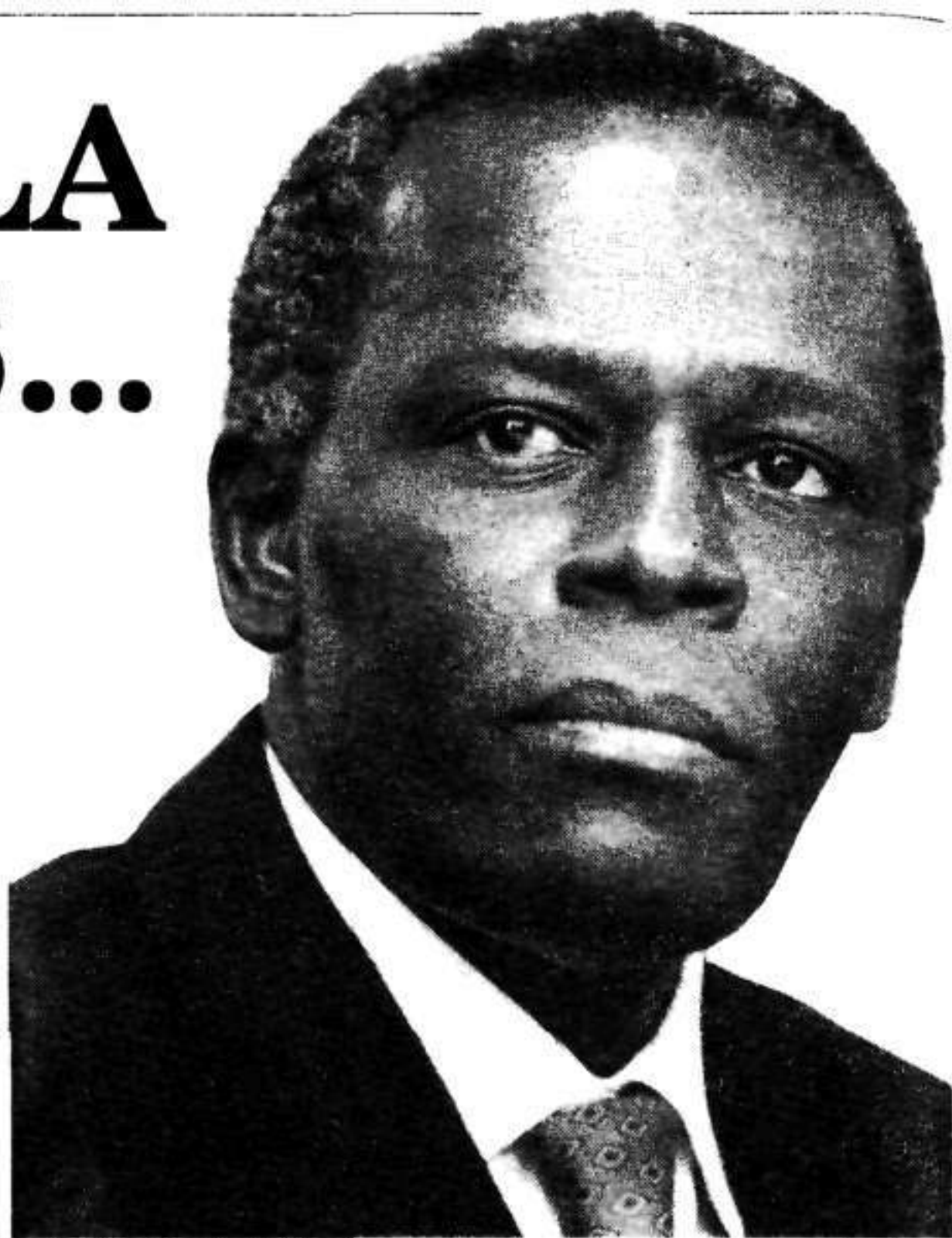


# ANGOLA EDGES...



*Angola is well on its way to reaching a settlement. The two parties to the 15-year conflict have already met face to face - and will continue to do so.*

*David Coetzee from SouthScan  
Features reports*

In the past months there have been signs that the inevitable settlement in Angola is inching closer. For the first time it has been officially acknowledged that the two sides to the 15-year conflict have met face to face - and will continue with a series of meetings.

But Unita and the government have also intensified military activity. The government threatened the southern Unita headquarters of Jamba, and the rebel force replied with sabotage attacks in the capital of Luanda, and a heightened offensive in the north.

There are developments in Luanda itself which might lead to an accommodation with the rebel force Unita - a preparedness for political reform not directly forced by Unita or its main sponsor, the US.

Unita seems to be seeking to establish a new zone of operations in the north of the country. This change of tactics comes after the loss of the southern town of Mavinga and the bombardment of its Jamba headquarters in March.

The intensified action is also aimed at strengthening its hand in the approaching peace talks.

There have been reports of increased rebel activity around the Quimbele strong-

hold in Uige province, involving active help from Zaire. It is believed that in early May the government only retained complete control of two municipalities in Uige and two in Malange.

There have also been persistent rumours that a number of small but significant towns have at various times in the past month fallen under rebel control, if briefly - notably Gabela in Kwanza Sul. There has also been a spate of Unita attacks in the central highlands, including an artillery attack on Huambo itself.

Luanda and surrounding areas have also been the target of increasing sabotage. The city's electricity was cut off for a period, and Unita hit the city's water supply for the second time in three months.

On the government side, it is likely that in March the Angolan armed forces, Fapla, launched a fresh offensive in the south to build on earlier gains at Mavinga in the south east. The airforce's bombing raids of areas near to and surrounding Jamba have apparently continued.

But as *WIP* went to press there were reports that government troops had pulled back from Mavinga - possibly as part of a diplomatic deal to facilitate a settle-

ment.

Despite intensified warfare, adherents of both sides - and other groupings - have met in peaceful surroundings in Portugal.

The first congress of Angolan expatriates took place in Lisbon on April 28, just after the official government-Unita talks in the town of Evora. The event was officially unconnected, but was welcomed by both sides to the dispute. It was organised by Francisco Viana, son of a well-known former MPLA figure, Gentil Viana.

In a conciliatory statement, the participants, who came mainly from Portugal, called for peace, for a society which respected differences, and for freedom of expression.

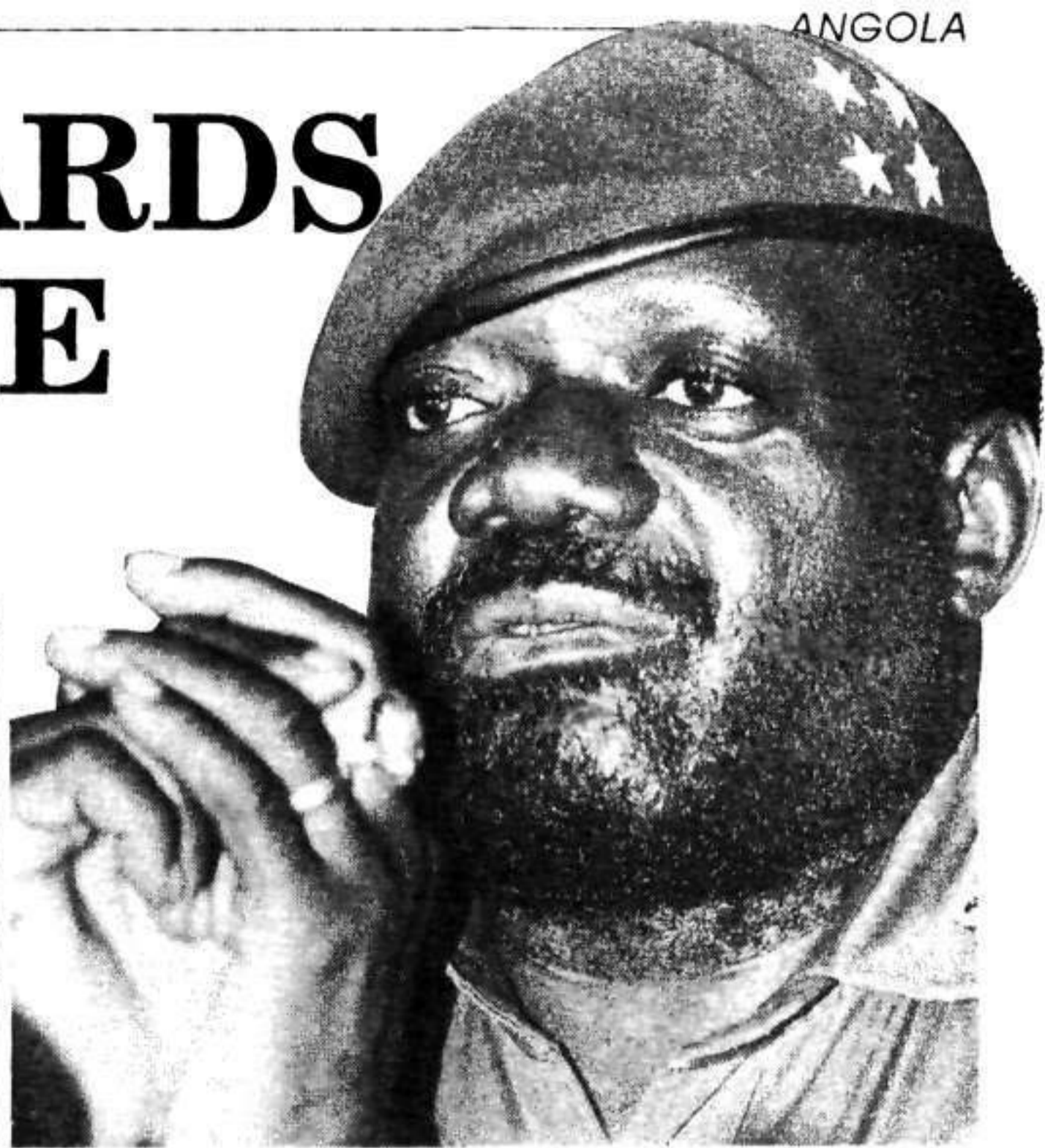
The congress was attended by the Angolan ambassador to Portugal. Unita also subsequently expressed its approval.

Participants said that for the first time Angolans from both sides of the political divide, and from other, non-party quarters, could meet on common ground.

There has also been intense discussion in Luanda about the overall direction of the country. Pressure for political reform has grown as the economic restructuring package (SEF), on which



# TOWARDS PEACE



so many had banked, failed to get off the ground. Once a major exporter of coffee and diamonds, Angola now relies on its oil industry for over 90% of its income. It ploughs half of that back into war spending. However, Angolans no longer blame the economic crisis solely on the war and its effects - they see government policy as a major cause.

Earlier this year a key figure in SEF development, Lopo de Nascimento, said that without political reform economic reform would fail. It is apparent that the new constitutional proposals are an attack on entrenched bureaucracy.

The document outlining the planned political reforms said: 'We have seen that carrying out our economic reform programme has been complicated by the absence of political and administrative changes creating the right conditions for its implementation'.

'We now need to define an outline of the country's economic recovery in a different situation, in which the gradual establishment of a peacetime economy becomes one of the bases of our policy', it said.

**V**iews have been canvassed on the proposed constitutional reforms, and the government has named 1990 'the year of the expansion of democracy'.

There has been an added impetus for change: international economic aid for the drought-stricken south has not been forthcoming at the levels needed, and observers believe it will not come until an inert bureaucracy is removed.

The proposed reforms include: separate government and party functions; a prime ministerial post appointed by the president; a time limit for holding party jobs. There is also a concession on the right to strike - as a last resort.

On the issue of multi-party elections, President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos said last month: 'We don't feel a pressing

need to change our system, but it's possible that the evolution of the system could lead, in the future, to a new system which includes several parties'.

Dos Santos was speaking after the MPLA central committee drew up the reform proposals to be put before a party congress in December.

However, many in the party apparatus in Luanda believe multi-party elections should come much sooner, and there is impatience with the constitutional guidelines, which is seen as a politically defensive document.

One sector which has already seen a response to its impatience is the media. The document cites new arrangements for press freedom - involving the creation of a ministry of information and the permitting of non-party publications for the first time.

The MPLA's director of information and propaganda Joao Miranda said in an interview with agencies last month: 'We came to the conclusion that we had mechanically transplanted the form of socialism, and this has been problematic for various reasons'. Miranda said Angola was not yet ready for a multi-party political system, but added: 'In the medium to long term, it will be admitted

in this country'.

'After the congress there should be radical changes - a prime minister, separation of party and government, the revision of constitutional and electoral law', Miranda said. 'I think that if all these changes take place we could see elections before the end of this electoral period (in 1992)'.

Many cadres inside the ruling party say the majority of the MPLA party now wants faster change - and some believe this will come in the next couple of months. The main opponents of change are described as those who kept tight control after the trauma of the ultra-left Nitista coup bid in 1977, which brought in its wake a much tougher and more centralised approach.

Today opposition parties are still not permitted, but the government has allowed 'civic associations' to canvass support.

The president of the country's first non-political organisation, Joaquim Pinto de Andrade, leader of the Civic Association of Angola (ACA), told reporters: 'Most people here are neither MPLA nor Unita. All these people are dreaming of a third voice, a third force'.

After meeting in the Portuguese city



of Evora on April 24 and 25, the Angolan government and Unita set out their preliminary negotiating positions.

However observers in Luanda believe Pinto de Andrade has the support of the US, Unita and Portugal in forming a 'third force' to take on the MPLA in elections.

The Portuguese government described the meeting as exploratory. The facilitator was foreign affairs secretary of state Jose Durao Barroso - who subsequently received effusive praise from Unita for his role.

Earlier the Luanda government had refused a US suggestion that the talks should be held in Geneva with Zaire President Mobutu's mediation, and with US and Soviet technical support.

According to President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, there are now two main issues under discussion.

First is the recognition of the present legal order, 'leading eventually to the recognition of our state and govern-

ment'.

Second is the multi-party system.

Dos Santos said on April 30 that if the issue of recognition was resolved there could be movement on the multi-party issue.

**U**nita, for its part, is refusing adamantly to recognise the Angolan government.

It has, however, declared that it will no longer engage in hostile propaganda, other than to make 'objective criticism of the government's social and economic programmes'.

In a statement on May 1, the organisation's political bureau said that there had been 'extremely positive results concerning everything that happened in Portugal regarding Angola'.

It recognised the Angolan state 'which has a leader with whom Unita, as armed opposition, wants to negotiate'. It would not, however, recognise the legitimacy of the government.

On the issue of mediation, Unita said the only channels between the opposing parties should be the Portuguese government, Zaire's President Mobutu, 'the official mediator', and the US and Soviet governments. Mobutu's position as 'mediator' is, however, becoming increasingly nominal as direct contacts between the two sides have become a reality.

Unita has also called for observers from the US, the Soviet Union, Cuba and Zaire to be present at the talks.

Dos Santos again accused the US and South Africa of continuing to send arms to Unita via Zaire.

The possibility of multi-party elections is a clear enticement to Unita. And another statement was clearly aimed at rebel leader Jonas Savimbi himself.

Dos Santos, in his new year's message enumerated eight points which had made up the Gbadolite agreement. Since Namibian independence and the Windhoek regional summit another point appears to have been added.

This concerns the special treatment which will be given to Savimbi in any peace deal.

If the new point in the Luanda plan means Savimbi being integrated into government as part of the integration of Unita into existing structures, as set out at Gbadolite, then Luanda has moved far down the path set out by Washington for its client.

During the mini-summit at the time of Namibian independence in Windhoek, US secretary of state James Baker told Dos Santos the US was prepared, in the context of a ceasefire and the beginning of a good faith negotiation, to improve relations with the government of Angola.

The Americans believe Dos Santos became prepared to see a ceasefire as a prerequisite to any political negotiation. Early in April Unita had said it was 'ready to cease hostilities immediately without pre-conditions even if the MPLA maintains its (military) positions', in the area around Mavinga (reversing a previous demand).

Also, if internal MPLA pressure for multi-party elections proves unstoppable, the US will have no ostensible reason for not dropping its long war with Luanda.

At present much is still being decided on the field of battle. But the two parties to the war - as well as many of their adherents - have met face to face, and will continue to do so. Another unstoppable Southern African political event may be beginning. - *SouthScan Features* ●

## ANGOLA

