



Editorial Notes:

Reflections on Nigeria

THE SUDDEN AND inglorious collapse of what was regarded as a shining model of 'Westminster-type parliamentary democracy' in Africa's most populous independent state must give rise to deep reflection by all concerned with the future of our continent. The taking over of the state apparatus by army officers, following a series of similar events in the Congo, Dahomey, Central African Republic and even revolutionary Algeria, is certain to lead to a spate of speculation by political commentators of all kinds.

Naturally the anti-African racists will be quick to see in these developments a further illustration of their thesis that Africans are not 'ready' for self-government. It would be understandable but regrettable if African patriots would angrily retort by justifying everything that takes place in our continent as beyond criticism.

The 'Westminster' or western-type parliamentary systems imposed by the colonialists have been rejected in almost every African country, within a few years of independence. Those who regard this type of political system as the essence of democracy will be bitterly disappointed.

Others will draw the facile but superficial conclusion that democracy itself is a fallacious conception.

The truth is that it is not 'democracy' but the specific theory and practice of bourgeois democracy as exhibited in Western Europe and North America, in the present period of the profound degeneration and inner crisis of capitalism, which has proved bankrupt. Even in the classical countries where bourgeois democracy developed to its highest level, the two-party or multi-party parliamentary system is at its lowest ebb. In Britain and America the so-called 'free choice' of the voter resolves itself into an option between rival parties (Labour or Conservative; Democrat or Republican) with virtually indistinguishable policies. Whether in home policy (no nationalization, wage-freezes, bigger profits) or foreign and colonial policy (support for America in Vietnam, opposition to national liberation in Rhodesia, Guiana, etc.) the Labour government follows the same line laid down by its Tory predecessor. Johnson is carrying out to the letter the recommendations of his defeated opponent Goldwater. Gaullist France has virtually abandoned parliamentarism for one-man rule. In the recent West German elections the Social Democratic Party advanced the identical policy to that of its bourgeois opponents. In Italy, all the main parties with the exception of the Communists are at one on policy; their differences relate only to which politicians should hold which offices in the Cabinet.

Once major matters of international and home policy are removed from the sphere of controversy, 'politics' becomes a cynical game between rival teams of aspirants to office—and the perquisites and personal opportunities which go with office. They are not seeking power—they recognize that power resides with the great monopolists of national and international finance-capital who can make or break any 'western' government. They are not even seeking administration of the state: administration resides in the hands of the permanent civil service and military bureaucracy, who remain while Ministers and Cabinets come and go. Lack of principle, careerism and opportunism among the political leaders, disillusion and political apathy among the public, which is ever more distantly removed from any genuine opportunity to participate in policy making, a dead outer shell of democratic forms which has all but lost the original conviction and reality which once gave it vitality—this is the pattern of perfect government which the colonialists have had the arrogance to hold up to the peoples of Africa and Asia as best suited to their needs, and indeed as the condition for their being allowed a constitution.

It is hardly surprising that, as soon as they were able, practically all the African and Asian peoples have got rid of this bogus type of 'democratic constitution' as soon as they were able to do so. It is a pattern

specifically designed to create the illusion of government by the people while preventing the people from actually participating in the legislative and administrative processes. It is designed to create artificial divisions, or to preserve old ones, to encourage corruption and opportunism, to permit manipulation on essential policy questions by the all-powerful forces behind the scenes. Little as it is suited to the real needs of the masses in the 'west', it is obviously incompatible with the aspirations of the revolutionary peoples of the former colonies, urgently in need of a major regeneration, a great national effort to transform societies petrified by years of colonialism, to uplift desperately low living standards. Such societies cannot afford or tolerate the nepotism, inefficiency, corruption, fanning of regional and tribal hostilities, domination by foreign and local vested interests, and general degeneration of political ideals, all of which flourish like bluebottles in the Augean stables of the western-patterned institutions which the departing colonialists conferred upon us.

Thus there will be few to mourn the failure of the Nigerian experiment in bourgeois democracy in a country dominated by feudal tyranny and neo-colonialist hirelings. The farcical general elections, followed by the Western Nigerian regional elections, were only the final symptoms of the fatal illness. Characterized by widespread corruption, ballot-rigging, terrorism, and even assassinations, they were a disgrace to Nigeria and to Africa. There was no public confidence in or support for the regime. The Majors and Generals took over this vast country of 55 million souls without resistance, with almost ridiculous ease.

General Ironsi has announced that he and his colleagues are preparing a new constitution. Most Nigerians will doubtless feel that whatever emerges from these deliberations, it can hardly be worse than what went before. Like them, we are prepared to suspend judgment until we see what is proposed, although the first announcement he made, there reassuring foreign capitalists that there would be no nationalization of industry, hardly gives the impression that the Sandhurst-trained Nigerian military men have any deep understanding of political affairs, or are inspired with the patriotic, socialist spirit of the African Revolution. And why should we expect them to be?

Militarism and army dictatorships are no solution to the problems of emerging Africa. It is true that in some cases, notably that of Egypt, military take-overs have eventually led to the establishment of genuinely patriotic and progressive societies, but this was only because in this case the state was transformed, by men who were genuinely concerned with the working people and who increasingly depended upon them, into a more popular and stable form of civilian regime. In the Sudan,

the reverse was the case, and only after much damage had been caused to the people that Aboud's stifling regime was overthrown.

In rejecting the 'western' type of bogus bourgeois democracy as unsuitable for African countries, we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the dirty bath water. The concept of democracy—of government of the people by the people—is profoundly in conformity with the ancient traditions and the present-day needs of Africa. But the practice of genuine, working democracy does not—as the practice of Ghana and Tanzania are increasingly demonstrating—mean weak, inefficient government, fostering of artificial divisions, careerism, and domination by behind-the-scenes moneyed and foreign interests. That such hateful practices are identified in the popular imagination with the idea of 'democracy' is merely a result of the successful trick played on Africans by imperialist propagandists, who have managed to impose their own false image as representatives of the democratic principle. In reality, as all these things are hated by the people, a real *people's government* would make it its main aim to eliminate them. Once we get this false concept out of our minds we will realise that a true democracy is one that is ruthless and dictatorial towards selfish moneyed interests and imperialist agents, while affording the greatest freedom of speech and organization to the people; one which arouses and draws the people into every aspect of the political and economic life of the country; one which expresses the unity of the whole nation in the great patriotic tasks ahead, and rests firmly on the conscious organized support of the working masses.

To achieve such a new democratic solution, a democratic dictatorship of the working people, it is essential that the masses, the working class in firm alliance with the rural people, should be independently organized in their own trade unions, peasant organizations and political movement. It is also essential that a clear vision should exist, based not only on African but also world experience, regarding our way ahead. For while African experience differs in detail from that of other parts of the world, the general rules governing historical development are universal. It is in this respect that we should recall the profound truth of Lenin's statement that no revolution can succeed without a revolutionary theory. Such a theory cannot emerge from the narrow area of military theory; nor can it be evolved from the general ethical principles, however admirable they may be, of religion. The priest and the soldier may have their place, but that place does not consist in the conduct and organization of human society. Nor for that matter can the conduct and direction of society be safely left to the professional politicians and statesmen, however eminent they may be. Democracy really means that the ordinary people must do their own thinking and deciding for

themselves. If they are not to be at the mercy of every demagogue, careerist and would-be Napoleon, our people must master the science of social progress and revolution: Marxism-Leninism.

JOHANNESBURG CELEBRATES THE NEW YEAR

ABOUT HALF A MILLION people live in the segregated complex of African townships south-west of Johannesburg—Soweto. The South African police chose to celebrate the new year in a manner which is symbolic of South Africa, by conducting a vast military-style blitz on these working people. Over 2,500 policemen, mainly whites and of course officered and commanded exclusively by whites, and backed up by the men and armoured cars of the East Rand Com-mando, descended on Soweto in the early hours of the morning, before most people were up. In three successive nights every house-hold was rudely awakened, entered and searched.

On the first night, over sixteen hundred people were arrested and flung into prison—the police phrase is ‘detained for screening’. Over 900 of them were subsequently charged with ‘criminal offences’—the great majority under the pass laws. This operation symbolizes not only the callous attitude of the Verwoerd regime towards the African majority in South Africa, but also the permanent martial law and civil-war type of situation of South Africa. No country which observed civil liberties, or where there is not a terrorist dictatorship, would for a moment tolerate such a furious attack on peaceful citizens. Try to think what it means. In London, for example, this would be the equivalent of an attacking force of over 30,000—that is to say, about the strength of three army divisions. The number arrested—if London was subjected to an assault on this scale—would be some 20,000, and the number charged with crimes apprehended in two hours would be over 12,000. That is if one takes the *total* population of Johannesburg in comparison with London. But in fact this punitive raid was not against the *total* Johannesburg population, but against approxi-mately half of it, the African half, confined involuntarily to Soweto. When this is considered, raiding on this scale in London would result in a night’s haul of 40,000 arrested, 24,000 charged.

This massive military operation takes place without a whimper from allegedly ‘democratic’ opinion in South Africa. The best the *Rand Daily Mail* can offer—now that editor Lawrence Gandar has been ‘kicked upstairs’—is to ask whether this is the answer to crime. ‘Police raids on this scale must never be allowed to become a permanent part of our social policy.’ Pious, cool and curiously