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## FORUM

### THE LESSONS OF THE MILITARY COUP IN NIGERIA\*

by

Horace Campbell

The fifth military coup in Nigeria on December 31, 1983 brought to an end an experimentation in a particular form of democracy in Africa and reinforced the centrality of the military and repression in the lives of approximately one hundred million Nigerians. Nigeria, the most populous state in Africa has in the past ten years arrogated to itself a position of leadership within Africa. In the process the Nigerian ruling classes have been active in a number of African fora, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Chad basin Commission, and the Niger River Commission. And in the case of the struggle against apartheid Nigeria attached itself to the frontline states, becoming "the sixth" member of the frontline states. This quest for leadership derived from the importance of Nigeria's oil to the economies of the United States of America and Western Europe. But the present conditions of the workers, small farmers, artisans and unemployed show that the oil revenues of a state which had been producing 2 million barrels per day were not geared towards economic prosperity for the vast majority, only for a selected few.

In essence the principal beneficiaries of the oil production has been those commission agents, contractors, property speculators, middle persons, politicians and civil servants who serviced the economy and whose conspicuous consumption distinguished them in a society where corruption, graft and 'Chop' had become the basic methods of economic relations. It is from this class that the leadership of the political institutions arose to oversee the transition from military to multi-party democracy in 1979. After the first military coups of 1966 and a violent civil war which left more than one million dead, the demands for peace and civilian rule by the vast majority led to the end of military rule after 13 years. In the years of the seemingly radical interregnum of Murtala/Obasanjo, a federal constitution was drafted embodying the separation of powers similar to the U.S. Constitution. This constitution provided the legal basis for the 1979 transition to multi-party democracy,

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but the social classes who aspired towards leadership showed that they were not committed to the principles of liberal bourgeois democracy. They showed that it was one thing to preach about democracy but quite another to engage in democratic practices where the broad majority enjoy the basic democratic rights.

The much vaunted and widely publicised election campaign of 1983 was hardly over, and the public relations experts hardly paid, when the military took power again to condemn the civilian leadership for corruption and mismanagement. This military intervention which was virtually bloodless came at the end of a year of reversals for the broad masses. Among these was the expulsion of 2 million African workers from Nigeria, giving solace to racists everywhere that, if Africans can expel Africans, then this grants them the right to forcibly remove blacks from Europe.

The jubilation of the Nigerian masses at the military take-over should not mislead the working poor as to the role of the military in Africa. The military in Nigeria and indeed Africa as a whole has become the nexus of state power as democratic processes of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to dissent, freedom of assembly, the rule of law and basic human rights are trampled upon by bureaucrats, commanders and life Presidents. Indeed in many ways, whether in a civilian administration or in the outright military dictatorships, the role of force in production is centralised as the neo-colonial rulers coerce the people to produce the cash crops for the West when commodity prices are falling and the conditions of work and farming are not favourable to the reproduction of labour power. Hence the problem of famine, drought and food shortages have become greater at a time when more tanks, jets, etc., are being imported into this sea of poverty. Repression, drought, unemployment, food shortages, militarism and IMF/World Bank recipes of cutting social services are the most visible signs of the present capitalist crisis. Some African leaders of the radical military genre in Ethiopia, Libya, Ghana and Upper Volta have tried to present an image of anti-imperialism but the success of their radicalism will be tested in the struggle for democracy, food, and popular representation in their societies.

The social and economic problems of Africa demonstrate the cul-de-sac of the colonial economic practices and can only be transcended by new forms of economic organisation which use the resources of Africa for those who produce the wealth in order to tap the vast reservoir of human and material resources which remain repressed in Africa. New economic forms are part of the struggle to generate popular participation and the highest forms of democratic activity involving the masses in the decision making process where they live, where they work and where they carry out their cultural activities.

## THE RECYCLING OF PETRODOLLARS:

The coup in Nigeria on December 31, 1983 did not come as a surprise to those who followed the economic and social chaos in Nigeria under the civilian leadership since 1979. The National Party of Nigeria under the leadership of Shehu Shagari had been given a mandate by the people in 1979 after thirteen years of militarism and a violent civil war 1967-1970 which had threatened to tear asunder the concept of Nigeria. The seeming success of the Shagari leadership and the elections of 1983, which gave his party a second term of office overshadowed a deep economic crisis in the society as the depleting oil revenues brought to the fore all the problems of an untransformed economy. From 1970 to 1979 this West African state had become the fifth largest exporter of crude oil to the Western World and oil revenues accounted for 92.9% of total exports. Simultaneously this dependence on oil led to a run down of the agricultural sector and Nigeria joined the ranks of African societies with the paradoxical situation with the bulk of the population engaged in agriculture but with the state as importer of food products. Seventeen per cent of Nigerian imports consist of food and grain.

The democratic experiment based on the republican constitution of the USA was predicated on the assumption that the oil revenue would be sufficient to placate all sectors of the society with the rulers making concessions to the regional and ethnic leaders in the 19 states of the Federal structure of governance. But with the deepening capitalist depression in Western Europe and North America oil revenues fell drastically. The decline in the demand for OPEC oil meant that an agreement had to be reached to cut oil production. Nigeria's production was thus reduced from 2.3 million barrels per day in 1981 to 1.3 bpd; with oil income halved from US\$20 billion to about US\$10.6 billion. The society sped into balance of payments difficulties and with the runaway buying spree of capital goods, plants, machinery and equipment Nigeria became indebted on the Euro-Currency market to the point where at the end of 1983 the debt had reached over \$14 billion US. Like the other countries of the underdeveloped world, Nigeria exports were going to meet the debt service payments. The debt crisis imposed a heavy burden on the Nigeria peoples and the US\$4 billion dollars needed to service Nigeria loans reflected the way in which over the last decade monetarist economic policies and banking competition produced an unstable international monetary order which engulfed borrowers from the underdeveloped world.

## CAPITALIST ECONOMIC PROPOSALS

The debt crisis with its component of impoverishment and dependence is graphically exposed in Brazil, Mexico, Chile and

Argentina where in 1983 these countries owned over US\$200 billions. Figures from Latin America for 1982 showed that over US\$114,000,000 was paid out in interest and debt services. No less a body than the Bank of International Settlements quarterly report reported that the US based banks are now draining resources out of the Third World rather than transferring them to it.

The Nigerian economy despite the boom of the late seventies had become enmeshed with the transnational banking system. The oil revenues were being recycled back to the capitalist banks to the point where instead of building up a surplus (savings) on her balance of payments Nigeria was becoming more indebted while in the society there was a drastic deterioration of service, shortages and in some states public employees not paid for up to one year.

The economic crisis and impoverishment has been compounded by the open door economic policies adopted by successive leaders. Since 1975 a programme of industrialisation had been underway but the big projects of iron-steel complex, motor car assembly, cement, electrical goods and machinery involved such a high cost structure that this programme of industrialisation was not viable without large state subsidies. Thus what was not transferred to the international banks in the form of profits and interest was transferred to the transnational corporations for patents, spare parts, raw materials, consultancy fees. In the past 14 years transnationals from the USA, France, Sweden, Britain, Japan, Holland and West Germany have been competing with each other to siphon out the profits from Nigeria while fomenting the myth that they were transferring technology and skill to the society. The impressive projects in industry, manufacturing, agriculture and transport only served to strengthen external control over production while there was a net outflow of visible and invisible payments. After the outflow of payments to the transnationals and foreign capitalists the remainder of the surpluses extracted from the workers and small farmers were consumed by the local intermediaries of foreign capital who bought millions of dollars worth of cars, radios, television sets, video games, in a society where the infrastructure of roads, water and electrical supply or sewage was never developed to absorb this form of consumption. It seemed that it was precisely this class that Fanon had in mind when he castigated the national bourgeoisie in Africa for wasting the assets of Africa.

#### NIGERIA CAPITAL, POLITICS AND CHAOS

The Nigerian capitalist class has matured in the past forty years in the interstices of the state and are to be found in the transport, processing, packaging and marketing of manufactured goods, with a small section seeking to establish light manufac-

turing of consumer items. This capitalist class has been unable to sink deep roots in the productive process and the tensions between those involved in production and those involved in speculation trade manifests itself in intense struggles around the state. For the link to the state is central to the reproduction of the Nigerian capitalist class. It is this struggle around the state which brings to the fore those sectors of the nouveaux riches who are internationally renowned for their conspicuous consumption and extravagance. The elements which comprise by far the most numerous section of the Nigerian capitalist class are the commission agents, the middle persons for transnational capital, the property speculators and those persons who openly boast of bribery, theft of state property and numerous fraudulent practices in the execution of state contracts. It is this fraction of the capitalist class who have inspired a tradition of get rich quick in the society to the point where many professionals and trained personnel from the bureaucratic petty bourgeoisie create trips overseas to carry out trade. The trinkets which are then imported increases the balance of payment burden as well as the number of persons occupied in unproductive activities. Thousands of lumpens are at the bottom of this unproductive heap and they offer the wares of capital in the congested slums and traffic jams of Lagos. Meanwhile garbage pile up, there is very little effort by the state authorities to supply clean running water while the middle persons peddle electrical generators as the ideology of individualism of the capitalists force individual solutions to the problem of electrical blackout. So the capitalist class in Nigeria has been unable to support a state structure capable of concerted planning and proper services so that those capitalists engaged in production can be guaranteed light, power, water, roads and sewage facilities.

It is this chaotic situation of petrodollars spreading waste uncoordinated investments and a hot house of accumulation which was overseen by a group of political careerists who did not have the material, political, social or ideological requirements to cement the multiparty democratic system as part of the political culture of Nigeria.

#### RULES OF THE GAME

It should be stated that when the military were about to relinquish the reins of crisis management in 1979, the ground-rules for the registration of parties by the Federal Electoral Commission were formulated in such a way to bring back those political elements who were 'Nationally' known. Hence new groups and organisations such as the Socialist Party of Workers, Farmers and Youth were excluded on the grounds that they did not have a national following. And if this formula of FEDCO was not enough to stifle fresh political ideas, a military

decree of December 1978 banned university employees and students from participating in party political activities. Richard Joseph (1978) in his study of "Political Parties and Ideology in Nigeria" documented how the major contenders for power were groups which were not only based on ethnicity, but also parties organised around well known political figures from the pre-military coup days of the early sixties. Consequently the 1979 elections turned out to be a contest between those careerists who had served in one way or another in the state apparatus, and on both sides of the military. These political leaders were to be found in the five major parties which emerged in 1979 contest: namely

- |                                      |      |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| 1. The Nationalist Party of Nigeria  | NPN  |
| 2. The Unity Party of Nigeria        | UPN  |
| 3. The Nigerian People's Party       | NPP  |
| 4. The People's Redemption Party     | PRP  |
| 5. The Great Nigerian People's Party | GNPP |

Apart from the last two parties which incorporated a section of the radical elements in the Nigerian polity the three principal parties were grouped around traditional regional/ethnic leaders. The largest party and the party which won the 1979 elections was most explicit in its tribal balancing act so that its programme to represent regional class interests meant that the President was drawn from the populous North, the Vice President from the East and the party Chairperson from the West.

The NPN, led by Shehu Shagari, who became Nigeria's first civilian President since 1966, was committed to the politicisation of regionalism, ethnicity and religion and in order to deepen the already intense ethnic identity the NPN was committed to a further division of the states. It was the view that the more states, the more the possibility for ethnic leaders to carve out their own niche for accumulation while using the resources of the local states media to polarise ethnic identity in the multinational society of Nigeria. The leaders who assumed power in 1979 were in a hurry to expand the oil resources on impressive projects and never bothered to draft legislation designed to improve the conditions of the vast majority since they were so busy drafting contracts and profiting from the chaos. Massive waste, obscene opulence generated scandals and the tales of corruption with fires burning out evidence of corrupt practices. The export of currency and hoarding by the political careerists compounded the distance between the working poor and the nouveau riche so that while the capitalists had private jets to take them on their weekly jaunts either to pray in Mecca or for shopping, public employees were not paid for up to one year. In this confusion public service ground to a halt as telecommunications, post, water supply systems and the education system functioned in a perilous state. Corruption became the principal means of accumulation for a class which was not directly involved in production and after



the December coup it was revealed that there were warehouses with up to 500,000 bags of hoarded rice. This hoarding was meant to force up the price of rice by up to 300%.

The corruption, lack of accountability and arbitrariness were carried to greater heights during the 1983 electoral struggles. So central was electoral office to the whole business of consumption and patronage that at all costs the NPN had to be returned to office. A multi million dollar campaign both inside and outside Nigeria to convince the world of the success of the "World's fifth democracy" covered up the widespread fraud, rigging and violence which took place during the Presidential and State elections. The NPN joined the league of parties such as Burnham's Peoples National Congress of Guyana which had gained international notoriety in the art of staging fraudulent elections.

It is very seldom in the Third World to hear of ruling parties losing elections. For the question of state power has become so important for the new ruling classes that electoral fraud and the use of state power to return ruling parties to power has become the norm. Nigeria was no exception and the NPN used all strategies necessary to get votes in the 1983 elections. Among the reported malpractices were the following:

- (i) electoral registers were not available to all parties;
- (ii) the polling process was not administered by persons considered impartial;
- (iii) ballots should have been secret and were not;
- (iv) there was not equal access to the media by all parties;
- (v) widespread rigging of votes.

At the end of an expensive election campaign the party of Shagari, the NPN, was returned with an overwhelming majority, winning 12 out of the 19 state governorships. The NPN won the governorship in states which had been hitherto the stronghold of the opposition party, the UPN. In the capital of Oyo state over 10 person were killed in the violence which accompanied the discussion about electoral fraud. The rigging was so absurd that in some regions more persons voted for the NPN than were registered on the voters list. Wole Soyinka, the outstanding writer, was one of those who raised his voice against this fraudulent democratic process and left Nigeria proclaiming that the excesses of the ruling party could lead to untold political instability. But the voices of those who raised questions about the 'success of democracy' were drowned by those in the international media who heaped praise on Shagari and the NPN. In fact if non Nigerians were to have depended on the media for news of the rot in Nigerian society they would not have known of the impact of the crisis of capitalism in that society.



With the elections over, the NPN was bent on another term of squandering the resources of the society while the masses were becoming more disquiet. Ministries were split in three to create new ministerial posts, and more unproductive employees to further the patron/client linkages. And conscious of the widespread outcry against corrupt practices, Shagari promised a Ministry of National Guidance to weed out corruption. But this corruption has become so endemic in the society that the only way to root out this problem is a change in the system itself; a change in the direction of socialism.

#### ANTI-SOCIALIST ANTI-AFRICAN CLASS ACT

But the ideological posture of the political careerist was not only anti-socialist but anti-African. The narrow and chauvinistic national sentiments were whipped up to mobilise support for the expulsion of 2 million West Africans sufferers from Nigeria in early 1983. The callous and forced removal of Chadians, Ghananians residents of Niger, was carried out without giving these Africans an opportunity to settle their affairs in Nigeria. These Africans had been guaranteed freedom of movement under the articles of agreement of ECOWAS but in the election year when the NPN was looking for scapegoats these migrant workers were blamed for armed robberies, banditry and violence which had become the norm in the urban areas of Nigeria.

These acts of violence had intensified since the expulsions in January, 1983 and demonstrated that the expulsion was a class act against a section of the working class unable to defend itself. Nigerians pride themselves in being Pan-Africanists but one of the central principles of Pan-Africanism is that the people of one part of Africa are responsible for the freedom of their brothers and sisters in other parts of Africa; and, indeed, black people everywhere were to accept the same responsibility. So while proclaiming to support liberation in Southern Africa the Nigerian ruling class had given succour to racists everywhere who wanted to expel Africans from their midst especially in France and Britain. It is not insignificant that the South Africans praised the expulsions and justified their own policies of bulldozing African neighbourhoods on the same grounds.

The anti-people and anti-worker position of the Shagari interregnum was not only limited to domestic affairs. The so-called Nigerian peace-keeping force which was flown to Chad in American planes in 1982 allowed the Western supported group around Hissen Habre to seize power after Nigeria had asked the Libyans to leave to allow for an 'African' peace keeping force. And in 1983 Shagari began to echo the US/South African call that the departure of Cuban troops from Angola was a pre-

requisite for independence in Namibia. Shagari mooted the idea that the Cuban troops should be replaced by an international peacekeeping force. The lessons of the American, French, Italian and British "peacekeepers" fighting the Lebanese patriots in Beirut meant that this position was met with a cool reception by the Southern African states being destabilised by South African military aggression.

#### THE COUP AND THE WORKING CLASSES

The anti-people and anti-worker position of the Nigerian political careerists was clear in the programmes for "economic development" undertaken by the regime. Academic work on the impact of the so called "Green Revolution" initiated by the leaders have brought to light how thousands of small farmers have been displaced by the massive agricultural schemes which assisted in the recycling of the resources overseas while entrenching Nigeria's dependence on imported food. Conceptualised as a strategy for self-sufficiency in food by introducing new technology and better irrigation, the schemes initiated under the World Bank Rural Integrated Development projects have led to the impoverishment of small farmers and the transformation of property relations in favour of big capitalist farmers. A study of "Agricultural Projects in Northern Nigeria" documented how the 'improvement' of farming had increased social differentiation more than has been the case with increasing capital domination over agriculture. This accelerated class differentiation in the agricultural sector led to independent class action by the small farmers and Tina Wallace in her article outlined how thousands of small farmers have rioted against the resettlement schemes which were supposed to benefit them.

Failures of ambitious capital intensive agricultural schemes abound in the recent political history of Nigeria and serves to highlight the crisis of capitalist economic organisation in Nigeria and West Africa. The notion of individual land tenure and the development of the capitalist farmer lay at the core of the World Bank programme for Accelerated Development in Sub-Sahara Africa. And it is this conception of development which was pursued in the rural areas of Nigeria such that millions of Nairas were poured into the pockets of so-called progressive farmers while the poor peasants eked out an existence and the structure of taxation ensured that the rural poor did not revert to a livelihood of complete subsistence. To compound the backwardness of agricultural production was the fact that the investments in the rural areas were not geared towards diversification of agricultural production from the narrow range of export crops, groundnuts, oil palm, cocoa and cotton.

The cumulative result of the intensification of the production of cash crops for the past eighty years in Nigeria has led to two destructive features:

- (i) the exhaustion of the soil, deforestation, desert encroachment, drought and
- (ii) the absolute fall in food production such that while over 80% of the population is engaged in farming, Nigeria is dependent on imported food to feed the urban and rural population.

This phenomenon is not unique to Nigeria for the present drought in West and Southern Africa manifests the complete cul-de-sac of the road to capital accumulation in Africa. For the Nigerian poor, who are at the receiving end of the exploiters, the oil boom was supposed to postpone the crisis temporarily. One of the ideological manifestations of the crisis in the countryside is the inability of the poor peasants to independently assert themselves. Locked in the impoverished villages, the rural Nigerians sink into greater poverty as their isolated and segmented form of production render them unable to concretely deal with the forces which deepen their exploitation. Indeed the political crisis around the state manifest in the instability is generated by the inability of the vast majority of the population to assert themselves in the political system.

In essence the political careerists have served to demobilise the peasantry with the politicisation of ethnicity and religion. The scope for the entrenchment of the ideas of tribalism in Nigeria is linked to the unintegrated nature of the economy. With no real links between the pastoralists of the North and the small peasants of the East the vision of a society of tribes (reinforced by the State governments) is successfully promoted in the absence of the progressive forces who could engender the potentialities of this vast multinational state. It is the isolation and ethnic ideology which challenges the working class as they concretely attempt to transcend tribalism in their struggle for food, clothes, shelter, transportation and clean running water.

Independent class action by workers in Nigeria increased as collective activity at the work-sites helped to transcend the deep ethnic identification which had hitherto acted as a brake on working class consciousness in Nigeria. Capitalist expansion in Nigeria created a commensurate expansion in the size and composition of the working class. The massive schemes by foreign capital and the state created a large pool of skilled workers and although the state had attempted to limit the dynamism of the Nigerian trade union movement, the workers made their grievances known by spontaneous and organised actions. Independent organising had been curtailed when the political

careerists sought to hand pick the leaders of the only legal trade union centre - the Nigerian Labour Congress. However the workers in Nigeria are struggling to develop their own institutions to be able to deal with the exploitation by foreign capital in alliance with the state and local contractors. The National strike of workers in 1981 by over 700,000 workers was a symptom of the potential for independent and collective class action by those who produced the wealth in the society. Though the regime sought to use sectional interests to divide the workers in May, 1981, schools, public transportation, factories and services were disrupted as the workers demonstrated that they were a potential source of power in Nigerian society.

This ability to carry out industrial action without the fear of coercion and violence will be the most important aspect of Nigerian democracy which will be affected by the military coup of 1983. All throughout 1983 the existence of a National Assembly with opposition spokespersons meant that students, workers and social groups with legitimate grievances would air their grievances. Indeed the assumption of the 5th military regime stemmed from the inability of Shagari to command the soldiers to command the vast masses to break strikes and to put down student protests. For as Babu outlined in 1971, it is the lack of committed political leadership in Africa which has led to military take-overs.

Shagari and the careerists had used the coercive apparatus of the state to silence workers, farmers, students and the unemployed but the breathing space given after the expulsion of 2 million workers could not last indefinitely; so, with the crisis of capitalism compounding the chaos, the military intervened on December 31 to coerce the masses and to manage the economy so that the foreign debts can be paid.

#### THE MILITARY IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

As stated above, the recent military coup in Nigeria was a reinforcement of the continuity of the centrality of force in production in African politics. However jubilant the masses were in welcoming the coup should not mislead concerned Africans as to the true role of the army, for the fact of the military coup is a symptom of the demobilisation of the people. Major-General Buhari of the Nigerian Army and a former technocrat in the last military administration joined the 20 odd other generals and colonels who supervise labour in Africa. Indeed in many cases the forms of political governance in one party regimes, multi-party systems or military dictatorships are blurred as the masses of Africans scratch the surface of the earth to survive in the present crisis.

The presence of more than half the Organisation of African Unity as militarists can be understood in the way in which military power is central to the present international division of labour. Expenditure on arms and the technology of coercion has increased in Africa more than any other continent. It is not insignificant that more than a third of the arms imported into Africa in the past decade has been imported by the racist regime in South Africa. For this armed camp where the Boers expand the apartheid war machine demonstrates the centrality of repression in the system of racial discrimination and capitalist exploitation which has made the South African system a pariah to the international community.

Throughout the seventies under the previous military leaders Nigeria has consistently been one of the big spenders on arms; behind Egypt, Libya and Morocco. Robin Luckham in his study of 'Armaments and Underdevelopment in Africa in Alternatives July 1980, showed how the competition between arms suppliers in the West and East, and with an ideology which equates national sovereignty with military power the process of militarisation has deepened in Africa since 1960. The Nigerian army of 158,000 has been expending an inordinate share of the resources of the society on tanks, jets, missiles, helicopters, naval vessels and sophisticated telecommunications equipment. The major arms dealers from France, Britain, the USA and West Germany have carried out a healthy competition to sell arms to the Nigerian army so that the poor of that society were subsidising their own repression. More importantly, the system in the procurement of weapons, uniforms, support equipment in the armed forces is so chaotic that there is no systematic basis for the procurement and servicing of weapons in the army, navy and airforce. This is partly due to incompetence but also due to the fact that Nigeria has been importing weapons for which she does not have the technical capacity to keep serviceable. Consequently the presence of military advisers from Britain and the U.S.A. is necessary.

Significantly there is a keen battle between the USA and Britain to train and indoctrinate the officer corps of the Nigerian army. Up to 1975 it was the pride of the Nigerian officers to speak of the spirit of Sandhurst in Britain and of the staff colleges where senior officers were inculcated with the counter-insurgency techniques of the British armed forces. However, since 1977 it has been the pride of the officers to go to United States military academies. Between 1959 and 1971 over 450 officers of the Nigerian armed forces passed through U.S. training institutions and this figure has now tripled in the past decade. In 1977 President Carter of the USA visited Nigeria - the first such visit by a US President outside of Egypt - and following the protocol signed after

that visit, the Nigerian naval force has had a special relationship with the U.S. navy. The Nigerian naval and nuclear programmes are explicitly justified on the grounds of achieving strategic parity with the South Africans but up to the present there is no evidence that the vast expenditure of the Nigerian navy will be used on the side of those in the forefront of the struggle against apartheid. Especially when the training of Naval officers is carried out by the USA, the state which has consistently supported the apartheid regime.

It will take another Senate investigation in the USA or exposure in Europe to expose how much bribe the military has been receiving under the table while Nigeria has been importing military capital. In 1976 the US Senate investigation exposed the fact that Lockheed had paid out US\$3.6 million for a less than US\$45 million dollar contract to sell C-130 transport aircraft to the Nigerian airforce.

The acquisition of weapons by the army under the NPN was in a chaotic state as the navy, the airforce and the army made independent requests for weapons, equipment and allowances. The assumption of power by the military will ensure that they will not have to haggle with the civilians over defence expenditure.

The soldiers who seized power used the same language as soldiers everywhere that they intervened to root out corruption, mismanagement and to restore responsible government. But however much the militarists are guided by noble ideals the fact is that the Nigerian economy is sinking deeper into stagnation and only a mobilised and organised workers and peasant movement can end the chaos. Thus in the absence of the mobilisation of the working people, the Nigerian capitalist class showed that they were incapable of defending liberal bourgeois democratic principles. Hence when the military intervened there was hardly a whimper, with only one casualty. The broad masses looked on askance while the same media which a week before heaped praises on Shagari was now showering praise on the need for the military to restore order and proper economic management for foreign capital.

#### THE MILITARY SOLUTION: LIBERIA, ETHIOPIA, LIBYA.....

Elsewhere in Africa it has been shown that even the populist military leaders have been unable to solve the social and economic problems generated by the global crisis of capitalism and compounded by greed and callous neglect. Both in Liberia and Ethiopia military regimes came to power after a wave of popular protest and in both cases the militarists hijacked the popular movement. Sgt. Doe voiced the popular slogan in the first years of his accession to power only to



expose his servile attitude to US imperialism and this was blatant when he rushed to become the first African head of state to visit Israel since the OAU called for the break with Israel in 1973. In Ethiopia the revolutionary process has ended in bloodletting and regional warfare as the seeming socialist administration of Mengistu failed to deal with the festering problems which had led to the war in Eritrea. Now the war in Eritrea is but one of the many wars for self determination in Ethiopia. The military solution to the problems of Ethiopia even when couched in the language of socialism (with support from the socialist camp) and with the promise of building a party from above, has not dealt with the questions of socialist transformation in Ethiopia. One litmus test of the radicalism of the military in Ethiopia has been their relationship to the organised workers. State control of working class institutions and trade unions in Socialist Ethiopia is indistinguishable from state control of trade unions in capitalist Kenya.

The regimes of Sgt. Doe and Col. Mengistu can be distinguished from the military regimes of Flight Lt. Jerry Rawlings in Ghana and M. Gaddafi in Libya and Sankara in Upper Volta. These three leaders enjoy a measure of popular support but in all cases the extent of the seriousness of these regimes can be measured by the extent to which they initiate a programme of demilitarisation to strengthen popular institutions of workers and small farmers. The experience of Egypt under Nasser served as a reminder that regardless of how popular a military leader is, if there is no effort to build up alternative bases of power among the masses then the local capitalists will bide their time to seize control of the society. Hence the Nasser regime in Egypt was succeeded by the Sadat/Mubarak regimes, leaders who were quite willing to come to an accommodation with Israel in the face of the Israeli military expansion in Lebanon and her intransigence over the occupied territories.

The attempt to reassess the radical militarists in Africa is necessary to be able to analyse the role of the military in Africa in the past two decades. During the seventies there was the view that radical and anti-imperialist military leaders were preferable to civilian leaders. However, the experiences show that the militarisation of the continent leads to repression and coercion. Army officers do not produce but consume and coerce, and thus they help to produce a double deficit in the production stock of African societies compounded by drought, famine, hunger and shortages. This circumstance presents itself as a destructive factor and leads to increased struggles around the state in the chain of coups and counter-coups. As this struggle becomes interwoven with the debt crisis and the dislocation of the international monetary and trading system, the base of social production is narrowed within Africa and this is



manifest in negative growth, agricultural crisis and the deterioration of services, health, water supply, housing, education and extension services.

...AND TANZANIA? HATA NA WEWE BURUTO!

The Nigerian officers who have resumed the task of military rule in that populous society have not shown the capacity to develop a cohesive programme of disengagement from imperialism. The economic crisis in Nigeria also demonstrates that the problem is much more profound than that of a lack of foreign exchange. All countries in Africa are travelling along the anti-democratic road in the absence of democratic participation. The present ruling classes have shown that they cannot even defend basic bourgeois principles such as the rule of law, the right to freedom of speech, religious freedom, freedom of movement and freedom of association. In Tanzania where the society seemed to have embarked on a different road, the leadership has given promise to the militarisation of the society by closely integrating the army into direct administration. Moreover, the insane system of forced labour (Nguvu Kazi) and the campaign for the Human Resource Deployment Act of 1983 which calls on the people to carry passes in the country, promise the 1984 system of control for the Tanzanian masses.

Democracy in Africa can no longer be understood in the voting for a party leader every five years. Democracy in 1984, the year of thought control and double speak must be understood as the genuine participation of the masses in the processes of production and reproduction. The present ruling class in Africa has shown by their political style that they are historically transient, merely attempting to intensify what has gone on before; coercing the people to plant more coffee, sisal, cocoa, tea, groundnuts and to export more copper, oil and uranium. The failure of the bourgeoisie under colonialism is being repeated by the petty bourgeoisie and the military under neo-colonialism.

The Nigerian coup has shown to the working poor of the continent that only the full mobilisation of the masses can lead to democracy. This democracy must be based on the self emancipation of the working people so that they can carry themselves to higher stages of political consciousness and action. With organisation, mobilisation and proper ideological direction the Nigerian masses will be able to play an important role in helping to break out of the bottom of the international division of labour. The issue of Nigeria shows that neither democracy nor the rule of law can be sustained under the form of capitalism in Africa and that democracy will only be possible under socialism where the people will collectively, cooperatively and in a democratic manner enter the process of production, distribution and the creation of new cultural values.