

(5) The Manifesto has called for democratic steps to be taken in arranging for the establishment of constitutional government.

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(i) The Constituent Assembly must meet this year. It must be composed such that *democratically elected* representatives of mass organisations of peasant-farmers, workers, students, petty traders and artisans, and patriotic segments of the professional classes *are in majority*.

(ii) the constituent Assembly must not reflect state interests. This is to avoid constitutional discussion degenerating into competition among state representatives for national resources. We recall the lessons of the "Leaders of Thought" Conferences which nearly disintegrated the country. Representation should be based on social classes and their organs.

(6) Lastly, party formation should only begin after the final constitution has been approved by the people in a national referendum.

Nigeria: Capitalism and the Coup—P. Collins, M. Dixon, G. Williams
We publish here a report, on the nature of the 1975 Nigerian coup and the state of Nigerian politics in its aftermath, which we received from Nigeria as we were going to press.

On 29 July 1975 the Nigerian Armed Forces deposed General Gowon. They immediately retired all state governors and civilian commissioners, and several senior police and army officers, including all above the rank of Brigadier. Most of the men they deposed had held administrative positions in government and the armed forces since 29 July 1966. Brigadiers Murtala Mohammed, Obasanjo and Danjuma, leading field commanders during the civil war, assumed the key posts of Head of State, Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters and Chief of Army Staff. Brig. Mohammed, who had been one of the architects of the 1966 coup which had brought Gowon to power explained that since the war ended in 1970: 'the affairs of state, hitherto a collective responsibility became characterised by lack of consultation, indecision, indiscipline and even neglect'. He singled out for particular criticism the state governors whom Gowon had promised, but failed, to remove: 'All over the country there were allegations of graft, misuse of public funds. . . There were complaints of ostentatious living, flagrant abuse of office and deprivation of peoples' rights and property, perversion of time-honoured procedures and norms. . . nepotism and favouritism, desecration of traditional institutions and public humiliation of highly-respected natural rulers, all of which gave the impression that the states were being run as private estates'.

What were the developments and issues which led to the fall of the Gowon regime, and what measures have been taken to rectify the state of affairs described by Brig. Mohammed? During the Gowon regime, the Head of State and state military governors had decided policies with scant regard for the advice, either of the public or of their military peers. The army officers who had put Gowon in power were particularly enraged by their exclusion from decision-making. Under military aegis, key civil servants had exercised power without being held to public account at both state and federal levels. But it was at the federal levels that the 'super permsecs', especially in

finance, oil and economic development had determined state policy on a wide range of crucial issues. Since the coup, there have been massive retirements of senior civil servants, from secretaries to military governments and permanent secretaries downwards. They followed 94 senior police officers, and several judges, including the long-serving Chief Justice. These dismissals have been accompanied by a spate of exposures of misuse of public funds, many government contracts have been suspended and a few selected assets have been reappropriated. But most retirements have been with full benefits, creating a large class of privileged pensioners.

Other measures were taken to deal with a number of issues which the Gowon regime had notoriously failed to resolve. The 1973 census figures, which had been manipulated to favour the northern states, were nullified. Instead the 1963 figures, themselves incredible in their time, will continue to be the basis for allocating oil revenues among the states. The Black Arts Festival, scheduled to take place at the end of the year, which was becoming notorious for the corrupt and irresponsible expenditure of vast sums of money, and which threatened to discredit its Nigerian hosts, has been postponed. Panels have been set up to advise the government on the intractable questions of the site of the federal capital, and the creation of new states, and on how to deal with inflation. The creation of new state administrations will multiply points of access to office and contracts throughout the country. At the same time the power of the Federal State, which was enhanced under the Gowon regime, has been consolidated. State governors are now responsible as serving officers to the Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters and are not represented at the federal level.

A unitary state has been established. But unlike Ironsi's ill-fated unification of 1966, this one will leave local patronage and appointments in state hands, and will ensure the protection of northern interests at the federal level. Inflation was fueled by the indiscriminate public spending of oil revenues. It was accelerated early in 1975 by the payment of massive arrears and salary increases recommended by the Udoji Public Services Commission, and by the subsequent round of wage and salary demands which they precipitated in the private sector. These sudden and unplanned increases in purchasing power have completely congested the nation's ports. Over 300 ships are now waiting for several months each before they can offload their cargoes at Lagos. Huge public spending has yielded meagre returns in better docks, roads and railways. Manufacturers and contractors cannot get essential supplies. Consumers cannot find sufficient imported goods. Hoarders, aided and abetted by state officials, have profited from shortages.

The 1972 Indigenization Decree promised to adjust relations between foreign capital and expanding indigenous capitalists to the latter's advantage. Its effect has been to restrict rather than expand opportunities for them. The main thrust of state intervention was to facilitate the purchase of minority shares in a defined range of expatriate companies. The major beneficiaries were certain privileged bureaucrats, managers and businessmen. In addition, the mismanagement by the regime—ports and road congestion, increased labour and other

costs, inadequate water and electricity services, and maladministration—all created obstacles in the way of indigenous businessmen. Not that the alliance of foreign capital with its Nigerian associates is threatened in any way. It was Chief Fajemirokun, Chairman of the Nigerian Chambers of Commerce, who assured foreign investors of their continued welcome in Nigeria under the new regime.

On 1 October 1974 General Gowon revoked his promise to restore civilian rule in 1976, exactly four years after he had made it. This was resented by political groups and factions throughout the country. Key officers in the present regime had links with different political groups. Gowon tried to buy popular support by freely spending the oil money so as to increase the income and opportunities of businessmen and bureaucrats, and by conceding to demands for better wages and prices to workers and farmers. Critics who drew attention to broken pledges and corrupt practices were severely dealt with. The press was intimidated, universities were closed, and farmers, journalists and writers were detained. The new regime has released all detainees. It has not abolished its power to detain. It has promised a political programme but delayed any reference to the transfer of power to civilians, nor indicated the sort of government they would like to see in Nigeria.

While Gowon was employing oil-barrel politics to buy support, he and some senior officials were ensuring Shell-BP a continued flow of crude oil at cheap prices. It is small wonder that Gowon was so enthusiastically feted by Cambridge, Fleet Street and Buckingham Palace. These actions provoked controversies within the federal oil administration. Critics objected to the way in which the National Oil Corporation had been kept weak, selected foreign interests had been served, and opportunities for a more nationalist policy, for respect within OPEC, and for co-operation with other underdeveloped countries had been quashed. Consequently Nigeria had no oil policy. The policies of the oil companies prevail. Gowon's insistence on appointing a plant General Manager to the National Oil Corporation was the last straw. One of the first actions of the new Head of State was to revoke this irregular appointment, made over the heads and in defiance of the opinions of the Federal Executive Council. Thus as the basis of disagreement was Gowon's personalized control of the sharing of the surplus rather than more institutionalized forms of national control, such as through an effective national oil corporation.

The palpable maladministration by the Gowon regime has created the impression that the basic problems are technical ones which can be put right by proper management of the government and resources of the country. This diverts attention from the issues of social justice and class conflict. The present regime proposes to deal with the country's ills by sacking the old guard, promoting younger and hitherto frustrated officers and officials, eliminating 'laziness, idleness and corrupt practices', and applying the virtues of 'discipline and sense of purpose' to the tasks of administration. These slogans and measures singularly fail to recognise the sources of Nigeria's crises in the contradictions of capitalist development under imperialist domination.

Foreign capitalism in Nigeria subordinates and subverts the states and its

officials to serve its purposes. At the same time its continued domination requires the collaboration of state officials and agencies. Indigenous capital is prevented from developing except in a dependent relation with foreign firms and suppliers. The mutual interdependence of foreign capital with the indigenous state on the one hand and indigenous capitalist interests on the other generates conflicts over the contradictory demands of national interests and foreign capital. In a capitalist society, oriented to the pursuit of private profit, state institutions are always liable to subversion by multinational firms which compete among themselves for supplies and markets by bribing public officials. Indigenous capitalists can always be bought off by collaborative arrangements with foreign firms. Subordination to foreign domination causes competition between the state and indigenous capitalists, and among factions of each, for the fruits of collaboration. Conflicts of this kind underly the vigorous debate over the nature and limits of state intervention in the economy. They similarly fuel inter and intra state conflicts over the allocation of opportunities.

A return to bourgeois politics will enable an entrepreneurial political class to gain access to the corridors of power. There they will ally or compete with the civil service and the military for control of patronage and policy. The elimination of the compradore state, serving as an intermediary for foreign interests requires that government be accountable to the workers and peasants—hence the seizure of power by the workers and peasants themselves. Both workers and peasants have shown that they can resist exploitation and oppression. But this capacity for resistance is yet to be co-ordinated through a socialist movement.

13 September, 1975.

Bibliographical Notes

Brig. Mohammed's speeches were printed in the *Daily Times*, 31 July and 1 August 1975. Subsequent events and revelations are reported in the Nigerian press, which is very partially summarized in *West Africa*. On the 'super permsecs', see 'The Nigerian Revolution, 1966-76', Presidential address, Nigerian Economic Society, University of Ibadan, 1973 by A. Ayida, then Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance, and appointed Secretary to the Military Government by Gen. Gowon in 1975. See P. Collins on 'The Political Economy of indigenization', *The African Review* 4,4 (1975). On workers and peasants see the essays on Nigeria in R. Cohen and K. Sandbrook, ed *The development of an African working class*, 1975, and E. de Kadt and G. Williams, ed. *Sociology and development*, Tavistock 1974. More generally see Comrade O. Oni and B. Onimade, *The economic development of Nigeria: the socialist alternative*, Nigerian Academy of Arts, Science and Technology, c/o University of Ibadan, 1975 and G. Williams, ed. *Nigerian: economy and society*, Rex Collings, in press.

[Ed. note: On 1 October, Brig. Muhammed announced a timetable for the creation of new states, reorganization of local government, convening of a constituent assembly, formation of political parties, and election of a civilian government to take office on 1 October 1979. Assets of retired officials are being probed, and a code of conduct imposed on civil servants. The regime plans to regulate but not to challenge the politics and economics of private enterprise.]