

NIGERIA: a COMMUNIST VIEW

by the African Committee of Correspondence

THE COLONIZING PROCESS

The formation of Nigeria as a country is inseparable from the rise and growth of world capitalism. Nigeria's first contact with Europe took the form of trade between European capitalists and Nigerian chiefs and petty-traders at the coasts of Nigeria. As industries grew in Europe in the 19th century, the European capitalists sought new sources of cheap raw materials and new markets for their manufactured goods. Sharp competition arose amongst them in Africa, each European nationality using their state machine to grab and control as much area of Africa as possible.

The area today known as Nigeria was annexed piecemeal by the British imperialists, a large part through the action of a British monopoly company, the Royal Niger Company. This company not only traded but organized the production of their required raw materials, and transported raw materials from Nigeria to Britain and manufactured goods from Britain to Nigeria. It also organized the state administration in its area of operation.

The protectorate of Lagos was proclaimed by the British government in 1861. In 1885, the oil river protectorate was proclaimed as a new name to include new territories annexed in addition to Lagos. In the same year the European imperialists represented by their different governments got together in Berlin to solve the problem of their cut-throat competition practices. They divided up Africa amongst themselves according to the areas of operation of their major monopoly companies. British

imperialists claimed most of the areas of today's Nigeria. However, the Berlin Conference did not end the greedy European inter-imperialist rivalry in Africa; annexation of territories continued.

In 1893, Britain proclaimed the Niger Coast protectorate. The areas under the exploitative domination of British imperialism in Nigeria grew considerably. Other British capitalists started challenging the monopoly of the Royal Niger Company. In 1900, state functions were taken from the Royal Niger Company and formal British state rule was established. Then the Northern Nigeria Protectorate was proclaimed. Later that same year, came the proclamation of yet another territory, the protectorate of Southern Nigeria, which included the former Niger Coast protectorate. (The name Nigeria thus appeared for the first time in history.)

The establishment of formal British state rule was instituted in order to fully use the British state apparatus: the army, police, customs, taxes, etc. in the interest of all British capitalists in Nigeria and not just the Royal Niger Company. Customs, taxes, trade laws, etc. were used to eliminate as much competition as possible from other European and indigenous traders. In 1914 the Northern protectorate and the Southern protectorate were amalgamated under the name the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, consolidating British colonial rule over Nigeria.

PEASANTS AND WORKERS STRUGGLE AGAINST COLONIALISM

Force of arms played a major role in the subjugation of African masses to colonial authority. The British colonialists used its reactionary army and police extensively for terrorizing and intimidating the people whenever they resisted. Land seizures, forced labor, taxation were common features of British colonialism. Large farms and extractive industries were established according to the raw material needs of British industry. The peasant masses were forced to become wage laborers in these industries -- thus a working class emerged in Nigeria.

The struggle against colonialism grew in proportion to its brutality, especially on the peasantry, and on the growth of a working class. The masses of peasants and workers in Nigeria were the militant backbone in the struggle for independence. In 1901 and 1903, the British colonial troops were sent to stop an Egba peasant revolt against colonial rule in Abeokuta (western region of Nigeria), represented by the Aleke. In 1926 a similar revolt took place in Warri and Kwale (midwestern region of Nigeria). In 1929 a similar revolt occurred in Aba, eastern region of Nigeria, led by women!

The success of the great October revolution in the Soviet Union in 1917, the world wars, and the great revolution in China in 1949 all had a lot of impact on the British colonial policy in Nigeria and also on the development of working class consciousness in Nigeria. Working class struggle against British colonialism and for trade unionism sharpened with the success of the great October revolution in 1917 and the participation of some Nigerian workers and peasants (forced) in World War II. In 1921 there was a railway wildcat strike in Nigeria, the first such action and without a union. A formal union of railway men was not formed until 1941 and in 1942 numerous strikes followed. Other unions were also

formed in Nigeria at this time e.g., the Nigerian Civil Service Union, African Civil Servants Technical Workers' Union, etc. In 1944 the first central labor organization was formed under the name Federated Trade Unions of Nigeria (FTU) which was later changed to Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC). The TUC was thus the first fruit of working class militancy and the first organ of workers' power in Nigeria. It published a newspaper "The Nigerian Worker."

The militant strikes and subsequent formation of a central labor organization in Nigeria was a major defeat to British imperialism which did everything in its power to either stop unionization or render it ineffective by directly trying to control it, by pushing tribalism or trying to appoint or suggest sell-out leaders. The central leadership was not very good. Some of them were not workers at all, some were very reformist and wanted to work closely with the colonial labor department; and others developed into nationalists who used the union as a springboard to leadership in the independence movement. This last type provided some of the earliest organizers and leaders of the independence movement like Obafemi Awolowo, Herbert McCauley and Iko li. The sell-out nature of the central leadership manifested itself in 1945 when a general strike was called to protest a government refusal for a wage and allowance increase to compensate for the tremendous price rises. Shortly before the strike was to start, the TUC leadership called it off. The rank and file workers ignored this call and carried out the strike which lasted for thirty-seven days and involved over 30,000 workers and about seventeen locals.

This militancy of workers and the sell-out nature of the central leadership led to the formation of another central labor organization in 1949 under the name Nigerian National Federation of Labor (NNFL). This union aims to become a mass base for developing a socialist party which will fight for the realization of a Socialist Society in Nigeria. It also pub-

lished a newspaper, the Labor Champion, with the motto: "Towards the creation of a socialist republic." The influence of the success of the Chinese revolution must be noted here. Socialism as the way to liberation had become the attitude of Nigerian workers. A marxist group also formed and played a major role in the socialist direction of this new central labor organization.

Since the NNFL, an anti-communist campaign was stepped up by both the British colonialists and the nationalists. The NNFL abortively tried to merge with the right wing TUC. The opportunism of the leadership of the NNFL was thus exposed; they lost the confidence of workers and the organization died. It, however, re-emerged in 1953 under the name All-Nigerian Trade Union Federation (ANTUF). This organization, too, later split due to the anti-communist campaign. The history of the Nigerian trade unions from then on was of two major trade unions, a right wing and a left wing. Attempts were made every now and then to unify the two, but these have always been abortive. Today there are the left wing pro-socialist Nigerian Trade Union Congress (NTUC) and the right wing pro-U. S. A. United Labor Congress (ULC).

The formation of the trade unions, the strikes and the socialist aspirations of the workers thus demonstrated the militancy and the formidable opposition of the workers to British imperialism. Unfortunately, this militancy was always co-opted by the nationalists who bargained themselves into better and better positions with British imperialism and eventually bargained themselves the inheritance of the whole British colonial apparatus in Nigeria -- the so-called "independence."

THE BOURGEOISIE AND THE PETTY- BOURGEOISIE AND THE STRUGGLE - FOR INDEPENDENCE -

The colonial tactics and method of colonial administration created a class of flunkies dependent on it. Colonial administration re-

lied on local Chiefs and appointed 'paramount chiefs' where there was none. The chiefs collected taxes, part of which they kept. With the impact of the great October revolution and the growing militancy of the workers and peasants, British imperialists devised the method of bringing Africans into the colonial bureaucracy in order to pacify and curb the militancy of the masses. Educational institutions set up by European missionaries played a major role in this phase of colonial domination, by providing them with the type of people they need. Sons and daughters of chiefs were the first chosen, since their families had good relations with the colonialists thus making them more reliable to the colonialists. They were trained overseas often in Britain. However, as the independence movement gathered steam, with the rise of tribal progressive unions, tribesmen organized to contribute for the education of selected students from their families. Sons and daughters of peasants and workers also started getting educated. There were also local rich traders (those who survived the monopoly trade of British companies) who were able to send their children to school, even overseas to England. In this way the 'educated' elite increased and their class origin diversified. Thus the Nigerian boss class emerged including the rich corrupt chiefs, the rich traders, bureaucrats, and the elite intellectuals.

Due to the difference in origins, the Nigerian boss class had two basic attitudes towards the independence struggle. One attitude represented by the Chiefs and their elite subordinates was for better accommodation with British colonialism. They contended that Nigeria was not ready for independence. (They actually didn't want to lose the protection of British colonial apparatus for their reactionary rule). This attitude was predominant in the northern parts of Nigeria where the British colonialists built the rule on the already existing well established chieftaincy (the chiefs power of exploitation and wealth got even better with colonial assistance).

The second attitude was represented most-

ly by the bosses from the southern parts of Nigeria where the absence of established chieftains in many places caused the British colonialists to appoint paramount chiefs whose political or economic power did not grow because of their unpopularity and stiff challenge from local entrepreneurs and rich traders. These southern bosses were mostly rich traders and the educated elite. This second attitude was more vocal than the first. Their desire for independence was based on taking over the colonial state apparatus for use in the interest of the developing indigenous capitalist class which they themselves are either part of or aspire to be part of. Many of the nationalist independence movement leaders like Nnamdi Azikiwe, the so-called father of Nigerian nationalism, came from this group of bosses.

It must be pointed out that none of the two groups of bosses in Nigeria questioned the colonial order or the economic base of colonialism but differed only in how to inherit the colonial apparatus -- how much accommodation should be made with British colonialists. These differences were later resolved by the bosses and the British imperialists through making deals. The Nigerian constitution had to be approved by the British imperialists! They did this in 1960 and the so-called independence was proclaimed.

THE NIGERIAN RULING CLASS AFTER -- INDEPENDENCE --

The granting of independence to the Nigerian bosses marked the temporary class unity of the Nigerian bosses who soon started their war on each other based on the already mentioned differences in their class origins. The two factions of the bosses also control geographic areas, the northern bosses controlling the northern parts of Nigeria while the southern bosses control the south. Due to the outcome of the deal that resulted in their independence the northern bosses controlled the post-independence colonial state (neo-colonial state), Federation of Nigeria. The southern bosses therefore did not relax in struggling

to take over the control of the state. Both factions of bosses used all kinds of tactics in their competition with each other, the most vicious of which is tribalism. They both used and perfected tribalism in order to mobilize the masses to support their reactionary ends. It must be pointed out that like bosses all over the world, the Nigerian bosses were always united against the just demands of the working masses. It took a general strike in 1964 (during which the bosses tried all kinds of strike-breaking tactics) in order to win a small wage increase. Armed forces are also sent to quell peasants' and workers' rebellions.

The southern bosses failed to outmaneuver the northern bosses by using constitutional means. So in January 1966 the southern bosses backed by the European common market imperialists attempted a reactionary military coup d'etat using junior officers in the Nigerian military whom they had sent into the military for that purpose. This coup was not successful and in May that year the northern bosses backed by British-U.S. imperialism came back in a counter-coup and established the present military government headed by Yakubu Gowon. In preparation for this coup and the military repression that followed, the northern bosses developed tribalism to the highest level known in the history of Nigeria. In order to contain the anger and class hatred of the northern workers and peasants and to win them to support their military dictatorial design, the northern bosses organized a most brutal tribal attack on southern workers and peasants residing in the north using northern workers and peasants. Over 30,000 people were killed in this attack which lasted from the time of their coup to about October 1966. The northern bosses concentrated on workers and peasants from the eastern region of Nigeria and on the Ibo tribe (the southern bosses are led by the bosses mostly from the east most of whom are also Ibo). Thus the northern bosses turned the class hatred of the super-exploited northern workers and peasants on other exploited workers and peasants and so ensured their reactionary rule.

The differences between the northern and the southern bosses have certainly grown rather wide. They made a few attempts at class reconciliation, the last of which took place in Ghana where the Ghanian bosses tried to help them settle their differences. These attempts failed and the eastern bosses leading the southern bosses, backed by European Common Market imperialism declared the eastern region to be the independent state of Biafra expecting the rest of the southern bosses to join up with them. The tribal attack on the southern working people by the northern bosses had certainly generated a lot of tribal nationalism amongst the masses in the south making it rather easy for the southern bosses to get massive support. The new state was headed by Odumegwu Ojukwu who was also head of the military.

The Nigerian northern boss run government, backed by a joint British- U. S. and Soviet imperialism, mounted a massive military attack against the so-called secessionist state. The viciousness of this campaign apparently scared the rest of the southern bosses who did not follow through but instead made up with the northern bosses. (The bosses are chicken when their life is endangered. Even the eastern bosses did not anticipate the viciousness of the attack.)

After two and a half years and the brutal murder of over two million workers and peasants the eastern bosses surrendered. The losing bosses include Soviet imperialism who thought they could outmaneuver British imperialism with their expensive courtship with the Nigerian bosses. The Soviet imperialists were instead outmaneuvered. British imperialism is now enjoying its best position ever in Nigeria. Oil production reached an all time high of 1.7 million barrels a day by the end of 1971. 70% of the oil production is owned by Shell oil British petroleum, 18% by Gulf oil, 5% by Mobil oil, less than 1% is owned by indigenous Nigerian bosses and the rest is own by European and Japanese companies. (Year book of the British Commonwealth 1972)

Other industries like mining and even agriculture show a similar picture. The British Bulk oil company (the new independence name for the Royal Niger Company, which had also previously changed their name to United Africa Company-- U.A.C. after state functions were taken over from them in 1900 -- remember?) still own most of the agricultural industrial production.

The Nigerian bosses have been frantically advertising for the partnership of British-U. S. imperialism. The advertisement shown below appeared in the New York Sunday Times, February 4, 1973. It clearly shows what favorable conditions the Nigerian military boss government has created for imperialism. Imperialism is assured enormous profits by paying workers less than slave wages while 'law and order' (military repression and suppression of any rebellion) is maintained by the reactionary military dictatorship in Lagos (capital of Nigeria).

People are earning HUGE PROFITS in Nigeria

- There is a huge domestic market of 55 million people and an external market of 300 million at the doorstep.
- Abundant manpower is available at a rate as low as 7 U.S. cents per man-hour.
- Raw materials are plentiful and agricultural products are in abundance.
- Good land is everywhere and is easily accessible to electricity, water and good roads.
- There is stable environment.
- Business is booming.
- Pioneer industry enjoys substantial amenities.
- It is possible to get your investment back in less than three years.
- Electric power is plentiful and can be as low as anywhere if you are on bulk supply rate.

People are earning huge profits in NIGERIA,

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YOU!*

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The General Manager and Chief Executive Officer

Electricity Corporation of Nigeria,
24/25 Marina, Lagos, Nigeria
Cable address: NIGERPOWER LAGOS

THE STRUGGLE OF THE WORKING PEOPLE CONTINUES

It did not take long after the so-called independence before the workers and peasants in Nigeria started to realize that if there was any independence at all it was for the bosses and not for them. Instead of mostly British supervisors, they now have a lot more Nigerian supervisors; instead of mostly British people living in the special towns called European quarters, they now find a lot of Nigerians living there. But, it was still out of bounds for them (how can you complain when you now have your own bosses). They also realized that taxes went up instead of down, that local police harassment of peasants in the countryside did not go down and that the quality of life in general for the working man got worse. This was described vividly in a song by an Ibo peasant singer, Udekwe Omambala, in a song 'Ocici Oji', (The rule of a black man). He described comically the conspiracy of the bosses to maintain a decent life for themselves while life got unbearably worse for the masses of working people. However the racial inferiority taught by the British colonialists caused him to think that the bad conditions of life were due to having black bosses instead of white ones.

The masses thus realized that to get anywhere with these rotten corrupt bosses (the Nigerian bosses were known and still are some of the most corrupt bosses in the world) they needed the kind of struggle they waged against the British colonialists. Rebellions and strikes once again flared up and the Nigerian bosses didn't hesitate one bit in sending their army and armed police against the protesting masses. The Tiv riot was one of the best examples of what the Nigerian bosses had in stock for any oppressed who dared to protest. The Nigerian army and military police slaughtered hundreds of peasants (practically unarmed). However this did not quiet the masses. Massive revolts were a major factor in the crises of the bosses that eventually led to the war in 1967. The anger and milit-

ancy of the masses turned almost every issue in Nigeria into a disaster for the bosses. Most notable of these were the Nigerian census, the Western elections, the General Strike of 1964, and the Federal elections. By the time of the Federal and Western elections they had to put their army in almost all parts of the country especially Western Nigeria. There had never been such a wide spread protest in Nigeria.

The masses of Nigeria have continued to protest even during the war. Since after the war there have also been protests and strikes despite the military government's no-strike no-protest decree-- there have been a number of postal strikes and many other strikes that eventually forced the bosses to give the workers a small wage increase (Adebo Commission). In the early part of this year 1973, the University students had a massive protest against the draft decree of the military government. The Nigerian professors even struck, too, in the early part of this year!

PROSPECT FOR A SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

The Nigerian masses have throughout their history been demonstrating a great militancy in class struggle. However the protests, strikes and rebellions seriously lack communist leadership, the only kind of leadership that can guide the militancy of the working people to a defeat of the bosses and their institutions. As long as bosses exist in Nigeria the masses will continue to be militant and the prospect of socialist consciousness very bright. A genuine Marxist-Leninist party must be developed if the militant masses are to achieve their socialist aspirations. Until that is done, the bosses will continue to take back the little victories won by the masses. The key to the liberation of the masses in Nigeria and the entire world is Socialism, a system in which the bosses are outlawed and the working people (workers and peasants) rule.

LONG LIVE THE STRUGGLE FOR
SOCIALISM!

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