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A TALK WITH A GUINEAN REVOLUTIONARY

*The following is an edited, tape-recorded talk with Mr. Gil Fernandez at UCLA, April 9, 1970. He is the Representative in Cairo of the African Independence Party of Guinea (Bissau) and Cape Verde Islands (PAIGC).*

I think I'd better start at the beginning and give you a very sketchy background. Guinea has been a Portuguese colony for the last five centuries. I think that it is the oldest European settlement anywhere in the world. Of all the Portuguese colonies, Guinea can be considered the only true colony in one sense. It was only a kind of market. The Portuguese came by sea, bought the raw material, took it back to Portugal where it was processed, shipped it back to Guinea, and sold it to us again. That means they made a double profit-- when they bought the goods at a very low price and sold them back to us at a very high price. A few of us decided (we were very young at the time, just running errands, not much more than that) that the whole situation was dysfunctional, that something had to be done about it; at the beginning we tried some kind of persuasion. We tried to found a club, a social club. But permission was denied, because the police got suspicious that we might have in mind more than a club. The whole thing didn't work out. So we decided that maybe if we carried on a strike, a protest movement in town, the crowds would be able to persuade the government to elevate us from a second class position to some kind of equality with the Portuguese. And that didn't work.

The breaking point was in August, 1959 when a strike was called in the South. As you know, by Portuguese law unions have no right to strike--completely forbidden. So the situation was entirely new for the Portuguese when they were confronted with a strike. Their reaction was panic. They called the troops, which came down to the docks and started shooting without even asking questions. As a result, about 50 people were killed, and over 100 injured. Those 100 were taken to a nearby hospital, but they disappeared during the night. So we decided that the whole approach was wrong. Starting any kind of a democratic procedure in the towns, like a strike or boycott, was meaningless, because it's very difficult to talk to or to persuade a fascist government. The only thing you could do was use your own kind of language. Get yourself a gun. So we went back down to the countryside and concentrated the struggle on the peasants, mobilizing them for the war later on. It was a very painful moment, and I believe probably the most difficult one: to persuade the peasants and to show them their capacity to wage war against the Portuguese. (In any colonial situation, the colonial power can only stay in the colony if they can create certain notions in the minds of the people.) In Guinea they were able to do it, and very well. So when you try to

mobilize and win support from the peasant, who by tradition is conservative, it is really very difficult. That took about four years. We would talk to the people about 10,000 times and say the same things. But they can be persuaded that they have the capacity, the possibility to change the situation completely. So slowly we were able to launch a movement. To secure weapons at the very beginning, we had to go to Portuguese sources and take them from the Portuguese by mounting very quick and small ambushes to get the very essential sort of armaments. From 1963 on, when the war started, we have been making some progress, and now we are occupying about two-thirds of Guinea. And we think that it is only a matter of time now, until we can occupy the remaining third of it. We hope that the people get to that stage of the last battle, the Dien Bien Phu, and that the Portuguese will sit down and talk; we think they probably will. Their strategy now is what General Gavin was advocating for Vietnam... to sort of dig in and then wait. So that's what they're doing now. They're going to the towns and building shelters and bunkers and waiting for some kind of miracle to change the situation. Even Caetano (Portuguese Foreign Minister), when he visited Bissau a few months ago, said that only a miracle could change the situation in Guinea. They have no hopes of reconquering Guinea. An advisor told him that it's not only a matter of taking over again the countryside militarily, but it would involve changing the minds of the Guinean people, which have been radically changed by the war and by the party (PAIGC). I think that it won't take long before we get the remaining third of it; it's only a matter of time...

I even have the feeling that this next stage will be the easiest part of the struggle. What might be required is heavier weapons, which we have anyway. I think that very soon they'll come to their senses. In a broadcast on BBC in London a few months ago, announcers said that Caetano had proposed having talks with Amilcar Cabral (of PAIGC) on freeing Guinea, but again, keeping Cape Verde, and that Cabral refused. BBC, as you know, has a lot of prestige, and very rarely puts out any propaganda of this nature. So I think that some element in the Portuguese government told the broadcasting station to launch this kind of trial balloon to see what's happening. The statement was not true at all. I don't think that they've ever yet proposed any kind of talk. And even some elements from some embassy down in Conakry, came and asked: Look, suppose Portugal proposed to you some kind of talks about freeing Guinea but keeping Cape Verde, what would be your reaction? And then Cabral just told the official: well, tell them to come and ask us, and you'll find out what our reaction will be.

I think that the best thing to do is to open the discussion to questions at this point.

*QUESTION: When you talked about the strikes, you said that the unions were not allowed to strike. Were the unions allowed to exist, and*

*if they did, what was supposed to be their function?*

ANSWER: I probably made a mistake by using the word *union*. In Guinea the concept is not the same. There's a very small union, if you want to call it that. Maybe we should think of the word *syndicate*. It would include most of the people working in commerce and trade primarily among the Portuguese. Among the dock workers one would never find anything resembling a union. It is actually non-existent. I was using the concept in a very broad sense. In a colonial situation it is very difficult for the colonial power to function well if it is going to allow small groupings of people, such as unions. These groups could be potential trouble.

QUESTION: *What were some of the problems encountered in convincing the peasantry to revolt?*

ANSWER: If you could think of the greatest problem someone would have in persuading a people, that would have to be the problem the PAIGC had in convincing the peasantry of Guinea. The peasant in our country is basically very conservative. Mainly that is because they did not have very much contact with the Portuguese--99.9% of the population literally. So when you go to the countryside and tell the population, look we're forming a party; we have the guns and we want you to help us and join the party, they answer, are you crazy? How can we possibly face the Portuguese when they have tanks and planes and cars, and we can hardly strike a match? What we had to do was to give them an example in a very subtle way. We would ask them: what did you eat yesterday? They'll tell us rice. What will you eat tomorrow?--rice. We would then ask them if they wouldn't like to have some meat in it, some oil. They would say, oh, but I'm very poor... I had only a few cows, and the government came and took them away... and I still have a few left, but I have to pay taxes. So I'm sort of saving so that I can sell them to pay taxes. We figured that if we could convince this same peasant that there might be a situation in which he would not have to pay any taxes to the Portuguese at all, he would be interested.

One tribe that we have called the Fulani is very difficult to mobilize because some time back they suffered very heavily from the Arabs (or the Berbers in the Northern part of Africa). These Fulani have a kind of vertical society, with a chief at the top, then a blacksmith or the worker, then the peasant, and so on. They have been in a better position than any other tribe in Guinea, and they resent change. The Portuguese sometimes would go to this tribe and pick out one person and make him chief of the next tribe. If you go to this tribe having a foreign chief, it would be easier to mobilize them. If you come to the Fulani, it's very difficult. They have a lot to lose if the situation were to change. And then sometimes you have to use other means. You go to a hut, and somehow you have some station

broadcasting in his native language, and you have a transistor. Then you come to the hut and you start talking to the fellow. Then you put on some music or some Portuguese broadcasting on the radio, and then you ask him: how would you like some day to hear your own language on this radio? He says, you've got to be joking! The white man made this thing, it's not for us to be talking into it. So you just sort of switch stations so that he'll be hearing something in his own language. And that pretty much persuades him.

And also the amount of repression which took place in Guinea made it somehow easier to mobilize, especially the young people. But the approach that you use is to go to the elder of the village most of the time. There is what you call the *homme grande*, the village elder. If you can persuade these elders, they can easily pinpoint for you other elements which are more likely to be persuaded to join the movement. We have twenty different tribes, and so we have twenty different ways of approaching the problem. One approach might be wrong a few miles away. It's a very elaborate type of work. It took us about four years to do it.

QUESTION: *In communicating with the people of the countryside, did you have difficulty with informers?*

ANSWER: We lost many men, many good friends during that stage. Sometimes we would talk to a peasant, and he'd say we were right, but to go back the next day to discuss it further. When we would go back the next day there would be some Portuguese hidden somewhere waiting for us. Then we would have to run back into the jungle, if we could run fast enough. And sometimes we would spend days hidden a few yards from a Portuguese who is waiting for us. And one could go weeks without eating. One might have only fruits and various plants. One might have to be immersed in water for many, many hours. It's very difficult. If the Portuguese had been cleverer, they could have really set us back many years; but they are mainly just ruthless! The element that came to Guinea about this time did not know very well the psychology of the African population. They resorted to a vast amount of brutality in any area where they knew there were some PAIGC people. And then everyone resented that. It made our work easier.

But we lost many good friends during the initial preparation stage. Many were shot.

QUESTION: *How closely in contact was your movement with other liberation groups such as FRELIMO?*

ANSWER: This was a common situation which we saw from the very beginning. We even operate an office in common in Algeria. We work out the propaganda material together. We have very close alliance not only with FRELIMO, but also with the ANC, ZAPO, and SWAPO. The problem that we are facing in Guinea is the same as the problem in Mozambique and

not MPLA? (SWAPO YUNIA)



Angola. They cannot be dissociated; therefore, we work very closely together.

*QUESTION: If it comes to a stage of negotiation, the Portuguese will need to take into account what effect negotiation with you will have on the other movements in the other colonies. If any negotiation goes on, will you be negotiating not only with the Portuguese, but also with the other liberation parties negotiating on your side?*

*ANSWER:* Well, if it comes to that, we will be sort of consulting them; I don't believe we will be sitting at a table with Portugal over there, and Angola and Mozambique, etc. over there. I'm not even sure that we'll be independent first. It could be the other way around--either Angola or Mozambique. But maybe for awhile the war will sort of go on in all the three colonies together. It will be easier on all of us. Once they free us, the 40,000 men that they have now in Guinea will go to Angola or Mozambique. However, if Guinea was the only Portuguese colony, we would have been freed a long time ago. They are thinking of what kind of effect it would have on the morale of the soldier in Mozambique and Angola if they ever free Guinea. It wouldn't make sense if you have them fighting in Guinea, and then you let Guinea go. The remaining troops fighting in the other areas would resent it. They'll say: but what are we dying here for--if they are just going to free all of them anyway? It is the domino theory--as Guinea goes, so goes Angola and Mozambique. It's really futile for them to be holding onto Guinea. They're not earning anything in Guinea. Even to feed their troops in the towns and in the south, they have to import rice from abroad. And there's an awful lot of rice in Guinea; but it is in areas which we are controlling. What they do is take helicopters and burn our rice stock and our rice fields. It doesn't make any sense for us to be eating rice and them importing it when they are only a few miles away.

*QUESTION: Wouldn't this also be the basis for the Portuguese to entrench themselves in Guinea, not because they have any particular hopes for Guinea, but because they feel they might have hope in Angola or in Mozambique?*

*ANSWER:* Yes, they are prisoners of their own lies. They have been lying to the world and to the U.N. that we are Portuguese, that Guinea is a sort of province--that Guinea is to Portugal what Alaska or Hawaii are to the United States--that we form part of a big community called...I don't remember which term is being used now...and that we are a province of Portugal. It's a funny thing that at the beginning Guinea, Angola, and Mozambique were *provinces* of Portugal. No, it was *colony* first; then it became *province*; then it became *colony* under Salazar. In 1965, the committee in the U.N. started probing those member states which had colonies. Then Portugal changed our designation from *colony* into *province*. Right now I don't even know where I am--if I am still Portuguese or what. It's very difficult for them to

justify their being in Angola or Mozambique, which legally in the U.N. are provinces of Portugal. So why free a province? Why free a state? They've gotten themselves caught up in this vicious circle.

*QUESTION: Is it your impression that PAIGC used different approaches (as compared to the South African and Zimbabwean parties), that perhaps account for the greater success in persuading the peasants to support the movement? Or do you think that it's a function of time or outside factors?*

*ANSWER: I think it's primarily a function of time. It will probably take a much longer time in South Africa because the whites were very clever. In the very beginning they started separating the different groups, which made contact difficult and unity very difficult. If the Portuguese had done the same thing, created Bantustans, it would have set us back many years. Also, the war in Angola started in a different way--a riot in some jail in Luanda which took momentum and then became a war of liberation. Many peasants in that area didn't know quite what was happening until the MPLA came and talked with them and tried to mobilize them. But by that time the whole thing was localized, that area in Northern Angola was localized. Then the Portuguese conducted what they called mopping up, i.e. killing everything in sight--anything moving. In Guinea the Portuguese thought that if any war would take place, it would be coming from the Republic of Guinea, and so they deployed troops around the border, assuming that it would be the same as in Angola: we would come in, hit them, and run back into the Republic. So they deployed troops at a point and we started the war in the middle and attacked them from behind. So what happened is that many of their troops were running into the Republic--from where we were supposed to be coming! But maybe we were very lucky in carrying on very intense preparation. When the first shooting started, just about everyone was expecting it; it was much easier, then, to hide or take cover...because, in the very beginning, very few of us had guns.*

*QUESTION: Is it your impression, then, that the attempts to gain peasant support have been more or less the same in Guinea as in the southern parts of Africa and is it simply that they have not had some of the advantages which you have had?*

*ANSWER: I don't think that the approaches have been exactly the same; we've probably been more thorough in Guinea than they have been anywhere else. But probably it was easier in Guinea since it's much smaller. We can get around Guinea in a very short time, where in Angola it would take a year going from North to South. If you tried to walk through South Africa it would take an awfully long time! So, in Guinea it has been much easier--even though we have the tribal problems and all that--which, by the way, we succeeded in eliminating from the very beginning. We've tried to build a nation at the same time as we have*

been fighting a war. In the long run I think we will be better off than many African nations when we become independent because we are learning from their mistakes. What happened is that many of them voted that they wanted to become independent and then they had a lot of problems that they had never had before; they didn't know how to tackle them. But after ten years of watching the others we have a pretty good idea of what to avoid--where the pitfalls are.

*COMMENT: The situation is quite different in South Africa. In the PAIGC/Guinea situation there is a very different level of organization, of effort, of commitment.*

*COMMENT: It is this different level of commitment which interests me.*

*COMMENT: Well, in southern Africa you do not have any mass movement. You have people who are cooperating with the white man, who are operating within the system, abiding by the status quo. Others who are committed are sometimes operating outside the system.*

*QUESTION: In terms of your organizational problems, how thorough was Portuguese control of individual mobility? How great were the restrictions on you with regard to getting around (say, in contrast to white South African control over movements of people)?*

*ANSWER: It was very difficult. Although they didn't have much control of the countryside, there were many informers, which made mobilization more difficult. And there is one slight difference between Guinea and South Africa, Mozambique, and Angola. Guinea was never a colony in the same sense. The Portuguese were traders; they would come and make money and pack up and go back. But in the other areas there are settlers--intending to remain. Thus, in South Africa, for example, the government needed a greater degree of control--to protect the white community.*

*QUESTION: Besides allowing the PAIGC to operate out of some of the capitals of Africa, what support do these neighboring governments give Guinea? Did you lose a friend when Nkrumah was overthrown? Were any troops trained in the other countries?*

*ANSWER: Yes, we lost a friend when Nkrumah was overthrown; in the very beginning, some of our people were trained in Ghana. We do get some information from most African states. We received a lot from Ghana.*

*QUESTION: Do you have arms support as well as financial support?*

*ANSWER: Yes, we get both--arms and financial support. There is the Liberation Committee within the OAU, so which ever nation wants to give us weapons can go through the OAU. The money is put in a common pool of this committee and then it is given to us every year. There is a budget as part of this committee and they allocate so much to the*



various groups such as PAIGC. Other than that we have no bilateral arrangements with many African countries--that is, ones we deal with directly rather than going through the OAU--like Algeria, Guinea, and Senegal, and Tanzania, etc.

QUESTION: Do you happen to know what percentage of the revolution is carried out with these funds from neighboring countries?

ANSWER: I won't go into numbers, but it's a great amount of it.

QUESTION: More than half?

ANSWER: I wouldn't say half--maybe less than half.

QUESTION: Everyone seems to be very impressed with the types of institutions you have set up in the liberated zones. Would you care to comment on what kind of society you envisage?

ANSWER: We are trying to build something new and unique. We are trying to give a voice to the peasant, to the people, which has been denied them for five centuries. And that is the only way we can really understand a revolution. You must change the life of the peasant. One thing we are doing is liberating the women (after many years it is only being done now in the U.S.). From the very beginning we started doing it. Some people argue that we are going to have trouble with these women later on because women will be having their guns also; we can't mess around too much with them.

We tried to let the peasants take a part in government; we tried to give them the vote, to show them that they will be running their country, Guinea. So we start from the Village Committee, at a very low level. It has about five members. And from these, at least two must be women. And any decision concerning the village has to be taken into account by this committee, which keeps order or informs the next level of the party what is happening. And after that the next level is what we call zones, so you go from villages to zones--involving more than two to three villages. Then from the zone we have the interzonal committee. In between each of these levels there is always someone appointed by the party to supervise each of these committees. When things go wrong the party can always re-direct. Concerning the military, we deal with them in a different way. In the court system which we have formed we differentiate between the people's court and the military court. If you are a guerilla you will not be touched by this committee; you have to appear before a different court, a military court--although guerillas might not be military as such. A guerilla is judged in a different way. But at the lower levels decisions are made by the people. We are trying to avoid the trap which many African countries have fallen into. They are independent, but nothing has changed in the villages. (We are avoiding having the elites doing everything; the masses will.) That way we eliminate the power of

the-elite. We think we can do it in Guinea. We can make the so-called elites go into the fields and plow for awhile. Maybe it would be better for them than sitting at a desk. When you switch roles you learn the value of the work someone else is doing--in the field, plowing, while you are sitting in an office with air conditioning and FM radio, etc. If you go into the fields you might enjoy it for awhile.

QUESTION: *Won't this be opposed by the elites?*

ANSWER: That is a circle we can fall into, but we are trying to minimize this as much as possible. But certain problems are impossible to avoid. You can't take a peasant and tell him to write a constitution, so the so-called elite will be doing it. But we are trying to minimize the problem even if it can't be abolished completely.

QUESTION: *It seems clear that you have managed to overcome a lot of difficulties, particularly with organizing the peasants. Obviously you couldn't have done what you have done without having succeeded in that respect. What do you see at the moment as your greatest problem, the one which stands between you and final success?*

ANSWER: It is difficult to pin-point one single thing; I think it's just a matter of time. You see, for the last two years we have been holding the same areas, more or less. We are trying to bring up to the level of the war such things as education, a smoother administration, etc. The more area you conquer, the more problems you have, e.g. the need for more schools, more doctors--you have more people to feed.

We have been concentrating on strongholds, for even in the areas which we control there are still Portuguese outposts, surrounded by barbed wire. We are living around them and this Portuguese presence there is still a problem. So we have been concentrating on these areas rather than getting more territory. However, in the last 18 months we have thrown them out of over thirty areas. Therefore, if I have to pin-point the thing which is delaying final victory, I would have to say it is only a matter of time...time before the last push. But everything is much easier now at this stage. If you were to ask me which stage is the most difficult in the struggle, I would say mobilization, talking to peasants--but also going without guns. However, now we know where they are; they are localized. If we can apply enough pressure on them in the towns and make life difficult for them in these towns, they'll give up. Essentially in any guerilla warfare one is not aiming for the military victory as such. Instead you try to make the situation impossible for your enemies, so that they will have to sit and talk with you. The many wars which have been won by guerillas have been won mainly in the metropole.

QUESTION: *Do you see any outside interest in your struggle, in Europe, in America? When the final victory does come, do you see any hawks*

*from opposite angles swooping down?*

*ANSWER:* The thing is there, yes. As a speculative example, the Portuguese gave Ethyl Oil Company a concession for the drilling of oil in Guinea around 1958. They have been drilling and surveying all this time. When the war started they began offshore drilling. Now nothing has come of all of this so far--all these years of just prospecting. They have not told anybody what they have found. Is there oil in Guinea or not? I think that they are stalling, sitting on the fence, waiting to see who is going to win. Then they will try to get a contract with the winner. That's the hawk right there!

*QUESTION:* *If, as you say, the final victory will be won in the metropole, do you feel that you have any viable support within Portugal? Both PRELIMO and PAIGC have made contacts with those within Portugal who are anxious to change the structure of Portugal itself. Do you feel that there is any possibility for collaboration, for internal pressures?*

*ANSWER:* Well, in the case of Guinea, I didn't mean to imply that the final victory would be won in the metropole. There's a possibility, but we do not have the physical means for doing it. Our plan is to carry out a more persuasive form of politics. But I think there are some signs in Portugal of restlessness, especially the youth who are being drafted. It is very difficult for Portugal to tell these youths that they are going to be drafted and sent to Guinea. In many cases now they are put on a boat to go overseas and they are never told where they are going until they near Guinea. But if they knew, they wouldn't go; they would desert. The youth of Portugal are restless about this war. The opposition has put a great amount of pressure on them. Of course, that is why a regime such as Salazar's could remain in power for so long; the amount of repression was terrible! They can do the same things within Portugal to keep the opposition quiet as they do in Guinea and the other areas. The Portuguese people themselves are living under a great amount of repression. Forty-three percent of the population is illiterate and these people are hardly taking part in or benefitting from the economy. It would be impossible for such a poor country to wage a war in Guinea and in the other areas at the same time if it were not for the help they are getting from NATO.

*QUESTION:* *You mentioned the Gavin formula of fortifying enclaves. Is this a possible Portuguese strategy? Can you give an assessment of how effective this might be in a small country like Guinea? What are the enclaves? Can they be held? What percentage of the population is involved? Could the Portuguese see this policy effective in the extreme by simply holding the Cape Verde Islands? Do you have any aim and objectives for the Cape Verde Islands?*

*ANSWER:* Maybe they will end up with the Cape Verde Islands. Even when we attack, their planes often fly to the islands. As far as enclaves, the technique doesn't work very well. A Portuguese newspaper man went to Guinea to report the situation. He described life in a bunker (an enclave) where they might live underground for months and months sometimes. What we do is keep snipers around it, and we force them to keep their heads down. Whatever they do physically has to be done within the bunker--all their physical needs. We know that we can get them out of there easily with our heavy weapons. If you can pour enough shells into the bunker, large mortars, they will get out. And they are getting out! I don't think it's very successful, but it does allow them to hold on for some time. What they are doing now is to build an enclave in the middle of the population, so that in order to attack them we have to go through the population. During the night the bunker will be in the dark and then they put flares on all the huts of the peasants, so if we attack them we have to kill our own people. And they know that we will never attack our own people to get them. So they put in land mines, illuminate the huts. Sometimes they leave their bunkers and go out four or five miles and shell the huts to give the peasants the impression we are attacking them (the peasants). It is a very vicious war!

*QUESTION:* You mentioned financial support from African countries. Do you get support from any other countries?

*ANSWER:* Yes, we get some support from Eastern countries such as the Soviet Union--and some from Cuba. And lately the Swedish government has decided to allocate some funds for the party. They started giving us about one million crowns every year which we can use in any way we choose. Mainly we have been buying supplies in Sweden and sending them to Guinea. Although we have a lot to eat, our problem is that when we want something like a shirt we cannot get it. We need shirts, so we tell the Swedes to send us shirts which we take and give to the peasants in exchange for rice--a kind of barter system. I think this is setting a trend...that the liberal nations...the Scandinavian countries are helping us. Maybe later on we can get help from Holland, etc. Bit by bit people are becoming aware of the situation. Even a few weeks ago the UAW (United Auto Workers) in Washington decided to give us some help in medicine and drugs--around \$40,000 every year. Some Frenchmen have formed a committee to send us blood. Every two weeks a plane comes from Paris which stops in Conakry from where we can get the blood. So this is the blood of Frenchmen while the French government helps Portugal. Funny war.

*QUESTION:* What is the rate of defection of the Portuguese military?

*ANSWER:* Maybe for the size of their military it is not very great, but there's a lot--not just in Guinea or Mozambique--but in Portugal itself. Once they are in Guinea it is very difficult to escape service. So, the Portuguese have two problems: fighting us and controlling their

own troops. We broadcast daily to Portuguese troops and encourage them to desert. And some do come. We tell them it is not their war and that the Portuguese will be going from Guinea anyway and ask them why they should waste their lives in Guinea. We tell them that if they come to our side we will give them a ticket to go anywhere in the world. And they come and we ship them out--all of them. Who wants them anyway! They usually go to Algeria; there's a large community there of Portuguese escapees.

*QUESTION: Do you have facilities for making them feel secure, for helping them cross lines?*

*ANSWER:* Well, more don't come because they don't feel very secure. In a speech that the Minister of War made in Portugal to encourage the troops, he told them that they were going to go to Guinea to fight wild beasts who run naked in the jungle. In order to preserve the Christian civilization, he told them, they must go and defend their mother country from the monkey, from the savage. Unfortunately, many Portuguese do believe that. After all, 43 percent of the population of Portugal is illiterate. So, when you tell a poor peasant who doesn't know any better that he is going to fight a savage, he will probably believe it. But once they go to Guinea and see what is going on, they change their ideas completely. One of the techniques the Portuguese use to combat these changing ideas is to continue changing troops so that the veterans cannot tell the new recruits what is going on. If these troops could get out from under Portuguese control more easily we would have had more come over. There have been many instances of Portuguese soldiers being killed trying to join our side. If the Portuguese know that there is someone trying to escape they will hunt him day and night. About a year ago five of them were killed in a land mine, among whom was a Portuguese officer, trying to come to our side. I cannot tell you the exact number of them, but there are quite a few deserters. Of course, we take a risk. We can never be sure if they are real defectors or intelligence agents.

*QUESTION: Are African troops employed by the Portuguese against you?*

*ANSWER:* In the beginning, yes, but now, very few. The Portuguese have found out that when they recruit these Africans and train them, they usually end up having trained them for us. So, now these troops are used in the rear, the truck drivers, the cooks, the police force, etc. But in combat duty not many are used anymore.

*QUESTION: From where are these people recruited?*

*ANSWER:* From the peasants...compulsory service. I was drafted some time ago. They never got me.

*COMMENT: This would be very difficult for a peasant who is drafted into the Portuguese army. He suddenly has to decide which side he is going to be on.*



ANSWER: Yes, and we understand it. That is why we are too soft on them. They don't have much choice. But we are talking about a very small percent of the troops...maybe less than one percent. There are some informants, but mostly in the towns--and very few.

QUESTION: *Would you comment on the role of the Catholic Church in providing inspiration, will, etc. to the Portuguese?*

ANSWER: It is practically the same as in some other areas--maybe less so in Guinea because we have very few priests. We tried to send a message to the Pope when he went to Uganda, pointing out what was wrong and what could be done. But I don't think any resolution was passed on Portugal regardless of our message. Usually what is true for Angola and Mozambique is true for Guinea. The Catholic Church plays a very negative role where Guinea is concerned.

QUESTION: *With regard to the deployment of African troops in Angola and Mozambique, do you think that the numbers there are also diminishing?*

ANSWER: Yes, I think the same is true as in Guinea, but one still finds quite a few African troops, for they have no choice.

QUESTION: *Have you made any changes in methods of agricultural production in the areas that you control? And would you say that agricultural production is greater now than it was before the war?*

ANSWER: Production is greater now. And maybe it is a kind of miracle, when you realize the kind of conditions under which the peasants have been living, being bombed and living in a shelter, etc., and at the same time being able to diversify and produce more. But Guinea has a very fertile soil and the Portuguese had never tried to exploit to the full extent agricultural production in Guinea. They would just get what they could out of a particular area and forget all the rest. We have sent some people abroad for training as agronomists and they are now experimenting with new things.

QUESTION: *Have you made any attempt to produce more than just enough to feed people?*

ANSWER: Yes. For one thing, we always have to produce more because we never know when some food crops will be burned by napalm. It is difficult to hide rice. You can hide one ton maybe, but when you try to hide the food for an entire nation, i.e. thousands of tons--you have to pile the rice somewhere and these piles become targets for planes. So, we have to produce more than we can eat, for the Portuguese will burn some. They are probably burning some right now.

QUESTION: *I noticed there was an article in NEWSWEEK about the revolution in Guinea. What did you think of it? And what sort of reception*

*have you been getting in the United States?*

ANSWER: I think the article was quite good for *Newsweek*. The whole problem basically is lack of information. Few people really know what is happening in Guinea and we don't have enough manpower or money for the propaganda business. I think that, if Americans were informed about what is happening, they would very likely come and help us. Maybe later on we will send someone here to go around and talk with people and explain the war. There is always the possibility of getting some amount of aid from the United States--not the government, of course.

QUESTION: *One of your promises to the people was to broadcast in their own language. Do you think you can carry on with this kind of broadcasting since you have many languages?*

ANSWER: We broadcast about four hours daily in every major language in Guinea, plus Portuguese. We even have a special program for Portuguese soldiers.

QUESTION: *Now, when it is time for you to establish an educational system, how will you solve the language problem?*

ANSWER: You can carry on with nationalistic sentiments, but you have to be realistic. All of our textbooks are in Portuguese and it is a very long process to develop your own writing, grammar, phonetics, etc. It might take 20 years to do it. So, we are very realistic and we will be using Portuguese to begin with. But maybe later on we can use Creolo which is widely spoken in Guinea--a very badly corrupted form of Portuguese. Maybe after becoming independent and with the right type of institutions, we can develop a grammar for it. But one has to be practical. We might run into difficulties if we pick one language and try to make it the national language. And the others will say, what's wrong with my language? No, we will use Portuguese to begin with.

QUESTION: *Could you elaborate a bit more on the educational system?*

ANSWER: The school system has changed a bit from what it was under the Portuguese. Up to 1960 around 99.7 percent of the population was illiterate and then the war began. People had to be trained and informed. Even some weapons are very complicated to handle unless you can read, i.e. calculations for range, angle. During the five centuries of colonialism there were only about 40 schools in all of Guinea. Now we have about 150 in our areas. We have two boarding schools, one in the North and one in the South. And we train students in these for about three or four years. And then the best ones are taken to Conakry where we have a very special school. They remain in Conakry for three to five years until they attain a certain level from which we feel they can continue with their education somewhere else. We came to a point where

we had to write our own textbooks because the Portuguese ones were meaningless. Under colonialism, if one wanted to pass the school certificate examination in Portugal, at about 11-12 years old, one had to be selected for his work during the year. Then one had first a written and then an oral examination. Can you imagine an 11 year old school kid going through all that! That final oral examination is public; anyone can come and watch one perform. The little student had to sit in front of a panel of four or five people who would fire questions at him. They might ask about the railroad going from Porto to Lisbon and all the stops in between. A poor African kid doesn't really care about the railroad stops from Porto to Lisbon. And these kids had no idea of what was happening in Guinea. Well, I suppose it was considered that, since they were legally Portuguese anyway, they should know about the mother country. So we needed to change all that and we needed to find the means to teach people how to learn to read and write quickly. We are trying to do in two and one-half years what the Portuguese do in four. We need fewer years of schooling. It is a very complicated thing--a revolution. There are many more things which come with it that you have to supply.

*COMMENT: I was talking with a Portuguese army captain in Lisbon who had captured the primary school textbooks of PAIGC. He told me that they were infinitely better than Portuguese textbooks. In fact, he is now doing a Master's thesis on the educational system of the PAIGC!*

*QUESTION: How did you keep up the training of your personnel and conduct a war at the same time?*

*ANSWER: We haven't quite kept up with it; we are somewhere behind; it is very difficult. And then you have to be very careful. You cannot demand too much from the peasants. We sent a few of our people abroad who then came back and quickly taught others. Bear in mind that we began with 99.7 percent illiteracy. We built schools very rapidly; we taught people very rapidly. If we don't do this, we will end up after the war with a gun and nothing else.*

*QUESTION: Is it not true that the Guinean who speaks Portuguese and is accustomed to Portuguese culture feels superior to the peasants?*

*ANSWER: Yes, I felt superior for a time. You see, in order to rule Guinea the Portuguese had to educate a very small elite in Guinea so that they could put them in very key positions. They could, then, use these people to rule the majority. I was born in Guinea where I lived for twenty-one years. I do not know one single native language! I know Creolo which is wide-spoken, but it is essentially corrupted Portuguese. The Portuguese develop in the elites a spirit of superiority. One has been assimilated into Portuguese culture and one has to behave like a Portuguese. There are the indigenous people (meaning the masses), the Portuguese, and then something in between. If a truckdriver,*

say, wanted to become an *assimilado*, he had to apply to city hall. The authorities would go to the person's hut after testing his writing ability. At the hut they would see if the person had a toilet, to see what kind of food he is eating--how close it is to Portuguese food. Then, if one passed, one was given an I.D. card which made one automatically an *assimilado*. One would have a fancier life--better job--kids could be sent to school, etc. It was a bad situation.

QUESTION: *There is a definite lack of information in an English-speaking country like the United States. There is very little information on the movements in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea. There is, then, the problem of what kind of propaganda you can use. What kinds of materials do you have?*

ANSWER: Our material is mostly written in French and in Portuguese. We have very few people in Guinea who can cope with English. But we are thinking of translating our bulletin into English. But one of our shortcomings is lack of information. We have concentrated too much on the internal struggle and we are now suffering from our neglect of the information end of it. However, we don't have enough people to do it in English.

QUESTION: *What will you do if the Portuguese take off for the Cape Verde Islands? How will you get them out of there?*

ANSWER: That is a hypothetical question. I don't know if they will do that. But the party, the PAIGC, is fighting for Guinea and Cape Verde. We haven't had a war in the latter yet, for conditions have not been right. But it will be only a matter of time before there will be a war in Cape Verde. It is more difficult logistically, but we are preparing for it. The Portuguese are going to have the surprise of their lives in Cape Verde itself!

QUESTION: *Is there much American investment in Guinea?*

ANSWER: No--other than the oil company--practically none. Mostly these investments are in Angola and Mozambique. The main kind of American investment is, of course, NATO guns going to Portugal!

**ANY INFORMATION ABOUT WAYS TO SUPPORT P.A.I.G.C. MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN FREEDOM ACTION COMMITTEE (SAFAC), AFRICAN STUDIES CENTER, U.C.L.A.**