PROBLEMS OF SOCIALISM

: The Nigerian Challenge

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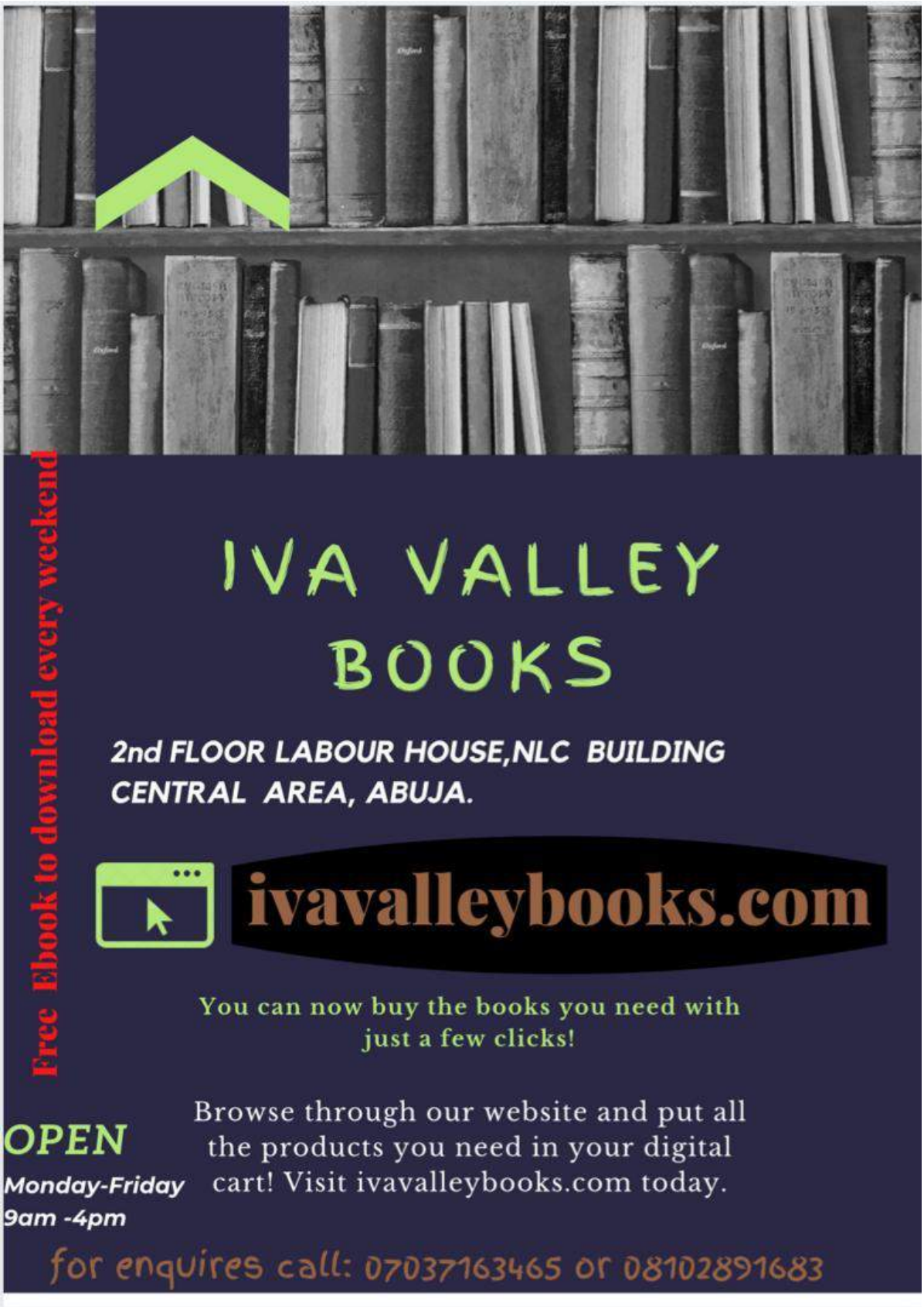

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Introduction: The Need for Self-Clarification

This book should be seen as an open attempt by a Nigerian Marxian socialist to reach self-clarification on several problems connected with organized socialist struggles in Nigeria, at least over the past decade. It is made open so that it can serve simultaneously as an invitation to Nigerian socialists to inaugurate a new phase of debate on the problems of socialist transformation —a debate which has been made necessary by the present diffuseness[1] of socialist voices in Nigeria.

We are also attempting an exercise which, at least in this country, has nearly always been evaded for reasons of opportunism, or only timidly carried out by socialists; that is, to locate the specific problems of socialist transformation in Nigeria within a global perspective. In other words, although the various concrete problems considered in this essay are encountered in Nigeria — whose present political conjuncture supplies the challenge for the work —we are proposing that the theoretical (and even practical) issues involved belong, in varying degrees, to the world socialist movement at large.

The implication of the term 'world socialist movement' is clear to us and we assume full responsibility for it. This is simply that the problems of socialist transformation have not been completely transcended anywhere in the world. These problems are therefore relevant not only to movements in countries yet to take the first step towards socialist transformation — the *political* overthrow of capitalist rule (or local national wing of world imperialism) — but also to movements which have taken this step and are tackling the question of socio-economic and cultural reconstruction. To that extent, the following text should be seen as an attempt by a Nigerian socialist to reformulate, critically, the global problems of socialism as they now present themselves on the Nigerian scene.

If we permit ourselves to separate existing social forces in world broadly into two, imperialist forces and socialist forces[2] (ignoring the various links between them and differentiations within each system forces), we see immediately that socialist forces have won great victories over the last two decades. In this respect we can mention, on one level, the victories scored in Africa (Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde), in Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Laos), and in the Middle East (Yemen, etc.). On another level, we can mention the intensification of revolutionary struggles in Latin America and Southern Africa, among others.

But just as there have been victories, there have also been problems, reversals and defeats which can be grouped on at least three levels. On one level we have the defeats suffered by revolutionary movements which had actually gained control of state power (Ghana under Nkrumah, Chile under Allende). On another level, we have the reversals suffered by revolutionary movements pushing for state power (Bolivia, Ceylon, etc.), by those movements which were simply pre-empted and crushed (Indonesia, Sudan etc), and by those movements whose organizations have been repeatedly 'nipped in the bud' externally or aborted internally (Nigeria, Ghana, etc). We must not forget the uneasy and sometimes bloody alliances between nationalist and socialist parties (e.g. the alliance of Ba'ath and Communist parties in Iraq, Syria, etc)[3].

On the third level, we have problems raised by the experiences of the various established socialist regimes. There are problems of internal degeneration of revolutionary leaderships; objective problems arising from the existence of only one world market, dominated at present by imperialism but in which socialist countries participate, albeit peripherally; problems raised by the fact that revolutionary movements are today organized within national boundaries[4] which are largely created by world imperialism. There are also immense political and ideological problems thrown up by the history of the first successful socialist revolution; problems arising from the fact that socialism is a designation for a transitional social order which can take several forms; problems arising from socialist commitment to prevent imperialism (actively by military deterrence and passively by the policy of peaceful co-existence) from unleashing another global war on Mankind.

This book does not aim to provide solutions to the various problems raised; its only objective is to formulate or reformulate them in the light of our concrete experiences. For as Marx wrote:

> Where speculation ends — in real life — there, real positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Empty talk about consciousness ceases, and real knowledge has to take its place. When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence. At the best its place can only be taken by a summing-up of the most general results, abstractions which arise from the observation of the historical development of men. Viewed apart from real history, these abstractions have in themselves no value whatsoever. They can only serve to facilitate the arrangement of historical material, to indicate the sequence of its separate strata. But they by no means afford a recipe or schema, as does

> philosophy, for neatly trimming the epochs of history. On the contrary, our difficulties begin only when we set about the observation and the arrangement — the real depiction — of our historical material, whether of a past epoch or of the present.[5]

A revolutionary, theoretical self-clarification becomes necessary when a certain set of formulations repeatedly fails to grapple with the essence of a problem. It is a fundamental proposition of historical materialism that no social problem presents itself as immediate until, the pre-conditions for its solution have developed or are at least in the active process of development. When, therefore, a certain problem is identified as one whose solution is crucial to the solution of other problems — that is, when a problem is identified as immediate — then self-clarification becomes necessary, if the solution to this problem is not to become more elusive every day.

For the socialist movement in Nigeria the need for self-clarification is urgent. For more than a decade, continuous attempts (varying in their degree of seriousness) have been made to unite the various localized and backward Socialist/Marxist groups in the country. The equally persistent abortion of these attempts has become almost a tradition and a culture. It is a tragedy which reflects certain fundamental errors of theory and practice, and therefore calls for thorough self-clarification. This is the fundamental premise of this analysis.

The exercise of self-clarification involves the submission of key concepts, formulations and applications to critical re-examination. It also involves re-examination of present and past revolutionary practice. In other words, both theory and practice — our entire heritage — must be examined. We recognize the critical character of such points in history — critical in the sense that the result of such an exercise is most often either a leap to higher revolutionary engagement or a slip into disillusionment, capitulation and surrender.

Social reality is complex. The problem of grappling with this complexity is a theoretical one. Were reality a simple and obvious fact, were history a unilinear process, the need for theory would hardly arise.[6] Since, however, the comprehension of reality involves the telescoping of its various aspects through abstraction, theory presents itself as indispensable. Our basic attitude, therefore, is that theory has no autonomous existence except as an indispensable tool for the comprehension bf the complexities called reality.

Theory itself bears a dialectical relationship to reality. It is a means of comprehending reality and to that extent it tails behind it. On the other hand, it is a tool for transforming reality, and to that extent, it goes beyond

it. Theory remains properly so-called so far as it can maintain its dialectical (contradictory) character coherently through its various stages of development. As soon as theory ceases to make reality comprehensible or falls to illuminate possibilities for further transformation of reality,[7] the need for self-clarification arises.

There is an important and decisive aspect of self-clarification which should be mentioned. Every revolutionary or revolutionary organization is subjected to a multiplicity of forces — class enemy forces, pressures from the toiling classes, internal tensions within the organization (or internal contradictions within the individual revolutionary) — forces which can at once be political, ideological, economic, social, or cultural. No *practising* revolutionary can pretend to be indifferent to these forces. since self-clarification, involving a temporary halt to current political practice, can at times take the form of ideological or political concessions to the enemy. The danger of such situations is very clear.

It can be argued — and very strongly too — that continuous self-clarification is the duty of every revolutionary and revolutionary organization. This objection presupposes the existence of the condition for such continuous exercise. But the need for self-clarification of the type we are now discussing arises at a point in a process of 'zig-zag' empiricism. It can also be argued that self-clarification is achieved only through political action whose results proves or disproves a theoretical premise[8] or at least breaks an undesirable stability.[9] Again this serious objection presupposes that the present conjuncture opens up possibilities for meaningful political action based on our existing tradition — which, one may argue — is no tradition at all, judging from its extremely fragmented and episodic character.

We admit that the last paragraph has an alarmingly pessimistic note. Although this pessimism is real in Nigeria, it is not our intention to perpetuate it. Instead we believe that a clear admission of our political tragedy is a necessary condition for transcending it.

Notes

1. This diffuseness is expressed both ideologically and politically. The ideological expression is simply the absence of any formulation of socialist strategy, while the political expression is the fact that, whereas all the officially recognized political parties in the country have self-professed socialists in their leading positions, there is no nationally organized socialist group.
2. With this broad classification, we include within the socialist system of forces all those movements whose objective directions of struggle

constitute a challenge to imperialist hegemony (whether military, ideological, political or economic) and through which the specific socialist forces in the country could gain an enhanced strategic position. (We use the term `socialist' instead of the more appropriate designation 'anti-imperialist', simply because several wings of imperialism in the Third World have verbally appropriated the ideology of anti-imperialism and emptied it of all content and meaning.)
3. To that extent, whatever the dreams of Ayatollah Khomeiny may be, the current Iranian Revolution belongs to the socialist system of forces.
4. With the possible exception of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde Islands where a single revolutionary party — the African Party for Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (P.A.I.G.C.) — is in the leadership of both countries, or was until the coup of November 1980 on the mainland.
5. K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976), p.43.
6. G. Novack, *Understanding History*, (Pathfinder Press, N.Y., 1974), pp.15-16.
7. Reality in the context we now employ it, includes human social practice. Hence the transformation of reality embraces the re-direction of human social practice.
8. K. Marx, *Second Thesis on Feuerbach* in *Marx-Engels: Selected Works*, (International Publishers, N.Y., 1977), p.28.
9. Che Guevara gave this as one of the reasons for his embarking on the Bolivian revolutionary enterprise — to end the isolation of the Cuban Revolution and break the stalemate over the Vietnam War by opening a new revolutionary front.

PART 2
A Critique of the Nigerian Left

5. The Tragedy of the Nigerian Labour and Socialist Movement

> Only on the basis of a study of political processes in the masses them-selves, can we understand the role of parties and leaders, whom we least of all are inclined to ignore. They constitute not an independent, but nevertheless a very important, element in the process. Without a guiding organisation the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a pistonbox. *But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam.*[1] (emphasis ours)
>
> The Communists are distinguished from other working-class parties by this only: 1) In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality; 2) In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, *they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole*.[2] (emphasis ours)

The response of a political movement to a national political development is, to a large degree, a reflection and an expression of its own strength. This depends on the extent of the movement's mass base, its organizational power and cohesion, its capacity for continuous existence and development, and its 'ability to propound the basic historical problems of the time, to define them in clear terms, and to indicate... the direction in which the basic solutions may be found and the form of action that is called for.'[3] These various elements of a movement's political strength can best be understood by considering its history. Let us therefore start by sketching the general character of the history of the Nigerian socialist movement, which is, in fact, inseparable from the history of the Nigerian labour movement.

This inseparability is not simply theoretical. In general, every organization of labour is political (and therefore engenders its own political contradictions) and socialism (of whatever brand) is the only political movement against the conditions of labour under capitalism. But

in Nigeria the inseparability of the socialist and labour movements is more specific and more concrete — as we have shown below.

We should, therefore, be pardoned when we use the terms 'socialist movement' and 'labour movement' interchangeably. We should also be pardoned for using the word 'movement' very broadly. This is done purely for convenience of exposition, and should not be seen as a misuse of categories with time tested and accepted meanings. For example, we shall often use the term 'socialist movement' to describe a situation where only the existence of *isolated* individuals with socialist ideas, and maybe commitment, can be asserted, in the absence of organizational forms or programmes.

The Nigerian Socialist Movement Before the Military Intervention of 1966

The Nigerian labour movement,[4] born out the general nationalist response to colonial political economy, had an uninterrupted history of militancy between 1940 up to the advent of military rule in 1966. Although this history was also marked by perennial factionalism, splits, groupings and regroupings within labour unions, central labour organizations and worker-oriented parties, the workers' movement as a whole maintained a continuous impact on the Nigerian political scene during this period.

The period (1940-66) can be, divided into two sub-periods according to the general political tendencies within the movement. The first period was characterized by:

1) A series of uneasy alliances between the nationalist parties and the labour movement;

2) A split, during the early years of the movement, into a right wing and a left wing — with the left wing favouring an alliance (through workers' parties) with the nationalist parties and the right wing favouring independence from political influences;

3) An ever-increasing influence from international labour organizations on the movement — which had the effect of further perpetuating the split into right and left.

The second period, which can be taken as dating from the eve of independence (1960), was characterized by:

1) A tendency within the left wing to break off alliances with nationalist parties (which were then fast becoming ruling parties) and independent workers' parties; and the right wing still opting for political neutrality;

2) A tendency towards institutionalization of intercine struggles with the leaderships of both right and left wings for vantage positions to grab the

resources of the movement and material aids coming from international labour organizations;

3) The perpetuation of the split between right and left and the blocking of all attempts and opportunities for a sustained united front of workers — mainly for reasons mentioned in (2) above.

The splitting of the Nigerian labour movement into right and left was *initially* engendered by conflicting attitudes on the part of the labour leaders towards colonial rule in general (and not just towards colonial labour policies). The initial factors were therefore political.

The first central labour organization in the country, the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria, which was established in August 1943, made a political declaration to the effect that its aim was 'to press for the nationalization of milling and timber industries, township transport and other public services.'[5] This declaration was not fortuitous; it expressed the political motivation of those who spearheaded the formation of the Congress.[6] When the first major split in the central labour movement occurred in 1949, it was — at least overtly — over the question of what political stand to take up *vis-a-vis* the colonial administration, right or left. While the right wing declared itself independent of political influences, the left wing proposed 'to press for the socialization of important industries in the country with a view to realizing Socialist Government where the identity of the working class would not be lost and, ultimately, the achievement of a world-wide parliament of the working classes.' [7]

It was the fate of the Nigerian socialist movement that political questions within the labour movement, which initially gave the socialist movement its organizational and political forms, gradually became eliminated. Opportunistic tendencies developed equally within the left and right factions, and with time, these tendencies completely overshadowed and falsified the political questions. By the time the army assumed power in 1966, the right-left political split was largely meaningless.

We shall come later to what we consider the main causes and elements of the opportunistic tendencies which dominated the movement up to 1966, and which, under new forms, continue to dominate it today. But for now let us note that the year, 1963, is very significant in the history of the Nigerian socialist movement. This was the year the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (S.W.A.F.P.) - a party originally embracing the vast majority of socialist intellectuals and activists (Marxist and non-Marxist) as well as left-wing labour leaders in the country - came into being.

It can now be said, in retrospect, that whatever may have been the illusions or alternatively genuine determination of some of the participating Marxists, the S.W.A.F.P. actually came into being to institutionalize and promote opportunism still further within the socialist movement. This historical development is by no means inexplicable, nor could the then Nigerian Marxists be completely absolved from blame for not foreseeing it. The opportunism of S.W.A.F.P. (or its leadership) was predictable.

In the first place, starting from independence onwards, struggles within the labour movement in general, and its left-wing faction in particular, became gradually transformed into mere struggles for leadership between labour bureaucrats. This tendency was both the cause and effect of another phenomenon, the increasing divorce of rank-and-file union members from the politics of their unions and the leaders' increasing alienation and loss of credibility. It was these same leaders — leaders who by 1963 had organized themselves into veritable mafias for the struggle to loot workers' funds who constituted the labour core of the new party.

In the second place, the party, and the need for it, did not develop from the conscious activities of the rank-and-file'.[8] The party came into being *bureaucratically*, namely, by the mechanical merger of socialist intellectuals (some of them socialists only by label, association, or self-acclamation) and left-wing labour leaders. Of course, we do not deny that the Nigerian working masses were still very militant at the time the S.W.A.F.P. came into being; all we are saying is that the people who, in 1963, constituted themselves as the party had only formal links — if any at all — with the workers.

By the end of 1963 (that is, by the time the S.W.A.F.P. was established as nothing but a mere bureaucracy), it had become almost impossible for the left-wing labour leadership to mobilize workers for purely political actions; nor could the new party (dominated at least bureaucratically and financially by the same set of people) provide a credible political leadership for the working class.

Also, by the end of 1963, as many as five central labour organizations (which together with the S.W.A.F.P. constituted the main organizational forms of the Nigerian workers' movement) had emerged in the country. These are briefly described below.

1) The leadership (but certainly not the rank-and-file) of one of the central labour organizations - the Nigerian Trade Union Congress (N.T.U.C) - claimed, to be and was largely described as left-wing. The actual situation was that, though the leadership of this particular organization evolved out

of the militantly anti-colonial labour leadership of the previous two decades, the new leadership's claim to leftism was now based solely on this historical link and its affiliations to a left-wing international labour organization. The loss of the organization's militant content was bound up with the birth of purely opportunistic struggles between members of the leadership. It is worth noting that the organization's leadership at this time came to power by physically seizing the secretariat — and not through rank-and-file decision.[9]

2) The leadership of the second central labour organization — The United Labour Congress (U.L.C.) — was reputed to be right-wing. There were stronger reasons for calling this particular organization right-wing than there were for labelling the first organization left-wing. In the first place, the leadership evolved historically from the moderate wing of the labour leadership under colonialism. Secondly, this leadership explicitly and officially labelled the leadership of the first labour organization communist.[10] Thirdly, the post-independence Federal Government had accorded it official recognition for being moderate — a moderation which was indeed shown in actions involving direct confrontation with the state. Finally, the organization had a link with a right-wing international labour movement. Again, not much could be said about the political attitude of the rank-and-file.

3) The third central labour organization — The Labour Unity Front (L.U.F.) — was formed by these leaders in the first organization who had been removed by a *coup d'état*. This leadership can today claim to have continuously represented the tradition of militancy, nationalism and workers' power in the Nigerian labour movement. Hence this leadership's leftist label was more correct than that of the first.

4) The last two central labour organizations were formed by splinter groups from the first and second central organizations respectively. One was allied to an international Arab labour organization while the other was allied to an international Christian labour organization.

The existence of up to five central labour organizations in the country in the 1960s was due mainly to the struggles amongst labour bureaucrats for vantage positions to control the finances of the movement. A labour leader would rather break away and form his own union — however small — than remain in an organization over whose finances he had no control or to whose funds he had no direct access. Although political factors were not completely absent from these struggles, they were little more than slogans and banners under which sordid opportunistic struggles went on between labour leaders.

This was the situation into which, as we have noted, the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (S.W.A.F.P.) was born. We have earlier expressed the view that the character of the leadership of the new party constituted a terrible inheritance which immediately indicated a possible direction of development for the the party. But this does not mean that all the conditions (objective and subjective) for its developing into a powerful mass party were absent. In fact, the party was formed under a very favourable set of political conditions. these were the mass anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and nationalist resentments generated by the events in the Congo (1960-61); the attempted Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact; the attempted Preventive Detention Act; the series of national crises through which the country had been passing (the crisis over the 1962-62 census figures, the crisis leading to the declaration of a state of emergency in the then Western Region, etc.); mass dissatisfaction of workers; and the attempted formation of an all-party government at the federal level.

But all these favourable conditions were lost without the new party being able to build on them.

The party itself emerged as a bureaucratic union between the leadership of the Nigerian Youth Congress (N.Y.C.)[11] and the new leadership, (which had seized power through a *coup d'état*) of the 'left-wing' central labour organization, the Nigerian Trade Union Congress. It is still being claimed by some older Nigerian socialists that this *coup d'état* in the labour movement was gaged by those who wanted leading positions in the new party. The formation of the party, therefore, had the immediate effect of further perpetuating the split in the labour movement not only into right and left but also into various factions of the left. It is therefore not surprising (judging from the state of the labour movement at the time) that the new party was unable to its potential and remained largely still-born until it was decreed out of existence — along with other parties — when the military came to power in 1966.

Within a few months of the birth of this new working-class socialist party and the *coup d'état* in the 'left-wing' Nigerian TUC, a shattering new crisis developed within the reconstituted socialist movement (now made up of the 'left-wing' labour centre, the party and the Nigerian Youth Congress — or their leaderships).[12] Twelve years later, Eskor Toyo, one of the leaders of the movement, identified the major causes of the crisis as including:

1) gross arbitrary and irresponsible mismanagement of thousands of naira of the movement's funds; 2) a bourgeois and irresponsible non-accountability for scores of thousands of naira worth of the movement other property; 3) gross abuse of position to favour

> blood relatives in the award of scholarships and contracts made available to the movement; 4) the use of bourgeois employer-boss and employee-servant methods in dealing with the movement's cadres; 5) the inordinate ambition on the part of the party's secretary to be a secure and comfortable bourgeois millionaire benefactor holding the purse strings, dictating to the movement and holding it to ransom by means of financial power; 6) the use of thuggery just like bourgeois fascists to silence their critics within the socialist or the trade union movement; 7) a shameless and dishonest exploitation of the differences in the international communist movement to perpetuate their gross opportunism; 8) several acts of political opportunism in the Nigerian bourgeois style; 9) open betrayal ... of democratic fronts and falsifications before international organizations.[13]

While history has largely confirmed this diagnosis to be correct,[14] it is pertinent to ask: What was responsible for the existence of such a degree of false consciousness and opportunism in the leaderships of a 'Marxist' party and a left-wing' central labour organisation? In posing this question, we must not forget that the leaderships of the Movement (Party and union) did not evolve continuously and organically from the movement; in other words, the leadership had, by 1964, become almost detached from the movement, thus making it impossible for rank-and-file to intervene effectively in the struggle within the leadership.

We propose the following as guides to an answer:

1) The severance of the political alliance between the nationalist parties and the labour movement: The historical reason behind this phenomenon was that, as the country advanced towards independence, the political posture and interest of the nationalist parties became more and more bourgeois and hegemonic. Since the labour movement was born and developed under conditions of nationalism which was politically led by the nationalist parties, the working-class parties which were formed after this severance found themselves in stiff competition with the nationalist parties for support within the working class — a struggle which working-class parties did not even wage, let alone win.

2) *The damaging influence which the huge financial and material support from international labour organizations and parties had on the Nigerian socialist movement*: In a social, economic and political situation thoroughly permeated by bourgeois corruption (almost evolving into a culture!), the influence of these large sums of money on a detached leadership can be imagined.

3) *Ideology*: (We offer this as only a provisional thesis). It would appear that the labour and socialist movement was born into an international ideological atmosphere which was dominated by an emphasis on the *objective* factors for socialism and ignored the subjective factors. In other words, such revolutionary demands as socialist morality, humility, solidarity, honesty, or revolutionary example, were completely absent from socialist politics.[15]

The last pre-civil war revolutionary act of the Nigerian working class, as a political class constituted nationally, took place in 1964. It took the form of a General Strike (echoing that of 1945), which came as a reaction to a rare convergence: political dissatisfaction and economic grievance on a national scale.[16] In the brief period of a few months, the Nigerian working class condensed and brilliantly re-enacted its history of militancy, and equally suffered (also in a condensed form) a repetition of all the treachery and betrayal by its leaders that had occurred in 1945.

An indication of the general political mood of the workers at this time is given by the resolution passed in August 1963 by the first Annual Delegates Conference of the Eastern District Council of one of the central labour organisations. In the resolution, the Conference urged the parent organization:

> To set up a political Action Committee which will have as its primary objective the propagation of a socialist welfare state and the furtherance of the workers' power and influence in the national politics of Nigeria ... and to proceed to establish proper liaison between it and other organizations, political or otherwise, that subscribe to the principles of a socialist welfare state in Nigeria.[17]

Under the pressure of workers, the leaders of the central labour organizations and other 'neutral' trade unions decided to set up the Joint Action Committee, whose first act was to issue a call to the Federal Government 'to set up a governmental enquiry into wages and salaries with a threat that, if this were not done, the unions would call out their members on 27 September,1963.'[18] The government was compelled to set up a commission — the Morgan Commission — to advise it on 'a general upward revision of salaries and wages of junior employees in both government and private establishments.'[19]

The General Strike started eventually early in June 1964, initially as a pressure on the government to release its decisions on the report of the Morgan Commission. In the course of the strike, the decisions were released; but, falling far below the recommendations of the Commission, they led to an intensification of the strike and further spread its coverage.

Robin Cohen described the height of the General Strike in these words:

> The Prime Minister issued a Canute-like order to the strikers to return to work without having either the credibility or power to enforce this order. The strike involved perhaps 750,000 workers, many of them not unionists, and spread over the whole countryside. In contrast to 1945, the tin miners in Jos also joined the strike. Besides the wage and salary-earners, a large measure of support came from other sources. Many domestic servants refused to work, while in the towns, a number of unemployed joined the workers at political rallies and mass meetings.[20]

The government was compelled to give in; a committee of government and labour representatives was quickly set up to consider the report of the Morgan Commission and make recommendations to the government. But, as we said earlier, the 1964 General Strike was both a success and a failure. It was a success because the very foundation of the Federal Government was shaken by the united action of determined rank-and-file workers, and the erstwhile arrogant administration was terrified and forced to swallow its pride, climb down, and enter into negotiations with the workers. On the other hand, the strike was a failure because the workers' hope that the Joint Action Committee would become a permanent organization and unite the Nigerian working class was quickly betrayed by most of the leaders of the component central labour organizations who struggled to recover the independence of their separate bodies after the strike.

According to Eskor Toyo, there were two main causes of the labour leaders' consistent resistance (as distinct from the junior cadres and ordinary members of the labour unions) to efforts towards labour unity. The first was what he called ‘opportunistic perfidy’, and the other ‘sheer ignorance'. He went on:

> The labour malefactors ... know all about the sources and disposal of the finances of their organisations. These elements are anxious to impress some circles outside Nigeria that the trade union front in Nigeria is permanently divided (by themselves); that the other faction is being heavily financed by its mentor; that nothing on earth can be as necessary as the preservation and expansion (of the separate central labour organisations). The war of empires and the anti-unity arguments ... are only the camouflages of perfidious and callous empire builders . ... The second reason for the opposition of certain elements ... to the reality of Nigerian trade unions is sheer ignorance — mistaken leftism by those who have read little of Marx or Lenin,

who know nothing at all about the basic sciences on which Marxist or Leninist reasoning is based but who think they are great Marxists indeed. These men think that workers can be carried for revolutionary action only on the day when practically every worker has become a Marxist.[21]

By the time the army assumed power in January 1966, the labour movement had lost the unity of 1963-64 and was again divided rigidly into five or more central labour organizations; the labour bureaucrats themselves had become miserably alienated and discredited, while the state of the socialist movement was no better. Under these conditions, Nigerian workers could hardly be expected to intervene or play any class role in the events leading up to the Civil War (1966-70). Today, more than nine years after the end of the Civil War and in the face of contradictions within the bourgeois camp and the miserable conditions of the people, the socialist movement is as divided as ever. But let us consider the concrete history of the Nigerian socialist movement under the military regime, for this is the immediate key to its current tragedy.

The Nigerian Socialist Movement During the Military Regime (1966-79)

It must not be thought that the Nigerian working masses did not struggle against their alienation from the affairs of their movement by the labour and socialist leaders. They did wage struggles — but they lost! The workers struggled unsuccessfully on several occasions against the dissolution of the Joint Action Committee which had been formed by the central labour organisations to direct the 1964 workers' agitation; they attempted, again unsuccessfully, to throw out the corrupt leaders of the ‘left-wing’ central labour organizations; some workers also struggled against the opportunistic leadership of the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party — and, in fact, as a result of this, a rival workers party, the Nigerian Labour Party (N.L.P.), was formed in 1964. But the new party quickly degenerated under the weight of the same disease — opportunism and corruption — which had led to its creation.

Why did the workers fail in these struggles? In the first place, the labour movement was heavily bureaucratized. Since the workers were dispersed and, any case, since most of them were tied down with the problems of daily physical survival, the affairs of the movement almost became the affairs of the leaders alone. Moreover the movement was so constituted and structured that the summoning of meetings, conferences and conventions and even the selection of delegates, were the responsibility of the same corrupt leaders. In the second place, the leaders freely and shamelessly used the funds, resources and privileges

of the movement to buy support for themselves, thereby entrenching themselves. This was the situation when the army came to power in January 1966.

The first political act of the military regime was to decree politics and political parties out of existence. One would have expected a revolutionary party, whose legal existence under a neocolonial regime was an exceptional (and therefore a temporary) situation, to respond to this decree by going underground. This did not take place, nor could it have taken place: a political party with no mass base and whose leadership was bitterly divided over the issues could not possibly pretend to go underground — a process where absolute secrecy, discipline, courage and sacrifice are demanded. Of course, a group of leaders secretly planning how to continue looting the movement's funds could deceive themselves into believing that they were holding an underground party meeting!

The impact of the decree on the socialist parties was total: the parties simply disappeared. Henceforth the question before each leader was how to grab and appropriate as much of the parties' property as possible for himself. Thuggery, theft, blackmail and falsifications were freely used as means. In these battles, it would appear that the labour leaders in the party leadership had an initial advantage. Whereas the labour leaders still had an open and legal platform — the trade unions — on which to operate and with which to disguise their activities, the intellectual socialist leaders had no such platform (at least not immediately), and were therefore much more open to dangers of being accused of violating the provisions of the anti-politics decree. The labour leaders fully exploited this situation.

What was the immediate attitude of the labour and socialist movements towards the military regime? Like many other pressure and opposition groups and organizations in the country, the socialist and labour leaders generally welcomed the military regime. But it was only a general welcome — the type that was extended to the new regime even by those who had benefited under the old political dispensation and hoped to benefit equally under the new. Although rank-and-file workers — like many other ordinary Nigerians — were relieved to see the corrupt, tyrannical and insensitive politicians go, and expected their conditions to be improved under the new regime, their leaders had neither the orientation, the will, nor the capacity to translate this wish — this realizable wish — into action. This is not strange, considering the miserable state of the labour movement on the eve of military

intervention. Robin Cohen described this pathetic failure of the labour leadership to influence the military regime:

> For the unions this was a golden opportunity gone to waste. The Ironsi government was a desperate improvisation, a child of circumstance, whose power rested on sufficiently shaky foundations for the workers, had they acted quickly under a united leadership, to gain some kind of voice in the decision-making process. As one might expect from the tortuous history of the labour movement, the union leadership was incapable of producing any initiative, while conscious of the possibilities of cooperation with the military authorities, the union centres made no sustained common programme. In the event, Ironsi fell back not on the support of the unions, but on a power base that would have been more familiar to his civilian predecessors, his fellow Ibos in the civil service and officer corps.[22]

It is, therefore, not surprising that, when the national crisis[23] erupted a few months later, the labour movement was unable to intervene other than by issuing statements pleading for peace and unity. A further blow fell on the movement when the crisis developed into secession and civil war in 1967. The movement simply split into two not only geographically, but also ideologically — each component upholding and supporting the particular military regime under which it found itself.

As soon as the Nigerian crisis developed into an open war, a new form of opportunism emerged in the labour movement.[24] Whereas under the previous civilian regime, the labour and socialist leaders had competed with one another for access to the movement's funds, materials and privileges, under the military regime they competed to assist the federal military regime in its war efforts. Several leaders from both the right and the left took part in this new race.

The Federal Military Government was badly in need of industrial peace, domestic political support and foreign military, economic and diplomatic assistance; and it was ready to grant privileges and give facilities to anybody who would assist in providing these. The right-wing labour leaders responded to the government's economic needs by swinging ‘their ideological pronouncements solidly behind the Federal Government's line even to the point of pronouncing a no-strike policy for the duration of the War.’[25] The left-wing leaders adopted a slight different ground and offered their assistance to the military regime on the political and diplomatic fronts. In this they were joined the socialist intellectuals who were only too happy to seize the opportunity the government's needs to come out of their forced holiday from political activities. Organizations

were formed to campaign and mobilize support for the government's war efforts; delegations were led to the socialist countries where they presented their credentials as Marxist-Leninists fighting against imperialist attempts to dismember their country.

It must not be assumed (and, of course, history cannot be deceived) that the national and international support which these leaders helped to gain for the government was a reflection of their authority, popularity or credibility. These leaders merely exploited the public sentiment which had been moulded by the slogan of One Nigeria. The immediate consequence of this new role of the leaders was their further entrenchment in the leadership of the movement. Internal struggles, if any, were confined as-before to the circles of the leadership, and as always centred round the control of funds.

The war ended and One Nigeria was achieved. But the leadership of the labour movement emerged from the War as thoroughly divided, and as completely alienated from the rank-and-file as ever. With the end of the War, the honeymoon which the leaders had enjoyed with the state also ended. They were duly reminded that the state of emergency and the ban on political activities were still in force — and as if to drive home this fact, some of these leaders were thrown into detention shortly afterwards, for making statements 'prejudicial to the interests of the state'. Of course, no finger was raised by the workers against the detention of their ‘leaders'!

Factors Preventing the Emergence of an Integrated Revolutionary Movement

Between the end of the Civil War in January 1970 and the return of open political activities in September 1978, several attempts were made to forge *national*, *mass-based* and *revolutionary* (as opposed to *localized*, *esoteric* and *academic*) socialist organizations in the country. That these various attempts resulted in failure was due to a number of historical, economic, political and ideological causes which we shall now attempt to enumerate.

1) The Influence of the Past on the Present

The main approach which socialists and Marxists have repeatedly adopted over the past eight years to forge a socialist united front in the country has been the summoning of meetings or conferences which have always been dominated by intellectuals, students and labour bureaucrats. Whenever any such meeting or conference included the older socialists (and more often than not they were included), they dominated and directed it — even when initiative for the meeting did not come from them, and the actual preparation for the meeting was not done by them! The

result? The old divisions, antagonisms and prejudices (most of them now completely exhausted and baseless, or at least irrelevant) quickly intervened and doomed the conference.[26] Nothing significant has ever been achieved by such a conference. More often than not a sterile and boring statement of ‘commitment to socialism and liberation of the Nigerian masses from imperialism and neocolonialism' would be issued —a kind of statement that, in Nigeria today, merely reminds the people of the impotence of the socialist movement, rather than its determination.

On other occasions, the conference might succeed, not in adopting concrete and realistic programmes for workers' organization, education and struggle (and a method of testing every participating socialist or socialist group by these programmes), but in setting up a bureaucracy — whose initial character, namely, its sheer size and composition, always predicted its immediate death; and it always died, even before the first meeting. A new socialist conference would then be arranged and the same process would be re-enacted. This catalogue of failures would, of course, not compel Nigerian Marxists and socialists to re-examine their method. No; the struggle must continue in the direction that has been chosen and ordained as 'correct'.

2) The Appearance of a New Generation Without Heritage or Concrete Experience

The military regime and the Nigerian crisis had a certain effect which, in a historical (though limited) sense, can be regarded as positive: the development of a new generation of radicalized Nigerians — mostly young intellectuals and students. In the early years of the crisis this radicalism was rooted, and found expression, in the military-led campaign, first against corrupt civilians, and later against 'imperialist intrigues to dismember Nigeria'. Later on, as a result of further evolution of the military regime and the economy, this radicalism became more and more differentiated; on certain levels it acquired the voice of anti-militarism and anti-capitalism.

But this is only one side of the story. It is also true that this new generation of radicals came into existence, and initially developed, under a set of historical conditions which together helped to shape them into what they are today.

Firstly, the young radicals came into existence when the old leadership of the socialist and labour movements had been totally discredited, and a new one had not been created. They could not take over the leadership of the movement because, on the one hand, the old leadership was firmly entrenched, and on the other hand, most of them had little or no contact with the labour socialist movements. Nor could the

young radicals accept or work under the leadership of the older socialist and labour leaders, for that carried, and still carries, the danger of the new inheriting the reputation of the old. *Hence the new radicals developed mainly outside the working-class movement.*

Secondly, these new radicals came into existence and developed during the state of emergency and the ban on political activities. Hence, their radicalism did not acquire serious and continuous organizational forms — except when these forms were created specifically for the immediate (and sole) aim of demonstrating support for the regime. The result was the development of a generation of militants with strange ideas and illusions about what socialism and revolution were all about — ideas and illusions which could only be tempered and corrected by concrete organizational practice, rooted in the working population.

The new generation of militants therefore developed under a double disadvantage. On the one hand, there was a near-complete absence of heritage (i.e. of continuity from the past to the present), and on the other hand, there was an absence of concrete practical experience. Under these conditions, they could not *easily* have displaced the old leadership and provided a new one for the socialist movement.

Of course, the new generation recognized its disability, and often struggled to overcome it. Since the older generation had experience and roots in society, they were indispensable in any attempt to forge a national revolutionary organization. On the other hand, since these same old leaders were discredited, there was a danger in serving under them. Therefore, they should be invited to meetings with the hope of confronting them with a 'revolutionary' programme which only the new activists could execute. But as we noted earlier, the old leaders always dominated and doomed such meetings and the struggle continues.

3) Political Power and Ideological Hegemony of the State

As we said above, the military regime imposed a rigid ban on political activities as soon as it came to power in 1966. It was precisely under this condition that a new 'nationalism' — the defence of the country's unity and territorial integrity developed. In the absence of independent political organizations, the state became the vanguard of the people. A genuinely revolutionary organization, even when officially banned, could still have provided either the vanguard of genuine nationalism or the vanguard of struggle against false nationalism. But the vanguard did not exist, and had in fact ceased to exist even before the military came to power; the military merely formalized a de facto situation by imposing a ban.

Side by side with the state's ideological hegemony was the menace of the effective use of the state's political and military power. Strikes were banned, and offenders were threatened with detention under emergency regulations. Of course, it was left to the state and its bureaucracy to determine what constituted a strike or a strike situation: a peaceful meeting could be one, so even could a public statement. Under these admittedly difficult conditions, and in the absence of a radical programme to confront them, revolutionary consciousness (rooted in revolutionary practice) could not have developed, nor could the state's ideological hegemony be broken. How could a national revolution organization be forged under such conditions?

4) The Effect of the New National Prosperity

Towards the end of the War, a new prosperity — the oil boom - descended on the country. The state's revenues and, foreign, exchange earnings doubled and doubled again; fantastic projects were initiated and hundreds of contracts went out to businessmen; everybody became, or hoped to become, an importer or distributor of consumer goods flowing into the country from Euro-American industries. This phenomenon had a devastating effect on the working class and those commonly referred to as the petty bourgeoisie. There was simply no sustained class solidarity any more, nor was there any need for it since everybody hoped to escape from the slavery of wage labour into the freedom of business life.

Who was to confront this situation? On the one hand, we had the socialist and labour leaders who had been thoroughly discredited and divided and who were, in any case, in any case, in the same mad race to accumulate wealth. On the other hand, there were socialist intellectuals and students who, though not in the race (except possibly in their dreams), had neither the necessary links with the working class nor the capacity and will to establish them. The result was an effective penetration of bourgeois ideology — the ideology of free enterprise — into the working population. Only an equally effective revolutionary programme of education and mobilization could confront this phenomenon. But this programme was lacking.

5) The Question of Strategy

Since this question will be dealt with more fully in the chapters that follow, we shall merely present it very briefly here.

The question 'Which way to socialist revolution?' has been asked at every gathering of socialists — at least since the present writer's active and conscious involvement in socialist struggles in Nigeria. It has acquired a particularly urgent tone in the last few years, and has caused many painful, and sometimes violent, splits within socialist grouping. It is

over this question that some very serious revolutionary (though localized) socialist organizations — which the present writer believes had the potentiality of developing into revolutionary vanguards — have disintegrated. But as many times as the question was posed; as often did it fail to produce a unanimous answer; and the more urgent the tone of the question, the more elusive the answer became.

An answer could not be found, precisely because it was the wrong question to ask. For a revolutionary organization, the ability to formulate a strategy for revolution depends not only on intellectual knowledge of objective situations in the country, but also on the con*crete experience* of the organization. In a situation where the only revolutionary experience is, at best, localized, primative and sporadic, any excessive (that is, immodest) claim to intellectual power of articulation is a self-delusion. In our view, for a group of genuine revolutionary socialists coming together to forge an organization, the correct question to ask is: 'What are the irreducible conditions for any revolutionary strategy at all'? When *this* question is asked, the organization will begin to see the need for workers' education, newspapers and journals, insertion into mass organizations, the creation of material and structural conditions for continuous existence and development, etc. It is partly on the basis of these elementary preparations and the experience gained from them that the question of revolutionary strategy will be correctly posed and correctly answered.

The set of problems enumerated above characterizes — as we have said earlier — the *organizational* experience of the Nigerian socialist movement from the end of the Civil War to September 1978 when open political activities were once again allowed in the country. It was indeed a terrible experience. These problems also give an indication of the political and ideological weakness of the movement. With the movement lying heavily crushed under these problems, and with no capacity even to pose the proper questions of how to transcend them, the movement's influence on the daily lives and activities of the people or on national political questions could not but be marginal.

Of course, committed (and one could say, mature) revolutionary socialists have always existed and have been continuously reproduced in the country since the 1940s. These committed men and women have always tried — both as groups and as individuals — to intervene in national political and social questions. But, as we have noted, they have always dissipated their energies in asking and trying to answer the wrong questions. Their intervention in the national crisis has always naively anticipated the collapse of the social and political order, or at least a major concession from it. Whenever this anticipation was lacking, the

revolutionaries would sit back and refuse to intervene in what was usually dismissed as petty bourgeois agitation.

The result? When the state failed to collapse or even make any concession to popular demands — which was always the case — the revolutionaries usually declared the struggle lost; no attempt would be made to draw lessons from the failure or ensure an elementary continuity of some organizational forms of the struggle — for the purpose of preparing for future struggles.

The Socialist Movement and the Return to Civilian Rule

In September 1978, the 13-year ban on political activities was officially lifted; but long before this date, political organizations had started to take shape underground in cynical anticipation of the military's faithfulness to its pledge to return the country to civilian rule in 1979.

The response of Nigerian socialists to this anticipated return were as varied as the movement itself was atomized. But their aggregate was simply pathetic. In the space of a few weeks, they demonstrated first to themselves and later to the country and the world at large, that they constituted no threat whatsoever to the present social order, either in their reality or in the direction this reality was moving. In the space of a few weeks the theoretical degeneracy, confusion, infantilism and opportunism — tendencies which hitherto had been partially concealed under the conditions of the state of emergency — became thoroughly exposed for the world to see.

Let us briefly sketch the main responses.

1) Some 'realistic' socialists claimed that the socialist movement was too weak materially, and that, in any case, the consciousness of the masses was too low, for socialists to contemplate forming a separate political party ‘to fight the bourgeoisie'. But since socialists must nevertheless take part in the ‘struggle', they should infiltrate the bourgeois parties with the hope of taking them over from within. Such captured parties would then be reformed and used as instruments for socialist revolution! These 'realistic' socialists would not say which particular parties should be infiltrated and whether this infiltration should be done as a group or as individuals. Of course, none of them could contemplate any other form of working with the bourgeoisie.

2) There was another group of socialists — slightly to the left of the group mentioned above - who believed that two of the five officially recognized political parties should be so infiltrated since, according to them, these

parties were 'near-socialist'. Again, nothing could be said about the form of infiltration.

3) There was a third group of socialists who believed that the two parties mentioned in (2) above were, in fact, socialist (or at least, mass-oriented) and should therefore be joined by socialists. The question of which of the two parties was more socialist was left to individual socialists to decide.

4) There was a group of 'experienced and authoritative' socialists who maintained — or pontificated — that the Nigerian working class was too backward for anyone to envisage forming an exclusively workers' party. The correct thing to do was for socialists to join hands with 'liberals, democrats, nationalists, patriots and so on' to form a 'people's party'. This group believed that any workers' party formed at this stage of the revolution — which they characterized as the stage of national democratic revolution — would necessarily become dictatorial (as a result of the backwardness of the workers) and might lead to fascism if it came to power. These 'authoritative' Marxists failed to say categorically whether a workers' party must put before itself the question of capturing state power through the 1979 electoral processes. In any case this group later 'joined hands' and formed one of the two parties mentioned in (2) and (3) above, without even saying whether they hoped to transform this party into a socialist party or break away and form a socialist party when they felt strong enough or when the workers had become more advanced.

5) There was a group of socialists who argued that an open socialist party must be formed now by all means. This group can, in fact, be divided into two sub-groups. There were two main differences between them: a) whereas one sub-group maintained that such a party must compete with the bourgeoisie in the 1979 general elections, the other left the option of competition or non-competition open; b) whereas the first sub-group argued that such a party should be a mass party, the other maintained that it must be Marxist-Leninist. But the two sub-groups were both agreed that the conditions were ripe for such a party, that the masses were waiting for it and that the whole country would laugh at socialists if they failed to seize the opportunity offered by the government. The two sides to this debate simply refused to consider the fact that the same government which had given the signal for the formation of political parties also prescribed the conditions for existence of such parties.[27]

6) There was also a group of socialists who were convinced that the time was not ripe for the formation of any socialist party in the country. As to what should be done, this group did not offer any concrete suggestion.

7) There was, finally, a group of socialists who, like the group in (6), believed that the time was not ripe for the formation of a socialist party;

but unlike that group they offered concrete suggestions as to what should be done: serious and active socialist groups in the country should come together and form a *centre* and this centre should work towards the formation of a workers' vanguard party when the material, ideological and political conditions for its existence had been created through revolutionary practice. This group was even prepared — to satisfy those who wanted the name 'party' — to give the centre the name 'party'. But they insisted that it must be composed and structured according to the principles of Marxism-Leninism, and must remain unannounced until it became strong and authentic enough.

These were the various responses which Nigerian socialists gave to the anticipated return to open political activities. But what actually happened when the ban was finally lifted? A number of open socialist parties came into existence, but they quickly disappeared[28] when they were decreed out of existence for failure to satisfy the conditions for existence. Several leaders of these parties later found their ways into the legal bourgeois parties — a step that more 'realistic' socialists had earlier taken. They bowed to reality, offering their supporters various types of rationalization. Other leaders simply disappeared with the proscription of their parties. The lesson of this tragedy is a simple one: that the Nigerian socialist movement (or even the idea of it) has not transcended its historical problems, and therefore, has not created the conditions for the resurgence of organized socialist political practice in Nigeria.

The Military Regime and the Unification of the Labour Movement

When the last military regime (1975-79) came to power, it made it clear that its mission was to enforce discipline in the general population — including the workers and their organizations. It did not require much effort on the part of the regime to come to the conclusion that a necessary condition for the realisation of this aim was the unification of the Labour movement. In this exercise the regime effectively exploited the disunity within the movement, the notoriety of the labour leadership for its corruption, and a series of petitions sent by rival labour leaders asking the regime to intervene in the labour movement — of course on the side of the petitioner.

The unions were thus unified by decree. More than 1,000 trade unions were reduced to 31 by the merger of unions belonging to the same industry; finally, the new labour organization was heavily bureaucratized and its officials placed on salaries on a par with, or even higher than, the salaries of the most senior government officials. The exercise was a bureaucratic one: the discredited union officials met and were constituted into electoral colleges; the electoral colleges elected the new labour

central's leaders; finally the leaders, in conjunction with government representatives, elected the paid full-time union administrators. It is therefore not surprising that neither the alienation of the labour leadership nor their bad reputation, let alone the political impotence of the labour movement — as a *class* organization — has been removed by the state's bureaucratic intervention.

The problems of the movement, therefore, still remain. We only need remark that the state unification of the Nigerian trade unions — just like its state capitalist nationalization of certain industries — can become a lever for the promotion of socialist struggles; but to make use of such an opening, or even to recognise it, depends largely on the existence of an authentic movement of working people.

Several Socialists and Marxists have criticized the government for its intervention — which was considered a violation of the democratic rights of workers to evolve freely their own organizations, elect their leaders, and unite or refuse to unite — all this at the workers' pace.

We agree with the charge of anti-democratic practice brought against the state, but we wish to offer the following comments;

1) It must be remembered that state intervention was not opposed either by the leaders or the rank-and-file. This opposition failed to come for various reasons. The leaders were eager to occupy the high positions, salaries and privileges attached to the new labour bureaucracy; and on the other hand, the whole exercise of unification was carried out behind the backs of rank-and-file workers, and in any case, they were too atomized organizationally to present any credible opposition.

2) No bourgeois government is under any obligation to restructure the trade union movement exactly in the way labour leaders want. The Nigerian Government readily, and indeed happily, accepted the various petitions addressed to it and unified the movement — not, however, to please even the petitioners, but rather in accordance with the government's plan, which the Commissioner of Labour had clearly stated on several occasions.

It is again necessary to add that some marginal but revolutionary influences other than those sketched here might have been present, in the movement during the period of unification. We have been concerned mainly with the dominant influences precisely in order to reveal to these marginalized elements what they have to do to become dominant.

References

1. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*.

2. K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*.
3. Andre Gorz, *Socialism and Revolution*, (Allen Lane, London, 1975) pp.55-6.
4. For a greater appreciation of the political evolution of the working-class movement in Nigeria, see Robin Cohen, *Labour and Politics in Nigeria*, (Heinemann, London, 1974); Wogu Ananaba, *The Trade Union Movement in Nigeria*, (Ethiope Publishing House, Benin City, Nigeria, 1969); Eskor Toyo, *The Working Class and the Nigerian Crisis*, (Sketch Publishing Co. Ltd., Ibadan, Nigeria); J.S. Coleman, and C.G. Rosberg, *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa*, (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1966, pp.340-81.
5. Robin Cohen, op. cit., p.72.
6. Among these early militant working-class leaders, we may mention Michael Imoudu, who today remains a committed fighter for workers' emancipation.
7. Robin Cohen, op. cit., pp.73-74.
8. We agree with Andre Gorz that 'a genuinely revolutionary organization can be built only after the need to organize had been experienced by people engaged in mass struggles.' Andre Gorz, op. cit., p.65.
9. Many writers, labour leaders (living and dead) and socialists have given accounts of this episode. See, for instance, R. Cohen, op. cit., p.89.
10. Wogu Ananaba, op. cit., pp.259-317.
11. The Nigerian Youth Congress (N.Y.C.) was a militantly anti-colonial movement which was formed on the eve of independence. The Congress drew its initial membership from the ranks of militants who had been purged from nationalist parties. Most of these militants belonged to the Zikist Movement (the youth wing of one of the nationalist parties), an organization through which an anti-colonial alliance between labour and politics was effected.
12. It might be more correct to say that the existing contradictions within the labour and socialist movement were carried over into the reconsti-tuted socialist movement.
13. Bab Oluwide, *Dapo Fatogun School of Falsification*, (Ororo Publications, Ibadan, Nigeria, 1978), pp.13-14.
14. It is instructive to compare this analysis with what some of the combatants saw as the cause of the crisis 15 years later: 'Then came the first crisis in the party which arose from causes that were minimally fundamental but largely personal and subjective. All the Marxist-Leninists in the party broke into two. Ultra-leftists took

charge of one half and party-line discipline took charge of the other. The first half backed out of the party (some of them expelled) and the *disciplined* half (emphasis ours) decided to sort its problems out and keep the party flags flying.' *New Horizon*, (A Nigerian Socialist Monthly Journal), Vol. 3, No. 4, June/August 1978. Eskor Toyo and his group were the 'ultra-leftists' of New Horizon, whereas the 'disciplined half' was the group criticized above by Eskor. As if in anticipation of *New Horizon*, Eskor Toyo had written two and a half years earlier: 'Only in the socialist movement in Nigeria are we being called upon to behave like harlots whose bed is free to all callers, no matter their past or present, who come along with a silly seductive smile.'

15. We offer this thesis almost in total defiance of the possible impact of the Cuban Revolution on the world revolutionary movement. But it would appear that the impact was quickly absorbed and lost.
16. For descriptions of this convergence and the actual strike, see R. Cohen, op. cit., p.64 and Wogu Ananaba, op. cit., pp.228-52.
17. Ibid., p.237.
18. R. Cohen, op. cit. p.165.
19. Ibid., p.165.
20. Ibid., p.166.
21. Eskor Toyo, op. cit., pp.76-77.
22. Robin Cohen, op. cit., p.218.
23. Several accounts of the Nigerian crisis (including the Civil War) between 1966 and 1970 have been written. We may refer to the following: R. Cohen, ibid., pp.216-239; F. Forsyth, *The Making of an African Legend*, (Penguin, 1977); N.U. Akpan, *The Struggle for Secession*, (Frank Cass, London, 1971).
24. In socialist political circles, opportunism is defined generally as sacrificing the overall interests of the movement for the interests of a section of it (this section may just be one person) or sacrificing or endangering the long-term interests of the socialist revolution for temporary and questionable gains (in most cases, of a section of the movement). Opportunism can be manifested in many forms and can be rooted in various historical, ideological, economic and political conditions.
25. Robin Cohen, op. cit., p.244.
26. We are definitely not falling into a common metaphysical (i.e. undialectical) error of dividing Nigerian socialists (like Nigerians in general) into old and young. What we mean here is that the problems which we had earlier identified always succeeded in

dominating and frustrating these meetings, and that the older socialists were the dominant carriers and expressions of these problems.

27. Among the 'conditions of existence' which a party must satisfy (accord-ing to the Electoral Decree) are the following: a) that every party must operate fully staffed and equipped party offices in at least 13 out of the 19 states in the country; b) that the National Executive Committee of every party must 'reflect the national character of the country'; c) that such a party must show 'evidence of having grass-root support' (which means opening up offices in the rural areas), etc. It is clear that a necessary condition for satisfying these conditions was the possession of huge sums of money. No socialist grouping in the country could boast of this.

28. They disappeared in reality; they did not go underground for the conditions for underground existence were simply not there.

6. The Ambiguity of Student Radicalism

The question of the role that students play in society, or more specifically, their role in social reproduction, has often been distorted by an insistence that the various aspects of social reproduction remain quite separate. One writer has defined 'social reproduction' as 'the combined mechanisms that ensure the re-creation of the physical, social, political and ideological conditions for the functioning of a given society'. It is quite possible to break down this definition, that is, separate it into definitions of economic reproduction, political reproduction, ideological reproduction, and so on. This method is useful to the extent that it allows us to isolate the various aspects of social reproduction in order to determine their links and relative weights in a given situation or a given historical period.

It is nevertheless an atomized method. That it is usually adopted by our academics and politicians is not altogether inexplicable. We all know that there is an immense division of labour in social reproduction — party necessary and partly unnecessary. Our academics and politicians merely reflect this division and perpetuate it in their views, sometimes unconsciously (that is uncritically) and sometimes for definite conscious reasons. But atomization is both useless and harmful. It is useless because it does not allow us to see clearly how the various social activities are linked together and how they mutually reinforce their conditions of performance; neither does it allow us to see how the movement from one function to the other by the same human agency is effected.

We all know that in a given society the people will continue to perform their economic functions so long — and only so long — as the political and ideological conditions ensure social compliance. As soon as the existing political and ideological conditions are sufficiently undermined, the abstract economism of our academics and politicians collapses. For instance, in January 1979 at the height of the Iranian Revolution, the instructions of the head of the Iranian Oil Corporation were as worthless as a scrap of paper precisely because the worker — the 'economic man' — had suddenly become a 'political man'. But the same man had believed a few months earlier that he was part of a process of pumping oil from the soil for ever. This incident vividly establishes the connection between politics, ideology, and economy.

Again, we know that the description of a man by his profession (e.g. teacher, plumber, farmer, student, politician, etc.) is at best a statement of first approximation. A plumber who helps his child with his homework is doing the work of a teacher; if he has a farm on which he works, he is a farmer; if he debates politics at night, he is a politician, and so on. His

description as a plumber is simply a question of his dominant (but not exclusive) role, and the stamp put on him by the needs of the division of labour. Similarly a motor mechanic who presides over a church after work is both a mechanic and a priest. If there are unions for the two professions, he will belong to both; and if the two professions are to be investigated, his evidence will be important in both.

Finally, we are aware that intellectuals are identified socially by their ideological role. But an intellectual or student who engages in private business is as much a businessman as he is an intellectual — thus breaking the false boundary between economy and ideology. For example, in the 1972-73 academic session, the president of the Lagos University Students Union was also the president of Motor Owners and Drivers Union. Hence the abstraction called 'intellectual' is only approximate, if not entirely false. Indeed, as Antonio Gramsci said, though intellectuals may exist, non-intellectuals certainly do not exist, since every human labour involves some mental exercise.

Atomized definitions of social reproduction then, have little or no use. As for the harmfulness, atomization allows the academics and politicians to say to students: 'Your job is to read and pass examinations. You have no business interfering in how you and your parents are governed. You have no business talking about corruption and public theft, or criticizing the courses and programmes imposed on you or debating politics.' It allows them to say to the mathematician: 'Your business is to teach mathematics; you have no business discussing the lives of those you teach; you certainly have no business delivering a lecture which a professor of political science is trained to give.' It also allows them to say to the organizer: 'Your job is to organize cultural dances and displays; you certainly have no business presiding over a lecture, or discussing the larger social existence of the dancers'. These are all practical implications of atomization. We should repudiate it. In our discussion of the place and role of students, we must adopt a total view of their role in social reproduction.

In Nigeria, as well as in most other countries, the term 'student' normally refers to people engaged in formal academic courses. It does not. For the purpose of this chapter include those engaged in various practical apprentice-ships or training — and only for this purpose — we shall adopt the same convention. Therefore when we use the term 'students' the limited sense in which we use it should always be borne in mind.

Students are formally divorced from material production — even though they do manual work during vacations, because this practical

integration of roles is not given theoretical recognition. But this formal divorce ends on the economic plane. All attempts to extend it to ideological and political planes have always ended in complete failure and will continue to do so, for various reasons.

1) Students are linked to the larger society by family, marriage, friendship, religion, ethnicity, culture and history generally; and they cannot pretend to be indifferent to the fate of this society. When the rulers inflicted a civil war Nigeria, students suffered along with the larger society.

2) Students are trained to take up positions in the social organization of labour. The conditions of this imminent integration into the larger society riot but affect students' consciousness, negatively or positively. Since there is no passive consciousness, in other words, since every consciousness strives to express itself in human action, students are often compelled to anticipate their imminent integration by political and ideological actions.

3) Students are maintained in their education by the larger society either collectively, individually, or both. They cannot therefore be expected to be indifferent to social developments and policies which, by increasing the economic and social burdens of the larger society, directly threaten to disturb or terminate their education.

4) By virtue of their training, students have access to information and ideas. They can therefore articulate, rightly or wrongly, the various state policies, and measure rhetoric against reality. They can also compare their society with other societies with which they have come in contact through information and ideas. The result is critical consciousness; and as indicated above, consciousness always struggles to express itself in action.

We can therefore conclude that, though students are formally divorced from material production, they cannot be divorced from ideological and political struggles. Precisely because ideology and politics have a dialectical influence on material production, students can be said to have one foot in material production and one foot outside it. This ambivalent location in social reproduction in general lies at the root of the limitations of the students' role; and it is at the same time the objective cause of the ambiguity of this role.

So much for students in general. Let us now deal with Nigerian students in particular. We shall first briefly discuss students' roles during the colonial and immediate post-colonial civilian periods. We shall then discuss students' roles during the military era — but within the context of their limitations. In this way their ambiguity can be revealed more vividly.

In order not to be abstract, we shall base our analysis on at least 22 student protests in 1944 and between 1959 and 1979. These are:

(I) The King's College strike of 1944;

(2) The protest against the Western Regional Housing Bill (May 1959);

(3) The protest against the Eastern Regional Pension Bill (1959);

(4) The protest against Harold Macmillan over his government's attitude to Africans' conditions in Southern Africa;

(5) The protest over the Sharpeville shootings (1960);

(6) The protest against the French for testing atomic weapons in the Sahara;

(7) The protest against the proposed Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact (November „ 1960);

(8) The protest against the murder of Patrice Lumumba (February 1961);

(9) The protest against the American Peace Corps (October 1961);

(10) The protest against the Press Law;

(11) The protest against the proposed Preventive Detention Law (1963);

(12) The protest against the census manipulations of national population figures (1962-63);

(13) Various protests preceding and during the Civil War (1967-70);

(14) The protest over the murder of Adepeju (1971);

(15) The protest over the National Youth Service (1973);

(16) The protest over police disturbance of Adepeju's memorial processions (February 1974);

(17) The protest against Gowon's detention of critics (1974-75);

(18) The protest over promotions in the army (1975);

(19) The students' demonstration against the February 1976 attempted *coup d'état*, led by Colonel Dimka;

(20) The protest over school fees (1978);

(21) The protest over the Technical Education Programme (1978-79);

(22) The protest over University admissions (1979).

Most of these protests are important on account of their national and patriotic, rather than localized and sectional character. Students could also be said to have engaged in most of these particular protests more spontaneously and consciously than in several others. They are also representative of the general trends in student militancy during three successive stages of our national political history: the colonial, post-colonial civilian, and military stages. Of course, students also engaged in numerous trivial and elitist protests during these periods. Although these often gave students' militancy an ambiguous character, it nevertheless remains true that, during the first two periods under consideration, our students tried — consciously and unconsciously — to integrate their elitism with genuine nationalism and patriotism.

The first six protests took place during the colonial period; the next six during the post-colonial civilian period and the last ten during the military era. We shall consider them in these three groupings.

Protests During the Colonial Regime

The colonial administration initiated a programme of higher education for two main reasons: first, to train middle-level manpower which would serve the increasing needs of the colonial economy and administration; and secondly in response to nationalist agitation for higher education. The first generation of Nigerian higher education students (from Kings College, Lagos, Yaba Higher College and University College, Ibadan) were therefore both *nationalistic* and *elitist*.

Let us first consider these two tendencies in turn, and then their inter-relationship. The students' nationalism sprang from their opposition to the inferior recognition accorded them both in school and on graduation in relation to their European counterparts with the same qualifications. The students increasingly realized that the solution to this inferior treatment was an end to colonial rule. This opposition to colonial rule immediately linked the students politically to the nationalism of the larger society. This is not to say that Nigerian students opposed colonialism purely for selfish reasons, which would be untrue, but to point out that their opposition initially sprang from their own position in society. This opposition could, and often did, acquire additional consciousness with time. For instance, the King's College strike of 1944 was in protest against 'bad food and unhealthy accommodation'. The colonial administration responded to this strike with arrests, trials and forcible conscription into the army. This immediately gave the protest a nationalistic character by bringing in the political parties, workers and other nationalists. One writer has recorded that this particular crisis accelerated the formation of a nationalist political party.[1]

In May 1959 the students of the then University College, Ibadan, staged a protest against the housing allowances approved by the government of Western Region for its Premier and other members of the government. In particular, they denounced the £800 allowance for the premier. The students' protest letter reads in part:

> It would be realized that fantastic salaries as are being paid to Nigerian politicians have helped to produce a type of professional politician who are more interested in the pay than in the public service. ... Let us appeal to the Premier not to continue to exploit the indifference with which the people of the West treat all governmental activities in this process of establishing a country where all the state money is spent to enrich the purses of politicians.[2]

This is the voice of Nigerian students 20 years ago. The premier, his government and other political appointees responded very sharply and harshly. One particular party stalwart commented:

> Nigeria is not the first country to have the experience of undergraduates who seek to run Governments of their respective countries from their University Campus.... Therefore, Nigerian students in the University College, Ibadan, and in other institutions, who in their enthusiasm and ignorance endeavour to apply to our public affairs data copied from, textbooks are only following a tradition.[3]

This was the voice of a Nigerian politician 20 years ago. Has he changed?

Needless to say, the housing allowance bill was passed. Not long after this event, the students protested 'against clauses in the Eastern Region Legislative Houses Bill, which provided pensions for high political office-holders.[4] The protest was joined by some other social groups in the country; and the result was the withdrawal of the clauses. These two protests and their respective failure and success were significant in two major respects. In the first place, they show the relative intolerance, insensitivity and arrogance often exhibited by the early political leaders. Secondly, and more importantly, they show that victory in students' political protests depends heavily on mass participation. The lesson is crucial.

Before independence, the Nigerian students engaged three other politically significant protests of a Pan Africanist character; against Macmillan, the Sharpeville shooting and French atomic tests respectively. These protests stand to the credit of our colonial students. But the students were also elitist. Their elitism sprang from their relatively

privileged position vis-a-vis the colonized people as a whole. While in school, the students were exposed to privileges not hitherto enjoyed by the colonized people at large and which had their counterparts only in the circles of European colonizers. They were served meals in dining halls; their rooms were cleaned for them; they were waited upon by stewards, etc. On graduation, the students were immediately catapulted into the Senior Service. This privileged position was, of course, reflected in their consciousness and it exhibited itself as elitism.

The convergence of nationalism and elitism gave the students' political role an ambiguous character. Were the students struggling for freedom from colonial bondage in the interest of the people as a whole, or were they merely desirous of filling the positions hitherto occupied by the colonizers? We shall not give an answer, but merely propose that this duality is characteristic of several phenomena in nature and society, and that the ability to combine contradictory aims properly and effectively is a powerful motor for social change. We shall say more about this further on.

Protests During the First Post-Colonial Civilian Regime (1960-65)

Independence brought the nationalist parties to power and simultaneously expelled the colonizers from the overt (but not covert) political scene. Students still remained students; but their former allies in the political parties had now ascended the social ladder. The contradictions between students and political leaders, hitherto concealed under overall nationalism, became more and more visible. The students still complained — often violently — over bread and butter issues, and they still agitated for increased social recognition. But they also protested against state policies which they considered inimical to true independence and against the interest of the people.

In these protests their main allies were no longer the ruling politicians, but the workers. In other words, the location of students in the balance of social forces was shifted. Between 1960 and 1965 — in addition to protests over food and recognition — Nigerian students engaged in at least six protests of a political and national character. These, as we indicated above, were against the projected Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact (November 1960); against the murder of Patrice Lumumba (February 1961); against the American Peace Corps (October 1961); against the projected Press Law; against a proposed Preventive Detention Act (late 1963); and against the national census figures (1962-63).

The workers were physically involved in at least three of these protests. What were the results? The plan for an Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact was dropped**.** Lumumba could not be brought back from the dead

but the political significance of the protest was registered in Europe and America. The American Peace Corps was withdrawn — although not immediately. The proposed Preventive Detention plan was dropped. All these historic protests and partial victories stand to the glory of Nigerian students and workers; and they showed decisively that students could be a vital political force under specific conditions.

But in these patriotic protests the students often still fell under the ideological and political influence of the rulers. We may mention just one instance. A particular students' union protested loudly not against the national census figures as a whole, but in support of the stand taken by the government in the particular region where the institution was located. The students failed to understand that the common people had no interest whatsoever in population figures, that population figures were only important to the professional politicians who saw them as political levers for a greater share of the national booty. It should also be remembered that in those days political party branches were organized in colleges; and students often carried out purely partisan protests in support of particular parties — the effect, in large measure, of political influence.

Students' Roles During the Military Era: Their Strengths and Limitations

We now come to the core of this exposition. Why did all major protests, except those staged in support of the regime, result in failure? In particular, how was the regime able subsequently to issue a detention decree and a Press Law against which the students and workers had successfully agitated more than 15 years previously? Why was it possible to ban the National Union of Nigerian Students (N.U.N.S.)? The answers to these questions are located in the present objective and subjective limitations of students' protests — limitations which, we hasten to add, can be progressively negated.

Let us list some of these limitations and then illustrate them by means of actual examples:

(I) The socio-economic position or role of the students in social production processes;

(2) The state factor, especially the various government institutions and policies, ideologies, etc.;

(3) Students' illusions as to their aims and objectives and ways to realize them;

(4) Students' illusions as to what they are: 'leaders of tomorrow';

(5) Students' elitism towards other social groups, and therefore their inability to integrate their specific interests with the interests of society at large —especially the underprivileged;

(6) False consciousness which manifests itself in uncritical comprehension and analysis of social and political developments (religion, ethnicity; etc.);

(7) Increasing class consciousness now exhibited by men of so called ‘timbre and calibre’, import-exporters and general contractors, and partisans of discipline, security, unity and stability;

(8) Internal organization, that is, questions of democracy, leadership, unity, etc within the students' movement.

What was the immediate impact of the military regime on students' consciousness? The collapse of the discredited civilian regime in 1966 and the ability of the military regime to present itself as standing above sectional interests and as representing the national interest, immediately placed an ideological block on students' consciousness. In that early stage they saw the military regime as one with which they shared identical national aspirations. This block was not removed even when the regime split politically and geographically in two: the students merely followed suite and also split into two — one group in Nigeria, the other in Biafra. The two ideological blocks later reunited. But this optical illusion which we have called an ideological block — has been undergoing a progressive transformation since the Adepeju crisis of 1971, except for a brief period in 1975 and 1976.

By 'ideological block' or 'optical illusion', we mean the inability to see any other possibility beyond what is given. Thus when the military came to power, it was immediately accepted as the only logical and rational solution to civilian maladministration. No other better solution could be seen. When a leader comes to power, he is immediately acclaimed as God-given, thus implying that God has suddenly withdrawn his recognition not only from his predecessor, but also from other possible leaders. In short, the optical illusion consists of elevating historical accidents to a status of absolute laws before which we must bow or stand condemned. The military deposed the corrupt civilian regime — yes; but it also produced an optical illusion. The students and almost all the vigorous forces in the country fell for this illusion, so that when the God-given leaders then imposed civil war on the country, a third force was lacking.

But to return to the main discussion. With the out-break of major civil and military disturbances in July 1966, the student movement — with the possible exception of a small fraction of it completely succumbed to the

ideological and political domination of the new rulers. Furthermore, it became increasingly polarized along the lines taken by the various factions of the military-civilian barons. By the time the Civil War broke out in July 1967, the polarization in the student movement had become complete. We had the pro-Nigeria faction and the pro-Biafra faction. Of course, the students were not completely free to choose their factions; their respective choices were to a large extent prescribed and imposed on them irrespective of their higher consciousness. As we have said earlier, students are tied to the larger society materially and emotionally: their fees are paid for by the society, they have families; they come from particular parts of the country, they grew up in specific cultural and religious conditions, and so on. These various ties confronted the students as an objective reality before which they were forced to bow. *But it is equally true that, given a different political and ideological consciousness, the students could have confronted this 'objective reality' differently.*

What happened? For three years the students were unable to play an independent role apart from echoing the war slogans of the two factions and engaging in actual combat, organized and led by the factions. Most of our students were unable to see that the slogans of One Nigeria and self-determination were meaningful only to the extent that the import-exporters and general contractors (and their ideological hirelings) did not distort and subvert them for their personal interests. Most of our students did not realize that, though millions of Nigerian people had sufficient reasons to take the stand which they initially took, these reasons became increasingly betrayed and emptied of all content by those who subsequently benefited from the crisis. The lesson of the crisis is that official formulations of national problems given by the rulers (and those who aspire to rule) are in most cases aimed at serving their own interests — and not the interests of the people; that what-ever benefit might accrue to the people is merely a by-product in the process of achieving the rulers' interests and hardly ever the conscious aim of the rulers; hence, official formulations should always be approached critically.

What were the limitations of the students' role as brought out by this crisis? The first was the limitation imposed by objective and subjective ties; and the second was the limitation imposed by their lack of critical consciousness, which immediately placed the students under the ideological and political hegemony of the ruling class. We shall come back to this in relation to students' response to the current political campaigns.

We have earlier observed that students are formally divorced from material production and that their role in social reproduction as a whole is heavily mediated. This fact and its implications are brought home to students in any major confrontation with the state. For instance, the state can afford to close down all schools and institutions of learning for weeks or months at a time with little or no adverse effect on the economy; but it cannot close down the harbours or airports for more than a day except where it is fighting for its own survival. We can cite instances of extended school closures from many countries — Senegal, Egypt, Ghana, Liberia and Ivory Coast, among others. In Nigeria, the state took this step in the students' crises of February 1974, February 1975, and April 1978.

We have also mentioned students' difficulty — if not inability — to relate their specific interests to the overall interests of the people. If we set aside student protests over mundane bread and butter issues (which also, of course, have their importance since students must eat) and consider major crises, we can mention the protest over the National Youth Service, the protest over Technical Education Programme and to some extent, the protest over school fees, as most vividly exhibiting this weakness and its consequences.

With the interests of our students — as expressed by them — only remotely related to the general interest, the larger society could not be expected lo rally round the students — even if they could. What is more, even in practical protests, the students often resorted to terrorizing the campus workers and other underprivileged people. The result is usually increased alienation, indifference and opposition on the part of the larger society. When thus left to their fate, the students are isolated, encircled and finally defeated.

The recent student agitation over the new Technical Education Programme is a case in point. The students are right to demand that they be involved in the process of drafting a programme designed for them. This is a democratic demand. They are even right in demanding that their specific interests as students and future producers be protected. But the students are definitely not right in isolating their interests from the interests of other people whose elementary democratic rights are continually violated. The students must see that the violation of their democratic rights is a specific instance — and only an instance — of a general phenomenon. More fundamentally, they must relate their interests and positions on the new programme to the interests of other producers — the workers and peasants. Only then, can the students hope to get the people's sympathy and support. In the crisis over school fees, the students' interests and the general interest objectively coincided on a

certain level — whatever the consciousness of the students, the larger society pays the students' fees.

To some extent students recognized this objective coincidence. But we cannot claim that, in the actual execution of their protest, the students' actions consciously and consistently reflected it. Many ordinary people — who were also directly or indirectly affected — were still terrorized, and ordinary campus workers were manhandled. In a certain sense, this particular weakness of the student movement can be described as elitism — a feeling of separation, a feeling of superiority. But elitism has its own logic which operates not only between groups.

It is not surprising that the feeling and practice of superiority which the students exhibit in their relationship with underprivileged members of the society are ultimately carried into their own ranks. We then have big students and small students, graduate students and undergraduate students, university students and technical students, degree students and diploma students, rich students and poor students, female liberationists and male chauvinists, northern, students and southern students. Just as export-importers feel superior to the rest of society and logically to one another, so do our students feel superior to workers and peasants and logically to one another. This logic is responsible for the dichotomy between the banned National Union of Nigerian Students (N.U.N.S.) and the National Association of Technological Students (N.A.T.S.). The result is disunity within the student movement which leads (increasingly and dangerously) to lack of mutual solidarity in struggles and reduction in student overall effective political weight.

Early in 1979, thousands of Nigerian students demonstrated against University admissions — alleging discrimination. We sympathize with them, although we equally chastise them. The students failed to ask the fundamental question: Why is it that, of the candidates who had the necessary qualifications and who were desirous of entering university, less than 20% were finally admitted? Instead of a Darwinian struggle for limited opportunities, why is there not opportunity for all? These are the questions students must ask, because in a situation of limited opportunity there is bound to be discrimination based on ethnicity or politics, or both. The students should always ask these questions if they hope to see through the false problems presented by the powers that be.

We cannot conclude our analysis of this period without mentioning the patriotic role played by the students against the attempted coup d'etat by Colonel Dimka in February 1976. Even while the bourgeoisie were still hiding under their beds or escaping to their home towns to hide under their mothers, even while it was still in doubt whether the counter-coup

would succeed or fail, the students came out in opposition to Dimka and in support of the government. They protested and smashed up the British and American embassies, and the government upheld their action. We now ask the police: Why did you not shoot at the students in February 1976 when they were actually violent, but shot at them in April 1978 when they were not? The answer is an immense political lesson which may not be found in any textbook.

References

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2. J.S. Coleman and C.G. Rosberg, *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa*, (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1966), p.430.
3. Ibid., p.43.
4. Ibid., p.432.

7. The UPN Today: A Socialist Party?

The ban on political activities in Nigeria was lifted in September 1978; the 13-year-old State of Emergency was repealed and was immediately replaced with the Public Order Decree. This new decree was a reminder to the bourgeoisie that they had to find a peaceful solution to their differences and a reminder to the revolutionary forces (wherever they might be) that the situation had not changed and that their time had not come.

As we know, all but five political parties were ruled out of existence. All five promised the people-of Nigeria every good thing on earth. In the words of *Africa* magazine, all the parties were

> wooing the voter with promises of basically the same goodies. All are offering free medicare, free education, cheaper and better housing, pipe-borne water in all the villages and cities, more Made in Nigeria goods, jobs for every man and woman, self-sufficiency in food production through mechanised agriculture, better and cheaper transportation, etc.

The only difference in their programmes was specificity. For instance, while one of the political parties promised that on coming to power in October 1979 it would decree free education 'on all levels', the other parties merely promised to effect free education when 'the country is able to finance the cost'.

Some political commentators grouped the five registered parties into two camps: three of them were said to be capitalist while the other two were said to be socialist. The two parties which were described as socialist did not deny the charge. Indeed one of them, the Unity Party of Nigeria (U.P.N.), under the leadership of Awolowo, a self-declared 'democratic socialist' of more than 20 years standing, explicitly stated that socialism was its final goal.

When the ban on political activities was lifted, Awolowo was the first to announce the formation of a political party: in fact he did this within hours of the government's decree. In this very first announcement he categorically stated his commitment to socialism. Subsequently, the party's programme, manifesto, policy statements as well as statements by its leading members, enunciated the party's strategy and tactics for socialist transformation. These can be sketched under three main headings: 1) philosophical foundations;
2) immediate practical measures; 3) theoretical justifications and projections.

Philosophical Foundations

There are three main elements to this. First, the party claims to be completely opposed to violence and believes that violence is not a necessary means of attaining socialism — at least not in Nigeria; secondly, it claims to believe that the purpose of society is service to man, and hence, economic, political and social programmes must be formulated and executed from this premise; finally, the party claims that it believes in equality and social justice.

Every, brand of socialism would accept the second and third 'philosophical foundations'; no comment is needed except to remind ourselves that the problems of socialism are not philosophical, but political: in the sphere of politics, philosophical naiveties and illusions quickly disappear. As for violence, we state categorically that no Marxists (since Marxists are those normally accused of violent tendencies) would extol violence for its own sake or promote the 'inevitability of violence' to the level of theory. *But to rule out the possibility of violence, ab initio, from the process of negating a social order maintained by violence is simply unscientific*. The question of whether violence will be used or not does not depend on the pacifism or aggressiveness of a party. It depends rather on circumstances which one cannot completely determine in advance: the strength and resistance of the social order being negated, the strength of the revolutionary movement, the international situation, historical accidents, etc. Hence a genuine programme of socialist transformation, while not glorifying violence, must recognise its possibility and be informed accordingly.

From time to time the party reminds us that socialism is a fixed end which has several *alternative means* of attainment. The party has chosen 'non-violent' means! The comment above applies here also, but in addition, we have to remind ourselves that, in real life, means and ends cannot be rigidly separated. In theory some separation can be done, but only for the purpose of analysis and no more. Some ends immediately and logically rule out certain means, just as some means decisively rule out certain ends. For example, it is simply crazy to think of defeating an armed detachment by prayers or verbally convincing the capitalist class (not just individual capitalists) that the society would be more peaceful and more humane under socialism. In any case, there is a tendency for this question to become rhetorical. The truth of it is tested in the struggle to transform society. Revolutionaries in Chile are no longer debating the question.

Immediate Practical Measures

The party proposed a four-point programme which, it believes, would prepare Nigeria and Nigerians for peaceful socialist transformation: 1) free education at all levels for all Nigerians; 2) free medical services for all Nigerians; 3) full employment; 4) integrated rural development.

No one doubts that these are revolutionary measures — whose execution will immediately transform the quality of life of millions of Nigerians. There are doubts, however, as regards the means of executing the measures. As the writer remarked at the time:

> If a party tells us that it is going to mechanize agriculture, we are right to doubt it unless the party tells us simultaneously that it is going to stop the importation of luxury goods in order to be able to finance the importation of agricultural machinery. . If a party tells us that it is going to double the national minimum wage, workers will be right to dismiss the promise unless the party simultaneously promises to reduce the wages and incomes of some other people, since the national income cannot be multiplied at will. . . If a party tells us that it is going to ensure full employment, we shall be justified to have a big laugh unless the party simultaneously tells us that it is going to nationalize key sectors of the economy since no government can indefinitely enforce employment in businesses it does not control. ...

Theoretical Assertions

The party makes certain theoretical assertions as justification of its non-violent and gradualist socialist programme: 1) that socialism cannot be achieved 'in one fell swoop', it has to be constructed stage by stage; 2) that there are no Nigerian capitalists(!) and that the pseudo-capitalists are too few to constitute any real threat to socialist transformation led by a patriotic and committed party. What we have is foreign capitalism which can be confronted by such a party; 3) that foreign capitalism will be defeated as soon as Nigeria acquires the necessary industrial technology and Nigerians acquire the necessary industrial and managerial skills.

These assertions ignore certain facts.

(1) Socialism is a revolutionary process: it is a continuous process of negation of capitalism — viewed, of course, as an integrated world system where every nation, though having its own peculiar but historical characteristics, nevertheless occupies a definite place and plays a definite role. This process has economic, political, social and cultural aspects which are not negated uniformly. for instance, where economic concessions are objectively necessary, these have to be balanced by greater political intransigence and determination. The Russian

Revolution, which is cited by friends and foes alike, showed very clearly that socialism is a contradictory process of transformation. The revolutionary regime, at one stage, had to grant *economic* concessions to the capitalists and allowed the restoration of some forms of free enterprise. But simultaneously, the state intensified its *political* campaign against the capitalists and further restricted their political rights. It is the intensity of these contradictions and the ways in which they are continuously resolved — in the overall interest of the working people — that characterize socialism. The case for socialism cannot be presented in terms of ‘stage-by-stage’ or ‘one fell swoop’.

(2) The problem of socialism is not reducible to the question of transfer of technology or the question of replacing foreign experts by indigenous ones. One must ask: Technology for whom and in whose interest? Indigenous experts in the service of whom? In Nigeria today technology and technological expertise are certainly in the service of some people, and there is no reason to believe that their being owned by Nigeria will put them immediately at the service of all the people. We need to be reminded that Nigerians are differentiated, and the acquisition of technology and technical expertise (if we over- look the naivety with which this expectation is normally expressed) will not remove these differentiations, neither will it, taken alone, create the condition for their removal. In other words, the acquisition of technology and technical expertise (viewed as purely economic gain) will merely transform our class relations; it will not obliterate class differentiations.

(3) In terms of ownership, control and profit appropriation, it is true that the productive capital operating in Nigeria is partly foreign and partly indigenous. But this capital cannot be physically split up into two component parts corresponding to this duality (except for the purposes of sharing profits). In other words, productive capital, though composed of two parts, goes into the market as an integral entity. It is false enough to assume this rigid dichotomy; it is atrocious however, to proceed on this basis to declare that, since the ‘foreign share’ is predominant, capitalists do not exist in Nigeria! Foreign capital does not operate in a social vacuum. It enters and operates in the country through structural and human agencies - the ‘conveyor belts’. These agencies play a definite and necessary role in the world capitalist system of production, realization of profits and accumulation of profit. It does not matter whether this role is a subordinate one or not: the fact remains that one cannot regulate the operation of foreign capital in Nigeria without dealing with the structural and human agencies. One may, of course, hope that this will be an easy task, but contemporary history indicates otherwise.

In conclusion, and as a general remark, it seems strange that a programme for ‘stage-by—stage’ socialist transformation can be drawn up without a word on property relations: the question of who owns what. Perhaps we can help the theoreticians of this party by logically deducing the party’s position on property relations from its general position on socialist transformation. The most logical deduction would be that the question of ownership will be settled (by nationalization) as soon as the country acquires the required technical skills to take over and run the nationalized industries and services.

This position is the same as the one criticized in (2) above. We only need to add that nationalization is not the same as socialization. It is indeed possible to achieve complete nationalization under capitalism without essentially altering capital-labour relations, that is, without advancing to socialism at all. Means of production, are not automatically passed on to the producers simply by nationalizing them — merely a legal act — for the relationship between capital and labour is more than a legal, one. It is a social relationship. According to Bettelheim:

> Changes in legal forms of ownership do not suffice to cause the existence of classes and for class struggles to disappear... These conditions are rooted... not in legal forms of ownership but in production relations, that is, in the form of the social process of appropriation, in the place that the form of this process assigns to the agents of production — in fact, in the relations that are established between them in social production. ... The existence of state or collective forms of property is not enough to ‘abolish' capitalist production relations. ... The bourgeoisie can continue to exist in different forms and, in particular, can assume the form of a state bourgeoisie.[1]

In other words, workers are oppressed and exploited under capitalism not just because the law says that the means of production belong to the capitalists. Similarly, the agonies of the workers would not end the day the law decrees that the means of production now belong to all the people. The conditions of oppression of workers under capitalism are made up of the following elements (among others):

a) Workers are treated as part of the costs of production just like machines and raw materials. Hence nothing like the human needs of workers are seriously considered by capitalists. Human needs are extra-economic, and hence irrelevant, under capitalism because production is primarily for profit. The price of labour is wages, which are calculated just like the price of a machine.

b) Workers have no power to deploy and allocate the means of production, have no power to determine the conditions under which they produce, have no power to determine the deployment and distribution of their products. All these powers belong to the capitalists or their agents.

It is hardly necessary to argue that these conditions can remain, and therefore perpetuate the *social relations of capitalism*, even when all the means of production have been nationalized.

The party's position on the character of the state is as ambiguous as its position on property and class relations — in spite of the presence of many ‘socialists' and 'Marxists' in it. We doubt, however, if the party is under the illusion that the state is neutral in the social struggles between the citizens. The personal experience of some of the leading members of the party and the experience of the party as a whole in the 1979 presidential and parliamentary elections are sufficient to dispel such illusions.

Final Reflection

Socialism is both a critique, and a process of negation, of capitalism. As a critique, socialism denounces capitalist society as a civilization which, having grown on the accumulated material, scientific and cultural acquisitions of man, has now become a condition for his exploitation, oppression an, frustration. As a process of negation, socialism maps out, and undertakes the execution of, a programme of continuous transformation (in the realms of economy, politics and culture) from the present regime of exploitation, individualism and irrationality to a regime of free association, collectivity and rationality.

The alternative programme with which socialism confronts capitalism is not, and cannot be, a complete programme for it is derived solely from present social contradictions and the possible directions of resolution of these contradictions; possibilities which can only be realized through the practical actions of men. In the course of the struggle to realize these possibilities, new contradictions develop and new possibilities present themselves. Thus the process of transformation continues.

Although no social order can be negated or transformed all at once, there are *existing pillars*, on which every social order rests and which continuously reproduce this social order, which *must be dismantled if the process of transformation is to begin at all*. This is the essential point about the categorical imperatives of socialist transformation.

Furthermore, since socialism is a process of continuous transformation of man and society, the problem arises as to identification of the point at which it can be said to be completed. We can only say that

a completed socialist construction cannot be claimed until at least the dominant characteristic features of capitalist civilization — private property, wage labour, commodity, the law of value, the state, etc — have been transformed; no one can say when man will reach this stage of historical development, but definitely no country has yet fully reached it.

Socialism is therefore a necessarily contradictory process; it is a continuous transformative process which is characterized at every stage by combined capitalist and socialist forms. Although it is impossible to construct socialism on the old inherited political forms (state, party, bureaucracy, etc.), it is equally impossible to build it on entirely new social forms. 'For the old ones cannot be abolished all at once. In other words, socialism is the initial phase of communism during which these contradictory processes evolve, while the predominance of new forms of a specifically communist nature will mean that the first phase has been overcome.' Lenin frequently commented on this contradictory process and emphasized that 'it always exists in the development of nature as well as in the development of society' and that 'only by a series of attempts — each of which, taken by itself, will be one-sided and will suffer from certain inconsistencies — will complete socialism be created by the revolutionary cooperation of the proletarians of all countries.'[2]

References

1. Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the U.S.S.R., First Period 1917-1923*, (Monthly Review Press, N.Y., 1976), pp.21-22.
2. V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, Vol. 2, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970), p.640.

8. The Importance of Correct Analysis

The subject of this chapter is the relationship between historical events or situations in Nigeria and the ways in which these have been theoretically described. As we have already stated in the introduction to this work, theory bears a dialectical relationship to reality, sometimes lagging behind, sometimes projecting ahead. It is our contention, to be demonstrated with reference to two particular misrepresentations of reality, that dogmatic insistence on the *fixed* nature of phenomena which have been characterized in a certain way has serious repercussions at the level of action and the empirical understanding of existing situations.

Is There a Class Struggle in Nigeria?

> Kautsky resembles the miserable schoolmaster, who for many years has been repeating a description of Spring to his pupils within the four walls of his stuffy schoolroom, and when at last, at the sunset of his days as a teacher, he comes out into the fresh air, does not recognize Spring ... and rises to prove that Spring is not Spring, after all, but only a great disorder in Nature, because it is taking place against the laws of natural history.

Recently two university students confronted the writer with a series of questions: When can a class struggle be said to take place? Under what conditions can a class struggle be said to take place? And, what are the characteristics of class struggles? The writer did not attempt to answer these questions (if ever they can be answered in the way they were posed!), but instead wanted to know their origin.

It appeared that a senior lecturer in political science - one of-those who might be described as library Marxists — had pontificated to his students that a social class could not wage a class struggle until it has evolved from a class-in-itself to a class-for-itself. Having given this abstract definition, the lecturer concluded that, since the Nigerian working class was not yet a class-for-itself, it could not wage a class struggle; therefore, class struggles did not exist in Nigeria!

Our dear lecturer is not alone in this type of metaphysical error which can be described as that of seizing on historical moments — identified. by Marx and rigidly separating and ossifying them. This is an attribute of those who can recognize a social phenomenon only in textbooks and never in reality. Of course, this common mistake is also a result of non-involvement in, and inability to observe and reflect, political practice. It is above all a reminder — according to Trotsky — that Marxism is not a method of analysing text-books but of analysing social events.

The question of the correct characterization of historical situations is a recurrent theme of discussion in Marxist and non-Marxist academic circles in Nigeria. We would not have considered this particular question worthy of comment here but for the fact that it has profound practical and political implications for those who often feel compelled to go from speculation to action. The manner in which one acts upon a social situation depends, at least initially, on one's characterization of it.

The concepts of existence-in-itself and existence-for-itself were not created by Marx; but like every other concept which he appropriated,[2] Marx shed them of all mystifications and integrated them into his general theoretical and methodological framework — which is thoroughly materialist and scientific. These concepts can, therefore, be regarded as Marxian concepts only if they are considered in relation to Marxian methodology and theory.

Pre-Marxism dialectics held that no object or phenomenon ever came into existence fully developed: every existence had to pass through quantitative and qualitative stages of development, every historical phenomenon went through various stages — coming into existence, (growth or development) and going out of existence (decay). Marxian dialectics, while making the same assertion, insists that the passage from one stage of development to another has a material basis; that is, this passage is not imposed on the developing object or phenomenon out of the blue by an all-powerful, all-wise Mind.

In tracing and analysing the development of contemporary social classes, Marx employed the concepts of class-in-itself and class-for-itself: this he did on several occasions, sometimes implicitly. In his 1847 polemics against the French metaphysical philosopher, Proudhon, Marx urged that in relation to the bourgeoisie stages of development should be distinguished: that in which the bourgeois class constituted itself as a class under the regime of feudalism and absolute monarchy; and that in which, already constituted as a class, it overthrew feudalism and monarchy to make society into a bourgeois society. The first of these phases was longer and necessitated the greater effort.[4]

It is clear that what Marx did here was to identify two qualitative moments in the development of the bourgeois class — the first moment being characterized by feudal political rule and the second by bourgeois political rule. Marx neither saw, nor introduced, any rigid separation between the two moments. What he saw and identified was the qualitative difference between them —their dominant characteristics. Nothing more. For, if the dominant feature of the second stage of bourgeois class development was the political overthrow of the feudal

regime, then this regime must have been sufficiently weakened, and under mined during the first stage. Even if the feudal regime was over-thrown in a single battle, the possibility for this must have been previously created.[5] The bourgeois class could not simply wake up one day and over-throw their feudal landlords! Indeed, historically, feudal and bourgeois classes went through a long period of struggle for supremacy (as Marx indicated above), and the final phases of this struggle could properly be called those of dual authority; that is, a situation where one class had control of some spheres of social life, while the other class held on to other spheres.[6] The struggle between these two classes did not end with the political over-throw of the feudal class: the character of the struggle merely changed. The rebels became the legal authority and the old authority became the rebels!

The points we are making should be obvious to practising Marxists who see and use Marxism as a living tool of social analysis, a very powerful tool which, however, must be creatively and intelligently used. It should also be obvious to those who see Marxism as an integrated and coherent science, and not one that can be torn apart at will, and used to justify all manner of political illusions and intellectual laziness. But we emphasize these points against our pontificating, textbook-quoting 'Marxists' — not with the hope of changing them (although we shall be pleased to see them change) but as a duty to the young and impressionable Nigerian youths whom they are employed to teach.

As regards the development of the working class, Marx had this to say:

> Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. *This mass is thus a class as against capital, but not yet for itself* [emphasis ours]. In the struggle ... this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.[7]

We are almost certain that this is the passage to which the Nigerian lecturer we mentioned above was referring — although we are also certain that he would not have seen the duty of letting his students into the secret, for fear of being confronted with a different interpretation!

A careful reading of, and reflection, on this passage by any educated person will bring out the following points being made by Marx:

1) the capitalist mode of production *economically* defines the working class by that class's separation from the means of production and by the engagement of its members as wage labourers;

2) these workers are *objectively* - placed in a common situation and therefore have common interests — these interests are *objectively opposed* to the interests of capital;

3) a common situation and common interests, however, are not sufficient to constitute the workers into fighters for their *specific* class interests, into a class-for-itself — this specificity develops with the struggle itself; and

4) 'The struggle of class against is a political struggle'; in other words, a class does not wait to be constituted first as a class-for-itself before waging a political struggle. The constitution is via class (and therefore, political) struggle.

It is doubtful that the learned academician had read the passage carefully; or else he would not have seen it as endorsing the hallmark of Nigerian academic methodology — endowing every social phenomenon or very specific stage of development of society with ready-made characteristics manufactured in heaven and then imposed on earth. He simply failed to understand a central thesis of Marxism: that the transition from one stage of human history to another is accomplished only by a process of human action on nature and society and reflection on these actions; that even if two moments in the development of a social class — class-in-itself and class-for-itself — are conceived in their logical and temporal sequence, the evolution of one into the other is possible only through a process of active (that is, human) transformation both of nature and society; that there is no form of class development or transformation other than the class struggle; in short, that the transition from class-in-itself to class-for-itself is accomplished through class struggle.

In spite of the violence which official and professiorial academicians have inflicted on otherwise very useful and penetrating social concepts and categories, we shall still insist on using them, but shall always try to state our position as and when clarifications are necessary.

We, therefore, not only retain the concepts 'class-in-itself' and 'class-for-itself; we shall also retain the distinctions between these two moments in the development of the working class. But two points should be clarified. In the first place, just as we noted in the case of development of the bourgeois class, the two moments are not mutually exclusive: they merely indicate the dominant character and tendency of the class at a given point in its development. A particular moment also corresponds to the type of political tasks which the class poses for itself. In the second

place, the distinctions between the two historical moments are at once political and economic — and they are interlocked. As regards the ideological elements (which are, in fact, the only elements many people have in mind when considering the development of a class), our position can be stated as follows: *the existence of class struggles does not depend on the identification of the struggles, or on the class's comprehension and articulation of the fundamental class antagonisms revealed by such struggles. Identification, articulation and comprehension (in short, consciousness) grow with the struggles themselves.*

Our academic Marxists would do well to reflect on the following passage which they often quote without much understanding:

> Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production.[8]

We proclaim again that a class does not become conscious first in order to be able to struggle next: a class becomes more and more conscious as it engages more and more in struggles. Class and class consciousness, according to Peter Waterman, are not *things that exist* but *relationships that develop*.[9]

Classes and class struggles exist in Nigeria. They exist under the noses of our academics who can recognize them only in textbooks. When the workers of the University of Calabar demonstrated against the University Bursar in 1978, they were waging a class struggle — whether the bursar recognized it as such or not, and whether the workers themselves thought they were only demanding more 'human feelings' from the Bursar or 'equal treatment with the senior staff'. Similarly, the Nigerian workers who beat up their racist expatriate overseer at the airport construction site in 1977 were waging a class struggle, even if they believed they were merely defending their country against an insolent and racist European or were merely struggling to be treated well in their own country.

What Constitutes a Revolutionary Situation?

> Though every revolutionary situation is inevitably a crisis situation, not every crisis situation is a revolutionary situation. Even though the antagonism may have come to the surface, and there has been a confrontation, and even though the power of the state may have been brought into question in that confrontation, it may still remain that the conditions are not ripe. One may not risk throwing one's very

existence into the balance, as a party or a class organization, with sufficient chance of success in making the leap that could win the day. Everything depends on the balance of forces, in other words, on knowing which one will be left out, which class will ally itself with which to create the weight of an effective majority.[16]

Some time ago, the writer had occasion to exchange critical notes on the correct characterization of a 'revolutionary situation' with a comrade. The comrade wrote, *inter alia*.

> The characterization of more or less sporadic struggles and crises in post-civil war Nigeria as 'revolutionary situations' is wrong. . . . I don't think we've ever reached even a 'pre-revolutionary situation', a situation where the crucial opposing classes wage skirmishes and ambushes as a response to economic and social upheavals; I don't think we've ever reached this situation in Nigeria.

The following paragraphs give the substance of the present writer's reply, and a statement of his own position. What constitutes a revolutionary situation can only be grasped concretely and not abstractly. In other words, there is no such thing as a general revolutionary situation. There can only be, for instance, a revolutionary situation relative to the current level of struggle and class polarization. Just as there is no general revolutionary situation, there is likewise no general revolutionary expectation from a revolutionary situation.

In December 1974 and January 1975 the Nigerian regime was faced with the following conjuncture: 1) widespread and voiced dissatisfaction with the Udoji salary and wage awards and the rumoured preferential treatment of the military; 2) weakness of the regime's internal cohesion over several questions, including the census, the return to civilian rule, etc; 3) struggles between the bureaucratic and comprador bourgeoisie (each side supported by sections of the regime); 4) voiced dissatisfaction (involving workers and students nationally and simultaneously) over the widespread corruption of the regime and its detention of political critics; and 5) the general economic crises (inflation, etc.) and the paralysing general strike.

The objective and subjective elements of the national crisis at that time —if it had existed — were such that a vanguard could have successfully placed itself at the head of the movement and forced a solution, with positive results if it had weakened the bourgeois hegemony. The solution would not necessarily have been the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'; it could have been the inauguration of a permanent crisis, a precipitated-de-militarization of the political apparatus, etc. But, of course, the question could not even be posed because no such vanguard existed.

The point here is: *a revolutionary situation is not simply called such because a conscious revolutionary intervention could lead to a sharp change in the class character of the state. A situation could be revolutionary even if the most that can be achieved is the deepening of the crisis in the power structure or the sharpening of the contradiction between economy and politics.*

Since the analysis above was originally made, we have had several opportunities to engage in further discussions and exchanges with a number of comrades (including the particular comrade who initiated this debate). We have also reflected further on what some revolutionary Marxists have said and written on the question. In particular, we recall the famous passage from Lenin's *Left-wing Communism*:

> The fundamental law of revolution which has been confirmed by all revolutions and especially by all three Russian revolutions in the 20th century, is as follows: for a revolution to take place, it is not enough for the exploited and oppressed masses to realize the impossibility of living in the old way, and demand changes; for a revolution to take place, it is essential that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. It is only when the 'lower classes' do not want to live in the old way and the 'upper classes' cannot carry on in the old way that the revolution can triumph. This truth can be expressed in other words: revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters).[11]

We represent below the results of our discussions and reflections, which elaborate to some extent correct our earlier position on the subject.

(1) An important element of a revolutionary situation is the subjective aspect; that is, the state of political, ideological and organizational maturity of the revolutionary class or classes, the type of questions they pose and the tasks they set for themselves. If a national crisis temporarily creates a political vacuum which however cannot be filled, then whatever may be the magnitude of such a crisis, it could hardly be called a revolutionary situation. To that extent it might not be correct to characterize the situation in Nigeria between the end of July and early August 1966 (when there was no effective government in Lagos) as revolutionary.

(2) Although care must be taken to avoid the common mistake of retrospectively endowing, or refusing to endow, a situation with a revolutionary character (all depending on whether a revolution ensued or failed to ensue from the situation), a wrong identification can, however, be detected in retrospect. If the balance of social forces is such that a perfect

restoration of the *status quo* results from a crisis, then such a crisis could hardly be called a revolutionary situation. Whatever happens, a revolutionary situation —being a general crisis involving both the oppressed and the oppressor classes —should lead to a definite change in the political structure, if not in the economy.

The Need: Concrete Analysis of Concrete Situations

To a revolutionary or a revolutionary movement, the task of characterising correctly every unfolding social reality is a very vital — and often extremely crucial — one. An opportunity for effective revolutionary intervention may be lost through a faulty, dogmatic or metaphysical (that is, undialectical) characterization. Since particular national and international political conjunctures cannot be recalled at will once the movement realizes its error, such an error of characterization may in fact become historic — and, in consequence, notorious.

We are far from suggesting that the fate of a revolution can be sealed, for all time, by a single error — however tragic.[12] Such a belief is much more harmful than the belief in metaphysical absolutes which we have hitherto been criticizing. But we insist that a tragic error can so shift the balance of social forces[13] against the revolution that it may take a revolutionary movement several years, or even decades, to build up a similar balance. The tragedies of the Indonesian Communist Party (1965) the Sudanese Communist Party (1971), and the Ceylonese J.V.P. (People's Liberation Front), clearly demonstrate this fact.

As we have argued earlier in this chapter, social categories and concepts like class, class struggle, revolutionary situation, imperialism, neocolonialism, etc., cannot be properly understood if their investigation is approached-meta-physically or dogmatically. They must be approached dialectically, that is, in their development, contradictions, inter-actions, mutual influences and totality.

No revolution in history has ever had a 'pure' class character, since, on the one hand, no social class can come to power without the support of some other social classes, groups or strata, and, on the other hand, no social order (which a revolution is to negate) itself bears a 'pure' stamp of the ruling class or faithfully reflects the pure interests of the ruling class. To the extent that reality is complex and contradictory, so is the revolutionary process a complex and contradictory one.

It is certainly not enough for a revolutionary to know that Nigeria is located in the world imperialist system, for Britain, America, Japan, South Africa, Israel, etc. are also located therein. It is necessary to know what all these countries have in common with Nigeria, but also in what respects they differ. It is equally not enough to know that Nigeria is a

neocolonial (that is, peripheral capitalist) country, for Zaire, Haiti, the Central African Republic, etc., are also neocolonial. We know that Nigeria differs very profoundly from these countries. It is not enough to proclaim socialism as our goal for, again, we know that there are many socialisms: Russian, Chinese, Cuban, Yugoslav, Senegalese, Iraqi, Sudanese, etc. We must try to be much more concrete, for we are confronting a concrete reality.

On the level of social formations, it is not even enough to know that there are three main classes in Nigeria: the capitalists, the peasantry and the working class. It is also necessary to know that there are differentiations (often politically crucial) within each class, that the boundaries between the classes are extremely fluid, unstable and in some areas almost indeterminate, that there are several (some of them strategic) intermediate social groups and strata. It is also necessary to note that social classes and groups play different roles in socialist revolutions depending on the specific historical situation of the society in question. Finally, it is necessary to note that in Nigeria — just as in several other parts of the world — class oppression often merges with ethnic oppression, and conversely.

What we are calling for is not new: it is a *concrete analysis of concrete situations*. For Lenin, as well as for us, (the categorical requirement of Marxist theory in investigating any social question is that it be examined within *definite* historical limits, and, if it refers to a particular country (e.g. the national programme for a given country), that account be taken of the specific features distinguishing that country from others in the dame historical epoch.'[14]

By concretely analysing concrete situations we shall, at the same time, be struggling against 'revolutionary schematism' — which has several, but equally dangerous, expressions in Nigeria today. Revolutionary schematism is the twin brother of metaphysical characterization.

Revolutionary schematism insists that the revolutionary transformation of society has to be effected in stages; that the 'vital stages' of the revolution cannot be skipped. Since Nigeria moved from colonialism to neocolonialism, this dogmatic schematism insists that the next stage of the, revolution must be a ‘national democratic' one: a stage where the working class has to ally itself with the national bourgeoisie that is patriotic, as opposed to comprador, which is unpatriotic to overthrow imperialism, and at the same time to effect some necessary democratic changes. Only thereafter will the question of socialist revolution be posed. This beautiful schematism fails to say explicitly in what respects the

national bourgeoisie can be considered patriotic, democratic or even liberal; it fails to say what democratic reforms the Nigerian national bourgeoisie of today can be mobilized to struggle for. An explicit statement is necessary since a revolutionary programme cannot be based on implicit assumption.

Revolutionary schematism insists that the working class and its organizations have to work for political alliances with some other class organizations; it equally insists — in obedience to a time-tested revolutionary dictum — that the working class has to lead such alliances. But it fails to consider the state of the Nigerian working class; it fails to consider the possibility of the working-class organization moving at some subsequent period from a weak position to a leading position in a political alliance. It fails to see that the categorical imperative for communists in a political alliance is not that they should, of necessity, lead such an alliance, but that, in taking care of the present interests of the revolutionary movement, they should also 'represent and take care of the future of that movement.'[15]

Revolutionary schematism insists that a genuinely revolutionary party must be Leninist in its composition, structure and programmes; that the organization of such a party must involve 'the selection of a group of single-minded revolutionaries prepared to make any sacrifice, from the more or less chaotic mass of the (working) class as a whole';[16] that the continuous growth, security, resilience, capability and battle-readiness of the party can only be ensured by the strictest adherence to the principles of iron discipline, democratic centralism, revolutionary morality, criticism and self-criticism; that the party must operate on two levels and be capable of rapidly switching emphasis from one level to the other with the least damage to its programme and logistics, etc.

All these citations are correct as far as they go, that is, as enunciations of the Leninist conception of a revolutionary party. But revolutionary schematism forgets that this same Leninism insists that it is categorically imperative, for a Marxist to be historically specific in his social analysis.

Lenin's conception of a revolutionary proletarian party is both general and *historically specific*. It is general as regards its ideological-political premise and method of its construction — Marxism and the aim of the party, which is the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism (and whatever feudalistic elements survive within it) and the construction of socialism. But it is equally historically specific — and this is more important. Lenin's conception rests on what he saw as the immediate task of the proletariat of Europe in general and the Russian proletariat in

particular — the overthrow of imperialism. It was also a direct response to the peculiar absolutist and tyrannical regime in Russia - a country where police agents and *agents provocateurs* successfully permeate the entire society. His conception also draws from the long history of heroic struggles of Russian revolutionaries.

Lenin did not arrive at his conception mechanically; and Leninism does not expect us to be mechanical. In other words, Leninism demands that we should proceed from the present situation *in Nigeria* and demonstrate *anew* in what general respects the Leninist conception of a revolutionary party is applicable to Nigeria and in what respects it fails to apply. This exercise would not amount to a correction or refutation of Leninism. Instead, it would further enrich it.

References

1. Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, (New Park Publications, London, 1962), pp.167-68.
2. Such concepts include profit, capital, labour, civil society, the state, etc.
3. It is, of course, clear that Marx could only be referring to the development of bourgeois classes in Europe and later America where capitalism first developed— before It was 'exported' and imposed on the entire world. The development of the capitalist class in other parts of the world was not linked necessarily with the political overthrow of the ruling feudal class by the nascent capitalist class.
4. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, (International Publishers, New York, 1975), p.173. 5. We certainly agree with Montesquieu that 'if a particular cause, like the result of a battle, has ruined a state, there was a general cause which made the downfall of this state ensue from a single battle.' Quoted in E.H. Carr, *what is History?* (Penguin, 1977), p.101.
6. For example, the bourgeois class could become economically dominant under feudal political supremacy. Such situations are, of course, merely transitional — and cannot be stabilized.
7. Karl Marx, op. cit., p.173.
8. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973), p.504.
9. Gavin Williams, *Nigeria, Economy and Society*, (Rex Collings, London, 1976), p.184.
10. Regis Debray, *Prison Writings*, (Penguin, 1975), p.122.
11. V.I. Lenin, *'Left-Wing' Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975), p.69.
12. Some Nigerian 'socialists' held and expressed, such views towards the end of 1978. The occasion was the tragic absence of an organized, sizeable, and nationwide socialist movement from the political scene

when the military regime finally lifted the ban on political activities. These ‘socialists' felt that since we had lost the historic opportunity to come out as a party, we should permanently forget about socialist revolutions, dissolve our organizations and enter bourgeois political parties — in the interest of the nation!
13. We must not forget that what is usually called the balance of forces has
several elements: political-military, ideological, national, international. A sharp decline in a movement's ideological credibility may result in a shift in the balance of forces just as significant as a major political or military defeat.
14. V.I. Lenin, *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism*, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970), pp.50-57.
15. Marx and Engels, Selected Works in One Volume, (International Publishers, New York, 1977), p.62.
16. Georg Lukacs, *Lenin: A Study in the Unity of his Thought*, (New Left Books, London, 1977), p.24.

9. The Question of Strategy

The Transition to Socialism: Competing Views

There are two generally agreed points of departure, theoretically and even politically, as regards the various tendencies within the Nigerian socialist movement. Both are premised on the level of the country's productive forces.

The first point of agreement is that the transitional (first) phase of socialist transformation will economically be a mixture of private and state sectors, with the banks, leading and strategic industries, import-export trade, insurance, education, health, etc. falling under the state sector. The second point of agreement is that, during this phase, state power will be an alliance of the working class, the peasantry and some other strata of the population.

From these general points of agreement, however, divergent political conclusions are drawn — conclusions which, as much as any other factor, account for the near-atomization of the socialist movement today. Let us try to isolate some of these conclusions so far as they can be articulated and reconstructed.

(1) Some Nigerian socialists and even Marxists, proceeding from the conception of a mechanical correspondence between economic base and political superstructure, maintain that the alliance mentioned above must

be realized in a single political organization — that is, in an organization of workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie, craftsmen, market women, petty traders, youths, ‘national' and 'anti-imperialist' bourgeoisie, patriots, democrats, etc. No special political or ideological role is assigned to any class. Similarly, their conception of economic mixture is a very weak one — that is, weighted in favour of capitalism. Some of these socialists usually call this transitional social order the period of national democratic revolution. (There is a timid tendency among these comrades to separate the anti-imperialist phase from the anti-capitalist phase)

(2) Some socialists argue that the alliance will have to be realized as one between two or more class-based political organizations, that is, the Workers Party and one or more 'democratic' or 'progressive' political parties. The distribution of state power will depend on the relative strengths of the various organizations participating in the alliance and the social forces (national and international) they can each mobilize. The degree of economic mixture is usually left open.

(3) The other socialists, believe that the only way forward to socialist revolution is for socialists to infiltrate bourgeois political parties as individuals, and working from within, to revolutionize these parties into authentic agencies of socialist revolution. This school of thought usually does not present any concrete programme for the socialist transformation of these bourgeois parties.

(4) There is a fourth school of socialists which maintains that the alliance could be realized through institutions of popular power (workers' councils, youth associations, women's leagues, professional associations, etc.) under the overall leadership of a proletarian vanguard party. Some of these socialists also usually admit the possibility of an accidental vanguard (e.g. the army). This transitional social order is often characterized as the People's Democratic Revolution. The degree of economic mixture is usually strong — that is, with heavy socialist dosage right from the start.

These, then, are the four broad strategies of transition as projected by the various tendencies within the Nigerian socialist movement. We are aware that these do not exhaust all the thinking of those who, in Nigeria, go by the name socialist or Marxist. We are only picking up the most significant ones — that is, those that have already registered themselves on the national political scene.

Rather than making a mechanical choice between these four strategies and the tendencies which express them (which will, of course, be a deviation from the set purpose of this essay), we shall merely take

them as raw material for reflection, and make commentaries on them in form of provisional theses.

Provisional Theses

(1) For a socialist revolution considered as a continuous process of transformation of the economy, politics and culture, there must exist an element in the transitional political regime which embodies the means for the process to be continuous (since a socialist revolution either moves forward or backwards; the period of stagnation can only be temporary). Politically, this element is a separate Marxist socialist organization, party, movement, or group.

(2) We do not rule out any of the following possibilities: i) the separate Marxist formation being embedded in a larger political party; or ii) the formation being in alliance[1] with other parties; or iii) the formation standing at the head of the entire revolutionary movement as its vanguard. The choice will be dictated by the concrete conditions in which the Marxist formation finds itself — if of course it exists at all. The organizational form of Marxists' participation in such an alliance must be properly informed by the balance of forces, the anticipated form of the inevitable rupture.

(3) The existence, in the transitional regime, of a separate Marxist formation will be politically significant if this formation is able to struggle for, and ensures, an ever-increasing expansion and strengthening of areas of popular - and democratic control of social production and distribution by the working population (workers and peasants, in particular). For instance, the Marxist formation must struggle for independent workers' organizations, and their participation in production decision-making, the setting up of peasant collectives which will be directly in charge of production management and marketing, adequate direct representation of workers and peasants in the various organs of state power, general defence of the people's democratic rights, etc.

(4) The necessary conditions for (3) are: i) that the position of the Marxist formation in the entire regime must be such as to enable it to carry on the build-up of its organization and the execution of the workers' ideological education; ii) sufficient separation of the formation from the political alliance, so that it could become effectively critical of state policies and be free to promote, and take positions on, working people's actions. Several Marxist revolutionaries[2] have emphasized these crucial conditions — which are far from being abstract, as the recent history of the world revolutionary movement has shown.

(5) It must be recognized that, over the past decade, the inauguration of socialist transformation in the Third World in general and Africa in

particular has taken the form of a sudden rupture at the level of political power. This sudden rupture — amounting to *political* revolution — has been 'followed by a struggle between the forces of socialism and those of state collectivism.'[3] Ethiopia provides a classic example of this phenomenon. Marxists must ponder this, its implications and the problems posed by it.

(6) Generally, and by way of summary, let us remind ourselves that human history has recorded two different ways by which a people can achieve a revolutionary change in their society — when this change has become objectively necessary for the advancement of the society as a whole. Trotsky formulated this observation as follows: 'Revolution can be achieved either by a nation gathering itself like a lion preparing to spring, or by a nation in the process of struggle becoming conclusively divided in order to free the best part of itself for the execution of those tasks which the nation as a whole is unable to carry out.'[4]

The Algerian independence struggle offers a classic example of the first, while the current Ethiopian revolution offers an example of the second possibility. There is no ground whatsoever for us to admit the first possibility for Nigeria if we consider the two possibilities in their pure forms. But these never exist in juxtaposition except in their pure forms — which hardly occur in practice. In practice, therefore, these possibilities are posited against each other only with respect to their relative weights in a given struggle.

References

1. It must be emphasized that a political alliance is not granted, proposed or offered by one political party to another gratuitously. An alliance, if it is one at all (and not the melting of one organization into another) is struck on the basis of mutual recognition of each others political weight. Their shares of power reflect this.
2. Writing in 1931 in support of Communists joining a United Front (against fascism), Leon Trotsky expressed the conditions metaphorically as follows: 'March separately, but strike together! Agree only how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! Such an agreement can be concluded with the devil himself. . . . On one condition, not to bind one's hands.' Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, (Penguin, 1975), p.106.
3. Samir Amin, *Capitalism, State Collectivism, and Socialism*, Monthly Review, Vol. 29, No.2, June 1977, p.39.
4. Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects*, (New Park Publications, London, 1971), p.185.

10. The Way Forward

The Urgent Task: To Build An Authentic Nigerian Socialist Movement

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a night-mare on the brain of the living. Anti just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battlecries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.[1]

We have repeatedly stated that what we are writing is an urgent call to Nigerian socialists -- wherever they may be and in whatever political camp they now find themselves — to try and arrest the present confusion, paralysis and stale-mate by re-entering individual and collective debate[2] on several questions which have threatened to ossify the socialist message and which have almost persistently frustrated the development of an authentic socialist political organization. The aim is to break through what has now threatened to be a political and ideological (and maybe also epistemological) block.

The question of this block is not new in the history of the socialist movement. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia broke through such a block, a block whose ideological and organizational expression was the decay of the Second International and most of the parties associated with it. The triumphant Chinese Revolution also broke through such a block — not, of course, before the Chinese Communist Party had learnt some historical lessons concerning the dangers of infallibility.[3] The Cuban Revolution also broke through a political-ideological block, and simultaneously rendered dogmatism and its organizational expressions irrelevant.

Corning nearer home, Africa has witnessed, and is witnessing, in this decade several attempts to break through such particularly handicapping obstacles, whose main component is the question of the 'overdeveloped post-colonial state[4] that is, the phenomenon of very strong state apparatuses standing guard over backward economic productive forces. The result is that the revolutionary movement, which

partially reflects the level of productive forces and revolutionary tradition, is confronted by a monstrous state apparatus, which in most cases has been specially equipped by imperialism. We now witness in several countries a total absence of correspondence between the level of productive forces and the political apparatus.

In spite of this particular neo-colonial phenomenon, several political and ideological breakthroughs have been recorded in Africa during the past decade. All revolutionaries refer with pride to the 1974 Revolution in Ethiopia — the rupture in the state machinery which immediately lifted the Ethiopian social struggle to a new historic level and sharply altered the balance of forces in that part of Africa. In spite of later developments, the previous rupture in Somalia, (also via the army) is referred to with pride.

However, we must observe that, as soon as a way forward is opened by revolution, history simultaneously appears to close the opening — in the sense that its emulation elsewhere becomes impossible or at least very difficult.[5] In other words, each revolution opens a block, but also creates a new one. Since the Cuban Revolution, a block appears to have been created in Latin America. Perhaps Nicaragua will produce the long-awaited break. The question of the liberation of Southern Africa (Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa), not to mention the question of the liberation of large parts of the rest of Africa from neocolonial claws, imposes the need for a break — at least on the level of theory.

Nigerian socialists hardly need to be reminded that they cannot break through the present stalemate by sitting back and waiting for history to pro-vide a ready-made break into which they will then insert themselves. This particular tendency is fed by the belief that the bourgeoisie will always generate national crises, which, in turn, will furnish revolutionary situations. Our answer to this naivety is not theory, but history: when the bourgeoisie plunged the country into crisis in 1966, what did the socialists do?

We are not arguing that the bourgeoisie can in the immediate future find a formula to prevent national crises resulting from their internal contradictions and pressures from the population. The road to increasing bourgeois hegemony (which the bourgeoisie are pushing for) runs through a series of national crises. All we are saying is that any revolutionary opening created by a bourgeois crisis will be lost unless it is immediately seized by a revolutionary organization, already existing or which can be created during this crisis.

In a previous chapter we raised some theoretical questions whose clarification provides the possibility of breaking through the present condition of marginalization in which the socialist movement now finds

itself. To complete the presentation, we summarize below the practical-political preconditions for a new opening.

The prospects for a resurgence of organized socialist political practice in Nigeria can be resolved into three separate questions:

(1) What do we mean by a resurgence of organized socialist political practice? In other words, what will announce or signal the resurgence?

(2) What are the concrete problems and weaknesses which must be transcended if the necessary conditions for this resurgence are to be created?

(3) What are the immediate practical and political actions which must be taken?

By resurgence of organized socialist political practice we mean both the creation of conditions (organizational, political, material, etc.) which will permit a resumption of socialist intervention in the national politics of Nigeria, and the actual intervention itself. We must create the ability to oppose systematically by organizational, political and ideological means the false formulations[6] continually being given by the bourgeoisie to our national problems. A resurgence does not mean the sudden appearance of a universal reformer[7] on the Nigerian political scene; nor does it mean the emergence of Nigeria's Karl Marx. A resurgence is a political and programmatic presentation of an alternative path of social development.

Problems to be Overcome

Turning to the second question, we can identify the following as some of the major historical problems which must be transcended before a new socialist opening is created — or which must be transcended in the course of creating such opening.

(i) *Poverty of Practical and Political Knowledge* — on which concrete programmes can be based and from which theoretical abstractions — leading to the formulation of strategic and tactical questions — can be made. Most striking is the poverty of knowledge of the history and political economy of Nigeria. There is also no systematic documentation of usable data on the economic, social and political development of Nigeria and the world. This problem must be transcended organizationally and a machinery created for documentation. The crucial nature of this should be clear. Socialism cannot continue to operate in the air indefinitely without drying up.

(ii) *The Lack of an Economic Base*: that is, the problem of how to create the conditions for the reproduction of resources[8] for the execution of political programmes. This is a practical problem which must be solved practically.

(iii) *The Problem of Dangerous Ideological and Political Tendencies* — all claiming to be socialist and Marxist: The existence and prevalence of these tendencies is, in part, a reflection of the lack of strength and reality of the socialist alternative. Among these tendencies are:

(a) *Sectarianism* or ‘ideological purity',

(b) *Infantilism* or the reduction of revolution to the work of a brain-wave;

(c) Subjectivism — Romanticism or the attempt to create a Lenin or Castro in the absence of conditions that created them; or the attempt to recreate the Russian or Cuban Revolutions outside specific historical circumstances and preconditions;

(d) Putchism — Adventurism or the search for the 'quickest road' to socialism;

(e) *Dogmatism — Scienticism*: or the insistence on time-honoured and ossified theoretical dogmas on the so-called material conditions for socialism — dogmas which revolutionary practice has from time to time tried vigorously to falsify;

(f) *State Socialism*: the belief that any type of state power can be used by socialists to build socialism, and hence the insistence on the capture of state power. This naivety leads in practice to a denial of any need to create a separate socialist or workers' organization and to what a comrade has called infiltrationism, i.e. the tactical entry of socialists individually into bourgeois parties with the strategic aim of transforming these parties into agencies for constructing socialism;

(g) *Elite Vanguardism*:[9] the belief that the struggle for socialism will have to be led by self-appointed elites who know the answers to all socialist questions. The claim of the elites is based on their current official positions in bourgeois society — lecturers, doctors, professors, labour bureaucrats, etc;

(h) *Gradualism*: the belief that socialism can be realized solely by quantitative additions without any qualitative rupture. This illusion is very strong in Nigeria now and is being expressed in such terms as the 'nearness' or 'closeness' of pertain political parties to socialism. This tendency assumes that the difference between capitalism and socialism is the relative purchasing power of the privileged few and the underprivileged majority;

(i) *Ideological and Political Impotence*: perpetual incapacity to transcend primitive and localized organizational work, perpetual lack of an overall national revolutionary perspective, perpetual incapacity to engage in any systematic practical revolutionary programme, and the glorification and

rationalization of this impotence. This tendency is prevalent among Marxist or Socialist groups in the university campuses;

(j) *Opportunism*: the tendency which regards the revolutionary socialist enterprise as another type of bourgeois career and where personal social promotion is the sole aim;

(k) *Professional Intellectualism*: the tendency which substitutes abstract criticism of reality for its practical negation.

What Is to be Done?

We now come to the third question: What is to be done now? Arising from the various problems which have been presented so far in this work, we can propose the following as imperatives for a resurgence of authentic socialist political practice in Nigeria?[11]

(a) The establishment of a Centre, to be initially constituted by individuals who have shown in the last few years that they are committed to the struggle for socialism in Nigeria. There is no difficulty in the mutual identification of these individuals. This Centre, being a self-constituted one, will serve as an external vanguard,[12] and by a process of self-negation, will be transformed and developed into an internal vanguard.

(b) The immediate establishment of a Research and Documentation Department.

(c) The unification of the various efforts which committed socialists have been making.

(d) A serious attempt to create an economic base for the new socialist Centre as defined above.

(e) A serious attempt to develop concrete class-specific and general programmes: journals, educational (ideological) programmes, workers' co-operatives, farmers' collectives, etc., and the building of organizational structures around these programmes. The creation of an economic base must be linked to these programmatic efforts.

(f) Initial deployment of members of the Centre to these programmes — based initially on the unification of efforts mentioned above.

(g) The use of these programmes (and their organizational forms) to effect political alliances[13] and a national political practice

(h) The programmatic and systematic criticism of the tendencies mentioned above both ideologically and practically; in other words, the new effort must struggle to create its own authentic voice which will rise above the muffled socialist voices which now dominate the socialist movement.

We are aware that what we are now calling for amounts to a break with the past and the creation of a new beginning. We are equally aware that the various theoretical and political-practical problems which we have tried to articulate cannot be completely resolved before a determined effort is made to regroup. Finally, we are conscious of the fact that some determined (and yet abortive and painful) attempts have been made in the past few years to effect a serious regrouping. Yet, in defiance of these problems and painful experiences, we are calling for a regrouping.

Tradition — including revolutionary tradition — is very resistant to change. The subjective elements of this tradition are even more resistant.[14] A call for regrouping is a call for a break in tradition — a call for a break with traditional political practices, a call for a break (and a leap) in consciousness. This is a difficult problem which cannot be solved overnight. And even if a break in political practice and consciousness is rendered imperative by our recent experiences, this will not automatically effect a change in the objective social reality which the new political practice and consciousness must confront.

Just as consciousness and political practice often tail behind objective social reality, so do they often leap beyond it. This is where Marxism and Leninism act as an intervention. We are calling for such intervention now. We are calling for this intervention in the ardent hope that the experiences of the past few years have clarified our vision.

In conclusion, we commend the proposition made by Regis Delray about 15 years ago:

> When the list of martyrs grows long, when every act of courage is converted into martyrdom, it is because something is wrong. And it is just as much a moral duty to seek out the cause as it is to pay homage to murdered or imprisoned comrades.[15]

References

1. K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, (Marx-Engels Selected Works in 3 Volumes), Vol. 1, (Progress Publishers, Moscow,1973).

2. It may be argued that debates have been going on for over a decade but have produced no unity. This is admitted. But the debate we are now calling for is not necessarily aimed at achieving unity as such. It is aimed at creating a nucleus, which will, among other things, attract other socialist formations to itself or render them historically irrelevant. Such a qualitative leap would mark the beginning of our resurgence.

3. By 'infallibility' we mean the tendency to regard the revolutionary trajectory that led to a successful revolution and the ideas of those who led it, as a universal a-temporal blueprint for revolution.
4. See *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 5, 1976. We may also note that revolution in Europe, America and Japan faces an equivalent problem: the existence of a destructive military machine under the control of imperialism. This constitutes a permanent deterrent to Euro-communism in particular.
5. The reason is both objective and subjective — objective because history is not linear, and the particular historical conjuncture which produces a revolutionary situation and revolution is hardly reproduced; subjective because both imperialism and revolutionary forces learn from revolutionary victories and defeats.
6. Two such false formulations in connection with the current political campaigns can be mentioned: 1) the question of whether there should be one or more popular ballots for the presidency; and 2) the question of whether anyone who has not paid his income tax correctly is fit to rule the country. The first question says nothing about the interests which the presidential candidates represent, while the second takes for granted that the incomes which are being taxed have been legitimately earned. Under the bourgeois system, the poor worker on a salary of 50 naira a month is a criminal if he does not pay his tax regularly, while a representative of a multinational company, on an annual income of more than a million naira is a 'good and honest citizen' if he pays his income tax regularly.
7. Some of our erstwhile 'socialists' appear to have recently discovered in one or the other bourgeois political leader the universal redeemer whom Nigeria has been expecting.
8. The recent failure of some socialist parties to meet the (largely financial) requirements of the Federal Electoral Decree is a clear pointer to this need.
9. 'We are far from saying that consciousness will descend on the masses out of the blue. The contradictions of peripheral capitalism at a certain stage are bound to produce individuals — mainly intellectuals initially — who may decide to constitute themselves into groups and assume, the historic role of initiating a challenge to capitalism. But unless they insert into the masses, they will continue to represent only themselves and may be mere ideas . . . . The imposition of a revolutionary party from above will create from the beginning a dichotomy between the leaders and those who are led. . . . A party for genuine human liberation must grow up from, and be internal to, the mass struggle of the people. E.I. Madunagu, Against Elite Vanguardism, (Paper presented at the First All-Nigeria Socialist Conference, Zaria, July 1977).

10. By 'authenticity' of an organization, we mean such qualities as its capacity to intervene effectively in national politics and prevent social forces developing a stable balance.
11. These imperatives are presented in only a sketchy form here — to be developed through discussion.
12. For a characterization of external and internal vanguards, see for example, Andrew Gorz, *Socialism and Revolution*, (Allen Lane, London, 1975), pp.65-6.
13. This is necessary to avoid premature political isolation.
14. We must confess that we have no ready-made formula to prescribe for confronting this resistance. Aside from being aware of it (which is very vital), we shall only propose that the process of conscious creation of a new world out of the old is a contradictory process, a process which has one leg in the old and one in the new, a process which can only be completed through self-negation.
15. Regis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?* (Grove Press, N.Y., 1967), p.87.

AFRICA SERIES

PROBLEMS OF SOCIALISM THE NIGERIAN CHALLENGE

EDDIE MADUNAGU

Problems of Socialism: The Nigerian Challenge is a call to Nigerian socialists to overcome their current confusions and lack of organization. It comes from Dr. Eddie Madunagu — mathematician, academic, and long-time political activist. He is addressing people in the trade unions, universities, and elsewhere. The time has come, he argues, to establish a properly financed Socialist Centre which would encourage research into and appropriate theoretical formulations of Nigeria's problems, with a view to engaging in political education and organization of Nigeria's workers, farmers and students. The central thrust of this book is a Nigerian answer to: What is to be done?

Nigeria since 1979 has had civilian rule — which makes political activity less difficult than in the past. Also, the squandering of the country's huge oil income by the bourgeoisie that controls it is creating an unparalleled opportunity for Nigeria's socialists, as people realize the new wealth is being used not to abolish poverty, but to line the pockets of the new ruling class. Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, is on the threshold, of the development of a sustained and organized socialist opposition. This book is a contribution to that development.

Part One deals in brisk fashion with the Nigerian situation today — its underdeveloped capitalist economy; the ways in which civilian and military rule have disguised the growth and consolidation of the Nigerian bourgeoisie; the undemocratic facade of the 1979 elections which returned the country to civilian rule; and the ethnic minority question.
[This part has been omitted from this version of this book]

Part Two is a critique of the Nigerian Left over the past 20 years — the trade union movement, student radicalism, and self-styled socialist individuals and initiatives. The book then tackles the key questions: Is there a class struggle in Nigeria? What must Marxists do to develop correct theoretical formulations of the situation? How can the transition to socialism be worked for? Which are the problems to be over-come in building a revolutionary socialist movement? Without doubt, this book will stand as a political landmark in the struggle for socialism in Nigeria.

Edwin Madunagu is a former academic and mathematician who has taught at the Universities of Lagos and Calabar. He became a socialist while still a student. In 1975 he was National Secretary of the Anti-Poverty Movement of Nigeria and editor of *The People's Cause*. In the same year he was detained while participating in agitation for better conditions for Nigerian workers and an end-to the Gowon dictatorship. In 1978 he and other lecturers were dismissed for supporting student protests against increases in fees; three years later he turned down the University's offer of reinstatement. He is a prominent contributor to various newspapers and journals in Nigeria.