

**UCLA**

**Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies**

**Title**

The Uganda Crisis: What Next?

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1r40z6rg>

**Journal**

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 15(3)

**ISSN**

0041-5715

**Author**

Nabudere, Daniel Wadada

**Publication Date**

1987

**DOI**

10.5070/F7153016973

**Copyright Information**

Copyright 1987 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

## THE UGANDA CRISIS: WHAT NEXT?

*Dan Wadada Nabudere*

### **Introduction**

Uganda has been in a continuous state of crisis for approximately twenty years. Unlike most African states, where the political environments settled down to a greater or lesser degree after independence, Uganda has experienced extended periods of violent internal strife, similar to that found in Chad, Sudan and Zaire. Yet, in contrast to these countries, where relative quiet has been achieved of late at the cost of personalized dictatorial rule, in Uganda even this method has proved unsuccessful. Despite the widespread use of political repression, both Milton Obote and Idi Amin failed to bring to Uganda long-term stability. Will President Yoweri Museveni succeed where his predecessors failed? All of this points to the uniqueness of the Ugandan situation in Africa.

The changes that took place in Uganda in January 1986 are seen by some as the ushering in of a 'new era'. The leader of the new regime, Yoweri Museveni, has indeed declared that what took place in January was not merely a change of guard but represented a more fundamental change. Many Ugandans, and indeed, those within the high positions of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and its supporting army (NRA), are themselves not sure what the fundamental changes will be. This raises the question of "What next?" in the continuing crisis in Uganda.

Many Ugandans feel that the cost of instability in terms of lives,

property, and economic and social development has been too high and many were prepared to give NRM a chance to correct the situation. This was characterized by the euphoria of the first few months following the overthrow of the Tito Okello military government. This regime had discredited itself from the outset, and without the support of the Democratic Party (DP), the Okello regime could not have received the acquiescence of the other political parties. Without a strong basis of support, Okello's brief period in power was characterized by an almost insane brutality, even in the regions where the regime claimed to control. Acts such as rape and murder were intensified, particularly with the return of Amin's former supporters in the army. The crimes of Obote, which Okello had been quite vocal in condemning, paled in comparison to those committed by his own regime during this brief period. Such brutality rapidly undermined the regime's undeserved 'credibility' obtained by virtue of support from the DP. It was this continued senseless brutality that made the population turn to the NRM to dislodge Okello. Consequently, many Ugandans warmly welcomed the NRM when they assumed power in Kampala.

Yet for others with a perhaps deeper understanding of the fundamental causes of the crisis in Uganda, no long-term solution to the crisis appeared despite the welcome political change. The crisis could only be resolved by recognizing the right of the people of Uganda to democratically determine their future - a right denied to them since independence. However, the NRM while claiming a victory for democracy, instead introduced their own version referred to as "popular" or "participatory" democracy in which "grass-root" village committees formed a key element. Many other developments suggested that the NRM's programme would unleash another wave of discontent and renewed conflict. This short article attempts to analyze some of these issues and problems that have recently emerged along with some proposals as to how to overcome them.

### **Victory? What Victory?**

What was the NRM's declared objective for the 'resistance' against the Obote government? It was to remove a regime that had rigged the 1980 elections and allow the people of Uganda to freely determine their future. The NRM's failure or success will be determined by how it tries to fulfill this promise. Doubts as to whether NRM could indeed bring about such a democratic situation were raised very early. It was noted that the leadership of the NRM had participated in creating the conditions of the rigging of the 1980 elections. Museveni



had himself taken part in the military coup of May 1980 that overthrew the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) government. Along with Paulo Muwanga and Tito Okello, the NRM had claimed that the UNLF was trying to frustrate the 'fighters' who had overthrown Amin, and that the UNLF was seeking to install a one-party system under the guise of the UNLF umbrella. Museveni was the Vice-Chairman of the Military Junta that rigged the elections. He then formed his own party, the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM), and contested the elections as a presidential candidate. When his party failed to win more than a single seat, he declared a retreat to the 'bush' to fight it out, thereby putting into question Museveni's commitment to the democratic ideal.

Another issue that emerged early in the NRM strategy was the tendency towards *militarism*. The struggle against the UPC-Obote regime was seen by the NRM purely in military terms. Because of this tendency the real political issues were not articulated. Calls for a united front of all the opposition forces were ignored. Instead alliances formed around military considerations or were based on a calculated opportunism by Museveni. This is what led to the formation of the NRM, which emerged out of an alliance between Y. K. Lule's Uganda Freedom Fighters (UFF) and Museveni's Popular Revolutionary Army (PRA). The rationale for this alliance was based on two considerations. The first was the desire by the PRA to have a safe political base in the Luwero Triangle resting on support of UFF along ethnic lines. Secondly, Lule planned to utilize the PRA military muscle and then to stake a claim to power on the basis of the support raised within the NRA. These two considerations fashioned the politics in the NRM up to the time of Lule's death. The result of this strategy is already influencing the political tendencies within the NRM: *militarism* and *monarchism*.

But in fact these two elements came to be reflected in two other ways. First, the ethnic factor which Lule tried to exploit was also utilized by the PRA elements within the NRM. These former members of the PRA were in control of the military programme on the ground. The politics that emerged in the bush due to the 'alliance' were *anti-northern* in nature. It was alleged that the enemy were 'northerners' who had monopolized Ugandan politics and used their power to try to annihilate the 'Bantu' people of the south. For a time this motivated the young people, particularly those who saw their relatives killed by northern soldiers. The fact that the army was composed of many other ethnic groups was played down as well as the objective character of the neo-colonial state and imperialism's role (particularly British). We will see later that this opportunistic approach to the complicated Ugandan

situation has had an adverse effect on the politics of the NRM, despite its leftist rhetoric. This ethnic contradiction was brought into sharp play by both sides during the Okello period. The coming together of the former Amin soldiers with forces under Tito and Bazilio Okello seemed to create a new 'unity' among the 'northerners' which the NRM saw as another ominous attempt to retain control.

The militaristic aspect was revealed in the calculations of the NRA when, in 1982, the NRM entered into an agreement with the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF) of Moses Ali in which the two organizations agreed to work together to fight 'Obote's dictatorship'. The fact that the UNRF was *not* a democratic organization, but a purely military group of disgruntled former soldiers in the Amin army was ignored in an effort to gain military support from Libya. The fact that the UNRF was the army which Museveni's FRONASA claimed to have fought and defeated with the Tanzanian army was momentarily forgotten in this opportunist military alliance. This alliance, as we shall note later, has already impeded the NRM's efforts to 'democratize' Uganda.

Indeed, it was this militaristic approach which fashioned the NRM's attitude to the Okello regime. It was an open secret that the NRA had initiated talks with the Uganda National Liberation Army in the overthrow of Obote in 1985. The mediator in these contacts was Paulo Muwanga, who, in his effort to create a position for himself in the next government, had contacted NRM in order to cement an alliance with the 'Acholis' in the UNLA who were dissatisfied with the Obote regime. In fact, the key man in this alliance was Bazilio Okello who controlled the Northern Regiment of the UNLA and who finally moved to overthrow Obote. At this stage, the two Okellos were not looked upon as 'criminals' by the NRA despite the fact that they were part and parcel of Obote's repressive machine. Although this group ultimately turned out to be unpopular, the NRA nevertheless decided to open up 'peace talks' with them although it was clear that it was also preparing to fight them. When the 'peace talks' ended with the Nairobi "Peace Accord," the NRA nevertheless decided to fight the Okello regime which they were able to defeat within weeks. Yet despite the defeat of the Okello regime, Museveni was quick to offer presidential facilities and protection to Tito Okello whose regime had just been overthrown. It was now alleged that only Bazilio Okello was the 'criminal' despite the fact that the bulk of the UNLA was retained as part of the NRA. Such a calculation can only be regarded as military opportunism, bound to create difficulties for Ugandans very soon.

It is these same calculations that have led to the later incorporation of Moses Ali's UNRF and Lumago's Former Uganda



National Army (FUNA) [both factions of Amin's army] into NRA. Indeed, Moses Ali was made second in command in the NRA and a cabinet minister, while Emilio Mondo was designated as Ambassador to the USSR. Today these two remnants of Amin's army are accommodated in expensive hotels in Kampala, despite a repugnance for them by young NRA soldiers who correctly see them as former enemies who fought and killed their comrades in the battles around Lukaya during the last days of the Okello regime. No other reason can explain this otherwise perplexing and dangerous alliance outside of military calculations.

It is these developments that are already on people's minds when the whole issue of 'fundamental change' is considered. A large number of the NRA's original soldiers see the recruitment of former undisciplined soldiers as a betrayal to their 'cause', whatever that may be. This division is also being played on by the monarchist forces in Buganda who are demanding the restoration of Kabakaship (Kingship) in Buganda. They are also pointing to the NRA as an alliance of forces against the 'Baganda'. Thus here we see a convergence of these two negative tendencies and the way they tend to reinforce one another to create a situation which could lead to re-emergence of confusion in the country, and the subsequent imposition of an even harsher dictatorship within the near future. It is this prospect which prompts us to ask ourselves VICTORY? WHICH VICTORY?

### Is Democracy the Issue?

It is indeed this development which raises the whole question of whether the NRM is committed to the establishment of democracy in Uganda, a 'cause' which they supposedly fought for. We have already alluded to a number of issues which cast doubt on their intentions, but it is desirable to go further and deal with a number of other developments. The first is that upon seizing power from the Tito Okello military council, the NRA declared itself a military government by decree. It was announced that the NRM will be in power for four years, and that a 'freedom fighters' government would be set-up composed of the 'freedom fighters' and a number of other parties and groups to give it a 'broadly based' character. It is important to note that this was not decided by the National Resistance Council (NRC) which was *assumed* to be the supreme body in the NRM institutional hierarchy. Indeed, although additional members were later added, this Council has yet to meet. To date it has convened only once, at the beginning of the regime's tenure, and then only to confirm the *prior* election of Yoweri

Museveni as chairman of the NRM - a duty that had already been executed by the NRA High Command. This was itself questioned within the NRM ranks as being improper and undemocratic, and constituted the second development which suggests a dictatorial trend.

Thus the very beginnings of the NRM as a government began on a dictatorial note. The political parties which were co-opted to be part of this 'broadly based' government were not consulted, nor did they take part in the decision as to how long their interim government was to remain in power. Some of them later questioned this decision but they were no longer in a position to influence the situation as well as their relationship to the NRM. Their role was not clearly defined, nor was the nature of the NRM structure itself made explicit. Thus the notion of a broadly-based government may become an instrument in establishing a dictatorial structure in the country. The political parties were again playing a subservient role in the politics of Uganda. At this point it should be noted that while the military groups such as the UFM, FEDEMU, FUNA and even UNLA were bargaining for *actual power* in the NRM, the political parties seemed to be meekly incorporated. Even the DP, which made the most noise about democracy, went on their knees to remain in the Cabinet by joining the NRM 'interim arrangement' without discussions about the future, whereby these parties may well have surrendered their claim to being democratic institutions. It is also doubtful if their members have ever approved their leaders' involvement in this arrangement.

Very soon these feeble political leaders who had committed their parties to a programme they did not understand were partially awakened by the first political bomb-shell which just fell short of destroying them. This Radio Uganda pronouncement was not even supported by a decree of the NRC, first made by the minister of information, Abu Mayanja, but later confirmed by the president himself. It was decreed that political parties were prohibited from issuing press statements. This was later broadened to include a ban on the exhibiting of party flags and signs as well as the holding of political rallies to propagate their ideas. It also seems that these parties were not consulted in order to obtain their consent regarding this order, although the leaders were in the government of the NRM. In any case, having joined and accepted the arrangement without ascertaining what they were participating in, they found themselves unable to say anything that might jeopardize their positions. They increasingly found themselves in a 'Catch 22' situation.

Further measures were taken to incorporate the UNRF and FUNA into the NRA and NRM without the discussions that might have



been expected to take place in the NRC and cabinet. But since the NRC had been summoned to confirm the president, to elect him as chairman of the NRC, and to quickly disband until such a time as they are called again to rubber stamp decisions already taken, such a process would not have been possible in any case. It is now understood that once a decision was taken to 'expand' the NRC, it was also decided that the NRA High Command would have to approve all the NRC's decisions, with the result that the NRA High Command - whether by design or fluke - became the supreme decision makers in the country.

Furthermore, the decision that 'grass-root' committees would be set-up as part of 'popular democracy' was proclaimed by the NRM in their Ten-Point Programme. But the first efforts at setting up these committees on a democratic basis proved abortive. First, the issue as to who would organize the elections to the committees was unclear. Spontaneous decisions were made by the 'political commissars' on the spot to hold these elections. But these were not co-ordinated since the NRM secretariat was not set-up. The result was that a number of committees elected in this first period were dominated by supporters of the political parties and for this reason it was decided to create 'special district administrators' under the president's office to undertake the whole political exercise all over again. The NRM secretariat's role as a political organizer was shelved and the state itself now undertook the task of organizing the committees from above. This development was significant because it removed that primary element of democracy at the primary-cell level with the result that these committees either became instruments of political party politicking or state 'watch-dog' organs, as indeed was admitted to be their function.

The above developments clearly indicate a trend towards dictatorial power emerging in the country. If the NRM has managed to silence the political parties, it can only be regarded as a matter of great concern, particularly when NRM's democratic institutions themselves are flouted or avoided. Such a structure of power easily leads to the emergence of absolute power in the hands of a single individual, with dire consequences for the country as a whole. This fear is reinforced by the decision by Museveni to place emphasis not on creating democratic institutions but on building his own personal army (rather than a national army). It is already clear that the NRA will continue to be the 'national army' despite its commitment to a single leader and movement. This raises the whole issue of whether the NRM is committed to the agenda of establishing democracy in the country. If the future army of Uganda is being raised as an army of individuals committed to the NRM program and policies, how can it ever come about that any other political



party or movement can ever hope to take power or even contemplate winning any election in the country. Even if such an impossibility were to occur, such a party could never hope to govern with the sympathy and support of such an army. This is perhaps the reason why FEDEMU refused to agree incorporation into the NRA without first deciding on the future of the Ugandan army. But even then, FEDMU or any other group cannot challenge this position unless they wish to put up a fight. It follows that the only scenario open for a change would be civil war.

Thus it is clear that the whole question of the NRM establishing a democracy where the people of Uganda can freely elect their leaders without harassment and control cannot in fact be realized within the NRM's interim arrangement as it stands at this time. Many doubts are already being raised by political parties and interest groups as to whether in fact a dictatorial regime is not already in place. Should it be surprising, therefore, that dissensions are already being publicly expressed within the NRM ranks, taking the form of monarchist-ethnic politics as a response to what is feared to be a total dictatorship?

### Monarchism - A Recording Played Back

As already indicated, when the PRA entered into an alliance with the UPP of Lule, a compromise was made between militarism and ethnic politics. This resulted in the *anti-northerners'* alliance which enabled the NRM to survive in Luwero Triangle. The issue of Obote's destruction of the former kingdoms was played on as an element in these politics. The 'northerners' were referred to as 'animals' even by a faction of the UPC 'science' clique led by Paulo Muwanga and Tiberondwa. The reliance of the NRM on this political line was later reflected in the move by Museveni to bring Ronnie Mutebi to the Masaka area during the last phase of the struggle against the Okello military regime. Mutebi's presence in these 'liberated areas' was exploited fully as Museveni took him around in rallies to help mobilize support for the NRM.

At this stage Mutebi had already raised the question of his return to Buganda as *Ssabattaka* (Head of Buganda Clans) and the claim was considered harmless at the time. But as soon as the situation and the euphoria cleared, the monarchist elements in the NRM and those without a power base started to raise the whole question of 'the future of Buganda'. This demand arose almost naturally because the monarchist elements argued that the concession by the NRM on the issue of allowing Mutebi to return as *Ssabattaka* was a *quid pro quo* for their

support to the NRM when they fought in Buganda. Indeed the issue of why the 'Banyankore' were fighting 'in Buganda' had been raised by the UFM and FEDEMU during the early periods of the resistance to the UPC-Obote government. At a later stage still, this question was raised even more by the time of Okello regime when the two movements were co-opted to fight NRA. It was used by the Okellos to try to isolate the NRM in Buganda.

Now the record was being played back by the very political forces that had been exploited by the NRM and this seemed to draw support from those elements within the NRM who were beginning to feel uneasy about the drift toward personalized rule. The demands that the former Lubiri be returned to Mutebi as the heir to Muteesa and that the former Bulange, which was housing the ministry of Defense, be returned to Buganda, were made at public rallies throughout Buganda. Although the NRM government indicated in a series of statements that this matter was not a 'priority' in its programme, the issue nevertheless seemed to gallop-on. Later it was announced that Mutebi had quietly returned to the country, but in the prayers that were held on his return by the Church of Uganda, he was publicly referred to as *Ssabattaka* by the Bishop of Mmengo, clearly revealing that the issue was still dragging on. In the meantime, it was announced that the former Lubiri - which the NRA was using as military Barrack - would hence be used as a detention center. Such an announcement made so soon after could not have been regarded by the monarchists as a step towards a reconciliation with them, particularly after Museveni was handed a memorandum by the fifty-odd clan leaders claiming these 'things' had not been responded to by Museveni's committee. Could this have been taken as a slap in the face by the monarchists?

It appears then that the monarchists had now joined the issue. The NRM government's response that the matter had to be resolved by a Constituent Assembly four years hence was not well received. The NRM in the meantime created a ministry of constitutional affairs to begin to collect views about the future Constitution of Uganda. But as already noted, this was not being done in isolation of other developments. The consolidation of the NRA as the national army with an alliance of all the old armies clearly indicated that these armies, which had shown no respect for the people's aspirations, could not be relied upon to guarantee any constitutional rights to the people of Uganda. The reply to concerned Ugandans that a constitutional conference would be held in four years' time was no assurance to them that in those four years their viewpoints about the future of their country would be taken into account. Already the village committees were acting as 'watch



dogs' for the regime, supervised by the special district administrators who were regarded as 'super DCs' in the districts. How could a Constituent Assembly set-up on the basis of these committees ever be regarded as the democratic basis for deciding the future constitution of Uganda? It was clear from what was transpiring that the NRM was not an interim arrangement but a *permanent* one. It was therefore a naive fellow who believed that the Constituent Assembly to be convened after four years would be a representative body airing the views of ordinary Ugandans.

This fear was already being expressed in relation to the so-called National Political Education Schools in which the NRM was peddling a hotch-potch of petty-radicalist rhetoric. The attack on the NRM political education center near Kampala in fact revealed a development that many suspected was connected with resistance to Museveni's consolidation of military power. The arrest or suspension of three leading NRA and NRM commanders and officers clearly showed there were cracks developing in the movement. It was alleged that the so-called political education school was in fact a military training center at which a special battalion or brigade loyal to Museveni personally was being trained and that the attack was carried out by well-placed NRA commanders. The claim made earlier by the Minister of State for Defense that the attackers were pro-Obote FOBA forces was retracted within a few hours and it was then officially acknowledged that the attack was a 'mistake' made by the NRA Bombo barracks and that the matter was being investigated. Museveni himself appointed a commission of inquiry to report within a week, yet the following day he ordered the arrest of the three NRA commanders and a political commissar at the NRM headquarters. Up to now, no light had been shed on this incident, but it already reveals disagreements about the program the NRM is trying to implement without the people of Uganda being told what it is all about.

This introduction of political schools without a properly thought-out educational program is also causing concern among the more conservative and particularly religious circles. Indeed one of the reasons given for the suspension of the NRM political commissar was that he was following a syllabus not approved by the NRM. Moreover those giving this so-called political education are themselves ill-educated in the ideas they are selling. A very crude Marxism is being dished out on Radio Uganda and in these educational programs which is offending those opposed to the introduction of 'communist ideology'. In fact what is being taught is itself far from Marxism, but a hotch-potch of neo-Marxist, neo-Trotskyist fabrications. In handling the matter in such a way, the exercise is creating more divisions in the country instead of

consolidating the gains that may have been made. It is in fact an exercise in left-wing opportunism to hide the militaristic character of the situation building up in the country which will later be justified as 'socialism'. It is not surprising in these circumstances that the religious leaders in their joint letter to Museveni called on him to discontinue the exercise. The Cardinal of the Catholic Church circulated a pastoral letter in which he condemned the creation of these private army training and education centers. All this goes to show what Uganda is heading for in the near future as the contradictions build up.

### **The Ethnic Factor Again**

From what was said earlier, the playing up of the ethnic factor by the two factions in the last phase of the Okello regime was bound sooner or later to emerge again as a factor in the crisis of Uganda. The defeat by the NRA of the Okello faction of the UNLA, together with the FUNA and UNRF, already created a situation in which the anti-northern sentiments was self-evident in the streets of Kampala. Many northerners suspected of being "Anya-Anyas" were accosted in the streets and given what was called in the post-Sowetan period, the 'three-piece-suit' treatment of burning with the tire. The current resentment to the Moses Ali arrangement in Kampala is in fact a reflection of the ingrained politics of this period. Today it can be heard among young NRA men that those who come from these northern areas of Uganda are 'animals' and many still swear that they will continue to fight and 'finish them off'.

While Museveni emphasized the idea of 'unity' once he became president, it was clear that ethnic sectarianism (which he had in part helped to generate) was a factor that had to be reckoned with militarily. It is in part because of this realization that he moved for the sake of cementing national unity into the NRA, the UNRF and FUNA, as well as some elements from Okello's UNLA from the north. But as already pointed out, this 'cementing' was being done with militaristic calculations which could not be lasting in addressing the national crisis. In fact this co-optation itself had consequences not only in the NRA itself but also in the monarchist circles who now alleged that this was the old Obote strategy of uniting the north, east and west against 'Buganda'. At the root of this reaction was an ethnic factor, creating what one academic observer at Makerere University called a 'reproduction of the 1962 syndrome'.

But the real danger in this development was that this factor was being used as a basin for a new armed conflict in the country. The swift



move of the NRA into the northern areas in pursuit of the remnants of the Okello soldiers who were still resisting led to a premature euphoria in the ranks of the NRA that they had 'won' and that the issue of the north was already settled. To some extent, the NRA was welcomed in these areas because of the utter ruthlessness of this Okello clique - itself proof that the ethnic factor was being over-played by individuals for their own ends. Nevertheless the fact remained that so long as the Obote and Okello forces continued to play up this ethnic contradiction in order to win back power, and as long as the mood within the NRA and in Buganda reinforced this contradiction, it was obvious that it could be the basis for renewed armed conflict in these areas.

In fact, such open conflict did not take long to manifest itself. Within four months after the new government took power in Kampala, isolated ambushes were reported in parts of the north. These attacks were immediately condemned as actions of 'criminal elements' who had been defeated. These isolated ambushes however continued to take place along the Kampala-Gulu road, culminating in a major military onslaught on the Gulu barracks by a force reported to have numbered 500 soldiers of the former UNLA in mid-August, 1986. These attacks were announced by president Museveni himself on his return from Libya. He reported that the attackers had been 'massacred' but the massacre turned out to be 30 of the invading troops killed and 3 government troops killed. Later the Sudanese government was accused of having supplied weapons, food and transport to the attacking force - an accusation which Sudan denied.

It was clear then that the Okello and possibly Obote forces were regrouping to put up a fight once more. Museveni himself admitted that the Force Obote Back (FOBA) forces were active within Kampala and large numbers of FOBA suspects were rounded up from time to time in the streets and suburban areas of Kampala. Although it was too early to assess the strength of these forces and their political base of support in the country, nevertheless it was clear that a continued conflict in the country would not be looked upon favourably by the people since it would only worsen economic and social conditions for them. Furthermore, any conflict in the country was bound to strengthen the military elements within the NRA vis-a-vis those wishing to see democracy re-established in the country, as well as to increase the likelihood of an internal *coup* within the NRA itself. All this suggested that every means had to be found to put a stop to this conflict and to find peaceful ways of resolving it.

The issue was linked with an even more difficult problem of *internal security*. Although Kampala had become quieter than before,

sporadic gun-fire at night continued to worry the population. At first it was blamed on 'criminal elements', but as time passed, the FOBA and other politically inspired groups were also blamed. In fact the problem turned out to be bigger than was initially thought. The president himself admitted that NRA soldiers were very much behind some of the incidents of insecurity in the city. On his return from another visit abroad (Burkina Fasso), he ordered the arrest of some 300 NRA soldiers who were accused of having engaged in nightly shootings around Kampala. The FOBA were held accountable of the rest of the trouble. The arrest of the NRA soldiers began to undermine among the masses their confidence in the NRA's ability to maintain security. It appeared that the 'Uganda disease' had begun to catch-up with the NRA as well.

Moreover, the insecurity around Kampala was much less disturbing than the insecurity that had become a permanent feature of the Karamoja situation. Ever since the colonial days, a solution to the socio-economic crisis of this area had eluded all the regimes with the sole exception of progress made by the UNLF during their short period in power when they tried to address this problem in a democratic way. The latest phase of the violence in Karamoja introduced new elements in the crisis. New weaponry never before dreamed of was being brought into the area, ranging from anti-tank grenades to anti-aircraft guns. The attacks against the neighbouring districts were in fact linked to a much more organized racket backed by *mafutamingi* merchants-of-death in Kampala who supplied much of the weaponry in exchange for cattle to sell in the urban areas. These attacks had spread from Teso to Lango, Acholi, Sebei and Bugisu, as well as to parts of Bukedi. These areas were laid to waste, with each attack introducing a new element into the neo-colonial crisis in which Uganda found itself caught. This also opened up the possibility that this conflict might merge with other conflicts, further complicating matters.

Quite clearly, this worsening situation was also being influenced by the attitude of the *political parties*. It might appear that the NRM's strategy of incorporating these parties into the NRM government in a so-called 'broadly based' government was a solution to the problem of the parties. In fact it was so calculated as to tie them up rather than seek and obtain their consent which would have been possible if a Round Table Conference had been held. On their part, the parties must have gone into the arrangement to bide for time, knowing fully well their fate. They must have read the following passage in the NRM Ten-Point Programme with consternation:

As has always been our line, the National Resistance



Movement is a home of the *former* DP, UPC, CP and UPM members; one's religion, colour, sex, or height (*sic.*) is not considered when welcoming new members in NRM: rather we consider one's goodness or badness (e.g. corruption) or contribution. (Emphasis added).

Thus they came into the NRM knowing fully well that they were considered *dead* and were being tolerated for the time being. For this reason, the NRM has never won the full support of the parties for they know they have to wage a 'guerilla war' for their own survival *within* the NRM structures. This has tended to create suspicion and even open conflict within the political parties in much the same way as it did among the monarchists. This fact clearly will compound the NRM's problems, for every mistake the NRM makes will be capitalized on by the parties. Already the UPC is seen by the NRM as supportive of FOBA and the DP is also regarded with suspicion because of their possible links with FEDEMU, which has never agreed to join the NRA. It is clear, too, that this kind of situation will lead to confrontation sooner or later, and must be addressed in an open and democratic manner. Conspiracy will not work.

### The Economic Situation

Any scientific analysis of the situation in Uganda should reveal that one of the *main* contributing factors to the political crisis in the country is economic dislocation. This dislocation can be traced to the Amin period, but it is clear that one of the factors that created difficulties for the first Obote administration was the economic crisis. He was unable to solve much of the problem during his second term as well, since his IMF-sponsored programme was an inadequate basis for economic recovery. But the tragedy of it all is that within a few months of the fall of the Okello regime, inflation sky-rocketed ten times what it was in January, 1986. Whereas Obote's programme had ostensibly brought down the gap between window one and window two exchange rates within the margin of 100 Uganda shillings (250/- -360/-), the NRM's first economic measure to fix the exchange rate was already as high as shs. 1,400/- for the 'priority rate' for 'essentials' whilst the 'parallel rate' stood at shs. 5,000/-. This rate had, according to the Bank of Uganda, shot up to shs. 7,000/- by mid-July, 1986.

This shows the dilemma facing the NRM government. Its efforts to stabilize the currency struck very hard at those social classes (such as the poor peasantry) that had given it support. The working class has been hit even harder since its salary remains fixed. Attempts

to increase the price of coffee have meant very little since the rate of increase falls far short of the galloping inflation rate. At the moment, the peasant is taking home barely 10 per cent of his coffee earnings, with the state taking the 90 per cent in export taxes and levies. The worker's minimum wage of shs. 6,000/- a month is only US \$1, whilst a bunch of *matoke*, the staple, costs shs. 15,000/- (US \$2.50). Even the middle-class is hit hard, the salary of a university graduate is no more than US \$5.

Although the government in its recent budget has adopted a single exchange rate, there is no doubt that this will soon give way to a *kibanda* (black market) exchange rate which is currently hovering in the shs. 8,000/- level. According to a Bank of Uganda official quoted in the government's own *New Vision*, the rise in the *kibanda* rate by shs. 2,000/- over the last few weeks indicated that the objectives of the policy could not be met. As foreign exchange earnings decline over time, the demand for foreign exchange in the Bank of Uganda will increase and this will very likely widen the gap between the two rates and add to the inflationary spiral in Uganda. This could be exacerbated by the government economic policy decision to rely on coffee earnings to purchase goods and pay existing debts without respect to international credit.

All this has ominous implications for the political stability and security situation in the country, particularly at a time when armed attacks are being mounted, apparently with the support of foreign governments. There appears to be a direct relationship between the insecurity that has reappeared around Kampala and this worsening economic problem. The arrest of the 300 NRA soldiers for nightly shootings was blamed on the economic plight which they face. Many of these soldiers had not been paid for sometime, but even if they were paid, their salary is no more than that of a worker. The peasants can no longer continue to subsidize the NRA, as they did in the Luwero Triangle. Now that the NRM is in power, the peasants expect the NRM to alleviate their hardships. But such relief, in either the short or medium term, is unlikely unless a correct political line is adopted to alleviate the conflicts that are emerging in the country.

### What Next?

The Uganda National Liberation Front-Anti-Dictatorship (UNLF A-D) regards this situation as fragile and dangerous. The stability of the NRM government cannot be guaranteed under these conditions and this has serious implications for the future of the country. No single party



or movement has the mandate from Ugandans to adopt dictatorial policies that inevitably will lead the country into another prolonged period of civil strife and chaos. The NRM has made its contribution in its war against the Obote and Okello regimes. It cannot co-opt, incorporate and, in that way, compromise the other political parties and groups unilaterally without consultation simply because it is holding the guns. Of course these parties have a right to reject such an undemocratic method, and the fact that they have not done so indicates the kind of parties we have in the country at this time. Yet we can understand their predicament, leaving aside for the moment opportunism. It is this approach that increasingly will lead to a confused political situation in the country.

As already noted, the monarchist elements who supported the NRM are trying to distance themselves from that body. It is clear that some of their demands cannot be met except through the constitutional discussions that must take place in some democratic framework. But some of the things to be addressed could have been resolved without them being allowed to drag on. Museveni himself must be held responsible for his double-faced politics on this issue. He made statements in his rallies in the Masaka area attended by Mutebi in which he accepted the restoration of the kingdoms. One contributor in the Catholic Luganda daily *MUNNO* has quoted him as having said:

*Obwakabaka butekwa okudawo kubanga Obote yaggyawo  
Obwakabaka nga tamaze kwebuuzza ku bannanyini bwo,  
kyokka sija kulangirira okuva olwo Bwakabaka kuddawo  
nga ssimaze kuwulira Tito Lutwa ky'agamba...*

**Translation:**

*The Kabakaship must be restored because Obote abolished the kingdoms without consulting those whom the decision affected. But I shall not make an announcement about their restoration without first hearing what Tito Lutwa has to say...*

It should be remembered that when Museveni allegedly made this statement, he was already on his way to participate in the Okello government as vice-chairman of the Military council, so it was understandable that he wished to consult him first. But there was in fact no need to have made such a statement without consulting *his own* council and there should have been a clear national policy on this by the NRM, particularly since they fought most of their successful battles in Buganda. Realizing fully well the feelings of the Baganda, they must have known that it would be a burning issue at some future time. Furthermore, understanding their sensitivity to Obote's occupation of

the former palace of the Buganda kingdom and the desecration of things that were held dear in the hearts of many Baganda, if not other Ugandans for historical reasons, it is indeed surprising that the NRA decided to continue the imposition of this great insult and indignity on the people of Uganda. This palace, like the other palaces in the west and Busoga, should have been declared national relics and preserved as historical and cultural sites for future generations. Museveni could have done this in the early period of euphoria without conceding the issue of restoration and announcing openly the mechanisms by which this important issue was to be resolved. As for the Bulange, a decision should have been made at an early date, instead of continuing to use it as a Ministry of Defense headquarters. This insensitivity has strengthened the more backward elements within the dispute and has weakened the more democratic elements who do not wish to see the kingdoms restored.

The issue also demonstrates the NRM's utter disregard for democratic processes, and the arrogance of its belief, that its strength entitles it to ride over issues without proper discussion and compromise. At this stage of our development, it is crucial that *open* methods of work be encouraged to facilitate discussions involving the masses. Manipulating matters from above and making announcements over the radio is a method characteristic of dictators and should be discouraged. Indeed each of the problems that are now building up could have been discussed openly by representatives of all democratic organisations at a Round Table Conference (RTC), where important national matters regarding the future of the country would have been openly debated.

The idea of a RTC was first advanced by the UNLF A-D in its *Position Paper on the Current Military and Political Situation in Uganda* in March 1981 and communicated to Milton Obote in a letter dated April 11th of that year. Copies of this letter were circulated to all the political parties and organizations. Later the idea of the RTC was crystallized as policy of the UNLF A-D and was incorporated as one of the points in the UNLF A-D *Five Point Programme* adopted in mid-1986. The fundamental proposition in the RTC idea is the acknowledgement of a *simple* but often forgotten fact that *no* single party or organization can resolve the crisis in Uganda on its own. This fact has often been repeated by the leaders of these different organizations but the point is soon lost once they hold or approach the reins of power. Obote used to repeat it but he did not on a single occasion accept the reality of meeting his opponents (including those who were then in the 'bush') to resolve the crisis. It is this UNLF A-D idea of a RTC which later received the support of the religious leaders who, around 1982, wrote a joint letter to



Obote to try to find a peaceful solution to the crisis. It was Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga, however, who was more persistent in propounding the idea, and at one time he managed to get Ssemogerere, the DP leader, to let go of Obote's political apron and to support the call for a RTC. But this was only a jester and he quickly forgot about it.

The UNLF A-D persisted in finding ways of bringing about a RTC in which the government of UPC would agree to meet and discuss the civil war with all its opponents somewhere in a neighbouring country. Various contacts were made with all of the parties and groups which had a democratic program. Although these organizations supported the idea of a RTC in principle, however, they did not see it as 'viable' or 'workable'. The NRM in particular, while generally accepting it (and this depended on whom one spoke to) nevertheless, believed in their 'invincibility' and their almost certain conviction that they alone would win the war. For this reason, they did not take these proposals for a broadly-based democratic *discussion* seriously. However, whenever they agreed to talk, it was always with the military groups. They despised what they called 'political groups' that did not 'fight', and the only struggle worthy of being called 'fighting' to them was that which involved the use of guns.

Indeed, it was this attitude that was responsible for the immediate response by the NRA to hold 'peace talks' with the Tito Okello Military Council although there was pressure from other democratic forces to call for a RTC and which would have called on the Okellos to resign. Although the parties later joined Okello's cabinet, the NRM, as the then leading armed group in the opposition, should have called on the other parties to refuse to work with them and insist that they surrender power to a government of national unity composed of *all* democratic organizations and parties. Instead, they were more prepared to spend a whole six months engaging in so-called peace talks which they knew they were not going to honor in any case. Although at a general level the Cardinal continued the pressure, the Military Council's response was only partial, since it was planning to hold its own so-called National Conference. The DP agreed to the idea of RTC at this time, but as Obote had done earlier, Ssemogerere also insisted that such a conference had to be held inside Uganda. He did this although Ssemogerere was at the very moment leading a government negotiating team in the 'peace talks' in *Nairobi*. Such duplicity and double talk weakened the influence of the Cardinal, who was also under pressure from other quarters, including the Okello Military Council, to abandon the idea and support their narrow militarist schemes and maneuvering in *Nairobi*. The NRM accepted the RTC proposal at this stage because of

democratic pressure from *inside* their own movement, but the militarist wing - 'the boys in the bush' - insisted on resolving 'security questions first' with the Okello Military Council.

Thus although the Nairobi 'Peace Accord' finally accepted the position of holding a National Conference after the two armies had been integrated, no detailed discussion was held at that time as to what would be the real function of such a conference if the Military Council was still to control the executive and state functions in the country. Only two of the accord's approximately 40 articles dealt with the issue of the Conference and it was clear that such a meeting would be analogous to Amin's 'National Forum' where hand-picked individuals would 'advise' the government on issues put forward by Amin himself. But as we know, the Nairobi 'Peace Accord' was not adhered to and fighting continued until the Okellos were removed. The NRM at this time promised to 'implement' the accord and said the reason they had fought on was precisely to implement it. Of course the intention was quite clear and soon after they took power they resorted to exactly the same tactic of co-opting the parties into their own government without consultation. The idea of a National Conference and a RTC was shelved into cold storage permanently. It is now also being argued by the NRM that such a conference is no longer necessary since they are going to call a Constituent Assembly after four years.

Yet it is clear that some kind of conference or *dialogue* - to use the most minimum language - is necessary if the lines being drawn by the political actors in the present situation are not going to harden. The UNLF A-D believes that even if the NRM chooses not to hold a RTC (which would be the most democratic and open forum for discussing the future of the country), a dialogue should at least be initiated immediately with the forces now fighting the government in the north. There is no sense referring to them as 'criminals' when in the first place the NRM had participated with them in plotting the anti-Obote coup, and when, the NRM had also engaged in six months of negotiations with them in Nairobi. It is not principled to 'absolve' Tito Okello of the killings when he was head of the army under Obote and the Military Council, *personalize guilt* onto one individual - Bazilio Okello, and at the same time to bring back other former Amin murdering cliques into the NRA and the cabinet. It is more principled to refuse to deal with either of the two armies and insist on court of law trials for all those who committed crimes. This cannot be done if the top commanders of those who might have committed the crimes are absolved. Today Muwanga, one of these political leaders, is at his home being guarded by NRA soldiers. Although this is called 'house arrest' in fact he welcomes such



presidential treatment as free security.\* So let us be serious. If the idea is to have 'national unity' with everybody then let us have it, but in an *open manner* where all the other political parties and organizations can have their say concerning what they think of such unity and its implications for the future.

But our proposal about cutting short the conflict in the north is based on a more fundamental issue: *any continuation of the war along these lines would threaten the future unity and territorial integrity of Uganda*. This is said with the full knowledge that the forces now grouping in the north are being given political and material support by some elements in Sudan - which are possibly linked to the ethnic groups that claim common descent with the Acholis of Uganda. Given the present fragile world situation and open state of terrorist activities of the super-powers and their resolve to overthrow legitimate governments, finance mercenary bandit forces and destabilise governments, the super-powers are directly involved. One should not forget the fact that Uganda is not too far from the Horn of Africa where such conflicts have become a permanent feature of the political scene. The UNLF A-D therefore appeals, not only to the NRM government but also to the political parties in the government to face this issue realistically and try to find a peaceful way of resolving it. If this is not done quickly, it may soon be too late before the issue becomes unavoidable. We should not forget history and act as if we are ordained to be doomed. But to be fruitful, such dialogue must be *open to all* parties and groups.

The UNLF A-D also wishes to see a dialogue open between the parties and the government on the *future* of the country. A number of *fundamental* policy issues affecting the future stability of Uganda have not been resolved nor discussed, and it appears that the NRM thinks that these matters are its prerogative because they 'fought'. In reality they do not have the legitimacy to do this, and the fact that they momentarily may be enjoying a political honeymoon should not blind them to the fact that all honeymoons end, and they will soon be called upon to explain their actions. By then it may be too late. The matters which require discussion in which the UNLF A-D would wish to be involved are the following:

1. The interim period.
2. The government of the interim period.
3. The recruitment, training and deployment of a national

---

\* By the time we went to press, Muwanga was in jail. (Ed. P.G.O.)

- army.
4. The future constitution of Uganda.
  5. The general election.
  6. Interim political organization including the village committees.
  7. Fundamental human rights and the right to all Ugandans of free speech, free assembly, free association and the freedom of the judiciary and press in the interim period.
  8. Policy for the rehabilitation of the economic structure and social services.
  9. All other matters all the organizations may wish discussed.

It is clear that the NRM has unilaterally decreed that they will stay in power for four years, by which time they feel they will have consolidated themselves enough to bar other parties from participation in the electoral process, or to freely rig the elections in their own favor. But if the situation which is currently unfolding in the country continues, they may find these four years to be very long. Indeed, the period of an interim government ought to be made as brief as possible. That is why, although UNLF had a period of two years before they were to organize any elections, the National Consultative Council (NCC) decided that this must be done within nine months. When the Military Commission staged a coup, the issue of elections had been agreed upon and arrangements were afoot for the holding of the elections under the umbrella of the UNLF - a proposal the NCC had debated and decided on freely. Any attempt by the NRM to play tricks by relying on military might to entrench itself politically will not in fact help very much. The issue should be discussed freely by all the political organizations. Such discussions should also occur with respect to the nature of the interim government, including the principles upon which a broadly based government is to act. The powers of the NRC and High Command of the NRA have to be defined.

The issue of the national army of Uganda cannot be left to the NRA to decide alone. They have no right to constitute themselves into a national army when their loyalty is to a single movement and a single leader. If we are talking of a democratic order in Uganda, it is clear that such a situation cannot be tolerated, for to do so is to create the basis for a more dangerous form of fascist rule in the country. So the issue has to be faced and discussed by all Ugandans at a RTC or a similar mechanism that would ensure the representation of all the democratic forces in the country. The NRM can claim equal voice on such a matter,



but it has no right to claim monopoly right. If such a claim is to be entertained, then the NRM must realize that the only way other Ugandans can challenge that monopoly is by taking up weapons against them. If this is to be avoided, then the NRM must submit its ideas to all other organized parties and groups for open discussion and debate.

In the same way, the issue of the future constitution of Uganda cannot be left to an NRM minister of constitutional affairs to manipulate. The matter has first to be discussed by all the democratic organizations and the mechanism of collecting public views has to be agreed upon. If this is not done, one can expect the other parties and organisations to remain suspicious. The fact that the NRM Village Committees are to be involved and that a Constituent Assembly shall then debate the constitution is no guarantee of its acceptability. Of course, the NRM can use all its powers of force and patronage and ensure a favorable result but, as already pointed out above, such maneuvering would be of little help in the medium and long run. They should remember that it was they who appropriately raised the issue of democracy in the 'bush', and many of those who genuinely fought for this cause will be the first ones to challenge any dictatorial tendencies once again. Already there are signs that this challenge is emerging within the ranks of the NRM itself. These voices will be joined by millions of other Ugandans who do not wish to see this happen. Already, Village Committees are being manipulated and are being imposed from above to obtain a desired result by the powers that be. The Special District Administrators have evolved into a kind of local oligarchy functioning above the law. Hence the need to discuss all these interim structures.

The holding of a general election is at the very crux of the matter, for the political crisis in the country has arisen in part because of the rigging of elections and of denying Ugandans the right to freely choose their leaders. This means that the process must begin early. Things like constituency boundaries, population, electoral laws and regulations, supervising institutions and personnel as well as the equipment for the holding of a *democratic* election must all be planned ahead of time with the full consent and cooperation of the political parties. We cannot afford to leave these matters to a single movement to decide, nor can the matters be left to be rushed through at the very end of the period. This matter has to be discussed and the mechanisms agreed upon well in advance by all who will be affected by them. For the same reason, the enjoyment of fundamental democratic rights cannot be suspended and only restored when it is too late for them to be effectively used. The banning of political parties from holding meetings or even showing their flags or signs must be lifted. If this is to happen,

then the NRM must submit itself to the same discipline. Otherwise, this is a disguised method of banning all other parties and organizations. One newspaper has already been banned by administrative decree and read over Radio Uganda no less! Hundreds of people are being arrested and put away in military barracks. Already as indicated, the Lubiri Military Barracks have been turned into detention centers just as Makindye was at one time used for the same purpose. In a recent press interview, Museveni himself confirmed that this is happening. According to him, "Even the 3,000 policemen are so corrupt that one could not trust them with the detention of suspects" (*The Standard*, Nairobi 1.7.86). Museveni had not even known that the barracks were being used for the detention of civilians. This matter was only brought to his attention by a local journalist, Henry Gombya, when he returned from his OAU Summit trip. *The Standard* reported, "The president said as a result, the National Resistance Army...has taken it upon itself to arrest and detain suspects in army barracks where they could not escape." For this reason, Lubiri Barracks along with other barracks used for this purpose were to be gazetted as detention centers. This was already indeed a sad commentary on the so-called freedom Ugandans had won under the NRM.

What is proposed above is in fact the most reasonable position that can be advanced to resolve the crisis. The NRA is currently arguing that they need the four years in order to rehabilitate the economy. But there can be no rehabilitation of the economy without a democratic order in the country. They should not forget that even Amin was talking of 'rehabilitating' the economy by the time he fell. Obote spent four years also trying to rehabilitate the economy with IMF/World Bank assistance and after he claimed that this was accomplished, he embarked on a so-called recovery programme. The NRA now says the economy has to be rehabilitated once more before the NRM can devise an integrated national economy. The rehabilitation of the economy has become a short-hand expression for consolidating dictatorships and the NRM should abandon this trick and work with the other organizations in an open democratic manner to restore democracy in the country. Only then can the government elected by the people with their mandate undertake policy formulation and implementation of an economic program.

Already there are indications that opinion in the country is pressing for a well-defined path leading to a democratic order. A recent editorial of the *Makererean* addressed to the Chancellor (Museveni) raised some of these issues. The Editor-in-Chief pointed out that NRM's 'participatory democracy' should be made more explicit, "If a constitutional conference is not possible now, let the resistance councils



right from the village to national level be the forum for basic decision making...They might even debate whether it is very necessary to divert labour from important activities to lining up for sugar every week." The paper added that it is necessary that the resistance councils also debate on how a national army should be recruited, "*It is dangerous for any leader to be personally identified with peoples' security forces.*" These sentiments clearly reveal that the so-called grass-root Village Committees are not, in fact, carrying out the very function they were supposed to carry out according to the NRM Ten-Point Programme. It also reveals the distrust of the NRM which is already emerging among young intellectuals. The very fact that the students were raising these matters at such an early stage demonstrates the very dynamic democratic mood in the country, and is a sure warning for the NRM not to ignore it. Even the very fundamental question of how long the NRM should stay in power as an interim government was raised by the students in the open editorial of the *Makererean* :

*It should be the councils to decide the length of the interim period of government. That would be called participatory democracy. But if councils are there to only implement government policy without criticizing it, then it is worse than representative government democracy.*

The students also called for a clear definition of the role and functions of the Special District Administrators and their "para-military status". They observed:

*At a district level, now it would mean that the top most public servant is politico-NRM. The traditional qualities of a civil servant require that public servants should be apolitical, in other words, they should not necessarily be leaders in any political party, movement, or group. It helps in the day to day administration of the department or district for justice not only to be done but to appear so. For, when people have begun taking security, for granted, they might begin to ask... [The Makererean, 25 July, 1986]*

It is then clear that the students imply that the system being set-up by the NRM is not wholly approved by the people. Moreover, it is also clear that some of the so-called popular measures are being forced down peoples' throats. No stable system can be established in the country under these conditions. Hence the need for an *open, principled and democratic dialogue*, preferably in the form of a RTC where all these major issues can be discussed instead of letting the situation drift towards a new wave of instability and possibly another civil war. This,

in our considered view, would help to cement the trust and confidence that we all mean well and are united as Ugandans to resolve the crisis ourselves to avoid future dictatorships. To this process, the UNLF A-D is dedicated to a united, democratic and independent Uganda.