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AMCOMMAF

# American Committee on Africa

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George M. Houser  
*Executive Director*

July 12, 1961

Dear Friend:

I think that you will be very interested in the enclosed statement by Malcolm McVeigh, an American Methodist missionary who has just returned from Angola after four years, and who has first-hand information about what is happening in Angola, which cannot be found in the press. This is a statement which he gave at a press conference sponsored by the Methodist Board of Missions, but apparently it was not picked up and used very widely.

Very truly yours,

*George M. Houser*  
George M. Houser

GMH:mr  
Enclosure

## THE PRESENT SITUATION IN ANGOLA

(Statement by the Rev. Malcolm McVeigh, Methodist missionary who just returned from Angola, July 1:)

I must confess in the beginning that I feel somewhat inadequate for the task before me. I am not a reporter, or a member of an investigating committee, or a policeman, or a lawyer. I am merely a missionary of the Methodist Church, one who has recently returned from a term of service in Angola. I have seen certain things, and heard others, during my stay there, especially things that have happened recently, that I think should come before the attention of the world. I do not now speak as an official representative of the Christian Church in Angola or the Board of Missions in New York. I speak as an individual and bear the full responsibility for all that is said. I am not trying to make a case or prove anything (although it may seem that I am). My purpose is to try to give information about what is going on. If I seem to be one-sided, it is not because I am ignorant of the fact that there are two sides to the Angolan question. I merely feel that only one side, namely the Portuguese point of view, has been told to the world. The world is ignorant of the African side.

### I Portuguese Presuppositions

To appreciate what is going on in Angola today it is necessary to understand some basic presuppositions behind Portuguese rule wherever it is found. These presuppositions certainly would not be accepted as valid all over the world, perhaps in no place outside of Portugal itself, but they determine all policy and help us to understand the Portuguese attitude and reaction to the recent events in Angola.

The Portuguese believe that Angola is Portugal. They do not recognize Angola as a colony but as an integral part of Portugal.

The Portuguese believe that the great majority (they used to say all) of the Africans consider themselves Portuguese, are content under Portuguese rule and loyal to the Government. In their view, the Africans don't want independence, and all political activity is considered an expression of external, foreign, Communist influence.

The Portuguese believe that they are the only ones who know how to colonize properly. It has become for them a sort of religious crusade. They believe that by slow evolution (it may take centuries yet) the Africans will become completely "assimilated" into the Portuguese culture.

They also believe that by rigid control of both internal and external news, displays of force on their part can maintain the present system indefinitely and assure a "peaceful" evolution. Force is considered an unfortunate necessity used for the real good of the majority.

### II Underlying Causes of the Present Situation

Understanding these presuppositions, we are better able to appreciate the practical situation which has evolved over the years causing the present tragic state of affairs.

First of all, there is a complete lack of political participation by the people, both whites and blacks. Assimilated Africans (about 30,000) are permitted to vote only once every seven years, and for only one man, the President of the Republic (a purely honorary position without power) in an election, the outcome of which is well known before anyone goes to the polls. No government official in all Angola



is elected. They are all appointed from Lisbon, and the majority of them see Angola for the first time after their appointment. Portugal for all practical purposes is ruled by one man, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, who although never entering a national election has ruled Portugal for 33 years. His power was seen recently when he succeeded in replacing his entire Government, men who had recommended rapid reforms, while he alone remained. Since Angola is a province of Portugal, it is also ruled by Salazar, although he has never been there. Real political parties are prohibited in Angola and anyone engaged in or suspected of engaging in political activity is considered an enemy of the State and thus a criminal. African nationalism, no less a real influence in Angola than in any other part of Africa, is given no channel of expression and has thus become an underground movement.

To control political activity, all publications are rigidly censored. Freedom of the press is permitted for only one month every seven years, before the national elections. From the big Luanda dailies to simple religious pamphlets everything must be passed by the censor. The slightest hint of criticism of the existing order will result in certain banning and possible reprisals.

With no channel for expressing dissatisfaction with things as they are, abusive social and economic practices are the common order of the day. Forced labor is not only common but defended by the Portuguese as the only way to teach lazy people to work. Everyone who does not have Modelo J (a paper that says that you are a private farmer -- like so many things it is very difficult to get) must seek an employer. If he does not do so, one is found for him. Only by some higher officials is it denied that this system still exists. Local graft and the use of the bribe are but some of the more obvious results of the forced labor system. The desire for cheap labor to support European plantations has also been the cause of increasingly higher standards being required for Africans to become assimilated. Women and children are still the unwilling instruments of the repair of secondary roads and have always been considered a vital part of the coffee harvest and the cotton program. The cotton program is one of the most notorious of the Government forced crop programs and has always been a source of discontent among the people. In many areas, especially in recent years, it has been increasingly difficult for Africans to receive money for their goods. This was notable in the Libolo area where I spent two weeks last year. Merchants paid for locally grown crops only with manufactured goods making it almost impossible for Africans to pay their taxes, let alone send their children to school, support their churches, or fulfill other desires requiring money. The one bright light in this dreary picture is the almost complete lack of a formal color bar. Certainly there is cultural discrimination. All women in native dress, for instance, must go 3rd class on the train, but African people who dress and act like Portuguese may travel on trains and enter hotels and eating places. Africans who show their assimilation papers may enter movie theatres.

Educational development has been notoriously slow. There are very few Government schools and even these are not free. Most education is private, in general being connected with either Protestant or Catholic Missions. The Catholic Missions are subsidized by the Government. Even the minimum fee required is a major obstacle to the poverty-stricken Africans, and the vicious circle of illiteracy, ignorance and superstition perpetuates itself. The educational system and the textbooks used are exactly the same as those used in metropolitan Portugal. The system is not adapted to mass education or to the real needs of either the whites or blacks of Angola. Its purpose is to train a small elite. The people of metropolitan Portugal are still about 50% illiterate.



Although religious liberty is proclaimed by the constitution, various and sundry means are used to "favor" Catholics. Quite often the result is nothing less than outright persecution of Protestants.

### III Events in Angola since January

Political movements for Angolan independence have been at work both inside and outside Angola since the Korean War. The two main groups presently at work are the MPLA, led by Mario Andrade, and the UPA led by Holden Roberto. It is a mistake to consider these foreign or Communist movements. If there are signs in the Angola liberation movements today of leanings toward the East, these are probably caused by the lack of hope that the West was interested in African freedom. These movements are expressions of the same nationalistic phenomenon which has led to the establishment of independent countries all over Africa in recent years.

It is interesting that the impetus for the first outward action of this movement should have used as its point of departure the desire of Portuguese whites for a more liberal government. I refer, of course, to the Santa Maria affair which was a signal to spark Portuguese opposition to the Salazar regime. Within a short time, African nationalists attacked the Luanda prisons seeking to free suspected political agitators who had served considerable prison terms before they were ever tried in a court of law. Brutal reprisals followed in the African sections of Luanda in which scores of innocent Africans were killed by angry Portuguese troops and officials. This action was freely reported in the international news due to the fact that many foreign correspondents were permitted to enter Angola in expectation of the arrival of the Santa Maria. When foreign correspondents began to send out reports unfavorable to Portugal, they were sent packing and their films confiscated. From that time until the present, there has been a complete blackout of impartial news concerning the happenings in Angola. It is interesting to note that the first African attacks in Luanda were not anti-white as such. They were in essence complaints against the existing order which allowed no recognition of the political rights of the people. It is a tragedy of enormous proportions that the first attacks were met with such violence and irresponsible reprisals, rather than sincere recognition of error and the need of reform, as many high government officials since deposed, advocated. I say unfortunate because it encouraged a view long held by the Africans that peaceful reform was impossible in Angola.

One of the most significant events following directly the happening in Luanda was never mentioned by the Portuguese newspapers. This was the revolt in the Baixa de Cassange in early February. The revolt in the Baixa de Cassange again was not so much an anti-white attack as it was directed against abusive practices in the government-sponsored cotton program run by the company Cottonag. Africans did break windows and upset the stores of white merchants; they did attack a Catholic mission and the residences of local government officials, but they did not rob the stores and few, if any, whites were killed. It was a spontaneous demonstration against abusive practices by the Cottonag Company, and most whites who fled the area agreed that the Africans had a right to complain. A military general was put in charge of crushing the rebellion. What we know of the action is mostly through African sources, for no report appeared in any Portuguese newspaper, and we were forbidden to enter the area. Until today no missionary has been allowed to visit that region. Reports of Africans killed ranged from the high hundreds to ten thousand. It is impossible to know exactly how many were killed. Many Africans fled to the Congo. Villages were bombed, and the soldiers "cleaned up" other areas not reached by the bombings. Since Malange was the point of departure, we are in a position to confirm that hundreds of troops were sent to the area, and that many planes were seen heading there during that period. One pastor sent down word that the smell of dead bodies was so bad that they could hardly stand it. At that time, Joaquim Monteiro,



a Cape Verdian, was district governor in Malange. He went up to investigate the situation, and concluded that there were just causes for complaint from the African side. He sent a complete report to the governor general on the abusive practices of the Cottonag Company, and leaflets, written in Kimbundu, were dropped on Baixa de Cassange stating that the Africans would never again be compelled to grow cotton against their will. This was unprecedented. Cottonag, unfortunately, also sent representatives to Luanda and within two weeks Monteiro was called to Lisbon, supposedly to receive a higher position in the Portuguese UN delegation. To our knowledge, he is still in Lisbon. The brutal suppression of the revolt in the Baixa de Cassange laid a blanket of gloom upon the African population throughout the Melange district, but not a word concerning it was published in the Portuguese newspapers. They continued to tell their people that everything was fine, and the Africans were perfectly contented. In this way, they contributed directly to the death of nearly one thousand of their own white countrymen on isolated farms in the North of Angola about a month later.

From the middle of February until the middle of March, although Africans continued to be picked up as political agitators in Luanda and in other areas, notably in the North, the situation was relatively calm. On March 15th, African attacks leading to the violent and brutal killings of hundreds of Portuguese whites, including women and children, were launched. The events of those attacks have been fully recorded in the Portuguese and world news. The part of the story that hasn't been told was the reaction of the Portuguese to those first attacks. It was both swift and violent, following the philosophy that brutality must be met with brutality. I was holding evangelistic meetings near Ucuva when the attacks were started. I was there until March 18th and can honestly say that the Africans in that area did not know what had happened. They were as much in the dark about it as I was. On March 18th, the local Chefe de Posto came and asked me to leave immediately because he said that they were "going to bomb those villages". They bombed villages throughout the Demos and the Congo districts. The majority of those people who escaped the bombings and did not flee were either taken prisoner or killed. These reprisals were not confined only to the area of rebel attack. White militias were hastily formed and armed throughout the country and were given complete freedom to use their arms as they saw fit. For various reasons, Protestants seemed to bear the brunt of white ire. Our pastors and church members in the areas of Golungo Alto, Ambaca, Dondo, Cacuso, and the Libolo, areas that never experienced any real rebel activity, were taken and many killed. A reign of terror began. The white militia, in its attempt to revenge the deaths of Portuguese killed in North Angola, went far beyond the original intent of the official who armed them. I assume this from statements made by the Overseas Minister Senhor Adriano Moreira, who later warned whites not to "make the innocent pay for the crimes of the guilty." Nevertheless, the reign of terror continues. When I left more Africans were being taken into custody every day. In the past three months thousands have disappeared, carried off by the local militia, government officials, or the troops. We have heard of very few new prisons being built, and no one has ever heard of a concentration camp. The prisons are constantly being filled and emptied, and very few returned to their families. One of the big questions is: Where are they going? The rumor in Malange (I have heard it from whites, mulattoes, and Africans) is that they are being killed and buried in mass graves by bulldozers. I've never seen it, and I can't prove it, but to dispel the rumors the Portuguese should make it clear where these people are and allow their families to see them. Of all of our pastors who are believed to be in prison only one has actually been seen by a relative. Reports come from the prisons of conditions so bad, no beds, no blankets, food impossible to eat, beatings, that we are left wondering if any will survive the treatment. The day I left Angola they held the funeral for one prisoner, Joaquim Figuerdo, one of the first picked up. He spent over two years in prison without a trial and is one



of the few who actually was convicted in a court of law. He died June 8th, of a stroke, and his body was given over to his family. This is the only case that I know of where the body was given over to the widow. It is impossible to know how many Africans have been killed. In some ways the worst part of the present situation is the uncertainty. The Portuguese in the meantime are importing thousands of troops and the rebellion continues.

#### IV The Place of the Methodist Church in the Events

The Methodist Church has had missions in Angola since 1885. It has established churches in three areas hit by the recent revolt: the Baixa de Cassange, Luanda and the Dembos. In a number of other areas, namely the Libolo, Amaba, Golungo Alto, Dondo, Causco, and others, although there was no rebel activity, pastors and church members have been picked up and either killed or put in prison. According to the best figures that we can establish, of the 167 pastors and teachers of the Luanda Region, 26 are supposedly still in prison, 21 killed (a conservative number), 34 are still free, and the whereabouts of 76 are still unknown. Of the 34 who are still free, only 11 are at their posts. Only two of these are outside Luanda. If we were to include lay members, the number would be of course much higher. On the surface it would seem that this is a surprising occurrence. The Methodists, and Protestants in general, have been pioneers in education, hospital work and social service. Emphasis has been focused along the lines of establishing a democratic Church government with the development of African leadership. We have taught more Portuguese and brought more Africans to assimilation status than the government has. In reality, however, these results have made the Church suspect. When no Protestant missions were attacked or missionaries harmed in North Angola, many whites concluded that the Protestant missions "were cooperating" with the rebel activity. We were even accused in the Portuguese press of "arming" terrorists. Our mission in Luanda was attacked by Portuguese whites, with most of the windows in the church, administrative building and the individual houses broken. Our social center in the African section was completely destroyed.

#### V Observations Concerning the Present Situation

There are several important things to note about the present situation. In the first place, the government is encouraging and stimulating tribalism. By their constant reiteration that the Bailundos (and other South Angolan people) are loyal, they hope to divide the Africans into two camps. They recognize that the most valuable African weapon is unity. Secondly, they are trying to stimulate religious hatred and hope thereby to further divide the Africans between Protestants and Catholics. However, it is clear that this is in no way a religious or tribal movement as such. It is a nationalistic movement of the people which is not confined to any particular religious or tribal group. Thirdly, Portuguese ire has been especially directed against those in whom they took most pride previously, namely assimilated Africans (black Portuguese, if you like). The worst reprisals have been made against pastors, teachers, nurses, and functionaries, the more highly educated and better trained classes. Fourthly, the present government shows no signs of reform. I use as evidence the following facts: 1) the new Governor General, Venancio Deslandes, was sent to do "the exact opposite" (exatamente ao contrario quoted the Luanda Daily, O Comercio) that the UN asked; 2) they continue to pick up people in Luanda and other areas; there were more picked up in Luanda the last week that I was there than in the previous month; 3) they still refuse to give information to Africans regarding the whereabouts of relatives who have been taken prisoners; 4) there has been no attempt to bring prisoners to a court of justice; 5) forced labor continues; they are rounding up thousands of Africans for the difficult coffee harvest; 6) rumors have spread that the Portuguese will level Angola if they are forced to leave.



## VI What About the Future

It is easy to be pessimistic and difficult to be optimistic. Salazar, from the standpoint of economics, morale, and his own prestige, is dedicated to putting down the rebellion quickly. He is sending thousands of troops. On the other hand the rebels seem equally dedicated to continuing their guerilla activity. They are favored by the natural terrain and reports indicate that thousands are presently being trained in the Congo. The Portuguese have made it clear that surrender is impossible, and it likely wouldn't be acceptable even if it were possible. The result of these two opposing forces seems to be a perpetuation of the present tragic situation with more and more bloodshed. It is impossible to think that Africa can anywhere long remain under complete white domination. The only real hope seems to be in a radical re-thinking on the part of the Lisbon government, and a reform movement leading to assurance of basic rights for all. There was a time when a multi-racial society would have easily been possible in Angola. It is my hope that that might still be possible. The real tragedy is that so many whites in their fear and anger and desire for revenge have tried to burn that last bridge of hope for their future in Africa.

Four great unanswered questions remain:

- 1) Why didn't the Portuguese report the events in the Baixa de Cassange?
- 2) Where have all the Africans, who have disappeared, been put?
- 3) Why won't they give information on those who have been taken prisoners?
- 4) Why won't the Portuguese allow foreign correspondents to report freely the events?
- 5) Can the Portuguese justify the bombing of African villages?

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(July 7, 1961)