

Nigeria—Shortcomings of Military Rule

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THE NIGERIAN ARMY is another ex-colonial institution and has an officer corps with a social ideology identical to that of the senior civil servants, only theirs has a dash of the Sandhurst contempt for civilians. This makes it constitutionally incapable of destroying the roots of Nigerian corruption and apathy. For these roots are deeply set in the status system of the bureaucracies and in the reaction of the clan and family organizations to the existing pattern of productive relationships between the peasantry on the one hand and the bureaucracy and foreign capitalists on the other. The majors who led the revolt, and the colonels and lieutenant-colonels who replaced the politicians, are in the same social class and in fact have extensive personal connections with permanent secretaries, top corporation executives and other managerial staff whose complete replacement as a ruling group is necessary for any real change in the social and political system.

Now to proceed to show this system is a neo-colonialist system. And how any analysis of its corruption always leads back to this basic fact. This fact about Nigeria can, of course, be concealed under all sorts of rhetoric about 'under-development', 'emerging nationhood', 'take-offs', etc. but what it means in terms of the social, economic and cultural existence of the Nigerian peasant and worker is clear and simple. It means exploitation and barrenness. The barrenness of a society in which a luxury-consumer-goods economy is maintained on the back of a poor, diseased, overtaxed and swindled rural population. The role of international capitalism in this system is also quite clear. It is exploitation through industrial and mining activities, trading, contract work for building and roads construction, banking and insurance.

Control of the industrial and manufacturing sector is concentrated in the hands of the United Africa Company, The Nigerian Tobacco Company, John Holts, Taylor Woodrow and a few other German

and American firms. The Nigerian Tobacco Company, for instance, is a subsidiary of the international combine the British American Tobacco Company, and this firm controls about 90 per cent of the supply in cigarettes and an equal size in manufacturing activities. It makes huge profits by fixing low prices for the tobacco farmers, charging high prices for its cigarettes and paying very low wages to its workers. Only recently the workers at its factory in Zaria had to go on strike before they got a long overdue increase. This company with its monopoly of the supply of cigarettes, monopoly in the demand for raw tobacco and in some places even that of seasonal credit to the peasants, exploits the country with an almost callous relish. The other 'giant' in Nigeria is the United Africa Company, a Unilever subsidiary, which has since its withdrawal from a monopoly control of produce-buying established itself in textiles, sugar, beer, vehicle assembly and almost in all fields of manufacturing activity. Shell-B.P. and the American Gulf Oil now control the increasingly important oil industry emphasizing the bureaucratic-capitalist nature of the economy since petroleum extraction is necessarily for monopolies and through royalties concessions and special taxes these monopolies build strong links with the bureaucracy.

Other capitalist firms concentrate on the highly lucrative market of luxury goods and foods. The Greek firm A. G. Leventis with other Indian and Levantine merchant houses specially concentrate on exploiting this need for expensive status consumption of the civil servants, managers, politicians, the comprador and commercial bourgeoisie and the army officers.

Other firms in the trading sector like Paterson Zochonis, C.F.A.O., and John Holts of Liverpool dominate the wholesale market. For John Holts especially this together with a monopoly of hire purchase facilities in some areas has led to high profits. In a statement of accounts published in *The Financial Times* of February 4th, 1966, John Holts raised their annual profits of £604,000 in 1963-64 to £1,059,000 for the year 1964-65. An increase of over 40 per cent in a single year. The Chairman assured the shareholders of 'an increasing flow of profits from this source'. There is little reason to believe that the military *coup* will make any difference to this prediction.

In building and road construction the big contractors are Costain, Borini Porpno, Cappa Taylor Woodrow and Bogialla. In this sector the profit margins depend directly on the decisions of politicians and civil servants about the location and type of project and the standards of inspection to be imposed when the project is completed. The influence of the foreign governments who provide the loans, grants and other types of 'aid' for these projects is another factor, indefinite

but crucial, in this type of exploitation. A classic example of their type of architecture is the Costain Housing Estate in Kaduna, perhaps the best symbol of the sterility of Nigerian bureaucratic-capitalism.

But a more subtle and pervasive power is in the banks and the insurance companies. They are undoubtedly the most powerful institutions through which international capitalism keeps its grip on Nigeria. Barclays Bank D.C.O. and The Bank of West Africa are the two giants. Their tentacles extend right into the rural areas through their special credit arrangements with the Produce Marketing Corporations. These government institutions guarantee their buying agents for bank loans which are used for the purchase of the cash crops—cocoa, groundnuts, etc.—from the peasants. The interest on these loans is, of course, extorted from the peasantry by weight-fixing or by simply tying a peasant to one buyer through seasonal loans and advances until the last ounce of his produce has been sucked out of him.

This, in brief, is the Nigerian economy. Now the place of the politicians has been taken by army officers. One party, The Northern Peoples' Congress of the Sardauna of Sokoto and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, seems to have disintegrated. The two older southern parties are still intact.* They are solidly composed of the bourgeoisie of Ibadan, Abeokuta, Onitsha and Enugu and their spokesmen the lawyers and journalists. The army officers can hardly govern for much longer without their co-operation. The spineless ruling classes of Northern Nigeria have been scared out of their wits by the sudden death of the Sardauna and it will be some time before they organize themselves again. The army together with the senior civil servants has now proceeded to centralize the country's administration and has also taken other measures very comforting to the foreign investor (ref. *The Economist*, Friday, February 11th, 1966). None of its measures seems to have tackled basic problems. And nothing in the personality or proclamations of its leaders suggests that they will do so.

The army is arresting some of the old politicians and might try them for corruption and all sorts of mayhem. But it lacks the mass following, and the discipline and force of a coherent revolutionary ideology to tackle the roots. The army cannot inspire and organize the rural population into a system of producers' co-operatives and later into communes which would become the organs of government in the rural areas, cannot change and expand the educational system; cannot cut down the bureaucracy, reduce its salaries, eliminate all its privileges; cannot reorganize the police force and dismiss most of

* This article was written before the decree dissolving political parties.—*Editor.*

the present officers. And these are only a few of the changes absolutely essential to even the elimination of corruption. The centralization of the administration will certainly increase unity and the cessation of the old political squabbles will reinforce this. But change, change in terms of the social, political, economic and cultural existence of the Nigerian peasant and worker is still far off.

Dear Comrade Fischer

The Bulgarian communists and the working people in Bulgaria learnt with great indignation of the unjust sentence passed on you by the 'court of justice' of the Government of the Republic of South Africa—a Government hateful to your people—for your struggle and the struggle of all patriots in the Republic of South Africa against oppression, colonial bondage and racial discrimination.

Your courageous speech of self-defence, which found deep response among the Bulgarian people, was an indictment against the Verwoerd apartheid regime, which is a disgraceful phenomenon of our time. We, Bulgarians, admired your courageous behaviour at the trial; it reminded us of the undaunted behaviour of Georgi Dimitrov—the immortal leader and teacher of the Bulgarian people—during the time of the Leipzig Fire Trial in 1933.

We are confident, dear comrade Fischer, that the just cause to which you and your comrades have devoted your lives and energies will be victorious.

We hail your struggle and demand that the unjust sentence passed on you be quashed and that all political prisoners in the Republic of South Africa be released.

Wishing you, dear comrade Fischer, good health, stamina and success in your grandiose struggle for genuine liberation of the people of the Republic of South Africa, we are

fraternally yours,

CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE
BULGARIAN COMMUNIST PARTY.

[Text of a letter sent to Abram Fischer, member of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party, who received a sentence of life imprisonment on May 4th, 1966.]