

Lúcio Lara

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Tor Sellström: Representing MPLA, when did you come into contact with the Nordic countries?

Lúcio Lara: The first contact was with Denmark. We built a kind of educational institute at Dolisie in Congo-Brazzaville, close to the border with Cabinda. We received support from SIDA and the Danish organization WUS. The students from World University Service helped us to build that educational centre. They sent us construction materials and an administrator, Peder Sidelmann, who still works with us in Cabinda.

TS: At that time, you served as MPLA's Secretary of Organization and Training?

LL: Yes. I still have the whole educational collection that we managed to produce. The mathematics book was one of the books printed in Sweden. That was the first contact we had. In 1971, Peder Sidelmann and the General Secretary of WUS invited me to Denmark for discussions. While I was in Denmark, I took the opportunity to establish the first contact with SIDA in Sweden.

In 1972, I went to the Swedish Social Democratic Party congress as a delegate of my party. We were in Stockholm during the congress and we established very good relations. It was very interesting. The main personality was Mme Binh from FNL of Vietnam. Amílcar Cabral from PAIGC was also there. I do not recall who was there from Mozambique. We had a march in Stockholm in favour of the liberation movements. The only photograph I have is with Prime Minister Olof Palme.

TS: Mário de Andrade had by then published some articles in the Swedish newspapers and President Neto had already visited Sweden. There was some knowledge about MPLA. But the first concrete support was to the Dolisie school?

LL: Yes. With a lot of help from Sweden and Denmark and with the government of Congo as an intermediary.

TS: Norway also supported schools for Angolans in Zambia. Were they run by MPLA?

LL: Yes.

TS: Were they of the same kind as the Mozambique Institute in Dar es Salaam?

LL: No. Our curriculum was both for children and freedom fighters.

TS: Was this part of MPLA's Centre of Revolutionary Training (CIR)?

LL: Yes. The Dolisie school was at the same place, but separate, because there we had programmes connected with classical training. We had two types of training, revolutionary and classical.

This year I am going to have an exhibition of the books that we edited at that time. I have them all. I lost one set. When I came to Luanda, I loaned it to the Ministry of Education, but they lost it. However, I kept one at home. They want me to have an exhibition on education because of the 40th anniversary of MPLA. An exhibition of the books we used. Among the books is the mathematics book edited in Sweden. I was there to correct the drafts. Alberto Neto was our representative in Sweden.

TS: You are a mathematics teacher by training?

LL: Yes, of physics and mathematics. I even worked as a physics and mathematics teacher when I was in exile in Conakry.

TS: Coming from a very different world, how did you view the Nordic countries then?

LL: In the Nordic countries, we were pleased and encouraged to find complete understanding. At the time, we were very anti-American. It is only now that we have good relations with the United States. The Americans were our main enemy, but Germany and France also supported Portugal a lot. Germany had aeroplanes at the Beja airbase and gave weapons to Portugal. France created political difficulties for the liberation movements. We had to pass through France clandestinely. We had passports from Guinea-Conakry and Congo.

Neto once came to Paris, but they did not let him enter the country. They saw his name on the screen and refused him entrance. France made it difficult for us. The Nordics were very co-operative, understanding and dynamic. There was an active solidarity, not only

speeches or words. They showed a kind of equality and comprehension that we were also to find with the Dutch in the Angola-Committee. They were also very dynamic, although not as generous because they did not have the same means as the Nordics. Above all, the Nordics gave us concrete support and materials. For the Dolisie school they assisted us with machetes, hoes and seeds, because that was also a part of education. It was very useful.

TS: Later Sweden donated trucks and other means of transport for MPLA's eastern front activities. Was that not strange to you? After all, Sweden and the other Nordic countries were part of the Western world?

LL: Their attitude showed total understanding. Actually, they had the same attitude towards Guinea-Bissau. It even made us a little jealous. They assisted PAIGC much more. We compared the figures in terms of the size of the countries and saw the difference. The reason was the presence of Amílcar Cabral. He was very dynamic and always on top of events. That was very important.

TS: There were strong links between Sweden and PAIGC.

LL: Yes, and also with Vietnam.

TS: Did that help you to understand why Sweden assisted MPLA?

LL: Yes. It was a natural solidarity, without conditions and demands. It was much appreciated. We were regarded as Marxists, Communists etc., but Sweden never gave us any problems.

TS: Olof Palme wanted practical results. Is it also your opinion that Palme was a man of achievements?

LL: Yes. First of all, he was in favour of active support to the liberation struggles and he had the ability to understand the root of the problems. He did not fall into the traps others did. He did not hesitate. At the same time, he was very humanistic and that helped him in the choices he made.

TS: But many criticized Palme. They said that he was more interested in the Third World than in Sweden?

LL: That characterized his active solidarity. He sometimes sacrificed domestic issues, just as we did in the struggle against apartheid. Angola sacrificed a lot to defend a cause that concerned the whole of Southern Africa and the

entire world. The Angolan people sacrificed the most.

TS: Sweden and the other Nordic countries channelled a lot of support to ANC and SWAPO in Angola. Did you never see this as interference in your internal affairs?

LL: No, not at all. Solidarity has a broader dimension. Precisely because Angola had earlier benefited from this kind of solidarity on the part of Sweden and the Nordic countries, we understood perfectly well that Sweden wanted to assist those that Angola was also supporting in our country. We did not see that as interference at all.

TS: However, Sweden and the Nordic countries did not support the armed struggle. At the United Nations, for example, they could not vote in favour of resolutions that made reference to violence. Did you see this as a problem or did you understand the position of the Nordic countries?

LL: From the beginning of the armed struggle, we were used to being very careful with that aspect. For example, we gave a signal for the insurrection of 4 February 1961 at a press conference in the House of Commons in London attended by Mário de Andrade, Viriato da Cruz, Américo Boavida, Aristides Pereira and two persons from Goa—which was also part of our Anti-Colonial Movement (MAC). We worked together. We had not yet separated into national movements. We just called ourselves MAC. Although PAIGC of Guinea-Bissau and MPLA already existed, we did not present them to the public because many people had been imprisoned in Angola.

When we had that press conference, Fenner Brockway and Basil Davidson—who supported us in London—asked us not to talk about armed struggle. We therefore talked about 'direct action'. We learned very soon to deal with the sensibility of assemblies, members of parliament and national oppositions in countries that wanted to help us. We always understood that.

TS: At the time of Angola's independence, MPLA had problems with the Socialist Party of Portugal (PSP) while the Nordic Social Democratic Parties supported PSP. How did you look upon that?

LL: Well, in Angola we call it '*makas*' (problems). But the problem was not with the Socialist Party, which was almost non-existent at that time. It was Mário Soares' preconceptions,

which lasted until the end, well, until today. Wrongly, he always believed that we were agents of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), which is untrue.

When we were preparing for MAC, the Communist Party invited us—not as MAC, because we never said anything to the Portuguese, but as a group of revolutionaries from the colonies—to send an observer to the fifth congress of PCP in 1957. We chose the poet Noémia de Sousa. But at the last moment she was unable to go and I was appointed to attend. It was in Lisbon, somewhere near Cascais. We went in a special kind of taxi that was very big and normally used for weddings, lying on the floor. The car drove into a garage. We went through a tunnel which they had dug from the garage to the house. We only saw the roof of the tunnel and then we were in the house where the congress took place. I stayed there for about five days. At that fifth congress, the Portuguese Communist Party for the first time took a clear position in favour of freedom and independence for the Portuguese colonies. Before that they wanted to help us to organize, but we never let them.

I knew Joe Slovo of the South African Communist Party very well. We were very good friends. His party's philosophy was South African. It was not paternalistic. It was nationalist. The Portuguese Communists did not understand that. They more or less tried to recruit us to work in the colonies as members of the Portuguese Communist Party. But I was contacted by the *Angolan* Communist Party, through Viriato da Cruz. Yesterday I found the credentials, with the photograph he gave me of the person I should contact here. It was the *Angolan* Communist Party. We never even considered working in Angola as Portuguese.

I fled from Portugal because I had been to that PCP congress. After almost two years, the police found out who had been there. There was a man from the Central Committee who betrayed us and someone from the party warned me. He was also fleeing and came to my house for shelter. He told me that 'so-and-so betrayed us. He gave the police a list of everyone present at the congress, so we have to leave'. Our guiding principle was not to let ourselves be taken by the Portuguese secret police, PIDE. It was better to flee to a foreign country than to be sent to a Portuguese jail. I therefore went to tell Agostinho Neto. I had a

Communist colleague and I also told him: 'Look, I am going to leave, because I know that someone betrayed the Portuguese Communist Party and gave away the names of those who were at the congress. My street is already being watched and in a day or two they will take me'. That guy then went to tell the leaders of the Portuguese Communist Party. He returned and said: 'You cannot do this. It is a mistake. We will protect you. We will be responsible for your security. Go underground and we will take care of you'. But I said to him: 'We do not want to be dependent on you and be your responsibility. We have to take care of our own lives'. They never understood that. And they became very upset.

TS: Maybe the difference between Olof Palme, Mário Soares or Álvaro Cunhal was colonialism? Sweden did not have a colonial heritage.

LL: Of course. But Álvaro Cunhal was a very wise man and in touch with the people. He easily learned what was wrong in his ideas. You discussed with him and he saw what was wrong and then he corrected it. That is very important. Mário Soares always saw us as connected to the Portuguese Communist Party, but there was never any connection. There was not, because we were the colonized people and we accepted neither the Communist Party nor the Portuguese government.

Having colonies immediately conditions the outlook—even the revolutionary thinking—within the colonizing countries. Of political parties as well as of countries. Talking in Marxist terms great perception is necessary in order to overcome the myths and the determinants that the colonial system imposes on the working classes. In our struggle, we said that the whites in Angola generally had an attitude against the indigenous people. It was necessary to overcome that and some did.

Not having colonies represents an advantage over the colonizing countries when we talk about revolutionary parties, which have to struggle against and overcome many constraints.

TS: Do you think that there were conditions attached to the support given by the Nordic countries to MPLA?

LL: No. Absolutely not. The natural respect and sympathy that we always enjoyed from our friends in the Nordic countries in general is explained by the fact that they in their expressions of material support and solidarity

never imposed any conditions, demanding that we did this or that. We ourselves were informed by that. We were affected by the idea of non-conditional support. SWAPO and ANC were here and we never imposed any conditions upon them.

TS: Did Angola co-ordinate policy at the United Nations and within the Non-Aligned Movement with the Nordic countries?

LL: Yes, especially in the Non-Aligned Movement. The Nordics always gave us very important support. Policies were co-ordinated. There were meetings where we discussed strategies for every document and each position.

TS: Do you believe then that in relation to Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, the Nordic countries enlarged the political space for the liberation movements?

LL: Yes, of course. It was an opening and more or less an alliance of beliefs. The Western countries were generally colonialist and reactionary, but the Nordic countries offered us support in the midst of the Western world. That was necessary to break through some barriers and carry some resolutions and votes.

TS: In the case of Sweden, the first official support to MPLA was given in 1971. In that way, Sweden *de facto* recognized MPLA as a government-in-waiting?

LL: Yes. I myself was received at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs for a meeting with SIDA to present our projects.

TS: Did you feel that Sweden recognized MPLA as the representative of the Angolan people?

LL: Yes, and that was very early.