

# SPARKING THE CARNATION REVOLUTION

*National Liberation  
and Socialist Solidarity  
in Africa*





Internationale

Forschungsstelle

DDR

ZETKIN  
FORUM  
FOR SOCIAL  
RESEARCH

The Zetkin Forum for Social Research (ZFSR) stands in the tradition of Clara and Maxim Zetkin for internationalism, social progress, rigorous scientific research, and anti-fascism.

The IF DDR is its Berlin-based research institute.



# CONTENTS

## **INTRODUCTION** ..... 04

## **PORTUGAL 1974**

Remembering the Carnation Revolution 50 Years On ..... 05

## **EAST GERMAN WEAPONS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST FASCIST PORTUGAL**

How the GDR Came to Provide Military Support for  
the Mozambican Liberation Struggle ..... 13

## **INTERVIEW**

How Guinea-Bissau's Anti-colonial Struggle Influenced  
the Carnation Revolution ..... 30

# SPARKING THE CARNATION REVOLUTION: NATIONAL LIBERATION AND SOCIALIST SOLIDARITY IN AFRICA

On 25 April 1974, the Carnation Revolution brought Portugal's almost 50-year-long military dictatorship to an end. One major consequence was the withdrawal of Portuguese troops from the country's colonies in Africa and the subsequent founding of new sovereign states such as Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. Yet an aspect that is rarely explored in historical accounts of the Carnation Revolution is the role played by the national liberation movements in Africa in weakening Portuguese fascism and creating the conditions in which progressive military officers could overthrow the Estado Novo regime. Today it is also often forgotten that while the capitalist West propped up Portuguese colonialism with funds and weapons, the socialist East was arming and training liberation fighters in Africa.

This dossier reflects on the Carnation Revolution from three different perspectives: an eye-witness account of the political situation in Portugal during and after the Revolution; an analysis of how the socialist states supported the armed struggle of the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO); and an interview with a member of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) whose fight against Portuguese colonialism took the form of education and professional training in socialist East Germany.



# PORTUGAL 1974: REMEMBERING THE CARNATION REVOLUTION 50 YEARS ON

*John Green, 25 April 2024*



*May Day in Lisbon, 1974 (Photo: John Green).*

*John Green studied film and camera in the German Democratic Republic (DDR) during the 1960s. He returned to his home country, the United Kingdom, in 1968 and began working for GDR television as a foreign correspondent. Green and his colleagues were part of what became known as the “Gruppe Katins” at GDR Television, a team of correspondents led by the well-respected East German producer Dr. Sabine Katins. They covered events in Portugal for several years after the Carnation Revolution of 1974, making 10 documentaries in total. They also reported regularly on the liberation struggles in Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa.*

The world was taken by surprise on the morning of 25 April 1974, to hear that Europe's oldest dictatorship in Portugal had been overthrown. I and my colleague, as journalists working for GDR television, were sent to cover events as they unfolded.

We touched down at Lisbon airport on the morning of the 27th, immediately unpacked our camera and started shooting. From then on, we only put the camera down when we went to bed late in the evening. Already at the airport the atmosphere was charged: large groups of people waited for their loved ones to arrive; many had been exiled for years by the dictatorship. There were ecstatic embraces, laughter, and tears of joy.

The centre of Lisbon was awash with flowers and knots of jubilant groups on every street corner. Soldiers and sailors stood sentry in front of official buildings, not in a menacing manner, but nonchalant and relaxed, red carnations in their lapels or in the barrels of their guns, now converted from killing tools into flower vases. They were continually embraced by



*John filming the Portuguese officers who led the Carnation Revolution, 1974.*

ordinary citizens, who showered them with flowers and kisses and food. I have never seen an army so at one with the people. One young conscript told us, “Yes we now have a unity between the people and the armed forces, and we must make sure no one destroys that.”

Every street corner, office and factory became a beehive of revolutionary activity. Political prisoners, some who’d been languishing in the dictator Caetano’s notorious jails for years, were released into the arms of their overjoyed families; the secret police headquarters, the radio stations and government buildings were now in the hands of rebel soldiers, trade unions were re-established, housing associations and local residents’ committees set up and political parties mushroomed from nowhere. I instinctively felt the parallels with the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, as described by John Reed in “10 Days that Shook the World”. There was a palpable sense of unity and fraternity, of regained national dignity, everyone celebrating together.

This revolution was not only a cause for great celebration in Portugal itself but perhaps even more so for those in the Portuguese colonies that would soon, after years of brutal and relentless struggle find themselves free. And it should not be forgotten that it was largely as a result of the increasing success of the liberation forces in these colonies that led to the Carnation Revolution in Portugal itself.

Between 1961-74 Portugal had been waging wars of attrition in its African colonies. Apart from France, Portugal was the only European country still holding on to its overseas colonies in Angola, Mozambique Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands in Africa, Goa in India and Macau in China.

Still in the grip of a fascist dictatorship, Portugal was determined to hold on to its colonies even though doing so was bleeding the mother country dry. At their height, the wars were consuming up to 40 percent of the Portuguese budget. They were costly also in terms of lives lost. The Estado Novo regime enforced an army conscription, which included a mandatory two-year tour in the African colonies. Apart from many ordinary soldiers, a considerable number of young officers were also

losing their lives in what were widely seen as unwinnable wars, and at home this was creating increased resistance to the wars. Disaffection within the army was spreading and it was this that finally triggered the overthrow of an intransigent and ossified regime in the mother country.



*Peasants in Beja demanding agrarian reform, 1974 (Photo: John Green).*

The liberation struggles in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau were becoming very effective and were bleeding Portugal economically and giving it real headaches. The armed forces of FRELIMO in Mozambique, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and The African Party for the Independence in Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), were all led by very capable leaders. These guerrilla forces were being supported with weapons and training by the socialist states, particularly the Soviet Union and the GDR.

In February 1974, Portuguese dictator Caetano decided to remove General Spínola from the command of Portuguese forces in



Guinea-Bissau in the face of his increasingly vocal dissatisfaction with Portuguese colonial policy and the regime's military strategy. This inspired other military officers to set up the clandestine Movement of the Armed Forces (MFA) with the aim of liberating Portugal from the fascist Estado Novo regime and introducing necessary reforms.

Only the year before the Carnation Revolution itself, I had been filming a report in Mozambique and witnessed first-hand the demoralisation of Portuguese forces there, which were already confined to small bases and had little control over the surrounding countryside. I also noted that the weaponry the Portuguese were using was marked as from NATO supplies, a fact never disclosed at the time.



*The first PCP office opened in the city of Barreiro, 1974 (Photo: John Green).*

Only days after the 25th April, we visited the former Lisbon headquarters of PIDE, the secret police. In the office of Silva Pais, the security chief, his diary was still open on the 25th, his papers were held down by an enormous plaster penis, a half-drunk bottle of Johnny Walker stood next to two dirty glasses. On the bookshelf behind his desk was a selection of books, including one by Regis Debray on Che Guevara, tomes on the history of the USSR, communism in Africa, a Batista autobiography, and a number of books on Cuba, which clearly reflected the preoccupation of the secret services with the liberation struggles.

Since the Communist Party was the only one that had existed on the ground in the country throughout the dictatorship it was at that moment the best organised political force in the country. Álvaro Cunhal, the Communist leader, returned from exile in Moscow and stood shoulder to shoulder with Mário Soares, the socialist leader, returned from Paris, together with soldiers from the MFA (the Movement of the Armed Forces). For a short time, it looked as if the Carnation Revolution would become a socialist revolution.

Leading western nations were, however, appalled at the idea of Portugal, a NATO stalwart, turning socialist – the Caetano dictatorship had been a loyal member of NATO and the Organisation's South Atlantic headquarters were in Portugal.

Mário Soares' Socialist Party had been formed only the previous year in West Germany, and was quite small and insignificant at that time, but for many it represented a more palatable alternative to the communists. Soares offered the people 'socialism with a human face', but when his party came to power, it gave the people only another dose of the same economic austerity medicine they'd been forced to swallow for decades.

In the first free, constitutional elections of 1975, the Socialist Party emerged as the strongest party and began calling the shots.



*John and his colleagues reporting on May Day in Lisbon, 1975 (Photo: John Green).*

There was the economic sabotage by the powerful capitalist nations and Portugal's own ruling class. The new US ambassador was Frank Carlucci, who had been their man in the Congo when Lumumba was assassinated in 1961, and in Brazil before the military coup and bloody suppression of democracy there. He did his best to ensure that Portugal remained firmly in the capitalist camp.

Mário Soares became the first civilian prime minister in 1976 and president in 1986. He happily presided over a country still firmly capitalist and little better off economically than in the past, although it now enjoyed a pluralist and stable bourgeois democracy.

Unfortunately, the nominal liberation of Portugal's African colonies did not spell the end of oppression. When Portugal admitted defeat and pulled out its troops, this was shortly followed by pulling out virtually all its administrative and support staff from the colonies, leaving them

bereft of much needed expertise. Angola and Mozambique particularly were also later subjected to blatant interference and sabotage by the imperialist powers and their local proxies, South Africa and Rhodesia (as Zimbabwe was then known). These interventions cost the newly liberated countries dear and, despite continued generous aid from the socialist countries, those early years after independence were years of bitter and continued struggle.



# EAST GERMAN WEAPONS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST FASCIST PORTUGAL

How the GDR Came to Provide Military Support for the Mozambican Liberation Struggle

*Mascha Neumann, 25 April 2024*



## ARMED LIBERATION STRUGGLE IN THE NUCLEAR AGE

Today, the German Democratic Republic (DDR) is remembered by many progressive forces around the world as a pioneer in support for the national liberation movements of the 20th century. The DDR's anti-imperialist solidarity ranged from education programmes, medical care, industrial and agricultural development, civilian aid, financial support, the printing of agitation material, and military training and equipment. In retrospect, this military support seems like a logical extension of international solidarity. However, at the beginning of the 1960s, it was quite controversial in the DDR whether the delivery of East German weapons and ammunition to organisations such as the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO) was appropriate.

In principle, the use of weapons in the fight against colonial rule was considered legitimate in the socialist camp. However, the former diplomat Helmut Matthes<sup>1</sup> describes the GDR's relationship to armed struggle as ambivalent. From the outset, "political and diplomatic means were regarded as decisive".<sup>2</sup> In the nuclear age, especially after the so-called Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the states allied with the Soviet Union were concerned that the confrontation with the imperialist states could escalate into mutual annihilation. Against this background, the concept of **peaceful coexistence** ("the peaceful coexistence and co-operation between states of different social orders in the era of transition from capitalism to socialism") became a guiding principle of Soviet foreign policy, while other socialist states such as the People's Republic of China and Cuba took a much more offensive approach to the question of armed anti-imperialist struggle.<sup>3</sup>

A closer look at the development of the GDR's position towards the armed struggle in southern Africa reveals an initial hesitancy that can be attributed to several factors: Could another nuclear crisis unfold across Africa after Cuba? Had legal and diplomatic efforts really been exhausted? Should East German weapons be exported for conflicts abroad, even if they might come up against West German weapons? Was it possible to ensure that the guns ended up in the right hands? Could the GDR industry keep up with the demand of the liberation struggles in both East Asia and Africa? In view of intensifying hostilities in southern Africa in the mid-1960s and the escalation of the Sino-Soviet split, the political leadership in Berlin decided in early 1967 to commit itself to providing military support to the liberation movements in Africa. Thus, the GDR began to spend millions of marks on military aid and training programmes for fighters from national liberation movements and former colonies.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to the narrative propagated by the West German press ("**Honecker's Africa Corps**"), the decision to supply "non-civilian goods" was only taken after careful consideration.



*FRELIMO militants during a training exercise.*

## THE SOCIALIST CAMP AND THE FIGHT AGAINST THE PORTUGUESE COLONIAL REGIME

The initial reluctance in the GDR with regard to the plans of the Mozambican liberation front FRELIMO, which wanted to emulate the liberation movements in Angola (1961) and Guinea-Bissau (1963, then still “Portuguese Guinea”) and take up the armed struggle against the colonial power Portugal, illustrates the ambivalence mentioned by Matthes. After a visit by two FRELIMO representatives to the GDR in 1963, the subsequent report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MfAA) stated that the liberation front currently saw no other way of achieving independence for Mozambique. Although this was met with a certain degree of understanding, it was criticised at the same time:

*“FRELIMO pays too little attention to the questions of the simultaneous utilisation of legal possibilities of the struggle in order to create an even broader national front against Portuguese colonialism (e.g., attempts to create a legal opposition, contacts with other parties and with the so-called assimilados<sup>5</sup> in the administration, participation as individual candidates in elections, etc.).”<sup>6</sup>*

A “Chinese influence” was suspected behind this “one-sided orientation towards the armed struggle” – not least due to the recent visit of one of the FRELIMO representatives (Marcelino dos Santos, who later became Vice President of the Liberation Front) to the People’s Republic of China, where he was said to have been personally received by Mao.<sup>7</sup> The quote also indicates that the decision to join the armed struggle was considered premature and that it was considered more promising to first secure the support of other Mozambican actors.

The fact that the Soviet Union finally decided to support FRELIMO militarily in 1964 despite its own reservations (initially by offering to train 40 fighters in the USSR) is said to have been seen by its chairman, Eduardo Mondlane, as an attempt to deter China from interfering too much in Mozambique.<sup>8</sup> The Soviet decision will not have been insignificant for their allies either. When FRELIMO increased its efforts to obtain military support from the socialist states after the start of hostilities in September 1964, it was quite successful: Bulgaria and the ČSSR, among others, agreed to supply weapons in the spring and summer of 1965.<sup>9</sup> Weapons had also been requested from the GDR since 1965 at the latest, and FRELIMO was not alone: the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) from Angola and the *Zimbabwe African People’s Union* (ZAPU) from Rhodesia<sup>10</sup>, which borders Mozambique, had also repeatedly made such requests.<sup>11</sup> However, the GDR was not yet able to agree to arms deliveries at this time.



## WEST GERMANY'S MILITARY AND POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR FASCIST PORTUGAL

However, in the case of the GDR, the question of arms deliveries, especially for the Portuguese colonies, was also much more sensitive than for the other socialist countries: after all, weapons from both German states would be involved in direct confrontation there. At the beginning of the 1960s, the Portuguese leadership turned to its NATO



*At the beginning of their armed struggle, FRELIMO fighters often used weapons looted from the Portuguese forces. In this picture is the G3 rifle, which was produced by the West German arms manufacturer Heckler & Koch.*

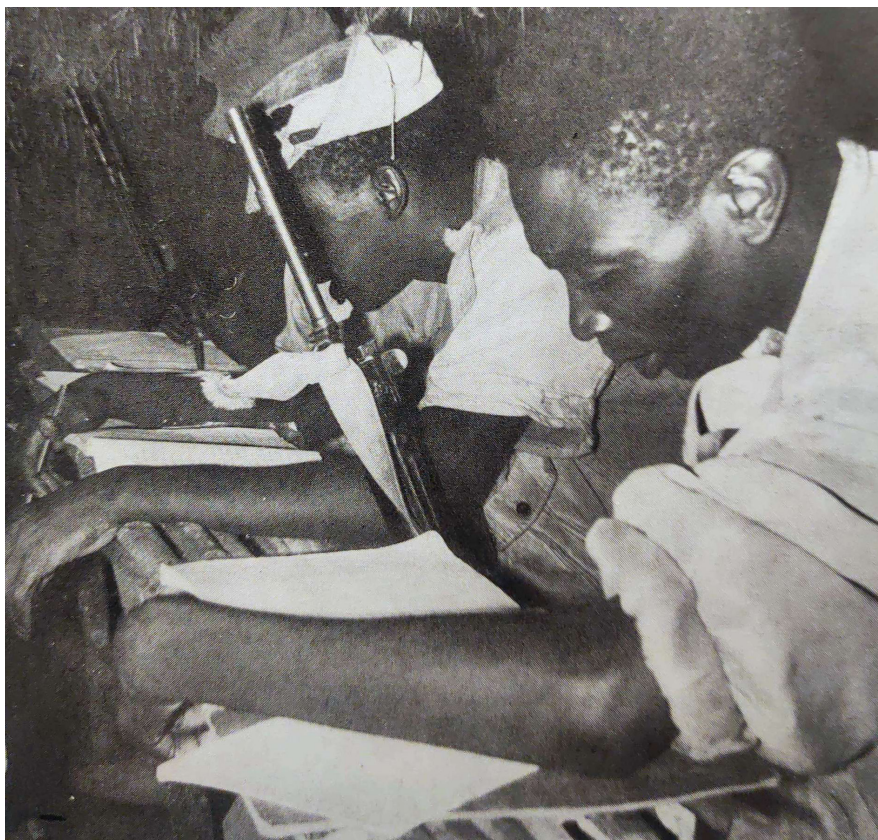
allies for help. The government under dictator Salazar claimed to be threatened by a communist uprising supported by the Soviet Union in its so-called “overseas provinces”<sup>12</sup>. As a result, a number of states supported fascist Portugal with loans, fighter planes, warships, ammunition, and chemical defoliants, among other things.<sup>13</sup> Up to this point, the USA had been Portugal’s biggest financial and military supporter, partly in order to secure its strategically important military bases in the Azores and Cape Verde.

Although the loans granted were intended for use in Portugal, this freed up funds elsewhere that could be used for the administration of the colonies and ultimately also for the colonial wars.<sup>14</sup> Following the adoption of the “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples” by the UN General Assembly in December 1960<sup>15</sup> on the initiative of the Soviet Union<sup>16</sup> and in view of the worsening situation in the Portuguese colonies, the USA under its new President John F. Kennedy significantly restricted the supply of arms to Portugal. The Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), which as a non-member did not have to justify itself to the UN, subsequently replaced the USA as the main supplier of military equipment.<sup>17</sup>

West Germany made a significant contribution to the Portuguese colonial wars on a military, economic, and political level.<sup>18</sup> In the 1960s, large quantities of surplus Bundeswehr material went to Portugal, including mainly weapons and military aircraft. In addition, the Portuguese military was supplied with new products by West German industry until the 1970s, including warships and all-terrain vehicles, which were also used in the colonies.<sup>19</sup> In 1965, a so-called “end-use clause” was negotiated to exclude transfer and thus use in the colonial wars. However, it was known that weapons and other military material and equipment supplied by West Germany were still being used there.<sup>20</sup> Portugal’s repression of the liberation movement in Mozambique became increasingly brutal, culminating in the massacre of Wiriyamu in 1973, in which 400 villagers were gunned down by the Portuguese army and security services.<sup>21</sup>

## THE TURNING POINT FOR THE GDR AND THE BEGINNING OF THE “DELIVERY OF NON-CIVILIAN GOODS”

Another indication that there was great fear of an escalation was the handling of a draft proposal by GDR Foreign Minister Otto Winzer from the spring of 1965, which advocated for a definitive decision to support liberation struggles with military material. The reason provided was explicitly the repeated requests from various liberation movements, some of which the GDR’s Solidarity Committee was already supporting with civilian and even paramilitary goods – including the MPLA and the FRELIMO. This document was classified as so confidential that it was not initially discussed with any other government agency. Since it was ultimately not submitted



*Overcoming illiteracy was one of FRELIMO’s central goals. Here, fighters use a break to learn to read and write.*



to the Politburo of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) for approval, it is reasonable to assume that at least one of the three ministers (including the Minister of National Defence, Heinz Hoffmann, the head of the Ministry of State Security, Erich Mielke, and the Minister of the Interior, Friedrich Dickel) to whom the draft was submitted in advance, applied the brakes.<sup>22</sup>

However, the issue was not off the table. After Erich Honecker had spoken out against the arming of such groups in November 1966 (in his function as Central Committee Secretary for Security Affairs at the time)<sup>23</sup>, the Politburo finally reached a definitive decision on 10 January 1967 and approved the possibility of “supplying non-civilian goods to national liberation movements in Africa”.<sup>24</sup> According to Matthes, the basis for this policy shift was the intensification of political contacts at international events during the 1960s and the visits of high-ranking representatives of the liberation movements to the DDR.<sup>25</sup> It stands to reason that more frequent encounters enabled better familiarisation and thus contributed to the decision. For example, FRELIMO President Mondlane had visited East Berlin in person for the second time just six weeks before the decision. Whether the Soviet Union had also urged the SED to reconsider its previous hesitation and follow their example has not yet been clarified, as there are no conclusive sources on this.<sup>26</sup>

What certainly also contributed to this decision was the intensification of fighting by many liberation movements in southern Africa in the mid-1960s. By 1966 (at the latest), military activities had become a defining factor in the liberation struggle. It is also interesting to note that a Cuban military delegation visited the DDR at the end of 1966, whose influence on the decision in favour of arms deliveries cannot be ruled out, although it cannot be clearly proven. However, since the talks dealt with topics relating to the armed liberation struggle and, among other things, specifically with the question of whether the GDR could provide weapons and military training, this is another probable influence in favour of the decision.<sup>27</sup>

This decision was then immediately followed by the first concrete deliveries. FRELIMO was prioritised and received the largest number of weapons and ammunition. The reasons for the MfAA’s





*Samora Machel with inhabitants of a village that had been destroyed by Portuguese colonial troops.*

draft decision stated that the liberation movements in question were the most important, most successful, and most progressive forces in the respective colonies and that the military aid was in line with the foreign policy principle of supporting national liberation.<sup>28</sup> In this way, the DDR had not only joined its socialist allies (and China) in its stance on armed struggle, but also followed other countries on the African continent that could look back on a successful liberation struggle. Algeria, for example, which had been independent since 1962, had gained extensive combat experience in its war of liberation against France and, at the request of the FRELIMO leadership, had provided military training and equipment for its first 250 fighters.<sup>29</sup>

### ACTIVE DIPLOMACY OF THE LIBERATION MOVEMENTS - THE EXAMPLE OF FRELIMO

Since 1967, arms deliveries from the DDR to FRELIMO have taken place almost every year.<sup>30</sup> Their volume, like the overall support, increased significantly in the early 1970s. This can be explained in part by the uncertainty that had previously prevailed, triggered by Mondlane's assassination in 1969<sup>31</sup> and the subsequent power struggles within the liberation front. Support in other areas was maintained during this difficult period and even increased in some areas.<sup>32</sup> However, supplying weapons on a large scale to an organization in the midst of an ideological reorientation would have represented a risk. During his leadership of FRELIMO, Mondlane had increasingly moved towards the socialist states and eventually turned his back on the West definitively.<sup>33</sup> Yet following his assassination, it was unclear who would succeed him in the ideologically very heterogeneous Liberation Front. In May 1970, FRELIMO's central committee finally appointed army chief Samora Machel as the new president. This meant that the wing around Marcelino dos Santos, who had long been regarded as socialist and subsequently became vice president, had finally prevailed.<sup>34</sup>

In the run-up to the first official reception of a FRELIMO delegation by the GDR government (not by the Solidarity Committee as had previously occurred), which took place in April 1972, the Central Committee of the SED planned the delivery of a large consignment of infantry weapons and corresponding ammunition without any

concrete requests from FRELIMO, in order to be able to respond immediately to possible enquiries during the visit.<sup>35</sup> This rather unusual approach was due to the fact that there were acute fears of the Liberation Front moving closer to China. A delegation led by Machel in his new role as FRELIMO president had visited China, North Korea and Vietnam in autumn 1971, which was apparently perceived as so worrying that the DDR Consulate General in Tanzania subsequently invited him to a “meeting”. There, Machel said he was very pleased with his trip, during which China had emphasised its willingness to provide extensive material support and further arms



*A solidarity donation from the DDR's Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee for FRELIMO is loaded onto a plane. It was officially handed over to FRELIMO at the end of 1972.*



deliveries. He praised the way in which the delegation had been received in all three Asian countries. For him, this clearly represented a criterion for the attitude towards the liberation movement and he drew comparisons with other socialist states, which came off badly. He noted that the “SU, as the first and strongest socialist country [...] apparently showed little interest in the FRELIMO problems”.<sup>36</sup>

According to the consulate’s report, Machel also described the support from the DDR as being in need of improvement. Although the FRELIMO president showed understanding for the economic difficulties of the socialist countries, he nevertheless openly criticised them. Numerous wishes had been formulated towards the GDR, but there was a lack of realisation of the promises made: verbal assurances were of no use. It was much more important to achieve an improvement in material aid from all socialist countries.<sup>37</sup> Machel’s clear words show that FRELIMO still did not want to be drawn into the Sino-Soviet conflict: Help was explicitly accepted and also expected from all socialist states. At the same time, the dispute in the socialist camp had the potential to gain more support overall. The sources cited here suggest that FRELIMO sought to encourage the Soviet-aligned states to “outbid” China’s pledges of support.

In the DDR, this criticism was taken to heart. During Machel’s visit in April 1972, it was explained to him that the DDR’s options were severely limited due to its obligations towards Vietnam. In this context, reference was also made to the necessary coordination within the framework of the Warsaw Treaty and to the Potsdam Agreement, which only permitted the production of weapons in the DDR to a limited extent. Nevertheless, the government was prepared to continue supporting FRELIMO and to fulfil its wishes if these were communicated at an early stage. From then on, regular lists of possible deliveries were drawn up, partly in response to specific demands and partly in anticipation of further requests.<sup>38</sup>

Support in the “non-civilian” sector did not end even when Mozambique’s independence became foreseeable as a result of negotiations with Portugal following the Carnation Revolution (1974). On the contrary, the DDR was convinced that the political changes in Portugal and the resulting new situation in the Portuguese

colonies even required “increased support for the anti-imperialist struggle of these peoples”<sup>39</sup>, which was reflected not least in an additional consignment of a considerable amount of “non-civilian” material, which was decided by the SED Politburo in October 1974. During the second official FRELIMO delegation visit to the GDR (December 1974) and beyond, further extensive (partly paramilitary) deliveries were requested by Machel and authorised in Berlin.<sup>40</sup> It is obvious that FRELIMO’s position within Mozambique was to be strengthened militarily before its official “release” into independence in order to secure its power in the long term.

## CONCLUSION

Portuguese fascism was overthrown in the Carnation Revolution in April 1974. The following year, the last Portuguese colonies in Africa secured their independence. The liberation movements in Mozambique, Angola, and the other colonial territories played a central role in overthrowing the fascist dictatorship. Through their fighting, they massively overstretched the Portuguese military and the state budget, thus creating a revolutionary situation in the metropolis, which progressive officers and political organisations were then able to successfully control.

Portugal, a founding member of NATO, was supplied with armaments by its allies (including West German rifles and warships) before and during the colonial wars. This gave the Salazar regime – which was not willing to cede its so-called “overseas territories” peacefully – a great initial military advantage over those campaigning for independence in the colonies. Subsequently, the *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC), the MPLA, and finally FRELIMO had no other way out of the oppression than to declare armed war on the coloniser, despite the unequal balance of power. The socialist states recognised this fact and began to support the anti-colonial liberation struggle with weapons and military training in the mid-1960s. This was not a straightforward process; in the DDR in particular, there were a number of considerations that led to caution and restraint in military support until 1967 (and partly beyond). Over time, however, political confidence grew and, thanks to closer relations with the liberation movements, the supply of “non-civilian” assistance was secured.

The effects of the Sino-Soviet split were also clearly felt in the Portuguese colonies. While the Mozambican liberation front FRELIMO, for example, was able to exploit the rivalry to exert pressure on the socialist states and demand more support from all sides, the split undoubtedly undermined the unity of the anti-imperialist struggle and even encouraged bloody clashes between different liberation movements within some countries, as was particularly evident in Angola.

With regard to the Carnation Revolution, it should not be underestimated that East German weapons and non-military support for the liberation struggles in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau not only had an impact in Africa, but also influenced significant developments in Europe. Socialist solidarity thus made an important contribution to the weakening of Portuguese colonialism and the overthrow of Portuguese fascism.

## NOTES

- 1 Matthes was GDR ambassador to Tanzania (1973-76) and Mozambique (1983-88). He also worked for several years as a university lecturer at the Institute for International Relations at the Academy for State and Law in Potsdam.
- 2 Matthias Voß, 'Die Beziehungen der DDR – VR Mosambik zwischen Erwartungen und Wirklichkeit. Helmut Matthes über Stellung und Praxis der Beziehungen zu Mosambik im Rahmen der Afrikapolitik der DDR', in: Matthias Voß (Hg.), *Wir haben Spuren hinterlassen! Die DDR in Mosambik. Erlebnisse, Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse aus drei Jahrzehnten*, Münster 2005, pg. 12-33, here pg. 13.
- 3 In DDR literature from the 1980s, the policy of peaceful coexistence for the colonies was also explicitly rejected: "It is not possible to apply the principles of peaceful coexistence to the class struggle within the capitalist states or to the anti-colonial struggle or to the ideological class struggle because these spheres constitute wholly different forms of social relations. Peaceful coexistence thus does not equate to settling for the social status quo." *Dictionary of Scientific Communism*, Berlin 1982, pg. 109.
- 4 Exact figures for the entire period are difficult to determine, but for the 10-year period from 1973 to 1983 alone, the Ministry of Defence spent around 700 million marks on military support for the former colonies and liberation movements. Cf. Hans-Georg Schleicher/Ilona Schleicher, 'Waffen für den Süden Afrikas. Die DDR und der bewaffnete Befreiungskampf', in: Ulrich van der Heyden/Ilona Schleicher/Hans-Georg Schleicher, *Engagiert für Afrika. Die DDR und Afrika II*, Münster/Hamburg 1994, pg. 7-30.
- 5 The "assimilados" were a legally defined group of people in the Portuguese colonial system. These were inhabitants of the colonies from the local population who were granted citizenship rights based on the fulfilment of certain requirements (knowledge of Portuguese, Western lifestyle, employee status or landowner), which made them appear sufficiently "civilised" in the eyes of the colonial administration. However, the majority of the local population (over 99% in the 1950s) were not recognised as citizens and therefore had fewer rights and received, for example, lower wages, even for the same work. See Marvin Harris, 'The Assimilado System in Portuguese Mozambique', in: *Africa Special Report*, 3 (1958), pg. 7-10, URL: <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/assimilado-system-portuguese-mozambique/docview/1304046356/se-2>.
- 6 Jeschewski (4. AEA), Information/Aufenthaltsbericht, 27.01.1964, in: PA AA M 1-A/17423, pg. 48-52.
- 7 Both quotes *ibid*.
- 8 Natalia Telepneva, 'Mediators of Liberation: Eastern-Bloc Officials, Mozambican Diplomacy and the Origins of Soviet Support for Frelimo, 1958-1965', in: *Journal of Southern African Studies* 43 (2017) 1, pg. 67-81, here pg. 79.

9 Ibid.

10 The former British colony was ruled by a white minority government from 1965 to 1980. The country has been called Zimbabwe since 1980.

11 Klaus Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität. Militärbeziehungen und Militärhilfen der DDR in die „Dritte Welt“*, Berlin 2012, pg. 108.

12 In 1951, Portugal redefined its colonies as “overseas provinces” by amending its constitution and from then on officially regarded them as an integral part of the country. This went so far that the Portuguese government claimed after its accession to the UN (1955) that it did not administer any dependent territories. See United Nations, *A Principle in Torment. 2, The United Nations and Portuguese administered territories / Office of Public Information*, New York 1970.

13 Elizabeth Schmidt, ‘Africa’, in: Richard H. Immerman/Petra Goedde (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, Oxford 2013, pg. 265-285, here pg. 276.

14 Thomas H. Henriksen, *Revolution and Counterrevolution. Mozambique’s War of Independence, 1964-1974*, Westport/London 1983, pg. 173.

15 The resolution was adopted with 89 votes in favour and none against. Only 9 states abstained, including Portugal, South Africa, Great Britain, France and the USA. See Wilfried Skupnik, ‘Portugals Kolonialismus und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Schluss)’, in: *Vereinte Nationen, German Review on the United Nations*, 22 (1974) 4, pp. 113-118, here pg. 114.

16 Franz Ansprenger et al. (ed.), *Wiriyamu. Eine Dokumentation zum Krieg in Mozambique*, München 1974, pg. 4.

17 Luís Nuno Rodrigues, ‘The International Dimensions of Portuguese Colonial Crisis’, in: Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo/António Costa Pinto, *The Ends of European Colonial Empires: Cases and Comparisons*, London 2015, pp. 243-267, here pp. 257 ff. West Germany, in turn, was overtaken in this respect in the first half of the 1970s by France, which was not a NATO member at the time and did not impose any restrictions on the deployment locations of the weapons supplied, etc. Cf. Henriksen, *Revolution and Counterrevolution*, pg. 175.

18 In addition to the publications by Schroers, Henriksen, Lopes and Rodrigues on this topic, the most recent German-language publication to be mentioned is Nils Schliehe, *Deutsche Hilfe für Portugals Kolonialkrieg in Afrika. The Federal Republic of Germany and the Angolan War of Liberation 1961-1974*, Munich 2016.

19 Thomas Schroers, *Die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Die Entwicklung der Beziehungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zur Portugiesischen Republik (1949-1976)*, Dissertation (Universität der Bundeswehr Hamburg), Hamburg 1998, pg. 60; Rui Lopes, *West Germany and the Portuguese Dictatorship, 1968-1974. Between Cold War and Colonialism*, Basingstoke/New York 2014, pg. 145.

20 Schroers, *Die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, p. 72 ff. For a well-known case in which the omission of the final destination clause was even



mutually agreed, see Lopes, *West Germany and the Portuguese Dictatorship*, p. 147. This involved three military ships whose purpose was obviously to be used in the colonies. Although Bonn repeatedly delayed the delivery, all three were ultimately handed over to the Portuguese army and used in the colonial wars (cf. *ibid.*). See also FRELIMO reporting: FRELIMO, 'West Germany involved in the Portuguese Colonial War', in: *Mozambican Revolution No. 1*, December 1963, pg. 3-5, URL: <https://jstor.org/stable/al.sff.document.numr196312>.

**21** Ansprenger et al. (Hg.), *Wiryamu*.

**22** Storkmann, *Geheime Waffen*, pg. 108.

**23** *Ibid.*, pg. 109.

**24** Politbüro (ZK der SED), Arbeitsprotokoll Nr. 1, TOP 14, 10.01.1967, in: BArch DY 30/45305.

**25** Voß, Die Beziehungen der DDR – VR Mosambik, pg. 12.

**26** Storkmann also comes to this conclusion. See Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität*, pg. 109.

**27** Schleicher/Schleicher, 'Waffen für den Süden Afrikas', pg. 12.

**28** Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität*, pg. 246.

**29** Helen Kitchen, 'Conversation with Eduardo Mondlane', in: *Africa Report*, 01.11.1967, S. 31-51, here pg. 52.

**30** Storkmann, 'Fighting the Cold War in southern Africa?', pg. 156.

**31** Mondlane was murdered on 3 February 1969 in a letter bomb attack by the Portuguese secret police PIDE, which was active both in Portugal and internationally.

**32** This applied in particular to support in the education sector, including the deployment of teachers.

**33** Victoria Brittain, 'They had to die: assassination against liberation', in: *Race & Class*, 48 (2006) 1, S. 60-74, here pg. 64.

**34** George Roberts, 'The assassination of Eduardo Mondlane: FRELIMO, Tanzania and the politics of exile in Dar es Salaam', in: *Cold War History*, 17 (2017) 1, pg. 1-19, here pg. 17.

**35** Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität*, pg. 248.

**36** Zenker (GK Daressalam), Aktennotiz/Gesprächsvermerk, 12.10.1971, in: PA AA M 1-C/6071, pg. 1.

**37** *Ibid.*

**38** Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität*, pg. 249.

**39** Sekretariat (ZK der SED), Arbeitsprotokoll Nr. 109, 14.10.1974, in: BArch DY 30-62668, pg. 73.

**40** Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität*, pg. 250.

# INTERVIEW: HOW GUINEA-BISSAU'S ANTI- COLONIAL STRUGGLE INFLUENCED THE CARNATION REVOLUTION



*Mamadu during our interview in February 2023.*

Born in the mid-1950s, Mamadu (name changed upon request) grew up in Guinea-Bissau's coastal region of Tombali under the long shadow of Portuguese colonialism. As a child, he witnessed Portuguese raids on his family's village and the armed resistance of the *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC), a Marxist-inspired liberation front founded by Amílcar Cabral and his comrades in 1956. In the 1960s, Mamadu received an education through the school system set up by the PAIGC in the areas it had liberated. There, he first came into contact with the German Democratic Republic (DDR), for the mathematics textbooks used by the PAIGC had been produced in cooperation with socialist East Germany. At the age of 16, Mamadu then travelled with several schoolmates to the DDR, where he studied agricultural mechanics and engineering.

We interviewed Mamadu in February 2023. In the following, we share excerpts from our conversation in which he talks about the history of Guinea-Bissau, the effects of slavery and colonialism on his society, and how the national liberation struggle in the colonies was interconnected with the Carnation Revolution in April 1974.

### What led to the colonial subjugation of Guinea-Bissau?

The region that is today the state of Guinea-Bissau had been inhabited by the local peoples for almost 3,000 years. But this history is hardly ever found in the textbooks.

From 1441, the first Portuguese adventurers – not “explorers” – arrived in the region and established contact with the indigenous population. From around 1450, present-day Guinea-Bissau was one of the first places where the Portuguese built their trading bases. In the beginning, Portugal was actually the sole ruler of the entire Guinean west coast. The French arrived later and began competing with the English and Dutch for the land. After the Berlin Conference of 1884/85, France and Portugal signed a treaty dividing up the territory. A large part of West Africa went to France, while Portugal remained firmly installed in Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau.

From 1895 to 1936, there were major armed conflicts. Guinea-Bissau has 21 different peoples or ethnic groups – I don’t use the word “tribes” – and the largest 5 or 6 ethnic groups put up resistance. France and Portugal played the ethnic groups off against each other and were thus able to subjugate the people more easily. From 1936, Portugal took control of the country and was able to extend its colonial rule over the entire country. From the beginning, the Portuguese brought Cape Verde and the current territory of Guinea-Bissau under one administration.

### How did this European domination influence the development of Guinea-Bissau?

Transatlantic slavery introduced a significantly new dynamic that derailed the ‘normal’ rhythm of development in our society.

It is true that the Europeans found a pre-existing slave system in Africa. But it was in no way comparable to the transatlantic slave system. In the African empires, captives from war were to work for their captors. The captives were subordinated and put to different tasks, but they were not depersonalized. They were traded, but they remained within their geographical territory – they circulated here. And this system only affected working-age individuals.

Transatlantic slavery, on the other hand, led to the bleeding of Africa. The workforce was exported en masse, and this led to social regression: knowledge was not passed down, technology was not developed further, labour power was missing everywhere, and social structures were dismantled. In the end, the maldevelopment caused by the European slave trade was so great that the effects can still be seen today. This is too often not taken into account in the analysis. It wasn't just direct colonialism that harmed us.

It was a huge disaster. The hegemonic encounter between Europe and Africa led to domination and exploitation instead of cooperation and collaboration.

### How did the African Independence Party of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) come about?

It is precisely in this context of colonial division and oppression that the PAIGC emerged. The agricultural engineer Amílcar Cabral founded the party on 19 September 1956 with two other comrades. Interestingly, Cabral's parents had been teachers of Cape Verdean descent. They were sent as teachers to Guinea-Bissau, not even to the capital, but to the interior of the country, where Cabral was born on 12 September 1924. A noteworthy aspect of the party was that from the beginning it campaigned for – as it is called – “African independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde”. Pan-Africanism was built into it from the beginning, but not as an abstract Pan-Africanism without territory. There was a concrete reference to Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde as the regions in which this struggle was to be taken up. I too am a product of this process.



*A DDR solidarity stamp with the PAIGC's liberation struggle, 1978.*

### **What is your personal background? How did you come to the DDR?**

I am from the south of Guinea-Bissau, from a relatively large village by Guinean standards. I was born in 1955 and first came into contact with Portuguese soldiers in 1962. They had surrounded us and there was a lot of commotion. For us children it was like a happy day, we ran out curiously to the cars and soldiers. But it was bad. There were many arrests in the neighboring village; an uncle of mine was also arrested and taken to the concentration camp in Tite near Bissau, as I later found out.

This first contact with the soldiers had a huge impact on my life. Our village was caught in the crossfire: on the one hand there were Portuguese barracks barely 2 km away from us, on the other hand, PAIGC fighters were camped about 4 km in the other direction, and they largely controlled our village. The Portuguese patrols kept coming and there were real battles around the village. Afterwards we had to evacuate.

In 1969, I entered the school system set up by the PAIGC in the liberated areas. The best students were selected there and sent to boarding school. First to a boarding school in the liberated areas and then to Conakry, the capital of Guinea. This boarding school operated as a pilot project where the PAIGC tried out new didactic

and pedagogical concepts. This is where I first came into contact with East Germany, because the GDR was the country that produced school materials for the PAIGC's mathematics lessons in the liberated zones. The handover of the first educational materials was held at the GDR embassy in Conakry. A pioneer group was selected to officially receive it. I was in the group and had the privilege of speaking there – I had never dreamed of that!



*A student at a PAIGC semi-boarding primary school in the Sarà region reviews the mathematics textbook for grade one, produced for the FRELIMO by the German Democratic Republic (DDR), 1974. Source: Roel Coutinho, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal Photographs (1973–1974); Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research.*

I was 14 years old at the time and stayed at this boarding school for two and a half years. There was a large offer of study scholarships from socialist countries, and I received a training place in the GDR. So, I travelled to East Germany when I was 16 years old. There I trained to become a tractor and agricultural mechanic.



The socialist countries – the GDR, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Cuba, and so on – provided direct support for our liberation struggle. We knew these states were our real friends. The end of the socialist camp almost overwhelmed me back then. I was devastated – really distraught! Because we knew that without the help of the socialist camp in the anti-imperialist struggle, there would still be apartheid in South Africa today! There would still be Portuguese colonialism in Guinea-Bissau, fully backed by the Federal Republic of Germany [West Germany] and others. No doubt about it.

You were in the DDR when Guinea-Bissau's independence was declared. How did you and the other students stay in touch with the PAIGC?

We were always in constant contact with Guinea-Bissau when we were in the DDR. At that time, our party founded a youth and student organization. We held monthly meetings in which we would organize and develop our activities and pay our contributions.

In November 1972, Amílcar Cabral made an official visit to the DDR. He sat with our student contingent for a whole day and discussed with us. He prepared us for Guinea-Bissau's upcoming declaration of independence. That was in November, and he was murdered in January. This came as a total shock for all of us. At that time, all students sent a joint statement to the party saying that we wanted to go back to fight at the front for the liberation struggle. But we were then told that our mission was to study, so that we could come home with a profession – that was also a big shock.

But it had been seared into our heads: 1973. Cabral had declared it in his New Year's communiqué: In 1973, we will declare our national independence. And so, 1973 became the most exciting year here – will it work or not? Instead of getting the usual bad news – that the Portuguese were advancing and so on – we began to receive optimistic updates from March onward: Portuguese garrisons were being overrun by PAIGC fighters, planes were being shot down again, and so on. And then came our unilateral declaration of independence. We celebrated in East Germany. The DDR's Afro-Asian Solidarity



*PAIGC militant combatants use their resting time to learn to read and write.*

*Source: Roel Coutinho, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal Photographs (1973–1974);*

*Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research.*

Committee called on us to hold joint events. We invited students from other countries – that was a great experience. And it was shortly after the 10th World Festival of Youth and Students in Berlin. 1973 was the craziest year! We are all celebrating at the Festival in Berlin and Inti-Illimani, the October Club and everyone was singing at the end of the day. And I was there!

After Guinea-Bissau's declaration of independence, the international stage became very important. At that point, the Portuguese military was on the defensive. And now it got exciting: Will the international community recognize our independence or not? By December of that year, we had the absolute majority of UN countries behind us. So, we knew that Portugal was now beaten internationally – military, political and diplomatic. When we heard that a coup had taken place in Portugal, we knew it was done. This is our victory. And we celebrated the coup as our victory.



When I finished vocational school in 1974, I was supposed to go back home, but because of my good grades I was recommended for engineering school. The party approved this and so I stayed in the DDR until 1977.

### How was the liberation struggle in the Portuguese colonies connected to the Carnation Revolution?

It was said to be the first time in modern history that pressure from the South was able to bring about the overthrow of a regime in the North. For us it was clear: the founding of the PAIGC in 1956 and the start of the armed liberation struggle in 1963 would definitely help to bring down the fascist regime in Portugal.

I later learned that the Socialist and Communist parties in Portugal were very much discussing with the liberation movements how joint cooperation should be organized. Amílcar Cabral made it clear that they must now join our struggle for independence, instead of our people who were currently studying in Portugal all joining the Socialist and Communist parties – some members of our party were also members of the Communist Party of Portugal. The reasoning was that if the fascist system in Portugal falls, then the Portuguese colonies will not automatically fall with it. But, if the Portuguese colonies defeat this colonial system, the fascist government, which had already existed for 40 years at that point, will automatically collapse.

In his writings, Cabral emphasized: We are fighting against one and the same enemy. We have to be very conscious of this. What the PAIGC is doing in Guinea-Bissau is just part of the same fight you are currently fighting – in Portugal, in the Federal Republic of Germany and elsewhere. It is your duty, as a trade unionist in the North, to support the struggles in the South. This is not charity, as is often portrayed these days, but rather an obligation. In Guinea-Bissau, many of us died from Portuguese napalm bombs, but every time we repulsed the colonial army, it was also a victory for you in the North. Through our daily fight in the South, we in fact support your fight. Unfortunately, this understanding has largely been lost today.

## COMING SOON – STUDY #3: “SOCIALIST AGRICULTURE IN THE DDR”

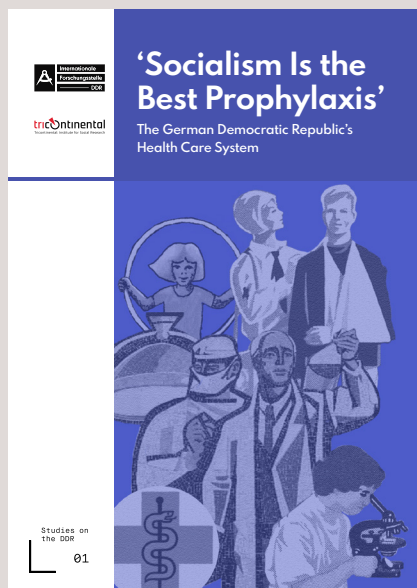
In the second half of the 20th century, there were epochal ruptures in rural living and economic conditions in East Germany. The centuries-old semi-feudal order was finally overcome after the Second World War through new, cooperative, and communal ways of working and living on the land. Yet at the close of the century, private capitalist competitive relations were reimposed on East Germany.



© Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum

The land reform initiated in 1945 broke the political and economic power of the landed nobility who had dominated the countryside for centuries. Farm workers, landless peasants, and their families were freed from the system of economic exploitation and disenfranchisement. The historically oppressed classes now actively shaped life on the land and in the village. From the early 1950s onwards, peasants gradually joined together to form agricultural production cooperatives in a decade-long process full of contradictions. These cooperatives democratized the villages, alleviated social inequalities, lessened the labour burden for the rural populace, and enabled active participation in cultural, sporting, and social pastimes. The old torments of hunger and existential angst became things of the past.

In view of the massive depletion of nature, the persistence of mass hunger and poverty, and the market dominance of agricultural multi-nationals, there is a tendency within progressive movements to view small-scale agricultural production as the only solution to these ills. The DDR followed a different path; it set out to industrialize agriculture while avoiding the negative consequences of large-scale production. Today, when peasants' participation in the struggle for a better world is urgently debated, the experiences of socialist East Germany offer a wealth of practical and theoretical insights into the possibility of creating an alternative to the capitalist path of agricultural development.





### **ZETKIN FORUM FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH**

European platform encouraging international exchange guided by principles of internationalism, anti-fascism, social progress and scientific research.

*[www.zetkin.forum](http://www.zetkin.forum)*



### **INTERNATIONALE FORSCHUNGSSTELLE DDR**

researches the history of the German Democratic Republic and its enduring relevance for international movements today.

*[www.ifddr.org](http://www.ifddr.org)*