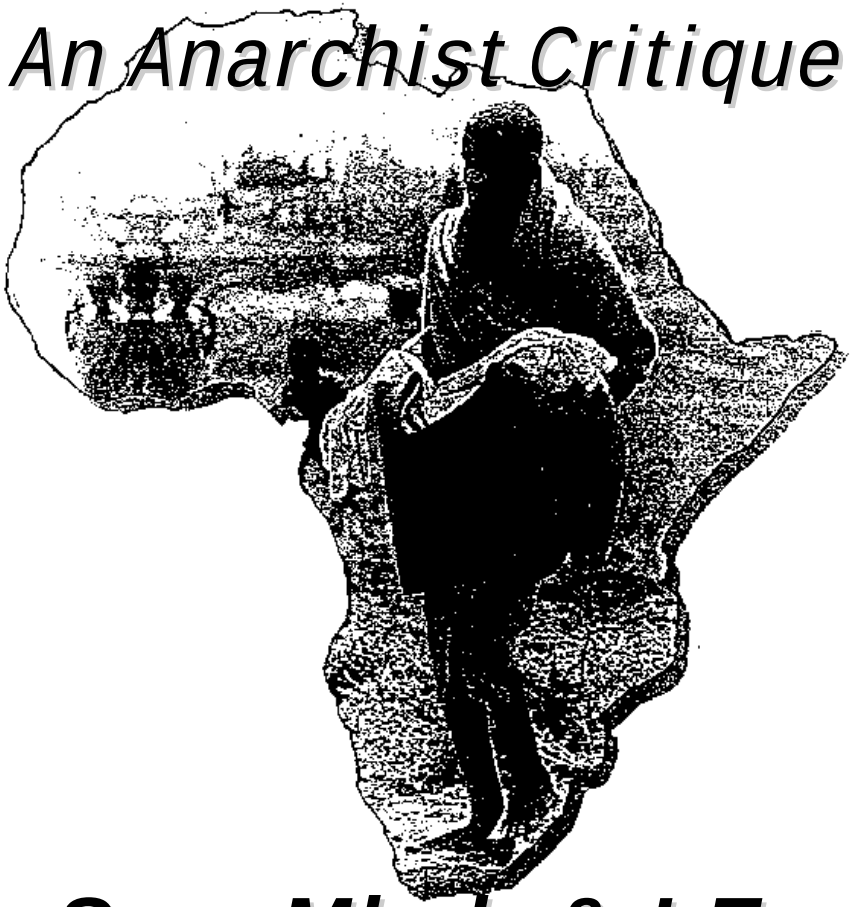
African Socialism

An Anarchist Critique



Sam Mbah & I.E. Igariwey

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Post: Postnet Suite 116, Private Bag X42, Braamfontein, 2017, Johannesburg, South Africa
E-Mail: zabalaza@union.org.za
Website: www.zabalaza.net/zababooks

ANARCHISM - THE WAY FORWARD FOR AFRICA

The relevance of anarchism to human society has nowhere been more obvious than it is in Africa. Given the multitude of problems that stare the peoples of Africa in the face, the debilitating socio-economic conditions under which a great majority of them live, and the overall economically deprived status of Africa vis-à-vis the other continents, anarchism is really the only liberating concept capable of turning "the dark continent" in a truly forward-looking direction.

Things have gone haywire for too long; only a drastic cure can satisfy an increasingly angry, bitter and restive population stretching from Cape Town to Cairo. Conditions include the seemingly endemic problem of ethnic conflicts across the continent; the continued political and economic marginalisation of Africa at the global level; the unspeakable misery of about 90% of Africa's population; and, indeed, the ongoing collapse of the nation state in many parts of Africa.

Given these problems, a return to the "anarchic elements" in African communalism is virtually inevitable. The goal of a self-managed society born out of the free will of its people and devoid of authoritarian control and regimentation is as attractive as it is feasible in the long run.

At the global level, human civilisation is passing through a period of transition occasioned by the collapse of Marxist "socialism" and the evidently insuperable crisis of capitalism and the state system. So, where do we go from here? As we noted earlier, all advances in human history to this point have been made possible by humanity's quest for both freedom and human solidarity. Since this craving seems a natural instinct and, as such, is not going to disappear anytime soon, it follows that the continued evolution of society will be in the direction of freedom, equality, and community.

The process of anarchist transformation in Africa might prove comparatively easy, given that Africa lacks a strong capitalist foundation, well-developed class formations and relations of production, and a stable, entrenched state system. What is required for now is a long-term program of class-consciousness building, relevant education, and increased individual participation in social struggles. Meanwhile, the crises and mutations in capitalism, Marxist socialism, and the state system, individually and collectively, cannot but accelerate. For Africa in particular, long-term development is possible only if there is a radical break with both capitalism and the state system - the principal instruments of our arrested development and stagnation. ***Anarchism is Africa's way out.***

African Socialism:
An Anarchist Critique

Economic development has been central to the ideologies of post-colonial African states. In their choice of which ideological model to adopt for economic development, some states have chosen a form of socialism - "African socialism," as some of its proponents have labelled it. However, the term "socialism" as used here does not signify a rigid, doctrinaire approach as in Marxist Leninism. Thus Senghor identifies "spiritual values" which he feels were lost to Soviet Communists under Stalin; Kwame Nkrumah saw no contradiction between socialism and Christianity; and Julius Nyerere has associated African socialism with traditional kinship solidarity in his Ujamaa concept. Advocates of African socialism postulate that the Marxist theory of material determinism should not be applied in Africa, given Africa's vastly different (than European) economic and social conditions. Rather, they call for a decentralised, democratic African socialism, which they trace back to the history and cultures of the African people.

But the concept of African socialism has been severely criticised. Goldthorpe identifies a strong strand of elitism in "African socialism." According to him, where there is socialism in Africa, it has been planned by an elite. Similarly, Paul Sigmund has pointed out that many post-colonial African states see strong government as the only way to achieve modernisation and development, and their leaders coin phrases such as Sekou Toure's "democratic dictatorship" to express their belief that the government or ruling party must lead the people. Nkrumah, who advocated African socialism, asserted that his Convention People's Party formed the nucleus of a new Ghanian society. This required that the party "generalise" itself into society. As Nkrumah said, "the CPP is a powerful force, more powerful indeed than anything that has appeared in the history of Ghana. It is the uniting force that guides and pilots the nation, and it is the nerve centre of the positive aspirations in the struggle for African irredentism. Its supremacy cannot be challenged. The CPP is Ghana, and Ghana is the CPP."[1]

The actual policies and the failures of "African socialist" regimes reveal the emptiness of such grandiose, self-serving rhetoric. The African poet Okot aptly captures the failure and tragedy of post-independence African regimes in his article, "Indigenous Ills":

> . . . the most striking and frightening characteristics of all African governments is this, that without an exception, all of them are dictatorships, and practice ruthless discrimination as makes the South African apartheid look tame. African Socialism may be defined as the government of the people by the educated for the educated . . . [It is] discrimination by the educated men in power against their fellow men - their brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, against their own folk left in the villages.[2]

Let us look at some specific instances where African socialism failed to improve the lives of the ordinary people. What happened to the Guinean revolution after independence? Some analysts describe what happened in post-independence Guinea as simply an overreaction; but for a more detailed analysis we turn to Samir Amin's book, *Neo-colonialism in West Africa.* According to Amin, the first important point is that after independence, the PDG opened itself to the opposition parties that had represented the chiefs. The second important point is that, despite an original democratic organisation from the village upward, soon major decisions for the country were made by the general secretary and the executive organ of the political bureau. Thus decision-making soon became very centralised. The PDG incorporated all organisations, including trade unions and women's organisations, into its fold, thus concentrating power at the top.

Given all this, it's obvious that the Guinean peasantry had little impact on government decisions. As we have seen, decisions were executed by a cadre of the few African civil servants educated by the French, and by a number of expatriates. In the first three-year plan, the peasants were to be organised into co-operatives, and the government was to establish a number of state farms using modem techniques; but by 1970, Amin could report no serious start on cooperative organisation, and the plans for co-operatives were subsequently dropped. He also reported that agricultural modernisation had not proceeded at all.

R.E. Galli cites two factors for the failure of the Guinean revolution. One was the over-centralisation of the party in the post-independence period. Second, and *more* fundamentally, the government and party deliberately chose to rely on mining as opposed to agriculture as the economic base of the country. From the moment that it achieved power, the PDG moved to ally itself with mining companies in the hands of foreign capital. According to Galli, the party saw the mines as its opportunity to extract an economic surplus with which to maintain the state and to keep the PDG in power, because the mines could provide an income source independent of peasants and workers, and the PDG could thus afford to ignore their

1974.

Like Nigeria, Libya has signed relevant international protocols on human rights, including the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. These prohibit torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Unfortunately these accords have done little or nothing to curtail human rights abuses by this "Arab socialist" state. Zimbabwe is another "socialist" state with a poor record on human rights. Under Robert Mugabe's 17-year rule, state-sponsored harassment and intimidation of political opponents and the stilling of labour unions has been routine. And in Algeria the populace is held hostage in a virtual state of terror between an authoritarian military government and a murderous Islamic fundamentalist opposition.

The situation in the newly emerging "democracies" in Africa, namely Kenya, Ghana and the Ivory Coast, is not markedly different. Human rights violations in these places are systemic, thus enabling the authorities to invoke constitutional and legal provisions. Ghana under Jerry Rawlings has literally decimated the opposition. In Kenya, Arap Moi is engaged in an ethnic cleansing campaign against some nationalities, notably the Kikuyu and the Luo. And in nominally democratic Egypt, the police are conducting a "dirty war" against a violent, fanatical Islamic opposition.

What emerges is the omnipresence of authoritarian state control - in the new democracies, in the remaining state-socialist outposts, and, of course, in the military-ruled countries. It's extremely unlikely that this situation will change significantly while private/corporate capitalist regimes (civilian or military) and state-capitalist ("socialist") regimes remain in power. The abolition of these regimes and social reorganisation based on the anarchistic elements in traditional African societies is the only answer.

and the elimination of all forms of domination. This will be achieved through the establishment of economic communes and administrative organs run by African workers and peasants themselves in their workplaces, forming a system of free, voluntary councils which will not be subject to authoritarian control by any government or political party.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTION

The human rights records of African countries - be they military (Nigeria), "socialist" (Zimbabwe, Libya), or bourgeois democratic (Kenya, Ghana) - have never been worse than they are today. This is in spite of the bourgeois democratic current currently sweeping the continent. Usually, the facade of elections is the only significant feature of the transition from an authoritarian, one-party state dictatorship to a multi-party "democracy." Even the most minimal human rights agenda is almost always lost in the shuffle.

In Nigeria, for example, the number of political prisoners detained without trial in the past five years has risen significantly to over 1000 at any given time. Several detainees lose their lives daily in prisons and police dungeons nationwide, sometimes without any record of their arrests, detention, or deaths. The Nigerian government regularly closes or bans newspapers and other publications that it considers critical. Nothing, perhaps, better captures the Hobbesian state of Nigeria than the uncanny ease with which the military authorities promulgate decrees and edicts that override the regular courts, especially the notorious preventive detention Decree No. 2 that removes the jurisdiction of the courts over the indefinite detention of persons.

Those suffering long terms of confinement since 1991 include labour leaders, political activists, students, and politicians. These include four members of the Awareness League detained in 1992 and not released until March 1993. Nigeria's military rulers have since proscribed all labour unions, dissolved their leadership, and frozen their assets. The massive repression in Nigeria is matched only by the climate of insecurity that pervades the country because of the criminal activities of armed robbers, the desperately unemployed, and outright gangsters.

Similarly, in Libya hundreds of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, are held in detention centres for reasons and/or under conditions contrary to international human rights standards. A report compiled by Amnesty International (MDE 19/03/92) puts the number of political prisoners in Libya in 1992 at 554, an increase of 127 over the previous year's figure. Some of these prisoners have been held since

interests.

However, despite its ventures into mining, Guinea today remains one of the poorest countries in the world. The United Nations has designated it as one of the 31 least-developed countries; and it has a very low GNP. Guinean workers, as one might suspect, have not fared well - throughout the 1970s and 1980s real wages fell as inflation rose.

The purpose of examining Guinea here is not to paint a complete picture of its political economy, but to lay bare the sham of African socialism and, in particular, the role of the state in it. The lessons to be learned from Guinea are:

1) There can be no development of Africa that does not raise the productivity and income of peasants, skilled and non-skilled workers, who form about 90% of the economically productive population of sub-Saharan Africa. Any development policy that aims at meaningful change must touch the lives of the poor majority.

2) The reliance on state power over workers and peasants directly contributes to Africa's underdevelopment.

3) A successful agricultural production process will be based on the workers and peasants themselves running things (voluntary collectivisation), the elimination of the profit motive, and the appropriate application of technology.[3]

Tanzania provides another pertinent case study of a country whose leaders dedicated themselves to rural development shortly after achieving independence (from Britain). Julius Nyerere, head of the Tanzanian government, was one of the foremost exponents of African socialism and the principle of self-reliance. In 1979 he addressed the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, stating that:

> Rural development means development. It indicates an approach and the order of priorities. It involves every aspect of government and social activities. It means acting to reverse the traditional flow of wealth from the rural areas into the towns and forcing that wealth into channels which will benefit the workers who actually produce it with their hands and brains. It means transferring to the poorer and rural areas some of the wealth produced in the richest economic sectors. In practically all developing countries these things require a revolution in the present patterns of government expenditure and taxation. They will be done if, and only if, the people can organise their own power in their own interest.

Has Tanzania practiced what Nyerere preached? To answer this

question, let's look at the story of socialism in Tanzania.

Tanganyika won its independence from the British in 1961 after years of struggle led by the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). TANU was led by teachers, junior civil servants, merchants, rich farmers, white collar workers, salaried employees, shopkeepers - basically the educated and professional classes in the urban areas and rich farmers and merchants in the rural areas. TANU successfully mobilised the peasantry, to which it gave some economic and organisational support. Like the PDG, TANU aspired to be a mass party. In 1964, it organised itself in cell-like fashion in towns and in the countryside. Ten families formed a party cell at the base of the party structure. Organisation extended from village to ward to district to region and, finally, to the national level.

The British did not abandon Tanganyika (later Tanzania, after its merger with Zanzibar) as the French did in Guinea, but very few Europeans ever lived in the country. The British owners of capital were indirectly represented by the colonial state and the managers of their plantations and companies. They employed as an intermediary group the Asian commercial class, which included merchants that dealt in importing and exporting, professionals such as lawyers, high state functionaries, and business managers. This Asian intermediary group was comparable to the French middlemen in Guinea. Even after independence the Asians stayed behind in their customary roles.

The rest of post-colonial Tanzanian society may be broken down as follows. There was an Asian class of artisans, white-collar workers, small merchants, and even salaried employees. They were higher in rank than their African counterparts. Another class consisted of rich farmers. And still another consisted of mine, plantation, construction, and service workers. This last was a small but important group, though it never exerted any real influence in TANU. The final and most numerous class consisted of peasants, differentiated into middle and poor peasants.

One of the first actions of the new TANU Tanzanian government was to consolidate its power and position against the Asian commercial class. It did this by limiting the latter's scope of activity and by expanding the state sector to take over commercial and industrial enterprises; the state was moving to take over the Asians' intermediary role between the people and the foreign capitalists.

The government also moved against rich farmers who had benefited most from the co-operatives set up to facilitate marketing. When inefficiencies and corruption became apparent, the government also moved against the co-operatives. And, to consolidate its control, TANU moved against the National Unions of Workers in 1964 after a series of disputes,

enmeshed in deep crisis. Rather, it is a vindication of the anarchist critique of both private/corporate capitalism and of state capitalism masquerading as socialism.

The current crisis in Africa thus affords anarchism an historic opportunity to take firm root on the African continent. In reality, post-colonial Africa has always been in ideological flux, but this flux has increased with the collapse of Marxism. The majority of post-colonial African states have traditionally tended towards the capitalist model only because it was foisted on them as a condition for the granting of political independence; due to capitalism's failures, other African states opted for state "socialism," which likewise failed to deliver the goods. This leaves Africa with an alternative model of development that will confront the present crisis of hunger, poverty, and disease by ensuring that Africa's productive capacity no longer remains under the control of capitalist or governmental ruling classes.

Today, the military in Africa make no pretence of offering an alternative to capitalism or to state "socialism." If anything, most military men are well aware that they are very much part of the crisis facing the continent. Gone are the days when Eurocentric scholars painted the African military as an alternative agent of modernisation or development. Today, African military regimes know that the magnitude of the crisis facing the continent is beyond the capacity of their much-vaunted organisational capabilities. It is finally becoming widely recognised that military intervention in African states is fundamentally reactionary, a temporary aberration that serves to roll back the gains of the poor in their struggle against ruling elites. The way this works is as follows:

Upon coming to power, the military imposes martial law in an attempt to hold together the disintegrating state structure. As the crisis continues unabated in spite of military repression and dictatorship, the military regime is forced to announce dates for elections and the return of the civilian ruling elite. In reality, this is a vicious circle: elections lead to a corrupt civilian government, followed by military intervention, followed by elections leading to a corrupt civilian government, and so on and so forth.

In sum, both civilian and military regimes in Africa represent a mere transitional phase in the march toward a society that will fulfil the human aspirations for liberty, equality, and a humane standard of living. Throughout Africa, the enormous socio-political and economic tragedy that has been the continent's lot since its first contact with capitalism and the state system continues to deepen. It is against this background that we postulate an inevitable new social order which will entail the reorganisation of social life on the basis of libertarian communism, the abolition of states and political parties, the disappearance of monopoly control of property,

example, introduced austerity measures in 1985 while Menghistu drained the national treasury on military expenditures; and Nigeria first introduced full-blown austerity measures in 1981 under the corrupt Shagari regime, and then again in 1986 through the World Bank/IMF Structural Adjustment Program.

The imposition of austerity measures has had far-reaching consequences in many African countries. Rather than ameliorate economic problems, these "adjustment" policies exacerbate them. Rising unemployment, inflation, a soaring cost of living, and other worsening social conditions give lie to the assumptions of SAP. Its social consequences alone are a strong goad to a revolutionary consciousness among Africa's working class; but with the potential radicalisation of this sector of African society comes the prospect of the return of military governments to protect the privilege of both foreign and local elites.

Apart from the prospect of military intervention, some African regimes have introduced constitutional conventions as a means of sabotaging the burgeoning of radical consciousness. Such a convention was employed with telling effect in Benin, where President Mattew Kerekou passed the political baton to Nicephore Soglo. Nigeria is the latest example in Africa where the government set up a constitutional convention to obviate the prospect of radical change.

Constitutional conventions normally prescribe electoralism as the way to alleviate a country's problems. But electoralism in Africa is merely a diversionary tactic used to mask the transfer of power from one group of exploiters to another. The fact that dictators in countries such as Congo, Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, and Malawi have lately installed multi-party electoralism is evidence that it leads to nothing really new. As elsewhere, electoralism in Africa does nothing to fundamentally change the status quo; it does nothing to abolish the system of privilege and class differentiation. It seems obvious that at this point electoralism carries no redemptive prospects for Africa. The success rates of the various "democratising" political movements in Africa on such minimal programs as human rights and the rule of law are nothing to write home about.

The introduction of SAPs and constitutional conventions have coincided with the collapse of Marxist Leninist socialism the world over. Africa has witnessed the collapse of communist dictatorships in Ethiopia, Benin, and Somalia; and socialist regimes in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Angola are tottering and have sought respite by opening their economies to foreign trade and investment, and by allowing "free market" forces to operate. The point is, however, that the collapse of so-called African socialism does not translate into a triumph of capitalism, because African capitalism itself is

placing the organisation under the control of the Ministry of Labour. After the mid-1960s, Tanzanian workers effectively lost their right to strike.

By the end of the 1960s we can see that the leaders of TANU had limited the economic capabilities and influence of most rivals or potential rivals: the Asian commercial class; the rich farmers; and the working class. The next step was to consolidate their hegemony over these groups and any factions that were not yet under their control.

TANU leaders outlined their relationship with foreign capital and the peasantry in the Arusha Declaration of 1967. The state nationalised land, and it also took control of majority ownership in the major means of production - the banks and the large industrial firms. Did this mean that the Tanzanian state was driving out foreign capital? Did it mean that the state refused to play an intermediary role? No, according to notable scholars such as Colin Leys, John Saul and Michaela Von Freyhold. After all, the state was merely nationalising the banks and industries, in some cases offering to merge its capital with that of large foreign firms, in effect becoming their partners. According to Von Freyhold, "no national bourgeoisie can any longer afford to ignore the facilities offered by international capital." And, we might note, capital from the World Bank, the United States, Canada, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, even China, as well as Great Britain, poured in to assist in the building of infrastructure, the training of managers, and to foster agricultural and rural development. As of the late 1970s, foreign aid was paying 50% of the government's development budget.

This alliance of national interests with foreign capital did not solve the problem of the government's growing need for an economic base - that is, revenue to support the state and a surplus to invest in development. Nor did it build a political base in the form of a loyal, supportive constituency.

It was against this background that Julius Nyerere turned to the peasantry, which constituted 90% of the population, by preaching a return to the tenets of African communalism. Henceforth, agriculture and the people themselves would become the new bases for development. The government encouraged Tanzanian peasants to form themselves into villages based on cooperation and communal work—the Ujamaa villages. To support this, it would provide social services such as roads, schools, etc. In September 1967, Nyerere published his pamphlet, *Socialism and Rural Development,* in which he spelled out three fundamental traditional principles upheld by the African family: equality, mutual respect for all families, and participation in the benefits of collective production. These were to be the basis of the Ujamaa villages.

Today, there are no surviving Ujamaa villages in Tanzania, only

memories of them. The economy is in serious financial and production crisis. Agricultural production continues to decline, and food shortages abound.

In the early 1970s, Gavin Williams wrote a short but very interesting article called "Taking the Part of the Peasants," in which he compared Tanzanian and Nigerian government policies. He found that in both cases the governments considered the peasants the *problem* rather than the solution to raising agricultural productivity. Despite the fact that the one government called itself socialist while the other was avowedly capitalist, both governments focused on outside, particularly foreign, expertise and technology to develop agriculture, and ignored the peasants themselves.

The Ujamaa model failed because it degenerated into state control over the peasants. Through its bureaucrats and technical assistants, the state started to dictate to the peasants what to do and what not to do, what to produce and what not to produce. Soon, too, the World Bank and other aid donors hijacked the program. The government/World Bank/foreign aid strategy was to establish national production targets for each food crop, including export crops such as cotton, coffee, cashew nuts, tea, sisal, and tobacco. The next step was to set regional targets for the crops grown best in each region - a type of regional division of labour. The third step was to communicate these goals to villages through the state apparatus. Whatever the peasants produced was sold to the authorities, and the government controlled the prices. In this way, the state squeezed the peasants for as much surplus as possible. It would have been simply unthinkable to imagine that Ujamaa, in its original, undiluted form, would have succeeded as part of a state system. To that extent, its failure was logical and inevitable.

African socialism has been a failure in other parts of Africa as well. In Ethiopia under Menghistu, for instance, the so-called Workers Party by the late 1980s had failed miserably in its attempt to lay the groundwork for the socialist transformation of agriculture, the attainment of self-sufficiency in food production, and improvement in the standard of living. Although apologists for the regime normally blame these failures on "strong economic links with the capitalist countries . . . [which meant Ethiopia was] hard hit by the worsening economic crisis of the capitalist world,"[4] the crisis stemmed largely from Ethiopia's state capitalism and bureaucratic centralism. It's also worth noting that the Soviet-style Menghistu regime was one of the worst, most murderous human rights abusers ever seen in Africa.

In Mozambique, the ten-year development plan adopted in 1980 by the ruling FRELIMO party proved unsuccessful. This failure was blamed on

pressures around the continent.

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT, ELECTORALISM AND AFRICA'S FUTURE

The introduction of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in the mid-1980s was a clear signal, if any were needed, that post-independence African regimes have not severed the bonds of imperialism. Despite the fact of political independence, African states are still closely tied to international capitalism.

Foreign control of African economic policies is facilitated by the massive indebtedness of African regimes to American and European governments and financial institutions. As Ablaye Diagne, a lecturer in economics at the University of Senegal, has stated, "the debt is one of the mechanisms through which the African countries have again fallen under the yoke of the most ferocious imperialist exploitation."[27]

Diagne identifies some of the causes of this massive indebtedness as: 1) the way in which African countries are integrated into the international capitalist division of labour; 2) the economic policies followed within that framework; 3) in particular, the forms of indebtedness and the use of resources borrowed from abroad; 4) the armaments race, into which Africa has been plunged by imperialism; and 5) debt rescheduling policies.

Because of the economic crises facing them, many African governments have had no choice but to borrow from financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF. A standard IMF package often involves, among other things, the following "conditionalities": 1) devaluation of currency; 2) tight monetary and fiscal constraints; 3) budget cuts, with sharply reduced public expenditures; 4) a wage freeze; and 5) sharp reduction or elimination of import and price subsidies.

Chinweizu argues that the IMF medicine administered to cure a country's liquidity headache almost always worsens the illness. This is mainly because the IMF "treatment" is designed to help countries with strong industrial bases - countries that can overcome liquidity problems through more competitive pricing of their industrial goods. But for African countries, with weak or nonexistent industrial manufacturing bases, the IMF solution does nothing but stimulate more raw material exports at low prices into a weak world commodity market.

Nevertheless, African governments have had no alternative to bankruptcy other than to borrow from the World Bank and IMF and to introduce the harsh austerity measures they demand. Ethiopia, for

that reported in late 1982, in which five top officials of the Nigerian External Telecommunications Company were arrested for a $53 million fraud. These incidents are only the tip of the iceberg in the corruption that engulfed the Shagari regime shortly before the military coup on December 31, 1983.

Corruption and theft of public funds by public officials have since become a way of life in Nigeria, as every regime struggles to "better" the record of its predecessor in office. This reached its apex under dictator General Ibrahim Babangida who, along with his aides, salted away billions in overseas bank accounts. General Abacha, the man who succeeded him, is no less corrupt.

Is there any causal relationship between the two variables - political corruption and socio-economic instability - in African states? Joseph Nye, in his article, "Corruption and Political Development: A Cost-Benefit Analysis," argues that, so far as corruption destroys the legitimacy of political structures, it contributes to instability and quite probably leads to national disintegration. In many African states, "corruption contribute [d] to the aura of disillusion that preceded coups and made it impossible for the regimes to find popular (or elite) support when the chips [were] down."[25]

Nye notes that "one of the most important functions of government is to provide goods and services to qualified recipients on a regular, predictable basis."[26] According to him, there are two problems in the allocation of goods and services through politically corrupt relationships. First, they tend to be selectively allocated, not on the basis of need or utility, but on the basis of personal ties; second, that such allocation tends to be "unreliable because the goods themselves are closely tied to the political fortunes and positions of the distributor [or] office holder." Individuals or groups who do not find themselves in any of the distributive networks get left out altogether, or, at best, are marginalised.

Against this background, one can see that in corrupt capitalist/statist political systems, the distribution of political goods and services both creates social inequalities and exacerbates those that already exist. In Africa, the gap between the haves and the have-nots has continued to widen since independence, with the lot of both majority and minority ethnic groups deteriorating. It's little wonder that both groups have become alienated and cynical. For example, Nkrumah's "Dawn Broadcast" was privately derided by his colleagues and critics, and was received with cynicism by the public, because the corruption of the regime was by then too patent to be concealed.

The net impact of all this is a rejection of government and the political process by Africa's poor majority, and the intensification of revolutionary

"foreign aggression through bandit gangs." Nothing was said of the excessive centralism of Mozambique's planning and management, as well as retention of colonial structures inherited from the Portuguese.

In West Africa, the Burkina Faso "revolution" of 1984 came to an end in 1987 with the assassination of Thomas Sankara, its initiator. Although Sankara recognised that the majority peasant population was a key force, he unfortunately had an overtly critical attitude toward the trade union movement and left-wing parties.[5] Sankara's efforts centred on the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs). CDRs were organised at all work places and in all neighbourhoods and military units, as "defenders" of the revolution; that is - as in Cuba - they functioned as spies for the government and as enforcers of its policies. The CDRs in Burkina Faso, however, did not have the time to develop the efficiency of their Cuban counterparts, which can be considered the backbone (or at least the far-reaching tentacles) of the Cuban repressive apparatus. In his review of the book, *Thomas Sankara Speaks,* Ahmed Azad notes that "no real attempt it seems was made ... to resolve the issue of the role, functions, duties, and responsibilities of the CDRs and those of the trade union movement."[6]

On October 15, 1987, Sankara was assassinated by his friend and comrade, Blaise Compaore. In justifying the coup, Compaore said that the Burkinan revolution had strayed under Sankara; he compared his "rectification process" with glasnost in the Soviet Union. However, according to Jabulani Mkhatshwa, Compaore's idea of glasnost "is the further class differentiation that is taking place among the people, the creation of the petty bourgeoisie and the import of Mercedes Benz."[7] Jabulani blames Compaore for the implementation of economic policies contrary to the original ideals of the revolution. As we have seen, however, the process of betrayal was already well under way under Sankara.

We can see that the so-called socialist parties and regimes in Africa - both those that led their countries to independence, and those that achieved power in the post-independence period - have not succeeded in changing the lives and fortunes of poor workers and peasants. These regimes have not achieved anything beyond what openly capitalist states have achieved. If anything, they have maintained and expanded the old system of class privilege. The result has been that class antagonisms, instability, and economic crisis confront the continent. As the crisis rages on and the prospect of the radicalisation of the masses heightens, African regimes have been compelled to react. Some have turned into full-blown dictatorships and become openly repressive; other have tried one form of structural adjustment or another; and still others have experimented with

various forms of electoralism. Yet all these are palliatives aimed at temporarily quelling restive workers and peasants, for whom daily life has become synonymous with misery.

STATE CAPITALISM AND INSTABILITY

It's now time to look at how the fundamentally capitalist state system in Africa has created unstable socio-political and economic structures, as well as the prospect of its own collapse. In analysing the connection between state capitalism and instability in Africa, our primary objective is to demonstrate how the economic manifestations of state capitalism - underdevelopment, dependence, and subordination to foreign interests, plus their concomitants, poverty, illiteracy, and disease - have led to political instability.

The root of African underdevelopment is, of course, the establishment of colonial capitalism. Put differently, Africa's recent economic history is the result of its colonial past, the most significant aspect of which was the displacement of the pre-colonial African mode of production through the expansion of mercantilist capitalism from Europe to Africa. As we have seen, during the struggles for national liberation, the fundamental economic relationships established during the colonial period were not generally seen as detrimental to the interests of the developing nations. Nationalism in Africa was thus primarily limited to the elimination of outright foreign political domination, and the granting of political independence witnessed the perpetuation of class antagonisms and the emergence of an indigenous ruling elite.

In accounting for the instability of present-day African political systems, Professor Claude Ake argues that there are strong revolutionary pressures against the existing exploitative class relations, and thus against the very survival of the ruling elite and the state. He attributes these pressures to, first, the desperate poverty of African workers; second, the huge economic and social discrepancy between rich and poor; third, rising expectations due to modernisation; fourth, the enticing models provided by the developed countries, made even more piquant by their portrayals in the media and by the limited penetration of consumer goods and retail firms into African markets; and fifth, the politicisation of the African peoples through their frustrating colonial and post-colonial experiences.

Ake notes that the African people are essentially demanding two things. The first is equality, which, in effect, means the abolition of post-colonial capitalism and its privileged classes. The second is "social well-being, . . . easing the agony of extreme want."[8] Ake, however, postulates that neither

Cocoa Marketing Board. A 1956 investigation of the CPC revealed that the CPP had used the CPC's control of agricultural loans, bulk purchasing, and transportation to enrich party coffers, to coerce farmers into joining the party, and to control petty commerce that was dependent on cocoa. By 1961, accusations of corruption among the party leadership had grown too loud to ignore, but even Nkrumah's much-celebrated "Dawn Broadcast" of April 8,1961 - in which he denounced official corruption and self-seeking - did not break the cult of corruption that had gripped the party and the state bureaucracies. Ocran charges that corruption had become institutionalised in high places and among Nkrumah's ministers and followers in the CPP.[22] He mentions a report of the commission of inquiry into the affairs of the National Development Company which found that it was "established ostensibly to finance the CPP, but that it later became a clearing house for bribes paid to the party or to Nkrumah personally." Ocran concludes that "Ghanaians both inside or outside the party were having a field day chopping Ghana small, without any let or hindrance whatsoever."

The above occurred under the "socialist" government of Kwame Nkrumah, at the time considered the beacon of hope for the decolonising countries in Africa. In Nigeria, shortly after independence on October 1, 1960, the young state came perilously close, first to collapse, then to constitutional chaos and a bloody civil war. The upshot was a rapid succession of civilian and military regimes. In the late 1970s under General Olusegun Obasanjo, a constituent assembly was set up to write a constitution for the country. In 1979 it produced a constitution which ushered in the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari.

Like previous Nigerian civilian and military governments, Shehu Shagari's regime was a showpiece of corruption. Ill-conceived bills slid their way through the national legislature lubricated by bribes. Under Obosanjo and then Shagari, the Nigerian government lost millions of dollars to fraud; an example under Shagari was a $20 million (Nigerian dollars) fraud loss by the Federal Housing Corporation.[23] Another instance was the sale of 4,000 bags of rice to ruling party bigwigs at $6.00 per bag. They then resold the rice for between $60 and $90 per bag. An aggrieved permanent secretary in the upper chamber of parliament mentioned senior public functionaries - past and present - as some of the beneficiaries. He alleged that import licenses were given to 121 persons for 255,350 tons of rice, and the President Shagari took 200,000 tons for himself.[24]

A year after the multi-storey Republic Building in Lagos went up in flames, the Audit Division of the Federal Capital Territory was similarly razed. The incident was connected with a $15 million (Nigerian) fraud involving department payment vouchers. Another example of fraud was

This "advances both the critical consciousness of the subordinate classes and die polarisation of African society."

POLITICAL CORRUPTION AND SOCIAL INSTABILITY: CASE STUDIES OF GHANA AND NIGERIA

Because of its role in creating instability in African states, political (official) corruption is directly associated with, and almost synonymous with, the state system. The existence of the state and the manipulation of the structures and institutions of the state by the ruling elite for the (mis) allocation and (mal) distribution of public goods and services inevitably leads to corrupt practices. Levine defines political corruption as the "unsanctioned, unscheduled use of public political resources and/or goods for private, that is, non-public, ends."[20] In Africa, the coup d'etat is often preceded by the instability generated by political corruption.

In Ghana, the populist Convention Peoples Party (CPP) government of Kwame Nkrumah was more or less a conglomeration of divergent interest groups, some of which were more concerned than others with the plunder and expropriation of national wealth. To this end, it is pertinent, as Professor Card points out, to distinguish between the CPP leadership and the CPP membership in order to discern what Card terms the "class" basis of the party.[21] The tendency to see the CPP throughout its 15 years as an undivided entity has blurred this distinction.

As Card points out, many members of the CPP leadership began their careers as independent radicals "with little or nothing to lose, in the Fanonist sense." However, over the years, many of the early CPP leaders gained access to wealth and power via the state, "and differences in purely personal interests began to be reflected in differences over policy matters related to the extent and pace of Ghanaian socialism." By 1960, when inner party purges of the old leadership began in earnest, some of the formerly "radical" leaders had become wealthy men, whose prosperity was "linked to the state and foreign capital."

The political corruption of the CPP began in the 1950s, when the party began to consolidate its hold over the population and over the centres of economic and political power. It organised party branches throughout the country, set up a variety of auxiliary organisations, and began to move its people into key positions in various government agencies. Levine cites as an example what happened when the party managed to gain control of the Cocoa Purchasing Company (CPC), formed in 1952 as an agency of the

of these demands will be granted by African ruling elites because "the very condition of underdevelopment very drastically limits the expansion of the economic surplus." Thus the capitalists cannot react favourably to revolutionary pressures without committing class suicide, which, of course, they will not do. According to Ake, this leaves them the option of trying to discourage such demands, while preventing their political manifestations. This is what Ake means when he refers to "depoliticisation."

According to Ake, the primary manifestation of depoliticisation in Africa is the preaching by African regimes of one-party state ideologies; this, of course, tends to make African regimes particularly repressive. In Ake's view, "every African country is in effect a one-party state in the sense that every regime in Africa assumes its exclusive right to rule and prohibits organised opposition." Moreover, "given the contradictions in contemporary African society, depoliticisation cannot be carried out without brutal repression."

In considering the effects of depoliticisation on African regimes, it could be argued that, since depoliticisation helps maintain existing class structures, it promotes "political stability."[9] Here, "political stability" means the persistence of the political structure, especially the relationship between the dominant and subordinate classes. Depoliticisation in this sense enhances the stability of regimes when it leads to the homogenisation of the exploiting classes. "Depoliticisation increases homogenisation by imposing ideological unity, by building alliances between factions, by co-opting dangerous opponents into the hegemonic faction and by liquidating certain other factions altogether."

On the other hand, depoliticisation may actually accentuate governmental instability. In fact, Ake postulates that "on balance, the intra-class depoliticisation is more conducive to government instability than to stability." He attributes this to the fact that "it greatly reinforces the destabilising effect which statism produces by focusing the ambition of all the factions of the exploiting class primarily on the capture of state power, by making the outcome of the struggle for hegemony among the factions of the bourgeoisie too important."[10] In effect, suppression in the political arena does not eliminate the crisis in society. Even with the depoliticisation of the masses or the establishment of a one-party system, instability remains because the objective basis of the differences between factions in society remain. Thus, pressures mount, with explosive social tensions between groups in the system. "When major differences in this political monolith appear, a crisis invariably occurs."[11] The options for resolving these differences are drastically limited, according to Ake, because they arise from the substructure. The rulers are obliged to use coercion, but this only

worsens the unstable political situation, creating opportunities and conditions that facilitate military intervention.

THE MILITARY FACTOR

In the view of Peter Harris, the widening gulf between the progressively impoverished majority and the privileged few generates the potential for crises in African political systems.[12] Describing the present character of African political developments such as the phenomenon of military coups, Harris recalls that Franz Fanon had predicted as far back as the 1950s that the African middle and professional classes who led the national independence movements would increasingly turn their backs on the people and instead align themselves with foreign interests.

In *Class Conflict in Africa,* Markovitz argues that a fundamental reason for the ease of military takeovers across the continent was that the politicians represented only the privileged.[13] He agrees with Ruth First that in the absence of a socially rooted, economically productive base, "power lies in the hands of those who control the means of violence. It lies in the barrel of a gun, fired or silent."

According to Harris, as the corruption and profiteering of the ruling class have become more blatant, and the stagnation of African economies has reached the point of national bankruptcy, popular discontent has become widespread. As a result, many regimes have discarded their populist smokescreens. This, combined with popular discontent, has set the stage for military takeovers. As Fanon had forewarned, when the discontent of the peasantry and the workers grows, and the regime is forced to resort to harsher measures of rule, "it is the army that becomes the arbiter. . . ."[14] According to Harris, military officers corps, an important segment of the local ruling class, enter the centre of the political arena by replacing discredited politicians, thereby preventing the mobilisation of the people. The military assume power not only to preserve the continued dominance of the local privileged class, but also to protect the neo-colonial interests of the former mother country and of multinational corporations. As Fanon puts it, "the ranks of the decked-out profiteers whose grasping hands scrape up the bank notes from a poverty-stricken country will sooner or later be men of straw in the hands of the army cleverly handled by foreign experts. In this way, the former metropolitan country practices indirect government, both by the bourgeoisie that it upholds and also by the national army. . . ."[15]

Harris and Murray have also analysed how the grave economic problems of post-independence African regimes have caused the decline of populist nationalist parties and of the charismatic national leaders that led

the struggle for independence. Harris believes that the nationalist parties and one-party rule have become obsolete forms of protecting the interests of international and local capitalists due to the combination of predatory economic structures and the growing awareness of elite corruption. Murray attributes this to the deplorable economic conditions in Africa, growing political cynicism, and the abiding human quest for freedom in the social, economic, and political spheres. He argues that this decline is a direct result of the effects of economic stagnation, urban inflation, the ossification of the nationalist parties, and the rapacity of the ruling elites.[16]

Murray argues that because of the political and economic situation, many post-colonial governments have been unable to deal with growing contradictions in their societies, and have had difficulty legitimising their authority. As a result, both foreign and internal pressures have provoked changes from civilian to military rule. According to Murray, the corruption and incompetence of the nationalist politicians have added to die "fringe costs" of economic activity in these states, and are undermining the function of these regimes as "political holding companies" for foreign capital. The military, on the other hand, has offered "a more effective alternative to foreign capital and to the local bourgeoisie not directly benefiting from the discredited regimes."[17]

So, typically, the military intervenes and comes to power on the crest of rising public discontent, particularly over economic downturns, and the corruption and decadence of the political leadership. They succeed in turning the moral outrage of the people to their own advantage and justify their seizure of power by pointing to the corruption and inefficiency of the politicians. Kenneth Grundy states that, under the initial euphoric state of affairs that attends most military interventions, the military succeed in raising the expectations of the masses over and above their ability to deliver.[18] This strategy, of course, produces a time bomb.

In the long run, military regimes appear even less capable of winning popular support than the civilian regimes that they replace. Because of the time bomb of impossible-to-meet rising expectations, the military are ultimately forced either to resort to repressive measures and risk a counter coup or to relinquish power to a new set of civilians. Because of die reluctance of military regimes to give up power, this often sets in motion a vicious cycle of coups and counter coups, and helps "to bring into clearer focus the social and political crisis of neo-colonial society."[19] According to Harris, this crisis stems from the fact that "the small local bourgeoisie (including its military component) have neither the economic power nor the support of other social strata to stabilise their position of domination and privilege." Consequently, they are forced to rely on repressive measures.