to a National Assembly representing the people throughout the country. This body, speaking for the people of Guinea-Bissau will have the power to announce the freedom of the people.

The Assembly is only the most recent of the many creative structural measures taken by the PAIGC under Cabral's leadership. As early as 1960 he established the first training school for political leadership, designed to develop a cadre of organizers to work inside their country for its liberation. Later, as areas were freed from Portugal's control, people's stores, schools and hospitals

were organized. Always, as soon as possible, the people were involved in running and controlling their own lives, men and women, through the establishment of democratic village committees.

The murderers have killed a great man, but their actions will not kill a movement so deeply rooted in a whole population. Last year, speaking at the United Nations, Cabral condemned the aid given Portugal in its fight against the people of Africa, by the United States and other Western powers. He questioned how nations that called themselves champions of liberty and defenders

of the "free world" could continue to give assistance to the "most retrograde colonialist country on the planet." But he said, no power on earth could prevent them from attaining their complete liberation, from protecting the sovereignty of their people and from developing the "new life" they have begun to build in the liberated zones.

As he closed, he said "It is still a very difficult life indeed, but it is a life of beauty because the depth of work is being carried out in liberty, democracy and the happiness of our people."

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Amilcar Cabral addressing U.N. Committee in Conakry, Guinea, April, 1972