

Distribution of pro-Lisbon leaflets was arranged by Zanzibari

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By David Leigh and Christopher Walker

Distribution of propaganda leaflets supporting Portugal at a protest rally in London on Sunday was arranged not by the Portuguese Embassy, but by Mr Ahmed Seif Kharusi, chairman of the Zanzibar Association, it was learnt yesterday.

Mr Kharusi said last night that the association had arranged the distribution of leaflets to show support for Portugal and to draw attention to the lack of democracy in Zanzibar.

He refused to say where the money to pay for the scheme had come from, but denied that it came from Portuguese, Rhodesian or South African sources.

Mr Kharusi, although he is of Arab descent and fled from Zanzibar in 1964 when the Arab-dominated Zanzibar National Party was overthrown by the largely African Afro-Shirazi Party, denied also that he was opposed to African regimes as such.

"But at least in Portugal, although I can't say there is democracy in full, there are signs that gradually people will

have the right to express themselves and choose their government", he said. "In Zanzibar, the contrary is true.

"We are ready to support Portugal and Rhodesia because we don't find these people are as bad as the present tyrannical rule in Zanzibar."

He appealed for the fair trial of former Zanzibari ministers held by Tanzania, which is officially united with Zanzibar. He feared they had been sent to their deaths in Zanzibar.

His organization had several branches and about 220 active members, he said. Asked where the finance had come from for the leaflets, he said: "I can't tell you who donated it or how it happened. It isn't necessary for you to know."

The association had not necessarily been given money specifically for the Portuguese visit. Did the Portuguese Embassy donate the money? "No. We have had no contact with the Portuguese Government."

Throughout the day spokesmen for the Portuguese Embassy denied that they had been responsible for the hiring of the young men and women who were distributing the leaflets in different parts of London.

The distributors were hired by the Alfred Marks Bureau, one of the country's biggest employment agencies. About 120 of them were on the streets during the day distributing yellow and white leaflets proclaiming the twin messages "Portugal like Great Britain Loves Peace" and "Portugal is forced to fight for Freedom as Great Britain was".

The mystery deepened after directors of Alfred Marks denied earlier statements from the company that the contract had been ordered by the Portuguese Government. It was eventually cleared up after 70 of the leafleteers had crowded into the company's Strand branch demanding a higher rate of pay.

While angry distributors crowded the stairway of the office, Mr Sidney Marks, a director of the agency, told a press conference: "An earlier statement made by our company to the effect that the Portuguese Government was involved was inaccurate. I can emphatically state that claims in the press that any 'rent-a-crowd' activities have been involved are completely untrue."

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Mr Kharusi got in touch with the Alfred Marks Bureau late on Friday and asked if about 200 people could be employed to distribute leaflets on the day preceding the visit of Dr Caetano the Portuguese Prime Minister, yesterday.

The bureau called on a number of young people in London and offered them 60p an hour to distribute the leaflets. Many had no idea that they would be involved in a controversial propaganda exercise.

Miss Jyotika Patel, aged 18, told me: "I was just doing it for the money and until a man arrived to give us the leaflets I had no idea they would be Portuguese. In fact I disapprove of what they are doing in Africa."

The situation was complicated further when the distributors arrived to collect their pay. There was confusion in the offices as negotiations took place between them and agency executives. At one stage journalists' notebooks were

seized and the police arrived to keep watch outside the office.

Eventually the company agreed to increase the rate to £1 an hour after a dockers' shop steward, Mr Tony Delaney, arrived on the scene to take over the negotiations. He said afterwards: "I am dead against Portugal, so it was the wrong cause but the right principle."

Some of the people who had been employed said that they had been questioned by the police. Mr Danny Hudson, aged 25, said: "I was stopped twice by police and told that the pamphlets were illegal because they did not carry the name of any publisher."

As well as the slogans, the leaflets also carried crude drawings of a man, apparently representing Portugal, being threatened by a dragon representing China and a bear symbolizing Russia.

Mr Marks said last night that the total cost of the operation would be £2,500 after the negotiation of the new rate. He was not certain whether the extra rate would be charged to Mr Kharusi or "swallowed by the bureau".