

# Foreign Report

## THE LEGACY OF AMILCAR CABRAL

by Gerard Chaliand



Amilcar Cabral: 1925-1973

On January 20, 1973, Amilcar Cabral was shot to death in Conakry, capital of the Republic of Guinea. Leader of the liberation struggle in the Portuguese colony of Guinea-Bissau, Cabral was widely known as one of the most important figures in the Third World—comparable in stature to a Ho Chi Minh or a Fidel Castro. His assassination thus sent shock waves throughout Africa and around the world. Even so, the reasons for the conspiracy against his life remain obscure.

*Gerard Chaliand is a French author who has written extensively on national liberation, armed struggle and the problems of socialism in the Third World. His books include Armed Struggle in Africa, Peasants of North Vietnam, The Palestinian Resistance, and Algeria: Failure of a Revolution. He first met Cabral in 1962 and visited the liberated areas of Guinea-Bissau with him in May-June 1966.*

At 8 P.M. that evening, Cabral met with a delegation from the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO). Shortly thereafter he proceeded to a reception at the Polish embassy, then left at 10:15 P.M. and returned to his closely guarded home six miles from Conakry. As he stepped down from his car, he was shot down by Innocencio Kani, a member of his own party—the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands (PAIGC). Kani and others then seized Aristides Pereira, one of Cabral's principal aides, along with a number of other party leaders and forced them to board a boat. The Cuban ambassador, who was on his way to the PAIGC headquarters at the time, heard the shots and telephoned Guinean authorities immediately. The Guinean Navy was alerted and, after a chase, captured the fugitives.

As of now, the only certainty is that Amilcar Cabral was murdered by members of his own party. Several hypotheses have been put forward concerning the motives of his assassins: (1) they were Portuguese agents, to whom Lisbon had promised the independence of Guinea-Bissau if the present leaders of the PAIGC were eliminated; (2) they were party dissidents, and their action arose from internal disputes between black "Africans" and mulattos from Cape Verde; or (3) they were involved with certain Guineans in positions of authority who were opposed to the president of the Republic of Guinea, Sekou Touré.

All of these explanations seem plausible, and it is possible that all are true, to one degree or another. Luiz Cabral, Amilcar's younger brother, stated simply that "Amilcar Cabral's death was a result of poor security measures. During the last year, numerous deserters from the African troops serving Portugal joined the PAIGC without being screened."

The world press immediately recognized the significance of Cabral's death. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* covered the story on page one. The French daily, *Le Monde*, called him an exceptional leader with the stature of a head of

state. The United Nations paid tribute to him, and more than 40 delegations attended his funeral at Conakry. He was, in fact, probably the most remarkable revolutionary political leader that contemporary Africa has yet produced.

In the last 15 years there has been no shortage of "dashing leaders" whose charisma transformed them into mythical figures in their own lifetime. Cabral was not one of these. He preferred patient organizing and carefully calculated political initiative to earth-shattering declarations and spectacular gestures. Over a period of seven years he founded and built his party and laid the basis for the armed struggle he was to lead for the next ten years. Through a slow process of political organization and mobilization, combined with actual military struggle, he was eventually able to establish control over two-thirds of "Portuguese" Guinea (Guinea-Bissau).

A small country of 14,000 square miles and a population of about 800,000, Guinea-Bissau does not have the economic wealth of Angola and Mozambique with their subterranean riches. It is an agricultural country, and its harvest of rice and peanuts is exported to Portugal. Unlike Angola and Mozambique, where big international monopolies hold sway, Guinea-Bissau is ruled almost exclusively by Portuguese interests. It is noteworthy that Portugal's heavily adverse balance of trade shows a surplus only for the African colonies. The latter have little to show for their sacrifices: in four centuries of Christian and Portuguese "civilization," Portugal produced less than 15 university graduates from its Guinean "Overseas Province" and barely 2000 children even attended school.

Cabral was born in 1925 in Guinea-Bissau. A mulatto of Cape Verdean and Guinean descent, he belonged to that elite group of Africans known as "assimilados"—natives whom the Portuguese judged worthy of full citizenship. The remaining 99 percent of Africans were—until 1961—subject to the so-called "native statute" that pro-

vided the legal basis for a policy of apartheid. They were forbidden to move freely in their own territory and were subjected to forced labor.

In the early 1950s, Cabral went to Lisbon to study in the university and graduated as an agricultural engineer. There he met other "assimilados"—men such as Mario de Andrade and Marcelino dos Santos, who were later to become leading figures in the Angola and Mozambique nationalist movements. Together they organized a center for African studies to analyze their condition as a colonized people.

Later Cabral returned to Africa and travelled for two years in Angola and Guinea-Bissau. The experience deepened his understanding of the effects of colonialism and awoke in him a strong desire to form a political party which would dedicate itself to the struggle for independence. After the publication of *Census*, his remarkable monograph on "Portuguese" Guinea, Cabral, along with other nationalists, founded the PAIGC in 1956, and thereby united the struggle in "Portuguese" Guinea with the one in the Cape Verde Islands. (The islands,

about 1000 kilometers from the Guinean coast, have a population of 200,000 mulattos, all considered to be "assimilados.")

The party worked underground. At first, its members came mainly from urban intellectual and semi-intellectual backgrounds, but their ranks were soon swelled by workers and unemployed young people. During its first three years, the party concentrated on forming cells in the major towns. On August 3, 1959, a workers' strike broke out in the port of Bissau. Portuguese troops were used to suppress it, and 50 workers were killed. After the strike, the Portuguese Political Police (PIDE) succeeded in dismantling a part of the PAIGC organization. Cabral fled to the neighboring Republic of Guinea, which had won its independence from France the previous year.

In the wake of the August strike, leaders of the PAIGC re-examined their strategy and decided that it was a mistake to limit their work to the cities. Conditions in rural areas appeared favorable for armed struggle.

Thus the PAIGC set up a school for political studies in Conakry, Republic

of Guinea, in order to train cadres to carry the fight for independence to the countryside. The recruits, a great number of whom were young peasants, underwent six to eight weeks of training. For the first time in 400 years of colonization, Guinean peasants had a chance to acquire some kind of education. They learned well and returned to Guinea-Bissau, often to their native villages. There they have constituted the backbone of the party inside the country. They understand and can communicate with the peasants, and have thus been able to find people who sympathize with the aims of national liberation and undercut the influence of Portuguese agents.

The task they faced in 1960-61 was not an easy one: Guinea-Bissau is a small but complex society. About 30 percent of the population is Moslem (Foulahs and Mandingos) and the other 70 percent is animistic (Balantes, Mandjaques, Pepels). The Moslems, and especially the Foulahs, have a society which functions under the traditional chief-tain system. Social distinctions are well defined, as is the system of patriarchal slavery. The Foulahs were historically shepherds; today they own a significant amount of livestock. They have a sophisticated economy based on peanut farming, cattle raising and

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### WORKERS' CONTROL

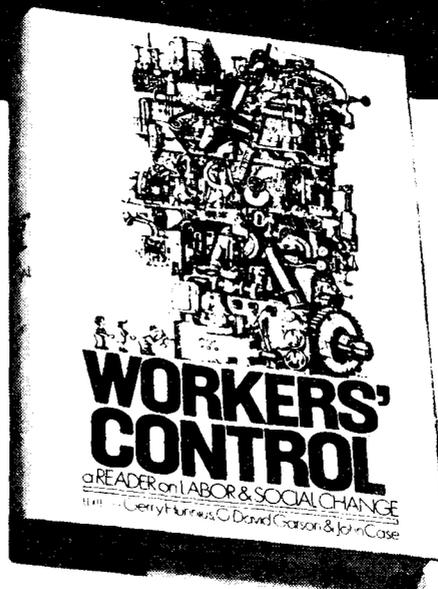
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various forms of trade.

In the early days of colonization, the Foulahs collaborated with the Portuguese, and the latter, in exchange, granted the Foulahs numerous privileges. Along with the Cape Verde Islanders, they became the instrument of indirect rule over the animistic tribes. The animists themselves have no social stratification, the major social distinction being age (the elderly members have moral prestige). They live by rice farming, own little cattle and do not engage in commerce. As a result, the animists have borne the brunt of forced labor. In addition, the Portuguese imposed Moslem chiefs on the animist villages; the chiefs then kept the communities under strict surveillance and collected taxes. This system of indirect rule enabled the Portuguese to maintain a low profile at the same time as they engineered the quick and easy subjugation of the animistic population.

Cabral's special genius was to discover and exploit this reality. Far from overestimating the peasants' spontaneity, as did Che Guevara and Franz Fanon, he carefully based his military action on ongoing political work. His strategy was thus closer to that of the Chinese and the Vietnamese NLF. With years of political experience and a thorough knowledge of social conditions in the area, Cabral had prepared

the conditions for an armed struggle which was to become the most significant in Black Africa.

In 1961, the PAIGC joined with FRELIMO of Mozambique and the MPLA of Angola to form the Conference of Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies (CONCP). By that time, most British and French colonies in Africa had achieved independence, but Portugal's fascist government and its economic backwardness ruled out the possibility of even formal independence for its colonies. Armed struggle seemed the only road open to them.

Early in 1963, it began in the southern part of Guinea-Bissau, in the area bordering on the Republic of Guinea. It soon spread to the north, near the Senegalese border. By thus launching attacks in widely separated areas, Cabral split the Portuguese troops and prevented the destruction of the embryonic guerrilla movement through excessive concentration of forces. At the same time, he maximized the impact on the population of the politico-military movement.

The PAIGC succeeded in liberating the Isle of Como, much to the chagrin of the Lisbon government. In an attempt to retake it, the Portuguese launched an offensive with 3000 troops in 1964, but failed to oust the liberation forces. That same year the PAIGC held its first congress inside the

liberated territories. By 1966, it had succeeded in extending the struggle to half the nation's territory, despite the presence of an increasing number of Portuguese soldiers (10,000 in 1962; 25,000 in 1966; 35,000 today), bolstered with substantial military assistance from NATO countries.

Once having liberated territory, Cabral developed a new kind of political-administrative structure in the zones controlled by the PAIGC. He formed committees on the village level, consisting of three men and two women who were elected democratically and who could be dismissed by the village assembly. Instituted at the grassroots level in 1964-65, this structure still constitutes the basis of Guinea-Bissau's administrative organization. It manages production, solves communication problems (transportation of material and food), supervises the people's militia in the village, and maintains constant contact with the party. It has not only allowed the villagers to make their voices heard, but has also noticeably altered the conditions of women and young people by encouraging them to participate in the struggle and the decision-making process. Forced marriage has been forbidden; young girls, especially, have joined the party en masse as nurses and teachers, and sometimes as



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Scenes from liberated areas in Guinea-Bissau

fighters. The living conditions of the rural population have improved dramatically: every five or six villages now has a school and a small medical center.

In driving the Portuguese out of these zones, the party has eliminated the Portuguese economy as well. In its place, the PAIGC has established alternative economic relationships. For example, at "People's Stores," agricultural produce can be exchanged for goods (textiles, salt, etc.) supplied by the party.

On the military level, each village has a militia made up of young volunteers, which is responsible for the village's self-defense, and for gathering information on Portuguese troop movements. Some militia members go on to join the Army of the PAIGC, which is the principal military force in the country.

The party has complete control of the military. Each guerrilla section includes one political commissar for every 10 to 20 soldiers. These political commissars are charged with maintaining good relations between the guerrillas and the population so that they can function together "like flesh and blood." Cabral himself used to spend months at a time in the liberated zones, inspecting, speaking at the people's meetings, organizing and re-organizing, working with the cadres,



and holding party conferences.

In 1966, Cabral appeared at the Tri-continental Conference in Havana to represent the nationalist movements of the Portuguese colonies. There he gave his speech, "Theory as a Weapon," which brought him recognition as one of the major leaders of the Third World. In it he analyzed the role of ideology, the relationships between Marxist theory and the actual conditions (the level of the productive forces) in African societies. He also discussed the nationalist petty bourgeoisie as a potentially determining force in the revolutionary struggle. Through this speech, Cabral emerged as one of the rare theoreticians of the Third World, as well as a remarkably able political and military leader.

On the diplomatic level, Amilcar Cabral proved that he was a shrewd politician, able to carry out difficult negotiations with neighboring African countries—whether friend or skeptic. He succeeded in keeping his party free from the consequences of the Sino-Soviet conflict and carefully maintained a "non-aligned" status in the best sense of the word. "In order to co-exist peacefully, it is necessary to exist," he declared. "Therefore, we are struggling for that right." With great deftness, Cabral maintained his objectives without serving the interests of any big power, socialist or otherwise.

Never neglecting an opportunity to publicize his people's cause and weaken the international position of Portugal, he led a delegation from the Portuguese colonies to visit the Pope in 1969. He made several trips to Scandinavia, where the Swedish government granted him humanitarian aid for use by all the liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies. He also travelled in the United States and put his case before the United Nations. In Europe, only France refused him entry.

While Cabral was carrying out these important diplomatic missions, the Portuguese were developing increasingly sophisticated pacification techniques. They would, for example, take control of important hamlets and conduct helicopter offensives against liberated zones, following the pattern used by the U.S. armed forces in South

Vietnam. The PAIGC responded to this tactic by increasing the mobility of its units and then gradually destroying the strongholds still held by the Portuguese forces. In this way, the party maintained its control of two-thirds of Guinea-Bissau. (To be sure, the Portuguese dispute this claim, but over the past eight years, the party has allowed dozens of observers to inspect the different regions they control; in 1971, for instance, the UN Decolonization Committee visited the liberated areas and verified the party's claims.) By 1972, the Portuguese controlled only the coastal strip, the cities and the central region occupied by the Foulahs—who had remained loyal to them.

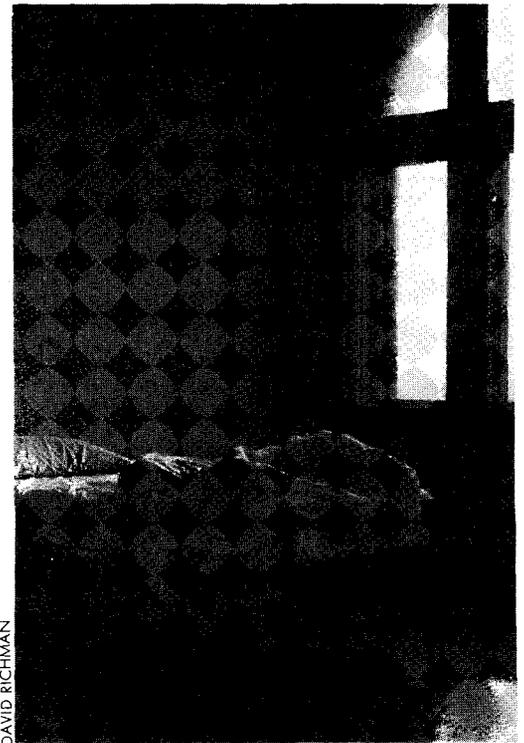
Thus, at the time of Cabral's death, the PAIGC occupied a strong position in Guinea-Bissau. It had recently held its first Assembly of Representatives elected from all the liberated territories, and in October 1972 Cabral had told the UN's Decolonization Committee that a State Council would soon be proclaimed.

It is perhaps unnecessary to add that his death constitutes a considerable loss for the PAIGC and for revolutionary Africa. What will happen now in Guinea-Bissau depends largely on the party's ability to close ranks around a new leadership which would follow the policy line developed by Cabral. However, his political sense, his particular genius for combining intelligence, flexibility, firmness and imagination, will be hard to replace.

All those who knew Amilcar Cabral will remember his thin frame, the Guinean cap he always wore, his calm and humorous way of speaking, and his poetry, too. He lived only to lead his people to independence: an independence he hoped would be real, without a corrupt and privileged ruling class, without government ministers, and without a capital city. I remember a very large tree in the Olassato region where we arrived after a long journey, and he said to me, "You see, once we have independence this wouldn't be bad as a capital for our country: a tree where you could rest after a trip to the villages." And speaking of the future, he added a phrase which he often repeated and which I will always remember as his own: "I'm telling you, it's going to be hard!" ■

# A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

## The Scandalous Conditions at Boston City Hospital



DAVID RICHMAN

*We lost a patient last week. . . . We would not have lost her if we had not had an inexperienced anesthesiologist.*

—Dr. John C. Norman,  
Boston City Hospital

**O**n the morning of Thursday, January 8, 1970, the City of Boston woke up to discover that the century-old and long-respected medical-training center of its three prestigious schools of medicine, Boston City Hospital, had been denied accreditation for the first time in 104 years.

“CITY HOSPITAL LOSES ACCREDITATION” was the front-page headline in the *Boston Herald-Traveler*. “REPORT CITES 52 DEFICIENCIES. INCLUDES HOUSEKEEPING, FIRE SET-UP . . .”

In its letter rescinding the hospital’s accreditation, according to the press, “the Joint Commission made 52 separate observations covering a number of deficiencies ranging from fire extinguishing systems to book-keeping practices to purported medical facility inadequacies.” In the final category, the commission pin-pointed the need “for

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improvement in housekeeping in specified locations, need for re-location of the surgeon’s dressing room to reduce potential outside contamination . . . and urgent need . . . for facilities to provide for proper separation of infected gynecological patients from the obstetrical-newborn area.”

The storm that broke loose on that day in 1970 has not yet quieted, even though BCH was re-accredited in late December. It is the same storm that has engulfed such institutions as the Harlem Hospital and Lincoln Hospital in New York City, Cook County Hospital in Chicago and a dozen other ghetto hospitals in a dozen other major cities. The issue is not the old and almost comfortable issue of archaic plant or antiquated apparatus. The issue is black people. The issue is white medicine. The issue is colonial health-care in its most blatant and most devastating form. The issue is two-class medicine in a racist and divided social order. Yet these are the words nobody wants to use.

[“Unnecessary mortality . . .”]

**R**eaction in Boston was, from the start, defensive and apologetic. Initial response was overseen by John H. Knowles—at that time the best-known medical administrator in

the nation. (After provoking a controversy at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, he became director of the Rockefeller Foundation in New York.) In the curious position of being at once one of the nine trustees hand-picked by Boston’s mayor to govern Boston City Hospital and director of prestigious Massachusetts General Hospital, Knowles’ national reputation as a health-care liberal seemed to be imperiled by the Joint Commission report.

“There’s shenanigans going on here,” Dr. Knowles announced. “It’s like being hit in the face with a cold codfish.” Then, with a nod to the traditional faith in cost-free and inevitable progress voiced forever by the academic liberals of Beacon Hill, Knowles proceeded to promise: “Six months from now this hospital will be fully accredited.”

It was one of several promises to the black and poor of Boston on which the medical power structure was not able to deliver. For more than 30 months, beginning January 1970, BCH would serve low-income blacks and Spanish-speaking people of Boston on a quasi-legal basis: lacking full accreditation.

Apologetic, however, evaporated quickly in the wake of still more seri-

by Jonathan Kozol