

# FACTS ON ANGOLA

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We have pleasure in publishing an article prepared by a group of Angolans who have set up a Study Centre with a view to issuing accurate and authoritative information on the actual conditions existing in Angola. The article has been translated, in somewhat abbreviated form, from *Angola, Cultura e Revolucao*, issued by the *Centro de estudos angolanos* in Algiers.

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The liberation struggle poses demands which require boldness in action and in thought. And boldness can give rise to over-hastiness, the source of imperfections and errors. . . .

No matter! The movement proves its mettle on the march. In these days it is still better to stumble than to remain seated. Quick march!

Majhemout Diop.

THE ANGOLAN POPULATION can be divided into two groups, Europeans and Africans. In 1960 the former numbered 172,000, the latter 4,600,000. Since the employers, administrators, skilled workers are all European, while the workers and peasants are African, official 'per capita' statistics are distorted and conceal class inequalities.

For instance, the cost-of-living index includes various foodstuffs, but there is a sharp division between what Europeans eat and what Africans eat. The Europeans consume the wheat, butter, milk, sugar and coffee, while the Africans exist on manioc, maize, palm oil and a little dried fish.

In any case, the bulk of the peasantry is never counted in official statistics.

In this article we set out to expose the living standards of the Angolan African population, putting special emphasis on the low quantity and quality of their food consumption.

For this purpose we divide the African population into three groups:

- (i) urban proletariat and the very few petit-bourgeois and civil servants—who buy their own food:
- (ii) farm workers (both voluntary and forced labour): miners, some of whom receive rations from the employer: half of their wages is spent at company stores, while the remainder is paid out when they return to their homes:
- (iii) finally, the peasantry who, for the most part, live on their own produce, supplemented, when possible, by purchases from the stores.

Before giving details of the economic and social conditions of the three African groups, it should be pointed out that in Angola only 47 per cent of the population is economically 'active'. The colonialists claim that, because of high birth and death rates in the rural communities, the number of dependants or 'inactives' is uncommonly high and the economy must carry them.

In fact each worker must support one dependant.

We should note, however, that, no matter how desperate the struggle to feed workers and their dependants, Angolan exports are loaded with foodstuffs.

## **THE PEASANTRY**

### **1. Conditions governing food consumption**

The Angolan rural economy is a subsistence economy—the cultivators consume what they produce. When there is a surplus, it goes to buy necessities, such as knives, clothing, bedclothes. When there is no surplus, life is just a matter of getting food. If the rain holds off, famine sets in with all its tragic consequences. For instance, in the stock-raising areas of South-West and South Angola, drought is revealed by the increased number of cattle for sale at the markets. The colonialists pretend that the Africans are interested in cattle solely as symbols of prestige, but cattle represent to the peasants the sole means of achieving a surplus from their toil. Drought to them is the major problem.

Drought, low productivity and their inability to cope with climatic extremes render the peasants an easy prey for colonialist exploitation. There is no hopeful prospect for the peasant. He is trapped forever in a vicious circle of misery and low productivity.

The colonialists analyse the situation thus: the backward economy, due to under-exploitation of natural resources, leads to low productivity, which leads to low yields, small surpluses, low purchasing power, therefore little investment, therefore a backward economy and so on round the circle again.

But this glib analysis hides the real situation: out of date implements, difficult land (the colonialists have taken the best) crude methods, absence of agricultural schools, lack of granaries, and absence of safeguards against the ravages of nature all lead to low productivity and the forcing of workers off the land.

To these obstacles must be added the load of permanent debts carried by the small farmers, debts that are added to by government taxes and penalties that must be paid in cash, e.g. the tax on home-produced wine, the fines for drunkenness, the cash payment for permits to hold traditional celebrations, etc. The hard fact is the peasants rarely have real cash in their hands. There is no cash to buy new equipment or anything else. There is, in truth, little purchasing power to stimulate the economy: therefore there is scant investment in agriculture: therefore agriculture stagnates.

It goes without saying that peasant food consumption is low. The peasant depends on natural sources, mostly gathered food; little is cultivated.

The existing conditions produce a class of under-nourished land-workers, many of whom are forced into the towns, thereby turning agriculture into a migratory occupation and, at the same time, swelling the ranks of work-seekers in the towns. Often the migrants seek work in neighbouring territories, where indeed the Angolans in some spheres make up the bulk of the labour force.

## **2. Further details**

In addition to mere subsistence farming, some peasants engage in growing crops for the market, mostly one-crop production, e.g. coffee, cotton or maize (in Central and Northern Angola.)

African coffee-growers immediately come into competition with European coffee-growers—and the odds are against the Africans, as the following official figures witness: during the years 1959-61 European production increased 48 per cent while African production decreased 5 per cent. (85 per cent of European production came from big landowners.)

The picture is different with maize, there being five times as many African cultivators as European. The explanation lies in the low profitability of maize, despite the demand to feed manual workers and the demand for export. African maize farmers go in for other crops on a small scale, e.g. haricots, but the markets for such produce (except maize) are fixed against the African grower.

Cotton is largely produced by African farmers, but the conditions of land occupation and the fixing of the market prices by the monopolists resulted in 1961 in each African cotton producer

receiving a cash return of £12. On this ridiculous figure the farmer must support at least one dependant. Consequently, in common with all the poor farmers, he turns to growing manioc, which needs little labour, but which—be it noted—is appallingly low in nutrition value.

## **THE URBAN PROLETARIAT**

### **1. Factory Workers**

According to 1962 figures there were 60,000 employees in 3,000 concerns, of whom 49,000 were Africans and 11,000 Europeans. The Europeans are the administrators and technicians. Let us repeat that lumping their salaries with African wages serves to raise the average figure.

#### *(a) African purchasing power*

Although official figures do not separate African wages from Europeans, it is possible to estimate wages by analysing statistics concerning TEXTANG, a textile company. This analysis gives 23 escudos (5s. 8d.) as the average daily wage for an African worker. (In any case, we know from experience that the average daily wage is around 20 escudos.)

Sociologists postulate an average African family as comprising, in addition to the breadwinner, a wife, one child (7 to 14 years) and one child (2 to 3 years) (cf. the Kenya Carpenter Report of 1954 which recommended a 'family' salary on this basis).

This figure implies food consumption 2.5 times that of an individual. But the Portuguese law—pretentious and unrealistic—allows for a family food consumption of 2.85 times that of an individual. (These figures apply only where the husband is fed by his employer.) We will use the figure of 2.85, but will show its impracticability later in this article.

Let us return to the TEXTANG worker.

Twenty-three escudos a day is the maximum the family can count on for food, clothing, shelter, transport, taxes, illness, schooling, etc. After allowing for tax, rent, soap, heat, light and clothing, the family have 14. One escudo for food, consisting of manioc and manioc leaves, dried fish, beans, palm-oil, and matete—a mixture of manioc and sugar.

The worker sees his family malnourished, victims to every illness. Faced with possible wage-cuts and unemployment, the worker in Luanda is trapped in misery from which, under existing circumstances, he cannot escape.

To supplement the family income his wife goes to work at a

starvation wage. (Since there are no kindergartens or nursery schools, the children are left to look after themselves.) If the wife is lucky, she may find work in a factory and earn 10 to 15 escudos a day. More often she takes in washing for ridiculous payment.

What about promotion and higher wages? This is only rarely possible. Even if an African advances socially so that he is *assimilated*—a step detested by thinking people—he finds himself confronted with the prospect of unemployment. Since the employer is now obliged to pay him European wages, he prefers to give the job to a European.

### (b) *Degree of Exploitation*

It is difficult to assess the surplus-value extorted from Angolan workers, but, again using TEXTANG wages as a guide, the following table gives the share-out of the gross income of the manufacturing industry:

Capitalists, 4.5 per cent of personnel in the industry, take 63.2 per cent.

European workers, 17.6 per cent of personnel in the industry, take 18.2 per cent.

African workers, 77.9 per cent of personnel in the industry, take 18.6 per cent.

## 2. Mine Workers

An analysis of official figures on the mining industry reveals that the average daily wage for African workers is 12 escudos (3s.).

### (a) *Food consumption on the mines—in theory and in practice*

The law recognizes a worker only after he has served six months with the same firm: the law also lays down that a worker must be fed by his employer. Going further, the law prescribes diets which are richer in protein and calories than the diets laid down by the F.A.O., as absolute minimum.

Taking F.A.O. diets as 100 per cent, the average calorie content of Angolan prescribed diets is 138 per cent and proteins 300 per cent. Diet No. 1, for instance, prescribes maize flour, fresh meat, dried fish, milk, beans, manioc leaves, ground nuts, palm oil and oranges, giving more calories and proteins than F.A.O. diets.

But practice does not keep up with the law's demands.

In the first place, employers quote the F.A.O. tables as an excuse to break the law. Other verifiable facts expose the utopian character of the law. Take the case of dried fish.

In 1962 some 20,618 tons were produced. Allowing for exports and imports there were 9,544 tons for home consumption. Now,

the official diets refer solely to the 'contratados' (forced labourers) numbering 370,000. If they consumed every ounce of the total annual tonnage for home consumption, each man would receive 70 grammes of dried fish a day, already below the 100 grammes demanded by the law. (If you divide the dried fish among the entire working population, there would be a daily ration of 11 grammes per worker—and this does not take into account the 53 per cent of the population not in employment.)

*And so the law is a delusion.*

And this is true of other foodstuffs, because agricultural produce is generally grown for export, leaving a minimum amount for home consumption.

And even this amount is disproportionately divided between Europeans and Africans, since the well-off Europeans have the cash to buy whatever is available. Fresh meat consumption, for instance, is highest per capita where Europeans are concentrated. In fact the whites in Angola have a higher per capita fresh meat consumption than the people of Lisbon and Oporto. In actual practice the African workers in the mining industry simply do not eat meat, oranges and milk and get far less of the other items than the law prescribes.

In the Companhia dos Diamantes d'Angola workers are fed for 4.7 escudos per day. Our figures for the 'family' wage of a factory worker allowed as a minimum for food for an adult 5.6 escudos per day.

*And so the law is a delusion.*

### *(b) Degree of Exploitation*

On all sides one hears—even sometimes from the colonialists—that the African's low productivity is due to malnutrition, his weak physical condition. But it is also due to the fact that the African never shares in the wealth he produces. In 1961 only 17 per cent of gross income went on wages.

The 'shark' of the mining industry is the international monopoly, the Companhia dos Diamantes d'Angola. A confidential report of a governor of Malanje—just dismissed from his position and therefore in conflict with the company—stated that the company's wages were systematically the lowest in the country. Workers were getting 1,200 escudos a year (£15) plus a little more than that in food.

Other figures for 1958 show that the company paid out nearly as much in recruiting and transporting its workers as it did in wages and rations. In 1958 a trade inspector disclosed that the

company was buying foodstuffs from African farmers at illegally low prices and was selling goods to the same farmers at an unbelievable profit.

In diamond mining the surplus value achieved by the company was in 1958 523 per cent (dividing available profit by wages). In other words out of 12 hours work 2 hours are necessary labour time, 10 hours are given free to the company.

'Petrangol' (oil company) in 1964 grabbed a profit equal to 160 per cent of the value of the labour involved.

### **3. Workers in Agriculture**

#### *(a) Forced labour*

If the condition of factory workers is tragic, the condition of agricultural workers is even more so.

Official figures for agricultural workers are not available. In 1960 the figure for paid workers was 554,000, which included both forced and voluntary labour.

Basil Davidson found in a 1955 report the figure of 379,000 forced labourers. Accepting this figure as authentic and allowing for the authorities' reluctant veering away from the forced labour system (thanks to the scandal abroad and mounting resistance at home), then we can assume the number of forced labourers still to be approximately the same, giving us a breakdown of wage earners: 68.4 per cent forced labour and 31.6 per cent voluntary labour.

This shows that colonial production is still based on forced labour.

This group of workers is mainly employed on the land, in the public services, railways, roads and mining. The great bulk of agricultural labour is forced in the interests of the big farmers and the agricultural companies.

Most land workers are found in the growing of coffee, sugar, sisal, tobacco and palm trees.

#### *(b) Workers in Coffee*

Coffee is both the country's principal export (44 per cent of the total) and the largest sphere of labour-exploitation. There are 89,545 workers on coffee farms, drawing a miserable wage and most of them enduring the wretchedness and the violence that go with forced labour. Many die: some escape: many are sent home physically unfit. The colonialists are mad with joy as each year coffee exports grow, but the producers do not even know the taste of coffee.

In 1959 the Government, fearing internal agitation, imposed new wage rates: 2,400 escudos per annum, plus (but not in all cases) a similar allowance for rations, i.e., 4,800 escudos (£60) or 13.2 escudos a day (3s. 4d.). But previously we have shown that the minimum food necessary for a typical family costs 14.1 escudos a day. So the coffee grower gets even less than that minimum: and, in any case, has nothing left for other expenses. But still this outline is too good to be true, for only occasionally are the workers fed by the employers.

*(c) Degree of Exploitation*

The degree of exploitation is revealed in the fact that in coffee-production the capitalists (2.2 per cent of the persons engaged) receive 63 per cent of the income, while the workers (97.8 per cent of persons engaged) receive 37 per cent of the income. But these figures are misleading, for they include for each worker a food allowance, which in reality is hardly ever spent by the employers.

The surplus-value produced by each worker is as follows: each worker produces per year over 1 ton of coffee to a value of 11,860 escudos. His salary is below 4,800 escudos. Therefore he produces 7,600 escudos surplus-value. Put in another way: for each hour of work necessary to produce the labourer's wages, he works free an additional 1½ hours for his employer.

## **SOME CONCLUSIONS**

Colonialist oppression in Angola reveals itself most clearly in the African's low level of food consumption, in the poverty of his standard of living and in his physical condition, which is frequently deplorable. Under normal conditions, the peasant is better off for food than those who are at the mercy of the market economy, but that is not saying much. Even among the tribes (least subjected to colonialist influence) crops are determined by the demands of the market and technical know-how is hopelessly out of date.

The colonialists, of course, maintain that there is freedom of choice for the African peasants. 'The "natives",' say the colonialists, 'grow the crops which fetch the best prices.' But they forget the entire history of the relationship between, on the one hand, the crops grown and, on the other hand, the needs of the workers and the demands of the market.

Manioc is a case in point. It was introduced from America by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, when the slave-trade with America was of such great importance. In order to increase the work output of the slaves, the African population had to become

physically stronger, acquiring a vigour which would at the same time ensure their purchase by the slave traders. Since in those days the Portuguese had contact only with the kingdoms of the Congo and Ngola, it was in these territories alone that manioc was developed. Today manioc cultivation is more or less confined to the same regions, where it is grown expressly to feed the workers on the cotton and coffee plantations, with a surplus for some industrial workers.

Maize, too, was introduced by the Portuguese at the end of the sixteenth century, when the new sugar industry at S. Tomé was absorbing all the labourers. So the reason for maize cultivation was to make labour cheaper. And let it not be forgotten that it was the Africans themselves who were furnishing the workers and their food. Starting at S. Tomé maize has spread to Luanda, Benguela and Mocamedes. It has become a basic foodstuff for forced labourers and an item for export.

Thus, 'freedom of choice according to market prices' most certainly does not operate for the Angolan peasants. On the contrary, they operate under a rigid control dictated by the interests of the colonialists, who are the only ones to profit.

With liberation this 'control' will be directed to serve the interests of the people. Today agricultural produce accounts for 67 per cent of Angola's exports. With liberation that situation will have to be rectified.

More or less violent means are used to increase the number of workers. Forced labour remains the basis of colonialist production. The degree of exploitation rises at the same rate as capitalist development: that is, industrialization spreads, prices mount, the working class grows larger, unemployment appears and migration to foreign countries increases . . . plenty of justification for the coffee workers in 1961 to rise up and shatter the tranquillity of the Portuguese colonialists.

Alongside the workers of Luanda and of the cotton-fields, they rose against oppression. They stood firm under the flag of the Revolution, despite the colonialists' savage suppression and the neo-colonialist pressures from those who were selling out the Angolan revolution in the imperialist market. The coffee workers belong to the Angolan labouring class, the most bitterly exploited social class, and, therefore, the most deeply committed.

Nor is there in the colonial set-up a future for the factory worker. Wherever he looks, he sees that he must throw in his lot with the united working class.

For this reason, on February 4th, 1961, the workers of Luanda

and the militants from other African classes stormed the prisons, setting an example of conscience and courage to their countrymen.

For this reason the day approaches when the Angolan working class with the peasants will smash every form of imperialism and exploitation in their country.

Only the People's Revolution can cry halt to the obstructive aspects of growing exploitation. That is true. But only close attention to the objective conditions of the revolution in Angola can bring about a gradual elimination of misconceptions and a more and more powerful struggle which will culminate in victory.