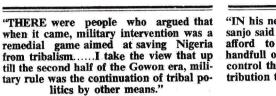
Unpopular Essays

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"IN his new year's message, General Obasanjo said among other things: 'We cannot afford to build a nation in which a handfull of people exclusively own and control the means of production and distribution to the perpetual detriment of the

erpetual dertiment of the majority.

The statement in itself reflects a proper understanding of the fundamentals of the problem. And certain actions of the regime indicate a determina-tion to part with the

portation more diffi-cult. And the process of constitution-making can only allow for the drafting and adoption of the manifesto of the commercial compra-

indication these concessions have been tactical. The ban on champagne and the current attempts to phase out luxury are powerful indices to the ultimate class position of the govern-

If this observation is correct, if this regime is becoming revolu-tionary, then it has to

tionary, then it has to take certain steps to avoid the destabilising powers of the West.
Radical policies must be pursued side by side with the appropriate institutions for consolidating progressive gains sive gains.

The Nigerian Army shall have to be edu-cated away from its current ivory tower mentality. There has to be a solidarity to be a solidarity alliance between it and other progressive or-ganisations like the market women asso-ciations, trade unions, students unions and so

Again, the govern-ment has to further review its ranks to re-

pared against ideological teams of reference.

A return to "civilian rule" of parliamentary "democracy" should be completely aban-

democratic. The reason is in its restrictiveness.

on.
The army shall then he reinforced by a People's Militia that shall cut across the social classes of society.

move people who do not accept its revolu-tionary posture.

Another draft con-stitution should be pre-

doned. Like military rule, civilian rule cannot be democratic. The rea-

THE CLASS CONTENT

OF MILITARY

THERE was some-thing theatrical about Ukpabi Asika. As an administrator, he was not considered the most efficient of men, most efficient of men, but there was no contesting his brilliance as a theoretician. Sunday PUNCH's A. B. Attah had asked him to compare his military regime with the one that went before. That is, Balewa and Co.

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By way of answer, the administrator gave a treatise on "the concept of progress". According to him, progress implies hope, hope that "my son will become a better man than myself"

than myself".

It is this consideration, he said, that tion, he said, that motivates a parent to provide the infrastructure for his son to re-alise himself. So, if the hope is fulfilled and hope is fulfilled and the son becomes a better man than the father, there is no basis for comparison between father and son. The logic is apparent. If father did not provide the infrastructure, son would not have been successful.

That is to say, if the Balewa government had not built the uni-versities and instituted the Sandhurst pro-gramme which pro-duced Asika and Go-won, there would have been no question about the military leadership

the mintary leadership being more successful. That w a s Asika some five years ago. Today, there is a greater historical rea-son for lumping the two regimes together. Both were the natural progressions of Nigeria's ethnic politics. But later, the Gowon/ Asika regime abandon-

ed tribe and came to champion the cause of the nascent commercial industrialist)

class.
What do we mean when we say that the Gowon regime even-tually came to represent the interest of the commercial class? To answer this question, we have to examine previous tendencies in Nigerian politics as they relate with the

tionalist note, eventually came to respond to this economic configu-

Titans like Azikiwe, Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello became incredibly tribal. From the eve of independence to the end of the First

"THE wage freeze is unpopular, and the price control efforts miss the point. It is wrongly supposed that since government has lifted import duties on certain essential commodities.....that retail traders do not have any reason to sell above the controlled prices.'

prevailing economic fortunes of the couneconomic try at each historical moment.

exercise will also lead us to under-stand the true content of the conflict that confronts the present

regime.

The First Republic was a period of great poverty in Nigeria. poverty in Nigeria.
Groundnut, rubber,
tin, cocoa and palm
oil were the leading
export commodities of the country. Apart from cocoa, they were remarkably low-priced products. And the price of cocoa in the world market was was

world market was rather treacherous. Scarcity induced tri-balism which was essentially, the politics of poverty. The counpolitics which had started out on a na-

Republic, they pursued policies that were primarily aimed at consolidating their various

tribal clites. There are people There are people who argue that when it came, military intervention was a remedial game aimed at saving. Nigeria from that chaos and confusion which tribal politics had plunged it.

Try as I have, it has been impossible for me to come to the same conclusion. On the

conclusion. On the contrary, I take the view that military rule, up till the second half of the Gowon era, was the continuation of tribal politics by other

means. Nzeogwu's extensive "head-chopping" list included only two bos. His later plea of improper execution does

fact. Ironsi's major ap-pointments made the

same political point.
And there was no contesting the northern relevance of the Gowon counter-coup. But all which started flow. oil, which started flowing in the later half of the First Republic had, at this point, completely altered Nigeria's economic fortunes.

The new-found wealth brought with it, the noveau-riche, a commercial class that swept the government off its feet. Contract award was devised as a means for syphoning the proceeds from oil into the fortification of this class. Indigenisa-tion was another effort at further enriching the class.

In one word, the re-

gime came to represent the class. In the process, Gowon and process, Gowon and his lieutenants became very corrupt. Murtala Muhammed's c o u p owed its legitimacy and approval to this corruption.

Are we therefore implying that the Murtala/Obasanjo regime has pried itself from this confusion? This question resolves itself into another question.

into another question.
What is the class posture of the present

regime?
In his new year's message, General Obasanjo said among other things: "We cannot things: "We cannot afford to build a na-tion in which a hand-ful of people exclusively own and control the means of production and distribution to the

commercial dors. But there have been a few inconsist-

One is its anti-inflation policy. The wage freeze is unpopular, and the price control efforts miss the point. It is wrongly supposed that since government has lifted import duties on certain essential commodities and cut down on the others, that retail traders do not have any reason to sell above the controlled prices.

Unfortunately there is no corresponding check on importers and no effort to trans-fer the export trade from the comprador class to the public. So that when import duties are lifted on certain commodities, it is only an invitation to the class to make more money from their imports. There is their imports. There is nothing in the system to compel them to transfer the benefits to the ultimate consu-

This same class in-terpretation could be

"THE Nigerian army shall have to be educated away from its ivory tower mentality. There has to be a solidarity alliance be-tween it and other progressive organisa-tions like the market women associations, trade unions, students unions and so on.

read into the govern-ment's policies on housing, Lagos trafic control, and constitu-tion-making.

On housing, there is

On housing, there is the provision for "peo-ple" to avail them-selves of public funds to build private hous-ing estates. The traffic policy tries to restrict the use of vehicles without making im-

Let our new system be truly representative, representative of the soldiers, workers and peasants.

The murder of General Muhammed could be attributed to the fact that where his policies were radical, he did not create the necessary institutions to back them up.