

MENDING FENCES *To the point v.7, n.25*

Portugal's future African policy in the balance

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Great hopes are being pinned on a major top level effort in the next few weeks to arrange a meeting between Portuguese President Ramalho Eanes and Angolan president Agostinho Neto in the not-so-neutral ground of Guinea-Bissau with a view to improving relations between their countries. Tentative arrangements are being made for Mozambique's Foreign Minister Joaquim Chissano to visit Lisbon and his Angolan counterpart Paulo Jorge may also be in the Portuguese capital next month if the Eanes-Neto talks break the present deadlock.

What African policy for Portugal now? As if the new Portuguese democracy had not enough problems to tackle already, a bitter controversy is raging in Lisbon political circles over the right policy to be taken towards the former "overseas provinces", especially Angola and Mocambique.

Leftist hard-liners led by Major Melo Antunes, an influential member of the Council of the Revolution, are campaigning vigorously to have a total ban clamped on pro-Western opposition movements active in Portugal against the Marxist governments of Angola and Mocambique.

Under withering fire from the communist-orientated forces are the Lisbon branches of Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and Holden Roberto's National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA). But on a wider scale, the campaign aims at "silencing, suppressing and repressing" all opposition to the regimes of Agostinho Neto and Samora Machel of the Mocambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO).

Antunes contends that "the permanent interests of the Portuguese State" lie in backing to the hilt the Luanda and Maputo rulers. But the editor of the Lisbon evening daily *Jornal Novo*, Helena Roseta, has challenged his stand, claiming that if it were not for the massive Cuban presence in Angola, Neto would have long been ousted.

Roseta believes that "friendship and co-operation with the Angolan people involves solidarity with those fighting against the foreign oppression installed in Luanda".

To support her views, she quotes the Portuguese Constitution which while advocating the abolition of all forms of imperialism, colonialism and aggression, "recognises the right of the peoples to insurrection against all forms of oppression".

She claims: "The argument of non-interference does not imply silence or complicity: human rights are at stake and Portugal's foreign policy cannot ignore them."

Quoting Portugal's President Ramalho Eanes when he told the United Nations last month "Détente cannot be built upon hunger, injustice or oppression of other peoples", she urges Portugal to assume a

more active role in the international scene, especially in the Europe-Africa dialogue.

The controversy could not have come at a more awkward time with Portugal gambling heavily on her admission to the European Economic Community (EEC) and also trying to mend her fences in Africa.

True, the recurring idea of a Luso-Afro-Brazilian Commonwealth of Portuguese-speaking peoples received a new boost during Eanes' recent state visit to Brazil. But with the present strained relations between Lisbon, Luanda and Maputo and Brazil showing every intention of leaving Portugal behind in its energetic quest for privileged relationships with Africa, the hoped-for commonwealth seems as remote as ever.

Portugal's dilemma became still more acute when FNLA and UNITA representatives were welcomed as special guests at the recent conference on Russia's Imperialist Threat staged in Lisbon. The communist-orientated news media, virtually all state subsidised, came out in vociferous protest at what they regarded as a slap in the face for the Luanda government.

In the whole problem of relations with the former African colonies, the Portuguese government has displayed a vacillating attitude highlighted by the controversial policy of "parallel diplomacy". Bypassing the Foreign Office, "special emissaries" have been sent on secret missions to Luanda and Maputo by the president of the republic, Prime Minister Dr Mário Soares and the main political parties. Results so far have not been promising.