

# Mass exodus as Angola's economy breaks down

The sound of shooting in Luanda has been replaced by the sound of hammering as Portuguese trying to leave the country pack their belongings in wooden crates. CARYLE MURPHY reports from Angola.

THE tremendous shock to Angola's economy caused by the political revolution in the country shows up in small ways as well as major ones. There are long lines for bread — many days there has been no bread. Potholes in the streets go unrepaired. "NAO HA TABACO" signs greet disappointed smokers. Smouldering fires on street corners burn uncollected rubbish. The market is half empty, lacking most vegetables and fruits.

There are long lines to buy suitcases and people have spent whole nights in lines waiting for travel agencies to open in order to buy tickets to Portugal.

Most of those leaving had no intention of doing so last January when the Transitional Government took power. But with the spreading of the war to urban centres all over Angola, the whites don't feel secure enough to stay.

The situation is a complicated one. Lisbon has dragged its feet organising a serious airlift to evacuate the 200,000 whites who want to leave by November 11.

In August, frustrated Portuguese formed the Front of Organised Portuguese Repatriates (FORP) to pressure the government for more transport back to Portugal.

An airlift involving US, West German, and French planes as well as those of TAP, which will try to transport 3,000 people in 12 to 15 planes daily, is supposed to begin shortly. Since June an average of five planes daily have taken out over 25,000 people. Approximately the same number have gone by their own means.

Other Portuguese have fled overland to Namibia. In Sa da Bandeira, they slept on mattresses on the ground, in cars and in tents inside the Portuguese barracks while they waited for permission from the liberation movements to pass the border. They had few possessions with them.

They were very bitter. One man said, "Colonialist that I am, I leave Angola where I was born 45 years ago with only my car, my wife and children and two suitcases".

The sound of shooting in Luanda has been replaced by the sound of hammering. Wooden crates are made overnight — at \$100 per cubic meter. But in the port, crates are piled so high and are moving onto boats so slowly that no more are being allowed onto the docks for the time being.

Port productivity has not become any better and many Portuguese are afraid they will never see their crates or cars again. One man reportedly bribed dockers to the tune of 30,000 escudos (\$1,200 official rate) to get his car on the next boat.

Although the government has criticised the Portuguese for leaving, accusing them of "economic sabotage", and has guaranteed civil servants pensions and other fringe benefits if they opt for Angolan nationality, almost all prefer to return to Portugal, taking a 50% cut in salary. Many say they will return when the war is over.

By independence 300,000 of the estimated 400,000 Portuguese in Angola will have left. Because the Portuguese did not bother to train many blacks in skilled and semi-skilled jobs, their departure will

be keenly felt. Offices are half empty. Things which break down cannot be repaired. Trucks are not bringing in produce. On the other hand, this situation allows the blacks to move up. A year ago there were practically no black taxi drivers and now they are a common sight.

Cars with empty gas tanks were lined up for days at gasoline stations in August when fuel ran out. The PETROANGOL refinery which supplies the whole country was shut down for a month due to a fierce battle between FNLA and MPLA at a nearby fifteenth century fort. One storage tank with diesel was hit, and burned.

The government bought a tanker-full of fuel to alleviate the situation until the refinery started up again. The oil companies ordered the tanker to proceed to Luanda at a snail's pace until the letters of credit were confirmed in New York. Confidence in the Angolan Government is not very high these days.

Overland travel is risky and in some places, impossible except by military escort. The vital Luanda-Nova Lisboa road is controlled by MPLA and UNITA. Neither lets supplies pass to the other's territory. There is no overland traffic from Luanda to the northern district of Uige. Truckers who had gone far in planning a caravan of 2,500 trucks which would go overland to Portugal were opposed by both the Portuguese and the liberation movements. The latter set up roadblocks in the south to prevent the caravan from leaving. In the face of this opposi-

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Crates destined for Portugal waiting to be shipped at Luanda port. By independence it is reckoned that 300,000 of the 400,000 Portuguese in Angola will have left, but many say they will return when the war is over.

p. 77-78. Oct. 1975

tion, the truckers decided to break up and go on their own; many got through the border.

One of Zambia's President Kenneth Kaunda's nightmares — paralysis of the Benguela Railway — has happened. MPLA took control of both ends of the line and UNITA controls the centre. Zambia has had emergency meetings with mining and transport officials to work out an alternative way to get her copper out to the sea.

The dreariest places in Angola are the airports. They are plastered with propaganda graffiti and peeling posters. Crowds of people, waiting for lifts on Portuguese Air Force planes or for available charter planes, wait days and nights, sleeping on foam mattresses in the airports. Private companies won't fly to the north but for the time being, air traffic continues between Luanda and the central and southern areas.

Employees favourable to MPLA at the Angolan airline, TAAG, are boycotting flights from Kinshasa and Carmona as a protest against FNLA. One of TAAG's friendships was hijacked by FNLA in August.

Commercial activity is limping along. Credit sales are practically nil but over-the-counter sales have increased due to the higher purchasing power of the black Angolans. Firms like Nogueira which have

been in Angola for over 30 years are still importing merchandise but their suppliers are more and more uneasy about the banking situation in Angola.

Back in May the three liberation movements decided on a bank policy for Angola in which the state would have 51%. When FNLA and UNITA abandoned the government, MPLA threw this out the window and nationalised the banks.

Bank directors were called to the Government Palace one afternoon and told that their jobs had been taken over by government administrative committees. They were all invited to be part of the new committees. While the Finance Ministry was advising them of this, policemen with machine guns occupied the banks much to the surprise of employees who did not know what was happening.

There are two banks in Angola with non-Portuguese outside capital: the director of Banco Totta Standard (40% Standard) hastily left the country, but the director of Banco Inter Unido (50% City Corp. of New York), Mr. Alan Williams, was not so lucky. When he tried to get on a plane for Windhoek a few days later, MPLA arrested him and put him under fixed residence for 48 hours.

They accused Williams of leaving the country with bank records "clandestinely", i.e. without telling the new administrative committee. Williams had photocopies of some bank records in his suitcase and when they found nothing missing in the bank they allowed him to leave Angola.

The Finance Ministry restricted personal withdrawals to 20,000 escudos (\$800) per

month to halt the panic drain on the banks and to control the black market which is approaching scandalous limits. In Nova Lisboa, 1,000 Portuguese escudos brings 10,000 Angolan escudos. The dollar, usually 25 escudos, runs between 120 and 200.

Dr. Vasco Vieira de Almeida, the Portuguese Economic Minister in the Angolan transitional government has warned that Angola is approaching a financial breakdown.

The coffee crop of 1975 is 50% lost, but plentiful stocks which are located 90% in the Luanda area will be able to cover demand well into next year. The 1977 supply however, will depend on the war. Right now the major coffee producing area is in the hands of FNLA. There is not enough labour to take care of the coffee because traditionally it was the southerners who came in droves to work the coffee. They are no longer coming.

If a stalemate develops and Angola is divided for many months into 1976, then Angola's second largest revenue-getter will suffer the consequences for many years.

While many towns in the interior are without any vital services and even without food, Luanda is running fairly well since the fighting stopped here. MPLA has turned its efforts in the city to encouraging the people to work. "To produce is to resist" is their slogan.

If UNITA holds out in the central highlands, they could put a strain on Luanda's food supply but the outlook now is that by November, MPLA will dominate the whole country.